This summer I had the opportunity to spend two months as a legislative intern for the Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations in Washington, DC. This Capitol Hill office is responsible for representing the public policy positions of the national Episcopal Church to the Executive Branch, Members of Congress, the media, interfaith, Episcopalians, and other organizations. I was able to experience work in all five of the office’s fields—foreign policy, domestic policy, international policy, and immigration. My responsibilities ranged from attending Congressional hearings on Capitol Hill, writing blog posts and bulletin inserts for the Episcopal Church website, to traveling to Salt Lake City for the Episcopal Church’s 78th General Convention.

A lot of my work in Washington, DC centered on attending meetings with the various policy analysts in the Office of Government Relations in accordance with their portfolios. For example, I would attend weekly meetings with the Haiti Advocacy Working Group (HAWG) aside Jayce Hafner, the office’s Domestic Policy Analyst. This incredible group opened my eyes to a lot of issues in places such as Haiti and the Dominican Republic that the media would not necessarily cover; and therefore, go unnoticed. I took diligent notes in order to provide the members of the group with any information they may have missed during their discussions. The meetings commenced with brief updates from any members on the ground in Haiti, and then the focus would shift to current issues, and how to deal with them from the United States. During my two months, the group dealt heavily with the deportations occurring in the Dominican Republic, and how to advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves. The members would
then coordinate on drafting various letters to Members of Congress, United States Ambassadors, and other groups in order to urge them to either sign on to co-sponsor, or simply support certain pieces of legislation. Following meetings such as these, I would then attend Congressional hearings for the group, such as the Haiti Elections Hearing chaired by Senator Marco Rubio in mid-July. I would take note of the Congressmen and women present at the hearings, as well as what their stances on current issues are to relay back to members of the working group.

Ten days of my time at the Episcopal Office of Government Relations was spent in Salt Lake City at 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. This is the triennial meeting of bishops, deputies, laity, and any Episcopalians looking to sit in on the Church’s legislative meetings. During this General Convention the Episcopal Church elected a new Presiding Bishop as well as passed new and monumental legislation. For example, this convention changed the marriage canons of the Church in order to include same-sex couples in the liturgy. Attending General Convention gave me the opportunity to see how the Episcopal Church works, advocates, and worships throughout the world. I met some incredible people in Salt Lake City, including the current Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefferts Schori. However, what I will remember most about my trip to Salt Lake are the several workshops I was able to sit in on that were aimed at promoting racial reconciliation throughout the United States. The people working for the Episcopal Church are truly inspiring in the way they commit themselves entirely to their work. Getting to be around these kinds of employees taught me the value in simply loving what you do.

More technically speaking, this internship helped me broaden my research, writing, and communication skills. A lot of my research was focused on new and ongoing legislation in
Congress such as the Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act, Global Food Security Act, and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act. By researching these bills I was able to make lists of co-sponsors, their party affiliation, and political views for the policy analysts in the office. My writing skills improved through being exposed to new kinds of writing styles such as blog posts and bulletin inserts. During my internship I was able to write a blog post for the Episcopal Church titled “Moving Forward: LGBT Rights in the United States.” The piece was timely due to both the Obergefell v Hodges Supreme Court ruling to legalize same-sex marriage as well as the Episcopal Church’s new marriage canons. Learning the importance of creating timely news oriented pieces was one of the many unique opportunities this internship offered me.

This internship was incredibly educational in that it showed me a new side to public policy that is more faith oriented. The Episcopal Church, along with the entire interfaith community, has the opportunity to offer a kind of moral voice to the often times questionable political field. I have recently been considering future job opportunities in policy, and this internship helped me understand the many ways one can work within the realm of policy. The part of this internship I cherished most was getting to see the multitude of advocacy work the Episcopal Church does, and I believe this is the kind of field I would be most happy. I am also comforted knowing the networking opportunities this internship has brought me going into my final year at Sewanee.