

A RICH HISTORY: WHY WE ARE DEPUTIES AND NOT DELEGATES

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depu•ty (dĕp'y-tē)

n., pl. -ties.

1 A person appointed or empowered to act for another.

2 An assistant exercising full authority in the absence of his or her superior and equal authority in emergencies: a deputy to the sheriff.

3 A representative in a legislative body in certain countries.

n. - suplente, sustituto, representante, delegado

adj. - suplente, sustituto

adjoin, remplaçant, suppléant, délégué¹

To understand the role of the General Convention deputy today it is important to look to the beginnings of The Episcopal Church and the context in which The Episcopal Church was born: we are informed by our history.

The first General Convention of The Episcopal Church convened in 1785, with 26 lay and 16 clergy deputies present. The attendees were referred to as deputies. The “journal” from the 1785 convention reads, “Clerical and Lay Deputies from several states assembled; and judging it proper to wait the arrival of the Deputies from other states, Adjourned until tomorrow at ten o’clock.”² By 1792, the journal had adopted the usage of the “House of Clerical and Lay Deputies” in order to distinguish the establishment of a separate House of Bishops, which joined the Convention in 1789. The present day name of “The House of Deputies” was not formally inserted into the Constitution until 1886, although the term was found in the Constitution as early as 1832 as a way of clearly distinguishing the responsibilities of the clerical and lay body from the growing influence of the House of Bishops.

In an 1839 edition of “A Dictionary of the Church” the word “delegate” and “deputy” are used interchangeably. Delegates to the General Convention are defined as the clergy and laity chosen as representatives by the conventions of the dioceses they represent. The dictionary also takes care, however, to define the special usage of Convention “deputies”: “Those clergymen and laymen who are sent or deputed to attend the conventions of the Church.”³ The melding of the two concepts, although built as they are on a fine distinction, underplays the historical usage of deputy to signify a position of importance in the representative polity of the early American church.

Early diocesan councils borrowed the word deputy from its contemporary use in describing representatives to the colonial legislatures, particularly those who were elected to bicameral bodies in contrast to appointed representatives who were more frequently called delegates.⁴

Not surprisingly, the earliest Diocesan conventions adopted existing legislative models. The American Episcopal Church was not immune to revolutionary ideas of the English reformation, including representative governance in Church affairs, and these ideas prevailed in the early Church councils.⁵ 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 Council.

Understanding of the meaning and evolution of the word “deputy” also sheds light upon the role of today’s deputy. Specific word use in the early days of The Episcopal Church was important. As the church’s roots lay in the Revolution, it is likely church founders chose with care the language associated with church governance. A brief look at the word “deputy” reveals roots in the Middle English word, “deputen”, derived from Old French “deputer,” from Late Latin “dputre, meaning to consider, or ponder. Our English word deputy means to appoint or authorize as an agent or a representative, or to assign (authority or duties) to another.”⁶ The concept of a deputy as a fully independent representative is suggested by a 1901 Constitutional change that proposed admitting Missionary District “delegates” as representatives to Convention with seat but with limited voting rights.⁷ The wording was amended to deputy in the final text to grant honor in name to the representatives of missionary jurisdictions.

In her opening address as President of the House of Deputies to the 73rd General Convention, Dr. Pamela Chinnis stated, "The House of Deputies was a complete innovation when this church was organized following the American Revolution. It gives clergy and laity an equal voice with bishops in determining policy, establishing our legal framework, and maintaining a living liturgical life."⁸ Similarly, in his Arrington Lectures, The Rev. Canon James Gundrum states, "As far as the English churches in America are concerned, it is important to remember that an overwhelming majority of the churches were dedicated to a republican form of government for the colonies, as well as the whole Revolutionary cause."⁹

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. Each deputy is elected to General Convention by his or her 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."¹⁰

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 deputies are charged to listen to other deputies, bishops and guests, to share our own thoughts and ideas while we are at General Convention, 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.

"We are governed, or seek to be governed in Church affairs, by the Mind of the Will of God. To this end the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church and presides in its councils. What a Church council seeks by its

debates and votes to ascertain is, not the mind of the majority of its Church members, but the Mind of the Spirit."¹¹

NOTES:

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. 4th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2003), deputy.

² Journal of a Convention in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the States of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and South Carolina; held in Christ Church in the City of Philadelphia, from September 27 to October 7, 1785. (Philadelphia: Hall and Sellers, 1785), 5.

³ Staunton, The Rev. William. A Dictionary of the Church, Containing an Exposition of Terms, Phrases, and Subjects, Connected with the External Orders, Sacraments, Worship and Usages of the Protestant Episcopal Church. With an Especial Reference to the Church in the United States. 2nd ed. (New York: Louis Sherman at the Protestant Episcopal Press, 1839), Delegates, Deputies.

⁴ Kammen, Michael. Deputies & Liberties: The Origins of Representative Government in Colonial America. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 20.

⁵ Mills, Frederick V. Sr. Bishops By Ballot: An Eighteenth Century Ecclesiastical Revolution. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁶ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, deputy.

⁷ The Journal of Bishops Clergy and Laity Assembled in General Convention in the City of San Francisco on the First Wednesday in October A.D. 1901 with Appendices. (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Sons, 1902), 194 and 244.

⁸ Chinnis, Pamela P. Opening Address from the Chair, House of Deputies, 73rd General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Denver, CO, July 5, 2000.

⁹ Gundrum, The Rev. Canon James R. Arrington Lectures, University of the South, 1982.

¹⁰ "Report of the Joint Commission on Structure of the General Convention and Provinces." In Journal of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. (1967), Appendix 33, 1.

¹¹ Grafton, The Rt. Rev. Charles C. "Proportionate Representation in the House of Deputies." In The Works of the Rt. Rev. Charles C. Grafton, Volume 7, edited by B. Talbot Rogers. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1914), 201.

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