

By the Rev. John Ohmer

Continuing from yesterday, here are more examples of how we at General Convention “drink the kool-aid” – ways we completely buy into ideas or systems – along with antidotes.

Legislative Lime: Most clergy and vestries I’m familiar with see “legislation” – the proposals that come before them – as a necessary evil, things that have to be done to enable the work of ministry.

But the further “up” you go into church governance, the more likely you are to find the Church structured as a legislative body, and so legislation proliferates, with the larger Church resembling the local church less and less.

The antidotes? First, to shout from the rooftops what’s mostly whispered over cocktails: that the most important, lasting work of Convention takes place in the Exhibit Hall, during daily Eucharist, and in the informal networking over meals and drinks.

And all this takes place in spite of the legislative agenda, not because of it.

The second antidote is for deputies to believe, when they hear a voice that says, “this is *such* waste of time, the *whole structure* of General Convention needs to be changed, I wonder if anyone out there is willing to foment rebellion...?” – for them to believe that that voice is of the Holy Spirit. And conversely, the

Heartfelt but Not Celebratory

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley and Thomas Eaves

Deputies “spoke from their hearts” in debating amended Resolution D025, just one day after the Bishops approved it.

“The feeling was that the members of the House spoke from their hearts in supporting this statement,” said Deputy Jean Reed, lay alternate from Virginia. The resolution “committed fully to continuing support of the Communion, while at the same time acknowledging the rights of all baptized Christians to seek holy orders, all levels of holy orders if so moved.”

However, he said, “in approving the resolution, I also feel that the Deputies in no way, shape or form disavowed B033 and certainly the option of refusing to consent to the election of a bishop is open at the diocesan level.

There was muted reaction from the House when the vote tally was reported, with little sense of celebration or exhilaration.

D. Rebecca Snow, the deputy from Alaska who proposed the original resolution, said that she was “glad that I was able to be of some help in getting the Church to be able to move forward.”

voice that says “sit down, be patient and drink your kool-aid” is not.

Budgetary Berry: Just as in Watergate, the key to understanding why our antiquated Episcopal Church structures have survived far past their usefulness is to follow the money.

If I stink at doing my job, people will vote with their pocketbooks, feet or both.

Parish clergy who are incompetent pastors, uninspiring preachers or ineffective administrators (or some Freddy Krueger combination of all three) will see it almost immediately in the annual stewardship campaign and in average Sunday attendance.

But mandatory giving – the fixed-percentage income the national Church and many dioceses receive – means no such immediate feedback.

The antidote? Move to voluntary giving at all levels of church governance. Let dioceses and the national Church do what vestries and clergy have always had to do: make their case, await the results and then adjust staffing and program accordingly.

Who knows? A move toward voluntary giving could mean 815 would *quickly* do what most businesses have had to do for years: identify its essential

mission and then find ways to accomplish it through a slimmer, smaller, more responsive structure.

Finally, **Self-flagellation Fruit Punch:** I’m all for honest and candid criticism of the Episcopal Church’s shortcomings. But too often we cross the line into beating ourselves up. So often we sound so defensive ... apologetic ... squeamish.

The antidote is to remember the unique role this wonderful, eclectic, generous part of the Body of Christ has to offer the rest of the Body.

That’s why yesterday’s sermon by Abigail Nelson of Episcopal Relief & Development was such a breath of fresh air. She clearly spelled out the economic and other challenges we face in keeping our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals.

But mostly she told *success stories*. She talked about what’s *working*. The difference we *are* making. The lives we really *are* changing. You left there encouraged ... motivated ... proud to be an Episcopalian.

Anticipation



Convention participants will go to great lengths—including enduring 15-minute-plus lines at the Hilton’s Starbucks—to get their caffeine fix every morning.

Photo: Matthew Lukens

the whole Church splitting. I don’t want to be left with half a church or none at all. I don’t want to leave this Church to chance, or the flip of a coin. I don’t want to see my Church, the place that I love, diminish. When you love something, you don’t want to see it hurt.

“The risk,” Mr. Sahdev said, “has gotten in the way of the reward.”

Rosali Fernandez-Pola, deputy from Puerto Rico and a member of the World Mission Committee, was pleased with the outcome.

“We have to move on if we want to serve the people and give reality to our mission,” he said. “There will be a little bit of pain and then we’ll be cured and we’ll stay together.”



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

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

E Pluribus Unum

By the Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, Bishop of North Carolina

About a year ago, I had an opportunity to address an Episcopal group visiting some ministries in Raleigh, N.C. In the course of our conversation, someone asked this question: “What do you see as the greatest challenge before the Diocese of North Carolina?”



I answered without hesitation: “*E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one.” That may be the great challenge before us. But that challenge is not only before one diocese. That challenge may be the great challenge before us as the Episcopal Church, as the Anglican Communion. That is the challenge before us as a nation, as a global community. In truth, that challenge ultimately will determine the fate of the Earth.

Is it possible for us as a Church, as communities, as a nation, as a world, to honor our shared humanity, embrace our variety, to learn to respect our diversity, to “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with our God,” as the prophet Micah said? Can we become, out of many, one?

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin proposed that phrase be included on the Great Seal of the United

States in 1776. At the time, they were struggling with how to fashion one nation out of 13 independent, distinct and diverse states. Little did they know that *E Pluribus Unum* would remain the great challenge—and the great hope—of the American experiment. Can we, from many, become one?

You can chart the movement of much of American history through the perspective of that challenge. Is it possible for us to find a deeper unity that can embrace genuine diversity?

Whether it has been the question of the relationship between the states and the Union, the question of slavery and the Civil War, the question of women and suffrage, the question of civil and human rights regarding race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration – *E Pluribus Unum* has posed the momentous, often troubling, challenge.

That is the challenge before us as a Church, before us as the 76th General Convention, before us as a country, before us as a world. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was right: “Together we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters, or together we will be forced to perish as fools.”

This matters absolutely. It matters to us and to the generations that follow us. The choice is ours—chaos or community.

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Committee Open Hearings

Ministry, 7:30 a.m., 30 min., Hilton California Ballroom B, D081, D082

Voices from Convention

“I said this six years ago at General Convention, and I will say this again. God did not call us to tinker on the edges of reform, and apply small BandAids to the open sores bleeding upon the world. He calls us today, TODAY, to the year of the Lord. He calls us to be ONE, to be whole. In wholeness, we dismantle the systems that harm the oppressor as much as the oppressed. In wholeness we reorder the priorities of our lives, our jobs and our consumptive systems. In wholeness we move from fear of scarcity to joy in abundance.” —Abigail Nelson, Episcopal Relief & Development

Editorial

Three Days to Go

Three days to go. It won’t be long before we venture back to the world outside the Convention Center.

No, not Disneyland. We mean the real world—the place where people don’t pepper their chitchat with resolution numbers, where they don’t sip a dozen cups of coffee a day on five hours’ sleep.

And when we do go home, prepare for the awkward but inevitable questions: “So what did you accomplish out there?” Or perhaps it will be: “What were you thinking?”

Don’t worry. There are plenty of good answers.

As Convention heads into the home-stretch, prospects are good for taking home an enriched liturgy, an improved disciplinary process for clergy, a strong denominational health plan, and a renewed appreciation for the power of witnessing to our faith through conversation and sharing. The jury’s still out on whether our budget will reflect our missions. All in all, it’s not a bad list of accomplishments.

The biggest challenge will be to explain to folks back home how we handled the hot-button issues that made the front page. After all, we’re not a Church that makes decisions that can be easily reduced to sound bites or headlines. That point was made glaringly obvious by the slew of newspaper stories that reduced a nuanced debate to a one-dimensional “victory” for liberals.

But this much is clear. This Convention has declared by surprisingly large margins in both Houses that the mystery of God’s call to ordination is open to all, including gays and lesbians. Now we must strive to explain to our Anglican Communion partners, along with folks back home, why our understanding of God’s will has led us to this place. Part of the explanation has to do with our canons and polity.

The bottom line is that our call to be inclusive, on the one hand, and our commitment to

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Letters to the Editor

Youth Are Our Future

Two articulate and passionate young people from the youth presence spoke to the House of Deputies yesterday. They reminded us that the youth are not only the future of the Church, but they are the present Church as well. They represented the spirit of Ubuntu for us. They told us what was important to the Church today. They showed us how to be the people of God.

But none of the dailies that cover the news of convention covered their presence yesterday. I hope this is not indicative of the Church's attitude toward the passionate youth who represent the Church of today and of tomorrow.

—The Rev. Canon Kate Harrigan
Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

Advertising Evangelism

I was struck by Monday's editorial, "Too Big for a Bumper Sticker." Kudos for pointing out the limitations of a media industry focused on the sensationalism of conflict that ignores the more joyful and subtle realities of life in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

I agree that the good news of the Episcopal Church often goes unnoticed and that we

need to take up the responsibility for conveying the story of our Church. My experience is that on a local level we do not understand or have an effective relationship with the various media forms.

A creative rethinking of how we use print and internet mediums is long overdue.

As a priest in Salt Lake City, I am often confronted in national gatherings with surprise that the Episcopal Church not only survives but thrives in Utah. There is a vibrant community who is not only sympathetic to the vision of the Episcopal Church but hungry for it.

How did that awareness happen? By effectively using print media and the internet to make our presence and our story known in our context. Thanks to an effective advertising campaign, our church is now known in the community and we regularly see three to five newcomers a week.

So as we look to doubling our attendance by 2020 and sharing the good news of our great and gracious Church, consider reframing your understanding of advertising and utilizing a form of evangelism that is often overlooked.

—The Rev. Michael Mayor
Diocese of Utah

Anglicans in the United States

By Matthew Farr

After several days of Convention, I have to unload something to readers of *Center Aisle*. The Episcopal Church is not owning its rightful inheritance, its birthright as the Anglican Church in the United States.

The argument involves more than semantics. The drama of William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet* would have fizzled in the first act if Romeo had actually forsaken his name and decided he smelled sweeter as a rose without his inherited name.

Granted, the Church would prefer less drama of such Bardian level. But it is the Church's responsibility to "own" the term "Anglican," to proclaim its identity and to challenge those who've commandeered its usage and, indeed, its very meaning.

The lack of response from the Episcopal Church has allowed a dangerous misconception to form in the media that there is a distinction between the adjectives Episcopal and Anglican. The result is a gerrymandered "Anglican" province with the trappings of orthodoxy.

The primate of the Anglican Church in the United States is the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori. She is trying to hold together a Church that knows only too well the difficulties of theology by democratic representative debate. She is no heretical schismatic, nor are her fellow bishops. Neither are our deputies a parliament of rogues.

What they are, what we are, is Anglicans. Say it with me: We are the Anglican Church in the United States. We are the inheritors through the waters of baptism and the liturgy of the Prayer Book to the glorious companionship of all the saints in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

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the Communion, on the other hand, have pulled us in different directions.

Bishops will have another chance today to strike a balance between those pulls, when they consider Resolution C056 on same-sex blessings. If the proposed exploration and study of such rites is authorized for consideration by the next Convention, there will be an opportunity to involve Communion partners in the study. As the Public Narrative Project at this Convention has demonstrated, sharing can only increase understanding.

All this may sound hopelessly complicated to the folks back home. But it's part of our story—part of the spiritual journey of a Church that continues to seek the Truth.

A Bold Proclamation of the Baptismal Covenant

By Cindi Bartol

Opinions and positions from the deputation of the Diocese of Virginia



One of the phrases that is used less frequently in our denomination these days is "cradle Episcopalian"—someone who claims membership and attendance in the Episcopal Church from the earliest months of existence. It surely is derived from the church school attendance list that used to hang on the nursery door with the bold-lettered heading, "Cradle Roll." Parents and godparents made the baptismal promises on behalf of these young Christians.

A resolution currently before General Convention, D005, recognizes that, as the Church increases its commitment to bring more adults into our faith tradition, the baptismal covenant doesn't necessarily take into account that, more and more, we're seeing adults stand at our baptismal fonts.

D005, which would authorize the study and directed, occasional use of an Alternative Baptismal Covenant, deserves consideration. Unlike infants at baptism, adults can speak for themselves and are able to take an active role in making promises. The proposed liturgy takes these factors into account.

The explanation provided in the resolution

details that, by not having declarations offered by the priest, "The whole people of God claim with their own voices the powerful words of our promises." The process becomes more interactive, allowing those being baptized to speak more boldly regarding their faith. Instead of responding, "I will, with God's help" to each question, the people can explain the how's and why's behind their responses.

For example, if the celebrant asks, "How will you each respond to temptation and sin in your own life?" the people reply, "With God's help, by persevering in resisting evil, and whenever falling into sin, repenting and returning to the Lord."

Let us seriously consider giving a place for this expanded use of our traditional language in the sacrament of Baptism.



Historical Election

By the Rev. Lauren R. Stanley

The House of Deputies made history yesterday by electing lay and clerical deputies to the Ecclesiastical Trial Court for Bishops. The vote appeared to be business-as-usual, until Deputy Sally Johnson of Michigan, chancellor to the President of the House of Deputies, pointed out that this was the first time since the Episcopal Church was founded that laity and clergy were elected to that court.

"The House of Deputies is now electing its members for the trial of bishops," Ms. Johnson said later. This election "recognizes that discipline in our Church, accountability in our Church, decision-making in our Church are in line with the baptismal covenant, which is now lived out in another way with lay people and clergy" participating in the trial court "as they do

with the selection of clergy and bishops. The deputies are now equally involved."

Ms. Johnson began working on this legislation in 1994, when the Title IV disciplinary canons were last changed. "Bishops need to be treated the same. It gives all orders in the Church accountability and discipline just as all orders participate in discipline."

OffCenter



No, changing "PB&F" to "AI&G" doesn't change my answer.

Cartoon: Mike Kerr

Center Aisle



Bishop Lee



Ed Jones



Emily Cherry



John Ohmer



Lauren Stanley

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Public Narrative at Work

By Sarah Dylan Breuer

Three years ago, the House of Deputies debated Resolution B033 on the last day of convention. Three days ago, Deputies debated and voted on Resolution D025 on the same subject. The atmosphere on those two occasions could hardly have been more different.

Three years ago, the tension was palpable, and emotions ran high. Some testified in tears, the pace was frenzied, and fear — perhaps even panic — was in the air and in many voices, both pro and con. Two days ago, debate was calm and reasoned on both sides, and observers noted that members of the House seemed to be listening to one another deeply and prayerfully. Why such a dramatic change?

No doubt many factors are at work — the years of reflection intervening, the firm and even-handed chairing and the non-anxious presence of Deputies President Bonnie Anderson, and individual deputies' choice to main-

tain an environment more conducive to discernment. But I suspect credit also belongs to the Public Narrative Project.

I admit I was skeptical when I first saw PNP materials, and I was concerned that conducting "mission conversations" and a committee of the whole during convention would strip valuable time and impede the efficiency of the legislative process. I now think I couldn't have been more mistaken.

The PNP has provided a framework that has helped participants talk with rather than past one another, and proved particularly valuable when the Committee on World Mission chose to use that model for Deputies' committee of the whole.

If you need to experience how that might be, I suggest the following exercise: Find a friend. Challenge this person to an arm-wrestling match. While you wrestle, try to agree on a restaurant for dinner. Even a thumb

wrestling match would make real conversation on nearly any matter, however trivial. It's just too hard to speak thoughtfully and listen deeply — or at all — in the midst of such a contest.

Wrestling matches of power and wits are sometimes necessary. However, such arenas aren't conducive to deep listening or spiritual discernment. By giving Deputies designated time for listening and sharing and a particular framework that has proven productive in large and small groups, convention officers guaranteed that much of the House would hear one another in a setting that was no contest to be won or lost.

That kind of experience can be habit-forming in the best possible sense — a monastic habit of "listening with the ear of the heart." May it be a habit that proves catching in the church and increasingly hard to break.

Sarah Dylan Breuer is a lay preacher, teacher and writer. She was elected to the Executive Council yesterday.