

## THE GENERAL CONVENTION

The 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church  
July 8 – 17, 2009    Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, California

The General Convention—the largest bicameral legislative body in the world numbering over 800 deputies and 300 bishops—is charged with setting the policies and structures of government, and having custody of The Book of Common Prayer for the Episcopal Church. Its tasks include election of officers and members of national boards and agencies; establishing standing committees and commissions; approving a budget; addressing resolutions and legislation affecting the church's faith and order, and its position on issues before the church and wider society; strengthen its identity and common mission through worship, Bible study and fellowship; and, if necessary, elect a presiding bishop. The House of Deputies meets only during General Convention, while the House of Bishops meets twice a year in the spring and fall, though it cannot enact legislation during these interim meetings.

The first assembly of representatives of Anglican churches in the newly independent United States was held at Christ Church, Philadelphia September 27, 1785 and consisted only of a single house of deputies, including lay persons, priests and deacons. A second General Convention met in 1786 at which the three bishops consecrated by that time, Samuel Seabury, William White and Samuel Provoost were recognized as having valid episcopal orders. In 1789 the Episcopal Church formally came into being as a separate denomination, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. At this third General Convention, the deputies adopted a constitution and a Book of Common Prayer and divided the convention into two houses: a House of Clerical and Lay Deputies, and a House of Bishops.

The House of Deputies consists of four lay and four clerical deputies from each diocese of the church. Dioceses also elect an equivalent number of alternates in each order. Deputies are not delegates, meaning they are not elected to represent their dioceses. Deputies vote their conscience which allows them to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All bishops, active and retired, make up the House of Bishops with seat, voice and vote. Other Anglican bishops can be admitted to non-voting membership in the House of Bishops. Legislation and resolutions can be introduced in either house, but both houses must concur for the measures to take effect.

Legislation, in the form of resolutions, takes up much of the convention's ten business days every three years. The resolutions are referred to any of 22 legislative committees which then report out to one of the two houses—House of Deputies or House of Bishops. Committees cover areas such as the consecration of bishops, communications, ecumenical relations, education, evangelism, prayer book and liturgy, social and urban affairs, and world mission. Each house's legislative routine is of resolutions presented and referred to one of 22 legislative committees, reports from legislative committees to each house, debates, votes and actions taken in each house. There are 17 legislative sessions (morning and afternoon sessions) during the ten days the convention is officially in session.

### How resolutions become an act of General Convention

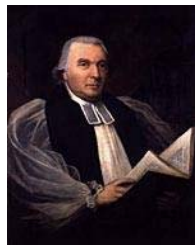
The four sources for resolutions are:

- “A” resolutions submitted by committees, commissions, agencies and boards (CCAB) and published in *The Blue Book*.
- “B” resolutions from bishops
- “C” from dioceses/provinces
- “D” from deputies

Each resolution is assigned to a legislative committee of each house for discussion and debate. One house is designated as the House of Initial Action (HIA). The assigned committee holds one or more public hearings on the resolution. Hearing times are posted at least four hours in advance. Resolutions may also be reviewed by the committees on Constitution or Canons for form, and by Program, Budget and Finance, if funding implications are present. After hearings and discussion, the committee can recommend a resolution be:

1. Adopted
2. Adopted, but with amended or substituted text.
3. Rejected
4. Referred to a CCAB
5. Or that the committee be discharged from further consideration of it.

The resolution is then placed on the Daily Calendar for floor debate and vote, or the Consent Calendar—which means it is voted on without discussion in the full house. The HIA may then accept the committee recommendation or provide its own. If the house rejects the resolution, it dies. If adopted, it goes to the second house’s legislative committee, and goes through the same process. If the second house amends the resolution, it goes back to the first house. A resolution only becomes an **Act of Convention** after both houses adopt it in the same form.



The first bishops of the Episcopal Church:

William White

Samuel Seabury

Samuel Provoost