

CHARLES W. LITTLE

702 BOWER HILL ROAD
PITTSBURGH, PA 15243

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Dear Diocesan Convention Deputy:

On November 5, 2004, you will be making a very important decision for the Diocese of Pittsburgh by casting a vote on the proposed amendment to Article I, Section 1 of its Constitution. The proposed change would add a statement allowing the Diocesan Constitution to override the Constitution of the whole Episcopal Church. This proposal is very controversial.

At the last convention, those opposed to the amendment charged that passage of the amendment was improper and out of order; might lead to presentments of clergy for violation of their ordination vow to uphold the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church; and would place the Diocese outside the Episcopal Church. They requested that Bishop Duncan seek a legal opinion on the amendment.

Proponents argued that the amendment is necessary to protect the Diocese from actions of the Episcopal Church that they consider illegal, and that the federal nature of the Episcopal Church gives the Diocese the power to enact such a change.

In your pre-convention packet, you received a discussion by the Chancellor of the Diocese, Robert Devlin, arguing the lawfulness of passing the amendment (see pages C12–C16). I believe that you should make your decision based on the best possible evidence, and I request that you read the enclosed essay before making up your mind.

This essay, written by Dr. Joan R. Gundersen, a historian who has published two books and numerous articles on the history of the Episcopal Church, makes the following points:

- Episcopal Church was not created by dioceses, as no diocese existed in 1784, when the national church began organizing.
- The leading scholar on the subject, Professor James Dator, of the University of Hawaii, has described the Episcopal Church's polity as "unitary" (a single, indivisible organization), not "federal" (a union of separate entities).
- From 1784 on, the requirement for diocesan membership in the Episcopal Church was clear: accession to its Constitution and Canons.
- From the beginning, General Convention reserved to itself the sole power to define faith and order.
- The experience of the Civil War emphasized the Episcopal Church's commitment to unity and its refusal to recognize the right of a Diocese to withdraw from the Church.
- General Convention has since passed measures emphasizing that dioceses are the creations of the Church and subject to its Constitution and Canons.

We hope you will find the essay useful in thinking about the amendment to our Diocesan Constitution.

Sincerely,



Charles W. Little
St. Paul's, Mt. Lebanon