

A Parish Priest's Perspective: Antidote for Drinking the Kool-Aid

By the Rev. John Ohmer

Coffee and wine aren't the only things Episcopalians are gulping down out here this General Convention: We're drinking the kool-aid, as well.

The *Urban Dictionary* defines "drinking the kool-aid" as, "To completely buy into an idea or system, whether good or bad, as in 'Coach Belichick got his players to drink the kool-aid.'"

There are a couple of flavors of kool-aid – several ideas or systems, good or bad, that we've completely bought into – that I'd like to name, along with their antidotes.

Civility Cherry

It seems that the greatest goal of a legislative hearing or floor debate is that it "was civil." "No one raised his or her voice," we say, "everyone was so *civil*." And so we gulp down Civility Cherry by the gallon.

But when did politeness become our highest value? And where do we get the idea that being nice to each other is more important

than fighting – fighting for what we believe in?

The antidote to this flavor of kool-aid is to recall that Jesus, in whose name we are gathered, not only challenged but deliberately *provoked* his opponents. I'm not calling for whip-of-cord, table-overturning violence, but c'mon, if something of importance is at stake, can't we act a little more like Jesus and little less like Mr. Rogers?

The-State-of-the-Church-Is-Just-Fine-Strawberry

The State of the Church Report isn't just the elephant in the living room of this General Convention; it is an entire Disney Safari Adventure – right under our noses, but rarely visited. The report details the rapid decline in Episcopal Church membership. It frankly states that "the structure of our organization above the level of diocese is not consonant with the church's mission," and "is not properly configured to serve the needs of its most important constitu-

ent[s]: dioceses and individual congregations."

In other words, we're hemorrhaging members and the national Church is more concerned about my just having referred to it as the "national"

Church than the fact that it is neither relevant nor helpful to my (thriving) church back home.

Antidote to this flavor? Follow the call from the Rev. David Knight, alternate deputy from Mississippi, for a Special Order to honestly discuss the State of the Church Report.

Tomorrow: **Legislative Lime** and **Budgetary Berry**.



Center Aisle

"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

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Perspective

Speaking the Truth

By the Katherine Tyler Scott

Katherine Tyler Scott, a lay deputy from the Diocese of Indianapolis and a Church Pension Fund Trustee, wrote the following poem exclusively for Center Aisle.



There is a lot of air in and between our words softening the blow of the truth of what we feel, think, see Just whom are we protecting? Ourselves? Others? and from what?

What is the damage we fear? Could it be worse than what is wrought by words that keep us from freely knowing, from being real, from speaking our truth?

Words float midair hovering, but finding no place to land, no ground on which to affix meaning. Words. Words. More Words. They spill out and fill the air but there is an emptiness to them that comes when there is avoidance of true connection, where both the giver and receiver reside in a hollow place and the weight of the word is lost

To fill the vacuum created more words are spoken and the cycle continues until and unless someone has the courage to step out and speak their truth unadorned and direct expressed in love and genuine respect

No vapid or vacuous wrapping of détente but true seeking of relationship and resolution, of learning and growth Truth at a slant misses the mark

deceptive in its nicety destructive in its illusion of care hidden behind masks of maturity and personas of professionalism

Real conversation that leads to real conversion is needed in unpredictable, unsettling times

Sustainable change and true transformation won't fit neatly in seven sequential steps. Their origins reside in both the spoken word and in the silence and solitude of prayer, in a faith that makes us all whole.

We need hospitable space to be real, a culture of inclusion and patience and time in which we allow God to help us craft our words and ultimately our actions in a manner that gives them meaning, substance and power.

We need courage, hope and the connection of community to go deep within, where all of our words and we can be transformed where the possibility of being changed is real and terrifying and exciting deep within, where we can be reminded of and reconnected to the life giving breath of our Creator

deep within, where the air we have breathed has touched the Word the world needs most to hear,

and when we exhale we will give birth to a new vocabulary a new way of being, an inspired way of speaking, a revolutionary way of coming together of being a community of faith engaged in the ministry of governance always seeking God's wisdom in finding a fuller truth which we can speak to others with passion, vision, clarity and conviction in this time.

Editorial

Bishops Have Their Say

Perhaps it's appropriate that "mystery" was a key word in yesterday's debate by Bishops over Resolution D025. When it comes to matters of human sexuality and our Church's role in the Anglican Communion, clarity is as scarce as an Episcopalian with no opinions.

The Bishops' 2-to-1 approval of the amended resolution will in all likelihood lead to quick concurrence by Deputies, who supported their version by a similar margin. A Bishops' amendment referring to the "mystery" of God's call to ordination offers context, but does not substantially change import.

D025 may be the best this Convention can do in reaching consensus on the ordination of gays and lesbians. Indeed, in a wonderfully Anglican touch, part of the resolution's "consensus" is to acknowledge that our Church "is not of one mind" about these matters.

It's important to note that D025 does not prevent any diocese from continuing to exercise "restraint" in the consecration of gay bishops, as called for by B033 from the last Convention.

But let's be clear: If this resolution passes, there may well be a high price to pay in terms of our Church's role in the Anglican Communion. Many may interpret this proposal as a unilateral lifting of the moratorium on gay bishops—a restraint repeatedly requested by the Communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury said as much after the Deputies passed D025 on Sunday.

The key question is whether those

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OffCenter

Where's the Bishop?

E V Y R U B A E S I A M E D S
T I A E H T I M S D S Y R E S
I O D E L O N U R B F D N D S
H T R O W S G N I L L O H U F
W A H H V S R A Q M J U R W R
G B M H I Q P A N E E D P A A
N O T S N H O J P D N L S H D
V Q K G D D P C M A E M Y S E
U O N O O M T J R V A R G R Z
Y W A Y N I C K H I T T S I Y
A C Z Z T D H F L Z A A G O R
R D H T I R E L L O H S M D N
G G U L E E I Y E K T W L N R
G O H T I W K C E B Z D Q J R
L I R O H C S Y P M U Y A E Z

Find the following bishops' names in the grid above. Search any which way to spell the names.

ANDERSON	ANDRUS
BECKWITH	BRUNO
ELY	FRADE
GRAY	HOLLERITH
HOLLINGSWORTH	JOHNSTON
JONES	LEE
LOUTTIT	PARSLEY
SHAW	SISK
SMITH	WAYNICK
WHITE	WILLIAMS

Bonus: Find the hidden word or phrase. First one to e-mail centeraisle@thediocese.net with the correct answer will receive a Diocese of Virginia scarf in the mail.

Credit: Mike Kerr

Title IV in Good Shape

The ball is now in the House of Bishops' court for Title IV, the rewrite of the disciplinary canons. The amended version addressed all the previous concerns about evidence and relationships. Now Bishops have a chance to pass this well-written legislation and change the canons from punitive to aspirational. —L. Stanley

Strike the 'The'

When does the word "the" cause a problem? When "the" is put in front of "Episcopal Churches in Europe."

 The Convocation of American Episcopal Churches changed its name, and brought that change to General Convention. The Convocation did not include "the" in its convention resolution, but somewhere in the resolution's filing, "the" was added, as were the problems.

There are other Episcopal churches in Europe: the Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain and the Scottish Episcopal Church. This little word is so important that the Primus of Scotland, the Most Rev. David Chillingworth, sent a quick message across the pond: "Please change the name of the churches in Europe. Don't forget, the gift of the episcopate came from Scotland." World Mission graciously responded by removing "the" from the title. —L. Stanley

Stop and Pray

While we gather here dealing with what seem like life-and-death issues, death is striking down our brothers and sisters overseas. On Sunday, several churches were attacked in Iraq.

Three Christians and one Muslim died in an attack in Baghdad; 18 other people were injured. As we continue our work in Anaheim, let us stop to remember and pray for those who are suffering and dying for their faith, and for those who are protecting our country. —L. Stanley



Committee Open Hearings

Rules of Order, 8:30 a.m., D093
Structure, 7:30 a.m., 10 min., Hilton California Ballroom, D066
Social/Urban Affairs, 7:30 a.m., 15 min., Hilton Capistrano, B025, D032, C083, D036, D018, D063
Prayer Book, Liturgy, and Church Music, 7:30 a.m., 30 min., Hilton Avila, A094, A099, A100, B004, C004, C009, C017, C019, C025, C028, C029, C031, C041, C042, C056, C076, C077, C078, D043, D056
Church Pension Fund, 7:30 a.m., 15 min., Marriott Orange Co. Ballroom 3, B024, D061
Stewardship and Development, 7:30 a.m., 15 min., Marriott Orange Co. Ballroom 2, D055
Communications, 7:30 a.m., 1 min., Hilton Malibu, D058

Letters to the Editor

Mindful Bishops

I would like to thank the Rev. John Ohmer for his incisive comment in yesterday's article, "A Parish Priest's Perspective: Who has the Pulse, Bishops or Deputies?" I think we now have a similar phenomenon in our secular politics. Years of gerrymandering, and what Bill Bishop calls the "Big Sort," have produced a House of Representatives that seems to consist of the extremes on left and right, who can play to the extremes in their districts, while senators are accountable to the whole state that elects them.

I have served Bishop Lee, Bishop Johnston and Bishop Jones. This week, I pray especially for them, and for Bishop Henry Parsley and Bishop Kee Sloan, whom I now serve. May all the bishops be kept mindful of all the people of their dioceses.

—The Rev. David Kendrick, Diocese of Alabama

Honoring Similarities

I have just read the Rev. Sue Eaves' perspective article commenting on Ray Suarez' sermon, and it brought me to a new place. I have often thought the whole idea of a "majority minority" to be a laughable oxymoron, even though I understand the thinking behind it. Clearly, though, if what has been the majority is outnumbered, they simply aren't the majority anymore.

It suddenly occurred to me to wonder if the day will come when we won't even think in those terms, when we won't count and divide and quantify people according to their skin color or ethnic origin or religious belief or non-belief. A day when we will be able to acknowledge and honor our similarities and differences without getting out the calculator.

When that day comes, then we will know indeed that the Kingdom has come on Earth!

—The Rev. Grace Cangialosi, Diocese of Virginia

Scenes from Convention



Top: Exhibition Hall
Right: Diocese of Virginia work room
Bottom: Thomas Eaves, volunteer, distributes *Center Aisle*

General Convention or In-and-Out Burger: You Decide

By Emily Cherry

Upon exploring the Anaheim area on our first full day at General Convention, my boss and I were excited to find a world-famous In-and-Out Burger, the West Coast fast food chain well known for its tasty hamburgers, fries and a shake.

The overall verdict was a mixed one. So I got to thinking: My first In-and-Out Burger experience wasn't all that dissimilar from this, my first General Convention experience.

1. Service with a Smile: At In-and-Out's drive-through, instead of giving our order to a voice in a box, we delivered our meal request to a smiling young teen who stood in the drive-through lane in a snappy uniform, ready to be of service. I've had a similar experience with the bevy of General Convention volunteers in their sunny aprons, cheerful and ready to lend a hand.



2. A Blue Book Like a French Fry: The fries at this fast food mecca were something of a disappointment: dry, heavy and dense. Like the lead-like fries, the Blue Book is hard to finish in one sitting. And parts of it are certainly dense. And, without a doubt, the 811-page tome qualifies as heavy.

3. A Bit of a Mess: When you go through the drive-through at In-and-Out, they give you a "lap mat" to help with the inevitable mess

made by your fast food feast. You may not get a lap mat at General Convention, but the overload of events could most certainly be described as messy.

4. The Sizing is . . . Off: My first bite of In-and-Out Burger was all bun, no burger. Alas, the burger was too small for the bun. Likewise, the sizing and duration of General Convention don't compute for this first-timer. The second largest governing body in the world for a membership of 2.2 million? Devoting 10 days to legislative meetings? Numbers-wise, things don't add up.

5. Keeping Things Flavorful: My burger came with loads of fresh onion and a tangy Thousand-Island-style sauce to up the flavor factor. General Convention organizers look to add flavor to the 10 days of events with cultural performances, movie screenings and more.

Of course, the similarities aren't endless. The menu at In-and-Out is small (burgers, fries, shakes, sodas), while the menu for General Convention is immense (hearings, dinners, presentations, legislative sessions). And while the In-and-Out Burger can certainly feed your stomach, General Convention has been known to feed your soul.

Latino Ministry: A Bold, Expensive, Overdue Plan

By the Rt. Rev. David C. Jones, Bishop Suffragan, The Diocese of Virginia

We had celebrated the Holy Eucharist for the first time in a former Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va. It had been purchased that day to be *La Iglesia de Santa Maria* Episcopal Church. A man stood by my side on the front stoop of the church as I was leaving the church building. Wistfully, he said to me, "I live across the street. I learned to speak English in this church, but this is the first time that I have been invited to worship." He had tears in his eyes as he spoke.

Earlier that evening, as I wandered through the newly acquired church, I saw the remnants of a congregation that had slowly declined and gone out of business. It was heartbreaking to see what had once been, but what had been allowed to die a slow, painful death. I asked myself, "Why did this have to happen? How could this congregation have

missed the demographic changes in its neighborhood? Why wasn't that man ever invited to church?"

A serious attempt to answer that question has been made in the preparation of *The Strategic Vision for Reaching Latinos/Hispanics*, which has been approved by both Houses of this Convention. It offers congregations in changing neighborhoods a way to respond to God's call and prosper in a changing demographic environment.

The bold plan envisions growing 100 small congregations in areas with increasing Latino/Hispanic presence by 30 percent in three years by helping them reach out to their own neighborhoods. It addresses the training of leaders and the use of demographic resources. The plan is intentional, workable and sound.

Committee 12 (Evangelism) was blessed to hear supportive testimony from throughout our Church on this innovative strategy. It is bold, it is expensive and it is long overdue.

The Next Right Answer

By Michael J. Kerr

In 1993, the Diocese of Virginia withdrew from the Medical Trust, ready to put accessible and affordable managed care in place. For Virginia, it was the right answer in response to the fluid and regionally biased issue of health insurance.

With the mantra of "bearing one another's burdens," we passed a canonical change requiring participation of those employees being provided health insurance by their church. Exceptions to participation were carefully included and responsibly requested through the years. As a result, we have successfully managed to provide richer benefits at lower costs. A few churches paid more, but most paid less.

Mandatory participation creates a determinable participant pool, which allows carrier underwriters to be interested in an association-type plan and to accurately price the plan.

Directed by Resolution A147 of the 75th General Convention to report to this Convention, the Church Pension Group spent three years researching and developing the recommended Denominational Health Plan. The proposed Resolution A177 will modify the existing Canon I.8 to authorize the Church Pension Fund to establish and administer such a plan.

This canonical change will require participation of those employees being provided

health insurance by their church. Exceptions to participation have been carefully included. Plan designs can be richer and costs should be more stable. As you can imagine, this sounds pretty familiar to me.

A177 allows flexibility in the plans offered in each diocese and, most importantly, the offered plans are designed through dialogue with diocesan leadership. This shared vision is a key driver in CPF's work, and a broad-based advisory board will continue the discussion at a denominational level.

In seeking to exceed typical plan benefits, this model is based on the premise that improving the health of our employees improves the health of the Church. That's why A177 deserves the support of this Convention.

A177 will require Virginia to return to the Medical Trust. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we must bear one another's burdens and Virginia may see an increase in premiums. Or, we may not. A177 is a flexible answer of leveraging larger numbers to provide cost savings, plan stability, and the socially just equality of benefits for all employees, clergy and lay.

Once upon a time, General Convention authorized the creation of a denominational plan to address pension administration. The

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Communion concerns can be assuaged by the first three resolves of D025, all of which deal with reaffirming "the abiding commitment of The Episcopal Church to ... the Anglican Communion" and our Church's desire "to live into the highest degree of communion possible." When it comes to formal Church declarations, that's about as close to a love letter as you can get.

Indeed, D025 is a case study of why it is important to read and receive resolutions in their entirety. Clauses can complement each other in ways that make the total impact of a resolution different from the sum of its parts.

The same total-is-different-from-the-sum-of-its-parts analogy applies to another resolution, C056, which deals with same-sex blessings.

The first two resolves of that resolution would mark a step forward in the study and exploration of possible rites of blessing for consideration by the next Convention. Other resolves deal with pastoral, though not liturgical, support for those in same-sex unions, marriages or partnerships, particularly in jurisdictions where those are now legal. Put it all together and you find forward movement balanced with restraint.

Of course, it's still true that no word, no punctuation is safe at this Convention from resolution drafters in search of just the right message.

Yesterday, Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music, while debating C056, pondered questions like: Should we say "commitments" or "holy unions"? Should we go with "including" or "noting particularly"?

All this word parsing is as it should be. Rest assured that Anglicans from Singapore to San Francisco will be searching for hidden meanings. But we should remain mindful that specific resolves must be read in the context of the full resolution. It's in that interplay of parts that Anglican balance often can be achieved.

multiple and disparate plans across the dioceses centralized into the Church Pension Fund. CPF continues to evolve and improve benefits and it is through ongoing conversations with end users that help make that evolution possible. The denominational approach seems to have been a pretty good answer.

This is the next right answer for the Church.

Center Aisle



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