



The Daily Opinion Journal of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia Thursday, July 2, 2015 Issue Nine

# Reflecting on Holy Moments

*This is the sixth General Convention for Center Aisle, and we've never cried this much before.*

*That's not a bad thing. It just seems there are more misty-eyed moments – indeed, holy moments – when something we've heard, something we've been reminded of, opens up our hearts...and our tear ducts. Were you moved to tears during this long, full, Spirit-filled convention? Here are some of those moments that moved us, sometimes to tears.*

## Feeling the Spirit

by The Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of Virginia

The Holy Spirit has been soaring these 10 days. She's been swooping down and whooshing up, sometimes brushing us gently with the softness of feathers, sometimes gripping us fiercely with the sharpness of talons. I've felt the brush and the grip during this General Convention as we've witnessed history and as we've made history. And I've seen it in the eyes of others when the Spirit flew so close that tears came unbidden.

One of the many times I was moved to tears during this convention was during the sermon of the Rev. Cathlena Plummer. She told of going to a dangerous place in search of stray lambs and hearing a voice there. Suddenly I felt a chill, a thrill, of the Spirit's presence. It was déjà vu and connection and recognition all at once.

As she spoke about hearing God in the voice of her departed father, I felt the embrace of my own recently departed father. And I knew that my own call, very different from Cathlena's, was affirmed all over again. My tears, right there in worship, were a Yes to God's continued work in the world.

## A Seat at the Table

by Ed Keithly, Managing Editor, Center Aisle

The morning after the shootings at Emanuel AME, I opened up the drafts of centeraisle.net's blog posts. Ready to go out that day was a "Throwback Thursday" post. Lots of white faces looked back at me – Edwardian Era bishops from the 1907 General Convention held in Richmond, Va.

One photo among the 11 included a picture of a delegation from "the Conference of Colored Church Workers to present their plea for Colored Bishops." I trashed the post and called Dorothy White, the chaplain of St. Catherine's School, Richmond, Va. By the afternoon, Dorothy's piece "Oh, My Heart Breaks" was up on Center Aisle, not the throwback Thursday post.

Soon after Bishop Curry's election, I received an email from Dorothy: "I heard the news about Presiding Bishop-Elect Michael Curry and am

thankful. I grabbed my computer and made hotel and train reservations [for his consecration]." In the silent Center Aisle office, surrounded by people, I cried. How much this means to Dorothy is her story to tell, not mine, but Dorothy's faithfulness against a canvas of murder and church burnings is astounding. It's Holy.

The stories I've found most moving while editing Center Aisle are Dorothy's reflection and the Rev. Phoebe Roaf's story, in which she wrote, "Some within the Church have conveyed...that there is no room for me at the table as an African American." Despite how crucial it is that Dorothy and Phoebe tell their stories in their own words, asking them to write can make me uncomfortable—as if the seat at Center Aisle's table is mine to offer.

But Bishop Curry's election signaled something – not the end of racism, but maybe the beginning of the end, the setting of a banquet where I don't draw the seating chart. A banquet where Dorothy and Phoebe already have taken their seats.

## Refreshed and Reconnected

by Lisa Kimball, Ph.D., Professor of Christian Formation and Congregational Leadership, Director of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching at Virginia Seminary

I was sitting on the wall outside the Salt Palace reconnecting with a very good friend from many, many years ago who is a priest of our church in Massachusetts. We went to college together. And, the two of us sat for probably an hour or an hour and a half and remembered what our lives have been and where God has moved in them and how we got to where we are today. It was just such a blessing to have been known by somebody when I was 18, 19, and 20 years old and to be seen again in the light of our current

lives and work. So, I give thanks for Jane and thanks to God. It was a wonderful, wonderful week.

## Infectious Faith

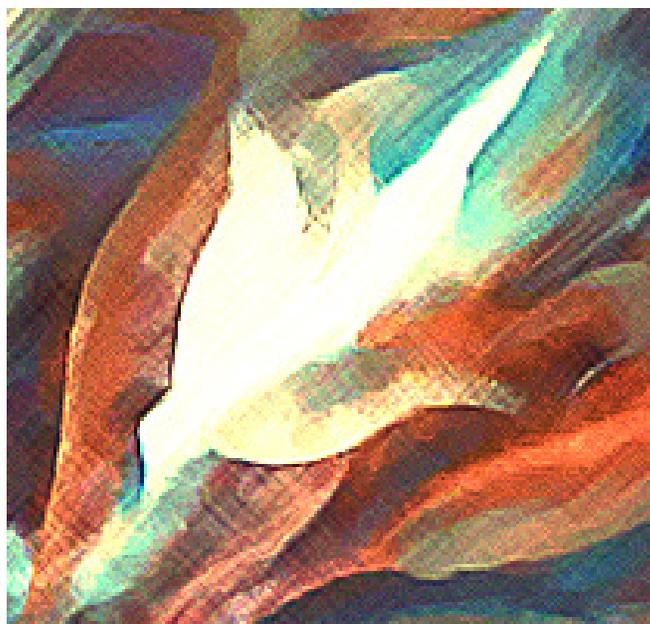
by Chris Sycama

I watched a delegate from the Diocese of Maine walk up, so moved by the statue of homeless Jesus. She was completely overcome. Something about her piety and faith was so infectious.

## Surrounded by Love

by Amber Carswell, Design Team, Young Adult Festival at GC78

The Integrity Eucharist was a moment I will never forget. This is my first General Convention, and I've never walked into a space and felt so surrounded by love. To see the work that Integrity has done for gay, lesbian and trans Episcopalians during its 40 years of existence was supremely moving.



# The 'Gay Kid from Utah' Finds His Church

by Jeffrey Stevenson, Staff Writer, Native Utahan



Accepted as a postulant by Bishop Shannon Johnston a few months ago, I'll begin my studies at Virginia Theological Seminary next month. Though I now live in Virginia, I grew up in Utah, just north of Salt Lake City. In fact most of my family members live within 30 miles of this General Convention.

Many of my weekends as a child here were spent with my dad in nature. This is where I first experienced a connection to God's grace and where I longed to find that grace in the pew.

Even at an early age, I knew that I wanted to be part of "the Church." However, the LDS Church was the only Church I knew, and I felt at an early age that they would not accept "the gay kid." The idea of exploring other faiths and other Churches was simply beyond my grasp.

Joining the Navy in 1995 gave me my first exposure to other traditions. This was the first time I saw other faith systems in action – and that changed everything. I found myself admiring the chaplains. I wanted to be like them and I wanted to do what they were doing. As the gay kid from Utah, it was so far beyond my reach. How could I be "holy enough" to make that commitment? As a gay man, I felt "less than"; I felt as though there was no Church that would see me as a member, much less a leader.

About a year after I left the Navy, I met my fiancé. I knew from our second date that he was the one. Not only do I love Noah, I love who we are as a couple. We are opposites in almost everything we do but, rather than a stumbling block, our differences have always been the source of

our strength. Though we are both strong individuals, we feel unstoppable together. Where one is weak, the other is strong. He is my balance, my inspiration, my partner in crime, my instigator and my shoulder to cry on. He is my best friend.

Together Noah and I discovered St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church, Annandale, Va. We felt we could make our church home there. We felt we were accepted there for who we are – not only accepted but embraced. Being gay wasn't a strike against us, and there was no feeling of "but they love us anyway."

This was the first time I felt I could be a member of Church; I could be a part of the body of Christ without stipulations. This was the first time I thought it might be possible for me to follow that tug, to listen to that whisper, to respond to this call. This was a place where I could worship and open myself to the Spirit – no guards, no hesitation, no fear.

It's important to remember that the House of Bishops and House of Deputies are debating how, not whether, to be more inclusive. They are not debating whether to excommunicate Noah and me. The Church is not turning us over to a government that is prepared to throw us in prison. We are a Church that has said, "God accepts you as living members of this Church and you are loved by God." Our Church is saying, plainly and without compromise, "We want to celebrate your love by allowing you to enter into a sacrament – a covenant with God that celebrates your love for one another."

Now, in my hometown, I have declared my love for this Church that has accepted us as a part of the body of Christ without stipulations. I pray that I will have the strength, wisdom and gumption to lead as we enter the next era.

## Making It Easy to Fall in Love with God: Worship at GC78

by the Rev. Canon Patrick Wingo, Canon to the Ordinary, Diocese of Virginia

Most people who attend General Convention agree that worship is a highlight. Almost without exception, the preaching, music and creative liturgy are extremely well done. We Episcopalians are at our best, Dean Terry Holmes once wrote, when all of these things "create a world of wonder that makes it very easy to fall in love with God."

The worship at General Convention often symbolizes the larger issues that engage us as a Church and society. This was clear to me on Tuesday, when the wonderful choirs from St. Augustine's and Voorhees colleges, Episcopal HBCs, sang hymns and songs that reminded us that Black Lives Matter, that we grieve over the deaths of the Charleston Nine, and that we rejoice in the election of our first African-American presiding bishop. I left that service inspired and proud of our Church.

Tuesday's worship also reminded me of another service at General Convention in 2006, when I was a deputy from the Diocese of Alabama. That was a difficult convention. Much of the energy and debate centered on the Windsor Report and the questions it raised: What would be the Episcopal Church's role in the Anglican Communion? How would we live together in our Church, given that we were deeply divided over important issues about inclusion, sexuality and process? About halfway through the convention, after participating in some very difficult legislative sessions, I decided to volunteer to distribute communion at a worship service.

It was a service very much like what we have been experiencing this week – perhaps one of the few high points of that convention. At the appointed time, I walked up on the stage to receive the basket of bread to take out into the crowd, and I was paired with a deacon holding a large flagon.

As we moved toward the stairs to take the Body and Blood of Christ to the 2,000 people gathered in the hall, the deacon, who walked just in

front of me, did not see the riser for the lectern. Her foot caught the edge, and because we were all hurrying to get the elements out into the crowd, her momentum sent her flying. She landed face-first, her glasses scattering off, a sickening thump as she hit the floor.

There was a gasp from the congregation and, after a moment of hesitation, those of us around her reached to help her. That was when we saw that, even though she had fallen hard, her right arm was stretched out, firmly holding the flagon of wine straight up, not a drop spilled.

She was badly shaken, her glasses broken and her vestments twisted. But as others helped her sit up, she insisted on carrying on with her ministry, taking the Blood of Christ to the people.

General Convention has seen a number of powerful worship moments – Bishop Michael Curry's "Crazy Christian sermon" in 2012, Maria Von Trapp's granddaughter providing lovely music in 2006, and yesterday's powerful sermon of healing by Becca Stevens.

For me, the enduring image of worship is a deacon sprawled across the floor next to the altar, firmly holding the Blood of Christ as if every drop was precious and necessary for the gathered Body. It was and is a reminder, a symbol, that each person is precious and necessary. May it always be so.



## "The Question is Now for Us, and Not for the Courts"

by David Quittmeyer, Esq., Lay Deputy, Central Gulf Coast

The Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage in most respects appears to be the "final word" on the subject, not subject to further review or modification. [But] this hardly means that the controversy has ended. One might compare the decision to *Roe v. Wade*, which has held public attention and debate, both in secular and religious forums, for decades.

Read more on the Supreme Court decision at [centeraisle.net](http://centeraisle.net).



centeraislevirginia

www.centeraisle.net



@centeraisle