

A Post General Convention Response from Bishop David C. Jones to e-mail messages.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church has now adjourned. I am back in my office for one day before vacation. I am now responding to the many e-mail messages and letters that I have received. Thank you for sharing your concerns with me.

First, I feel deeply the distress that has been expressed over the confirmation of Canon Robinson as a bishop. I can not remember an issue that has been more divisive in the church, including the General Convention Special Program, the Ordination of Women, or the adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. People of deep faith and conviction differed profoundly on this issue and the divisions continue to this day. In our diocese, Bishop Lee has restated our conviction, which I firmly embrace, that the normative context for sexual intimacy is lifelong monogamous marriage.

The issues of most concern regarding Canon Robinson's confirmation were personal morality and diocesan autonomy. For some, the issue of morality required overruling an election by a diocesan convention. But for others, the question was seen from an equally strong conviction that a diocese has the right to select its own leader. That is not to say that 62 bishops with jurisdiction approved of same sex committed relationships. But it is an illustration of the Anglican way of living with ambiguity. I recognize that it is extremely difficult to accept this ambiguity when some feel that their conscience has been violated.

As I sat in the House of Bishops, I could not help but appreciate the long history that House has had with addressing division. At the opening of Convention, during the roll call of all living bishops, I could hear echoes of the roll call during the Civil War when the southern bishops were called and were noted absent. I also imagined the joy and tension after the war when the roll was called again with some of the southern bishops present. That memory of the past gave me confidence for what lay ahead. While that war divided many denominations, ours had a form of government that allowed it to survive.

I will not forget the sadness of the group of bishops who publicly expressed their grief over Canon Robinson's confirmation. I was proud, however, that they were free to express their convictions from the platform of the House of Bishops with the television cameras on and with the national media listening. Ours is a church that can deal with acute differences in public.

Second, Convention said that individual dioceses were acting within the bounds of our common life in addressing issues of same sex blessings. This position, while hard for me to accept, is founded on trust and respect among bishops who may differ profoundly with each other. Again, this position was founded on a hesitation to yield diocesan autonomy. Very little has really changed since the founding of the Episcopal Church in this country

when colonial dioceses joined together in forming the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. There was great hesitation then as there is now of yielding the freedom of a diocese to govern itself. Our church has never yielded to a strong central government. The diocese remains the basic unit of the church.

Third, General Convention is a legislative assembly. It is not the Church. The strength of our church exists in the congregations where we worship. Jesus Christ is Lord. Word and Sacrament sustain each of us. Resolutions, however creative they may be, will never rise to the level of God's Word. At the beginning of each day, we need to say our prayers, read the Daily Office, and meditate on God's Word. At the end of the day, we need to turn all of our concerns to the One who really matters - the One who died that we may live.

As I part for vacation, I leave with sadness that decisions did not reflect my own hopes and desires. But I am glad to be an Episcopalian. I remain as committed as ever to building up the church, to encouraging evangelistic youth ministries, to supporting mission outreach, and to starting new congregations. I will be praying for our Church and for you.

Faithfully,

David C. Jones

Bishop Suffragan of Virginia