

## **My Reflections on the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church July 5-13, 2018**

This was my sixth convention as a deputy to General Convention. The last convention I attended was in 2012 and what a difference one convention made.

Everything was automated and on-line. No longer are the days of shuffling through volumes of papers. It took a day to get oriented to the new system and then it was go-go-go. The convention was non-stop from one session to another, lunch with the deputation going over those mornings' legislative committee actions, then back to the Bishops and House of Deputies legislative sessions, followed by the Evening Worship Service. This is exactly how our eleven (11) days of acting on key issues on immigration, same gender marriages, evangelism and church growth, prayer book revision, the Israel-Palestine conflict, racial reconciliation, care of creation and the environment and the 134 million dollar budget that oversees the next three years.

Several events outside of the legislative sessions brought us together to pray and advocate as witnesses against the many U.S. governmental actions on gun violence, and immigration policies. Mingling and socialization took place at several luncheons, provincial and seminary dinners. The largest joyful attended event was the Revival at the Palmer Events Center where over 2,500 people jumped and sang to the Presiding Bishop's message on how God is love and gives life.

Our deputation will report on several main issues and resolutions of the convention: Immigration and the Hutto Detention Center, Prayer book Revision, the Israel-Palestine Conflict, the \$134 million dollar budget, Racial Reconciliation, Title IV, the readmittance of the Episcopal Church of Cuba, and the Bishop's Liturgy of Listening to name a few of the key issues.

I will begin with the HOB's Listening Session which was held on July 4, the evening before the convention officially opened. Bishop DeDe Duncan-Probe of the Diocese of Central NY and Vice-President of the Province II Council planned the Liturgy of Listening to stories from Women and men who were victims of

sexual misconduct performed by someone in the church. This listening session became a vehicle for numerous resolutions for the convention to consider regarding sexual misconduct, exploitation, harassment, retaliation, and gender disparity.

On July 8, the House of Bishops responded to the liturgy with a covenant, entitled "A Working Covenant for the Practice of Equity and Justice for All in the Episcopal Church". The Covenant commits the Bishops to seek changes in their dioceses to combat abuse. This was the Bishop's way of offering sorrow for the church's role in sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

As a member of the safeguarding and Title IV Committee we heard testimony after testimony regarding approval of the resolutions against sexual abuse, retaliation and discrimination in the church. We were pleaded to do something now. As a deputy from Georgia stated, "The listening session is only a beginning... the work is incomplete, we must find a way to continue the hard work of seeking the truth, respecting the dignity of all human beings through the restoration of their God-given rights as children of God."

Others spoke about their own experiences of sexual harassment, the difficulty in speaking about their experiences, the retaliation and the aftermath that comes from speaking up.

I am happy to report that the committee heard the presenters and responded with action now with several resolutions approved by the committee and convention: A109 - Creates a Taskforce on Sexual Harassment, D016 - Seeking Truth, Reconciliation and Restoration, DO34- Amends the Canon IV.19.4- Suspend Statute of Limitations, DO47 - Compassionate Care of Victims of Sexual Abuse by Clergy and D076 To Provide Whistleblower Protection and Prohibit Retaliation.

Respectfully Submitted by,

The Rev. Lillian Davis-Wilson