

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Next American Edition of the Book of Common Prayer

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Abstract

The Episcopal Church has been engaged in efforts to revise its Book of Common Prayer since the mid-1990s, but a completed revision is still nowhere in sight. This essay explains the process for revision in the Episcopal Church, the working of that process leading up to the adoption of the Book of Common Prayer 1979 and the optimism about a further revision in the 1990s. It then seeks to understand the inability of the Episcopal Church to follow through on the hope of revision in the first two decades of the twenty-first century, despite considerable work on liturgical texts and the involvement of a growing number of task forces and special committees. It follows with discussion of the issues related to revision before the 2022 and the upcoming 2024 conventions and concludes with reflections on the obstacles to a completed revision.

Keywords: Book of Common Prayer; Constitution and Canons; general convention; Presiding Bishop; revision; standing commission

The Procedure for Revision

The basic outline for revision of editions of the Book of Common Prayer in use in the Episcopal Church has been in place since 1811.¹ Both houses of the Episcopal Church's General Convention (one house of lay and clerical deputies, and a separate house for bishops) approve a revision on one reading. The General Convention notifies each of the dioceses of the proposed revision; dioceses may express opinions on the merits of a revision, but they have no formal authority over the way in which their deputies (whom they elect for one-convention terms) and bishops vote. A second vote is taken at the following convention. Conventions are held at three-year intervals, and the revision must be adopted in identical language by both

¹Edwin Augustine White and Jackson A. Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Otherwise Known as The Episcopal Church, Adopted in General Conventions, 1789–1979*, 2 vols. (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1981 edn, 1997), 1, p. 133.

conventions.² To this point, there have been four editions of the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church: 1789 (which preceded the requirement for action by two conventions), 1892, 1928 and 1979.

While General Conventions have left this basic procedure unchanged since 1811, they have altered the details over time. The General Convention of 1877 allowed adoption of changes in the lectionary by a single convention.³ That of 1901 specified the manner of voting at the second convention considering a revision. The required vote by bishops was to be by ‘a majority of the whole number of Bishops entitled to vote in the House of Bishops’ and that of the deputies was to be ‘by a majority of the Clerical and Lay Deputies of all Dioceses entitled to representation in the House of Deputies voting by order’. ‘Voting by order’ means voting by diocesan deputation, with clerical and lay deputies tallied separately. Each diocese is entitled to up to four lay and four clerical deputies; for a deputation in an order to count in the positive, a majority of the deputies present must vote in favour. While commentators generally identify this procedure as requiring a super-majority for adoption, that does not always have to be the case; the rules, at least theoretically, could also allow minority approval.⁴ The 1904 convention exempted special forms of worship ‘permitted by the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer or by the Canons of the General Convention’ from the approval process.⁵ The members of the convention had two exceptions in mind here: allowance for foreign language translations (a provision for which a specific canon – now numbered Title II, Canon 5 – was added in 1904) and rites for observance of ‘days of Fasting and Thanksgiving, appointed by the Civil or by the Ecclesiastical Authority . . . for which no Service or Prayer hath been provided in this Book’.⁶ The 1904 provision for days of fasting and thanksgiving accorded with a rubric added for the first time in the 1892 Book of Common Prayer. That edition had not included collects or lessons for services for Independence Day or Thanksgiving. The House of Bishops made provisions for those days in 1917, as would the 1928 edition of the Book of Common Prayer.⁷

Another change took place following the adoption of the 1928 edition of the Book of Common Prayer. The General Convention in that year approved a

²There have been two exceptions to the three-year pattern; the Conventions scheduled for 1807 and 2021 were both postponed due to epidemics. To this point, the Constitution makes no provision for such delay, but a revision to the Constitution adopted on first reading in 2022 (Resolution 2022-A157) would belatedly spell out a procedure for such delays. Like revision to the Prayer Book, amendment to the Constitution requires action by the subsequent convention.

³White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 133–34.

⁴If there were 100 deputations, 51 of which in each order voted three-one in favor, the revision would be adopted in the House of Deputies, even if the remaining 49 deputations voted four-nought against, producing an individual deputy count of 306 for and 494 against. On the other hand, a two-two vote of 51 deputations in a single order would defeat a revision, even if every other vote were in favor (an individual deputy count of 102–698).

⁵White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 135.

⁶The Book of Common Prayer (1892), p. vi; and White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 464–65.

⁷The House of Bishops approved the *Book of Offices: Services for Certain Occasions Not Provided for the Book of Common Prayer* (published by authority of the House of Bishops, 1917), which included services for Thanksgiving and Independence Day. Proper lessons and collects for those days were included in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer.

resolution calling for the creation of a ‘Standing Liturgical Commission . . . to which Commission may be referred for preservation and study, all matters relating to the Book of Common Prayer’. Authorizing legislation for this body was added to the canons in 1940.⁸ *Commissions* differ from *committees* in that the latter meet during sessions of the convention, while the former meet between sessions of convention and report to them. The new Standing Liturgical Commission was to be a *joint* commission because it included representation both from the House of Bishops and from the orders represented in the House of Deputies (laity, presbyters, and – since 1982 – deacons). A ‘Joint Commission on the Revision and Enrichment of the Book of Common Prayer’ had been created to produce what would become the 1928 edition; the 1928 resolution for the Standing Liturgical Commission was a new step – a permanent body to monitor new scholarship and ongoing use of the Book of Common Prayer, rather than a temporary body created in anticipation of a specific revision.

The General Convention of 1964 added an intermediate step to the process of revision. It amended the Constitution to allow itself to authorize ‘for trial use throughout this Church, as an alternative at any time or times to the established Book of Common Prayer or to any section or office thereof, a proposed revision of the whole Book or of any portion thereof.’⁹ The General Convention took advantage of this provision in the period preceding the adoption of the 1979 edition by approving trial use in 1967 (*The Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper*), 1970 (a series of texts collected in *Services for Trial Use*), 1963 (texts collected in *Authorized Services*) and 1976 (*Proposed Book of Common Prayer*).¹⁰

The 1928 resolution creating the Standing Liturgical Commission and the 1940 canon confirming its existence left one important matter unresolved. Did the scope of the Standing Commission’s work extend beyond tracking scholarship and offering advice to providing leadership in the preparation of future editions of the Book of Common Prayer? In 1946, the House of Bishops adopted a resolution that noted that the Standing Liturgical Commission was ‘not a revision commission’. The General Convention of 1967, however, understood it to be such and directed it to prepare what would ultimately become the American Book of Common Prayer of 1979, rather than assigning that responsibility to some other body.¹¹ The 1967 decision, however, did not bind the General Convention to make the same decision about subsequent revisions.

The members of the Standing Liturgical Commission did not do all the actual work of revision, something that would have been extremely difficult for a volunteer

⁸Prior to 1940 each convention voted to continue the existence of the Standing Commission. The 1940 canon made the body permanent. See White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 456–58.

⁹White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 137.

¹⁰For an excellent review of the constitutional and canonical issues involved in the revision of the American editions of the Book of Common Prayer, see Matthew S. C. Olver, ‘Article X, Trial Use, and the History of Liturgical Authorization in the Episcopal Church’, *Anglican Theological Review* 105.2 (2023), pp. 167–93. In addition to the texts noted above, Olver points to two other instances of trial use in the 1960s and 70s: for *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* (1967, 1973) and for the COCU (Consultation on Common Texts) eucharistic rite (1969, 1970 and 1973). He raises questions about the appropriateness of designating ‘trial use’ in those two occasions and has similar questions about the designation of ‘trial use’ in the current century.

¹¹White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 459 and 461.

committee of ten.¹² The General Convention eased the situation somewhat by temporarily expanding the members on the commission to 16.¹³ The Commission, which was authorized by canon 'to constitute committees necessary for the carrying on of its work', went further, creating a series of 'drafting committees' chaired by members of the commission but drawing on non-members as well. The first of these to complete a draft was 'the Drafting Committee on Christian Initiation'. It was chaired by 'the Rev. Bonnell Spencer, O.H.C., member of the Standing Commission'. The non-Standing Liturgical Commission members of that drafting committee were Bishop George W. Barrett, Presbyters Reuel L. Howe, James F. Madison, Leonel L. Mitchell, William S. Spilman, and Laypersons Marion Bingle and anthropologist Dr. Margaret Mead.¹⁴

The Commission also drew on a larger group of consultants who were asked to comment on proposed texts. In 1970, the Commission's report to the General Convention contained a directory of the members of 12 drafting committees and a listing of 248 consultants, of whom 69 were on drafting committees.¹⁵ The General Convention also funded a position for a paid Coordinator of Prayer Book Revision, which would be held by Leo Melania from 1967 to 1979.¹⁶ Melania was aided by editorial assistant, Howard E. Galley, of the Church Army during those same years.¹⁷

With the adoption of an edition of the Book of Common Prayer in 1979, the operation of the Standing Liturgical Commission began to scale down. The temporary expansion in membership came to an end, the funding ended for the Coordinator of Prayer Book Revision and the editorial assistant, and the canon on the Standing Liturgical Commission was revised to omit the provision that 'The Commission shall . . . have power to constitute committees necessary for the carrying on of its work'.¹⁸

¹²The 1940 canons specified 'three Bishops, three Presbyters, and three Laymen'. The convention of 1946, reasoning that most of the actual work on the commission was being done by presbyters, changed the formula to 'nine members, of whom at least two shall be Bishops, two Presbyters and two Laymen' so as to allow the appointment of up to five presbyters. The 1949 General Convention added the Custodian of the Book of Common Prayer – the person in charge of authenticating printed copies of the prayer book – as an *ex officio* member of the Commission. See White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 458–60.

¹³General Convention made this expansion by the passage of resolutions in 1967 and 1976 rather than by altering the canon. After 1979, the commission returned to its previous size. See White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 461.

¹⁴White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 458; and Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church, *Prayer Book Study 18: On Baptism and Confirmation* (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1970), p. 7.

¹⁵General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Houston, 1970* (New York: General Convention, 1970), pp. 517–21.

¹⁶Standing Liturgical Commission, 'Memorial Minute-Leo Malania', *The Blue Book: Reports of the Committees, Commission, Boards, and Agencies of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church*, 1985 (New York: Office of General Convention, 1985), pp. 150–51.

¹⁷Marvine Howe, 'H. E. Galley Jr., 64, Editor and Author of Liturgical Books', *New York Times* (May 21, 1993) p. B-8.

¹⁸White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 462. The authors explain the omission of the previous sections 2 and 3 of the canon on the Standing Liturgical Commission as 'repealed, since much of their subject matter was covered in the general canon on standing commission (Canon I.1.2) adopted by the Convention'. Canon I.1.2 did not, however, make explicit the right to create necessary committees. Whether the General Convention intended to remove permission for drafting committees composed largely

The Optimism of the 1990s

Members of the Episcopal Church were optimistic in the 1990s about the possibility of a revision of the Book of Common Prayer of 1979. Many of the elements that had been in place in the two decades preceding the adoption of the 1979 edition seemed to be falling in place again. There was ecumenical support for revision. Two significant ecumenical bodies had published new materials. The Consultation of Common Texts (CCT) published a revision to the Common Lectionary for Sundays and Holy Days (The Revised Common Lectionary, 1992), and the English Language Liturgical Consultation (ELLC) published a volume of texts for widely used prayers (*Praying Together: Agreed Liturgical Texts*, 1988) that were more attuned to questions of male and female language than those in the earlier *Prayers We Have in Common* (1972), which were used in the Book of Common Prayer of 1979.

The strongest single issue driving interest in revision was the question of language. The Standing Liturgical Commission had devoted a meeting to language and gender in 1981 and had established a task force that later issued a paper on 'The Power and Promise of Language in the Church'. It was made available to the Church by inclusion in *Occasional Papers of the Standing Liturgical Commission: Collection Number One* in 1987.¹⁹

In that same year, the commission began to publish sample liturgies that demonstrated sensitivity to what was increasingly perceived as the male-dominated language of the prayer book. It would publish a series of four books, each drawing on the experience with the earlier editions. The first of these, *Liturgical Texts for Evaluation* (1987), was tested in a limited number of test sites, many of which were theological seminaries. Its cover page carried the warning, 'These texts are authorized by the Standing Liturgical Commission for use in worship in selected evaluation centres from September 20 through October 14, 1987. Except as noted on the copyright page of this booklet, reproduction of this material is prohibited'.²⁰ It was followed by *Supplemental Liturgical Texts* (1989), *Supplemental Liturgical Materials* (1991) and *Enriching Our Worship [I]* (1998).

With each iteration, the liturgies came closer to finished texts. The language moved from what was designated as inclusive language (which sought to avoid masculine pronouns) to balanced language (which retained some masculine language but sought to balance it with female language and imagery). From *Supplemental Liturgical Texts* (1989) on, the liturgies took advantage of the work of the ELLC in *Praying Together: Agreed Liturgical Texts*, thereby bringing the language use of the liturgies closer to that of other Protestant Churches. The parameters for use also changed over time. They moved from allowance on very limited occasions to the possibility of Sunday morning worship in any parish of the church that received episcopal permission.

of non-liturgical commission members is not clear, but no such committees have been created since 1979, though the liturgical commission routinely uses 'working committees' composed of its own members.

¹⁹Standing Liturgical Commission, *Occasional Papers of the Standing Liturgical Commission: Collection Number One* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1987).

²⁰Standing Liturgical Commission, *Liturgical Texts for Evaluation* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1987), p. 1.

Given the interest in male–female language, it is not surprising that the General Convention resolution to begin the revision process for a new edition of the prayer book came, not from the Standing Liturgical Commission but from Executive Council’s Committee on the Status of Women. The 1994 General Convention considered and then approved a resolution from the committee directing ‘the Standing Liturgical Commission to prepare a rationale and a pastorally sensitive plan for the next revision of the Book of Common Prayer, and report to the 72nd General Convention’, which would meet in 1997.²¹

Three changes in personnel in the 1990s could be read as favourable to revision. In 1991, the Episcopal Church hired the Revd Dr Clayton L. Morris (1946–2022) as liturgical officer for the Episcopal Church, a position in which he could coordinate liturgical revision. He also became an Episcopal Church representative on the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts. In 1994, the year the General Convention adopted the proposal the Committee on the Status of Women about preparing a plan for prayer book revision, the Episcopal Church’s publishing house, then known as Church Hymnal Corporation, initiated a new Liturgical Studies book series. The first two volumes, which were published in 1994, were *Liturgical Studies 1, Baptism and Ministry* and *Liturgical Studies 2, How Shall we Pray?* The third volume in the series, which appeared in 1996, made clear the hope of members of the Standing Liturgical Commission; it was subtitled *A Prayer Book for the 21st Century*. The majority of essays in the volume were written by those who had served on the Standing Commission or would do so in the future. These included presbyters J. Neil Alexander, Jean Campbell, Gregory M. Howe, Ruth A. Meyers, Leonel L. Mitchell, Juan M. C. Oliver, Jennifer M. Philips, Joseph P. Russell, and Louis Weil and Bishop Frank Tracy Griswold III.²² The authors did not limit themselves to the question of male–female language but expanded the discussion to include possible improvements in almost every section of the Book of Common Prayer. This series paralleled in some ways the earlier Prayer Books Studies series, which had prepared the way for adoption of the Book of Common Prayer 1979.²³

The two other personnel changes that could also be read as favourable for the prospects of revision took place in 1997. The General Convention in that year elected Griswold (1937–2023) to a nine-year term as Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. The convention also voted to merge the Standing Liturgical Commission with what had previously been a separate Standing Commission on

²¹General Convention, Resolution 1994-A051, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 1994* (New York: General Convention, 1995), p. 758. Title IV, Canon 4 of the Constitution and Canons identifies the Executive Council as having the duty ‘to oversee the execution of the program and policies adopted by the General Convention’. See *Constitution and Canons* (2022), p. 43. Constitution & Canons (episcopalarchives.org), accessed March 27 2023.

²²Ruth A. Meyers, editor for the Standing Liturgical Commission, *Liturgical Studies Three: A Prayer Book for the 21st Century* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1996). Howe, Oliver and Alexander would become *ex officio* members of the Standing Committee by serving in the role of Custodian of the Book of Common Prayer.

²³The Standing Liturgical Commission issued 29 volumes of the Prayer Book Studies series between 1950 and 1976. The next volume was *Supplemental Liturgical Texts*, issued in 1989 with the subtitle ‘Prayer Book Studies 30’. This was the final work in the series. *Supplemental Liturgical Materials* had no series designation, and the title of *Enriching Our Worship* (1998) would itself become a series title in 2000. The most recent publication in the Liturgical Studies series was in 2003.

Church Music.²⁴ The new body, which took the name Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM), had oversight over what had been two parallel discussions. The commission would have a membership of 16, plus the Custodian of the Book of Common Prayer, who was changed to a non-voting status. This was an expansion over the previous ten-member composition of the Standing Liturgical Commission but a reduction in the total membership that had been included in the two separate commissions.²⁵ In the early twenty-first century, the expanded commission demonstrated the utility of combining the two bodies by issuing three works that complemented the texts in *Enriching our Worship* [I]: *Enriching Our Music I* (2003), *Enriching Our Music II* (2004), and *Voices Found* (2003). The first two included canticles and settings for use with the Daily Office and Eucharist in *Enriching Our Worship I*. The third emphasized texts and tunes by women.

In 2000, the SCLM transformed *Enriching Our Worship* from the title of a single volume to a series name. In that year it added a Roman numeral to the title of the original volume, which became *Enriching Our Worship I*, and added a second volume: *Enriching Our Worship 2: Ministry with the Sick or Dying*, to what would by 2019 become a six-volume series.

As Matthew S. C. Olver noted in a 2023 article in the *Anglican Theological Review*, the approval of these texts did not fit the original intention of the provision for trial use. That provision was intended for proposed revisions of prayer book texts used during fixed periods of time, generally for three years. The Standing Liturgical Commission had made this point in *Prayer Book Studies XV: The Problem and Method of Prayer Book Revision*, which it issued at the time it was seeking the General Convention's approval of trial use: Trial use 'is *not* intended to cover any and every proposal made by the Standing Liturgical Commission or by any other responsible group in the Church. It refers only to a proposed revision of the Prayer Book in whole or in part that has been *duly undertaken by the General Convention*'.²⁶ The *Enriching Our Worship* series and the three inclusive texts that preceded it, were, in contrast, supplemental in nature and were used for extended periods of time.²⁷ The 1991 General Convention had attempted to clarify this situation by proposing a new subsection c of Article X of the Constitution that would allow 'limited use for other forms of worship on an experimental basis for

²⁴General Convention did not adopt a canonical provision establishing the Standing Commission on Church Music until 1973. It specified '12 members, of whom 2 shall be Bishops, 4 Presbyters, and 6 Lay Persons, of whom at least 4 are professional Church musicians'. See White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 470 and 476.

²⁵The Standing Commission on Church Music had 12 members, and the Standing Liturgical Commission had ten. For the 1997 canon that brought the two groups together see *Constitution and Canons* (1997), pp. 17–8.

²⁶The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, *Prayer Book Studies XV: The Problem and Method of Prayer Book Revision* (New York: The Church Pension Fund, 1961), p. 15. [Emphasis in the original.] The General Conventions of 1961 and 1964 provided the two-convention approval needed to amend the Constitution to allow for trial use.

²⁷Olver noted that the application of the category of trial use to the inclusive language texts was 'was the first time that the General Convention authorized trial use when the church was not in a stated process of Prayer Book Revision. . . . [T]hus we can say that this action in 1985 was a clear divergence from trial use's intended function'. See Olver, 'Article X, Trial Use, and the History of Liturgical Authorization in the Episcopal Church', *Anglican Theological Review* 105.2 (2023), p. 177.

such periods of time and upon such terms and conditions as the General Convention may provide', but it was defeated on the required second vote in 1994.²⁸ The majority of members of the General Convention apparently did not regard the ambiguity about trial use as a problem needing an immediate remedy.

Some in the Episcopal Church used the time that it had taken to produce the 1979 edition of the Book of Common Prayer to estimate the date by which a full revision could be completed. Twenty-nine years passed between the publication of *Prayer Book Studies I* (1950) and the final approval of the American edition of the Book of Common Prayer of 1979. If one took the 1987 publication of *Occasional Papers of the Standing Liturgical Commission: Collection Number One* as a rough equivalent of the 1950 publication of *Prayer Book Studies One* and took the 29-year process of the previous book as a general rule-of-thumb, a revision might be completed by about 2016 (though the convention would not meet in that year). Bishops and deputies at General Convention were, however, confident that they would be able to act more quickly. The original text of Resolution 1994-A015, for example, asked the liturgical commission to create 'a time-table for revision such that a new book might be ready for presentation to the 75th General Convention in the year 2006, being the thirtieth anniversary of the first approval of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer'.²⁹ The constitutional requirement of approval by two consecutive conventions meant that a 2006 presentation, if adopted, could lead to final approval in 2009.

An observer looking at other American denominations might reasonably conclude that a new edition of the prayer book was just around the corner. After all, the United Methodist Church (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 1992) and the Presbyterian Church, USA (*Book of Common Worship*, 1993) had just approved new liturgies, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was at work on what would become *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006). One looking at other parts of the Anglican Communion might also have cause for optimism. An appendix in *Liturgical Studies 3* listed six Anglican liturgies that had been adopted since the approval of the American Book of Common Prayer of 1979: *The Alternative Service Book* (England, 1980), *Alternative Prayer Book* (Ireland, 1984), *The Book of Alternative Services* (Canada, 1985), *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (1989), *An Anglican Prayer Book 1989* (Province of Southern Africa) and *A Prayer Book for Australia* (1995). The Church of England would publish *Common Worship: Service and Prayers of the Church of England* in 2000.

The majority of the volumes from elsewhere in the Anglican Communion involved approval of an alternative service book while continuing to authorize the existing edition of the Book of Common Prayer. Such an approach would not be impossible in the Episcopal Church and would be mentioned by members of the SCLM on occasion. It would, however, require changes in the *Constitution and Canons*. To this point, no serious effort has been made to introduce such changes.

²⁸General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Phoenix, 1991* (New York: General Convention, 1992), p. 405, and General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 1994* (New York: General Convention, 1995), pp. 634–35.

²⁹Executive Council: Committee on the Status of Women, 'Report', *The Blue Book: Reports of the Committees, Commission, Boards, and Agencies of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1994* (New York: Office of General Convention, 1994), pp. 266–79 and 278–89.

The optimistic timetable envisioned in 1994 has not been met. The report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to the 2000 General Convention pushed the estimated date of final adoption of a new edition of the Prayer Book to 2012. Its reports to the conventions of 2003 and 2006 omitted any estimates of completion of a revision. No draft of a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer was presented for approval on first reading to the General Conventions of 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018 or 2022 (delayed from the original 2021 date by COVID-19). None is expected to be introduced in 2024 (a date kept because the arrangements for the convention were well underway before the decision to delay the 2021 convention).

Church Fights and Limited Budgets

By the 1990s, the Episcopal Church was locked in a serious debate about how or whether to update the church's position on human sexuality. In the 1970s, the General Convention had carved out a compromise position on homosexuality, asserting in 1976 that 'homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church', and in 1979 that 'There should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behaviour the Church considered wholesome'. These were balanced with the 1979 statement that 'it is not appropriate for the Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage'.³⁰

This compromise was increasingly untenable by the 1990s. The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1973, a decision that was endorsed by the American Psychological Association in 1975.³¹ The AIDS epidemic added a new urgency to ministry to members to what was increasingly called the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community, with the General Convention of 1991 adopting 12 different resolutions on aspects of AIDS ministry.³² Some in the Church argued that full acceptance of gay sexual

³⁰General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . the Episcopal Church, Minneapolis 1976* (New York: General Convention, 1977), p. C-109; and General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Denver, 1979* (New York: General Convention, 1980), p. C-93.

³¹Both organizations, however, qualified their initial actions. In 1974, the American Psychiatric Society created a new category of Sexual Orientation Disturbance, for those who were troubled by their homosexual orientation. The title of the disturbance was renamed Ego Dystonic Homosexuality in 1980 and eliminated altogether in 1987. The American Psychological Association amended its note on homosexuality in 2008 to distance itself from the claim commonly made in the 1990s that homosexuality was genetically predetermined and therefore unchangeable by asserting that there was 'no consensus among scientists about the exact reasons that an individual develops a homosexual, bisexual, gay or lesbian orientation'. See Sarah Baughey-Gill, 'When Gay Was Not Okay with the APA: A Historical Overview of Homosexuality and its Status as Mental Disorder', *Occam's Razor 1*, Article 2 (2011), pp. 5–16 (13–15). The first number range is the page range for the article and the second range is for the specific pages cited. <https://cedar.www.edu/orwvu/vol1/iss1/2> (accessed March 28 2023); J. J. Conger, 'Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1974: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives', *American Psychologist* 30 (1975), pp. 620–51; and American Psychological Association, *Answers to Your Questions: For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), p. 2.

³²The 1991 resolutions were 1991-A001, 1991-A002, 1991-A003, 1991-A004, 1991-A005, 1991-A006, 1991-A007, 1991-A008, 1991-A009, 1991-A010, 1991-B025 and 1991-D096.

relationships was a prerequisite of any effective engagement with LGBT persons. Others maintained that the 1979 call to celibacy was the only appropriate path. Some pointed to the church's traditional teaching on sex, while others argued that the Holy Spirit was guiding the Church in the direction of a new understanding.

Individual progressive bishops, such as John Shelby Spong (1931–2021) of the Diocese of Newark, publicized their ordination of actively gay candidates. A few notable seminary professors even began to criticize exclusive monogamous relationships as immoral.³³ More traditional bishops brought charges against Bishop Spong and Assistant Bishop Walter Righter (1923–2011) of the Diocese of Newark for the ordination of Robert Williams (1955–1992) and sought out alliances with bishops of the Global South.³⁴

During the 1990s, the General Convention sought to balance the affirmation of the church's traditional teaching with the goals of gay liberation.³⁵ This uneasy truce broke down in the following decade. The 2003 General Convention endorsed the election of openly gay bishop-elect V. Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire. This was important because the election of bishops is the only part of the ordination process in which the General Convention could be directly involved; individual dioceses have authority over the ordination of deacons and priests.³⁶ Despite appeals to the Episcopal Church by the Anglican Communion's 'instruments of unity' to refrain from consecrating Robinson, the consecration took place. The event made it clear to traditionalists that the progressive side of the debate had a clear majority in both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. When the General Convention of 2006 showed no interest in reversing its course of action and elected a successor to Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold – Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori – who was

³³See Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989); and Louis William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988).

³⁴Williams was vocal about his opposition to monogamy for gay and lesbian persons. Presiding Bishop Edmond L. Browning (1929–2016) and his Council of Advice adopted a statement of disassociation with Spong's ordination of Williams to the diaconate. A church court, however, later ruled that Assistant Bishop Walter Righter did not violate Church doctrine by ordaining Williams to the priesthood, opining that sexual morality was not part of the Church's 'core doctrine'.

³⁵Resolution 1994-B012, for example, called for a dialogue committee on sexuality and urged the church to 'commit itself to dialogue in faith with no expectation of uniformity, but every expectation of unity'. See *General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 1994* (New York: General Convention, 1995), p. 135. Resolution 2000-C008 declared that the members of the General Convention would commit themselves 'to continue the process of mutual sharing, study, and discernment concerning human sexuality, so that we remain open and connected to one another despite our differences, and so we can permit the Holy Spirit to act in our midst'. See *General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Denver, 2000* (New York: General Convention, 2001), p. 244.

³⁶Prior to 1799 the Constitution of the Episcopal Church required approval of both houses of the General Convention for the ordination of any bishop. In 1799, an alternative provision was provided for cases in which there had been an election more than three months before the meeting of the convention: approval by individual diocesan bishops and by diocesan Standing Committees. As a result of negative reaction following the General Convention's approval of the election of Bishop Robinson, the General Conventions of 2009 and 2012 altered the constitution to make the bishop and Standing Committee approval the only allowable option. See White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, p. 67; and *General Convention, Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 2012* (New York: General Convention, 2012), p. 477.

strongly supportive of the consecration of Robinson, a number of traditional clergy and laity, and some parishes and dioceses withdrew from the Episcopal Church and began the process of forming a competing Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). The Episcopal Church responded with a series of lawsuits against those congregations and dioceses leaving the Episcopal Church that sought to take property with them. The Episcopal Church's *Constitution and Canons* made it clear that individual congregations seeking to leave were not legally entitled to take their property with them, a position that was generally upheld by secular courts.³⁷ The canons are not explicit, however, about ownership in cases where a diocese seeks to leave the church. With the US Supreme Court declining to take up the matter, individual state courts made their own decisions. Courts in Texas and Illinois allowed the dioceses of Fort Worth and Quincy to take property with them, those in Pennsylvania and California assigned property to the Episcopal Church, and the state Supreme Court in South Carolina divided property between a departing and continuing diocese and parishes.

The flurry of departures and lawsuits provided a significant distraction for the Episcopal Church. One of many issues that was pushed to the back burner at the time was that of prayer book revision. No one was surprised when there was no proposed draft prayer book revision for consideration at the General Convention of 2006. Two comments were frequently voiced in informal conversations in the Joint Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy, and Music of the 2006 General Convention and in the Church at large. Some, recalling that Episcopalians had quarrelled over prayer book revision in the 1970s, opined that the Church did not need another issue about which to fight. Others noted that it would be unlikely that the convention would approve any revision of the prayer book until the Convention had come to a solid consensus on human sexuality – including agreement on the appropriateness of a same-sex marriage rite.³⁸ The Convention of 2006 did adopt a revision of the lectionary – the Consultation on Common Text's Revised Common Lectionary – which required the vote of only one convention.³⁹ Even that action was indicative of a level of distraction, however. The members of the SCLM and the bishops and deputies at Convention did not recall that the citations for lessons for Holy Week in the 1979 Prayer Book lectionary were also found in the Proper Liturgies for Special Days. It would be up to the conventions of 2012 and 2015 to conform the citations in the special liturgies to those in the Revised Common Lectionary.

The turmoil of the church in the early twenty-first century had economic consequences. The single largest source of income for the national budget adopted by General Convention is the contribution asked from individual dioceses; this figure is calculated as a percentage of the dioceses' own budgets. The departing

³⁷Title I, Canon 7, sections 4 and 5, are often referred to as the 'Dennis Canon' because of the name of the person who proposed adding the sections to the canon. Those sections hold that 'all real and personal property . . . is held in trust for this Church and the Diocese thereof.'

³⁸The author of this article was a deputy to the General Convention from 2006 to 2022 and was a member of the Joint Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music in 2006, 2015 and 2018, serving as a secretary of that body on the latter two occasions.

³⁹See General Convention, *The Journal of the General Convention of . . . the Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 887–89.

dioceses and congregations halted their contributions to the Episcopal Church, and some of those that remained faced declining income and the need to divert funds for property litigation costs. The amount of diocesan contributions to the Episcopal Church anticipated over the years 2007, 2008 and 2009, in the budget adopted by the 2006 General Convention, was \$92,978,494. By the time the convention met in 2012, the budget anticipated \$73,500,000 in diocesan giving over the years 2013, 2014 and 2015.⁴⁰ The financial decline meant that the Episcopal Church had fewer funds for programme and staff, and that affected liturgy. The 2009 General Convention budget changed the name of the Office on Liturgy and Music to the category of 'Worship and Spirituality' and cut its funding for the 2010–12 triennium from \$582,109 of the previous convention's budget to \$269,360. It did so in part by eliminating the position of Liturgical Officer of the Episcopal Church that Clayton L. Morris had held since 1991.⁴¹ While the anticipated diocesan contributions would eventually rebound after reaching a low point in the budget adopted in 2012, budgetary concerns would continue to be a problem.

The retirement of Presiding Bishop Griswold in 2006 meant that the advocates of prayer book revision lost a knowledgeable liturgical scholar in the position of Presiding Bishop. The favourable moment for a new revision of the Book of Common Prayer was passing.

The Ongoing Work of the SCLM

While the effort for a thorough revision of the Book of Common Prayer stalled by 2006, it did not mean that the SCLM was inactive. One direction that consumed a considerable amount of time was the revision of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. Prior to the 1960s, the Episcopal Church's calendar of fixed holy days followed the traditional pattern of earlier prayer books in the Anglican Communion: it contained entries primarily drawn from the Bible: John the Baptist, the Holy Innocents, the twelve disciples (with Matthias replacing Judas Iscariot), the evangelists Mark and Luke, St. Michael and All Angels, and feasts of our Lord (Purification, Annunciation and Transfiguration). It also included All Saints' Day and, since 1928, the American feasts for Independence Day and Thanksgiving Day. In 1963, however, the Standing Liturgical Commission published the first edition of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, which added figures from the history of the Church up to the time of the Reformation and figures from the history of the Anglican Churches since that time. A second edition in 1973 added biographical sketches of the figures on the calendar. By the late 1970s, it became obvious, however, that this effort to reclaim the history of the Church had resulted in a calendar filled with ordained males of European heritage. A third (1980) and fourth edition (1988) began to address this imbalance. Later editions continued the work of giving greater diversity to the calendar; these editions, which

⁴⁰General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Columbus, 2006* (New York: General Convention, 2007), p. 819; and General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 2012* (New York: General Convention, 2013), 845–46.

⁴¹General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Columbus, 2006* (New York: General Convention, 2007), p. 829; and General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), p. 910.

were issued at frequent intervals, were identified by the year of approval by General Convention: *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2006. The early additions were primarily of women and African Americans; later additions attempted to acknowledge a wider range of cultures, paralleling a call for wider cultural sensitivity found in *Liturgical Studies 4: The Chant of Life: Inculturation and the People of the Land* (2003). There were efforts made at the same time to reconsider the way in which texts were being translated from English. The 2012 General Convention approved a resolution from the SCLM amending the canon on translation to include the provision that the Custodian of the Book of Common Prayer ‘or some person appointed by the Custodian, may exercise due discretion . . . so that such translations reflect the idiomatic style and cultural context of those languages’.⁴²

After 2006, the effort to expand the calendar became more complicated. Open days on the calendar were becoming scarce, and it was necessary to either group multiple figures on the same date or to remove some figures – an attempt guaranteed to bring protest from those persons, parishes, institutions or dioceses that had originally advocated inclusion. There was also disagreement about the appropriateness of including social reformers who had not been active adult Christians or of legendary figures who may not have actually existed. The environmentalist John Muir, who distanced himself from Christianity as an adult, is an example of the first; the General Convention of 2015 added him to the calendar on a trial basis.⁴³ Thecla, the miracle-performing companion of Paul whose story became popular in the second century, is an example of the second; the 2009 General Convention referred a resolution for her inclusion to the SCLM.⁴⁴

Further efforts at the expansion of the calendar by the Standing Commission were not uniformly appreciated by bishops and deputies. Three editions – *Holy Women and Holy Men* (presented to the General Convention of 2009), *Lesser Feasts and Fasts; A Great Cloud of Witnesses* (presented in 2015) and *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2018* (presented in 2018) – were not approved as the replacement for *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* but were given lesser status.⁴⁵

⁴²General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, 2012* (New York: General Convention, 2012), p. 581.

⁴³General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 727–29.

⁴⁴General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), p. 797.

⁴⁵The convention of 2009 authorized the new material in *Holy Women, Holy Men* for trial use until 2012. The 2015 convention voted to make *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* ‘available for publication and distribution’, That of 2018 approved trial use of the new commemorations in *Lesser Feasts and Fast 2018*. See: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . the Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), pp. 318–19; General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . the Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 332–33; and General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . the Episcopal Church, Austin 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), p. 679. Matthew Olver has argued that the designation of *Lesser Feast and Fasts* texts for trial use is ‘improper’, since ‘additions to or deletions for the calendar of saints in the BCP need to be passed as a first reading or a revision to the Prayer Book’, but ‘when collects and propers are added to LFF, the General Convention needs simply to pass a resolution that amends LFF, but should not use the language of trial use’. See Olver, ‘Article X, Trial Use, and the History of Liturgical Authorization in the Episcopal Church’, *Anglican Theological Review* 105.2 (2023), p. 180.

The SCLM also continued to add new volumes to the *Enriching Our Worship* (EOW) series: EOW 3: *Burial Rites for Adults* (2006), EOW 4: *The Renewal of Ministry* (2007), EOW 5: *Liturgies and Prayers Related to Childbearing, Childbirth, and Loss* (2009) and EOW 6: *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant* (2019). Other texts were issued that were not included in the *Enriching Our Worship* numeration and were generally approved by General Convention for private study and use rather than for public worship. These liturgies included *Changes: Rites of Passages* (2007), *Rites and Prayers for the Care of Beloved Animals* (2012), *I will Bless You and You will be a Blessing* (2013) and *Daily Prayer for All Seasons* (2014).

By 2015, the General Convention had authorized a large body of material for use, trial use, publication or personal use. The Church had moved no closer to approving a new edition of the Book of Common Prayer, however. What was still lacking was a clear path from the accumulation of resources to an edition of the Book of Common Prayer or a comprehensive Alternative Service Book.

A New Approach to Revision

Beginning in 2015, however, General Convention began to consider the possibility of completing a revision of the Book of Common Prayer once again. It approved resolution 2015-A169 directing ‘the SCLM to prepare a plan for the comprehensive revision of the current Book of Common Prayer and to present that plan to the 79th General Convention’.⁴⁶ It expanded the membership on the Standing Commission to 20, an indication in the past of an increased focus on revision.⁴⁷ The SCLM began a new attempt to clarify the status of those supplemental texts that did not fit the parameters of ‘trial use’, suggesting a revision of Constitution to the General Convention of 2015 to ‘provide for the use of other forms for the renewal and enrichment of the common worship of this Church, as an alternative at any time or times to any section or Office of the established Book of Common Prayer’. It was defeated as a result of a squabble between the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops over a joint committee amendment that such texts were to be used ‘under the direction and subject to the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority’ – a provision that was included in the text of some of the individual *Enriching Our Worship* volumes.⁴⁸ An effort to introduce the category of supplemental liturgies would be successful, however, in the General Conventions of 2018 and 2022, which provided the two-convention approval needed for a constitutional change.⁴⁹

This new surge of interest in revision was accompanied by a new round of publications exploring revision. In the summer of 2017, the *Anglican Theological Review* published a roundtable discussion featuring comments by three important

⁴⁶General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), pp. 886–87.

⁴⁷*Constitution and Canons* (2015), pp. 13–14.

⁴⁸General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), p. 915.

⁴⁹Resolution 2022-A145 Amend Constitution Article X [Book of Common Prayer Supplementary Text – Second Reading].

scholars associated with the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP): Louis Weil, Ruth A. Meyers and Scott MacDougall.⁵⁰ In early 2018, *The Sewanee Theological Review* followed with a series of papers that had been delivered at a two-part conference on the liturgy sponsored by the School of Theology of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and by the Virginia Theological Seminary. The same year, Church Publishing released *Issues in Prayer Book Revision*, containing essays from ten scholars involved with the teaching of liturgy at Episcopal Seminaries.⁵¹

These three publications had much in common. They were tied to specific seminary communities – CDSP, Sewanee and Virginia. The authors were primarily those with experience in the SCLM or non-Commission members with experience in seminary teaching of liturgy and music. They took the position that prayer book revision was a serious enterprise, and that male–female language and marriage, to which considerable attention had been devoted in the previous decades, were not the only issues to be addressed in a future revision. Several of the essays touched on matters that had been discussed in *Liturgical Studies 3: A Prayer Book for the 21st Century*, such as the need for prayers in the ordination rite that acknowledge that God was the ultimate agent of ordination and the need to live into ‘baptismal ecclesiology’.

The most striking difference among the opinions of the authors concerned the advisability of beginning prayer book revision in the immediate future. Those authors who had not served on the SCLM generally assumed that prayer book revision would take place and devoted their comments to specific matters that could be addressed in such a revision, while those with the closest connection to the Standing Commission were the most hesitant to move with dispatch. James W. Farwell’s contribution to *Issues in Prayer Book Revision* is an example of the first approach. His first sentence focused on the inevitability of revision: ‘a revision will come, as it always has, sooner or later’. He then moved to the subject at hand: ‘There are a number of matters the church might consider with regard to the Eucharistic rites’.⁵² The contribution to the *Anglican Theological Review* roundtable article by former Standing Commission chair Ruth Meyers was a striking example of the second approach: ‘one might expect that I am in favour of the proposal that the 2018 General Convention direct the SCLM to begin a comprehensive revision of the Prayer Book. But I do not advocate this path’. She went on to say that she favoured another approach; ‘intensive church-wide conversation between the 2018 and 2021 General Convention about whether a revision of the Book of Common Prayer is needed or desirable; to what extent; and whether, if revision is not desirable, the Episcopal Church should instead develop significant supplemental liturgical resources, such as a Book of Alternative Services’.⁵³

Something important was changing by this point, something that differentiated this effort at revision from that of the 1970s. Rather than relying on the SCLM as the

⁵⁰Scott MacDougall, Ruth A. Meyers and Louis Weil, ‘Revising the Episcopal Church’s Book of Common Prayer (1979): Liturgical Theologians in Dialogue’, *Anglican Theological Review* 99.3 (2017), pp. 499–518.

⁵¹Robert W. Prichard, ed., *Issues in Prayer Book Revision* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2018).

⁵²James W. Farwell, ‘A Reflection on the Eucharistic Prayer in Light of the Possible Revision of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer’, *Issues in Prayer Book Revision*, p.105.

⁵³Ruth A. Meyers, ‘Time for Prayer Book Revision?’, *Anglican Theological Review* 99.3 (2017), p. 504.

drafter of proposals for liturgical revision and the vehicle for liturgical reform, the General Convention was pursuing a more diversified approach. This was something that the General Convention was able to do since it had been a resolution of the Convention rather than the wording of the canon on the SCLM that had given the Standing Commission that role at the time of the 1979 revision. As Myers noted in her article, the 2015 resolution calling the presentation of a plan for prayer book revision in 2018 did not come from the Standing Commission itself, although the Commission was charged to prepare the plan. Rather it ‘came from within the General Convention’ – from the Joint Committee on Prayer Book Liturgy and Music. ‘Therefore’, Meyers opined, it ‘it reflects primarily the mind of the convention’ and did not yet ‘reflect as broad a consensus in the church as possible’.⁵⁴ Nor, one might add, did it reflect a broad consensus within the SCLM.

There were other indications of the willingness of the General Convention to look to bodies other than the SCLM for assistance in revision. In 2018, a ‘Task Force on the Study of Marriage’ reported back to General Convention recommending changes to the SCLM’s *I will Bless You and You will be a Blessing* (2013, revised edn 2015). The General Convention of 2018 approved the Task Force’s revision, and it was issued in the following year as *Enriching Our Worship 6: Rites for Blessing Relationships as presented to the 79th General Convention, 2018*. This was the first occasion when a volume in the Enriching Our Worship series was taken out of the hands of the SCLM. The 2018 General Convention also adopted Resolution D078 authorizing trial use of alternative expansive language for the Eucharist Prayers in Rite II of the Book of Common Prayer. Again, this was not the work of the SCLM but of a group of interested individuals including the Revd Laurie Brock from the Diocese of Lexington (Kentucky), who introduced the resolution to General Convention, and the Revd Scott Gunn from Forward Movement Publications. The resolution as adopted authorized trial use ‘until the completion of the next comprehensive revision of the Book of Common Prayer’. It did, however, give the SCLM an after-the-fact responsibility. It was ‘to develop a process for evaluation of the ongoing use of The Holy Eucharist: Rite II, including Eucharistic Prayers A, B, and D, (Expansive Language) among the dioceses and congregations of this church’.⁵⁵

The report on the revision process that the SCLM brought to the Convention of 2018 was extensive. It included interviews with ‘representatives in ten Anglican provinces who described their rationale for revising their Prayer Book, their process, and their hard-earned learning from their experience’. The report offered two options for revision. Option One envisioned ‘a decision by the upcoming General Convention to move into the revision process immediately, the first stage being to gather data, resources, and ideas, and then set up the structure to begin drafting immediately after 2021 General Convention’, which because of the COVID-19 pandemic did not convene until 2022. The report estimated that this option would require \$1,917,025 in the 2019–21 triennium of which a portion would go for a ‘Grounded Theory Research Project’ (\$483,300), for focus groups using a model advocated by ‘the Art of Hosting’ (\$908,800), and for a ‘Full-time Project

⁵⁴Meyers, ‘Time for Prayer Book Revision?’, *Anglican Theological Review* 99.3 (2017), p. 507.

⁵⁵General Convention, Resolution 2018-A078, Acts of Convention: Resolution # 2018-D078 (episcopalarchives.org) (accessed September 26, 2023).

Manager'.⁵⁶ Option Two envisioned 'a slower pace, while remaining open to Prayer Book revision in the future'. Option Two invited 'the whole church to broaden its familiarity with the 1979 Prayer Book and the history that underlies it, and provides for time to reflect as a body on the significance of common prayer in our tradition'. The budget for Option Two was projected to be \$1,180,625 for the 2019–21 triennium.⁵⁷

The presiding officers of the two houses of Convention decided not to assign this report (and accompanying resolutions that would effect Option One or Option Two) to the Joint Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music. The presiding officers, who have the authority to make all appointments to legislative committees, decided instead to create a special committee to consider the report, which they named the 'Committee to Receive Report on Resolution A169'.⁵⁸

The A169 committee ended up forwarding a resolution favouring Option One to the House of Deputies, which adopted it with minor changes. The House of Bishops, however, adopted a substitute resolution proposed by Bishop C. Andrew Doyle of the Diocese of Texas. The House of Deputies concurred.⁵⁹

The adopted substitute attempted to balance those with an attachment to the 1979 edition with those who were anxious for alternatives. It 'memorialize the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as a Prayer Book of the church preserving the psalter, liturgies, The Lambeth Quadrilateral, Historic Documents, and Trinitarian Formularies ensuring its continued use' and called for continued engagement with 'the deep Baptismal and Eucharistic theology and practice of the' book. At the same time, it also created a 30-member 'Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision (TFLPBR) ... with leaders who represent the expertise, gender, age, theology, regional, and ethnic diversity of the church'. The committee was to propose to the next General Convention 'revisions to the Constitution and Canons to enable the Episcopal Church to be adaptive in its engagement of future generations of Episcopalians, multiplying, connecting, and disseminating new liturgies for missions, attending to the prayer book revision in other provinces of the Anglican Communion'. The resolution also called upon bishop to 'engage worshiping communities in experimentation' and involved in 'the creation of alternative texts to offer to the wider church' and to 'collect, reflect, teach, and share these resources with the TFLPBR'. The resolution decreased requested funding for the revision process to \$200,000 for the triennium.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, Sub-Committee on Revision of the Book of Common Prayer, 'Report', *Reports to the 79th General Convention, Otherwise Known as the Blue Book*, 2 vols. (New York: Office of the General Convention, 2018), 1, pp. 193–367 and 194, 197, and 201.

⁵⁷Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, Sub-Committee on Revision of the Book of Common Prayer, 'Report', *Reports to the 79th General Convention, Otherwise Known as the Blue Book*, 2 vols (New York: Office of the General Convention, 2018), 1, pp. 194, 201 and 206.

⁵⁸2015-A169 had been the 2015 resolution calling the SCLM to present a plan for revision. The two resolutions on the matter presented in the SCLM subcommittee report on revision were numbered 2018-A068 (Option One) and 2018-A069 (Option Two).

⁵⁹General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ... The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 480–81.

⁶⁰General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ... The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 480–81.

While the major goals of the resolution were relatively clear to bishops and deputies – continuing use of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer while allowing the authorization of innovative materials – the manner in which they were to be attained was not. Some saw the resolution as a step in the direction that the Church of England has been following: recognizing a historic book (the 1662 Book of Common Prayer) while allowing for creation of modern alternatives (The *Alternative Service Book* of 1980 and the *Common Worship* materials beginning in 2000). Others may have imagined a continuing expansion of the *Enriching Our Worship* series. The 2018 convention did provide some clarity in one area, however; as noted above, it altered the Constitution, to create the new category for ‘other forms for the renewal and enrichment of the common worship of this church’ without including an explicit provision about the need for episcopal permission for use to which the House of Deputies had objected in 2015.⁶¹ This new constitutional category would be adopted on second reading at the following convention.

The Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision (TFLPBR) reported back to the next General Convention, which was delayed until 2022. It explained that it had organized four working groups: (1) Seek, Receive, and Review; (2) Communications and Website; (3) Constitution and Canons; and (4) Liturgical Revision and Creation. The Group I, responding to the 2018 enabling resolution’s call to bishops to ‘engage worshipping communities in experimentation’ that were involved in ‘the creation of alternative texts to offer to the wider church’, established a set of principles and guidelines for what it considered appropriate liturgies, reviewed 24 submissions from such communities and forwarded six of them to the SCLM for consideration. The Task Force presented a proposed resolution 2022-A057 that directed the SCLM to review materials that it had forwarded to it and to present it to the following convention ‘for optional and /or trial use’. Further, the resolution reassigned the work of receiving material from ‘worshipping communities in experimentation’ to the SCLM with the direction that it makes use of the ‘Principles to Guide the Development of Liturgical Texts’ prepared by the Task Force. This resolution was adopted by the 2022 General Convention with minor changes that made it clearer that the Standing Commission was not bound to present all material forwarded to it by the Task Force.⁶²

Group II focused on developing the website episcopalcommonprayer.org. The Task Force presented proposed Resolution 2022-A058 assigning the responsibility for maintaining the site to the SCLM and adding that responsibility to the canon descriptive of the Standing Committee’s work (Title I, Canon 1). The resolution was adopted with amendments directing the appointment of a web designer and asking the SCLM to distinguish the various forms of authorization for the texts listed on the site. Group IV identified two major tasks: identifying ‘aspects of our present corpus of liturgical materials that are in need of revision, modification, or fully authorized

⁶¹General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of . . . The Episcopal Church, Austin, 2018* (New York: General Convention, 2018), pp. 1008–09; and General Convention (2022), Resolution A145, <https://www.vbinder.net/resolutions/240> (accessed March 30 2023).

⁶²Task Force on Liturgical & Prayer Book Revision, ‘Report’, *Reports to the 80th General Convention, Otherwise Known as the Blue Book*, 3 vols. (New York: General Convention Office, 2021), 2, pp. 620–50 and 623–33, 645; and General Convention (2022), Resolution A057, www.vbinder.net/resolutions/57 (accessed March 30 2023).

alternatives' and identifying 'ritual needs of communities within the church that have need for rites that [do not] presently exist'. If it began that work of identifying needs for revision and rituals for needs currently unmet, it did not report upon it, turning rather to the preparatory effort of establishing 'guidelines for expansion and inclusive languages' to use with existing and proposed liturgies. The Task Force presented Resolution 2022-A060 asking the Convention to endorse its guidelines. The resolution was approved as presented.⁶³

Group III drafted a new proposed amendment to Article X of the Constitution, which deals with the Book of Common Prayer. The amendment would redefine the Book of Common Prayer as 'those liturgical forms authorized by the General Convention'.⁶⁴ This would mean that the Book of Common Prayer would no longer be understood to be a physical volume but rather a collection of adopted materials that might exist only in electronic form. The Task Force prepared Resolution 2022-A059 to this effect. The General Convention adopted an amended substitute to this proposal on the first reading that included significant changes. A new section four of the revision of Article X of the Constitution specified that 'No alteration therefore or addition thereto shall be made unless it has previously been authorized for Trial Use in accordance with the Article and the Canons of the Church'.⁶⁵ The amended substitute resolution also added a call for yet another working group that was to 'review the Canons relevant to the implementation of this Article and propose revisions to the 81st General Convention', for which an allocation of \$30,000.00 was suggested.

When the SCLM submits its report to the 2024 General Convention, it will report on the progress of the various initiatives assigned to it by the 2022 General Convention. The shortened period between the two conventions – two years rather than three – that resulted from projected 2021 Convention meeting in 2022 will no doubt affect the quantity of work to be accomplished.

A give-and-take between two members appointed to the TFLPBR provides some hint of what may occur at the 2024 General Convention. Matthew S. C. Olver, an associate professor of Liturgics and Pastoral Theology at Nashotah House Theological Seminary, penned the article for the 2023 *Anglican Theological Review*, which has been noted several times in this essay. The article is critical of the proposed revision of Article X of the Constitution that will come to the 2024 Convention on second reading. He characterizes the proposal as 'both too sweeping and too vague', identifies it as the 'major question before the Episcopal Church at its General Convention in 2024' and offers 'a resounding No' to the question 'whether this proposed revision of Article X solves the myriad problems [he has] identified and the problems raised by the bishops at the 2022 Convention'. He proposes a

⁶³Task Force on Liturgical & Prayer Book Revision, 'Report', *Reports to the 80th General Convention, Otherwise Known as the Blue Book*, 3 vols. (New York: General Convention Office, 2021), 2, pp. 620–50 and 646–47); and General Convention (2022), Resolution A058, www.vbinder.net/resolutions/58 (accessed March 30 2023).

⁶⁴Task Force on Liturgical & Prayer Book Revision, 'Report', *Reports to the 80th General Convention, Otherwise Known as the Blue Book*, 3 vols. (New York: General Convention Office, 2021), 2, pp. 620–50 and 648–49.

⁶⁵General Convention (2022), Resolution A059, www.vbinder.net/resolutions/59 (accessed March 30 2023).

further revision on the resolution, which would then require approval in 2024 and 2027.⁶⁶ Bishop C. Andrew Doyle of Texas, also named a member of TFLPBR and one of the architects of the proposed revision to Title X, has written a response to the Olver article, which he hopes will soon be in print. In the short term, the text is circulating informally.⁶⁷

Bishop Doyle, who has now become a member of the SCLM, attempts to refute the various arguments Olver presented and thereby avoid the delay that would be caused by a further revision of the amendment to Article X on the Constitution. Even if he is successful in that effort, however, he is not optimistic about a rapid completion of the revision of the Book of Common Prayer. He suggests that revision will take ‘a minimum of 18 years’ but offers the ‘conservative estimate’ that it will actually require ‘30 years, given convention timelines, finances, and the SCLM’s ability to bring forward the new book given all their other tasks’.⁶⁸ Resolution A051 of the General Convention in 1994 had, in contrast, expected a complete draft of a revision in 12 years.⁶⁹ The intervening years of study, trial use, and special committees and taskforces have not brought the possibility of a completed revision any closer.

Concluding Observations

Several years ago, this author wrote an article on the Episcopal Church’s attempt to adopt a revision of the Book of Common Prayer on second reading in 1886.⁷⁰ That attempt at revision did not go well, with the most creative ideas in the proposal failing and with the Convention requiring six more years to produce a relatively bland revision of 1892. The judgment offered of that attempt at revision might well apply to the Episcopal Church’s attempts at prayer book revision over the past 30 years: ‘The sheer complexity of the task that the joint committee set before the convention in 1886 may simply have been too great’ for a successful effort. The current multitrack approach to revisions, with the use of separate commissions, committees and task forces with no clear relationship to one another, may simply be too complicated to produce a coherent end product.

There are some indications of recognition of that fact. The President of the House of Deputies and the Presiding Bishop did not appoint the ‘working group of nine’ called for in Resolution 2022-A059, at least as an independent body. Instead, the task given to that group – reviewing the changes to the canons necessitated by the revision of Article X of the Constitution – has been given to a subcommittee of the SCLM. Another sign was the appointment of Bishop Doyle, who has been one

⁶⁶See Olver, ‘Article X, Trial Use, and the History of Liturgical Authorization in the Episcopal Church’, *Anglican Theological Review* 105.2 (2023), p.191.

⁶⁷C. Andrew Doyle, ‘The Past and Future Life of 2022-A059’, (unpublished manuscript, 2023). The article is currently being reviewed for publication by a theological journal.

⁶⁸Doyle, ‘The Past and Future Life of 2022-A059’, p. 6.

⁶⁹The reference in the 1994 resolution to 2006 as the ‘the thirtieth anniversary of the first approval of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer’ suggests that the movers of that resolution anticipated a new book in 2006 that would gain second and final approval in 2009 – a total completion time of 15 years.

⁷⁰Robert W. Prichard, ‘William Reed Huntington and the Revision of the Book of Common Prayer in the General Convention of 1886: A Cautionary Tale’, *Anglican and Episcopal History* 85.4 (2016), pp. 429–48.

of the most active participants in the discussion of revision from outside of the Standing Commission, to membership on that body. One can hope that further efforts will be made to provide a clear leadership to the revision process. Perhaps it is time to restore the provision dropped from the canons in 1979 and make explicit that the SCLM has the ‘power to constitute committees necessary for the carrying on of its work’.⁷¹

A related comment concerns the responsibility to ‘collect, collate, and catalogue material bearing upon possible future revisions of the Book of Common Prayer’.⁷² Something that has been missing in the ongoing discussions about the prayer book in the Episcopal Church has been a facility for keeping track of the liturgical projects approved by past generations and of their relationship to current endeavours. The failure in 2006 to recognize that portions of the 1979 lectionary in the Book of Common Prayer that were altered by the adoption of the Revised Common Lectionary also appeared within the book in the Holy Week offices and the decision of the 2018 General Convention to authorize trial use of alternative expansive language for the Eucharist Prayers (Resolution D078) without any instruction of how those texts related to the still authorized services in *Enriching Our Worship I* stand out in this regard. At the present time, the Episcopal Church is more adept at producing new liturgical texts than it is in keeping track of previous proposals. Nonetheless, that sense of overview is needed for a successful revision.

Finally, I would note that the President of the House of Deputies and the Presiding Bishop appoint all members of Standing Commission and all members of the General Convention committees and task forces. That gives them incredible – though indirect – control over what is decided about any future revision of the prayer book. They can appoint persons who favour prayer book revision to the SCLM and to General Convention’s Joint Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy, and Music, which received the reports of the Standing Commission and makes recommendations to the two houses of General Convention about what action to take on them. Alternatively, they can choose those with serious reservations about proceeding to revision at this time. In a large measure, the future course of prayer book revision lies in the hands of Julia Ayala Harris, who was elected in 2022 to be the President of the House of Deputies, and the successor to Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry, who will be elected in 2024.

⁷¹White and Dykman, *Annotated Constitution and Canons*, 1, pp. 458 and 462.

⁷²*Constitution and Canons* (2022), p. 24.