

Rector's report on the General Convention of The Episcopal Church

The 76th General Convention meeting in Anaheim, CA has just ended. If you have followed the actions of this Convention on our diocesan website or on other sites you know that The Episcopal Church (TEC) has traveled much farther down the road of theological innovation. In a move at the end of the Convention to save some hope, Bishop Lillibridge and others presented to the bishops the "Anaheim Statement" that attempts to hold those dioceses to some Anglican Communion norms (link below). But what Bishop MacNaughton wrote in 1995 has proven to be prophetic: within TEC there are two churches: one determined to remain faithful to mainstream biblical Christianity, the other determined to follow new theologies and understandings. Churches like Christ Church are now a distinct minority as evidenced in some of the big stories of this General Convention:

Presiding Bishop Schori in her opening sermon remarkably blamed the current crises on "the great Western heresy – that we can be saved as individuals, that any of us alone can be in right relationship with God." She went on to say, "That individualist focus is a form of idolatry."

In spite of a passionate plea against its passage from the Archbishop of Canterbury, a resolution was passed with overwhelming support of lay, clergy, and bishops that effectively ends the 2006 General Convention's moratorium on non-celibate gay bishops in the church. Our bishops both voted against this resolution. Bishop Lillibridge said on the diocesan website that Resolution D025 "accurately reflects where we are as a Church. If it is descriptive, I am in favor of it. But if it is proscriptive, telling me what I can and cannot do as a bishop, that's an entirely different thing for me." This resolution makes official what is already the practice in the church, that every bishop and diocese will do whatever they choose in these matters. After the vote, English Bishop Tom Wright (Durham) said, "The Americans know this will end in schism" (link below).

The House of Deputies voted to accept the recommendation of the Evangelism Committee to "discharge" (i.e. kill) Resolution C069 that affirms the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a multi-faith world. The same resolution proposed and passed in the Church of England's Synod earlier this year.

The church cannot discriminate against persons who seek ordination in TEC because they are transgender, transsexual, or transvestite, according to Resolution C001.

TEC will now collect and develop rites for same-sex blessings before the next General Convention in 2011, and in the meantime each bishop will decide whether or not same-sex blessings will be sanctioned in their diocese (Resolution C056). It is one thing to look the other way while renegade bishops allow same-sex blessings and an altogether new thing when the church officially allows them. To sanction this in our prayers is to endorse this as official

theology. 104 bishops voted “yes,” 30 voted “no.” Our bishops both voted against this resolution.

The House of Deputies declined to concur with the House of Bishops on a resolution sponsored by the Diocese of West Texas (C067) asking the National Office to disclose the amount of money spent by their office suing churches and dioceses who have left TEC. Last count TEC has recently initiated 57 lawsuits and it is anyone’s guess how much has been spent on legal costs.

The two churches within TEC were very evident at General Convention with conservatives outnumbered 2 to 1. Even in our own diocesan delegation several deputies commented about how there was not always unity on the issues. For example, while our bishop expressed sadness over the battles fought and lost, our Diocesan Chancellor and alternate deputy to Convention, Drew Cauthorn, blogging on our diocesan website about his experience in Anaheim, is elated with the experience of General Convention. He wrote, “I am encouraged by the passage of D025 and hope the House of Deputies will concur with the House of Bishops in the passage of C056, which move The Episcopal Church closer to the inclusion of all persons to full participation in all aspects of ministry and closer to the blessing of committed relationships of enduring love, mutuality and fidelity.”

Several months ago I asked Bishop Lillibridge to come to our August vestry meeting to report and to answer questions. He has graciously agreed to come Tuesday, August 18, 5:00 PM in the Parish Hall. All meetings of the vestry are open to anyone interested in attending, and I hope you will come if you are interested in hearing from our bishop.

Here are several questions that I hope he will answer:

1. Is there room in the Diocese of West Texas for a rector (church) that does not support the enactments of General Convention or the Presiding Bishop?
2. Is there room in the Diocese of West Texas for a rector (church) who cannot call good what the Bible calls sin – who will offer partnered gays and lesbians what he offers all sinners, all parishioners: nonjudgmental love, friendship, encouragement in Christ, AND the gospel of repentance, forgiveness, amendment of life, and God’s healing?
3. We have declared ourselves a Windsor diocese, and the Windsor Report calls us to adhere to traditional sexual morals (Lambeth 1.10) and calls for a moratorium on ordinations of non-celibate homosexuals and the practice of blessing same-sex couples. This obviously puts us at odds with the majority of Episcopalians, and in complete agreement with those in other Anglican jurisdictions in the United States. Will Christ Church be allowed to work in mission and ministry with Windsor-compliant churches

from other Anglican provinces, including being able to call clergy who currently serve in those provinces?

I love the breadth and generosity of our heritage, but I don't love how TEC has lost its salt and connection to historic Anglicanism. The wider Anglican Communion accepts the Bible as uniquely inspired by God and is our primary authority, while encouraging each member to wrestle with Holy Scriptures for themselves – I love that! It proclaims that we are justified by faith by God's grace, but allows for diversity and wideness in God's mercy – I love that! It respects other religions while holding fast to the belief that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, and no one comes to the Father except through him – I love it! Where gays and lesbians are welcome as everyone is welcome – I love that! That treats sin seriously as a pastoral matter, not as a bludgeon – I particularly love that! This is the fabric of our life together at Christ Church and the core values that attracted me to join you in ministry eight years ago. These commitments continue to make Christ Church an extraordinary church and will into the future. I can't help but wonder, though, will there ever be a day when we can focus on reaching more people for Jesus Christ, and worshipping in the beauty of holiness, and growing in our love for one another, without the weight of a deviant denomination on our shoulder?

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The Rev. Canon Kendall Harmon on the importance of Resolution D025
<http://t19backup.blogspot.com/2009/07/statement-of-kendall-harmon-on.html>

The Rt. Rev. Tom Wright on D025 (The Times of London)
http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6710640.ece

Dissenting bishops "Anaheim Statement"
<http://www.standfirminfaith.com/?/sf/page/24285>

About the 33-year fight for equal rights in TEC. Integrity is the lobby organization for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights in TEC.
<http://walkingwithintegrity.blogspot.com/2009/07/integrity-usa-achieves-its-goals-at.html>