

Second Report from the Bishop and Standing Committee on the possibility of re-aligning with the Province of the Southern Cone

In this second report from the Bishop and Standing Committee on the possibility of re-aligning with the Province of the Southern Cone, we would like to offer a brief analysis of some of the basic differences between the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church as compared with those of the Province of the Southern Cone (PSC). An English translation of the Constitution and Canons of the PSC can be found on the diocesan Web site, fwepiscopal.org.

In our Preliminary Report of January 9, 2008, we arrived at the following conclusion:

Based on our review, we have concluded that the structure and polity of the Province of the Southern Cone would afford our diocese greater self-determination than we currently have under the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. This autonomy would be evident most specifically in the areas of property ownership, liturgy, holy orders, and missionary focus.

One fundamental principle underlying the Constitution and Canons of the PSC is that “the Dioceses are at liberty to provide necessary selection and training of clergy, liturgical use, finances and possessions, and other affairs related to the local situation, provided they are not in conflict with other Anglican norms and this Constitution.” (See item 3, Rules, on page 2)

Specifically, we note the following:

Ordination Standards

Each local diocese has the responsibility for the ordination process and makes its own determination as to the eligibility and the qualifications for ordination to Holy Orders. There are no requirements imposed upon dioceses by the Province regarding gender or sexual orientation.

Liturgy

Each diocesan bishop determines matters of worship and Prayer Book usage in his diocese. The section on Liturgy (Canon 9) notes that “it is the responsibility of the Bishops to keep guard that the forms used in Public Worship and the Administration of the Sacraments be in accordance with Anglican Faith and Order and that nothing be established that is contrary to the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.” Membership in the Southern Cone would not necessitate a change in our liturgical practices or Prayer Book. It would also protect us from experimental liturgies already authorized or under consideration by the General Convention of TEC which advocate the use of expansive language for God, the elimination of male pronouns for God, or the blessing of same-sex unions.

Property

Canon 10 states that the Province's possessions "shall consist of the economic contributions of its Member Dioceses." The PSC does not lay claim to any buildings, real estate or investments of its member dioceses. Thus, title to all our churches, property, and funds would remain in the Diocese of Fort Worth. TEC makes the claim that all local church property is held in trust for TEC.

Provincial Polity

Instead of having a cumbersome General Convention that meets every three years for three weeks at great expense, with four clergy and four lay deputies from each diocese in the House of Deputies and all bishops in the House of Bishops, as in The Episcopal Church, there is a Provincial Synod (Canon 5) of the Southern Cone that meets every three years for three days. It is comprised of the Bishop and one clergy and one lay delegate from each diocese in the Province. This would be a much smaller legislative body on the provincial level, producing considerable cost savings and a council of far more manageable size for conducting business. Also, as a member diocese we would have a seat on the Provincial Executive Council (Canon 6), helping to direct program and budget. Our Bishop would have the right of voice at Council meetings, even if we were already represented on the Council by a priest or lay person.

Presiding Bishop/Primate

The Presiding Bishop of the Southern Cone, also referred to as the Primate or Archbishop, is not a separate, full-time, salaried position, as in TEC. Instead, the Bishop elected as Primate continues to serve as a diocesan bishop, like all the other bishops of the Province. There are no "national church offices" staffed with a bureaucracy of paid church employees. This makes for a much smaller structure and budget and keeps the emphasis for mission and ministry on the local diocesan level.

Provincial Budget

The budget of the General Convention of TEC was set at just under \$50 million for 2008. Most of this funding comes from an "asking" from each diocese, in the amount of 21% of its annual income. The remainder comes from investment income and other sources. The annual budget of the Province of the Southern Cone totals less than \$100,000 and is funded by the member dioceses on a proportionate basis, with contributions ranging between \$2,000 and \$6,000. Additional support comes from overseas partners. The funds are used mostly for basic costs of administration and communications. This minimal provincial cost keeps the focus and funding for ministry in the local dioceses.

We encourage you to read the PSC Constitution and Canons for yourselves. If you have further questions or matters that require clarification, please feel free to write the Standing Committee at the Diocesan Center for Ministry. Additional concerns will be addressed in our next report.

The Bishop and Standing Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth
Feb. 12, 2008