



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A LAY DELEGATE?

A Guide for New Hampshire Episcopalians 2023 edition

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For a Church Convention or Meeting

Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel in the Convention and Convocations of the Diocese of New Hampshire for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honor and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For Guidance

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor, and further us with your continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy Name, and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Introduction

This handbook was prepared for you by the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire:

- to help you make an informed decision about standing for election as a delegate
- to answer questions you have as a new delegate attending
- Diocesan Convention, your regional Convocation, or Diocesan Council meetings
- to suggest ways to engage and inform members of your congregation about matters of importance in the diocese.

PART I: Guide to Diocesan Convocations

A Delegate's Responsibilities

You are the link between your congregation and your convocation and between your congregation and the wider diocese. The Diocese communicates about Convention with delegates, alternates, and co-conveners primarily through email publications, including *The Call* (for church leaders), on occasional Convention-specific email communication, and with the wider church through *The Vine* (the general eNews communication) and the [Convention web pages](#). You should still make sure your Vestry and the congregation know what's happening. Depending on what works for your particular parish, you could meet with the Vestry at its monthly meetings, present during coffee hour discussions or adult education programs, or speak to the congregation during a service as invited by the clergy.

As a delegate, you are a leader in your congregation and in the Diocese of New Hampshire. Church leaders are counted on to be faithful in attendance at church services and activities, and to support their congregations with their time and their resources. Their enthusiasm for their ministry and their congregation's role in the diocese and the wider Episcopal Church inspires all members. Be sure to nourish your spiritual health as you enter the vital ministry of participation in Convention as a leader in this diocese.

You should be receiving our newsletter, *The Call*, which is for church leaders. If not, please email [Kathy Traynor](#) with the email address at which you would like to receive it.

What is a Convocation?

Convocations are representative bodies responsible for fostering communication between the diocese and the congregations and the Diocesan Council, information sharing, preparing delegates and clergy to make decisions on matters that come before the Convention, and reporting on activities related to convention resolutions.

There are six regional Convocations:

- **Northern:** Colebrook, Lancaster, Berlin, Littleton, Lisbon, Woodsville, North Woodstock
- **Lakes:** Tamworth, Wolfeboro, Meredith, Laconia, Tilton, Ashland-Plymouth, Sanbornville, North Conway
- **Seacoast:** Portsmouth (St. John's and Christ Church), Hampton, Dover, Durham, Exeter
- **Central:** Concord (St. Paul's and Grace), Dunbarton, Franklin, Hopkinton, Pittsfield, SpiritBound – NH Digital Mission, Weare
- **Southern:** Derry, Londonderry, Salem, Hampstead, Merrimack, Nashua, Milford, Manchester (Grace and St. Andrew's), Goffstown, Peterborough
- **Western:** Hanover, Newport, New London, Claremont (Trinity and Union-St. Luke's), Charlestown, Walpole, Keene

Canonical Requirements

The New Hampshire Canons explain in detail the makeup, organization, and role of the regional convocation. The full text of the canons can be found at www.nhepiscopal.org/governance. Convocation requirements are addressed in Canon 2, Section 4 of the document.

The key canonical requirements are:

- *A convocation is made up of a clergy person from each member congregation along with lay delegates from the parish.*
- *Each convocation elects 2 co-conveners at their first meeting following the Fall convention. The two co-conveners cannot be from the same congregation. But contrary to common understanding, they do not need to be from different orders. There can be 2 clergy or 2 lay co-conveners. Co-conveners have 2-year terms, renewable once.*
- *At the first meeting following the convention, each regional convocation elects 2 Diocesan Council representatives. In this case, the council representatives do need to be from separate orders, one clergy and one lay representative, as well as being from different congregations. Council representatives can be conveners and the term is also 2 years, renewable once.*
- *Convocations are required to meet no less than 4 times per year. Additional meetings may be scheduled by the regional convocations or called by the Diocesan Council.*

Canon 2, Section 4 also describes the responsibilities of each convocation:

- *provide liaison between congregations and the diocese,*
- *assist communications among congregations in the convocation,*
- *generate ideas and programs for referral to Diocesan Council,*
- *provide an opportunity to present diocesan program budgets to the people,*
- *provide a medium for the evaluation of on-going programs,*
- *discuss convention issues and proposals prior to sessions of Convention,*
- *assist convention delegates in becoming well informed on all aspects of diocesan life in preparation for their work at sessions of Convention,*
- *undertake local programs too large or too expensive for a single congregation to undertake, and*
- *focus on particular concerns or interests peculiar to the convocation.*

Best Practices

As described in the canons, convocations are required to meet no less than 4 times per year, although more frequency is recommended. Meetings may be held in-person or via Zoom. Attendance and participation is not limited to delegates and clergy in charge of congregations; meetings should be open to alternates, other clergy, and any church members.

Here is a suggested annual cadence of meetings:

- **January/February:** Congregations report delegates voted at annual meeting, co-conveners share orientation resources (handbook, membership lists, delegate contact information) with new delegates and co-conveners.
- **Mid-March/April:** Welcome newly elected delegates and alternates, review responsibilities as described in the canons, and report on Diocesan Council activities.
- **June:** Report on council meetings and support delegates in their roles and responsibilities. Discuss potential joint initiatives or activities among parishes.
- **August:** Annual report from each convocation is submitted for the Pre-Convention Journal by co-conveners. Report may include how each congregation has responded to the prior year's Resolutions.
- **September/October:** The *Pre-Convention Journal* will be posted on the website 45 days prior to Convention. Diocesan staff and resolution authors present proposed convention resolutions and draft budget. This may be done over two meetings if necessary.

- **November:** Diocesan Convention. Delegates will report the action on convention resolutions to their respective vestries.
- **November / December:** In the post-convention period, each convocation elects co-conveners and representatives to Diocesan Council (note terms in canons), debriefs on convention, and plans for implementation of resolutions.

The agenda for meetings can be augmented with appropriate program content, such as a guest speaker, an activity, a discussion topic. Meetings may include leaders/speakers who are involved with recently passed resolutions or task force initiatives. It is standard practice that time be set aside at each convocation meeting for sharing between churches. Although a minimum of four meetings are canonically required, some convocations meet six to eight times annually.

Each convocation is accountable to the Diocesan Council, and its representatives should report Council activities to the convocation and convocation activities to the Council. Each convocation also submits an annual report to be published in the *Pre-Convention Journal*, which serves as the Diocesan record of convocation activities.

It is important that the diocesan office be kept apprised of convocation membership and activities. As you elect co-conveners and council representatives, please provide their contact information and any changes in delegates. The diocesan office will provide a list of convocation delegates to each co-convener after receiving the Delegation Certification Form on parochial reports. Parochial reports are due on March 1st.

It is strongly recommended that each congregation designate a warden or vestry member as one of the convocation/convention delegates. This strengthens the communication between the diocesan office, the Diocesan Council, and the congregational leadership.

Although the canons don't specify the duties of a co-convener, they are nominally responsible for:

- Scheduling meeting date and location and/or sharing a meeting zoom link,
- Putting together meeting agenda
- Appointing a secretary, either for a term or meeting by meeting
- Presiding at each meeting

Convocations can add value beyond what is canonically required. They provide a forum for multiple congregations to team up to host a large event, such as a revival, a fundraiser, or an outreach project. Convocations present an opportunity

to interact with neighboring parishes and can be a source of new ideas and inspirations.

As we manage the day-to-day, Sunday-to-Sunday life in our congregations, it's easy to lose track of the fact that we are part of the larger body of The Episcopal Church. Convocations are a tool to help us connect; but like all things, they require a certain amount of care and effort to reap the bounty they can provide.

PART II: Guide to Diocesan Convention

What is Diocesan Convention?

Technically speaking, Diocesan Convention is the governing body of the Diocese; a representative membership of all year-round Episcopal congregations in New Hampshire. Other congregations, including seasonal and institutional chapels may join sessions of the Convention as non-voting members.

The Convention meets in an annual session, and in special sessions for particular purposes, as necessary (e.g., the election of a Bishop). The annual session of Diocesan Convention meets in the fall either virtually or in-person as publicized, usually the first weekend in November, which may be preceded or followed by a diocesan-wide worship service and/or other programming. Clergy, lay delegates, and alternates are expected to attend the primary session of Convention. In between,

regional convocations meet to share information and the Diocesan Council meets to make decisions on implementing diocesan programs and policies.

Convention Resolutions

The deadline for submitting resolutions for the annual Convention is usually mid-August. This gives delegates the opportunity to be well-informed about issues coming before Convention, and to participate in discussions on these matters within their congregations and convocations.

Convention Registration

Throughout the year, members of the Diocesan staff meet to plan for the next annual meeting and to evaluate past Convention sessions. During spring and summer, information and registration protocols and nomination forms are posted on the [Diocesan website](#). Logistics for business meeting registration and check-in will vary from year to year; the best source of information in a given year will be the diocesan website and communications to delegates.

Delegates are unable to vote at Convention if not registered before the stated deadline date each year, so please pay attention to that. (Previously certified alternates may replace delegates after the deadline, but new delegates may not be certified after the deadline.)

Pre-Convention Preparation

The *Pre-Convention Journal* and draft budget document will be posted on the diocesan website about 45 days prior to Convention. Delegates and alternates should become familiar with the document. The *Pre-Convention Journal* includes resolutions, nominee bios, the annual diocesan audit report, the report of the Trustees of the Protestant Episcopal Church in New Hampshire (the Trustees manage diocesan investment funds), and reports from convocations, commissions, and committees. The draft budget document contains narrative descriptions of diocesan programs and the funding requested for them.

Credentials and Voting Materials

All delegates are voting members and must be credentialed; for most delegates this happens when a church submits its annual report of elected officials by March 1. Direct your initial questions about this to your church.

A church may name a new delegate only before the annual published deadline for submissions (usually early October). No new delegates can be named after this deadline.

Delegates will receive ballots by mail. Specific instructions for event registration, check-in, and voting will vary annually, so your best source for delegate information will be the Convention web pages and diocesan communications.

The Credentials Committee tallies the number of clergy and lay delegates in attendance and reports this number to the presiding officer. This number is the basis for determining whether a quorum is present, and for ensuring that the number voting on any matter does not exceed the number eligible.

Convention Rules of Order

In general, the Convention follows the most recent version of *Roberts Rules of Order*. Rules particular to New Hampshire, or rules which are deemed important to have readily available to members will either be included in the *Pre-Convention Journal* or communicated directly to delegates. Rules of order are essential to the smooth conduct of an assembly such as a church convention. They enable the presider and members to move through debate, offering substitutions and amendments, calling for an end to debate and finally voting, with assurance that the process is fair and open.

Convention Leadership

Leadership of Convention and Officers are:

- The Bishop, who is also the President of Convention
- The Moderator of Convention, if appointed by the Bishop
- The Secretary of Convention, elected as the session begins
- The Chancellor, who rules on matters having to do with the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese (the Chancellor may also serve as Parliamentarian)
- Chaplain to Convention, elected as the session begins

Convention Worship

A worship service (in-person when possible) open to all in the diocese will usually be held the same day as, or the day before or after the business meeting. All delegates

are encouraged to attend. The best source of information on this in a given year will be the Convention web pages and communications from the diocese.

Convention Business Session

The annual business session follows an “Order of Business.” Reports from committees and commissions of the diocese are printed in the *Pre-Convention Journal*, but some may be presented to the body. Special guests and visitors may be introduced, as are clergy new to the diocese and those in the ordination process.

The Bishop’s Annual Report/Address is given at Convention and afterwards will be available on the diocesan website.

After organizational and introductory matters have been completed, the Convention undertakes its main business—presentation, debate and voting on the resolutions that have been introduced.

Types of resolutions:

- Budget Resolutions, including the annual Diocesan Budget and the annual resolution approving the framework of guidelines for clergy compensation
- Policy Resolutions, urging the Convention and/or congregations to act on matters of study and ministry or to take stands on matters of social and economic justice.
- Resolutions to amend the Constitution and/or Canons of the Diocese
- Courtesy Resolutions, to express appreciation for the service of individuals or groups to the life of the Diocese, or to extend the greetings of the Convention

Elections to various offices are part of each Convention session. These include:

- Officers of the Diocese
- Members of the Standing Committee
- Members of the Finance Committee
- Deputies and Alternates to General Convention (every three years)
- Delegates and Alternates to the Synod of the Province (every three years)

The Convention also elects the Bishop, although as previously stated, it meets in a special session for this purpose, with its own specific Rules of Order.

Addressing the Convention: Speaking to Resolutions

First: Be clear about what you want to say; and be brief. Pay careful attention to any time limits the Convention may have adopted. Procedures for the order of speakers will be shared annually.

At either an in-person or remote meeting, begin by introducing yourself: “Mr. President (if the Bishop is chairing) or Mr./Madam Moderator (if the Moderator is in the chair), I am [your name] lay/clergy delegate from [name of your congregation].” Continue with the point you wish to make or question you are raising.

Voting Procedures

Voting in elections is always by ballot and by orders. They are counted separately and a nominee must receive a majority in each order on the same ballot to be elected. If necessary, the vote is repeated, with a new poll until a nominee receives a concurrent majority in both orders. For resolutions, rules permit a request for a vote by orders, and a matter must receive a majority in each order to be adopted. Voting on matters before the Convention can be as simple as using the “Raise your Hand” feature on ZOOM or by completing a poll that will appear on your computer screen and click “submit” feature on Zoom.

Your vote on matters taken up by the Convention should be based on your own best judgment arrived at **through reading the information, discussions in your congregation and convocation, and prayerful consideration of the way your vote will further the mission of the Diocese and the Church.** Your congregation elected you because members believe you are a person of faith who will carry out this responsibility in continual conversation with God.

Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of New Hampshire

The Constitution is the foundational law of the diocese, and establishes the Convention, its leadership and its membership. The Canons define with more specificity the organization of the Convention, Council and committees, diocesan leadership. The Canons also include rules governing the creation of congregations and transaction of business in them. These documents are accessible on the diocesan website: www.nhepiscopal.org/governance.

Conclusion

Your service and ministry as a lay delegate are valuable and necessary gifts to the Episcopal Church of New Hampshire, your convocation, and your congregation, and are greatly appreciated.

We welcome your suggestions and input on this document or anything else about improving communications or processes for delegates. Share them with your co-convenor or send them directly to [Kathy Traynor](#).