



Summary of General Convention of the Episcopal Church Austin, Texas, July 5-13, 2018

Responding to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's call to "Follow the Way of Jesus," deputies (laity and clergy) and bishops of 110 dioceses at the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church acted on a record number (460!) of resolutions on key issues such as immigration, prayer book revision, Israel-Palestine, and readmitting the Episcopal Church of Cuba as a diocese. Convention also passed a \$134 million budget that reflects for a further three years the presiding bishop's priorities of evangelism, racial reconciliation and creation care. Meanwhile, the legislative processes were overseen by a resident roost of avian observers (three pigeons camped out in the convention hall), one of which adopted a social media presence to bring a steady flow of light-feathered moments to convention amid the often-intense and passionate debates on the key issues before the church.



Outside the legislative chambers, several events brought together bishops, deputies and visitors to mingle, socialize, pray, worship (daily Eucharist) and advocate, with a public witness against gun violence and another outside an immigrant detention center challenging the actions of the U.S. government in its enforcement of immigration policies. A revival service at Austin's Palmer Events Center on July 7 drew a crowd of more than 2,500 people who listened to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's rousing sermon about how "God is love and gives life." In his opening sermon on July 5, Curry challenged every Episcopalian to embrace the "Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-centered life" as a way to help the church enter into a new era of spiritual growth.



Below is a review of some of the major business items of the General Convention. If you desire to read more details about the convention, please go to this site:
<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/07/16/general-convention-wrap-up-following-the-way-of-jesus/>

- 1. New plan for liturgical and prayer book revision.** Convention adopted a plan for liturgical and prayer book revision that sets the stage for the creation of new liturgical texts to respond to the needs of Episcopalians across the church while continuing to use the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. Resolution A068 originally called for the start of a process that would lead to a fully revised prayer book in 2030. The bishops instead adopted a plan for "liturgical and prayer book revision for the future of God's mission through the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement." The bishops' amended resolution calls for bishops to engage worshipping communities in their dioceses in experimentation and creation of alternative liturgical texts that they will submit to a new Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision to be appointed by the presiding bishop and the president of the House of Deputies. It also says that liturgical revision will utilize inclusive and expansive language and imagery for humanity and divinity, and will incorporate understanding, appreciation and care of God's creation. Meanwhile, General Convention also adopted a resolution that allows all congregations in the Episcopal Church to use optional, expansive-language versions of three Rite II Eucharistic prayers in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.



2. **Acting on immigration.** If there was one issue that defied any expectation of controversy at the 79th General Convention, it was immigration. Bishops and deputies arrived in Austin last week on the heels of a national uproar over the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy toward immigration, particularly the decision to separate children from parents in detention. And despite the administration's reversal on family separations, immigration policies continued to be a hot-button issue, including in the border state that hosted the Episcopal Church's triennial gathering. But if the country remains divided over what to do about immigration, the thousands of Episcopalians gathered at convention presented a unified front in support of families who have been separated, those facing deportation and immigrants in general – through prayer, testimony, action and the unobstructed passage of legislation.



Convention passed three resolutions on immigration issues. Resolution C033 puts the church on record as respecting the dignity of immigrants and outlines how public policy should reflect that belief; A178 takes a forceful stand against family separations and treatment of immigrant parents and children; and C009, titled "Becoming a Sanctuary Church," encourages Episcopalians and congregations to reach out to and support immigrants facing deportation, including by providing physical sanctuary if they choose.

One of the defining moments of this General Convention was the prayer vigil held July 8 outside the Hutto Residential Center, an immigrant detention facility little more than a half-hour outside of Austin. A massive gathering of more than a thousand Episcopalians prayed and sang in support of immigrant parents and children who had been separated.



3. **Eight (of 110) Diocesan bishops who blocked same-sex marriages take reluctant first steps toward allowing ceremonies.** After a back-and-forth negotiation between the House of Deputies and House of Bishops, both houses approved an amended B012 that struck a compromise on the issue of granting Episcopalians across the country access to the liturgies, regardless of their bishops' stance on gay marriage. The new requirement doesn't take effect until the first Sunday of Advent, Dec. 2. One of the core compromises of B012 was to allow bishops who object to gay marriage to request that another bishop provide pastoral care and oversight for same-sex couples who wish to be married by priests in their home churches. The resolution also makes clear that no clergy member can be forced to preside over any marriage ceremony.



4. **Challenging injustices in Israeli-Palestinian conflict.** General Convention wrapped up its consideration of resolutions relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with mixed results due largely to the House of Bishops' unwillingness to take many of the bolder steps urged by the House of Deputies. Of the 15 resolutions submitted on Israel-Palestine going into General Convention, only six passed both houses, though the successful resolutions still touch on the plight of Palestinian children, the status of Jerusalem, the disproportionate use of lethal force on both sides and ways the Episcopal Church can press for peace through its investment decisions. Bishops and deputies, even those arguing for a tougher stance against the conditions of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories, took pains to affirm Israel's right to exist and to defend itself, citing longstanding church policy toward the region. And while the bishops rejected the most controversial resolution, D019, saying it amounted to a dangerous "divestment" from

Israel, they did join the deputies in passing Resolution B016, which echoes D019 in its use of the phrase “human rights investment screen.” Unlike D019 however, Resolution B016 includes no timeline for action by Executive Council or any reference to church complicity in the occupation, though it ultimately could result in the church pulling money out of companies that do business there.

5. **Welcome back, Cuba.** Convention voted to admit, or readmit, the Episcopal Church of Cuba as a diocese by passing Resolution A238. The Diocese of Cuba is set to join Province II, which includes dioceses from New York and New Jersey in the United States, Haiti and the Virgin Islands. The Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, began in 1953 and lasted until President Fulgencio Batista was forced from power in 1959. Batista’s anti-communist, authoritarian government was replaced with a socialist state, which in 1965 aligned itself with the communist party. “I feel the breath of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, everyone, for the support right now, but really for the support all these years,” Cuba Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio said in Spanish through an interpreter. She took a moment to remember generations past who’d longed for reunification, “those who’d suffered but always hoped we’d return to the church.”



Reunification was a long time coming. In response to the geopolitics of the time, the House of Bishops in 1966 voted unilaterally to separate from the Episcopal Church in Cuba. The House of Bishops “stabbed Cuba in the heart, and it refused to die,” said retired Southeast Florida Bishop Leo Frade, a Cuban who was 23 years old when the house voted to expel Cuba. (This is the bishop who received me into the Episcopal Church!) “House of Deputies did nothing, the House of Bishops acted. ... It was an unconstitutional action by a House of Bishops that had no authority to kick us out,” said a tearful Frade. “As Cubans, Cubans refuse to die. The reality is that the Church of Cuba is still alive, and it belongs here.”

6. **Bishops Against Gun Violence.** About two dozen clergy and lay leaders gathered the evening of July 9 to bear witness to the gun violence they have experienced in their lives, share their frustration at the inability to curb the death tolls from guns and listen for steps they can take to end gun deaths and injuries. The gathering, sponsored by Bishops United Against Gun Violence, came a day after Philip and April Schentrup, Episcopalians whose daughter Carmen was one of 17 students and educators killed by a gunman at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, shared their gut-wrenching testimony with the bishops and several hundred onlookers at Brush Square Park. The Schentrup family was joined on stage by Abigail Zimmerman, a ninth-grade Episcopalian from Waco, Texas, and co-leader of a school walkout in March in response to the massacre, who urged everyone “to make change happen.” Others during the session talked about growing up with guns in their households or shared memories about those they’ve known who have been killed by guns. Others mentioned that they work in rural regions where guns are a way of life. Many were at a loss as to what they could do to put a stop to the violence.

