

Wednesday,
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ISSUES 2015

The daily General Convention newsletter of the Consultation

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BP. HINES'S CHALLENGE TO GC 1976

If I Were a Bishop Choosing the New Presiding Bishop

Unfortunately, Jesus did not stand for nomination. He might be thinking, "Been there, done that... Whew!" In his stead, we bishops must choose. Which of the nominees do I trust the most to discern what Jesus would have us do?

Of the nominees, which would best navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of the Anglican Communion? Which would best preside over the House of Bishops, especially in difficult moments, as when one of us has done those things which she or he ought not to have done?

Which would best preside over our province? Which would most creatively work with Executive Council to implement the resolutions of General Convention?

It's easy to serve when everything goes well. How might each nominee serve when something does not go well?

In this drama, the Nominating Committee has the role of Jesse. Our role as bishops is that of Samuel. I like the slate Jesse presented, but I need to discern how each nominee serves in back fields, far from glossy official profiles.

Thomas Hardy insisted, "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst."

That's not cynical, but savvy stewardship.

Three of the nominees not chosen in the last two elections for PB retired early because of psychological difficulties. The Diocese of Maryland is not alone in narrowly restricting what the nominating committee get to see, such as reports from Oxford Documents.

The nominating process gives high priority to "balance" in the slate, just as Jesse made sure that Samuel would see only sons, and only sons with the most impressive outward appearance.

My assignment is to discern the heart.

Calendar

Experienced deputies longingly remember the unofficial calendar from previous General Conventions put together by Louie Crew. It not only contained official events of the convention but also many events that the official calendar could not publicize. We've been asked to see if we can recreate that. Being in no way as resourceful as Louie, you can help by emailing us at issuesatgc@gmail.com to publicize social justice events you think other deputies, bishops, alternates or attendees would want to know about. We'll post those events here and on our website at www.theconsultation.org.

June 23

7:00 pm - UBE Dinner

June 24

5:00 pm - EPF Award Reception & Injustice Wall
5:30 pm - Integrity Bishop & Deputy Reception

June 25

New Community Festival
11:15 am - Palestine Israel Hearing

June 26

7:00 pm - Open Meeting of the Consultation

The last three Presiding Bishops have encountered more strife than all their predecessors combined. Which nominee would most irenicly lead us and not forfeit our bold affirmation of the dignity of absolutely everybody?

Nominees, progeny of Jesse: thank you for being willing to put yourselves through this grueling process. Generations will bless you for helping to keep our process democratic with genuine choices. Pray that one of the other nominees will be chosen to take up these burdens; and, if our House chooses you instead, know that God will be your ever present help.

- Louie Clay Crew

A Response to TREC: How it actually worked

The TREC report attributes to General Convention the ability to debate and discern fundamental church issues such as women's ordination, LGBT inclusion, etc.

"General Convention (GC) has historically been most effective in deliberatively discerning and evolving the church's position on large-scale issues (e.g., prayer book revision, reform of clergy formation and discipline canons, women's ordination, same sex blessings). This should continue to be the primary role of General Convention."

Without a deeper look this is a simplistic attribution. These things neither sprung forth from General Convention, nor were taken up by GC with great enthusiasm. There's a grassroots story that needs to be told and that needs to inform those who are seeking to modify the GC and other church structures. If this is what General Convention does best, it is not necessarily in our best interest to shrink and streamline GC.

I can only tell this story from the LGBT experience, but I have spent countless hours with allies working on other issues, and I would say that our experiences are very similar.

In 1976, a GC of some moment, one of the resolutions passed affirmed that gay persons were children of God and equal in receiving the pastoral attention of the church. How did that resolution get there? The short answer is that a movement had begun among members of the church, lesbian and gay, to find one another and seek to organize for mutual support and to work towards ensuring that their visibility as lesbian or gay people in the church could not be called into question. What is important is that *a movement was started*. We call it grassroots now, and it was indeed that. But then how do we get from the movement to the resolution of GC? It was the openness of our system. A GC large enough that allies of lesbian and gay people could get elected as deputies, and, within a couple of GC's, LGBT people themselves. And these people had access to the system, i.e., a resolution process that was relatively easy to initiate and an open hearings policy that allowed people other than deputies and bishops to speak.

These two factors—a prior movement and a process with much flexibility and openness—were a crucial reason why the Episcopal Church was among the first

denominations to open the ordination process to LGBT people and to work relatively quickly toward a blessing for their unions, and, as we continue the journey, to equal marriage. It took more time in other denominations because their equivalents of GC were much more closed, and it took far longer for LGBT people to be elected to serve in their governing bodies.

This is a critical story to be remembered when we are considering shrinking and streamlining GC, Executive Council, and other church bodies. I fully recognize the very logical arguments about cost and cumbersomeness. Yet both have been a contributing factor for any number of justice-related issues in the church to be heard and acted upon. It's not clear to me from the TREC report that positives and negatives of the current system have been carefully weighed. If the church had had fewer people as decision makers and a much more streamlined process (which cannot possibly happen without someone exercising greater control), it is not clear to me that we would be where we are at least on LGBT issues. The resistance in the system to dealing with issues of human sexuality, even in the current system, were very strong, and, as one of the

leaders of that movement in the late '90's and early '00's, I had plenty of people in positions of power ask me, even beg me, to slow down, and very annoyed and angry that there was not much they could do about it. If a movement wants to be heard at our GC, it is almost impossible to stop it. That is one of our glories. We should exercise significant discernment about whether to change that dynamic.

I myself tried hard to make the system work as quickly as possible, although I was not entirely successful in that attempt. The cumbersomeness of GC did not allow for a quick decision on the one hand, but it also allowed a decision to form over time on the other. It is certainly true that it takes 800 people a long time to deliberate. But do we really want that to change? What future movement will be dealt with too quickly so that a poor decision is made, either for or against, and the church done more harm in the long run? And who will not be at the table to join in that conversation? How can we "streamline" without narrowing our scope of vision?

- The Rev. Michael Hopkins

Episcopal Peace Fellowship Advocacy

The Consultation's Platform includes this plank: 'Recognize The Episcopal Church's complicity in the suffering of the Palestinian people during the brutal Occupation and take steps to remove Church investments contributing to the Occupation's infrastructure.'

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship's Palestine Israel Network will be following four resolutions which

contain provisions relating to this statement:

- C003 Work for Justice & Peace in Israel-Palestine;
- C012 Divest/boycott products supporting infrastructure of occupation;
- C018 Pursue Justice, Peace and Security in the Holy Land; and
- D016 Being Socially Responsible Investors in Palestine & Israel.

Read about these initiatives in the article on our website 'Q&A Background information on Palestine and Israel' at <http://epfnational.org/PIN/qa-background-information>.

The Social Justice & International Policy Committee (07) will hold a hearing on these and other resolutions on Palestine/Israel on Thursday, June 25 from 11:15AM-1:00PM, continuing at 2:00PM if necessary.

Taxes and Economic Justice

Everyone has an opinion on taxes. Most will say we pay too much in taxes. Some will say we should tax the “rich” more. No matter what your thoughts, our tax code needs reform. Currently, our tax code is one of the biggest economic injustices in the United States.

Here are some examples:

- Since the 1960s, the top corporate and income tax rates (i.e. taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals) have dropped sharply, while the payroll tax (which hits the poor and middle class hardest) has more than doubled.
- Taxes on wages, which is the only source of income for most working- and middle-class Americans, are higher than the tax on capital gains, which is the primary source of income only of the wealthiest Americans.
- Because of requirements written into federal law, individuals and families claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit (a credit for the working poor and the largest poverty alleviation program offered by the federal government) are audited by the IRS three times more often than wealthy individuals, and eight times more than business partnerships.

- The federal tax code is full of loopholes available only to people wealthy enough to hire the lawyers and accountants who can find them, and the wealth to take advantage of them. While most Americans pay their taxes automatically through employer withholding, rich investors and business owners can shift money around until it is practically impossible to trace and tax.

So, what can be done? The first thing is learn the tax code. Not all of it. Just the basics. What are you taxed on? Why? Then, go behind the double talk. When someone says they want to cut taxes, whose taxes are they cutting? What exactly is the “death tax” and why should you care? Once you understand the code, you can see how it can be used to level the playing field.

During this General Convention, we will again be looking at the Tax Code. We will continue to create policy that assists The Episcopal Church in advocating for a fair and equal tax code, a code that assists in bringing in dollars to support the government and its many social programs, and why sustaining those programs is important.

- Laura Russell, *Episcopal Network for Economic Justice*

From Too Proud to Bend: Journey of a Civil Rights Foot Soldier

Long-time civil rights advocate, Consultation member, and former deputy of the Diocese of New York Nell Braxton Gibson has recently written a powerful memoir of her experiences as a young black woman in the south during the Civil Rights movement. This year in ISSUES, we are pleased to share excerpts from her book which are all the more pertinent in light of today's violence and rising awareness of racism.

First in a series of ten excerpts from Nell Braxton Gibson's memoir

At the time of this excerpt the author is thirteen years old

In August, when Girl Scout camp ends, we return home. In the last lazy days before school starts, (my sister) Rosemary and I stretch out under the famous Tougaloo oak with our friend Charlette Randall.... Charlette has always been more precocious than everyone else in our group, and on this day she begins to relate a story she has read in the newspaper. As she talks, an icy chill runs down my spine. She tells us she has read about the murder of a Negro boy who either spoke to or whistled at a white woman. She says his name is Emmett Till. Rosemary and I leave her under the tree and immediately go home to read the article for ourselves. The information is still sketchy, but it confirms everything Charlette has said.

As I put the paper down, I am gripped by a fear I cannot shake. For the first time in my life, I realize Negro children are not safe. Before this day, I thought we were innocent victims in an adult dispute; I thought adults would go after one another, but they wouldn't hurt children. In all the time we've been growing up, I have never thought of myself as living in danger, but now the unthinkable has happened—to a fourteen-year-old boy close to where we live—and now I know that in Mississippi, anything is possible.

Emmett Till had come from Chicago, Illinois, to Money, Mississippi, for a visit with relatives. On August 28, 1955, he and his cousins had driven to a country store to buy candy. Before entering the store, he reportedly accepted a dare from one of his relatives that led him to utter, “Bye-bye, baby,” to the white woman inside the store. The kids left without any further thought about the incident. Four days went by. Then at midnight on the fourth day, a carload of white men drove to the unpainted cabin of Till's uncle, Mose Wright.

Note: *The good folks at Amazon.com would be happy to help you read more from Nell's book.*

From the history of ISSUES

ISSUES, conceived in the living room of the late William Stringfellow, has been around as a voice for social justice at General Conventions since 1967. This year we are going to reprint some articles from our history. The more things change, the more they...

September 11, 1976:

"CROSS OF CHRIST"

The Church is tempted, from time to time, to withdraw from an alien, un-understanding world: to dig her own catacombs; to huddle with the faithful in some cavern of salvation amid the incense and mysteries; to perfect her own peculiar poms and "trappings of a nostalgic triumphalism," - while the world goes by on the other side muttering, "My God - how unreal! How remote!"

Will it reported of the Episcopal Church's 65th General Convention in after years - if there are those to ask and to reply - that when men and women knocked on these

ecclesiastical doors, in the midnight of the world, asking for the "bread of life," - we gave them the stones of an institutional idolatry both theologically and ecclesiologicaly? Or, when the world asked the Church for direction, and unity, and leadership of the imagination and integrity in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century, it received a set of Constitution and Canons (in which divided votes are counted in the negative), - a classical formula for ethical double-talk, a manual of sterile, uncostly religiosity, and an architectural drawing of a gilt-domed bomb-shelter of innocuous piety!

There is nothing in the pre-Convention material that promises to raise the issue behind and beneath all the issues. There is nothing to indicate the "raising of a standard" to which all like-minded men and women, whose consciences are being violated by "the retreat from reality" - can repair. It is not that housekeeping matters are unimportant. Rather that we keep them in perspective.

- The Rt. Rev. John E. Hines



The Consultation is a collaboration of progressive organizations within the Episcopal Church that partner to work for social justice. Before every triennial General Convention, we come together to develop a platform that will guide our shared advocacy and goals.

The Consultation member organizations are:

Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission
Episcopal Asiamerica Ministry Advocates
Episcopal Church Publishing Company
Episcopal Network for Economic Justice
Episcopal Peace Fellowship
Episcopal Urban Caucus
Episcopal Women's Caucus
Integrity
TransEpiscopal
Union of Black Episcopalians

Please join us for the Episcopal Peace Fellowship/Sayre Peace Award Reception

On Wednesday, June 24, from 5:00-6:30 pm, you are welcome to join us at the Cathedral Church of St. Mark at 75 South 200 East, Salt Lake City (walk 3 blocks East on W 100 S or take the city bus).

Help us celebrate the life and work of Newland Smith and lift up our Wall of Injustice installation. Tickets available at the door or at

<https://www.showclix.com/event/EPFGCReception>



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