

From: EpiscopalLife online. March 26, 2010

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/81803_121133_ENG_HTML.htm

SOUTH CAROLINA: Convention passes resolutions on diocesan identity, authority

By Mary Frances Schjonberg, March 26, 2010

[Episcopal News Service]

Episcopalians in the [Diocese of South Carolina](#) passed a series of resolutions March 26 related to their role as a diocese of the Episcopal Church.

The four resolutions are available [here](#).

The convention said in Resolution R-1, titled "Recognition of the Heritage and a proclamation of the Identity of the Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina," that "for more than three centuries this diocese has represented the Anglican expression of the faith once for all delivered to the saints" and that "we understand ourselves to be a gospel diocese, called to proclaim an evangelical faith, embodied in a catholic order, and empowered and transformed through the Holy Spirit."

The resolution had the convention "promise under God not to swerve in our belief that above all Jesus came into the world to save the lost, that those who do not know Christ need to be brought into a personal and saving relationship with him, and that those who do know Christ need to be taught by the Holy Scriptures faithfully to follow him all the days of their lives to the Glory of God the Father."

In Resolution R-2, the convention said it "affirms its legal and ecclesiastical authority as a sovereign diocese within the Episcopal Church" and "declares the presiding bishop has no authority to retain attorneys in this diocese that present themselves as the legal counsel for the Episcopal Church in South Carolina." The resolution also demands that Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori end any relationship her office has with such an attorney.

The convention added to its canons, via Resolution R-3, a statement that the bishop is the ecclesiastical authority in the diocese and that the standing committee assumes the authority in the absence of a bishop. The resolution also gives the ecclesiastical authority, with the advice and counsel of the chancellor, binding authority to interpret the diocesan constitution and canons.

Resolution R-4 gives what its explanation calls "explicit canonical force" to what it describes as Bishop Mark Lawrence's practice of "dealing pastorally with parishes struggling with their relationship with the diocese or province." The resolution adds a section to the diocesan canons giving the ecclesiastical authority in the diocese the power "to provide a generous pastoral response" to such parishes.

The votes came during the diocese's 219th convention at [St. Paul's Church](#) in Summerville. Lawrence and the standing committee had [postponed](#) the meeting of convention from its planned March 4-5 dates "to adequately consider a response" to what he [called](#) an "unjust intrusion into the spiritual and jurisdictional affairs of this sovereign diocese of the Episcopal Church."

Lawrence was referring to a series of [telephone calls and letters](#) between diocesan Chancellor Wade Logan III and Thomas Tisdale Jr., a Charleston, South Carolina, attorney and former diocesan chancellor, concerning what Tisdale called "recent and ongoing actions by some congregations in our diocese that threaten to 'withdraw their parishes from the diocese and the Episcopal Church.'"

Tisdale referred to himself in the letters as "South Carolina counsel for the Episcopal Church." Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori [told](#) the Executive Council in February that Lawrence was "telling the world that he is offended that I think

it's important that people who want to stay Episcopalians there have some representation on behalf of the larger church."

The March 26 votes follow [action](#) on Oct. 24 when the diocese distanced itself from the Episcopal Church by authorizing Lawrence and the standing committee to begin withdrawing from church-wide bodies that assent to "actions deemed contrary to Holy Scripture, the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this church has received them, the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference which have expressed the mind of the Communion, the Book of Common Prayer and our Constitution and Canons, until such bodies show a willingness to repent of such actions."

The special convention also declared as "null and void" two General Convention resolutions that had been passed the previous month. [Resolution D025](#) affirms "that God has called and may call" gay and lesbian people "to any ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church." [Resolution C056](#) calls for the collection and development of theological resources for the blessing of same-gender unions and allows bishops to provide "a generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this church."

Earlier in the day March 26, Lawrence urged passage of the diocese's four resolutions and lamented the need to spend time on what he called in his address (to be posted [here](#)) "distractions that come from the decisions others have made within the Episcopal Church," adding that those decisions "have created restlessness in my spirit."

Noting that the diocese is growing and has "congregations poised to extend the Kingdom of God and grow the Body of Christ," Lawrence said, "how I would love to make this my chief business as a bishop."

Lawrence compared the Episcopal Church's current state to the divisions and false teaching the Apostle Paul faced in Corinth and said "it would be insufferable to see this great Diocese of South Carolina come under the sway of the same false gospel that has decked so much of the Episcopal Church with decorative destruction and dreadful decline."

He called on the diocese to "live freely in Christ in a world of spin," adding that "the march of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement has gone on relatively unchallenged."

Speaking of the church's recent [consent](#) to the ordination and consecration of Diocese of Los Angeles Bishop-elect Mary Glasspool, Lawrence said "there is little reason to believe the move toward an ever-wider embrace of sexual understandings for those in ordained ministry should stop here."

"This is our battle to engage," he told the convention. "We are not entirely alone, but the list of allies at home grows thin."

Lawrence told the convention that he and Jefferts Schori recently had "a respectful conversation" about the matter of the Episcopal Church hiring a South Carolina lawyer to make inquiries about the diocese's intentions. During the conversation, Lawrence said, Jefferts Schori "asserted once again what she has stated publicly on many occasions: that she has responsibility for the whole church, that the property of the Episcopal Church must be protected and this is one of her duties." Lawrence claimed that the presiding bishop had "assumed" a duty not stated in the church constitution and canons.

"Unfortunately, after lengthy and respectful conversation, the presiding bishop and I stand looking at one another across a wide, deep and seemingly unbridgeable theological and canonical chasm," he said. "At present both of us have signaled a willingness to continue the conversation even if it requires phone conversations from vastly different area codes."

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