

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP



March 26th, 1952.

Dear Miss Jenkins:

I enclose the revised draft of the Report of the Joint Commission on "Giving Women a Voice in General Convention" for your consideration. I regret the delay, which has been unavoidable in view of the very busy schedule of Mrs. Kellerman, our composer,

It has not been easy to put together. I trust, however, that the final result may have the unanimous approval of the Commission.

I should be glad if you would indicate any minor changes which you think would lend force or clarity to the report. When I have received the answers from all members of the Commission, I will strive to incorporate them in a final draft with the help of Miss Anderson, our Secretary, and would then plan to send it on to the Rev. Rankin Barnes for publication. He will take care of the Church papers also. I hope indeed that this report may have the wholehearted support of every member of the Commission to the point where they would willingly advocate it on the floor of Convention. At the same time, I do not want to have any member feel that he or she is compelled by the pressure of others' opinion to acquiesce in a conclusion to which he or she has mental reservations of any kind.

Accordingly, there is a second type of approval which in this connection seems to me both genuine and proper, namely, that the report, while it might not win the wholehearted support of some member, would, nevertheless, have his signed approval by reason of its statement of the problem which he feels General Convention should face. Such a reservation would leave any Deputy or Bishop free to express himself freely on the floor of Convention, but at the same time put the whole Commission behind the report.

I should be grateful to you if you could return the report to me before Easter so that its final publication may be delayed no longer than is absolutely necessary.

Very sincerely yours,

Malcolm J. Prosser
Chairman

Revised Draft of the
Report to the General Convention of the
Joint Commission to Consider the Problem of Giving Women of the Church
A Voice in the Legislation of the General Convention

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Foreword

The Joint Commission to Consider the Problem of Giving the Women of the Church a Voice in the Legislation of the General Convention was created by resolution of the 1949 Convention. It was the direct result of considerable discussion and debate about the seating of four women who had been chosen as deputies to the Convention.

In 1946, for the first time in its history, the General Convention had been asked to seat a woman deputy. Her credentials being in order, the Secretary of the House presented them with those of all other deputies, and made the customary inquiry as to whether there were objection to the seating of any of the deputies-elect. A question was raised as to a rule about seating women. In the ensuing discussion a distinguished jurist, himself a deputy, pointed out that in statutes the words 'layman,' 'persons' and 'men' are considered all-inclusive, and moved that the deputy in question, Mrs. Randolph Dyer, be seated. Two motions, one suggesting referral to the Committee on Elections and the other to the Committee on Constitutions and Canons, were defeated, and Mrs. Dyer was seated.

In 1949 four jurisdictions--Nebraska, Olympia, Missouri and Puerto Rico--sent women as deputies. The House refused to seat them as being "not eligible" under Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution. The debate was considerable, and included theological, sociological, historical and practical arguments, but the vote of 321 to 242 was on the basis of interpreting the word 'laymen' to exclude 'laywomen.' On the following day the

House adopted a resolution providing for the seating of the women deputies, by courtesy, without a voice or vote. This the three deputies in attendance regretfully declined, pointing out that it was "irrelevant" to the question. They felt that what was involved was not a matter of courtesy to women, but "the right of women to represent, in its Councils, the Church they are proud to serve."

The Triennial meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary forwarded to the Secretary of the House a resolution it had adopted after considerable debate, asking the House to interpret the word 'laymen' in its Constitution, Canons, and other official documents so that it could include both laymen and laywomen. They stressed the importance of this so that women might prepare themselves for, and cooperate to the fullest extent in, all types of work open to the laity of the Church. This resolution, and an enabling one, the House sent to its Committee on Amendments to the Constitution, which reported favorably on a resolution substituting the words 'lay persons' wherever 'laymen' occurred in Article I, Section 4, but limiting to one the number of women deputies which any diocese or missionary district might have. This amendment was defeated by the House.

Subsequently resolutions were submitted for the establishment of a joint commission to study this problem. It is against this background that the commission has met and considered its task, and now makes its report, bespeaking the thoughtful and careful consideration which so vital and basic a matter demands.

Theological Considerations

Basic to the discussion of this subject stand ~~many~~ certain great doctrines of the Church.

The Christian understanding of the nature of man, derived from the Holy Scriptures and verified by man's experience, is given its distinctive Christian quality in the fact of the Incarnation, which declares that Jesus Christ is not only God, but also Man. In Him the divine intention for human nature is made fully known.

From reflection on this doctrine Christian Theology has consistently made certain assertions: (1) that man is the creature and child of God, created for community with his fellow creatures; (2) that he is revealed in the union of his body and soul both as a spiritual and a physical being; (3) that, through the work of Christ, God's grace is available to enable man to fulfil his destiny and realize to the full his potentialities; (4) that no natural distinction of sex or race impedes the redemptive action of God; (5) that all women and all men are one in sin and grace and equal before God in both these respects.

Christian insights reveal diversities of gifts (as between men and women) which equip them by natural constitution for different and supplemental functions. The fact that neither can fulfil itself without the other draws attention to their basic equality before God and their equal importance as contributors to the life of society and of the Church, that divine Society which is the body of Christ, within whose life and saving fellowship divine strength is made available to men and women alike.

Hence it becomes evident that the Church has a responsibility (1) to enable both men and women to realize to the full their capacities and potentialities, especially within its own life, and (2) to claim for

itself the full contribution which each group can give. It is equally evident that to place any hindrance in the way of such fulfillment and such contribution is in Christian eyes both sinful and wrong, since it prevents the fulfilling of God's Purpose in each of his human creatures and children and deprives the Church of the total services that each can furnish.

Historical Considerations

That the status of women has changed over the centuries, and that there is now almost no field of endeavor which they do not enter, is a statement so obvious as to need no documenting. This has been greatly accelerated by the draining off of manpower occasioned by two world wars. Even women who do not seek employment outside their homes find that their leisure activities have greatly widened their world. The community has become a familiar field to them.

The Church has always considered women as persons in their own right, not as satellites, and particularly not as satellites of men. Its Gospel has been for the redemption of all, including women, and it has from the earliest days recognized the importance of women in its life. The names of many women are included in the Gospels, an unusual thing in a patriarchal society like that of the Jew. St. Paul, who did not consistently exalt women, frequently mentions their services to the churches, and in the list of leaders in the last chapter of Romans, mentions eight women by name. Only in medieval days, when religious life centered in monasteries, did women cease to be thought of as persons. From this state women have moved a long way to their present inclusion in practically every sphere of endeavor. This inclusion has been as partners, not as servants. Today

our question is not whether they shall be allowed to work for the Church, but whether they may be the Church. If they are the Church--and surely no one would bar women from God's redemption in Christ--then they must be the Church fully. With respect to membership in legislative bodies, this has already come to be a fact, both in our Anglican Communion and elsewhere, to a little-known degree.

Practices of the Anglican Communion

The voice of Lambeth has long been clear in this matter. The 1920 conference brought in a thorough report on it, much of which is relevant to the problems of this commission. The Conference adopted as Resolution 46 the following: "Women should be admitted to those Councils of the Church to which laymen are admitted, and on equal terms. Diocesan, provincial, or national synods may decide when or how this principle shall be brought into effect."

What has been the response of the various provinces?

The Church of England established in 1919 a House of Laity in its National Church Assembly. Under the terms of the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act of 1919, the various assemblies--parochial, ruri-decanal, diocesan, and National--there is the comprehensive directive: "All representatives may be of either sex." In 1929 the Church adopted the Representation of the Laity Measure, confirming the previous action and using the same words. The present Archbishop of Canterbury reports that the results have been good. After thirty years of eligibility for membership in the House of Laity, there were in 1950 82 women delegates of a total membership of 340.

The Church of England in Canada opened its governing House to women in 1943. This Church reports that the reason that compelled it to open

its membership to women was their outstanding contributions to the life of the Church. It testifies that the women who have served have shown great competence. In the 1949 house there was only one woman member.

New Zealand, prompted by the Lambeth resolution, has permitted women to serve as voting delegates since 1922. In spite of this long-standing permission, the 1950 House of Laity was entirely masculine.

The Church of India, Burma, Pakistan, and Ceylon was constituted in 1927. The act which set up its legislative body made women eligible for membership. Ten served in this capacity in 1950.

In South Africa women have been made eligible for voting membership in the House of Laity only since 1950. A resolution to that end was adopted by the 1949 Synod and confirmed in 1950.*

In Wales women have been represented in the Church Councils since the 1920 disestablishment of the Church. In 1950, 88 women served in the House of Laity. Their leaders say that they are useful, that "few of them speak in the meetings, and helpfully."

In the Episcopal Church in Scotland, there are no lay persons, male or female, in the Provincial Synod, but some women serve on appointed Councils.

In one province of the Church of England, Australia, women are not permitted to serve in the House of Laity. This appears to be the sole exception to the rule that where laymen may serve in Church Councils, women are eligible to do so.

* We have this by word of mouth from the Embassy. Communication from Miss Anderson to the Archbishop not acknowledged as yet.

Summary of Practices in the Anglican Communion

The mother Church and five of our sister Churches admit women as members of the House of Laity. Only one of the remaining two branches excludes women where laymen are permitted.

The Episcopal Church in America

Since General Convention is the parish meeting writ large, it is well to look at the facts as they exist in our own Church, particularly at the diocesan and parish levels. The difficulty of getting adequate information is complicated by ambiguity of terms, for in different parts of the country various terms are applied to bodies with similar functions. From the confusion of figures amassed, however, some stand out as significant.

Of 73 dioceses replying to a questionnaire, 38 had no women serving on vestries. 34 had some 236 vestrywomen. One permitted them but had none. In diocesan conventions, 27 jurisdictions report women members. 44 say they have no women serving at present. In Diocesan Councils, the figures are reversed. Two-thirds have women members, while one-third have none. In Bishops' Committees, or Missionary Councils, 66 of the reporting dioceses have 795 women serving as members.

These figures, however they may vary, produce two notable facts germane to our consideration. The first is that there is no area of our Church's lay activity, except General Convention, from which women are generally excluded. Whether on vestries, parish councils, diocesan councils, bishop's committees, or diocesan conventions, women are now serving in these varied capacities somewhere in this Church.

The second conclusion which emerges is that the more institutional forms, such as vestries and conventions, strongly entrenched in tradition and often operating under charters difficult to change, tend to have fewer women in them than do the freer bodies like diocesan councils and bishops' committees.

General Convention

From its inception the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States has been strongly democratic in nature and structure. In this it reflected the temper of its day rather than that of the Church which was its ancestor, for the 1789 Constitution far exceeded, in democratic structure, anything that the Church of England had ever known. The provision for two Houses was characteristic, but the division of the lower house into orders of clergy and laymen was without precedent. At a time when Convocations of the English Church contained no laity, and were not meeting at all, when the Church was being administered by the Crown, its Ministers, and its Bishops, the new American Church had decided to include laymen.

This democracy has always characterized the Church and has been consistently apparent in General Convention even when individual dioceses were much less truly democratic. Some of the early dioceses, bound more closely to the English tradition by clergy and bishops trained in the mother country, were run largely by the clergy. Laymen were rarely consulted. Yet the autonomy of these dioceses was respected by the General Convention, even while it insisted upon its own more democratic structure. One of the great moments of our national Church's history must surely have been the recognition by the General Convention, at a time of national disunity, of episcopal consecrations authorized by only one section of the

Church. Nor has General Convention interfered with the right of the several jurisdictions to decide whether their councils and conventions shall include women. Such action, by autonomous dioceses, has been respected by General Convention throughout our history.

In 1946 and 1949 certain autonomous jurisdictions chose women deputies to the Convention. In one case the Convention respected diocesan autonomy, in the other it made a clear break with the past policy in this matter. The right of the House to constitute its own membership from duly elected deputies, properly accredited, was in 1949 interpreted to mean the right of the House to constitute its own membership from duly elected male deputies, properly accredited.

It is obvious that this last exclusion fails to respect the autonomy of certain dioceses.

Summary and Conclusion

The Commission has cited the figures that indicate the degree to which women already participate in the life as well as the work of the Church. It believes that these signify a slow but certain recognition on the Church's part of the fact that women are truly and wholly members of it. This seems inevitably to involve the right of individual dioceses to choose the deputies whom they wish to choose, whether they be men or women. In order to effect this, our report concludes with two recommendations, which are embodied in a resolution to the Houses of Convention:

1. Because of the theological and historical positions stated above, and after careful consideration of their practical implications, this Commission states that it believes there is no basis of distinction in principle between men and women as lay persons in the Church.

2. It recommends that the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies ask their committees on Constitutional Amendments to prepare legislation to amend Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution and Canons to read: "Lay deputies, men or women, communicants of this Church . . ." and "lay deputy, man or woman. ." in the two places where the term 'layman' or 'laymen' now appears. This recommendation is embodied in the following formal resolution.

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, that Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution be amended to read in place of the word "Laymen," "Lay Deputies, men or women," and in place of the word "Layman," "Lay Deputy, man or woman."

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