



I Am Because of You

The Border Crisis and the Episcopal Church

by The Rev. Victor Conrado, Associate for Ministries / Transition Minister, Diocese of Chicago



An expanded version of this article and a Spanish translation are available at www.centeraisle.blog.

Nothing is helping me more right now, as I watch human tragedies unfold on the U.S.-Mexican border and elsewhere, than to remember the sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the National Cathedral on Sunday, March 31, 1968, just four days before he was killed by an assassin's bullet.

Inviting his listeners to place their struggles in the context of God's ordering

of the universe, King suggested that whatever differences we may experience, our mutual vulnerability and humanity unite us more deeply:

"We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

Reading this, the word *Ubuntu* comes to mind. It is a Zulu word meaning, "I am because of you." Or, people are not people without other people. It's not a new concept, but it's one that is worth building on in these times.

As Episcopalians, let us ask ourselves this question: How, in modern times, is evil organized? And we must answer that it is in the systematic denial of the dignity of every human being, in the way we want to detach ourselves from our history, from our deep and God-given sense of *Ubuntu*.

Our country has drifted far from *Ubuntu*. We have created a system that refers to immigrants as human traffickers, rapists, and animals, so that we can take away what they have given us while feeling like we are doing the right thing. In the case of children being taken away from their parents, the feeling is that we are doing the right thing because we want to protect them from their less-than-human parents.

Episcopalians everywhere are responding with anger and disbelief. The Presiding Bishop has called this situation a major crisis of moral authority. These actions are not representative of who we are as a nation. Responding to calls from Episcopalians across the Church to act on behalf of families seeking asylum at the southern border of the United States, a team of concerned leaders at General Convention has planned a prayer service outside the T. Don Hutto Residential Detention Center in Taylor, Texas, at noon tomorrow, Sunday, July 8.

Still, there are places in our Church where this conversation has not taken place out of respect for different opinions or a fear of challenging the status quo. In times like this, it is important to remember to meet people where they are and to invite them to go deeper.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us that the business of the Church is to make the love and mercy of God real in this world. Love is a human right. It is not just for those who are, speak, behave, like me. It is God's gift for all and we, as Episcopalians, have received an urgent invitation to engage in the hard work of love.

But please remember that immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers do not need our pity. Pity creates power imbalances in relationships--the one doing the pitying keeps the power. Let us try to do something much harder: Try to imagine you are someone else, someplace else. Think of the children who were taken from their parents

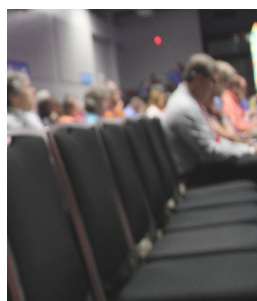
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Who Gets a Voice in the Room Where It Happens?

by Sarah Kye Price, Staff Writer

General Convention can be a sensory overload for a newcomer like me. My first few days, I've tried to immerse myself in listening at formal hearings and informal conversations around topics I feel are of importance. I've introduced myself to dozens, maybe hundreds, of my siblings in this Church (which makes me exceedingly grateful that we all wear nametags). One thing I tend to do when I have a moment to indulge my introversion is to reflect on what I have been hearing, looking for the common threads that are emerging from everything I've been taking in. In these opening days, I find myself reflecting a great deal on language and silence.



Language is what connects us and gives us voice. With it, we identify our commonalities and hear new expressions that bear witness to the diversity of our culture. At the powerful Liturgy of Listening, I was transformed by the language of those near me who were singing in American Sign Language, conveying something beyond the swirling emotions and words in my own mind – helping me understand the presence of God in the midst of pain. We sing and pray in our common worship using languages that are sometimes not familiar to us, reminding us that this Convention (and this Church) is not one voice, but many. When language is unfamiliar, it means we have to listen harder to hone in on unfamiliar dialects or to be sure we're getting an accurate translation so we can respond clearly. The language of committees, resolutions and amendments is no exception: Those who speak must also work

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if they were yours. How would you feel? Let us imagine something that is not our world, that makes us feel uncomfortable, that makes us feel vulnerable.

Refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers are made vulnerable by virtue of when and where they were born. That's it. The accident of birth. It is the accident of birth that makes you American or French or Australian. It's purely circumstantial. And I think there's something about that that we find threatening. So we can begin to believe that being born in America entitles us to more than someone born in El Salvador and relieves us of all Christian duties to our "foreign" brothers and sisters.

We must return to Scripture, tradition and reason in our conversations, and let them take us to places we never thought we could be. We must tap into our moral imaginations.

We will be transformed when we truly believe "I am because of you."

It will come when I take the time to talk and listen to that refugee, asylum seeking, immigrant family present in the pews every Sunday. It will come when we listen to our fellow parishioner who thinks that America needs to isolate to survive. It will come when we meet people where they are, not where I want them to be, and invite them to go deeper. It will come when we stop pretending that God is present only in people like us.

Jesus did not create an institution. Jesus created a movement. A moment comes to every institution when people recognize that we are *Ubuntu*. We are one family and we discover and experience this reality only by bringing to life the love and mercy of God—the most important human right today. Let us remember King's words to our Church and the world: "I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."

Who Gets a Voice, continued

diligently to hear each other. It's easy to speak our familiar language and sing our familiar song; but what are we missing if our own familiar voice is the only thing that we hear?

This leads me to silence. I have heard people ask, several times: What voices do we need to hear that aren't in the room? (And no, they aren't referring to people in line at Starbucks.) It's a serious question about who attends General Convention and who participates in Church governance. It raises questions that might be disconcerting: Who are elected as deputies and how does that vary by diocese? Who can afford to be here? How might our structure privilege some groups and voices over others? I think often about those I know in our parishes, as well as those who are served by our outreach ministries. I was relieved to hear someone say yesterday, "We can't hear the voices of the poor, because they are not here." That silence can be deafening. Those living with poverty and oppression in this world have so much to share with us about where Jesus is made known in their midst. But, if we cannot hear those voices because our privilege is speaking too loudly, then it might be time to turn down the volume and listen. When we listen to the silence, we hear those whose voices

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are farther out on the margins – whether that is culturally, socially or ideologically – and we begin to take those voices into consideration. A big-tent Church needs to know where we've staked the perimeters and move them so that we might expand to include who is welcome at the tables of our parishes, as well as in our governance.

These thoughts don't have easy answers, and they also don't mean that we aren't doing good work. I am awed by the richness of language as well as the beautiful spaces of silence that we keep, ensuring that we can be still and know the movement of the Holy Spirit, ensuring that She isn't drowned out by the details of daily business. I love seeing and engaging with the diversity of people who are here serving this Church that we love. But, I also urge us to listen: for the diversity of language, as well as for the silence. How can both help us learn more about the Church we are called to be?



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Purple Scarf Day

Monday, July 9 at 1:30 | Convention Center

by the Rev. Lucia Lloyd, Deputy, Diocese of Virginia

Currently, the House of Bishops is less than 9 percent women and more than 91 percent men – 24 women and 261 men. We are all used to seeing men as bishops, which can perpetuate the (often subconscious) tendency toward choosing what we are used to. Purple Scarf Day is a reminder that we can shift to a wider vision. The vision is for a Church in which women's leadership is recognized and valued as much as men's;



in which our House of Bishops benefits from the perspectives, insights and gifts of women, rather than a male-dominated hierarchy; in which seeing a variety of kinds of bishops helps all Episcopalians to recognize the image of God and the gifts for ministry in ourselves and in each other more fully.

Purple Scarf Day is Monday, July 9. Women and men are invited to show support for more women in the episcopate

by wearing a purple scarf. The Order of St. Helena will be distributing scarves from their booth in the Exhibit Hall. We will gather at 1:30 p.m. in the hallway outside of the worship space in the Convention Center for brief testimonies and prayers for women who have offered themselves to the election process.

Before her death in July 2017, Stefani Schatz, former canon to the ordinary in the Diocese of California, handed out purple scarves at the 2015 Convention as part of her work to address the gender disparity in the House of Bishops. I and others want to carry on her legacy. We hope you will join us.

Stay Centered

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