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## **An Epistle from The Consultation to the Episcopal Church – following the 80<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church**

### **Advent 2022**

To ++Michael, Julia, Rachel+, the Executive Office of the General Convention, the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements, all members of the Executive Council, all bishops, priests, deacons, and all those faithful who call the Episcopal Church their faith community:

To all God's beloved community –

May the grace and peace of God the Holy One and Jesus the Anointed live in you. As [The Consultation](#) – a collaboration of progressive organizations within The Episcopal Church – we celebrate the completion of the 80<sup>th</sup> General Convention of The Episcopal Church in spite of the many challenges faced in the lead-up to last summer. Our hearts are joyful, and our spirits encouraged by the many successes of Convention:

- Passing the resolutions put forward by the Presiding Officers' Working Group on Truth Telling, Reckoning, and Healing, especially those creating the Episcopal Coalition for Racial Equity and Justice and a commission to tell the truth of the Church's complicity in Indigenous boarding schools
- Continuing the work of extending the breadth and usability of the prayer book
- Affirming the Church's support for all LGBTQ+ people, especially for trans youth and their families
- Naming the Church's support for US-wide family leave and student debt relief policies
- Making history in the elections of Julia Ayala Harris (Oklahoma) and the Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton (Olympia) as the President and Vice-President of the House of Deputies

We honor and offer thanksgiving for the immense effort required for this convention to be such a success:

- The high degree of trust among deputies demonstrated by their willingness to forego floor amendments and maintain consent agendas in order to move essential legislation

- The grace and dedication of many to redouble efforts when they were already tired and frustrated, especially the work of the legislative committees as plans for Convention evolved
- The huge efforts by members and allies of the Presiding Officers' Working Group on Truth-telling, Reckoning, and Healing to provide expert testimony at committee hearings
- The growing use of social media to foster conversation that strengthened resolutions in real time

At the same time, we call on the whole church to be mindful of the sacrifices which fueled this success, and to claim the forward momentum generated by the convention as we prepare for the next General Convention and as the world continues to turn in the aftermath of the US midterm elections.

At the 80<sup>th</sup> General Convention last summer, consideration of more than 400 resolutions was only possible thanks to months of work by legislative committees meeting, hearing testimony, and deliberating via Zoom; efficient work by Dispatch of Business and the presiding officers; discipline on the part of bishops and deputies in utilizing consent calendars; and focused attention on the truly essential legislative business of the church.

There was much to celebrate in the completion in only four legislative days of what has, in the past, taken 10-14 days of work at the convention. While some might conclude that additional time is frivolous and unnecessary, as The Consultation, we urge the Church to recognize the losses inflicted on the Body that is the Church in order to complete the convention's essential legislative business in such a short time—a loss of time for building collaborative community, and the stress and pressure of what was functionally, for some, a multi-month convention.

We understand the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements has now established the legislative days for the 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention to be Sunday, June 23<sup>rd</sup> to Friday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, which would be more than the four we had in Baltimore but fewer than the eight days we have had in recent previous conventions. We assume that this schedule will include online legislative hearings ahead of the Convention; we recognize these do have the advantage of potentially including people from around the Church and the world. Nevertheless, we offer a cautionary note against replicating too much of what we did in 2022.

Lest we are tempted to think of a shortened convention as more agile than those we've conducted in years past, the compression of business in 2022 was the furthest thing from that. The costs to the Beloved Community – as the General Convention and as the wider church – were many:

- Complete absence of visitors and non-deputies, meaning lost interactions, undeveloped relationships, and the unintentional exclusion of local communities

- Absence of deputies who chose to forego attending the shortened, Covid-constrained convention
- Loss of time for floor presentations and thorough debate to understand the multiple perspectives of many different constituencies, not all of whom are fully represented by our bishops and deputies
- Limitations of functioning in a Zoom environment
- Intensive, relentless committee work required during the months of May and June, with short notice, leading to leadership exhaustion and/or absence of essential personnel, and pressures on deputies who have secular jobs or childcare responsibilities to juggle their schedules to accommodate the hearings
- Absence of interaction between the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies
- Restrictions that precluded worship as the full body of the convention – bishops, deputies, volunteers, vendors, and visitors
- Loss of presence, input, and expression that make us a more complete and diversified representation of the Body of Christ
- Loss of the fullness of life together, replaced by “all business, all the time”
- Discouragement of many, especially first-time attendees, who have no desire to repeat their experience in future General Conventions

Now we begin the work of the next General Convention, barely eighteen months hence; a Convention where we will elect our next Presiding Bishop. Our future success in reclaiming our convention’s ability to recognize and honor the full diversity of our church will depend on the decisions of the next few months. President of the House of Deputies Julia Ayala Harris has named inclusivity, accessibility, and safety as her priorities for the biennium. As we focus on addressing those priorities, The Consultation charges our leadership to design a Convention that is life-giving, and to remember that the Spirit needs time to do life-giving work. May our leadership hear the voices of the many calling for a less frantic schedule.

Facing many uncertainties before the 81st General Convention, may all of us be mindful of playing our part as followers of Jesus: practicing the way of Love and telling the truth about our Church and world.

The work begun at the 80<sup>th</sup> General Convention can bear much fruit, both in our church and in the larger world, as we remember Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves. May the Spirit that has brought us to this day empower us to do the work, together, that God has given us to do, with courage, love, and fortitude.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of us. Amen.

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