



# When It's Done Well

by The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston, Bishop of Virginia



For far too many, it's all a matter of who/what "wins" and who/what "loses." It's as if the final tally is the whole story. We can all understand that, and there can be no question that decisive action – sometimes very dramatic – is vitally important in the life and witness of the Church. There are moments, there are votes, that are the milestones by which we track and interpret church history. Anyone can think of some votes that stand out, and the reasons why we would consider an event to be such a

milestone will vary greatly. Just a very few from my lifetime in the Episcopal Church include the revision of the classic 1928 Book of Common

Prayer, the vote to ordain women to the priesthood and episcopate, and marriage equality. I thank God the Holy Spirit for these particular milestones, while others judge them as heresies. Some were inspired to become more active in the Church because of this or that decision while others felt dismay and drifted away. And therein lies my point.

The decisions reached by our General Convention are about much more than the final tallies. So much goes into a document or a resolution before it ever sees the light of day, and that very work forms souls and strengthens personal faith. How often, all of that is glossed over or is simply overshadowed by the results of a vote. Yet, our Church is undeniably made stronger by that unseen, unheralded faithfulness. Likewise, sometimes, entire lives are changed by disappointment following a vote; people are even driven into despair. Yet, the larger community

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# With Ears to Hear: The Church Responds to #MeToo

by Crystal Hardin, Staff Writer

Today, the House of Bishops will host a "Liturgy of Listening" in the main worship space of the Austin Convention Center just before the official start of General Convention.

Imagined and planned by the House of Bishop's Pastoral Response to #MeToo Planning Team, this liturgy seeks to draw participants into a sacred space, where things once hidden or whispered of might be brought into the light and offered to God.

Expecting your typical listening session, I was intrigued by the news of a liturgy. While a great many things drew me to the Episcopal



tradition, one of the most moving was its liturgy. My great appreciation for our life of common prayer has become more developed, nuanced, and learned as I've progressed from

newcomer to seminarian, and yet I am still moved by the same things: its call to unity, reconciliation, and sacramental living (if only for a moment). Taking on the #MeToo task through a purposeful, and hopefully well-moderated, listening session felt like a win. Engaging with #MeToo and its implications liturgically felt somewhat provocative, like the promise of something wild and Holy.

If the power of liturgy in part comes from the dissonance between what we do in liturgy – and what we know to be true in the doing of it – and the world outside of the liturgy, well, I can't think of a better medium in which to engage with #MeToo.

#MeToo, a movement started by social activist Tarana Burke more than 10 years ago and recently revived in Hollywood, has torn across social media and other platforms exposing acts of sexual harassment and abuse of women in seemingly every domain. Our beloved Church is no exception. The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, president of the House of Deputies, acknowledged this truth in noting that "those problems have been endemic in our culture in the Church for far longer than Hollywood,

or tech culture, or corporate journalism have existed."

Bishop DeDe Duncan-Probe (pictured at top), chair of the planning team, spoke with me about the upcoming event. She reflects that, growing up in the Church, a culture of sexual harassment and abuse of women has been "as much a part of [her] experience as prayer, communion and worship." She doesn't want that to continue.

Where do we go as a Church to acknowledge and begin to heal? Duncan-Probe answers, "to liturgy." She notes that while we've done many things very faithfully to both correct course and to acknowledge and repent for sins of the past, we've never as a Church done this: come together to seek God's healing by placing our sin in the light through the transformational power of liturgy.

The planning team has reimagined the way in which we share of ourselves during worship. Rather than a place of hidden truths, Duncan-Probe hopes that this will be an open space.

She notes that the liturgy will begin with repentance, led by the House of Bishops, so that those gathered "can have ears to hear" the witness of those whose stories have largely been known to them alone. Indeed, a posture of repentance feels necessary to the gravity of #MeToo, just as a posture of deep humility feels necessary to receiving the testimonies of the victims. The devastating impact of the systemic issue of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation within our Church cannot be understated. And, the pervasiveness of this culture in society at large must be acknowledged. On any given Sunday, a third or more women who come together to worship have been sexually assaulted, and far more have been sexually harassed.

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At [www.centeraisle.blog](http://www.centeraisle.blog)

Sarah Kye Price considers BCP revision through the lens of her own journey from evangelical, to Episcopalian, to seminarian.

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often loses touch with that pain, as if it doesn't matter. I believe that we would do well to keep the kind of perspective that causes us to remember that there are such stories and engage them. We would all be much the richer if we do because there are faithful members of our Episcopal Church who have endured the hurt, the rawness, of losing a "milestone" vote and have nonetheless stayed their course within our Church, even finding new strength. All of us can learn from such examples.

Now we've arrived at my inevitable soapbox. I'll admit that most of the time I'm just as interested in the process as in the product. I take no gratification from an agreeable point "winning" when the process is flawed. I will be among the first to cry "foul!" when something I don't agree with is defeated through a corrupt process. Moreover, there are many times when I can live with one outcome just as well as with the other. It's not that I don't care (anyone who knows me knows that full well!) but rather that I'm very invested in how well we disagree. Like-mindedness can make many friends – anyone can embrace and "need" people with whom we agree. But, I believe that the Church is more than that, indeed, is better than that.

As Christians in the Anglican Tradition, we should know probably better than anyone that we actually need those with whom we disagree inside our ecclesiastical tent as much as we need our teammates. They are not merely tolerated, not simply accepted as a fact of life, but are truly needed. This is our unique charism, and in my view we must hold it up to the whole world (which surely seems to need it more now than ever). I remember when we used to be pretty good at this, and I long for the time when we're steadied by it again. I suggest that our theological DNA is that creative tension that happens when we're more about the Body than we are about "which side." If Anglicanism were to have a motto, I'd like it to be "Agreement is overrated." (This will tell you why my own favorite milestone in all of Church history is the Elizabethan Settlement.) God grant us all the grace that we become a Body which is more about commitment than "agreement." We are to be committed to each other as fellow disciples of Jesus, not held together by one another's similar opinions. Like-mindedness can be a theological opiate, a seductive sedative for the soul. Instead, give me the liveliness and vibrancy of a well-honed disagreement which, when the question is settled, is distinguished and remembered for showing us how, in mutual respect, decisiveness is done well.

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Almost 40 people shared their stories of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation with the planning team. Ten of those reflections, representing the breadth of all that were submitted, will be read in the first person singular during the liturgy by members of the House of Bishops. Duncan-Probe shares that the courage of the people who submitted reflections is humbling and that "this is a trust that is being held safely and securely." Great lengths have been taken to ensure that the reflections remain anonymous and are treated with the utmost respect. Duncan-Probe notes that some of those who shared their story said this was the first time they really felt heard within the Church and that the very act of sharing their experience had restorative value in their lives.

Duncan-Probe hopes that this service, which is an entirely new offering, will be used as a model for other systemic issues facing the Church, having life well beyond the premiere event.

I look forward to experiencing this liturgy and feel hopeful that such a profound piece of our Episcopal identity will be used to acknowledge this wound within our polity (and larger society). With close to 30 related resolutions on the docket for Convention, this liturgy seeks to set a necessary tone of repentance and humility before the profound witness of those who have spoken their truth. Duncan-Probe invites all to "come, even those with skepticism, anger or righteous indignation, but come with ears to hear."

The Liturgy of Listening service will take place on July 4, from 5:15-7PM CST, in the worship space set up in the Austin Convention Center. The service will be live streamed at General Convention's media hub. A pastoral response team of clinical psychologists, therapists and spiritual directors will be available to those who may need them. For some, this liturgy will be too painful to participate in. Take care of yourselves and each other.



*Crystal Hardin is a seminarian at Virginia Theological Seminary, a recovering attorney, and an accomplished photographer.*

## GC79: Issues We'll Be Watching

*by the Center Aisle Editorial Staff*

The hallways, meeting rooms and dining spots of Austin, Texas, could heat up July 3-11, as thousands of Episcopalians gather to talk about issues ranging from the Middle East to the health of our marriages.

We can't focus our lens of "radical centrism" on every issue, but here are some we expect to address in the days ahead:

### Faith in the Public Square

We live in a divided world – politically, economically and racially. That's why witnessing to our Gospel truths in the public square is more important than ever. We'll be following issues such as racial reconciliation, gun violence and economic justice.

### How Do We Lead Together?

The relationship between bishops, laypeople, priests and deacons is key to our identity as Episcopalians. Those ties are being examined anew as we continue to encourage collaborative leadership in a hierarchical Church.

One key proposal in this category is Resolution A028, the seemingly bland proposal to create a salary for the President of the House of Deputies. But beyond the specifics of that proposal is a more general question: Who speaks for The Episcopal Church – the Presiding Bishop, the President of the House of Deputies, both together, either alone?

### Strengthening the Episcopacy

Following the tragic death of Tom Palermo by then-Bishop Heather Cook in a drunken driving accident in 2014, the Task Force on the Episcopacy was asked to improve the processes of how we select bishops, how we help them to be more effective, and how we can increase racial and gender diversity among the bishops. Strong ministry and leadership

go hand and hand, so we'll be monitoring these conversations.

### The Book of Common Prayer

We're not talking about a new Prayer Book at this Convention, but we may be moving toward that.

Why change the BCP at all? Because how we pray shapes who we are. A new BCP that speaks to the "riches of our Church's liturgical, cultural, racial, generational, linguistic, gender and ethnic diversity" would also help speak to a more diverse, welcoming Church. But creating a new Prayer Book would be a massive undertaking, and many believe we haven't embraced fully the '79 Prayer Book.

General Convention will be presented with two options: a three-year process of study and exploration leading to final approval of a new Prayer Book in 2024, or an invitation to the whole Church to clarify the role of supplemental liturgies and to broaden familiarity with our current Prayer Book.

### The Jesus Movement

A powerful preacher of the Word suddenly gained an even higher-profile pulpit in the city of Windsor, England this May. Yes, we are talking about our very own Presiding Bishop, and the "wow factor" he brought to a princely wedding.

Bishop Michael Curry has taken advantage of the opportunity to become a leading spokesman for inclusive, inspiring Christianity that's all about love.

How can we, at this Convention, help him send that message?

There undoubtedly will be more issues that emerge from the sidelines during our time together. But this is where we start. Let the discussions begin!

