CONFIDENTIAL

MINUTES

JOINT COMMISSION TO CONSIDER THE PROBLEM OF GIVING THE WOMEN OF THE CHURCH A VOICE IN THE LEGISLATION OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION

April 18, 1951 --- Calvary House, New York City

Bishop Peabody - Presiding

I. Bishop Peabody opened the meeting with prayer.

II. Those attending were: Bishop Peabody, Mr. Philip Adams, The Rev. W. P. Barnds, Dr. Roland L. Jardine, Miss Ruth Jenkins, Bishop Kirchhoffer, Miss Leila Anderson. Mrs. Harold Kelleren and Dr. P. M. Dawley attended as visitors.

III. Dr. Dawley's unrevised theological statement was read.

IV. Bishop Peabody asked the Commission to formulate its own position. He described the job of the Commission as defined in the Minutes of the first meeting a year ago.

V. Mr. Adams moved "that the Commission direct its activities toward giving women a voice in the legislation of the General Convention by removing any inhibition against women being eligible to serve as lay deputies."

Bishop Kirchhoffer seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Discussion in summary - Reasons for and against as contributed by members of the Commission with no effort at this point to reach a consensus.

FOR:

a. Reasons against are largely based on fear. Fear is devastating.

b. From Christian and democratic standpoint the eligibility of women for membership in Convention is logical and important.

c. The right of the diocese to elect whom it will to Convention should be guarded.

d. Women should share responsibility for policy-making in the life of the Church as well as other responsibilities such as money-raising. The Church should not exclude women from full participation in its fellowship and community. Responsible participation through decision-making is indispensable.

e. The Episcopal Church in the United States gives laymen a status they do not have in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the Church of England. In these churches laymen cannot have a part in decisions about doctrine, discipline or worship. Episcopalian laymen in the United States can. If this adaptation of practice could be made for laymen here, there is no reason for it not to be made for women here as it has been in several of the provinces of the Anglican Communion.

© Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society

f. Documents collected by the Commission support an affirmative position, e.g., (1) 1920 Lambeth Resolution No. 46, (2) Policies of the American denominations, (3) Policies of the following provinces of the Anglican Communion a. regarding membership in the major policy-making body--Wales, India, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, b. regarding meaning of "laity" and "laymen". (The Church of England gives men and women equal status in the General Assembly but the functions of laity are limited. See e. above.)

g. The role of the Commission is to set forward the thinking of the Church and not simply reflect it.

h. We should not easily assume we know the "mind of the Church". It is difficult to know what we are talking about when we use the expression.

i. The Commission should use principle as the basis of its work.

AGAINST:

a. It is not the mind of the Church that women should vote as indicated in (1) diocesan and parish practices, (2) 1946 and 1949 Triennial Meeting of the Women in which the percentage in favor decreased between 1946 and 1949, (3) the vote in the 1949 House of Deputies.

b. We should take into account the Committee's comments which precede the resolution of the 1920 Lambeth Resolution No. 46 which favors the admission of women on equal terms to those Councils of the Church to which laymen are admitted, e.g., that the apostles and the seventy were men and there is a diversity of functions for men and women in the Church.

c. House of Deputies functioning well - no reason to change the status quo.

d. Contribution of women will not be best made in General Convention. Women do a good job in the Woman's Auxiliary. Their strength lies in their influence not in their power.

e. Men may leave too much responsibility to women. Change would take away men's place to serve.

f. There is a tendency for women to seek the top rung of the ladder without working up.

g. Voting by women in General Convention might retard growth of our relationship with other historic branches of the Holy Catholic Church.

h. General run of women nationally do not want this.

i. Men and women talk differently. Women would change the character of the General Convention.

j. If in Convention women will exercise disproportionate influence in life of Church.

k. Job of this Commission is not to lead church but to represent mind of the Church. The Church is not ready for women to serve in Convention.

© Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society

Some Significant Points of Discussion --

1. What is basic issue?

   Some said -- Whether women are wanted in General Convention.
   Others said -- The rights and privileges of the sovereign dioceses and the relation of the House of Deputies to that question. The House always seats people unless papers are irregular.

2. Diocesan autonomy -

   How does this relate to the question before us?
   Cannot tell dioceses how to operate. Some said accept and build on this fact. Others said this is undesirable in Church life, based on federal principle.

3. What authority has House of Deputies to decide who shall belong to it?

   The House always seats people unless papers are irregular. House, however, can decide unforeseen questions.

4. Shall we recommend a percentage if woman are eligible?

   Commission rejected this. "Some people are not more 'equal' than others."

5. Tricameral system rejected - not considered feasible or desirable.

6. Canonical changes necessary -

   It was suggested that some chancellors and canonists should work on this, at least to comment on Commission's proposal.

7. How report to be presented at Convention?

   a. No possibility so far of a joint session.
   b. Triennial could ask member of this Commission to read the report and answer questions about it.

8. How Commission should report -

   What is the Commission's responsibility?
   Resolution says the Commission is "to consider the problem and report."
   Commission is responsible for level on which discussion takes place.
   It is hoped the discussion will center around debatable matters which serious people can take seriously.
   Place emphasis on diocesan autonomy.
   Narrow down to a politically feasible procedure.
   Report shall include - a. Theological statement
   b. Historical statement
   c. Factual material about current practices and concern
   d. Commission's recommendation - see Action #2 followi
   (Might give at this point reasons for and against, ethos of American scene, reassurance that no inundation by women is expected.)

© Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society

VI. ACTIONS OF COMMISSION at April 18, 1951 Meeting:

1. VOTED it is the sense of the Commission that there is no basis of distinction in principle between men and women as lay persons serving in the Church.

2. VOTED that the report shall state that the Commission does not favor constructing a tricameral system and the reasons for its position on this.

3. VOTED to amend Article 1, Section IV of the Constitution and Canons to read "lay deputies, men or women, communicants of this Church" and "lay deputy, man or woman".

4. VOTED that Mrs. Harold Kelleran be asked to write the report with Dr. Dawley as consultant.

5. VOTED that no information about the decisions of the Commission shall be released until the report is completed.

VII. NEXT STEPS

1. Mrs. Kelleran will write report in consultation with Dr. Dawley.

2. Steering Committee will go over the document.

3. The report will be circulated to the Commission for comment. No further meeting of the Commission will be possible because of lack of funds. (Commission may meet in Boston at the time of the Convention.)

LA:MH
5/52

© Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society