

Unfinished business

First in an occasional series on church governance

General Convention 2009 is past, but a bit of unfinished business remains.

What happens to resolutions that were not addressed or acted upon? A handful of resolutions, approved by one house of the triennial convention, but not addressed by the other, are now in the hands of Executive Council.

At General Convention 2009, which met July 8 - 17 in Anaheim, California, the House of Deputies and House of Bishops addressed and approved an astounding number of resolutions – 419 – on topics ranging from the Anglican Communion, the budget and liturgy to civil rights, the environment and healthcare. Resolutions passed by General Convention are binding on the Church, explains the Rev. Canon Gregory Straub, executive officer and secretary of General Convention.

Straub reports that only 19 resolutions were not acted upon at the 2009 meeting, thanks to the dedicated work of the bishops and deputies at General Convention.

Of the 19, Straub said, most were duplications of those that had been submitted and parts of them were incorporated into resolutions that were considered. “Legislative Committees routinely ask to be discharged from considering further this kind of resolution,” he said, “but by the end of Convention, committees are meeting only to vote on resolutions that have been amended by the other house. These were left behind.”

He added, “Five resolutions were incomplete: that is, they were perfected by a legislative committee, debated and voted on in one house of convention, but for one reason or another (usually time), the matter never came to the second house.”

What were the resolutions about?

Although 19 resolutions were not acted upon, all of their topics and concerns were. Straub explained, “The resolutions not acted upon covered a variety of topics, but no topic that was not otherwise addressed by this Convention. The incomplete resolutions were about commending the Presiding Bishop for peacemaking; supporting the Executive Council’s Committees on the Status of Women and HIV/AIDS; care for the environment with special concern for water; pastoral generosity in addressing civil marriage; and readiness for pandemics.”



House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson; Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori; the Rev. Canon Gregory Straub, secretary of General Convention. Photos: Janet Kawamoto, Jim De La, Episcopal Life staff.

So what happens to these 19 resolutions?

“General Convention passed a resolution authorizing the secretary to refer incomplete resolutions to an interim body,” Straub explained. “It is my decision to forward resolutions that have been perfected by a legislative committee and debated and passed by one house to a Standing Committee of Executive Council.”

Executive Council is an elected body, comprised of 38 members who are laity, clergy and bishops, plus the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies. Its duty is to carry out programs and policies adopted by General Convention and to oversee the ministry and mission of the Church.

“As all five of these incomplete resolutions were perfected by a legislative committee and debated and passed by one house of convention, they will be referred to a Standing Committee of Executive Council for further consideration before being voted upon by Executive Council,” said Straub

Executive Council, which held its first post-General Convention meeting October 5 - 8 in Memphis, Tennessee, can chose to act, or not to act, on the resolutions. “Executive Council has the power to debate, amend, pass or reject each of these pieces of legislation,” Straub said.

Straub pointed out the focus of the October Executive Council meeting is organizational in nature, so he does not expect Council to vote on these matters. However, he added, “The newly appointed Standing Committees will prioritize incomplete resolutions, determine what resources they will need to consider them (e.g., expert witnesses) and schedule their debate for a future meeting.”

For the record, the 19 resolutions from 2009 is a marked decrease from the 65 that were left behind following General Convention 2006. “We did a better job training the committees to seek discharges via the consent calendar,” Straub explained. “In 2006, there were 51 incomplete resolutions [passed by one house, but not the other]. So, there were far fewer orphans at this convention than last.”

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