

Authority and Responsibility

*Policy statements
governing the Executive
Council and its staff,
in matters of public
witness and action in
areas of concern.*

November, 1969

INTRODUCTION

The Executive Council, at its meeting September 23-25, 1969, ratified, confirmed, and established the following statements of policies, responsibilities, and procedures in respect of levels of authority, for the guidance of its staff. With the exception of section V (which was adopted by the Council at that meeting), the various statements had been previously adopted by the General Convention or the Executive Council and were in current force and usage. It was felt desirable to bring them together in one document, with the editorial changes required by the reorganization of the Council in 1968, and re-issue them for the information of the Council's members and staff. It was also suggested that the statements be made known in the Church generally, for information; and they are therefore published for general distribution.

The basic statement is that of the General Convention in 1964 entitled "Levels of Authority Within the Church", adopted by concurrent resolution of both houses. This is followed by four groups of Council policy statements dealing, respectively, with "Normal Operations", "Social Issues", "Participation with the National Council of Churches" and "Consultation on Grants, with Bishops" (the last-named being the new statement adopted September 24, 1969).

I

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.

General Convention

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.

House of Bishops; Diocesan Bishops

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.

**Presiding
Bishop;
Executive
Council**

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.

**Officers &
Staff of
Executive
Council**

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 groups 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.

(General Convention, 1964, Journal, pages 312-313)

II

NORMAL OPERATIONS

1. The Staff Program Group:

The Staff Program Group has two major functions, as follows:

A. It has responsibility to assure and achieve necessary central planning in behalf of the Council through

- a. Discernment of trends in society and in the changing ecumenical scene. . .
- b. Communication with Bishops, diocesan leadership, and others in the Church concerning short-term and long-range needs . . .
- c. Identification of critical issues . . .
- d. Development of proposals about strategic directions and new programs for submission to the Executive Council for the program of the Church . . .