

Your Committee recommends the adoption of the following Resolution:

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, That all Church units which have a group, counting both clergymen and full-time salaried lay employees, numbering four or more persons, be urged, at this time, to apply to the Church Life Insurance Corporation for the inclusion of such lay employees under the present Church Major-Medical Plan, as a step toward their eventual coverage in the proposed Church-wide Plan as proposed by this Committee in its Report No. 10.

Adopted by the House.

[Communicated to the House of Bishops by Message No. 120.]

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The House of Bishops received House of Deputies Message No. 120, relating to Major-Medical Insurance for Lay Persons.

On motion, the House concurred.

[Communicated to the House of Deputies by Message No. 145.]

### **Levels of Authority Within the Church**

In the House of Bishops on the Fifth Day, the Bishop of Bethlehem, for the Committee on Social and International Affairs, cited an announcement which had been made in the House to the effect that a statement on the subject of public pronouncements in the name of the Church would be included in the Pastoral Letter. He reported that the Committee on Social and International Affairs felt that a fuller statement should be considered by the House and submitted a draft of such a statement.

After certain refinements in wording suggested by the Bishop of Virginia, the Suffragan Bishop of South Florida (Bishop Hargrave), the Bishop of Newark, and the Bishop Coadjutor of Mississippi, the following Resolution was moved and seconded, to wit:

*Whereas*, Several Dioceses have petitioned the General Convention to define the context of responsibility within which the Protestant Episcopal Church speaks on various levels of authority; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That this 61st General Convention do now adopt and publish the following Statement on

### **LEVELS OF AUTHORITY WITHIN THE CHURCH**

It is the historic right and the undoubted duty of the Christian man and of the Christian Church to declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to witness to that Gospel in every phase of human life and activity.

The Church in so speaking rests upon the authority given to it by the Lord Christ. The Christian speaks out of faith and conscience. Both the Church and the Christian are, we pray, obedient to the Holy Spirit.

But in so speaking, individual Christians and bodies of Christians within the Church should speak out of the context of their own levels of authority and responsibility. There is an obligation in our mutual interdependence within the Body of Christ that calls for appropriate restraint lest any statement or action seem to claim authority that it does not possess.

1. The Protestant Episcopal Church accepts as its authority the Holy Scriptures, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, and speaks through the Book of Common Prayer and the Constitution and Canons of the Church. The Protestant Episcopal Church speaks also through the Resolutions, Statements, and actions of the General Convention. In these ways the Church speaks at the highest level of responsibility for the Church, to the Church and to the world.

2. Similarly, the House of Bishops, as the Fathers in God of the Church, speaks corporately to the Church the mind of its Chief Pastors. Further, each Bishop may speak as an apostolic Shepherd within his own jurisdiction, yet with a sense of mutual responsibility to his episcopal brethren and with faithfulness to the teaching of the Church.

3. In the interim of General Convention, the Presiding Bishop and the Executive Council are the responsible representatives of the Church, granted authority to implement the statements and actions of General Convention and of the House of Bishops. When, in the course of the fast-moving events of life today, it is not possible to await a meeting of General Convention, it is the duty of the Presiding Bishop and the Executive Council to speak God's word to his Church and to his world.

4. At a lesser level of responsibility and authority, the officers and staff of the Executive Council may, from time to time, speak their own Christian mind, after consultation with the Presiding Bishop, in areas of great concern in which General Convention has not acted. Such statements or actions should not be interpreted as the will of the whole Church, but as that of the individuals and group directly responsible.

The official bodies of the Church alone can commit the Church. But the right of voluntary and unofficial associations of members of the Church, as they are led, by conscience, to act and to apply Christian principles in specific fashion to concrete situations, is recognized.

In encouraging such witness, we urge that groups and individuals will identify their private character and not appear to assume authority which is not possessed. Unofficial groups and individuals also bear responsibility to the Church of which they are a part.

The Holy Spirit of God is not to be bound. Yet the Church must act with a sense of order within itself, that God's word be spoken effectually to God's world and in charity within its own fellowship.

The Resolution was adopted.