

US Episcopal Church Elects First-Ever Black Presiding Bishop

The U.S. Episcopal Church elected its first black presiding bishop on Saturday at its general conference in Salt Lake City, where members of the Christian denomination discussed its position on same-sex marriage, gun violence and outreach.

Faith leaders of the Episcopal Church, a branch of the 80-million member worldwide Anglican Communion, elected Bishop Michael Curry of North Carolina to replace outgoing Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first female to lead the Protestant denomination.

Curry, 62, was one of four bishops up for election to lead the two-million member church. He won by a landslide with 121 votes, compared to his closest competitor who earned 21 votes, according to results posted online.

His election will bring the first person of color into the church's top leadership office, the Episcopal News Service said.

The presiding bishop serves a nine-year term. Curry will take over the helm on November 1.

The general convention, held every three years, will also explore the church's directives on issues including gun violence, the Israel-Palestinian conflict and same-sex marriage, according to the official agenda.

A legislative session erupted in applause on Friday when the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark 5-4 ruling that Constitution's guarantees of due process and equal protection under the law means that gay couples have the legal right to

marry, the Episcopal News Service said.

The Episcopal denomination approved a rite for the blessing of a same-sex relationship at its 2012 convention.

This year, resolutions under consideration would expand gay and lesbian inclusion in the church, including a modification to the canonical definition of marriage as between only a man and woman, according to the agenda.

Episcopal Church members will also consider several resolutions having to do with the Israel-Palestinian conflict, with one proposal calling on the church to divest from Israel or companies that do business with Israel because of what it calls "Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories."

Jefferts Schori has said in the past she opposed divestment.

Bishops, priests and church members were also taking part in traditional church rites such as the Eucharist and holding sessions to discuss poverty, access to healthcare, and how to reduce gun violence in the United States.

Last week, nine members of Charleston's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church were shot to death inside the house of worship by an accused gunman motivated by racism, authorities said.

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