



July 20, 2009

To the People of the Diocese of Chicago

Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you at the conclusion of the 76<sup>th</sup> General Convention of The Episcopal Church. For the last ten days, bishops, deputies, delegates to the Episcopal Church Women Triennial, visitors and exhibitors have prayed together, discussed issues and engaged in legislation that will shape the life of our church for the next three years and beyond. The range of matters set before us was daunting and the sheer number of resolutions seemed overwhelming at times. I want to share with you some brief reflections on just a few of the decisions we made, some which already occupy the headlines and the blogs, and some which are less attention-grabbing but significant. Above all, I want you to know that we have sought to praise God who has come to us in Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are the two resolutions having to do with the openness of our ordination process and the collection of resources for the blessing of same sex unions. These resolutions are both being misrepresented in various press outlets.

The first of these resolutions reiterates what is already true: that according to the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church the process of discerning the possibility of a call to Holy Orders is open to all baptized persons and is under the direction of local bishops and dioceses. The resolution does not repudiate any past resolutions of the General Convention and it restates our commitment to the ongoing dialogue on these matters in the wider Anglican Communion.

The second of these resolutions calls for the collection of liturgical and theological resources regarding same-gender blessings. This resolution recognizes the pastoral needs of members of our church, especially for dioceses in states which have made same-gender marriage or civil unions legal. It does not authorize any rites, but calls for an open process of gathering materials on the subject and reaffirms earlier resolutions that clergy and congregations may provide for the pastoral needs of gay and lesbian members of our church with a wide range of pastoral responses. Other churches in the Anglican Communion are engaged in similar process and this resolution restates our commitment to remain in conversation with them and the structures of the whole Anglican Communion as we continue this pastoral and theological work.

The third matter, and perhaps the most far reaching, is the budget of the Episcopal Church adopted for the next triennium. It contains dramatic cuts in both revenue and expenditures. As in the business world and academia, funding for large, centralized structures and bureaucracy is giving way to a greater focus on local mission and ministry more responsive to local contexts. We are learning

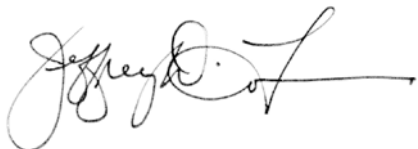
which matters are best addressed locally and which need the support of the larger organization. We recommitted ourselves to the eradication of poverty and disease in this world with a line item in support of the Millennium Development Goals. We increased our support of missionaries and our partner churches in the Anglican Communion and we adopted a national health care plan for employees of The Episcopal Church. While not part of the budget, a particularly moving highlight of the convention was the ingathering of the United Thank Offering from every diocese of this church – over 7 million dollars to support the mission and ministry of the People of God.

I served on the Prayer Book, Liturgy, and Music Committee of the convention. One piece of work presented through our committee and adopted by the convention, unlikely to make it into the headlines but of incredible value, is a new liturgical resource titled, Rachel's Tears, Hannah's Hopes. It's a beautiful collection of prayers and services for situations around childbearing and reproductive loss. It was prepared with input from persons across the theological spectrum and its pastoral sensitivity is impressive. I think we will all find it to be a sound resource for surrounding families in need with the prayer of the church.

There is so much more to share with you: we recommitted ourselves to the dismantling of racism; we took steps to address environmental degradation, an issue which may well dwarf all others; we welcomed visiting bishops; we supported the work of Episcopal Relief and Development. As time goes on, Bishop Scantlebury, members of our deputation and I will continue to share our understanding of the convention with you. The first opportunity will be a post-General Convention meeting for all clergy and laity on **Thursday, July 30** at our Episcopal Church Center beginning at 9 am (see our website, [www.episcopalchicago.org](http://www.episcopalchicago.org) for details).

For now, please join me in praying for the mission of our church. Let us recommit ourselves to work, pray and give, so that God's mission of reconciling the world to himself may be made real in us and in the Episcopal Church.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey D. Lee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeffrey D. Lee  
Bishop of Chicago