

## *Memorial to General Convention Regarding Proportional Representation*

*To the Bishops and Deputies of the 78<sup>th</sup> General Convention of The Episcopal Church*

Dear colleagues:

Please consider these comments about our equality in baptism as we decide whether and how to restructure our church to make us better able to preach the Gospel and build God's Kingdom.

Each baptized person is a minister of the Gospel; we ordain some baptized people to the clergy to carry out specialized ministries. Combining lay and clergy insight, like binocular vision, shows us God's will and our people's needs in greater depth and detail than any single viewpoint can. General Convention's inclusion of lay and clergy orders together demonstrates this insight in practice; it is a critical strand of Episcopal DNA.

We are now trying to reorganize to advance the Gospel better in a world different than our parents knew and vastly different than the world TEC faced when we organized in 1785. Our Episcopal DNA, though strong for ministry, has a critical flaw that demands correction if we are to succeed in this restructuring.

This flaw is serious and is both practical and theological. It is present both in our current system of diocesan representation at General Convention and in most current restructuring proposals.

This flaw is the grant to each diocese of the same voting power, regardless of the number of lay people or clergy in each diocese. We do so even though some dioceses have forty times as many people and ten times as many clergy as other dioceses.

Through such geographic blindness, we mute a great many voices that should be heard, while randomly amplifying other voices based on their address. We cloud our discernment of God's will and our people's needs. We demean both our people and clergy based on geography. We contradict claims of equal treatment of the baptized.

From a secular viewpoint, this arrangement is grotesquely unfair. In the United States political system this disparity in voting power would be an unconstitutional infringement on the right to vote. The standard of one person, one vote, was pronounced by the Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964). That case struck down geographic disparities in voting power similar to those in our current diocesan voting system.

The Episcopal Church is now more than fifty years behind our political system in providing elemental fairness. We have debated this issue in the church since the 1880s. Our current reform proposals are far more timid in this regard than those from the 1960s, when we unsuccessfully confronted the same disparities.

Unless we make voting representation at General Convention roughly proportional to the numbers of lay people and clergy in each diocese, we contradict our theology of baptism, which says that baptized people are equal before God. We also contradict our theology of ordination, which says that the authority conferred by a valid ordination is the same for each presbyter.

No coherent Christian theology can justify giving one set of baptized people forty times the voting power of another set simply because of their current residence. Similarly, no valid theology of ordination supports giving a clergyman in one diocese ten times the voice of a clergywoman in a larger diocese. Neither lay people nor clergy grow wiser or more foolish, holier or more profane, simply by moving from one diocese to another. Folly, wisdom, holiness and sin resolutely ignore geographic boundaries.

If we really believe that people are equal in baptism and that ordination confers the same powers on each presbyter, then it is long past time to fix this problem. Let us make proportional representation an essential part of any restructuring in order to practice what we have been preaching about equality and inclusion.

Respectfully submitted,

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