

The Archives of the Episcopal Church
Inquiry from the House of Deputies Study Committee on Governance and Polity
Research Report: Committees, Commissions, Boards and Agencies
December 17, 2010

Introduction

The General Convention has since its beginning relied on a series of committees, commissions and boards to carry out its work between triennial sessions. For most of its history, these bodies were generally appointed at each Convention to a specific task, or were allowed to stand for several sessions because of an ongoing need or concerns (e.g., new dioceses, funding, or communication with other Christian bodies). Stand-alone House committees and joint Convention committees with specific tasks were more common and numerous before 1960. As a point of comparison, in 1916 (prior to the establishment of National Council), there were 79 committees of General Convention; in 1934, that number was marginally smaller at 69, and by 1952, there were 62 -- *not* including “unofficial” agencies such as the Trustees of General Theological Seminary. This compares to 25 commissions and committees (not boards) in 2009.¹

Widespread skepticism about the use of institutional authority in the 1960s fed the agitation for new structures in the Church (diocesan and national). Support emerged after 1967 to increase participation of the under-represented and provide more interaction between the two Houses. In 1964, Bishop Hines appointed a Mutual Responsibility Commission that recommended dramatic canonical changes in 1967. For the first time, membership, appointments, and terms of office on committees and commissions were standardized and open to many.²

This 1967 change was only the first in a series of changes over a dozen years to rationalize the Church’s organizational systems. Standardization of the process as well as structure was a byproduct of pressure from progressive forces within lay and clerical Church members for greater openness and representation in the governance structures. Lay persons, especially women and minorities, were eager to become full and active members of the Church’s polity. By the 1990s the Convention was poised for an overhaul with the Structure Commission again leading the discussion. The impetus for this wave was related to a perceived need for organizational efficiency and accountability to General Convention’s mission priorities and pace for handling change.³

It is important to keep in mind that today’s usage of the expression “committees, commissions, boards and agencies” or “CCABs” is strictly a term of convenience that has no canonical or policy-level

¹It would not be difficult to identify an equivalent General Convention body from earlier in the Church’s history to match today’s standing commissions, boards or task forces. Notable examples of committees/commissions that have been employed as needed and with a variety of names for almost a hundred years include topics of ecumenism, liturgy, social or public policy, structure, budget, peace, social justice, archives, constitution and canons, Christian education, etc.

²Before 1967 procedures for the appointment of committees and commission were contained in the Joint Rules of Order of the two houses. Among the changes was that the President of the House of Deputies would appoint lay and clergy members and both presiding officers were ex officio committee and Council members.

³The 1985 General Convention acted on just 5 resolutions affecting the status of various committees, commissions, and boards. By 1997 the number of resolutions was 20.

endorsement or definition from General Convention.⁴ It is a replacement term that has been used in the most recent decade to loosely describe groups within The Episcopal Church that are assigned some level of oversight for special areas of Church governance, ministry, and polity.⁵ If the term has any meaning at all, however, it designates bodies that have a direct relationship to one degree or another to the General Convention. This report will focus on these entities.⁶

The Archives identified for this report seven groups that could be described as a CCAB. Each group is different in its relationship to General Convention, the scope of responsibility it has, and authority to act between Convention sessions. The last group, which we call “agencies” might not fit our earlier definition of having a direct relationship to General Convention. We have included them, however, for illustration. We provide first an overview of these categories, followed by more detailed information about their histories, membership composition, and appointments. The seven categories used in this report are described as follows and match the enumeration of Appendix B.

1.0 Executive Council. A category of one, Council is canonically charged with unique powers and responsibilities on behalf of General Convention. It is widely understood to have *ad interim* authority to act on behalf of General Convention and to execute prudent decision making in its fiduciary role as the board of directors of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society – the Episcopal Church’s corporate arm. While Council’s role is chiefly to carry out the work assigned to it and implement the policies of General Convention, it has historically responded to new challenges in ministry, society, and mission opportunity as authorized under Canon I.4.1(3). Likewise, General Convention guards its boundaries and has on several occasions rebuffed initiatives or decisions by Executive Council when Council has been perceived to overstep its executive mandate. Executive Council operates internally under its own bylaws, but its powers are defined by canon and can only be changed by General Convention.

2.0 Standing Commissions. These bodies are the modern incarnation of areas of mission and ministry in which the Church has long been involved. As of 1976, the Standing Commissions have been authorized in the Church canons (I.1.2(n)) and in 2006 their membership was standardized⁷. Enactment in the canons has not, however, prevented Convention from making numerous changes in the comings and goings of individual committees and their names over the years as priorities and needs have changed. Standing Commissions have a continuing charge and

⁴The expression “Committees, Commissions, Board or Agency” (uppercase) is used twice in the canons: (1) to capture the purview of the Structure Commission to review proposals for new entities; and (2) to define the coordinating work of the Executive Officer. The scope of the usage is not defined in either case. See Canons I.1.2(n)(10) and I.1.13.

⁵The designation “CCAB” replaced a common usage of the 1980s and 90s, “interim bodies,” presumably because it is simply descriptive of the entities without automatically implying *ad interim* authority in their individual function, which varies considerably from one entity to the next.

⁶Depending on one’s definition, the CCAB entities can encompass a variable number of entities. Consider, for example, the most recent “CCAB Manual” from the General Convention Office that describes “The CCAB System” as including “The Ten Types of CCABs.” Another source that is typically thought to give a measure of the number of CCABs is the official *Reports to General Convention (The Blue Book)*, which in 2009 listed 32 stand alone bodies and 47 entities if one includes Executive Council committees. These sources are considered but not strictly followed in this report as several of these units do not have a direct relationship to General Convention.

⁷Journal of the General Convention, 2006, (resolution A104), pp. 347-355.

do not go out of business except by action of General Convention. Their mandate is generally: “to study and draft policy proposals on major subjects considered to be of continuing concern to the mission of the Church.”

3.0 Joint Standing Committees. These Committees find their legal mandate in the Joint Rules of the General Convention and consider matters related to the work and function of the General Convention itself, rather than the overall life of the Church. Members are appointed for three-year terms and, in some cases, must be deputies or bishops. The exception is the Joint Standing Committee on the Nomination of the Presiding Bishop which is authorized by Canon I.2.1(a). Other Joint Standing Committees are also referenced in the Canons. Joint Committees that are not “standing” may also be authorized by concurrent action of the two houses (Joint Rule I.1).

4.0 Task Forces of the General Convention. These are established by concurrent resolution of General Convention under authorization of Joint Rule IX.22. The specific number of members or composition is determined at the time of authorization. The Presiding Bishop appoints the bishop members and the President of the House of Deputies appoints priests, deacons and lay persons. Consultants may be engaged in some cases. The establishing resolution must specify an expiration date for the task force; a two-thirds vote in both Houses is required to extend that date.

5.0 Committees of the House of Deputies or House of Bishops. Each House has the authority in its own rules to appoint committees with specific or ongoing responsibilities on behalf of the whole House. While they are accountable to the House that creates them, their impact is felt by the whole General Convention. Some “House Committees” are recognized in and are given specific responsibilities in the Canons (e.g., Deputies’ State of the Church Committee and Bishops’ Committee on Religious Communities). These House Committees are different from the on-site legislative committees that consider General Convention legislation.

6.0 Boards. There are three types of Boards that are typically lumped together when listed with the CCABs. Each operates as a semi-autonomous component of the Church, although their degree of independence varies. Boards are generally established in the Canons or as an Executive Council subsidiary (i.e., ERD). They oversee some large area of administration and program that often involves fiduciary supervision and professional management of a Church asset (pension funds, historical records, clergy records, etc). Boards can be semi-autonomous (e.g., Board for Transition Ministries, Board of Archives), fully autonomous (ERD), or fully autonomous and independent (General Theological Seminary, CPF). All report to and are ultimately accountable to General Convention. Two bodies described herein (Episcopal Church Women and UTO) operate as boards but are not canonically established. They operate as Boards that report to and are overseen by Executive Council.

7.0 Agencies. These are fully independent corporations affiliated with the Episcopal Church by virtue of their own charters or bylaws. These are agencies that have no canonical, legal or other reporting accountability to the General Convention or the Executive Council. Some have historical associations with the General Convention by virtue of their founding or because they have used the “Blue Book” to report on their activities, or have headquarter offices at the Episcopal Church Center. They have their own officers and boards which are usually self-appointed or elected internally. Agencies are expected to develop their own mandates and make their own business decisions.