

# Claiming the 2018 Blessing

*"I will bless you and you will be a blessing." Genesis 12:2*



## Full & Equal Means Full & Equal

In 1976 the Episcopal Church promised "full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church" to its gay and lesbian members. In the decades since, we have seen many milestones along the way in the journey toward making that resolution a reality -- not only for gay and lesbian Episcopalians but for all LGBTQ+ people. But we are not there yet.

Full and equal claim means full and equal claim -- and it is time to end the exclusion of a percentage of the baptized from a percentage of the sacraments by acting to end once-and-for-all the discrimination against the marriages of same-sex couples that still exists in some parts of the Episcopal Church.

Resolution A085 -- proposed by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage -- would do precisely that. It is time to "Let our yes be yes" [Matthew 5:37] and call the 79th General Convention to make the 1976 promise of full and equal claim finally both full and equal for every Episcopalian.



Claiming the Blessing [CTB] was convened in 2002 as an intentional collaborative of organizations and individuals within the Episcopal Church advocating for full inclusion of all the baptized in all sacraments of the church. Since 2002, our advocacy has included liturgies for the blessing of same-sex relationships, equal access to all orders of ministry by qualified gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender candidates and supporting civil and sacramental marriage equality.



# It is time to "let our yes be yes"

*by Susan Russell, Claiming the Blessing Convener*

In the Episcopal Church we have been on a 40-plus year journey from the 1976 declaration 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." Since that time the church has moved forward — again and again — to turn that resolution into a reality. Just as with the ordination of women in the 1970's not everyone has agreed ... but part of our charism as Anglicans has been to claim our big tent heritage by making room for minority theological opinions. And the resolutions coming forward to the 79th General Convention in Austin maintain that trajectory.

No one will be compelled to participate in nor to preside at any marriage. Period. Full stop. At the same time, no one will be denied access to the sacramental rites for marriage offered by this church to its members. Period. Full stop.

It really is that simple. And it really is that Anglican.

As Anglicans we were formed in the crucible of the 16th century Reformation into a particular body ecclesial uniquely capable of being both protestant and catholic in a time when such a possibility was beyond imagining. We are, therefore, uniquely wired by our DNA to be a church that can hold together the tension of being both gay and straight ... and everywhere in between ... in the 21st century.

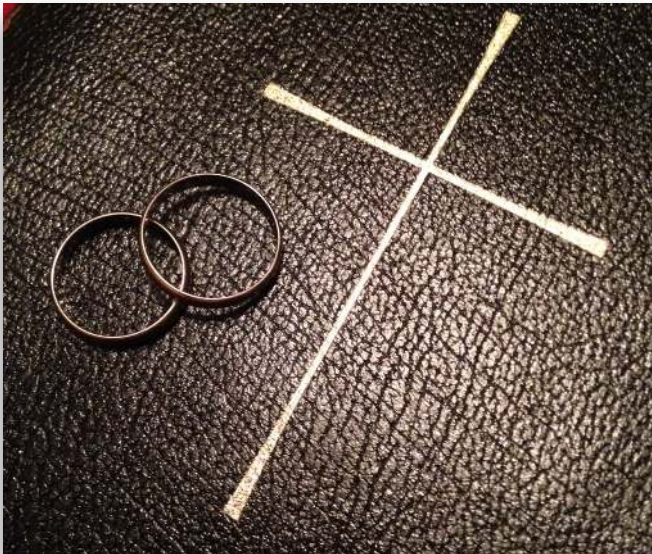
The question on the table -- and one we will be deliberating and deciding in Austin at the 79th General Convention -- is **not** whether there is a place for traditionalists with a minority opinion on marriage equality in the Episcopal Church. It is whether those holding that minority theological perspective should have the power to deny access to the sacrament of marriage to couples seeking God's blessing on their marriage -- something that is currently happening in only 8 out of 101 dioceses.

In the end the Gamaliel principle ("if it is of God it will flourish; if it is not, it will wither") will determine the efficacy of the choices we have made as we respond to where we hear the Holy Spirit calling us into her future — and it will be God's job to judge how we have responded to that call.

In Austin the Episcopal Church has the opportunity to lift up "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" as the values that make a marriage holy. It has the chance to talk about marriage as vocation of holy love, grounded in biblical values of faithfulness and forgiveness.

And it has the opportunity to say we are a community of faith focused on supporting all who are called into the vocation of marriage — not discriminating against some who are called into the vocation of marriage. It is time to let our yes be yes for all Episcopalians. We urge adoption of A085 as proposed.





# SUMMARY:

## REPORT OF TASK FORCE ON THE STUDY OF MARRIAGE 2018

The 78th General Convention called for the continuation of the work of The Task Force for the Study of Marriage (originally convened in 2012) and a report back to the 2018 79th General Convention.

The expansive charge of the enabling resolution (2015- A050) called for the Task Force to look at a broad range of relationships and households other than marriage that currently reflect the experience of one half of society and Church today, by means of a wide range of methodologies, disciplines and perspectives.

At the same time, the Task Force was charged with the exploration of particular issues regarding marriage: the impact of the marriage of same-sex couples on our Church, and the relationship between Church and state in officiating marriages.

The 121 page Blue Book Report from the Task Force offers a summary of the work of four task groups -- pastoral, ecclesial, academic and functional. That work includes essays, sociological data on marriage in general and specific data on the impact of marriage for same-sex couples in the Episcopal Church. It also includes narrative experiences solicited from around the Episcopal Church and feedback from Anglican Communion and interdenominational colleagues -- along with three resolutions.

We commend the report in its entirety to you and we urge support for **Resolution 2015-A085: Trial Use of Marriage Liturgies** which presents a road map for General Convention to fulfill forty (40) years of promises of full inclusion in the life of The Episcopal Church for LGBTQ+ individuals.



# Q&A ON THE STUDY OF MARRIAGE TASK FORCE REPORT

*Excerpts from the Q&A's prepared by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to accompany their Report to the 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church.*

## **Q. What was the Task Force on the Study of Marriage (TFSM) asked to do?**

A. Resolution 2015-A037 directed an expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage (TFSM) to continue exploration of biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage, as well as contemporary trends and norms, work that was begun by a task force appointed after the 2012 General Convention. The resolution also directed the TFSM to "study and monitor, in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church."

## **Q. How did the TFSM organize its work?**

A. The Task Force organized the assigned work into four working groups based upon the various tasks set forth in the enabling resolution. Phrases in quotes, below, are taken from Resolution 2015--A037.

- **Pastoral:** "consult with individuals and groups" across a variety of relationships statuses "about their experience of faith and church life."
- **Ecclesial:** "study and monitor ... the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church" and promote and study "the results of diocesan and parochial study of 'Dearly Beloved' toolkit" presented by the previous Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 77th General Convention in 2012.
- **Academic:** "explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives" on the contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium; "develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church"; and "provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church."
- **Functional:** explore, study and monitor "the continuing debate about clergy acting as agents of the state in officiating at marriages."

## **Q. How did the TFSM consult with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) on the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing?**

A. A member of the SCLM was appointed as a liaison to the TFSM. The liaison met regularly with the Task Force and some of its subcommittees.



# Q&A



## **Q. What does Resolution (A085) call for?**

A. (A085) Trial Use of Marriage Liturgies extends trial use of marriage liturgies first authorized by the 78th General Convention for the 2018-21 triennium; amends for trial use "Concerning the Service" for the Book of Common Prayer liturgies; adds Rite 1 and Rite 2 versions of a Preface for Marriage 2, and amends and expands the Catechism's section "Other Sacramental Rites" concerning marriage. It also outlines options for how General Convention might proceed to make these proposals permanent additions and revisions to the Book of Common Prayer.

## **Q. What exactly is "trial use?"**

A. Under the provisions of Article X of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church, trial use means that the church is considering revision of a section of the Book of Common Prayer. Revisions to the Book of Common Prayer must be approved by two successive General Conventions.

## **Q. Since General Convention approved these liturgies for trial use in 2015, why aren't they coming back for a second reading?**

A. Article X of the Constitution requires that revision of the Book of Common Prayer must be proposed in one meeting of the General Convention, then sent "by resolve" to the secretary of the convention of every diocese, to be made known to the diocesan convention at its next meeting. Resolution 2015-A054 authorized trial use of the marriage liturgies but did not include a clause directing that the proposals be sent to every diocese. The resolution that the TFMS is proposing includes a clause directing that the proposed liturgies be sent to every diocese. It also proposes revision of other sections of the BCP ("Concerning the Service" of marriage, the catechism, and proper prefaces of marriage), so that the language about marriage is consistent throughout the book. Thus, this proposes the "first reading" of this material.

## **Q. Does General Convention have the Constitutional and Canonical authority to adopt the proposed revisions to the Book of Common Prayer?**

A. Yes. Article X of the Constitution allows the General Convention to amend the Book of Common Prayer at any time. The provision for trial use explicitly allows a proposed revision to any section or office of the BCP, and Canon II.3.6, which stipulates conditions for trial use, indicates that these proposed revisions can be subsequently adopted as alterations or additions to the BCP. General Convention did just that in 2012 (A059) and 2015 (A067), amending the Proper Liturgies for Special Days (pp. 271-295) to incorporate readings from the Revised Common Lectionary.

## **Q. The TFMS reports that in 8 out of the 101 US dioceses, the bishop with jurisdiction has not authorized the liturgies for trial use. What would be the expectation in those dioceses if A085 is adopted?**

A. The resolution proposes that the liturgies be available for use in every diocese of the Episcopal Church, without further conditions. If the resolution is adopted, these liturgies could be used in any diocese where the marriage of a couple is permitted by civil law.

# Q&A



## **Q. Doesn't trial use have to be under the direction of the Bishop with jurisdiction?**

A. Article X of the Constitution, which allows the General Convention to authorize proposed revisions to the BCP for trial use, does not set any limits or conditions for trial use. Canon II.3.6(a) permits the General Convention to specify any special conditions for trial use, but it does not require that there be any terms or conditions. As the 1979 BCP was being developed, liturgies were authorized in 1970 and 1973 for trial use throughout the church and did not require that they also be authorized by the diocesan bishop.

## **Q. Will the proposed changes create greater challenges for our relationships within the Anglican Communion?**

A. There are those in our wider Anglican family who will disagree with any changes we make to be more inclusive and there will be those in our wider Anglican family who are watching us for leadership to help them move forward with similar changes. While there continue to be tensions and challenges around a variety of issues – including gender equality and human sexuality – the climate in the Anglican Communion has improved dramatically in recent years and we believe the ties that bind us are stronger than the differences that challenge us.

## **Q. Were the recommendations in the report unanimously agreed to by the TFSM?**

A. During the triennium the TFSM was blessed with multiple opportunities to meet both in person and virtually for deep engagement across significant differences. The final report was adopted by all but one dissenting member, who filed a minority report. We are profoundly grateful to be part of a church where we can grapple with theological differences and which provides opportunity for minority perspectives to be registered and received.

## **Q. What does the minority report say?**

A. The author of the minority report raises three areas of concern. First, a concern about deliberative process: that if the presiding officers of the Episcopal Church had added to the task force more people of color, representatives of Province IX, and those committed to a traditional view of marriage, the conversation may have been more beneficial. Second, two concerns about Prayer Book revision: that proposals for trial use liturgies typically come from the SCLM; and that in the minds of some Episcopalians, the proposed rites put the Church's teaching in tension with Holy Scripture. Third, a concern about Anglican relations: that new rites that depart from traditional norms might have less of an impact on Anglican unity if they were made available for temporary use as authorized rites, or if they were the product of a Communion-wide prayer book revision commission.

## **Q. Where does the TFSM see the evangelism opportunity in its report to the Church?**

A. The Episcopal Church has the opportunity to lift up "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" as the values that make a marriage holy. It has the chance to talk about marriage as vocation of holy love, grounded in biblical values of faithfulness and forgiveness. And it has the opportunity to say we are a community of faith focused on supporting all who are called into the vocation of marriage – not discriminating against some who are called into the vocation of marriage.

# DEAR GENERAL CONVENTION

*Ninety-three bishops have authorized priests in their dioceses make sacramental marriage equally available to all couples. Eight bishops have not. We believe it is important to amplify the voices of Episcopalians in those dioceses asking General Convention not to leave them behind. The Diocese of Tennessee adopted this Memorial to General Convention. Members of the Diocese of Dallas have offered this appeal through a video platform. And many others have shared stories and experiences via email and social media. Listen to their voices.*

## Memorial to General Convention: Diocese of Tennessee

To the Deputies and Bishops of the Episcopal Church assembled at the 79th General Convention:

Recognizing the continuing theological diversity of this Church, and in the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee, in regard to same sex marriage and the blessing of same sex unions, and out of respect for the deeply held beliefs across the range of opinion, we, members of the 186th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Tennessee (January 19-20, 2018), respectfully request that as you, the Bishops and Deputies of the 79th General Convention, prayerfully consider the re-authorization of "Liturgical Resources I" for the next Triennium, you take in account the exclusion, competing convictions, and loss of community experienced by members of this Diocese under the current terms of authorization for the texts.

Respectfully submitted,

The 186th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Tennessee

## Appeal to General Convention: Members of the Diocese of Dallas

Dear General Convention,

This summer you're going to consider a lot of important business in Austin, things that will seriously impact the life of our church in the next several years. But we want you to know there's some unfinished work leftover from the last convention.

You see, we are faithful Episcopalians in the Diocese of Dallas, but we could not get married in our own churches.

Our bishop strictly prohibits same-sex couples from being married in their churches, and neither could our clergy bless our marriages when we were married elsewhere.

We were told to go to Fort Worth or Austin, but we think that's wrong. We don't believe that's what you intended when you overwhelmingly approved marriage rites for same-sex couples at Salt Lake City.

We don't believe you wanted some faithful Christian couples to remain in the shadow of inequality just because they happen to be members of a church in the wrong diocese.

We want to be sure you know about us, because you are the only ones with the power to do something about it. This summer, we're asking you to reconsider the resolution you passed in Salt Lake City three years ago. This time, we hope you'll ensure faithful same-sex couples like us can actually get married in our own churches, and by our own clergy.

At the very least you could require all diocesan bishops legitimately provide access to marriage for same-sex couples within the geographic boundaries of their diocese. No more sending us to distant cities and unfamiliar clergy.

However you decide to solve this problem, we hope you won't be so careful to honor the consciences of some bishops that you actually make it possible for them to completely deny us access to a sacrament. This time, we hope you will finish what you started, and make marriage equality a reality for all faithful Episcopalians, including those of us in Dallas.

Dear General Convention, please don't forget about us. We're praying for you, and we're counting on you.





## VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

*We asked Episcopalians from the eight domestic dioceses where same-sex couples currently do not have access to the sacrament of marriage to tell us their stories. Here are some of their experiences of being in dioceses which were "left behind" by the actions of the 78th General Convention -- actions we have the opportunity to correct at the 79th.*

**Albany:** "Basically, Bishop Love's policy is that same-sex couples can go to Vermont or Central NY to be married, but their priest cannot participate. He has stated on several occasions that there would be a "taint" on the Church and on any clergy person who either performed or even attended a same-sex blessing/marriage and he has banned clergy from even being in attendance. Therefore, the rector of the parish I am affiliated with has not been able to even be in attendance at marriages of members of his congregation."

Our experience of "All are Welcome" comes with caveats and that although we are married civilly (and together for 43+ years), we are not permitted the full grace and sacrament of marriage within the Church by virtue of our belonging to a Church inside the Albany Diocese. While our local church acknowledges our being married, it cannot fully accept us and will not (cannot) fully honor our commitment and love.

**Central Florida:** "There has been no "generous pastoral response" from the bishop to LGBTQ persons or parishes that are in agreement with the 2015 GC resolutions on marriage. The sole response to the 2015 GC resolutions on marriage was to restate the opposition of the bishop to same-sex marriages and that the authorized marriage rites were contrary to scripture. No provision was made for members of this diocese who seek to marry partners of the same sex. There are no published guidelines or instructions for clergy to assist LGBTQ persons who seek to be married in a neighboring diocese. It's a "Don't ask because we won't tell" policy."

**Dallas:** "We believe our bishop has not honored the intent of General Convention, leaving us in a position of lingering and painful inequality. The rites approved three years ago for same-sex marriage are neither authorized for us in the churches of the Diocese of Dallas, nor are clergy permitted to officiate these rites elsewhere. Rather, couples are told to seek their availability in other dioceses, in unfamiliar churches with unfamiliar clergy. We think this is wrong, and not what the deputies and bishops gathered at GC78 intended. Just in the last three years, seven faithful couples from our parish have been forced to find alternative churches for their weddings, making this a deeply personal and bitter reality for us. The joy of the start of their new lives together was tempered by the grief that they were not able to experience the ceremony at their own church.





Our parish is not unique. There are several other churches yearning for the ability to conduct same-sex marriage, and there are a great many faithful gay and lesbian Episcopalians who are members of various churches around our diocese. We hope you will not forget about us, and will make possible what so many of you are already celebrating and experiencing in your own churches and dioceses.

We believe a true compromise – in which churches like ours, which have overwhelming consensus on this matter, can host the marriages of same-sex couples – could preserve the consciences of those opposed to such action, while permitting us to access rites overwhelmingly approved by the wider church. Therefore, it is up to General Convention gathered in Austin this summer to finish what was begun in Salt Lake, and ensure that the desire of our church becomes the lived reality of all its members. If marriage is truly marriage, then priests should have the same pastoral discretion with same-sex couples that they do with all others."

**Florida:** "Because there was no access provided to the marriage liturgies approved in 2015, we were married in the Diocese of Pennsylvania. My family was unable to travel that far especially my father who was seriously ill. We were able to have a house blessing but it was nevertheless not the same as being at our wedding. At least my father was able to celebrate with us at the house blessing; he died a few months later. My rector was also unable to offer us an "anniversary blessing" (which was a regular thing in that parish for any heterosexual couple), for fear of retaliation from the bishop."

**North Dakota:** "Bishop Smith issued a statement following GC78 stating that he would not allow same-sex marriage rites in the Diocese of North Dakota. St. Stephen's, Fargo sought Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (DEPO) and is currently under the oversight of Bishop Carol Gallagher. Our priest-in-charge is the only priest in the Diocese allowed to officiate/celebrate same-sex marriage rites and only within the walls of St. Stephen's. However, if another congregation in the diocese has need of them, he is allowed to do them but not on the church property of those congregations – and their clergy cannot participate officially in the rites (i.e. they cannot vest or co-officiate in any way in the liturgy)."

**Tennessee:** "In November 2015, Bishop John Bauerschmidt of the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee issued a Pastoral Directive that the liturgies were not to be used in his diocese, not to be used on any Episcopal owned property, and not to be used anywhere by any priest canonically resident or licensed to officiate in the Diocese of Tennessee. ASAP (All Sacraments for All People) was formed in December 2015 by concerned Episcopalians seeking full inclusion for LGBT Episcopalians. When the General Convention of the Episcopal Church meets in Austin it is our hope that they will draw the circle wide enough to include all." One priest wrote: "I know that there are couples in my congregation, faithful in the mission and ministry of our parish, raising children together in the faith, who are not married because they prefer to wait until they can marry in their home parish by clergy who know them and their families."



# KNOWING OUR HISTORY: LEGISLATIVE TIMELINE

The Episcopal Church has been officially debating the issue of human sexuality, particularly as it applies to gay and lesbian people, since the General Convention of 1976 when resolutions passed by the Bishops and Deputies began to frame the parameters of the debate.

In the intervening years resolutions have been passed and then amended as the Episcopal Church's position has evolved in response to the dialogue. In 1976, the General Convention asserted in a resolution (A06g) 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."

Here are some of the other key resolutions that have brought us closer to making that "full and equal claim" a reality, not just a resolution:

**1997-D011:** Apologized on behalf of the Episcopal Church to its members who are gay and lesbian and to the lesbians and gay men outside the Church for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church and affirm that this Church seeks amendment of our life together as we ask God's help in sharing the Good News with all people.

**2000-D039:** Acknowledged "other life-long committed relationships" and the expectation that such relationships will be characterized by "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God."

**2003-C051:** Reaffirmed language of D039 and recognized "that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.

**2009-C056:** Called for a Blessings Task Force to collect and develop theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same-gender relationships.

**2012 -D018:** "End Discrimination Against Same-Sex Marriages" calling for civil marriage equality was adopted by an overwhelming majority in both houses.

**2012-A049 & A050:** Authorized liturgical resources for blessing same-gender relationships and called for a Task Force on the Study of Marriage.

**2015-A036 & A054:** Amended the canons to make marriage equally available to same and opposite sex couples and adopted for trial use gender-inclusive rites for marriage.

For a more complete summary of legislative history visit: <http://tinyurl.com/CTBhistory>



## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION?

*It is quite simply a false narrative that the Episcopal Church is acting unilaterally and flying in the face of the entire rest of the Anglican Communion -- as this open letter to TEC from Church of England members demonstrates. Written in April 2018 it is a rebuttal to the response sent by Church of England Secretary General William Nye to the TFSM's request for feedback on how provisions for same-sex marriage has affected the Church of England. It clearly makes that point that while there are those in our wider Anglican family who disagree with our decision to make the sacrament of marriage available to all couples, there are also be those in our wider Anglican family who find both hope and encouragement in our actions.*

### **Open Letter from Church of England members to TEC on same-sex marriage rites**

Dear Sir

Mr Nye has mistakenly sent the wrong letter to you regarding your invitation to comment on how your provision of same-sex marriage rites has affected the Church of England.

The one which the majority of us (according to research surveys on attitudes to same-sex marriage amongst English Anglicans) expected him to send simply says:

"Thank you for leading the way on this important issue. We are grateful that you have recognised that not all married couples can have children and that a gender-neutral approach will enable us to become a loving and inclusive Church for all. We still have a few problems to sort out over here with those who keep threatening to leave, but we know that your actions have given great hope to thousands and shown that the Church is not as homophobic as it can sometimes appear."

We therefore want to publicly "dissociate" ourselves from Mr Nye's initial response and are expecting "stringent consequences" as a result of his actions.

Yours faithfully,

*350 communicant members of the Church of England from 41 across dioceses, including 2 bishops and 39 Members of the General Synod. <https://tec2letter.wordpress.com/>.*





## Full & Equal Means Full & Equal

At its 79th General Convention The Episcopal Church has the opportunity to take another step forward in making the 1976 promise of full and equal claim for all Episcopalians truly full and equal.

It has the chance to lift up "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" as the values that make a marriage holy.

It has the opportunity to talk about marriage as vocation of holy love, grounded in biblical values of faithfulness and forgiveness.

And we believe it has the responsibility to say that we are a community of faith focused on supporting **all** who are called into the vocation of marriage – not discriminating against some who are called into the vocation of marriage.

It is time to offer all sacraments to all people.

It is time make full and equal claim full and equal.

It is time let our yes be yes.



<http://www.claimingtheblessing>

<http://www.integrityusa.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/MarriageEquality4TEC>

<http://www.generalconvention.org/>