Dear People of West Texas,

As we begin writing this summary report, the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church ended just 48 hours ago. There is still much dust to settle, and it will take some time to more fully understand what General Convention did and did not do, and what the consequences are for the Diocese of West Texas. In late summer or early fall, we will provide a much more complete report and will include “news and views” from our lay and clergy deputies and alternates.

The scale of the Convention needs to be described. We met in the Austin Convention Center from July 3-13. Voting participants included eight deputies (four clergy and four lay) and eight alternate deputies from the 101 domestic dioceses and 12 or so foreign dioceses of The Episcopal Church. When in session, the House of Deputies (HOD) has about 900 members. About 140 bishops participated in the House of Bishops (HOB, which includes retired bishops, though not many attend). In addition, the exhibit hall brought together hundreds representing lots of ministries and advocacy groups. Also, the Episcopal Church Women’s Triennial Meeting took place in the Convention Center at the same time.

Nearly 500 resolutions came before us during the convention. All of these resolutions were assigned to one of 24 legislative committees (comprised, actually, of two committees—a deputies’ group and a bishops’ group). Each resolution was required to have a “public hearing” during which anyone could sign up to speak for or against, and each resolution had to be voted on twice in committee—once by the deputies and once by the bishops—making a recommendation for action by the full HOD and HOB. Both of your bishops were assigned to legislative committees—Bishop Brooke-Davidson as vice-chair of Stewardship & Responsible Investing, and Bishop Reed as chair of Governance & Structure. We spent a great deal of time doing committee work and spent little time sitting in on other committees’ deliberations.

We hope this brief description gives you some sense of what convention “is like”: complex and enormous - at times glorious and wonderful, at times unwieldy, tiring, confusing, and frustrating. We took part in beautiful and moving worship; we were inspired and challenged by Spirit-driven sermons; we were humbled and blessed to be in deeper conversation about so many questions with so many faithful Christians—those with whom we have much in common and those with whom we sometimes disagree.

So, in summary, here are some of the more significant things that happened.

Joint Sessions

The two houses met in joint session three times to hear presentations and to discuss about our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s three missional priorities: Racial Reconciliation, Evangelism, and Care of Creation. No resolutions were discussed during these sessions, but we were all challenged and encouraged to take what we were hearing and learning back home with us. Your entire deputation was inspired, and we will begin further conversation and planning
in the fall. (In the budget adopted near the end of convention, evangelism, church-planting, and racial reconciliation ministries were fully and generously funded.)

**The Book of Common Prayer**

We did NOT vote to revise our *Book of Common Prayer*. A resolution to do so was rejected by the House of Bishops by means of a substitute resolution, which was eventually adopted by overwhelming majorities. While the resolution acknowledges that, broadly, liturgical change has been going on and is always a part of the Church’s life, it also holds that, for the foreseeable future, full-scale revision is not wise or necessary. It specifically “memorializes” our Prayer Book as our standard for worship, while also encouraging bishops and dioceses to develop “alternative texts to offer to the wider church.” In the context of this development, the resolution encourages, but doesn’t mandate, the use of “inclusive and expansive language.” However, the bishop remains the chief liturgical officer of his or her diocese, and no changes to the liturgies of the Prayer Book or the use of “alternative texts” is allowed without the bishop’s consent.

**Same-Sex Marriage**

Our Church passed a resolution (B012) on the last day of the convention that keeps in place the use of the “trial rites” adopted at the 2015 General Convention. The rites, in effect, will have the status of liturgies in the Book of Occasional Services; they are not being added to the Prayer Book. Because the words are gender neutral, the rites may now be available to heterosexual couples, as well. By canon, no priest of this Church can be required either to officiate at any marriage, nor to permit a marriage in his or her church. The most significant change is that a bishop’s authority to not allow the use of the same-sex rites in his or her diocese is removed. We will be reviewing our diocesan marriage policies this fall to see what, if anything, will need to be changed. The resolution goes into effect on the First Sunday of Advent.

**Sexual Abuse**

The evening before convention officially began, all were invited to a worship service consisting of listening and a litany of repentance for the historic and ongoing pain and suffering inflicted on women and girls primarily, but also on men and boys. The focus wasn’t on abuse generally in society, but within our own Church. Bishops read letters written by women (mostly) from around the country describing abuses suffered, and often, the additional pain caused when the Church’s leadership failed to act or pressured victims to remain silent. It was powerful and heart-rending. Several resolutions were passed calling for the Church and our dioceses to self-examination and change, and the House of Bishops adopted a covenant to continue to study and respond to this matter.

**Diocese of Cuba**

In an overwhelmingly happy moment, the Convention voted to readmit La Iglesia Episcopal de Cuba into The Episcopal Church. Following Castro’s rise to power in the late 1950s, the House of Bishops in 1966, requested that the Diocese of Cuba withdraw from our
Church. Since then, it has been supported by the Anglican Church of Canada. Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio was immediately seated with other bishops in the HOB.

**Immigration**

Three resolutions regarding immigration were passed, primarily denouncing the (now rescinded) federal policy of forced separation of children from their parents when caught in the country illegally. The resolutions encouraged dioceses and congregations to become knowledgeable about immigration issues and actively seek to alleviate the suffering. At a prayer vigil of over 1,100 Episcopalians on July 8 at a detention center in Hutto, the Presiding Bishop said, “We do not come in hatred. We do not come in bigotry. We do not come to put anybody down. We come to lift everybody up. We come in love because we follow Jesus, and Jesus taught us to love.”

**Hymn Honoring Artemisia Bowden**

This resolution came through our Diocesan Council last February, via the diocesan chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians, and requested the addition of a hymn in honor of our “local saint” Artemisia Bowden, the child of slaves who came to San Antonio in 1902 to lead St. Philip’s School for Girls that eventually became what is now St. Philip’s College. The resolution was unanimously recommended by the committee it was assigned to as “Take No Further Action,” and that was agreed to in the HOB.

While disappointing to us, and to our deputation, this result wasn’t a complete surprise, since there are currently no plans to revise the Hymnal. Another resolution was passed, however, calling for the collection of “home-grown” hymns and songs in use in congregations and dioceses and making those available to the wider Church. We are hopeful that a hymn honoring the “savior of St. Philip’s” will one day be sung.

With almost 500 resolutions to consider, obviously we’ve just scratched the surface here. Plenty of resources are available (on our diocesan website – [www.dwtx.org/general-convention](http://www.dwtx.org/general-convention) - and the general convention website – [www.generalconvention.org](http://www.generalconvention.org)) should you want to learn more. As we communicated before and during the convention, please be circumspect and discerning when reading and listening to secular news accounts and social media.

We are grateful for the opportunity to represent you in the Councils of the Church, and we are profoundly thankful to have worked with the faithful and loving followers of Jesus who made up the West Texas deputation. And we are so, so glad to be back home!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Jennifer Brooke-Davidson
Bishop Suffragan

David Reed
Bishop