



BULLETIN INSERTS

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General Convention: The Episcopal Church's Family Reunion

Imagine Eucharist for 8,000 people. Imagine a marketplace of goods and ideas. Imagine quiet conversations among friends, old and new. Imagine one of the largest legislatures in the world. Imagine the utter silence of prayer before momentous decisions.

The every-third-year gathering of the Episcopal Church known as General Convention is all of these things. The 79th gathering begins in Austin, in the Diocese of Texas, on July 5 and continues until July 13. Bishops and deputies from the Episcopal Church will make broad decisions about policies and worship.

Those decisions take the form of resolutions agreed to by both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops.

The House of Deputies ranges in size between 800 and 1,000 members. Its sessions are moderated by its elected president, a position held by the Rev. Gay Clark Jennings of the Diocese of Ohio. Each diocese is represented by up to eight elected deputies: four priests or deacons and four lay members.

Deputies cannot be instructed to vote one way or another. They agree to have an open heart so that they can prayerfully listen to others and be led by the Holy Spirit. And they cannot refuse to vote on an issue.

Most resolutions or other actions must pass by simple majorities in each house. Occasionally, the House of Deputies votes by orders, meaning that clergy and deputies vote separately and each order's votes are counted as one vote with the majority of those two votes being recorded as the vote. If the deputation's orders are evenly split, the vote counts as "no."

The House of Bishops consists of diocesan, suffragan, assisting and retired bishops. It will be led by the Presiding Bishop, the Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, who was elected at General Convention in 2015.

Resolutions come from the groups that carry out work authorized by the previous convention, and from bishops, dioceses, provinces (geographic collections of dioceses), and deputies. Before a resolution can come before either house, it must be considered by a committee, which hears public testimony and makes recommendations on whether that resolution will be presented.

Convention is more than legislation. All business stops each day so that everyone can join in the Holy Eucharist.

In the exhibit hall, organizations and interest groups present their wares, recruit members and do their best to influence legislation. Many church-related organizations hold meetings in conjunction with Convention, including the Episcopal Church Women, who hold their Triennial Meeting concurrently.



Adapted from a 2009 text by Mary Frances Schjonberg and Janet Kawamoto.

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