

A Report from the Rt. Rev. Edwin F. [Ted] Gulick Jr. on the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention

*May The Lord bless you and keep you.  
May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.  
May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

A high point of Convention happened on Wednesday, July 14.

That was when the House of Deputies ended its morning session with prayers sung in Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, all three of which trace their roots to Abraham. The prayers were sung by Cantor Mark Saltzman, Congregation Kol Ami, Los Angeles; Mu'athin Ben Yousef, the Islamic center of Southern California; the Rev. Peter Rood, rector, Church of the Holy Nativity, Diocese of Los Angeles, all of whom were part of a group of ecumenical and interreligious guests at General Convention. I was particularly moved as it so happened that this chant occurred right before the bishops approved a major document giving guidelines for interreligious dialog. The committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious affairs, which I chair had been working on this document for three years and I also had the responsibility of co-chairing the legislative committee that perfected the document and offered it as a resolution to be considered. It was passed unanimously in both houses of the convention.

Each of the singers in turn sang a prayer and then combined their voices into what was called "a sung Abrahamic blessing to this house." As the individual voices soared and then blended together in the vast space of the House of Deputies, it became holy space, blessed space, and everyone in that space was changed, connected with one another in a new way.

The singers later visited the House of Bishops where they had an equally powerful effect. It was a lived experience of *Ubuntu*.

"I in you and you in me" is a phrase that sums up the meaning of the word "ubuntu." Ubuntu is a Zulu word that means a person is a person through other persons.

Ubuntu was the theme of the 76th General Convention and in that spirit, bishops and deputies alike worked hard to find ways to make concrete the inclusion of all the baptized – gay and straight, conservative e, moderate and progressive, young and old, immigrants and citizens, the poor and the hungry, the employed and the unemployed, and the whole range of nationalities and races encompassed by the Episcopal Church in the United States, Honduras, Taiwan, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, the British Virgin Islands and parts of Europe.

This work was marked by prayerful and careful listening. Legislative sessions in both Houses began and ended with prayer. The midday Eucharist was a vital source of spiritual sustenance for everyone. Members of the Fort Worth and Kentucky deputations worshipped together most days.

Persons from both dioceses were elected to important positions. The Rev. Tim Mitchell of Louisville was elected to the trustees for the Church Pension Fund, The Rev. Amy Real Coultas of Louisville was elected to the Nominating Committee for the Election of a Presiding Bishop, and Katie Sherrod of Fort Worth was elected to the Executive Council.

Mission was the subtext of every legislative session and certainly as bishops and deputies approved a sharply reduced budget that reflects the nation's economic crisis. The Program, Budget and Finance Committee [PB&F] had crafted a budget that gave to others before paying ourselves, resulting in a budget in which mission [program] takes up more than 60 percent. Still, hard decisions were made that meant nearly 40 employees of the Church Center will lose their jobs. This sad reality was much in the room as both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops voted to pass the budget.

There were 419 resolutions submitted to Convention. Your deputies worked hard. The House of Deputies dealt with 361 pieces of legislation. Ninety-five resolutions were incomplete, meaning one House or the other did not vote on them. They will be referred to an interim committee. The remainder either were combined into one resolution or did not make it out of committee.

Episcopal News Services reports that a sampling of resolutions includes "Resolution D018, which urges bishops to develop a pastoral teaching resource on God's mission and the global economic crisis and invites dioceses and 20 congregations to use Lent 2010 as a time of 'penitential reflection on the brokenness of the global economic order and its reformation in light of the gospel.'

"Deputies voted not to concur with actions by the House of Bishops July 16 on Resolution [C061] dealing with nondiscrimination language in church canons. Deputies earlier had added gender identity and expression to the list of factors for which people cannot be discriminated against. The House of Bishops then struck the entire list and replaced it with 'all baptized persons.' Deputies said the church needs to be specific in its nondiscrimination canons and chose not to accept the bishop's proposed language.

"Deputies also adopted on second reading Resolution A051, which changes the church's constitution to make it easier to license clergy from other denominations to officiate in the Episcopal Church, a move made in anticipation of possible full communion with the United Methodist Church.

"Deputies also adopted several resolutions dealing with the church's liturgical life, which included:

B020, requesting that Thurgood Marshall be added to the church's liturgical calendar of observances;

A178, encouraging dioceses, congregations and individuals to remember and support Episcopal Relief and Development's work during Lent;

A088, adopting *Rachel's Tears, Hannah's Hopes*, liturgical resources to assist with healing after abortions or other childbearing-related losses;

C078, directing development of a liturgy for the loss of a companion animal; and

A099, adding various observances and prayers to the church's liturgical calendar."

The biggest newsmakers, as usual, were resolutions dealing with human sexuality and the church's pastoral response to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Episcopalians. Here the bishops took the lead in crafting carefully nuanced resolutions that spoke to our Church's commitment to the Anglican Communion and to our commitment to the inclusion of all the baptized.

Changes in civil laws in many states in the US as well as in other parts of the Communion brought an added urgency to the work, which resulted in resolutions D025 and C056.

The full text of both -- indeed of all the resolutions -- can be found at <http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/> <http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/>.

Resolution D025 came first. I asked the presiding bishop during debate and before the vote on D025, "Would you see the moratorium enjoined upon us by the Windsor Process would not be lifted until a diocese elects a gay or lesbian person to the episcopate and that person is consecrated?"

Her response was definitive that the moment of a lifting of a moratorium would be that act and not this resolution.

I would add on a personal note that given the Episcopal Church's understanding of our commitment to our mission projects in the Anglican Communion and our deep bonds of affection with the Communion that it would be impossible for us not to consider our brothers and sisters in the Communion in a discernment process in an Episcopal election. There is nothing in this resolution that would preclude such a consideration in that discernment.

What this resolution does is remind the Church of the reality in our canons that the discernment process toward ordination is by canon open to all the baptized and states that this continues to be our canonical reality.

Resolution C056 was a response to the changing reality many churches in the Communion are facing.

It is not just the Episcopal Church that finds itself in this new reality as a result of changes in civil law regarding same sex unions and civil marriage. This resolution asks us to partner with other churches in the Anglican Communion who find themselves in this situation, among them New Zealand, Australia, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Anglican Church of Canada, and the Church of England.

I applaud this call for partnership with other parts of the Communion as we make our collective way toward a pastoral response to this new reality. This is in no way a unilateral action. This is a calling for collaborative work.

Resolution C056 authorizes no rites for the blessing of same sex unions or civil marriages. This to my mind is a heartfelt response and a pastoral attempt to address the newly occasioned situation of same sex civil marriage.

In both resolutions D025 and C056, our church has tried to walk that narrow line between pastoral care and caution in proceeding while respecting the consciences of others. The very nuanced nature of these resolutions speaks of this care. It also may explain certain inaccuracies in the reporting of these resolutions.

A careful three-year process to revise the disciplinary canons of our church passed in both houses. It allows the church to follow the models of disciplinary boards such as bar associations and medical associations rather than trying to base our response to misconduct on the code of military justice. I feel this revision will be of great use to the church and will make these difficult processes more manageable for the dioceses of our church.

The churches unwavering commitment to the Gospel of God's love made visible in the Lord Jesus Christ was the under girding reality of all we accomplished from the strong reaffirmation of the Millennium Development Goals to commitment to a program of Latino Evangelism. It was the most careful and disciplined General Convention that I have ever attended and it was a privilege to be among such committed Christians.