

## **Report of the Standing Committee (Given by Paul Evans, President)**

This past year has been challenging for the Standing Committee. We have sought to keep the mission of the Church before us and we have tried to fulfill our canonical responsibilities. My time as a member of the Standing Committee leads me to believe that our role is not well understood although specific responsibilities are set out in the canons.

Within the Anglican Communion, standing committees are unique to the American Church. They are the creation of William White, first Bishop of Pennsylvania, and actually first Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. At the time of the Revolution, with the emergence of a new non-established church, he sought to make American bishops more acceptable to the democratic spirit of the new nation. He sought to ensure that the power exercised by English bishops was shared between bishops and both clergy and laity. He created a standing committee as an instrument for this purpose. Times have changed and the potentially adversarial role of standing committees has largely disappeared. However, joint decision making continues to be an element of our polity with some important decisions requiring the assent of both standing committees and the diocesan bishop. These decisions include assent to the appointment of bishops, many matters involving clergy discipline, the advancement to ordination, the initiation of missions, the advancement of missions to parish status, (sadly) the reversion of parishes to mission status, and a number of major decisions that concern parish real estate. However, perhaps the most potent of the Standing Committee's roles is to act as council of advice to the bishop. Our vision of this role is that the Standing Committee and the bishop share perspectives together about any matter that impinges on the diocese. In this way we aim to support the bishop's agenda and to promote the general welfare of our diocesan community.

I told you last year that over a two-year period we had experienced uncertainties in our working relationship with the bishop and a widening difference concerning our role. As the bishop told you earlier, in the last twelve months we have worked very hard on this issue and I also can report progress. The Standing Committee and the bishop are close to agreeing on principles and processes that should engender a more productive relationship in the future. We ask your prayers in this endeavor.

The breadth of our responsibilities exposes us to a wide spectrum of criticism. Last year I told you that some people view us as overreaching while others think we are insufficiently involved—and possibly comatose. What is interesting is that the criticism in this diocese never arrives directly. In two years as president I have had less than 10 communications from either clergy or laity who have been unhappy about a matter involving us. However, I hear rumblings through third parties. As a community we disavow triangulation, but I fear we are expert practitioners. If we are to have a more responsive Standing Committee, let me urge that both lay and clergy leaders contact the next Standing Committee president directly when concerns arise. After all, we are your elected representatives.

You will be asked later to approve two canon changes affecting the Standing Committee. I have to tell you that we were not asked by the proposer of either change to express our perspective. As a former canon changer myself, I should perhaps refrain from criticism, but after two years on

the wagon of restraint I feel permitted to make one or two comments! First, it does seem that we have moved from being a diocese that never changed canons to one where the canons are in constant flux. I'm afraid it's largely because of the wishes of a few individuals rather than an organized diocesan-wide effort involving extended reflection. In my view, canon change should be the last resort, not the first alternative. Less formal organizational and process change are potentially far more productive.

The first canon change impacting the Standing Committee comes from the Deanery Task Force. The original rationale for a task force was to see if it could develop a process for creating new deaneries or changing deanery affiliations of parishes and missions. The task force was also expected to examine the role of deaneries in relation to ministry, including Area Ministry. Instead, we have a proposal to remove the responsibility for convening the Nominating Committee from the Standing Committee and to replace it with a 14 member committee directly elected by deaneries. The proposal doubles the membership of the Nominating Committee and as a result the committee will be harder to operate than the existing 7 members. More important, the proposal lengthens the terms of members and embeds the possibility that existing holders of offices may be elected to the Nominating Committee and nominate their successors. In short, I see the possibility of a self-perpetuating oligarchy. The current 7-member Nominating Committee has been operating for only 3 years. It has worked well--certainly in comparison to its appointed and independent predecessor that had, I recall, the distinction of never meeting. The current committee is a fast changing blend of appointees and elected member; this blend promotes the inclusion of those with knowledge of the roles as well as potential nominees. As a diocese, we selected the current nominating system after a large committee of 40 to 50 people worked for a year considering many alternatives. After this work the committee deserves a longer trial to judge its effectiveness. Please know that the Standing Committee is not wedded to convening the Nominations Committee and we are not against change if a better alternative can be identified; we do not think this proposal meets that standard.

The second canon change involves the Standing Committee minutes. For many years the Standing Committee did not publish minutes; the minutes contained everything from decisions to summaries of discussions, and often contained sensitive references to individuals at vulnerable points in their lives. During the last year we have published a redacted version of these minutes on the diocesan website for everyone to see. The proposal is that we should make the full version of our minutes available to the bishop and to the Executive Council, including (by implication) minutes of any executive session, and that members of the convention should be able to review everything but the executive session. I think this proposal is objectionable on several grounds. First, I think it is neither justifiable nor practical to publish two sets of minutes: one for Executive Council and another for the rest of you. Second, the proposal assumes that some decisions are taken in executive session. In the non-profit world I am assured that it is neither usual to take decisions in executive session nor to keep minutes of executive session. I am told that Roberts Rules of Order, the rubric by which we run this convention, applauds executive session without either decisions or minutes. So why should the Standing Committee be different? The final difficulty is that there is perhaps a potential conflict with the Canons of the Episcopal Church, and I refer to Canon I.12.1 for those that are into this stuff. This canon clearly empowers Standing Committees to set their own rules and to decide how to keep a record of their proceedings. I understand from my roster of canon lawyers outside the diocese that

“proceedings” equals “actions.” So what is the solution? I suggest that the Standing Committee takes all decisions in regular session and publishes a single set of minutes and meets the requirements of transparency to all members of the convention and to the diocese. The Committee’s need for private discussion around matters not involving decisions can be met in executive session. I urge the proposer to withdraw the canon change and to work with the next Standing Committee rather than pressing for a canon that I think might be clumsy, a potential source of conflict, and in some respects unenforceable.

During the past year we have adjusted to the changes that followed the canon changes you approved in 2008. We have established a working relationship with Executive Council and we have constituted the committees for which we are responsible. We maintain a relationship with Executive Council in two ways. Ron Culmer and I have met frequently with the leaders of Executive Council and a Standing Committee member attends council meetings.

In addition, we have established the committees for which we are responsible. I have already referred to the Nominations Committee. We have also constituted two other committees and the Task Force for Diocesan Institutions. The Committee on Governance has made a fast start under the leadership of Peter Jensen. The committee has identified a number of areas as you heard earlier this morning. Another committee is the Compensation Committee which deals largely with matters relating to the bishop. It has met several times under the leadership of John Tornquist. In addition to things like compensation matters, it is concerned with the provision and maintenance of the bishop’s house. I have to report that the house is in an excellent state of repair after several years where we’ve carried out repair. There is one exception that within a few years there is the potential of having to replace the foundation, which could cost us several hundred thousand dollars. The Committee is actively seeking to mitigate this challenge. The answer may well be to sell the home and purchase a more suitable house in a different neighborhood. The bishop is in agreement with this approach and consultations involving the Standing Committee, the bishop, and Executive Council will continue in the coming months until we achieve a resolution. The Institutions working group is now beginning its work under the leadership of Patrick Talbot Hall.

It has been my privilege to serve on the Standing Committee in a leadership role for two years. I have to say that participating in the administrative structure and processes of the diocese was rewarding, but much of the work to establish the role of the Standing Committee has been frustrating and exhausting. I trust that we are now on a more progressive path. I am thankful to wonderful and dedicated colleagues. For the past two years it has been challenging to enlist candidates to offer themselves for election, although this year we have quite a good slate. I urge all of you, whether critical or supportive of us, to offer yourselves to serve. If elected, you will find that your fellow members work tirelessly on behalf of the diocese.

[The foregoing is the Report of the Standing Committee given to the 161<sup>st</sup> Convention of the Diocese of California on October 16, 2010. It has been prepared by the Secretary of the Convention from the transcript of the convention proceedings, as it will appear in the journal of the convention.]