

**GENERAL CONVENTION OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH 2009
ARCHIVES' RESEARCH REPORT**

RESOLUTION NO.: 2009-C086
TITLE: Lesser Feasts and Fasts: Commend Dr. James Markham Ambler to LFF
PROPOSER: Diocese of Virginia
COMMITTEE: Prayer Book, Liturgy and Church Music

Directly Related: (attached)

None

Indirectly Related:

None

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions of General Convention for the period 1976 through 2006, selecting "direct" resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. Committee members who are interested in obtaining copies of "indirectly related" resolutions, legislative history before 1976, or who require other research assistance should contact the Archives at 800-525-9329 before Convention or at Convention in the General Convention Secretariat.

TOPIC/TITLE: Lesser Feasts and Fasts: Commend Dr. James Markham Ambler to LFF

PROPOSER: Diocese of Virginia

C&C PAGE:

BB PAGE:

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the 76th General Convention commend
- 2 the name of Dr. James Markham Ambler to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and
- 3 Music for its consideration of the possible addition of Dr. James Markham Ambler to the
- 4 Calendar of The Episcopal Church, recognizing October 30, the date of his death, as the
- 5 date of commemoration, and request that it report on this matter to the 77th General
- 6 Convention.
- 7
- 8
- 9

EXPLANATION:

James Markham Ambler was born in Fauquier County, Virginia, on December 30, 1848, and was a lifelong member of the Episcopal Church of Leeds Parish. Dr. Ambler's service with the crew of the United States Steamship Jeannette, on its voyage of Arctic exploration from July 1879 through its sinking in June 1881, and continuing through his own death in October of that year, is a record of both heroism and heroic faith, of service as a naval officer, as a physician, and as a Christian, of devotion to his fellow man and to Christ, and finally of love. The Jeannette was frozen into the drifting Arctic ice pack for 22 months. During that time, Dr. Ambler led the 33-man crew in exercise, insisted on monthly physical examinations, conducted scientific experiments, and performed surgery by candlelight in the Arctic winter. The ship's chief engineer, George Melville, would survive the expedition and testify that "no better man ever lived than Dr. Ambler." When the ship was finally crushed and sank, the crew journeyed for 90 days over the ice to reach open water, where they divided among three boats. One reached safety in Siberia, and another was lost in a gale. The third boat, carrying the ship's commander, George De Long, Dr. Ambler, and 12 crew members, was dismantled and blown ashore in an uninhabited region of the Lena Delta in Siberia. A month later, Commander De Long told Dr. Ambler that he and another sailor should leave the party and seek help. Dr. Ambler declined to leave his friends. He asked De Long to choose another man in his place, and those two sailors were eventually found alive. On October 17, the expedition's hunter, Alexey, an Alaskan native, lay dying. In accordance with naval custom, it had been Commander De Long who had read the Divine Service, the Prayers for the Sick, and the Burial Service. It was Dr. Ambler, however, who baptized Alexey prior to his death. On October 20, Dr. Ambler wrote his final diary entry, a letter to his brother Edward in Markham, Virginia: "I write these lines in the faint hope that by God's merciful providence they may reach you all at home. I have myself now very little hope of surviving... I write to you all, my mother, sister, brother Cary and his wife and family, to assure you of the deep love I now and have always borne you. If it had been God's will for me to have seen you all again I had hoped to have enjoyed the peace of home-living once more . . . God in His infinite mercy grant that these lines may reach you. I write them in full faith and confidence in help of our Lord Jesus Christ." The original of this letter is in the Virginia State Museum in Richmond. On October 30, Commander De Long prepared his own last journal entry, indicating that the only men still alive were himself, the expedition's Chinese cook, and Dr. Ambler. Chief Engineer Melville, who had been in the second boat, found their bodies in 1882. Melville believed that Dr. Ambler was the last man to die, and he wrote that he "kept his lone watch to the last, on duty, on

guard, under arms." Dr. Ambler's body was ultimately returned by the Navy to Leeds Parish, where it was laid to rest in February 1884. Dr. Ambler's life offers Episcopalians the chance to recognize that one can serve Christ and one's country simultaneously, and that the role of a physician's can be a reflection of Jesus' commandment that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Text of the original resolution passed at the 212th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia: R-4 Designation of October 30 as a Memorial for James Markham Ambler Resolved, That this 212th Annual Council recognizes that James Markham Ambler is worthy of commemoration under the guidelines established by the 1994 General Convention for altering the church calendar, taking particular note of his heroic faith, his love, his selfless devotion to God, and his service to others for Christ's sake; and be it further Resolved, That this 212th Annual Council permanently designates October 30 as a Memorial for James Markham Ambler in the Diocese of Virginia, and urges all parishes in this diocese to take appropriate steps to recognize such designation using the collect and readings adopted by the Episcopal Church of Leeds Parish; and be it further Resolved, That this 212th Annual Council authorizes the Bishop, or such official as the Bishop designates, to add the Diocese of Virginia as a sponsor to a proposal, to be presented to the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the United States, that James Markham Ambler's name be added to the list of persons set forth in Lesser Feasts and Fasts. Suggested Readings: Collects: All-knowing God, whose faithful servant Dr. James Markham Ambler answered not only the call of your Son, through his life and heroic death, but also the call of his country and of humankind, through his service as a naval officer, physician and explorer; may he be a guide for us in our eternal quest to discern and fulfill the purposes that you have established for us here on earth through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen O Judge of the nations, as we give thanks today for the life and witness of Dr. James Markham Ambler, we also remember before you with grateful hearts all the men and women who in days of decision ventured much for the knowledge and liberties we now enjoy. We thank you for their faith and courage which still sustain and inspire us. Grant that we may not rest until all people of this land share the benefits of true freedom and gladly accept its disciplines. This we pray with trust in your abiding presence. Amen. Lessons: Ecclesiasticus 38:1-8, 12-14 Psalm 107:23-32 John 15:9-15 Proper Preface: For a Saint (1) or (2)

BALLOT RESULTS: