

Bonnie Anderson, D.D., President The House of Deputies



The Role of a Deputy

Our Role in the Past

To understand the role of the deputy in the General Convention, it is helpful to look back at the history of how that role and its title evolved. The first Episcopal Church convention was in 1785. The *Journal* reads: "Clerical and Lay Deputies from several states assembled...." By 1792, the *Journal* had adopted the usage of the "House of Clerical and Lay Deputies" in order to distinguish a body separate from the existing House of Bishops established in 1789. The present name, "House of Deputies," began formal use in 1886.

Not surprisingly, the earliest Diocesan conventions adopted existing legislative models. The Episcopal Church in America was not immune to revolutionary ideas of the English reformation, including representative governance in church affairs, and these ideas prevailed in the early Episcopal church councils. Representatives to church councils were deputized to act fully and freely on behalf of what they thought to be the best interests of the church while they deliberated in the confines of the council.

The concept of a deputy as a fully independent representative is clear in a 1901 Constitution change that proposed admitting missionary district "delegates" as representatives to convention with seats but with limited voting rights. The wording was amended to "deputy" in the final text to grant honor in the name to the representatives of missionary jurisdictions.

In her opening address to the 73rd General Convention, President of the House of Deputies Dr. Pamela Chinnis stated: "The House of Deputies was a complete innovation when this church was organized following the American Revolution. Laity, clergy and bishops have an equal voice in determining policy, establishing our legal framework and maintaining a living liturgical life."

Our Role Today

The nature of the events that took place in America between 1782 and 1789, and the use and meaning of the word "deputy" help us to understand our role as deputies today. We are elected to General Convention by our own diocese. As deputies, we know our diocese, and the people of the diocese know us. We are not elected simply to represent the views of our diocese or any particular constituency. Deputies are extraordinary representatives who, "ideally...should reflect the will of the whole Church, act for the whole Church, and speak to the whole Church."

We are deputies because we are trusted by our diocese and by the deputies from other dioceses to be informed and to prepare ourselves through study and prayer prior to General Convention. While at General Convention, we are charged to **listen** to other deputies, bishops and guests; to **share** our own thoughts and ideas; and to **attend** and **vote** at all legislative sessions. We are trusted to cast our votes informed by prayer, factual information, and the workings of the Holy Spirit. We have a responsibility to report back to our diocese after General Convention, and to the best of our abilities, convey how we voted in light of what we experienced and what we learned.

Most importantly, it is our primary responsibility as deputies to watch for, to expect, to pray for, and to be open to the Holy Spirit. God guides and governs church affairs. To this end, the Holy Spirit dwells in the church and presides in its councils. What a council seeks to understand, by its debates and votes, is not the mind of the majority of its church members, but the mind of the Spirit.

Peace,



Bonnie Anderson, D.D, President



About the author:

Bonnie Anderson, President of the Episcopal Church's House of Deputies, is an advocate for the ministry of the laity. In the tradition of the great lay educator Verna Dozier, who called the laity "the sleeping giant," Anderson often reminds the Church "there are 2 million ministers in the Episcopal Church and many are still waiting to use their gifts actively to help bring about the Kingdom of God. Let's get going."

Prior to her election as President of the House of Deputies (HOD) in 2006 and re-election in 2009, Anderson served as Vice President of the HOD; Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance; an Executive Council member; and an Executive Council elected representative to The Episcopal Church Investment Committee. Anderson has been awarded honorary Doctor of Divinity degrees from the Episcopal Divinity School and the University of the South, Sewanee, and honorary Doctor of Canon Law degrees from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and General Theological Seminary.

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