

During my former church's annual St. Francis Day "Blessing of the Pets" ceremony, I once crouched down to a little pet carrier, peered inside the metal gate...and realized I was about to bless my first iguana.



As rector of the church I now serve, people will bring to me, before or after the service, various beloved objects for a blessing, and so I've blessed – joyfully – everything from Anglican rosary beads, to Chinese herbal medicines, to a senior Olympics gold medal in men's volleyball. At back-to-school time, I'm looking forward to our church plant's annual "Blessing of the Backpacks" ceremony, during which we'll bless hundreds of Ticonderoga #2 pencils, Trapper-Keepers and glue sticks.

And people? On the one hand, I can (but would not) bless the civil union of a man and

woman who met each other in Vegas on Friday night and got legally married by an Elvis impersonator on Saturday; on the other hand, I can (and probably would) bless the living-together-but-not-legally married arrangement of an elderly widow and widower who are in love but don't want to be legally married for tax or inheritance reasons.

I don't understand the Episcopal Church's willingness to allow priests like me to throw around blessings like Mardi Gras beads and then turn around and protect blessings like they were nuclear launch codes.

Which is another way of saying our Church has no coherent, agreed-upon theology of blessing. Which make the resolutions promoting same-sex blessings – let alone gay marriage – seem presumptive.

As little as three years ago, the presumption was we were *not* going to bless same-sex unions, let alone redefine marriage. But sometime over the past three years, the presump-

tion shifted, and now it seems to be "it's a matter of time."

As the Very Rev. Kate Moorehead, a deputy from Kansas, said, "I completely understand why the gay community wants marriage, and I wish I could just give it to them, right now. But there is no theology or biblical understanding to support gay marriage, as opposed to a gay union [for which there is]. In the name of justice, people are asking us to move so quickly that we're not allowed the time to theologically reflect."

Just because a burden of proof has shifted does not mean a case no longer has to be made. General Convention and the Episcopal Church would do parish priests like me a great favor if they would stop presuming a theology of blessing and actually develop one.

Read more from John Ohmer in his column, "A Parish Priest's Perspective," on the *Center Aisle* blog at www.centeraisle.wordpress.com.

Restaurant Review: Finding Heaven in a Tortilla

By Emily Cherry

Homemade tortillas are reason enough to make the 15-minute trek to Old Towne Orange for dinner at Gabbi's Mexican Kitchen. You can take your pick from corn or flour, but the



Carnitas nortenas at Gabbi's Kitchen.

former is the real winner. Not too thin, these white corn tortillas feature a fantastic texture to match a flavour that is robust, homey, toasty and chock full of corn goodness. You can even watch these little food wrappers from heaven being made in the open kitchen in back.

Some might argue, though, that it's what's inside the tortilla that counts. And

Gabbi's is sure to please the taste buds of these critics too. The *carnitas nortenas* hold braised Berkshire pork, *pico de gallo* and an irresistible guacamole in their corny exterior, while the *puerco poc-chuc* takes the spiciness up a notch by mixing an adobo anchorite marinade with that same pork, then adding grilled onions, *habanero* salsa, fried plantains and some silky black beans to the mix.

By now, those of us Convention-goers who aren't native Southern Californians might be starting to adjust to the initial sticker shock of food costs, but Gabbi's is a pleasant break from this trend. Entrees—ranging from fish tacos to a steak special and everything in between—ring in at a reasonable \$13 to \$21. And the wallet-friendly prices are all the more surprising and welcome in light of Gabbi's stellar reputation. The intimate, almost Bohemian-style restaurant ranks 25 out of 30 on the Zagat scale.

Oh, and did I mention the margaritas? They're reason enough to make your way out of Convention Central for a quick retreat to Mexican flavors in the heart of Southern California.

www.gabbimex.com
141 S. Glassell, Orange
714-633-3038

Committee Open Hearings

Structure, 7:30 a.m., Hilton California Ballroom A, 10 min., A005, A184, A121, B014, A126, D033, A127, A139, D045.

World Mission, Hilton Huntington ABC, 7:30 a.m., 10 min., D020

Social and Urban Affairs, Hilton Capistrano AB, 7:30 a.m., 15 min., A142, A143, C050.

Ministry, Hilton California Ballroom B, 7:30 a.m., 30 min., A079, C080, D028.

Education, Marriott Orange County Ballroom 4, 7:30 a.m., 10 min., D044, D062, D064.

Church Pension Fund, Marriott Grand Ballroom Salon F, 7:45 a.m., 30 min., A138, D053, D061.

Program, Budget and Finance, Hilton California Ballroom AB, 7:30 p.m.



"The middle is not the midpoint on a line between two extremes. In the life of faith, the great bulk of people are at the center, and that center is faith in the Risen Christ."
—The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, Bishop of Virginia

Center Aisle is an opinion journal offered by the Diocese of Virginia as a gift to General Convention. We offer analysis and opinions from a variety of sources that reflect the transformational center of our Church.
www.centeraisle.net

Perspective

Turning Jesus on His Head

By the Rt. Rev. James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool

George Herbert, the 17th-century English poet, in his poem "The Church Militant," charts the spread of Christianity as it follows the sun rising in



the east and setting in the west. His take on church history may not quite accord with ours but, as always, he pens some memorable lines:

"Then shall Religion to America flee:
They have their times of Gospel, ev'n as we.
My God, thou dost prepare for them a way
By carrying first their gold from them away:
For gold and grace did never yet agree:
Religion always sides with poverty."

The New World was a source of great mineral wealth for the plundering European nations. Yet in our day there is a new stripping away of wealth with the present economic crisis and with it a fresh challenge to our faith.

In the Gospels, the penniless and the poor flock to Jesus; it is the rich and the powerful who find him such a disturbing presence and preacher.

As Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick and befriended lepers, he lived out Herbert's poetic truth that "Religion always sides with poverty."

In England the most "successful" churches with the largest numbers, greatest resources and biggest staff teams are in our middle-class and prosperous areas. In the inner city and the outer-estates, where the deprivation is greatest, the churches struggle with small congregations and some of the denominations have all but disappeared.

It is such a contrast to the Gospels where the poor crowded around Jesus and the powerful gave him a wide berth.

In our time it seems the opposite is true. It makes me wonder what we have done to Jesus. We seem to have turned him on his head! Of course, Jesus loves the rich too. But why do the poor and the outcast not crowd into our churches in the way that they once pursued Jesus?

One of the interesting features of the Gospel story is that there are no details of what Jesus looked like. The virtue of this lack of description is that, as the message of Jesus Christ followed the sun and spread throughout the world, no culture could claim him exclusively as their own because of his complexion or the colour of his eyes. Conversely the danger is that it enlarged the possibility of us creating Christ after our own image and in our likeness.

To be truly evangelical is to bring every prejudice and well-worn opinion about Jesus under the fresh scrutiny of the New Testament text; to be truly liberal is to liberate Jesus from all cultural and psychological projections; to be truly catholic is to allow Jesus to be the saviour of all humanity; to be Anglican is to be all three.

As we journey with Jesus we constantly find ourselves caught up in an adventure of being bounced about by an unpredictable wind. That seemingly is what he promised to all born of the Spirit (John 3:8). Being in a relationship with him means sitting loose to all else, especially all those things in which we put our trust, including our money, "for gold and grace did never yet agree". It is just possible that in the new climate of financial insecurity we will find new insights of faith that will lead us to discover Jesus in unlikely places and people.

Editorial

Shhh. . . We're Listening

Talking has never been a problem for Episcopalians. But maybe, just maybe, we're developing another talent at this General Convention: listening.

The House of Deputies is off to a good start with yesterday's hour of paired conversations on B033, the last-minute compromise resolution on human sexuality from 2006. But tough decisions lie ahead.

It's no wonder you can almost hear sighs of resignation at the prospect of yet another round of passionate debate about sexuality. After all, as the Archbishop of Canterbury noted yesterday, there has been a cost to these discussions.

Some feel impatient, some undervalued. Others are frustrated that this process threatens to once again all but monopolize the energy of a Church called to vital mission work on so many fronts.

It doesn't have to be this way. We need to remind ourselves that the debate over human sexuality is not a political process based on who can round up the most votes on a particular resolution. It is, as the Windsor Report noted way back in 2004, "a pilgrimage towards healing and reconciliation." And despite concerns over foot dragging and

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Find out more about last night's hearing on B033 on Page 3.

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Pick up a paper copy around the hotels and Convention Center every morning.

never-ending cycles of committees, that journey is far from over.

Look around the Anglican Communion, from Christ Church in Alexandria, Va., to primates' statements issued in Alexandria, Egypt, and you will see that a rich pilgrimage could still await us. The notion that we're spinning our wheels, that there is nothing left to learn, is understandable. But it's wrong.

So what's happening?

The primates of the Anglican Communion, along with the Anglican Consultative Council, have called for "urgent conversations" with the Episcopal Church and other provinces over the sexuality issues that have divided our church. The proposed Anglican Covenant, now in its third draft, will soon undergo further review before being referred to the provinces for discussion.

The Listening Process may have had a sputtering start across many parts of the Communion, but there are signs of acceleration. In the United States, a number of initiatives are

underway. The Diocese of Virginia this year endorsed a Listening Process on the issue of whether parishes should be allowed to bless same-gender unions. So there's still much to discuss. That's why this General Convention must take no action that would negate Resolution B033. That crucial compromise has been recognized by the Anglican Communion's Windsor Continuation Group as a clear and honest sign that the Episcopal Church has heeded the pleas of others in the Communion to desist from unilateral actions on topics related to human sexuality.



A lifting at this time of the moratoria on the consecration of gay bishops and same-gender blessings would snuff out a Communion conversation that could enrich our Church.

It's wrong to assume that all minds are made up on these issues and that the time for compromise is past. The journey continues.



Dollars, Missions & Rules

The preliminaries are over; the real work has begun. We offer our take on an array of committee actions from yesterday.

It's Time

In 1991, the Church committed itself to paying lay employee pensions. Since then, 70 percent of congregations have done so, but that still leaves many lay employees without support.

A138, in the Committee on the Church Pension Fund, would make lay pensions mandatory for all employees working more than 1,000 hours per year in any domestic diocese, parish, mission or other ecclesiastical organization subject to the authority of the Church. CPF would oversee both compliance and the pensions to ensure that all who should be covered are.

Providing these pensions translates to \$20.80 per pledging unit in congregations – less than the cost of a yearly subscription to most magazines. With these pensions, laity working for the Church could be assured of support in retirement. Without this mandatory rule, too many employees are left in the cold.

Small parishes concerned about adding another burden to already tight budgets need not worry. Few of them have full-time lay employees, so this legislation doesn't affect them.

For all other parishes and church institutions, it's time to live into the commitment the Church made in 1991.

Support Our Missionaries

The World Mission Committee passed an amended A128 to provide funding for the Church's missionaries serving overseas that includes an approximate \$1 million increase in the budget.

Before A128 (amended) goes to Program Budget & Finance for approval, it needs both Houses' approval.

The increase isn't for new missionaries; it will cover increased health care and lay pension costs for the existing 65 or so personnel in the field. Without this increase, the Church would have to end some missionary assignments.

To uphold our commitment to mission and partnership with the Anglican Communion, both Houses as well as PB&F need to improve this increase.

Title IV Looking Good

The proposed Title IV revision (A185) making its way through Canons is worthy of support but there are still some concerns that need addressing.

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Virginia Voices

Visions of John Wayne in the Age of Ubuntu

By the Rev. Jim Papile

Opinions and positions from the deputation of the Diocese of Virginia

Ubuntu. The word is everywhere this week at General Convention.

Ubuntu. It has a rich, melodic sound, coming from down in the diaphragm. Try saying it with a squeaky voice; you can't, can you?

I first became familiar with the term in my studies of the theology of Desmond Tutu. What had given this diminutive yet leonine Anglican clergyman the courage to stand up to the racist ways of an entire nation? What had kept him going through the years of bloodshed and trauma?

As I learned more about who Tutu was, and what gave him his vision, I realized it was *Ubuntu*. It is not something the archbishop made up; rather, it comes from the deepest part of his tradition. It is, for Tutu and for many cultures in sub-equatorial Africa, a worldview, an overarching, organizing principle. Its essence is that there is no such thing as an indi-

vidual without placing that person with the context of the community: "There is no I without Us."

The Rev. Frank Wade, chaplain to the House of Deputies, talked this week about how he had been deep in contemplation about this foreign yet compelling idea of *Ubuntu* during a long flight from Washington several months ago. "I thought I had a handle on it," he said. Then, upon landing here, he looked up at the airport sign and read, "John Wayne Airport."

Suddenly it hit him. His was a time and a culture that had long valued just the opposite of *Ubuntu*. John Wayne's movie characters had been formed on just about as un-*Ubuntu* as one can get.

Clearly, for us this notion of *Ubuntu* is going to take some work. We, as a culture, are not used to thinking about the Us and not

the I. Actually, we seem to be all about the I. Isn't that exactly why we're in the economic mess we're in?

Yet, this way of relating may mean something new and different for the working of the General Convention, for the Episcopal Church and for all of us. For those working here in Anaheim, there is the possibility that we can work for some kind of consensus in doing the business of the Church. Maybe we can begin to lay down the deep polarizations and have meaningful conversations about what brings us together.

Maybe we can begin to realize and truly understand that when one person is diminished, one person denied his or her God-given privileges and rights, then we are all diminished. If anyone is left out, then we are all left out.



OffCenter



Cartoon: Mike Kerr

Center Aisle



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This revision of the disciplinary canons is a great improvement over the proposal that came forward in 2006. It has a theological basis that was lacking previously, and focuses on raising aspirations for all to meet, asking clergy to live into their vows, rather than focusing so much on punitive measures.

The questions that need addressing: the weight of evidence, which right now is too low and threatens clergy; clergy and their personal relationships; and issues of self-reporting that could put clergy in legal binds.

Overall, with some amendments, this proposed revision deserves the consideration and support of Convention.

Show Me the Money!

The Program, Budget and Finance Committee heard dozens of requests last night for financial support that would go far beyond the proposed budget and would challenge what the committee co-chair, Bishop Andrew Smith, called the "severely reduced income" he foresees in the coming triennium.

The requests focused predominantly on domestic funding, with aid to native peoples and Latino Americans receiving strong attention. Testimony showed strong support for restoring the Millennium Development Goals line item, but few requests focused on interna-

tional mission beyond the MDGs.

All of the requests for additional funding were made faithfully, but leave the Church in the same financial bind with which General Convention began: Everyone wants money to spend, but not enough is coming in to fund those needs and desires. Funding will depend on a theology of generosity and an awareness of our abundance, even in the recession.

In addition, living into our Ubuntu theme and Anglican Communion relationships will require a greater focus on international mission beyond the MDG line item.

—Articles by the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley and Matthew Lukens



A Markedly Different Tone

In a hearing that started out crowded and ended up with only a few dozen present, the World Mission Committee heard tremendous support to "move beyond" B033, the 2006 resolution that asked restraint on consecrating gay and lesbian bishops.

The committee heard testimony on 13 resolutions, all having to do with either rescinding or overturning B033, or focusing on canonical questions.

Of the 51 people who spoke during the hearing, 41 asked that General Convention move forward in some fashion. Some people focused on canons. Others made heartfelt pleas for the full inclusion of all people in the full life of the Church.

Ten speakers who opposed changing B033 asked that nothing be done that would further strain Communion relationships.

Last night's hearing was radically different from similar hearings in 2003 and 2006, which were marked by rancor, division and open antagonism.

Deputy Ian Douglas of Massachusetts, a member of the committee, said afterwards that the committee "has not yet begun to even imagine what a (final) resolution would look like. ... Really, I want to trust the process."

—Thomas Eaves and the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley