

Summary Recap of the 81st General Convention of The Episcopal Church

By Ryan Kusumoto, Chair, Diocese of Hawai'i Deputation

The 81st General Convention was held in Louisville, Kentucky, from June 23 to June 28, 2024. General Conventions usually occur every three years. The 80th general convention was held in 2022 (pushed back because of COVID).

The General Convention is the highest temporal authority for The Episcopal Church, influencing decisions in parishes and dioceses. It consists of two houses: the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. For a resolution to pass, both houses must approve it in the same form. Unlike the U.S. Congress, General Convention does not have a President with veto power or a Supreme Court.

The House of Deputies includes representatives from all dioceses, each sending four lay members and four clergy members, along with alternates. The lay members from our diocese were Ryan Kusumoto, Kimberly Arakawa, Roth Puahala, and Mary Carpenter, with Evette Tamos (attended) and Peter Lee as alternates. The clergy representatives were Steven Costa, Hau'oli Tomoso, David Jackson, and Katlin McCallister, with Jennifer Latham (attended), Brian Grieves (attended), and Charles Browning as alternates. Additionally, we were fortunate to have Nicholas Livingston from Holy Nativity representing us in the Official Youth Presence.

The House of Bishops is composed solely of Bishops, with Bishop Robert Fitzpatrick representing Hawai'i.

At this General Convention, both houses debated nearly 400 resolutions, slightly fewer than in previous years. These resolutions focused on changes to the Prayer Book, Constitution and Canonical changes, and how The Church testifies to the world, addressing issues such as protecting water, opposing gun violence, safeguarding civil rights and marriage equality, promoting racial reconciliation, and caring for creation. Additionally, Sean Rowe, the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania and the Diocese of Western New York, was elected as the new Presiding Bishop, succeeding Michael Curry. Julia Ayala Harris was re-elected for a second term as President of the House of Deputies. Below is a recap by day:

Day 1: Sunday, June 23, 2024: General Convention's Legislative Days began on Sunday, June 23, 2024. The day started with a focus on resolutions for the Rules of Order in the House of Deputies, which involved updating the rules that govern our operations.

The day's discussions concluded with two significant resolutions. The first resolution, D008, empowered the Office of Government Relations for the Episcopal Church to advocate and lobby for the protection of water in Hawai'i and other indigenous areas affected by government and military operations. This resolution, championed by Jennifer

Latham, was brought forward by the Hawai'i Deputation. The General Convention heard testimonies about the events at Red Hill on O'ahu from Jenn, Official Youth Presence Representative Nicholas Livingston, and Mary Carpenter. The resolution passed with resounding approval.

Another resolution, D014, (which passed) to note was one that opposes automatic assault rifles and addressed the impact of gun violence in the US. The Diocese of Kentucky handed out placards to every Diocese where a mass shooting occurred in 2023. Hawai'i received a placard for the shooting in Waianae.

Day 2: Monday, June 24, 2024: On the next day of the legislative session, we saw several significant resolutions passed. We began the day discussing the Denominational Health Plan (DHP) via resolution A101. The DHP of the Episcopal Church provides uniform health care benefits to clergy and lay employees, mandated by the 76th General Convention in 2009 to control health care costs and ensure equitable coverage across the church. This plan aimed to leverage our collective purchasing power to provide better access and reduce costs, which had been in place for several years. However, there were recognized areas for improvement. The resolution urges the Church Pension Group to implement equitable pricing methods for health plans, considering factors such as the relative ability of each community to pay for benefits and the prevailing costs of comparable coverage in each area.

Another resolution, C008, addressed the Episcopal Church Assessment on Dioceses. The resolution called for a reduction from 15% to 10%. After much discussion, this resolution failed because it was recognized that some missions and programs (including racial justice and creation care) heavily rely on these funds.

Day 3: Tuesday, June 25, 2024: We began the day by working on the triennial budget for The Episcopal Church. Budget resolution A164, approved a \$143 million churchwide budget for 2025-27 without amendments and with minimal debate. This plan maintains the 15% assessment on diocesan revenue. The budget funds 140 full-time staff positions, various programs, and initiatives in key ministry areas, although some leaders called for increased spending on creation care. The plan also includes \$2 million for unfunded resolutions and requires the new Presiding Bishop to oversee cost reductions of nearly \$3.6 million through strategic realignment.

We also approved the resolution to include the Episcopal Church and School in Guam, as well as the Preaching Station in Saipan into the Diocese of Hawai'i. This resolution, B006, received strong testimony from Roth Puahala and was unanimously approved, officially making The Episcopal Church in Micronesia a part of the Diocese of Hawai'i.

Following this, we addressed resolution C009, which proposed changing Navajoland from an Area Mission into a Missionary Diocese. A Missionary Diocese in the Episcopal Church is established in areas where the church is newly expanding or has a small presence, often relying on support from the broader church. These dioceses emphasize evangelism, outreach, and adaptability to grow local congregations and engage deeply

with their communities. Missionary Dioceses can select their own bishop, unlike Area Missions whose bishops are appointed by the House of Bishops. Resolution C009 passed unanimously, officially making Navajoland a Missionary Diocese and recognizing their desire for more self-determination.

Finally, the House of Deputies re-elected Julia Ayala-Harris, from the Diocese of Oklahoma, to her second term as President. The President of the House of Deputies presides over this house and can serve up to three 3-year terms. Julia was re-elected on the first ballot. The other candidates were Zena Link from Western Massachusetts and Rachel Taber-Hamilton from the Diocese of Olympia.

Day 4: Wednesday, June 26, 2024: Day four was the day designated for the election of the new Presiding Bishop. The election of the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church begins with a Nominating Committee that selects a slate of candidates, with additional nominations allowed by petition. The House of Bishops then votes to elect the Presiding Bishop, requiring a majority vote. The election must be confirmed by a majority vote in the House of Deputies. There were five candidates: Bishop J. Scott Barker of the Diocese of Nebraska, Bishop DeDe Duncan-Probe of Central New York, Bishop Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez of the Diocese of Pennsylvania, Bishop Sean Rowe of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania and Diocese of Western New York, and Bishop Robert Wright of the Diocese of Atlanta.

The bishops were sequestered in the Cathedral in Louisville to elect a new Presiding Bishop. After a single ballot, Bishop Sean Rowe was elected as the 28th Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church, succeeding Bishop Michael Curry. He will begin his new ministry on November 1, 2024.

Much of the day in the House of Deputies was spent discussing resolutions, particularly focusing on our stance and actions regarding the Holy Land. We approved resolutions D007 and D056, which were moral calls to condemn the attack and seek a cease-fire in the Holy Land.

One of the most discussed resolutions at this General Convention originated from the 2023 Hawai'i Diocesan Convention. This resolution condemned the attack in the Holy Land and authorized the Office of Government Relations to advocate for continued human rights and the rapid provision of food support for the area. The key point of debate in this resolution was the inclusion or exclusion of the term "apartheid state." Ultimately, the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops did not agree on the use of the term (HOD was in favor of adding apartheid and HOB was not), and it was passed without it.

Day 5: Thursday, June 27, 2024: On the fifth legislative day, we began discussing resolutions to adjust the Rules of Order in the House of Deputies. One notable resolution was A094, related to communion across differences. The General Convention decided not to take further action on this resolution, which called for another task force to look at the issue of communion without baptism, as it has been discussed in past

conventions. The consensus was that enough theological and practical discussions are currently happening at the diocesan level, so no action is needed at this time.

A021, Create a Care of Creation Loan Program for Episcopal Dioceses, was passed on the Consent Calendar. This resolution allocated \$3 million from its unrestricted endowment funds to establish a Care of Creation loan program, aimed at helping dioceses achieve carbon net zero compliance by 2030.

Day 6: Friday, June 28, 2024: On the sixth and final legislative day, we had a busy schedule that lasted until the planned time for sine die. We started the day by passing two resolutions: one uniting the dioceses of Eastern and Western Michigan, and another merging the dioceses of Fond du Lac, Eau Claire, and Milwaukee into a single Diocese of Wisconsin. The day concluded with the passing of C023, titled "Commemorating the Philadelphia Eleven in the Church Calendar." The Philadelphia Eleven were a group of eleven women who were ordained as the first female priests in the Episcopal Church on July 29, 1974. This ordination took place at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, despite the Episcopal Church's official prohibition against women priests at that time. Their ordination sparked a significant movement towards gender equality within the church, leading to the eventual approval of female ordination by the General Convention in 1976. At the end of the vote on this resolution, all female clergy were asked to stand, acknowledging that without the trailblazing efforts of these eleven women, our church might not benefit from the diverse gifts of our clergy.

Significantly for Hawai'i, resolution C023 also included the first reading to include Queen Lili'uokalani into our Church calendar. For a saint to be officially recognized in our Prayer Book or other Church Calendars, they must pass a first reading at the General Convention and a second reading at the subsequent General Convention. For almost 12 years, we have been advocating for Queen Lili'uokalani's sainthood, and passing the first reading is a crucial and meaningful step. This is a significant achievement and a proud moment for the people of Hawai'i, who honor her for her selfless leadership and enduring legacy.

The 81st General Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, was a significant event for The Episcopal Church, filled with important decisions and heartfelt discussions. Over six days, the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops worked together to address key issues like gun violence and environmental protection. They also celebrated the election of Bishop Sean Rowe as the new Presiding Bishop. All of Hawai'i's resolutions passed: (a) welcoming the Episcopal Church in Micronesia into the Diocese of Hawai'i, (b) recognizing Queen Lili'uokalani's sainthood (first reading), (c) Ola I Ka Wai, and (d) peace in the Holy Land. This convention showed our commitment to justice, equality, and honoring our diverse heritage. The deputation is thankful for the prayers and well-wishes during this time.