

THE GENERAL CONVENTION - JULY 7, 2012 LIVING CHURCH

New Seats, Hot Seats

By Joe Thoma

On the second legislative day of General Convention the House of Bishops consented to the election of eight new bishops after struggling in private with complaints brought against nine of its own.

Meeting in “private conversation” before the start of the public part of the afternoon session, bishops discussed recent complaints against the Rt. Revs. Maurice M. Benitez, retired Bishop of Texas; John W. Howe, retired bishop of Central Florida; Paul E. Lambert, Bishop Suffragan of Dallas; Bishop William H. Love, Bishop of Albany; D. Bruce MacPherson, Bishop of Western Louisiana; Daniel H. Martins, Bishop of Springfield; and James M. Stanton, Bishop of Dallas.

“It was a frank discussion,” Bishop Stanton said after the session.

Many Episcopal leaders and bloggers have questioned the timing and substance of charges that the bishops engaged in misconduct by endorsing a friend of the court brief prepared by the Anglican Communion Institute in a Texas Supreme Court case between the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Fort Worth concerning legal authority and ownership of church property.

The closed session focused on a July 5 letter by the Rt. Rev. John C. Buchanan, provisional Bishop of Quincy, and Wallis Ohl, provisional Bishop of Fort Worth, to Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, asking that the House of Bishops “set the record on the polity of this church regarding its hierarchical character.”

The house is scheduled to continue the discussion at its after-



Communion during the Eucharist on Day 2 of General Convention.

Matt Townsend photo

noon legislative session July 7, Buchanan and Ohl told Episcopal News Service in an interview after the house recessed.

Bishops consented to the election of Susan E. Goff as Bishop Suffragan of Virginia; Jacob Wayne Owensby, Bishop of Western Louisiana; Dorsey McConnell, Bishop of Pittsburgh; A. Robert Hirschfeld, Bishop of New Hampshire; W. Nicholas Knisely, Bishop of Rhode Island; Douglas John Fisher, Bishop of Western Massachusetts; Robert C. Wright, Bishop of Atlanta; and Jeff Wright Fisher, Bishop Suffragan of Texas.

In the week before General Convention the deputation from the Diocese of Fort Worth urged General Convention to ask stringent questions of bishops-elect about their understanding of the Episcopal Church’s Constitution and canons.

Structure Thinks Big

By Matt Townsend

General Convention’s Structure Committee heard testimony July 6 suggesting a reimagined role for the presiding bishop, a unicameral General Convention and markedly younger leadership.

Resolution B013, proposed by Bishop Ian Douglas of Connecticut, would eliminate the need for the Presiding Bishop to resign from a diocesan role upon election — a requirement enacted by General Convention in 1947.

“This is a fairly simple resolution with, perhaps, profound opportunity or consequences,” he said. Douglas said it may be time to imagine a new model for leadership in the church, and that reducing canonical

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Matt Townsend photo

Evangelism was discussed at the Triennial meeting of the National ECW on July 6.

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rules regarding jurisdiction would free the office to change.

"I submit that the constitutional confederacy, the corporate model, and the regulatory model no longer hold. We need something different," the bishop said. "We have a wonderful opportunity to reimagine what is the role of just this one particular office, the presiding bishop, as we look at electing our next presiding bishop. We have a window."

Baptism and Communion

By Lauren Anderson

General Convention's Evangelism Committee heard the cases for and against repealing a canon that specifies Holy Communion as intended for baptized Christians.

Proponents supported Resolution C029 from the Diocese of North Carolina as a step toward radical hospitality in the Episcopal Church.

Speaking against the resolution, the Rev. Jim Sorvillo of the Diocese of Central Florida said baptism is not an optional ritual. Sorvillo added that the Eucharist should not be

seen as a symbol of exclusion, but rather as a representation of "inclusion into God's family."

"I want people to have access, no doubt, but the table loses its power, its grace, if denied the powers of baptism," Sorvillo said. "Let's not throw out the baby with the baptism water."

The Rev. Eleanor McLaughlin also opposed the resolution.

"Yearning is not bad for us. Teens yearn for cars. ... Lovers yearn for consummation," McLaughlin said. "Anyone who yearns to be fed by God, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and desires to live after the manner of our crucified and risen Lord is welcomed by God and God's altar. ... And yet we do not have to change 2,000 years of tradition. This is a feast worth waiting for."

Meghan Johnson of the Diocese of Minnesota supported the resolution, saying her parish in St. Paul has increased its membership and baptisms by offering Communion to the unbaptized.

"The table leads to the font and the font leads to the table, and both lead to Christ," she said. "We don't need the numerical order anymore."

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