

June 22, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I am writing this reflection on the 75th General Convention on my way back to Southeast Florida inside one of the regional jets that American Eagle is using these days. Now I know how you feel when flying inside a pencil.

As I look around me I am aware of only four Episcopalians flying this same small plane--the Bishop of Haiti, his wife and two women deputies from Haiti. It feels strange after spending nine days completely surrounded by about 10,000 Episcopalians and/or Anglicans from all over the globe who were part of the Convention in Columbus, Ohio.

Several of the passengers inside the plane are obviously flying in order to board one of the cruise ships that leave from our ports and others take this early morning flight in order to make a connection to the Caribbean and to Latin America from MIA. I wonder how many of them are aware of what took place at General Convention or for that matter care at all about the decisions that were taken. But I am sure that most of you care about what happened.

We have taken many important decisions at General Convention. As your bishop, accompanied by the assistant bishop and the lay and clergy deputation--10 in all--we were part of the democratic and participatory system of making decisions peculiar to the Episcopal Church in America, which was founded by Anglican patriots who wanted their church, like their new country, to be democratic and independent.

I want to share with you a few highlights of my experience at General Convention. Be aware that of course they come mainly from the House of Bishops, which meets separately from the House of Deputies. Not only were the places where we met on different floors of the Convention Center, but our schedules also didn't match most of the time.

For me the most exciting part of the work the bishops did was to elect the 26th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church. This was the third election in which I participated, and this one was the longest. After the morning Eucharist the bishops boarded the buses that took us to Trinity Church, located in downtown Columbus across the street from the State Capitol. Our credentials were meticulously checked to assure that we had voting privileges before we boarded the buses, and all forms of communication equipment were barred from our gathering. Of course we didn't get to use a chimney to let the black or the white smoke to inform the people about the results of the balloting.

This time it took five ballots in order to have an election. From the first ballot the Bishop of Nevada was ahead, followed closely by the Bishop of Alabama; trailing behind were the bishops of Louisiana, Atlanta, Lexington, Colombia and Kentucky in that order.

After we heard the results of the fourth ballot we knew that we were going to have an election on the next ballot.

Because our democratic system requires the bishops' choice of the next Presiding Bishop to be confirmed by the lay and clergy that form the House of Deputies, the bishops remained locked in the church until the House of Deputies confirmed the election.

"It's a girl!" The next day "It's a girl" lapel buttons appeared rejoicing in the selection that the bishops had made. The Bishop of Nevada is Katherine Jefferts Schori, and she is now the Presiding Bishop-elect. Her installation will take place at our National Cathedral on November 4, 2006.

I happen to know Katharine well, because both of us started our "Baby Bishops" training at the same time. Even though I had already been a bishop for almost 17 years, a bishop who is beginning an episcopate in a new diocese is asked to participate in this very helpful training. As this made me part of the Class of 2000, Diana and I got to know Katharine and her husband Richard quite well. I can assure you that she is a person of prayer and deep spirituality and that she will be an excellent pastor, as she has proved during her five years at the helm of the Diocese of Nevada.

I am indeed very happy that we made the decision to elect her and encourage all of you to support her as our 26th Presiding Bishop. I know that there are a few among us that are not enthusiastic about the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate, and I hope that we give our sister in Christ the support she deserves. I pray that her ministry will allow us to see the Holy Spirit working in our Church and that through her leadership we all may be able to know Christ in a deeper sense.

The second thing I want to share with you concerns the decisions that we made about our response to the Windsor Report. I am aware that everyone's perception is colored by his or her criteria for interpretation of the issues raised in the report, as well as his or her particular position on those issues. I consider myself a Centrist and have preferred the Via Media of Anglicanism most of my life. Indeed, it was the Centrist perspective that prevailed at General Convention, which made both extremes unhappy.

No, none of us got exactly what we wanted, but we were able by a two-thirds majority in both the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies to seek reconciliation within our Anglican Communion. The Windsor resolutions that were approved give assurance of our desire to continue in the conversation with Anglicans around the world. We have reaffirmed our abiding commitment of The Episcopal Church to the fellowship of churches that constitute the Anglican Communion and to our desire to live into the highest degree of communion possible.

We have reaffirmed that The Episcopal Church is in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

We have made a commitment of the vision of interdependent life in Christ, characterized by forbearance, trust and respect, and have commended The Windsor Report and process as a means of deepening our understanding of that commitment.

The 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church stated that we receive and embrace The Windsor Report's invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation. The Convention also "called upon all Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any

candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion”.

We stated the regrets of The Episcopal Church for straining the bonds of affection in the events surrounding the General Convention of 2003, and also approved the Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) process as detailed in the March 2004 statement of the House of Bishops called “Caring for All the Churches”.

In addition, we urged continued maintenance of historic diocesan boundaries, the authority of the diocesan bishop and the respect for the historical relationships of the separate and autonomous Provinces of the Anglican Communion.

As a demonstration of our commitment to mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Anglican Communion we supported the process of the development of an Anglican Covenant that underscores our unity in faith, order and common life in the service of God’s mission.

However, it is also important to note that our General Convention also reaffirmed that gay and lesbian persons are by Baptism full members of the Body of Christ and The Episcopal Church as “children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church.” We reiterated our apology “on behalf of The Episcopal Church to its members who are gay or lesbian, and to lesbians and gay men outside the Church, for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church” and recommit to “seek amendment of our life together as we ask God’s help in sharing the Good News with all people.

In evidence of that apology, The Episcopal Church pledges to include openly gay and lesbian persons on every committee, commission or task force developed for the specific purpose of discussing issues about sexuality and request the same of our sister churches in the Anglican Communion. We committed ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion and, among dioceses, a diversity of pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us.”

One additional resolution approved that was proposed by the Bishop of Florida was to affirm that no resolution of the General Convention is intended to affect either the historic separate and independent status of the churches of the Anglican Communion or the legal identity of The Episcopal Church.

As you can see the work that we did dealing with the Windsor Report was more than enough to keep us busy, but there were other important issues discussed—our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals; changes to Title III dealing with the ministry; liturgical changes; and also a very important new relationship with the United Methodist Church that will permit new ways to explore a closer ecumenical walk in the future.

Was the effort worthwhile? YES! Definitely so! Will it allow us to heal our unfortunate divisions? I think that the 75th General Convention was just the beginning of a long journey that will demand of us honesty with each other, as well as a great deal of respect and civility, which sometimes seem to be lacking in our dealings with other members of our own Episcopal Church and our worldwide Anglican family.

I am aware that what we have is not perfect, but it is a good foundation that will help others persons of good will to realize that we mean business and that we are committed to be part of the Anglican Communion.

I ask your continued prayers for our Church and its mission “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ”.

Blessings,

+Leo Frade