

Episcopal Convention Update from Father Tom – Second Update

I write this update from the Alternate Deputy seating area of the House of Deputies. I haven't had much time in the House this year, mainly as a result of the rehearsal schedule for the music team, however, I have made it to the House on and off since the Convention began. It was mostly off this weekend. Saturday's two big events were the passing of a resolution calling for full revision of the Prayer Book in the House of Deputies (The House of Bishops has not yet taken up the matter), and a Revival with at least four thousand in attendance.

I found myself trying to follow the debate in the House of Deputies via Twitter, wishing I was there to see it in person. For the Music Team, however, Saturday was a full day of rehearsing for the Revival. We began at 8 am, and went straight through the Revival, which didn't end until after 7:30 pm. Fortunately, singing, while it can be exhausting, it is also energizing. In particular, we were working with the Theodicy Jazz Collective, a very talented small jazz band, putting all the pieces together for what proved to be a wonderful service that night. It was challenging and invigorating all at the same time.

The Revival was very similar to what we did at Honey Creek earlier this year, with music and prayer built around the Presiding Bishop's preaching. Bishop Curry preached for nearly 45 minutes, getting rousing response from the congregation again and again. His message was again to reinforce how the love of God must be central to our life as Christians and the life and witness of the Church. Our own Trina Mead shone at the event, as she did at Georgia's revival. If you missed it, you can watch it, here: <https://livestream.com/accounts/12656718/events/8099578/videos/177390376>. You can find Bishop Curry's sermon here, both text and video: <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/07/08/79th-general-convention-of-the-episcopal-church-july-7-revival-sermon-by-presiding-bishop-michael-curry/>.

Sunday, in addition to continuing the legislative process, there was an outing to the Hutto Detention Center, a facility for housing women who have been placed into the criminal system for illegal entry into this country. Around one thousand people gathered for prayer and

activism. The event was a powerful witness, in the sense that it sent a clear message to the women inside that they are not alone and are not forgotten. That message was, in fact, received according to reports from a non-profit here in Austin that helped organize the event. There is no doubt that the question of immigration is a complex and controversial one in our nation right now, and yet our witness as Christians is what it has always been (ideally), to love and support the aliens in our land and offer hospitality and love at all times. The event at Hutto will not change the debate, and yet it wasn't a wasted effort as some of its detractors have suggested. You can read about the event from an Episcopal News Service reporter

here: <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/07/08/episcopalians-gather-in-public-witness-outside-immigrant-detention-center/>.

When you hear that there is a lot of legislative work going on, the sheer amount of work is hard to fathom. There are some 440+ resolutions that have been filed at this convention. Much work is done in committees to combine and rewrite resolutions that have similar thrusts. While the committees try to get things out into the two houses, there are items that get held in committee or set aside for a future Convention to take up. In addition, the consent calendar is a way to get a lot of non-controversial items taken care of without debate. Debate on the floor in a legislative session can take a great deal of time, particularly when amendments start being suggested, debated, and voted on individually. As I've been writing this, for example, we've gone through at least three proposed amendments to the resolution that address rites for marriage in the Church.

This matter is an important one, which is why it has had so much debate. The question is not just about continuing to use the rites that were approved at the last General Convention, but how to handle dioceses where bishops have not made the rites available anywhere within their borders, which was not the intent of the last General Convention's decisions. This Convention is trying to make sure that there are specific guidelines for how a same-gender marriage might take place in those places. The proposal before the house is basically to allow for "Delegated Pastoral Oversight," as the practice of bishops or clergy from another diocese coming into a diocese for an approved official role. This DEPO process, as it's called, has been used already in dioceses where parishes

were at odds with their bishop and an outside bishop was assigned pastoral oversight. At odds are the justice issues at stake regarding the Church's expressed desire to provide marriage for all, and the canonical issues at stake as clergy and bishops cross diocesan borders more frequently.

It is a complex matter, and highlights the importance of the need for a General Convention. For those who wonder why all of this is necessary, these discussions and debates are indicative of the unique way we shape our common life. In some traditions a small group or even an individual can steer the Church, but ours is much more democratic. By way of all these deputations there are many voices invited into the conversation before a decision is made. Surely there are times we would wish for a single authority to make such decisions, and yet there are times when we are glad there is not such an authority. As has been said of our own governmental style, it isn't perfect, but for many it's the best in the world. I tend to think the same about the Church's structure as well.

By tonight all of our X Choir team will be in Austin, and we are getting better as we go through the convention. We have begun to gel with the group from Oklahoma, and we're getting the hang of the processes and flow of the worship and the rehearsals. It's a real joy to be singing at this Convention, and as I said to my fellow singers yesterday, our improvisations and the introduction of new music is making me a better musician overall. It's also loosening me up a bit. You may have noticed that I've been moving during some of the songs. I wouldn't call it dancing, but definitely moving. That's a big deal for a life-long Episcopalian like me, but some of these songs just can't be sung standing still.

There is much more going on than I can write about here. You can visit the media hub for Convention and get all sorts of live updates: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/general-convention-2018-media-hub>. If you want to get into the weeds, you can visit the Virtual Binder, which contains all the resolutions, amendments, and work before both houses. It's accessible outside of the Convention for the first time this year and can be found here: https://www.vbinder.net/select_lang.

In the Peace of Christ,
Tom+

