

A Parish Priest's Perspective: Having a Tevye Moment

By the Rev. John Ohmer

Today a friend asked, "So, John, what do you think about all this – the blessing of same-sex unions and gay bishops?" In answering him, I felt like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Recall the argument between the young, radical Perchik and the elderly villager, with the villager saying, "Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head."

Tevye says, "You're right."

Perchik counters, "Nonsense. You can't close your eyes to what's happening in the world."

Tevye says, "He is right."

Another villager challenges Tevye, saying, "He's right and *he's* right? They can't both be right."

And Tevye says, "You know, you are also right."

This cuts two ways: First, tempting as it is, conservatives, we can't close our eyes to what is happening in the outside world. In all likelihood, there have always been gay bishops; Gene Robinson is open about it. Shall we really return to an insistence that only closeted gays or those with the rare gift of celibacy be elected bishop?

Nor can we close our eyes to the reality that a number of states have legalized gay marriage. In those states, how are clergy to respond, pastorally, to parishioners – dedicated, legally married, confirmed communicants in good standing – who come to them seeking the church's blessing on their marriage? So liberals are right on this issue!

On the other hand, tempting as it is, liberals, we can't close our eyes to what is happening in the outside world. Actions we've taken at

this and the past couple of General Conventions fly in the face of a centuries-old, Judeo-Christian teaching based on Scripture, tradition and reason – namely that sexual expression is to be reserved to a lifelong monogamous relationship between a man and a woman within the bounds of marriage.

And it is the height of arrogant colonialism, our own modern version of the "Doctrine of Discovery," to assume our Christian brothers and sisters around the nation who "still" cling to this teaching need to just get over it. So conservatives are right on this issue!

But, you say, they can't both be right.

You know, you're also right.

Oy, vey.

Budget Passes; First Job Lost

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley

After long and heartfelt debate, Deputies passed the coming triennium's extremely tight budget, the result of a \$23 million shortfall. Even before debate ended, reports surfaced that the first employee of the Episcopal Church was laid off yesterday.

Multiple attempts to restore funding, particularly for communications and expenses for the Office of the President of the House, failed.

The passage means that up to 37 Episcopal Church employees – out of 180 – will lose their jobs. Programs and offices will be consolidated as well, and much of the work of evangelism and mission is being returned to diocesan levels.

Something not discussed during debate: The shortfall equals \$10.45 per Episcopalian per year, a fact that might be the most impor-

tant one we take home.

Hours later, the Rev. Michael Barlowe, deputy, California, invited every deputation to pledge \$1,000 to raise \$51,000 to restore the administration support for the Office of the President. By mid-afternoon, 11 deputations had pledged.

Church is in "a Really Healthy Place"

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley

At the beginning of General Convention, the Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers, deputy from Chicago, heard a lot of concern about deputies and bishops "being in different places."

Now, as Convention ends, Ms. Myers, the new Hodges-Haynes Professor of Liturgics at Church Divinity School of the Pacific and a founder of the Chicago Consultation, thinks the Church is in "a really healthy place."

Especially in the debates over Resolution D025, "people were able to express their views ... with an incredible level of candor and respect and generosity," she said. "It was one small piece of a much larger work."

Ms. Meyers saw how the bishops worked "to build consensus ... and then communicated to the deputies a real sense of collegiality."

The international visitors made a large difference as well, she said. "For us to hear

from five different countries saying that 'we are with you and we love you and we need you to do the work that you are doing' is huge. To have visitors come and say we care about you and value our relationships has been so important."

Our job now, she said, is to "deepen relationships, and that deepening of relationships needs to happen in many, many ways."

"I hope that the work we've done here inspires even more congregations and dioceses to engage in opportunities."

OffCenter

The money
you could be giving
by switching
to tithing



Cartoon: Mike Kerr

July 17, 2009

Issue 9

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



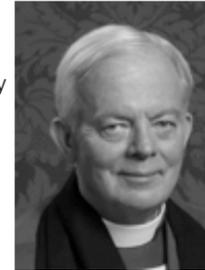
"The middle is not the midpoint on a line between two extremes. In the life of faith, the great bulk of people are at the center, and that center is faith in the Risen Christ."
—The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, Bishop of Virginia

Perspective

Convention: An Emphasis on the Local

By the Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, Bishop of Virginia

The most lasting impact of the 76th General Convention is likely to be an increase of initiative and energy in local congregations and dioceses. The sharp budget cuts in the three-year budget



of the General Church will have a painful impact on some faithful staff members, but will shift the focus for mission to the local church, rather than the local church waiting for initiatives from the General Church. The emphasis on local ministry is a proper expression of the principle of subsidiarity, whereby mission should occur at the level closest to the people who are called to engage in that mission.

Local mission is also enhanced by resolutions which the secular press has incorrectly interpreted as necessarily damaging our worldwide relationship and as following the agenda of a gay and lesbian lobby. Instead, what the convention did is to reaffirm that the ordination process is under the control of local bishops and dioceses, while stressing that access to that process is open to all baptized persons.

The Convention also invited local

churches and dioceses (as well as churches elsewhere in the communion) to collect liturgical and theological resources regarding same-gender blessings. Recognizing the unique pastoral needs of those dioceses in jurisdictions where same-gender marriage or civil partnerships are legal, the Convention affirmed that a generous pastoral response is needed.

The emphasis on the local did not deter the Convention from adopting both a denominational health plan for the whole church and a mandatory lay employee pension plan, both of which, in the long run, will strengthen the local church.

This is my last Perspective article as publisher of *Center Aisle*, since I am resigning as bishop of Virginia effective Oct. 1, 2009. I am grateful to Ed Jones, Emily Cherry, John Ohmer and Lauren Stanley, the key staff members of *Center Aisle*, for their engaging and faithful work; to my colleagues in the House, Bishop Shannon Johnston and Bishop David Jones; and to the staff and deputation of the Diocese of Virginia for their wise counsel and support of this work. I hope *Center Aisle* has made your convention experience richer and reinforced your commitment and sense of hope in this wonderful church to which God has called us.

Breaking Down Center Aisle Central

Center Aisle's red wagon, which also served as our distribution center, will go to St. Timothy's Day School in Compton, Calif.

Center Aisle's all-in-one printer will go to the front office at the Cathedral Center of the Diocese of Los Angeles.

Voices from Convention

Hope there aren't earthquakes while we're all in Anaheim – though we might bring some. (7/3/09)

Real bread makes Jesus food we can really chew – I think that's the plan. (7/16/09)

—Mary W. Cox, Director of Communications, Diocese of Southeast Florida
Read Mary's other haikus from *General Convention online* at www.centeraisle.net.

Editorial

Glorious Messiness

Tidiness is overrated. We head home a messy Church. Thanks be to God.

We are, by our own proclamation, "not of one mind" on matters that have caused division in the Communion

We are in search of a communications strategy appropriate for the changing media landscape.

We are developing resources for same-sex blessings, without committing ourselves to "action."

We will soon debate an Anglican covenant that could help clarify the bonds of Communion.

We are searching for creative ways to do great things with reduced resources, while living up to our mission responsibilities.

Put it all together and you have a Church that doesn't have all the answers—and never will. It is a Church on a spiritual journey that never ends.

But be prepared: There are neat-freaks who don't appreciate messiness. There will be cries of Armageddon in the wake of Convention's vote for an ordination process open to all.

Those doomsday predictions have been heard before. And it's true that the passage of Resolution D025, whose nuances have been lost in much of the media coverage, could create problems in the Communion.

But this is no time to despair. The bonds between our Church and Canterbury are still strong. It's hard to imagine a Communion that doesn't include the National Cathedral in

EDITORIAL continued on Page 2

The Last Issue

Today, *Center Aisle* ends its fourth circulation cycle at General Convention. But we'll still have news and opinions coming out of Anaheim today. Visit www.centeraisle.net for updates and analysis.

Letters to the Editor

A Response

I want to respond to Jim Hammond's comment that I had not theologically reflected on the issue of the blessing of gay unions. Although I have been reflecting on this issue for over a decade, I believe that the following items have not been reflected on theologically.

1. What is the difference between a blessed union and a marriage? Is there a distinction?
2. What are the implications of calling a bisexual person to ordination? Will they not be urged to live in either celibacy or monogamy? And if so, why is it considered essential for them to identify whom they are attracted to?
3. Transgendered persons have recently begun to speak out, but there has been little to no discussion about what it means to change genders and how we should respond pastorally to trans people.

I know there are passionate feelings on these issues, but careful theological reflection is clearly needed.

The Very Rev. Kate Moorehead
Diocese of Kansas

Thanks for the Effort

I want to thank all of you for your efforts over the days of this Convention. I have, as I always do, very much enjoyed reading reflections by John Ohmer, opinions from a wide variety of people, interesting stories by Lauren Stanley - so much good information.

It made me feel as though I was there with all of you. I also want to thank Mike Kerr for sharing his wonderful sense of humor in the cartoons each day. How lucky we are that our diocesan treasurer has the ability to laugh and make us all join him.

Godspeed on your journeys home.

Helen Spence
The Diocese of Virginia

Bummer Over Bono

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley

Who needs Space Mountain? Yesterday, I took an exciting ride of my own. I met Bono! I got photos! No, I met an imposter! No, a tribute singer! I think. I didn't want to believe. Alas, it was true. Oh, my excitement went up! Oh, my excitement went down! This is why I don't do entertainment news. I'm bummed.

At right, Center Aisle staff writer Lauren Stanley thinks this tribute singer is the real thing. "Bono" was in town for yesterday's U2charist.



Center Aisle



Bishop Lee



Ed Jones



Emily Cherry



John Ohmer



Lauren Stanley

Center Aisle: Published by the Diocese of Virginia; The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, Bishop Editor; Ed Jones; **Managing Editor:** Emily Cherry; **Lead Writers:** The Rev. John Ohmer; The Rev. Lauren R. Stanley; **Staff Assistance/Contributors:** Henry Burt; Mike Kerr; Matt Farr; Tyler Fox; Matthew Lukens **Volunteers:** Charles Cowherd, Liz Cunningham, Thomas Eaves, Kate Hahn, Steve Van Voorhees

The Making of a Prayer

By Liz Cunningham

The Rev. Frank Wade, a senior deputy and chaplain for the House of Deputies, is called on to lead the House in prayer at the opening and closing of each legislative session. I was under the impression that all of his prayers were impromptu, and of his own creation. I soon figured out this is not the case.

His opening prayers are prepared before the House is called into session, and he uses a variety of sources for his inspiration. Deputy Jennifer Phillips, Rhode Island, is an "excellent writer," Wade said, and has made her prayers available to him. He also uses the books *Women's Uncommon Prayers* and *Celtic Night Prayer*.

Mr. Wade prepares for the closing prayer throughout the session. He looks for patterns and takes note of major concerns. The result is a closing prayer that is specific to the events that have immediately taken place. His prayers create an intimate sense of communion, calling us back to God despite whatever has happened in Deputies. His prayers touch the heart, voicing our concerns, thanksgivings and sentiments.

At the end of Convention, the secretary of Deputies, the Rev. Dr. Gregory S. Straub, will post Mr. Wade's prayers and meditations online at www.episcopalchurch.org/gc2009.

C056 to Start the Day

Deputies start their last day of General Convention taking up the substituted C056 on same-gender blessings. The House of Bishops rewrote and passed C056 Wednesday, urging the development of theological and liturgical resources for consideration in three years. The resolution deserves prayerful consideration.

EDITORIAL continued from Page 1

Washington, the mission initiatives on Native American reservations of the Dakotas, and the rustic parishes of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

Discussions will continue. Compromises will be struck. Bonds of affection will be strengthened. The focus on the foundational beliefs that unite us will return.

The Church, in all its glorious messiness, will move forward.

Center Aisle 2009

The Virginia staff and volunteers who produce and distribute *Center Aisle*



(Left, clockwise from top left) The Rev. Lauren R. Stanley, staff writer; Emily Cherry, managing editor; the Rev. John Ohmer, staff writer; Ed Jones, editor. (Above, left to right) Thomas Eaves, Kate Hahn, Liz Cunningham, Charles Cowherd, volunteers.

A Profound Communion

By Liz Cunningham and Thomas Eaves

Center Aisle volunteers Liz Cunningham and Thomas Eaves interviewed five members of the Official Youth Presence yesterday. The deputies spoke on their own behalf, and not as a voice of the Official Youth Presence or their own dioceses.

The deputies participating were Grace Aheron, Southwestern Virginia; Zach Brown, Upper South Carolina; Carolyn Chou, Pennsylvania; Lucky Middaugh, Western Michigan; and Michael Sadrž, Southeast Florida.

Youths in our Church may be perceived as a monolithic "whole," but there is a much deeper diversity than most realize. As General Convention comes to a close, the Church faces difficult questions. The answers will present new challenges, and the young members of the Church want to be part of the solution.

"We've tried to show some unity within our group," Carolyn Chou said. "We've taken it up on ourselves [to show] that unity is possible."

Grace Aheron agreed: "We are equal members of Christ's body."

There is agreement about the profoundness of being in full communion. Every member with whom we spoke was concerned about reaching beyond boundaries.

Said Zach Brown, "I've seen churches in my diocese literally walk out.... To know that feeling, to have that feeling resonate inside me, is really sad and it is really heartbreaking."

Lucky Middaugh said that before he came to General Convention, he was thinking about those same fears, but added, "Personally, I feel



Members of the Official Youth Presence gather at General Convention. Photo: Episcopal News Service

like we had to push on past it, or it was just going to come back up in the future. ... There was nothing we could do about it; it would just keep coming back until it passed."

Asked how they think the Church needs to digest the consequences of its actions, Michael Sadrž said that parish leaders "need to figure out what they can tell their parishioners. ... They need to make sure they know that that they are still heard and that they still belong there and want to be there."

Some of the youths are concerned for Church members who already have left. It's not OK, they agreed, that we lose any members over this issue.

"There are so many more pressing matters that are really going to affect the world," Ms. Aheron said.

Added Mr. Middaugh: "I guess we have to remind people that we're here to worship God, not here to fight about the way people run their lives. We are here to worship God."

Helping Faithful Cubans

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley

"When does justice outweigh the law?" That's what the Rt. Rev. Leo Frade, Southeast Florida, wants to know when it comes to restoring pensions for retired Cuban Episcopal clergy.

Resolution B024 calls for a benevolent fund so that Cuban clergy can receive a small annuity when they retire "to pay for basic necessities ... for people loyal to Christ and our Church for years and years."

In 1967, the Episcopal Church declared the Cuban Church autonomous. "After 1968," Bishop Frade said, "the generation serving the Church worked under very difficult circumstances. ... These priests were loyal to Christ under communism. Now they are turning 72 and have no pension."

Because of the embargo against Cuba and the Patriot Act, financial transfers to Cuba fall under special regulations. "We can legally transfer small amounts," the bishop said, adding that the Church will work within the sanctions.

The Cuban Church is "faithful and ... growing," Bishop Frade said. "There's a revival taking place in Cuba. ... The [communist] giants have collapsed, but Christ is strong."

