

June 30th, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We, the General Convention Deputation of the Diocese of New Jersey, write to share with you the most compelling events of the intense days we lived through in Columbus. We look forward also to opportunities to speak with you about Convention in person in the days ahead. (A fuller summary of Convention actions is at:

www.epischicago.org/ResourceDetail.cfm?CatID=11&SubCatID=34).

It was with surprise and great joy that the House of Deputies received the news of the election of the Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, Bishop of Nevada, as the 26th Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church. The House of Deputies consented to her election overwhelmingly, and when she and Presiding Bishop Griswold were escorted into the House she was greeted with a prolonged standing ovation. Like the Bishops who elected her, we in the New Jersey Deputation are impressed with the many gifts our Presiding Bishop Elect brings to her new ministry and look with hope to her leadership of the Church in the next nine years.

Another piece of good news is the focus on the Church's mission that underlay so many of the Convention's actions. In particular, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which seek to eliminate extreme poverty throughout the world by 2015, received support not only in resolutions, but where it really counts – in the Budget the Convention adopted. Following the UN's guideline of giving 0.7% of income to enact the MDGs, resolutions of Convention and the Budget of the Episcopal Church for 2007-2009 include the following:

- A line item representing more than 0.7% of the budget dedicated to the MDGs in new ways.
- An additional \$1,326,000 in other mission funds that support the MDGs.
- A challenge to every department and funded mission and ministry of the Church to give 0.7% of their budgeted money toward the MDGs.
- A pledge by all members of the Program, Budget and Finance Committee (including our Bishop, the Rt. Rev. George Councill) to pledge 0.7% of personal income toward the MDGs and a challenge to all Bishops and General Convention Deputies to do the same.
- A call to Episcopalians to work with the Washington office of The Episcopal Church to encourage the US government to commit 0.7% of national income to the MDGs.

The Church's commitment to mission was one of the highlights of Convention that we need not to lose sight of in our focus on those events that have garnered more publicity. When asked after her election what her passion was, the Presiding Bishop Elect said, "My passion is for mission because I think that's how we build the reign of God. The Millennium Development Goals give us an image, an icon or a lens, if you will, for how we can build the reign of God in our own day."

Last, we need to speak of the actions of Convention in response to the Windsor Report and the relationship of the Episcopal Church with the rest of the Anglican Communion in the wake of our consent in 2003 to the consecration of the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson, a gay man living in a committed partnership, as Bishop of New Hampshire. Many of you will have already read Resolution B-033, adopted on the last day of Convention, in which the Convention called upon Bishops and Standing Committees 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." To understand how, amidst great pain, Convention came to adopt this resolution requires looking at the events that led up to it. Earlier, the Convention had adopted several Resolutions in response to the Windsor Report: an apology and expression of regret for having "strained the bonds of affection in the events surrounding the General Convention of 2003 and the consequences that followed." (Resolution A-160); a reaffirmation of "the abiding commitment of The Episcopal Church to the fellowship of Churches that constitute the Anglican Communion" and our desire to "seek to live into the highest degree of communion possible." (Resolution A-159); and support for "the process of the development of an Anglican Covenant that underscores our unity in faith, order, and common life in service of God's mission." (Resolution A-166). While these resolutions generated lively debate and, in some cases, a winding path through the legislative process, they were eventually adopted by wide margins in the House of Deputies.

That changed when Resolution A-161 came to the floor of the House of Deputies on Monday, June 20th. This response to the Windsor Report's request for a moratorium on the election of partnered gay bishops stated that the General Convention was "obliged to urge nominating committees, electing conventions, Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to refrain from the nomination, election, consent to and consecration of bishops whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion."

Debate on this resolution was passionate and respectful, but, for many, frustrating. A number of Deputies, including we from New Jersey, hoped to replace the words "refrain from" with "exercise very considerable caution" (language that had appeared in an earlier draft of the Resolution), but time limits on debate made that impossible. Left with voting on what felt to many like a flawed resolution presenting unacceptable choices, the House of Deputies defeated it resoundingly. New Jersey's Lay Deputies voted No unanimously; the Clergy vote was Divided (an effective No vote under General Convention rules). Interestingly, both strongly progressive and conservative dioceses voted against A-161. For progressives it gave away too much; for conservatives, it didn't go far enough. These unlikely bedfellows defeated a motion to reconsider the resolution, led in part by our Deputation, in hopes that the resolution's language against the election of partnered gay bishops could be softened.

At Tuesday evening's session, we learned that Presiding Bishop Griswold had taken the unprecedented step of calling for a joint session of both Houses on Wednesday morning, at which time he presented Resolution B-033. In his address, Bishop Griswold spoke of the importance of ongoing conversation with the rest of the Anglican Communion for our mutual conversion. While the resolutions passed to date indicated that desire, he also said, "unless there is a clear perception on the part of our Anglican brothers and sisters that they have been taken seriously in their concerns it will be impossible to have any genuine conversation." Adoption of Resolution B-033, he strongly implied, was necessary if the Presiding Bishop Elect was to have the opportunity to be in conversation with the rest of the Communion in coming years. (Bishop Griswold's address is at http://www.episcopalchurch.org/75383_76301_ENG_HTML.htm)

The mood in the House of Deputies was tense as we awaited word on the House of Bishop's action on B-033. We soon learned that though they had debated amendments that would have given bishops and Standing Committees more leeway when giving consent to bishops-elect whose manner of life presents challenges to the wider church, these were not adopted and the Deputies would need to act on the resolution in its original form.

As our debate began, Bonnie Anderson, Vice-President of the House of Deputies and its President Elect, informed us that Bishop Jefferts Schori wished to address the House. In an informal vote, Bonnie asked the will of the House, which was overwhelmingly in favor of hearing from our Presiding Bishop Elect.

In words similar to those she'd used in the House of Bishop's debate, Bishop Jefferts Schori said, "The resolution which stands before you is far from adequate. I find the language exceedingly challenging, but my sense is that it's probably the best we're going to do today, and at this convention. I am fully committed to the inclusion of gay and lesbian Christians in this church. I certainly don't understand adopting this resolution as slamming the door, and I do think that if you pass this resolution, you have to keep working with all your mind at finding a common mind in this church. I don't find this an easy thing to say to you, but I think this is the best we're going to manage at this point in our history." Her brief words had a great impact on the House and we were in complete silence until she left the hall. (Bishop Jefferts Schori's complete text is at <http://www.thewitness.org/article.php?id=1096>)

Other powerful voices in the debate were those of gay and lesbian Deputies. Not surprisingly, some spoke against the resolution. Others, in obvious pain, spoke in its favor as a necessary, costly sacrifice that might allow our new Presiding Bishop to be a force for change in the conversations of the Anglican Communion. In the end, all these influences led the House of Deputies to adopt B-033 with the support of roughly 70% of dioceses in both the Lay and Clergy orders. The vote of New Jersey's Lay Deputies was Divided (an effective No vote under General Convention rules); the Clergy voted Yes unanimously.

However Deputies voted, few completed a ballot without great struggle and pain. This was certainly true of New Jersey's Deputation. Those of us on the floor for the critical votes support the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the Episcopal Church; we also desire to remain connected to the wider Anglican Communion and to support the ministry of our Presiding Bishop Elect. In the intense last days of the Convention, we met regularly to discuss our pained struggles with these conflicting desires; to share our frustration and anger at being forced to choose between them; and, not least, to pray. When the vote on B033 was over, we all were in tears and heavy of heart, knowing that however each had voted, we had in one way voted against what we knew to be good while seeking another conflicting good.

We know that our actions and the actions of the Convention are troubling to many in this Diocese in varieties of ways. To our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters and their supporters, we offer apology for the deep pain caused by this vote and we offer our commitment to work with our Presiding Bishop Elect towards your full inclusion in the life of this Church. To those who believe Convention's response to the Windsor Report was inadequate, we ask understanding that we went as far as our consciences would allow us -- indeed, perhaps beyond. With all, we seek to be in that ongoing respectful conversation that characterized most of Convention's deliberations and were a mark of grace in the midst of great tension.

We are grateful for the leadership of our Deputation Chair, John Goldsack, who reminded us that however much we talked together, we must each in the end vote our own conscience, and for the ministry of our Chaplain, Linda Gaither, who led us in prayer time and again.

Mr. John Goldsack, Esq.*	Ms. Allie Graham
Dr. Linda Gaither*	The Rev. Jack Zamboni*
Ms. Betsy Allen*	The Rev. Joan Fleming*
Mr. Robert Fox *	The Rev. Joan Anders*
Ms. Jean McFarland	The Rev. Servio Moscoso*

The Rev. Gail Bennett, Deacon
The Rev. Keith McCoy, Deacon
*Voted on A-161 and B-033

Mr. Peter Hausman and the Rev. Phil Carr-Jones had to return to NJ
before these votes were taken.

