

General Convention Official Youth Presence

For each General Convention since 1982, the Office for Youth Ministries of the Episcopal Church has convened and supported an Official Youth Presence to take part in the discernment of legislation on the floor of the House of Deputies with seat and voice (Resolution #1982-B045, see below).

Two youth per province are gathered, for a total of 18 young people who are selected to represent a diverse cross section of the Episcopal Church.

To be eligible a young person must be a Communicant in Good Standing, must be a minimum of 16 years of age at the time of General Convention and no older than 19, and must still be enrolled in high school during the previous school year. Each applicant and one nominator must complete an application form, including a statement of why the individual young person is interested in serving on the General Convention Official Youth Presence.



Preparing for the 77th General Convention

This year the Office for Youth Ministries utilized an online application and nomination process that was open from December 1 through January 15. The nine Provincial Youth Ministry Coordinators followed up on all nominations with calls to nominators and engaged in a prayerful discernment process to work together with Youth Ministries Officer Bronwyn Clark Skov to identify the best and most diverse representation possible of youth in the church.

Each coordinator prepared a slate of six top nominees that included an even number of males and females, diversity across ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and representation from all sizes of congregations across urban, suburban, small town, and rural settings.

The nine Provincial Youth Ministry Coordinators gathered in New Orleans with Skov ahead of the *Forma* (formerly known as NAECED) conference to discern the final picks.

For purposes of rooming in double rooms in the training and convention hotels, there has to be an even number of males and females causing the split to be 10 youth of one gender and 8 of the other. From the original field of 109 complete applications accompanied by complete nominations, in prayer and consultation with the coordinators, Skov determined the final choices.

Invitations were issued on February 6 and participants were announced on March 13.

If we think of the youth presence as like a diocese, no diocese is at the microphone more often than the youth presence. I mean that in a positive way. They seem to be fearless. They don't seem to be cowed by the fact that they're addressing the House of Deputies, and they're not afraid to ask questions or to express opinions. They use the position very well and often.

The Rev. Canon Gregory Straub, executive officer and secretary of convention, in an ENS article on Young People at Convention

Selected were:

Province I

- David Karpf, *Diocese of Connecticut*
- Sarah Neumann, *Diocese of Massachusetts*

Province II

- Elisabeth Engle, *Diocese of Western New York*
- Grace Steele, *Diocese of Long Island*

Province III

- David Kilp, *Diocese of Central Pennsylvania*
- Isabelle Lock, *Diocese of Maryland*

Province IV

- Benjamin Cowgill, *Diocese of North Carolina*
- Nora Vinas, *Diocese of Southeast Florida*

Province V

- William Burton-Edwards, *Diocese of Indianapolis*
- Julia Robinson, *Diocese of Ohio*

Province VI

- Emma Grundhauser, *Diocese of Minnesota*
- Cole Mayer, *Diocese of South Dakota*

Province VII

- Laurent De Prins, *Diocese of Western Louisiana*
- Maria Taylor, *Diocese of Arkansas*

Province VIII

- Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas, *Diocese of Arizona*
- Patrick Melendez, *Diocese of California*

Province IX

- Darling Daniel Ortiz Chemountd, *Diocese of the Dominican Republic*
- Marlene Rodriguez, *Diocese of Puerto Rico*



Skov also received applications for Adult Mentors to accompany the 18 youth. The nine adults were chosen according to their specific gifts for ministry and skills. Shepherding 18 youth for 10 days through a largely adult event requires knowledge in Episcopal polity and legislative process without imposing partiality, energy to work long days one after another, attentiveness to basic needs for the entire group, ability to teach on the run as questions emerge, and intentionality in spiritual practices.

A chaplain was recruited for the group to assist Skov with the spiritual, pastoral, and medical needs of all participants. The 18 young people, along with the Adult Mentors gathered in Indianapolis the weekend following Easter to begin their journey to General Convention. The orientation and training weekend included community building, legislative education, parliamentary protocols, and discussion of broader issues impacting youth and the church.

Highlights of participation in the 77th General Convention

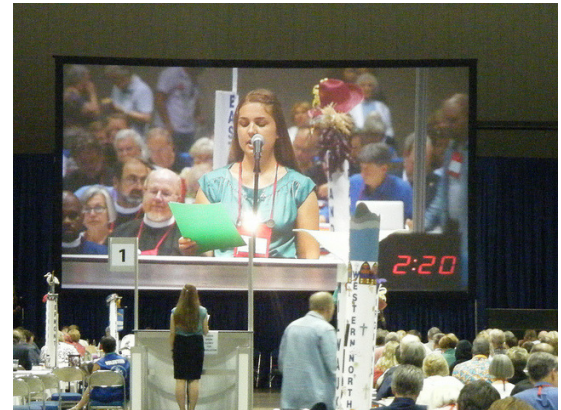
All participants in the Official Youth Presence are required to attend legislative committee meetings and hearings and are encouraged to speak to issues in hearings and during debate on the floor in the House of Deputies.

Youth events have taught me to speak even when my voice trembles.

Nora Vinas, Official Youth Presence member from the Diocese of SE Florida

Highlights of this participation included:

- Pre-Convention media training with Neva Rae Fox, Office of Public Affairs
- Meeting and conversation with Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori
- Dinner and conversation - including a video interview that was posted online - with House of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson
- Testimony given on a whole range of issues in committees, from baptism as a prerequisite for communion (Resolution C040) to a rite for same gender blessings
- Official Youth Presence participants speaking on the floor of the House of Deputies in favor of restoring funding for the Episcopal Youth Event
- Nora Vinas and Patrick Melendez addressed the House of Deputies, House of Bishops, and the Episcopal Church Women Triennium on behalf of the Official Youth Presence
- Official Youth Presence member, Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas worked with the Rev. LeeAnne Watkins, Deputy from Minnesota, to draft and submit Resolution D067, encouraging dioceses to support the DREAM Act and to create a scholarship fund for undocumented youth
- Testimony on D067 was given both in committee and on the floor of the House of Deputies in both English and Spanish, demonstrating the wide reach of this important resolution and the meaningfulness of it to our Province IX representatives
- Passage of D067 and the work of Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas, and all of the Official Youth Presence members, garnered a standing ovation on the floor of the House of Deputies
- Multiple participants spoke on the floor of the House of Deputies and worked actively to support D045, which would restore funding for youth ministries in DFMS
- Ariana Gonzalez-Bonillas, Nora Vinas, and Luz Cabrera (Young Adult Mentor/Spanish Interpreter) were interviewed on a panel for New Generation Latinos (NGL)
- Official Youth Presence members had the opportunity to meet and engage former Official Youth Presence participants currently serving as elected deputies
- Official Youth Presence members actively engaged Resolution A049 on Same Gender Blessings, both for and against passage of the Resolution



The youth participating in the Official Youth Presence for the 77th General Convention were motivated, poised, and responsible in their work. They were impressive in their passion and engagement and sincere in their presence.

They modeled decorum and respectfulness throughout the Convention and demonstrated that the voice of young people can and should have an impact as the church discerns its future.

Being with OYP at General Convention is like dancing with the Holy Spirit. Those who think the Church is dying have never spent time with GCOYP. Keep it up -- keep being the Church and changing the Church and listening to God's call.

The Rev. Vincent Black, Diocese of Ohio and GCOYP Mentor

Staffing

The Official Youth Presence was accompanied by a team of Adult Mentors who were discerned from their work on previous youth events. They are:

- The Rev. Vincent Black, Diocese of Ohio Canon for Christian Formation
- Luz Cabrera (Spanish Interpretation Assistance) Diocese of Texas and GCOYP Alumnus
- The Rev. Randy Callender, Diocese of Maryland, S.O.U.L. Conference Alumnus, Youth Advisor for the Union of Black Episcopalians
- Cookie Cantwell, Diocese of East Carolina and Province IV Youth Ministries Coordinator
- The Rev. Earl Gibson, Diocese of Los Angeles and Province VIII Youth Ministry Coordinator
- Jane Gober, Diocese of Rio Grande
- The Rev. Shannon Kelly, (OYP Chaplain) Diocese of Ohio and Province V Youth Ministry Liaison
- The Rev. Francisco Morales Colon, Priest in the Diocese of Puerto Rico, Province IX
- Jay Phillippi, Diocese of Western New York and Province II Youth Ministry Coordinator
- Cecilia Alomia, Spanish Simultaneous Interpreter for training weekend
- Dinorah Padro, Spanish Simultaneous Interpreter for training weekend
- Wendy Johnson, (Social Media Consultant for OYP) Diocese of Minnesota
- Valerie Harris, Associate for Formation and Vocation Ministries DFMS staff
- Bronwyn Clark Skov, Officer for Youth Ministries DFMS Staff



Communication

The 77th General Convention represented a watershed year for digital communication in the Episcopal Church, and the Official Youth Presence was no different.

Beginning with the nomination process and running throughout General Convention, the Official Youth Presence was represented online through a combination of blogging, YouTube videos, and photography, all of which can be found on the EpiscoYouth blog, episcopoyouth.org - combined with official reporting from Episcopal News Service.

Video introductions of each provincial Official Youth Presence pair were published before the start of General Convention.

From Convention, daily video blogs highlighting members of the Official Youth Presence were the cornerstone of communications. These 3-5 minute videos were augmented by videos taken of testimony as it was given, as well as photos and short reflections submitted to the EpiscoYouth Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/EpiscoYouth>, via smartphone. These

*You have done yourselves proud,
you have represented your
dioceses, parishes and families
magnificently well.*

Jay Phillippi, Diocese of Western
New York and Official Youth
Presence Mentor

posts increased traffic on the Facebook page and blog by as much as 4-5 times.

Resolutions that Created the Official Youth Presence

Resolution # 1982-B045 Concurred as amended at GC 1982, New Orleans

Title: Invite a Youth Presence at Future General Conventions

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 67th General Convention of the Episcopal Church through the administration of the National Church invite a youth presence as a permanent part of all future General Conventions of the Episcopal Church.

Resolution #1994-D115 Concurred as Amended at GC 1994, Indianapolis

Title: Support Seat and Voice for Youth at Church Conventions

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 71st General Convention allow, support, and accept seat, and voice, for the official Youth Presence of the General Convention; and be it further *Resolved*, That seat, and voice, be allowed, supported, and accepted for youth at their respective diocesan conventions.

Resolution #2000-D027 Adopted GC 2000, Denver

Title: Amend House of Deputies Rule XV.60(a)[Official Youth Presence on Floor]

Resolved, That the house of Deputies Rule 60(a) be amended, with an additional sentence as follows: In addition, up to 18 youth (not more than two youth from each Province) who are duly authorized representatives known as the Official Youth Presence, shall have seat and voice in a designated section on the floor of the House.

Expenses

Pre-Convention meeting	\$30,455.41
Convention registration - GCOYP	\$ 7,560.00
Convention registration - adults	\$ 540.00
Background checks	\$ 268.49
Convention expenses	\$17,266.38
Convention travel	\$12,323.13
Convention hotel	\$19,239.96
Total expenses	\$87,653.37

Income

Constable Grant	\$80,200.00
Total income	\$80,200.00

Expenses above and beyond the Constable Fund Grant were covered from the budget of the Office for Youth Ministries.