



# It's Time for a Dramatic Reaching Out

by *The Very Rev. Ian Markham*



How will this General Convention be judged by history? This is a difficult, perhaps impossible, question to answer. Yet, as we busy ourselves with the minutiae of resolutions and debates, it is worth trying to stand back and see the big picture.

One way to think about this question is to locate the Episcopal Church within the historical trajectories of our age. Secularization is on the rise; skepticism abounds. Populist movements are rising here in the United States and around the

globe, some with sinister racist propensities. Social media is growing. More locally, within the history of the mainline and the Episcopal Church, it looks clear that ACNA lost in the courts and is going to be seen, when compared to the 1979 Prayer Book division, as one of the smaller splits from the Episcopal Church. Smaller churches continue to struggle, while larger churches are just about holding their own. Dioceses are heavily dependent on the small number of strong congregations and are often having to cut programs to survive. We still have not turned around the decline in membership and attendance.

In one area, I am sure this conference will be attentive. With respect to the political, the concerns around immigration, racism and the environment will be given prominence. The Episcopal Church will

offer an appropriate witness for our time. This is a moment when deep moral seriousness is needed. It is entirely necessary, for example, that we should take some time to think and articulate our abhorrence of the creeping and visible racism of our age.

In other areas, I am less confident this Convention will seize the challenge of the moment. With ACNA increasingly irrelevant, this is the moment for a dramatic reaching out to those brave conservatives who have stayed with the Episcopal Church. For some dioceses, they are often the ATM of the diocese, yet are hardly ever accorded respect. We need to all say – thank you for your witness, your congregational vibrancy, and your presence in our midst. May Prayer Book revision leave plenty of options for conservative congregations to feel comfortable inside the Episcopal Church.

The challenge facing congregations needs imaginative and enterprising responses. We need to lift up those imaginative clergy and dioceses who are finding new ways of connecting. From “Missional Voices” to “missional communities” to eformation, there are ideas out there that are making a difference.

The Episcopal Church is a deeply serious “trust,” which we inherit from those who served in the past and we are obligated to pass to those who are going to come after us. Every single one of us is a steward, with temporary responsibility for our tradition. We should take our duties as stewards very seriously. Let us leave the future a stronger Episcopal Church. This is our task at this General Convention.

# BCP Revision: Will We, with God's Help?

by *Sarah Kye Price, Staff Writer*

I was a 20-something the first time that I set foot in an Episcopal church. Although that may have made me a star candidate on the people-parishes-want-to-attract list, all I knew in 1989 was that I was still recovering from a painful break-away from the evangelical denomination I was raised in, I had a heart for social justice, and I felt compelled to go to church so I could sing hymns again. I lived a short walk from an Episcopal congregation, so I thought I would give it a try one Sunday, in spite of my unfamiliarity. Within the first two minutes after slipping into a pew, a very kind person introduced herself, asked if I had attended an Episcopal service before (I answered honestly that I had not) and, anticipating my possible uncertainties, took the time and attentiveness to help me navigate the Prayer Book so that the whole service felt easy, welcoming and communal.

When I asked if I could take that Prayer Book home with me, the answer was a hearty, “Yes, of course!” Later that evening when I reached for the Prayer Book, it fell open to page 299, in the middle of the liturgy for Holy Baptism. I held that Prayer Book in my hands, reading the words of the Baptismal Covenant while tears flowed from my eyes. I had thought I was leaving the Church altogether when I left my childhood denomination; now I felt like a homing beacon from my own baptism had pulled me to this place, at this time, into this branch of the Jesus Movement. In that tiny apartment in the quiet space of my heart, I began my relationship with the Episcopal Church and the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Today, 29 years later, I'm a Gen-Xer Episcopalian and a second-career seminarian. I admit I have only known the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as “my” prayer book. As a lay leader (especially as senior

warden), I listened to the generations ahead of me profess their love for the 1928 Prayer Book and wrestle with this so-called “new” 1979 Prayer Book nearly 40 years after its publication. As a seminarian, I have learned to cherish people and their stories even more as I reflect on the BCP's important role in the renewal and transformation of my faith.

In short, I admit to a deep and abiding love for the 1979 Book of Common Prayer as well as a deep desire to be open-hearted rather than wistful about Prayer Book revision. So, I have undertaken with great personal conviction a desire to understand the proposals for revision that are being put forth by the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) for discussion and discernment by GC79.



Going in to GC79, the SCLM proposed two options to be discussed: Option One, which initiates a revised Prayer Book with three years of detailed study and conversation, drafting a new BCP after GC80 (2021), and approving it at GC81 (2024); or Option Two, which invites deeper exploration of the current 1979 BCP while adding to and clarifying the role of supplemental liturgies such as Enriching Our Worship. Both proposals have a detailed action plan and will require a commitment of both time and money. Both options are forward looking in different ways, reflected in the conversation already underway here at GC79, and that

-continued on page 2-

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conversation may lead us down the road to revision as proposed or re-envisioning our common prayer in emergent ways.

While at Church Divinity School of the Pacific for my June intensive, I asked the Rev. Paul Fromberg -- parish priest, CDSP instructor and member of the SCLM -- to talk with me about his thoughts on the work of the SCLM and the hopes of this committee as GC79 approached.

As he often does, Paul began the conversation with a phrase that would continue to resonate in my mind: "The future direction of the Church is fundamentally evangelistic." Perhaps that doesn't sound Prayer Book related, but it has everything to do with the SCLM's proposals. "Going in, it's not really a question of whether the Prayer Book will be revised but when," said Paul, "and if the answer to that question isn't now, then the larger question is: What criteria will we use to measure and evaluate when we are ready?"

This spoke to my academic heart as well as to my evangelistic spirit. The Church, of course, was never meant to be a static entity. We are designed to build on our knowledge, learn from our diversity, and are called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ--not only across people and places but also over time. The contemporary issues of 2018 were not in Thomas Cranmer's wildest imaginings (whatever those may have been!). Even our "new" 1979 Prayer Book did not have a vision of our digital world, our changing demography, or the call to new forms of ministry that are emerging in today's global society. If we believe in the movement of the Holy Spirit, then we have to believe that the time will come when expanding our common prayer speaks to that movement. My conversation with Paul summed it up well, "We cannot allow our fear of change to derail God's mission in the world. The best strategy to move us forward will be to walk together in hope, not fear."

The SCLM has done a bold thing: They have asked all of us, the

Episcopal Church, to engage in active conversation and prayerful discernment about what that direction will look like. Here at GC79, that conversation is beginning to take shape. "Members of the SCLM have engaged this process with a great deal of love and mutual respect, which is why we have two very well-crafted and specific options to present," Fromberg said. "It isn't that we can't decide; it is that we trust General Convention's wisdom to make a choice that will serve the Church in the long term."

Guided by the Holy Spirit, I believe we can be entrusted to do this work. In open hearings and committee conversations, earnest and thoughtful consideration is emerging about how to responsively embrace expanded language and liturgy with the blessing of an institutional process that reminds us that we are many voices in one Church. Common prayer is central to who we are. It is vital to my own life of faith, and my commitment to serve this Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement. I am deeply invested in our ability to discern together how to best respond in hope as a people of common prayer, whether it's one of the two proposals or some version of a middle ground that honors the diverse voices of prayer across the breadth of our Episcopal identity. I am praying for our wisdom, for our hopefulness and for the future of the Church.

Like our Baptismal Covenant, perhaps our best petitions surrounding our hopes for Prayer Book revision will also close with a heartfelt, "I will, with God's help."



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## Keep (Your Trip to) Austin Weird

### 5 Truly Austin Experiences to Make Time for During GC79

by Amanda Kotval, Staff Writer

Austin has long been known as the weirdest city in America: a haven for hippies, outlaws and outcasts of all stripes. I came to know Austin as a teenager—growing up not far from here in a town that seemed to stifle difference and dissent. Austin was the one place where those of us who didn't fit in anywhere else were welcomed for the weirdos we were, so we made the trek as often as we could.

It's been almost 20 years since I've been back, having left Texas for Virginia after college in 2001. The city has changed a lot since then, but the weirdness remains. While you're here, know that you're welcome for who you are, you weirdo.

Here are five truly weird, truly Austin experiences to make time for during #GC79:

**1. The Cathedral of Junk.** Located in a back yard on the south side of town, The Cathedral of Junk is about as weird as Austin gets. The artist, Vince Hanneman, began building the cathedral out of found and donated objects in 1988. He estimates that the Cathedral now contains over 60 tons of junk. It is truly a sight to see. By appointment only, call Vince at 512-299-7413 to schedule your tour. Donation suggested. 4422 Lareina Dr., Austin, Texas 78745.

**2. Sixth Street at Night.** Sixth Street is one of the main reasons Austin is known as "The Live Music Capital of the World." Just a couple of blocks from the Convention Center, Sixth Street is famous for live music, nightlife and people. Sixth Street between Congress and I-35 is known as "Dirty Sixth" and is the busiest section of Sixth Street. Wander west of Congress Avenue or east of I-35 for a different vibe. Bring your patience on weekends.



**3. The Congress Bridge Bats.** Every evening between March and November one of the world's largest urban colonies of Mexican free-tailed bats (almost 1.5 million!) emerges from under the South Con-

gress Bridge to swirl and swoop in an impressive aerial show for about 45 minutes. You'll want to find your spot at least 30 minutes before sundown and, unless you have a particular fondness for guano, a hat is highly recommended. Nightly, free. 305 South Congress Avenue, Austin TX 78704.

**4. Chicken S\*\*\* Bingo.** For a \$2 donation you get a ticket with a number on it. There's a chicken in a large, comfortable cage with a bingo card painted on the bottom. Chicken feed is scattered around the cage and the chicken walks around, eats and, eventually, does its business on a number, determining the winner of the \$114 cash prize. Four rounds every Sunday starting at 4 pm. \$2 donation per ticket. The Little Longhorn Saloon, 5434 Burnet Road, Austin, TX 78756.



Photo Credit: Crystal Hardin

**5. Barton Springs Pool.** One of the best ways to cool off in Austin in the summertime, Barton Springs Pool is a natural, spring-fed swimming pool that averages about 68 degrees year-round. Barton Springs is located on the south side of the 351-acre Zilker Park, which is also home to the Austin Nature and Science Center, Zilker Botanical Gardens, and an excellent disc golf course. Details here. Open daily from 5am to 10 pm, with an \$8 admission fee charged from 8 am to 9 pm. Closed Thursdays from 9 am to 7 pm for cleaning. 2201 Barton Springs Rd., Austin, TX 78704.



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