

**Reflections on the 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church
June 30, 2006**

God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love – like Christ in everything. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. He keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love. (Ephesians 4:15-17, in The Message)

Dear Friends in Christ,

“Come and Grow,” based on this text from the Letter to the Ephesians, was the theme of the 75th General Convention of The Episcopal Church. Reflecting on the Convention and its actions, I find great hope and great challenge for our Church.

I begin with a word of thanks for the diligence and care with which our Lay and Clerical Deputies and Alternate Deputies shared in the ministry of the General Convention. Please read carefully their thoughtful report on the Convention. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for their hard work. I affirm not only their serious engagement with the toughest issues facing our Church today, but also their prayerful, faith-filled and joyous life in community with one another. They took care of business and took care of each other.

My informal reports on Convention are posted on the “Bishop’s Blog,” at our Diocese of New Jersey web site at <http://www.newjersey.anglican.org/bishop/GC2006/index.html>. My own view of the Convention was limited by the requirements of membership on the Program, Budget and Finance Committee, which developed a \$152 million budget for The Episcopal Church for 2007-2009. Our work began with the adoption of the following mission priorities as an expression of our commitment to Jesus Christ: 1. Justice and Peace, including the support of the Millennium Development Goals; 2. Young Adults, Youth and Children; 3. Reconciliation and Evangelism; 4. Congregational Transformation; and 5. Partnerships with the Anglican Communion and others.

The Millennium Development Goals captured the imagination of this Convention. I saw this interest as a sign of our Church turning outward to minister to a suffering world. It was very gratifying to see \$924,000 (an amount in excess of 0.7% of income) allocated for projects that will address extreme poverty and other goals. Our Diocese has made that same commitment of 0.7% of our income for the MDGs for the past two years. My own household does the same. I encourage everyone to make this offering for the benefit of the most vulnerable of God’s people around the world.

It was my privilege to participate in the election of the 26th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church. In Trinity Church in Columbus, nearly 200 active and retired bishops prayed and sang together and sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the exercise of this solemn responsibility. The Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Bishop of Nevada, was elected on the fifth ballot. The House of Deputies concurred with this action.

Bishop Jefferts Schori is a remarkably gifted and able bishop. She is a good soul and a strong leader possessed of an extraordinary intellect. I have known her as a faculty member in the College of Bishops and been blessed by her wisdom and insight. Her election, guided by the Holy Spirit, is the fruit of our Church taking women seriously and valuing their gifts and leadership in ordained ministry for the past 30 years. It will be an honor and a pleasure to work

with our Presiding Bishop-elect in the coming years. Recognizing that this development represents a challenge for some of our Anglican partners, I nevertheless support our Presiding Bishop-elect in representing our Church among the Primates of the Communion. I celebrate the fact that women bishops of our Church are now members of the three instruments of unity in the Anglican Communion. I ask you to remember Bishop Jefferts Schori and her family in your prayers as she begins the transition to this new ministry as chief pastor and primate of our Church. May the Lord who has given her the will to do these things give her the grace and power to perform them.

Much of the energy and angst of this Convention was centered around our resolutions in response to the Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion. I believe that the six resolutions that were adopted represent a serious and substantive response to the questions and concerns of our Anglican partners arising out of the actions of the General Convention of 2003. These resolutions are the results of the labors of a strong, diverse and broad center of our Church. They are part of a larger process of listening and of conversation around the Anglican world. They are not the final word, but they represent this Convention's best effort to maintain our historic commitments to our worldwide Communion while, at the same time, affirming the place of gay and lesbian clergy and lay members in the life and ministry of The Episcopal Church.

On the final day of Convention, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies adopted resolution B-033, "On the Election of Bishops." Both the Presiding Bishop and the Presiding Bishop-elect made it clear that it was important for us to adopt this resolution in the proposed language in order for our Church to continue in conversation and ongoing relationship with the Anglican Communion. I believed that B-033, or something like it, represented an expression of restraint that was necessary for the life of the Communion.

I voted in favor of B-033. I realize that many view this action as harmful to gay and lesbian Christians. I intend to continue my support of the lives and ministries of our gay and lesbian clergy and members in New Jersey. I understand that some view this and other actions of Convention with regard for the Windsor Report as inadequate. As strongly as I disagree with that assessment, I will continue in respectful conversation with those who take that approach, calling us all to reconciliation through common mission.

The next step in the wider Communion is for a group appointed by the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council to assess The Episcopal Church's response to the Windsor Report and assist the Archbishop in the making of a report to the Primates at their meeting early next year.

Since the Convention adjourned, Archbishop Rowan Williams has set out his reflections on the Anglican Communion and his view of responsible decision-making within the Communion ("The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today: A Reflection for the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful of the Anglican Communion.") Archbishop Williams favors the development of a formal Anglican Covenant. Once the language of the Covenant is agreed to, it would be up to each of the 38 Provinces to adopt the proposed Covenant. It might be the case that some Provinces would not be willing to adopt the Covenant. It may be that some churches would be

“constituent” members while others would be “associate” members. This new structure will take years to evolve. It will certainly be part of the Lambeth Conference in 2008.

In my Address to our Diocesan Convention last March, I said that, “I have hope that our General Convention will respond to the Windsor Report in such a manner that we will continue to love and serve our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and integrity as an autonomous province of the Anglican Communion. To echo something Bishop Dyer said to the clergy last October, I want us to remain a world Communion for the sake of a suffering world. We need one another so that we can show the world that passion lives here; that Jesus lives here. On the day after the General Convention closes, I plan to return to that work and mission, with all my passion, here in New Jersey.”

I am so glad to come home to New Jersey and get back to work in our Diocese. In the past week I celebrated the 300th anniversary of the founding of St. John’s, Elizabeth; celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Rev. Bob Counselman’s tenure as Rector of Trinity, Woodbridge; presided at a meeting of our Diocesan Council, at which we heard of a bold plan to challenge all of our churches to support our common mission; attended an exciting, joyous and slightly raucous meeting of our Right Onward Visioning Committee, where we continued to develop a process that will lead to a vision and strategic plan for our Diocese; and accompanied Deacon Johnine Byrer and Hal Murray (from The Church of the Holy Spirit, Lebanon) to lead Bible Study and share the Eucharist and prayer with inmates at the Somerset County Jail. None of this will grab the headlines. But all of it is part of living the Good News of Jesus Christ, together.

I invite everyone to “Come and Grow” with the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of New Jersey. The abundant life of Jesus Christ (John 10:10) is among us. We are growing up into Christ. We are seeking his truth in love and we are speaking his truth in love. He will keep us in step with each other. May he continue to nourish us so that we will continue to “grow up healthy in God, robust in love.”

The Rt. Rev. George E. Councill
XI Bishop of New Jersey

