
General Convention 2009

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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It has been a week since the General Convention of the Episcopal Church concluded, and much of its heat-whether indicative of fire or not-has subsided. I remember a time, just thirty years ago, when most Episcopal parishioners had little idea what occurred every three years in the legislative councils of the Episcopal Church. Then, of course, in a double step forward, the Episcopal Church General Convention allowed women to be ordained priests and, at almost the same time, authorized a new Book of Common Prayer.

Those two events, around 1979, would have lasting effects on local congregations of the Episcopal Church. This year, in 2009, when every decision - and even every idle thought-of General Convention is quickly delivered around the world in internet seconds, one wonders which actions of General Convention will truly have immediate, or even lasting, effect on local parishes. Does General Convention affect our local parishes? How is the Cathedral of St. Philip affected?

My own review of the Episcopal Church after General Convention 2009 is that we have reiterated, and claimed our dependence upon, local initiatives for ministry in this church. On the controversial sexuality issues of the day, the Episcopal Church recognized pastoral generosity at the local level. On matters relating to the wider Anglican Communion, the Episcopal Church has urged local parishes, and dioceses and individuals, to develop personal and missional relationships themselves. I especially appreciated this Convention's work on ecumenical and inter-religious relationships; again, our Episcopal Church recognized that good and healthy ecumenical relationships occur most authentically at the local level. We entered into full relationship with the Moravian Church; we took more definite steps toward theological discussion with our neighbors in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

Perhaps the most dramatic decision of General Convention was the Episcopal Church budget for the next three years. Surely everyone recognizes that the global economic recalibration has affected even our local parishes, and certainly our larger offices. The Episcopal Church passed a budget which eliminated some major staff positions at the national level; the budget assumes that some of those offices will no longer exist. There was understandable lament at those decisions.

On the other hand, that very budget was also part of a de-centralization theme, a theme of local initiative, which lay in the background of almost every General Convention action this summer. Just because the national office of the Episcopal Church cannot finance a certain ministry does not mean that the ministry ceases to exist. Indeed, the ministry-whatever it might be-might flourish more wonderfully if it starts and develops at the local level-at the level of vibrant parishes! Even more critically, the Episcopal Church did restore major outreach funding levels; it did not balance the budget by cutting mission efforts outside the church.

The only exception to this theme of local initiative and de-centralization was also important. We passed a resolution authorizing a denominational health insurance plan for The Episcopal Church. In doing so, the Church hopes to take advantage of more negotiating strength in the matters of health insurance. Obviously, the Church is not alone in matters of health care across the world either. This may be one area where larger could be better.

How did General Convention 2009 affect us at the local level? Simply put, General Convention expressed the very need for

local initiative in the Episcopal Church. The vigor of Anglican Christianity continues to be most real in vibrant parishes, and in the energy of faithful parishioners. The Episcopal Church, and any church, is at its most effective when it encourages and enables such local energy and mission.

That is where we, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, are at our best. Even now, we are planning a magnificent Fall. We will celebrate Homecoming Sunday on August 16, with a grand display of mission and ministry. Sign up for a new one this year! It is when you have joined the Cathedral's mission, that you have joined the mission of The Episcopal Church, the wider Anglican Communion of Churches, and the even greater mission of Christianity in the world.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler