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Executive Council begins four-day Omaha meeting By Mary Frances Schjonberg, February 19, 2010

[Episcopal News Service – Omaha, Nebraska] The Episcopal Church's [Executive Council](#) began its four-day meeting here Feb. 19 by getting briefings on the work it faces and by hearing a renewed call for the church to stand with its Diocese of Haiti.

Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori also told the council that tension is mounting in the Diocese of South Carolina over efforts to ascertain the diocese's plans for dealing with disaffected Episcopalians.

The Feb. 19-22 meeting at the Omaha Hilton is taking place in the seat of the [Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska](#). Council will hear about the mission and ministry of the diocese on the evening of Feb. 21.

Jefferts Schori concluded her remarks by telling council members that "things are heating up in South Carolina."

She noted that [Diocese of South Carolina](#) Bishop Mark Lawrence has delayed the diocese's annual convention and attributed the delay "supposedly to my incursions in South Carolina."

"He's telling the world that he is offended that I think it's important that people who want to stay Episcopalians there have some representation on behalf of the larger church," she said, asking for the council's prayers for the people of the diocese.

In a Feb. 9 [letter](#) to the diocese Lawrence said that the convention would be delayed from March 4-5 to March 26 in order for him, the diocesan standing committee and the diocese "to adequately consider a response" to what he called an "unjust intrusion into the spiritual and jurisdictional affairs of this sovereign diocese of the Episcopal Church."

According to a series of letters the diocese has posted [here](#) on its website, [Thomas Tisdale Jr.](#), a Charleston, South Carolina, attorney and former diocesan chancellor, wrote Jan. 25 to current chancellor Wade Logan III confirming a telephone conversation between the two of them. Tisdale said in the letter that during that phone conversation he had learned that Lawrence does not intend to take legal action to protect parish property with regards to what Tisdale calls "recent and ongoing actions by some congregations in our diocese that threaten to 'withdraw their parishes from the diocese and the Episcopal Church.'"

Tisdale followed up that letter with others asking for a variety of documents, including a list of recent ordinations along with copies of the required oaths of conformity that each ordinand signed, standing committee minutes during Lawrence's episcopate, parish by-law amendments made since 2006 and a number of documents related to four specific parishes: [St. Luke's](#), Hilton Head; [St. Andrew's](#), Mount Pleasant; [St. John's](#), Johns Island; and [Trinity](#), Myrtle Beach.

In the first of those letters, Tisdale refers to himself as "South Carolina counsel for the Episcopal Church."

Logan responded with a [letter](#) saying that no parishes have left the diocese and that "the bishop, as the sovereign authority in this diocese, will work pastorally with diocesan parishes and their members in ways that will seek to keep them a part of this diocese."

The chancellor refused to supply the information requested and said that "it seems transparent that the Episcopal Church is trying very hard to find reason to involve either the bishop or the diocese, or perhaps both, in an adversarial situation."

On Oct. 24, the diocese [voted](#) to distance itself from the Episcopal Church by authorizing Lawrence and the standing committee to begin withdrawing from church-wide bodies that assent to "actions deemed contrary to Holy Scripture, the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this church has received them, the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference which have expressed the mind of the Communion, the Book of Common Prayer and our Constitution and Canons, until such bodies show a willingness to repent of such actions."

The special convention also declared as "null and void" two General Convention resolutions that had been passed the previous month. Resolution [D025](#) affirms "that God has called and may call" gay and lesbian people "to any ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church." Resolution [C056](#) calls for the collection and development of theological resources for the blessing of same-gender unions and allows bishops to provide "a generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this church."

When Lawrence was first [elected](#) bishop in September 2006, he faced numerous questions about whether he would attempt to convince Episcopalians there to leave the church. In a November 6, 2006 letter to the wider church he wrote that he would "work at least as hard at keeping the Diocese of South Carolina in the Episcopal Church as my sister and brother bishops work at keeping the Episcopal Church in covenanted relationship with the worldwide Anglican Communion."

Lawrence did not [receive](#) the required consents to his consecration in 2007 because some standing committee consent forms were canonically improper. He was subsequently re-elected, received the consents required for all bishops-elect and was [consecrated](#) January 26, 2008.

Near the end of the 2008 Lambeth Conference, Lawrence [told](#) reporters that during a [meeting](#) of conservative Anglicans and Episcopalians in Jerusalem a few weeks earlier he had witnessed a "new prince" being born.

Lawrence said he knew that his role is now to "hold together as much as I can for as long as I can that when he comes to his rightful place on St. Augustine's throne in Canterbury Cathedral he will have a faithful and richly textured kingdom."