



From Bishop Thomas J. Brown
General Convention #81 – Video Transcript
June 5, 2024

The General Convention of The Episcopal Church will get underway for the 81st time later this month. I'm coming to you in this video message to give you a little bit of history of general conventions to give you my own take on what I think we might look forward to as we come home from this meeting and to introduce you to your deputies and other friends of ours who will be at the general convention. For some of you this will be old news. You are familiar with how our church governs itself, but for others of us, this may be a good primer to understand how it is the general Church governs itself.

The first thing you might notice is my use of the word 'general', and it refers to the whole Episcopal Church, to the denomination that we refer to as The Episcopal Church -- because we comprise dioceses in the United States, in Taiwan, Haiti, several Spanish speaking dioceses, and several places throughout Europe. This is why we avoid using the term "the national church". We are multinational.

The Episcopal Church's structure and the general convention structure is not exactly like the United States government, but there are many similarities including that it is bicameral, though not completely analogous. You often hear people say that the House of Bishops is like the Senate and the House of Deputies is like the House of Representatives. Legislation must pass in both the House of Bishops, which literally meets in a different space, and the House of Deputies. What is referred to as the senior house, the house of deputies is called the senior house because at the first General Convention in 1785 only deputies gathered. The House of Bishops came later in 1789. So we talk about the senior house, those are the deputies. Each house has a presiding officer. The President of the House of Deputies elected by the deputies is either a lay person or a cleric. The Presiding Bishop is elected by the bishops. This bishop presides at the meetings of the House of Bishops. You know that we don't use the word Archbishop in our tradition, because from the earliest days of our founding the Presiding Bishop was simply the bishop with the greatest seniority, and he, in those days, presided over the meetings. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that our Presiding Bishop also became the chief executive after the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution, and the General Convention, which is the highest authority for our church. It's based on democratic principles. Bishops and deputies are elected, and resolutions on matters are brought to the convention and approved or not by the votes of the people who are there in each house.

The 81st General Convention returns to Louisville having been there in the early 1970s. Several notable conventions include 1976 in Minneapolis when the ordination of women to the priesthood was approved; 2003 also in Minneapolis, when Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, a married gay man, was confirmed as a bishop in our church; 2006, when the bishops elected Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori of Nevada to be the first woman presiding bishop; and in 2015, in Salt Lake City when the bishops elected Michael Bruce Curry of North Carolina to be our first black presiding bishop.

Matters are first considered in one of the two houses in the form of a resolution. Resolutions are numbered with a letter in front of them A B C or D. "A" resolutions come from various

committees or working bodies that meet between General Conventions. "B" resolutions come from bishops. "C" resolutions come from dioceses and conventions, and "D" resolutions come from deputies. Besides the legislative policy work that happens at General Convention, the budget for the entire church for the next three years is considered and voted on. There's also a grand spirit of reunion. Friendships are begun, and friendships are renewed. There's a huge exhibit hall that provides both a marketplace and a community to network at breakfast and receptions. Various groups in caucuses host events sometimes those are within the convention center, other times they're in hotels or in local churches.

This year the bishops will elect a new Presiding Bishop from among five nominees, and we'll do that at Christ Church Cathedral in downtown Louisville on Wednesday the 26th of June. The House of Deputies will also elect a president from among three nominees. I think that we should expect legislative reform about clergy discipline, especially for bishops. There will be debate about permitting so-called Open Communion -- that is to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ without baptism. Consideration of new prayers for Sunday morning and other days, for liturgical rights, for a new hymnal supplement. Various justice concerns will be debated. There will be discussion about national and international policy, including Israel – Palestine, prevention of gun violence, and anti-racism. But not everything is a hot button issue. Many of the resolutions will simply edit our canons or call for efforts to strengthen our faith communities to find new ways to proclaim the love of God made known in Jesus Christ or to increase our ties with other Christian communities - the United Methodist Church, for example. Just last month at their General Conference, they expressed desire to be in full communion with us. We will consider this, and I hope that in 2027, we will follow suit and become full communion partners with that church.

There are many Mainers who will be in Louisville for this meeting. Your deputies whom you elected in 2022 include four clerics and four lay people, and that's true for every diocese that sends eight. We have a mix of folk who have been going to General Convention for several years, and we have deputies for whom this is their first time. Our deputation is chaired by John Hennessy who the other deputies elected to fulfill this role which is basically the chief organizer. The other lay deputies are Christian Clough from the Cathedral Church, Dick Rozene from St. Ann's in Windham, and Mark Spahr from St Patrick's in Brewer. The clergy deputies are (the Revs.) Lisa Fry, Josh Hill, Lauren Kay, and Kerry Mansir. Susan Sherrill Axelrod, director of communications for both Maine and New Hampshire, will be on hand at the meeting for a few days, and besides Susan, there are three young People. Catherine Mansir from Christ Church in Gardiner will be part of what's known as the Official Youth Presence, and Emily Keniston, also on the diocesan staff overseeing faith formation, is accompanying two young people to be part of a youth-led witness about gun safety. (The Rev.) Steve Muncie, the rector at St Mary's in Northeast Harbor, has long worked in the House of Bishops in an administrative capacity, and he'll be there. (The Ven.) Aaron Perkins who is on the Council of Advice for the current President of the House of Deputies will also be in Louisville. So we will be a lot of Mainers!

While we are there, we'll send you regular updates, and The Episcopal Church will use social media and The Episcopal Church's website. Our own diocesan website will be regularly updated to tell you what's going on throughout our congregations and summer chapels. I bid your prayers for the General Convention. It is our church's means for setting a strategic direction for responding to how we hear God calling us and for equipping every one of our faith communities for the work of ministry. I'll see you very soon. God bless.