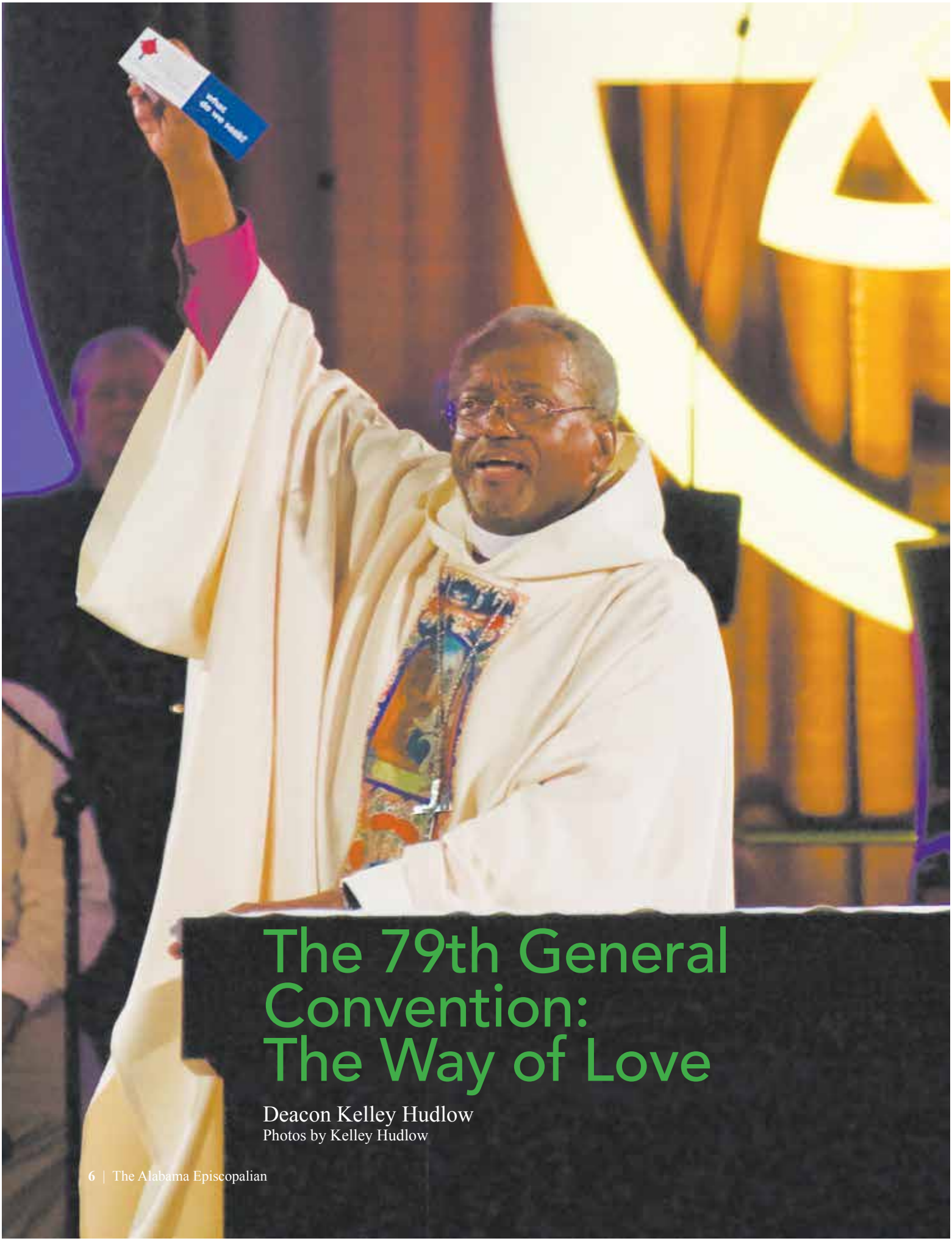


The 79th General Convention: The Way of Love

Deacon Kelley Hudlow
Photos by Kelley Hudlow



Presiding Bishop Michael Curry holds up a "Way of Love" card during his sermon. These cards and other materials were distributed to those at the service.

The 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church gathered in Austin, TX, from July 3-13. Following the success of Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's "Power of Love" sermon at the royal wedding in May, Episcopalians arriving in Austin were often greeted with "you're with the church of the royal wedding preacher guy."

At the Opening Eucharist held the on July 5, Bishop Curry's sermon focused on how we can live a Jesus-centered life. Referencing Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Curry said, "The key is to throw yourself into the arms of God. Throw yourself into the hands of Jesus." He then explained that he had gathered a group of Episcopalians—clergy, laity, members of monastic communities, and Christian formation folks—to develop practices to help people live a Jesus-centered life. The result was a rule of life called the "Way of Love."

Curry encouraged all Episcopalians to adopt these seven practices:

Turn: Pause, listen, and choose to follow Jesus.
Learn: Reflect daily on scripture, especially the life and teachings of Jesus.
Pray: Spend time with God in prayer every day.
Worship: Gather in community for worship every week.
Bless: Share one's faith and find ways to serve other people.
Go: Move beyond one's comfort to witness to the love of God with words and actions.
Rest: Dedicate time for restoration and wholeness.

To help folks in spreading the word about the rule of life, wallet size cards and larger pamphlets were distributed to those at convention. Materials are also available online, *www.episcopalchurch.org/explore-way-love*.

Curry pointed to the work in Alabama of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Blessed Jonathan Daniels as proof of concept that a Jesus-centered life can change the world. Curry preached, "My brothers and sisters, I am asking us as the Episcopal Church, no, asking us as individual Episcopalians, asking us as the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement before you begin your day, meditate on the life and teachings of Jesus. I am asking you to make that commitment."

In the closing words of his sermon, Curry remarked, "I love this church. I was born and raised in it. Baptized on the eighth day – oh, I don't know what day it was, but anyway, baptized as an infant according to the 1928 Book of Common Prayer. Lord have mercy! My swaddlin' clothes were that Episcopal flag. I love this church, and I love it because I learned about Jesus in and through this church. And I know, and I believe that we in this church can help Christianity to reclaim its soul and re-center its life in the way of love, the way of the cross, which is the way of Jesus."

Daily Worship

The first worship service at General Convention was on July 4 and was a "Liturgy of Listening." The service was designed and led by a committee of the House of Bishops. The music was gentle and meditative, and there were long moments of silence. Presiding Bishop Curry began with opening remarks explaining the purpose of the service:

> Tonight, we acknowledge the Church has failed her people. Bishops have failed members of the Church. Priests, deacons, laity, all members of the Church have failed our vows. Some have committed offenses against another, some have denied or covered up those offenses, some have silently



On Sunday, July 8, a dinner was held for the Alabama deputation and all those at General Convention with an Alabama connection.

> observed and done nothing. We have sinned against God and one another….This evening, we continue the work that has already started by offering a public witness, a time of lament and confession, and a commitment to move forward as the Body of Christ in covenant with one another.

The opening remarks were followed by a Lament, led first by the bishops, and then, the congregation joined. Bishops read excerpts from letters sent to them describing harassment and abuse experienced within the church.



July 5, Brian Denton-Trujillo, an alternate deputy from Ascension Birmingham, serves as a Eucharistic Minister for the Opening Eucharist.

Acknowledging the need for continued work, the service included no Absolution, but rather ended with a "Commitment for the on-going journey."

Beginning on July 5, daily Eucharist was offered featuring a variety of music and preachers. Days that TEConversations on evangelism, racial reconciliation, and care of creation were held, the Eucharist focused on the theme of the day. On July 7, General Convention was invited to a Revival held at the Palmer Center. Presiding Bishop ended his sermon with the instruction "Go!":

> My brothers, my sisters, my siblings, we have work to do. To stand for Christianity, a way of being Christian that looks like Jesus of Nazareth. A way of being Christian that is grounded and based on love. A way of being Christian that is not ashamed to be called people of love. So go from this place and be people of the way. Go from this place as people of Jesus. Go from this place as people of love! Go from this place and heal our lands! Go from this place and heal our world! Go from this place until justice rolls down! Go from this place until the nightmare is over! Go from this place until God's dream is realized! Go from this place and help us live!

On July 6, the Eucharist also included the triennial United Thank Offering Ingathering ceremony, which brought in $3,738,989.47. Less formal worship included popup prayer meetings held by the group Bishops Against

Gun Violence. Each day 96 crosses were distributed to remember the 96 people on average killed by gun violence in the United States. A bishop would then offer a short reflection and prayer. On Sunday, July 8, this group held a prayer service in a nearby park. Later in the day, more than 1,000 Episcopalians travelled to the T. Don Hutto Residential Center, in rural Texas, to offer prayers and a public witness to the actions and immigration policies that have led to the separation of families at the border.

Legislative Work of Convention

At its adjournment on July 13, General Convention had addressed over 500 resolutions. This work began in legislative committee hearings beginning on July 3. Hours of testimony were received on issues such as prayer book revision, church investments, the pension fund, immigration, marriage, Israel-Palenstine, gun violence, sexual harassment and abuse, and the budget. Members of the Alabama deputation served on the following committees:

Program, Budget, & Finance - Bishop Kee Sloan

Church Pension Fund - The Rev. Evan Garner (Vice Chair)

Christian Formation & Discipleship - Virginia Hillhouse

Stewardship & Socially Responsible Investing - The Rev. Candice Frazer

Safeguarding & Title IV - Mark Smith



The Rev. Evan Garner addresses the House of Deputies.

For those serving on committees, mornings usually began with hearings at 7:30 am and would sometimes go late into the evening. Alabama Deputies not assigned to committees attended other hearings in order to share information with the deputation at nightly meetings.

General Convention consists of two houses - the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies (made up of laity and other clergy). For a resolution to be adopted by General Convention, it must pass in identical form in both houses. Based on testimony and deliberation, the legislative committees make recommendations to their respective houses. Depending on the recommendation, a resolution may be placed on the "Consent Calendar." A familiar refrain from Gay Clark Jennings, the President of the House of Deputies,



The Rev. Candice Burke Frazer addresses the House of Deputies.



July 9 was Camp and Conference Day for General Convention, and the Alabama Deputation represented Camp McDowell. (L-R) Anne Kimzey, Judy Quick, Brian Denton-Trujillo, Kee Sloan, Virginia Hillhouse, Mark Smith, Lee Shafer, Evan Garner, Shari Harrison, Tommie Watkins.



On July 8, the Seminary of the Southwest hosted a Eucharist. Those that attended were able to visit with our two seminarians Drew Brislin and Lucy Strandlund. (L-R) Drew Brislin, Allison Taylor Brislin, Lucy Strandlund, Deacon Pearl Slay, Linda Kennedy, and Anne Kimzey



Lynn Hendricks greets Presiding Bishop Michael Curry. The Presiding Bishop Michael Curry visited with the National Altar Guild Association (NAGA) members during General Convention, thanking them for their great service both to the General Convention and to the entire church. Mrs. Lynn Hendricks of Birmingham completed her three year term as National President of NAGA at the end of the gathering. The Rev. Bill King served as Chaplain to the gathering.

was "the Consent Calendar is your friend." Resolutions placed on the Consent Calendar do not require debate or discussion, and the house can vote on a large number of resolutions at one time. Items can be removed from the Consent Calendar in either house to be considered and discussed. The Consent Calendar is how most of the over 500 resolutions were addressed.

The character of the two houses is quite different. The House of Bishops is smaller and the bishops have regular meetings throughout the year. This allows for more discussion and a bit of softening in the parliamentary rules. Discussion was respectful and collegial, though there were a few times their work was bogged down in parliamentary procedure, with amendments to amendments.

The House of Deputies consisted of approximately 800 members, and therefore, parliamentary rules and a timer were more crucial to the proceedings. Deputies were called on to be succinct in their remarks. Alabama deputies Candice Frazer and Evan Garner were familiar faces in the queue at the microphone on matters such as parliamentary order, stewardship, and socially responsible investment.

The Prayerbook

Of the many resolutions presented to General Convention, the one that perhaps received the most attention was Resolution A068 involving prayerbook revision. On July 7, the House of Deputies, on a vote by orders, passed the original version of A068, with amendments, that called for the complete revision of the Book of Common Prayer. This resolution would have begun the 12-15 year long process of study, drafting, and trial-use liturgies that could result in a wholly new prayerbook.

The resolution was sent to the House of Bishops for consideration on July 9. The bishops' discussion demonstrated division on the matter, and due to time, the House of Bishops was adjourned before a vote was taken. In the intervening time several proposed amendments or substitutions were filed, including an amendment/substitution authored by Bishop Andy Doyle. This amendment was adopted by the House of Bishops, and the new A068 was sent back to the House of Deputies. On July 11, by voice vote, the House of Deputies concurred with the amended A068.

Bishop Kee Sloan, in a statement at the conclusion of General Convention, summarized the prayerbook resolution in this way:

> It retains our use of the 1979 [Book of Common Prayer]. The book that most of us love, and invites some experimentation and some innovations on the local level. The resolution adopted continues the use of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, while inviting innovation in the creation of liturgies on the diocesan level. So that rather than revision coming from on high from the bishops down to everybody else — or from General Convention down to the rest of the church — it comes the other way, from the local level up….I was really enthusiastic about the resolution that passed. We hold on to the Book of Common Prayer that we're familiar with, and it gives us permission to explore other opportunities and possibilities.

The Convention also adopted resolutions on *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, the continued trial use of Marriage rites for same-sex couples, additions to the *Book of Occasional Services* for trial use, and a trial-use expansive language version of Holy Eucharist Rite II, Prayers A, B, and D.



July 8, at a luncheon hosted by the ECW, Virginia Hillhouse was honored as a Distinguished Woman. (L-R) Tina Sloan, Maggie Noland, Virginia Hillhouse, Linda Kennedy, Deacon Pearl Slay, Bishop Kee Sloan

¡Cuba, Sí!

Some of the most emotional and joyful moments at General Convention centered on the resolution to restore the Diocese of Cuba to The Episcopal Church. In 1966, in response to political events, the House of Bishops voted to separate from the Diocese of Cuba. Since that time, the Diocese in Cuba has existed as an autonomous diocese of the Anglican Communion under the authority of the Metropolitan Council of Cuba. In legislative committee hearings, questions were raised about what the Constitutions and Canons would allow, but on July 10, a resolution was sent to the House of Bishops for consideration. After the sometimes emotional testimony of several bishops, the House of Bishops unanimously voted to restore the Diocese of Cuba.

As the bishops and audience stood and applauded, Bishop José McLoughlin of the Diocese of Western North Carolina, escorted Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio of the Diocese of Cuba onto the floor of the House of Bishops. The House of Bishops sang the Doxology, and Bishop Delgado offered brief remarks through an interpreter, "I think the Holy Spirit is moving here amongst all of us….Cuba never left. It never left. It was always part of the Episcopal Church. It was our family, that is at the root of it, so we are one big family. The Spirit sometimes surprises you and this afternoon was a big surprise for me. Thank you my brothers and sisters for all the encouragement, all the hugs, all the prayers, and all the strengths that have brought us here today." Following her remarks, Presiding Bishop Curry invited Bishop Delgado to take her seat at table seven.

On the following day, the House of Deputies took up the resolution. Prior to voting, President Gay Clark Jennings called for a moment of silence before the "historic vote." Jennings called for the vote by asking that all those in favor of the resolution "to please signify by saying 'Sí'." On an unanimous voice vote, the resolution was adopted. During a prolonged standing ovation, Bishop Delgado, and the Rev. Gerardo Lojildes, and Mayelin Aqueda, president of the ECW in Cuba, were escorted to the platform. Following brief remarks, Lojildes and Aqueda were given seat and voice in the House of Deputies. The Diocese of Cuba will now be part of Province II.

In a press briefing on July 11, Bishop McLoughlin spoke about how the vote was a personal matter. McLouglin's father was born in the Bronx, and his mother was a Cuban refugee. His grandfather was a senator in the Cuban Senate, including the time during the revolution. McLoughlin described the vote as the "beginning of a sign of how the church continues to be a body of reconciliation. I think what happened today; what's taken place in the last twenty-four hours is a sign of what happens when the church is at its best."

For links to videos, news coverage, and information about resolutions, visit dioala.org/gc79.html. *For news about the ECW Triennial meeting, visit* https://bit.ly/2uxwHeq.



Bishop José McLoughlin of the Diocese of Western North Carolina, escorts Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio of the Diocese of Cuba onto the floor of the House of Bishops.



Bishop Henry Parsley visited with the Alabama deputies following a joint session. (L-R) Bishop Henry Parsley, Deacon Judy Quick, Brian Denton-Trujillo, Shari Harrison, Virginia Hillhouse, Bishop Kee Sloan, Ann Kimzy, Mark Smith, Rev. Lee Shafer, Rev. Evan Garner, Rev. Candice Frazer



The Triennial meeting of the Episcopal Church Women occurred concurrently with General Convention. Alabama was represented by Maggie Noland, Deacon Pearl Slay, and Linda Kennedy.

Point of Humor

A point of humor through General Convention was the presence of three pigeons in the House of Deputies. Dubbed an "impeccable pigeon" by Episcopal News Service, the pigeon(s) soon had a presence on Twitter with the handle @gc79pigeon. The pigeon's Twitter feed avoided controversy and rather, made humorous remarks about parliamentary proceedings and food. The pigeons also found their way into remarks from deputies, including some humorous comments by the Rev. Matthew Cowden, of Northern Indiana, made while surrounded by three people wearing pigeon masks. As General Convention came to a close, it was revealed that the online presence of the pigeon was the work of the Rev. David Sibley, deputy from Long Island, and the Rev. David Simmons, alternate deputy of Milwaukee. (Image is a screenshot provided by Episcopal News Service)

