

'You give me something I can feel'

The Rev. John Ohmer

It's a good thing there was a full day between the two celebrations of Holy Eucharist on Tuesday. Had there not been – had I not come up slowly from the lows of the morning Convention Eucharist to the highs of the evening's "U2charist" – I think I might have gotten a case of the spiritual bends.

Although both were Episcopal services, the two celebrations could not have been more different – in tone, energy level and impact.

First, the morning Eucharist: Maybe I'd accidentally dumped decaf into my hotel room coffeemaker and just hadn't woken up yet; maybe I was overwhelmed from trying to navigate the maze-like Convention Center; maybe it's just that I'm becoming one of those grumpy old lifelong Episcopalians who kvetch about innovations in liturgy...but the opening Eucharist struck me as impersonal, self-conscious and uninspiring.

In fairness to the organizers, it's not easy to create a sense of intimacy in a cavernous convention center, but they tried. The "visual

prelude" projected on the Jumbotron screens and the gorgeous art displayed throughout the service not only brought beauty and dignity to the gathering, but also managed to make the setting feel a bit like home. Having everyone sit at round tables, instead of in theater-style seating, also broke the room into more manageable, intimate space.

But alas, those same round tables have another purpose. Am I the only one who finds it painfully self-conscious to put "sermon and table conversation" into the same liturgical moment? Have I just grown weary of "breaking into small groups" or is there something primal and powerful when we're allowed to simply listen to a sermon, free from the need to instantly "process" or otherwise talk about it?

But I didn't realize how uninspiring the morning's service was until I attended the evening's "U2charist." The irony is that "U2-charists" are described as "modern" "creative," and "nontraditional" but the evening liturgy was, except for the Prayers of the People, straight

out of the Book of Common Prayer. I heard God referred to as "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;" I knew all the responses by heart; we even confessed our sins. There's just something hospitable about that.

As for the sermons: In the morning, Presiding Bishop Griswold had gently invited us not to be "driven by urgencies of which we are unconscious," and quoted Bernard of Clairvaux in his admonition to read both the Book of Scripture and the Book of Experience. In the evening, Bishop Michael Curry of North Carolina shouted, "the Lord didn't put you here just to consume oxygen," and quoted Bono in his admonition to eradicate global poverty.

The evening service wasn't perfect. Some say the announcements went on too long and were too political. But I left the service deeply touched, outwardly focused, and inspired to serve.

If that's what liturgies are supposed to do, the day ended better than it started. •

The High Table

A guide to area gastronomy

Completely Nuts

By Patrick Getlein

On High Street, at the corner of High and Gay, is a real nut of American culture. It's The Peanut Shoppe. And this year marks its 70th birthday, making it the oldest retail business in continuous operation in Columbus. The shop originally was owned by Planter's Peanut Company. You know, Mr. Peanut. And there is a treasure trove of Planter's memorabilia in the cases, on the walls and behind the counter: everything from a dimensional Mr. Peanut costume to miniature, cast-iron Mr. Peanut figures. Mike Stone, who owns it now, is the second owner of the shop since Planter's sold it about 50 years ago, but he is probably the single most enthusiastic nut man in the world. And he's got everything: spicy peanuts, macadamias, pistachios, pignolias, redskins, Spanish nuts, hard whites, blanched almonds, filberts. You might call him a complete nut. And he roasts his own. According to Mike, his is the only shop to roast nuts fresh each day



Mike Stone (right) and Rebekah Thomas are two faces you're likely to see on your visit to The Peanut Shoppe.

for that day. He's also got candy, though they don't make it themselves, including French burnt peanuts, buckeyes and, perhaps especially for Convention, divinity. For the non-nut lover, he's got figs, dates, corn nuts and roasted soybeans. So before you leave Columbus, be sure to visit The Peanut Shoppe. There are only about 30 in

the country. And when you walk in, be sure to ask what's warm.

The Peanut Shoppe, 46 N High St., Open M-F, 10-6 (9-6 starting Monday). •



'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 Pastoral Address to the 210th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia, 2005, the Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee

Perspective

The Fundamentals that Unite Us

By The Rev. Gary Jones

St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, Va.

After the last General Convention, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Va., experienced a level of conflict that was probably similar to that experienced by many other congregations across our church. Some members supported the controversial decisions, some opposed them, and most had a desire to focus on something other than those decisions.

Last spring, we issued a statement that expressed the overall approach we are taking regarding the issues that this year's General Convention is considering. The entire statement is available online at www.ststephensch.org, but the major points include the following:

We recognize that emotionally laden issues are often surrounded by volatile debates and misunderstandings, and we are concerned that centrist views could be pushed to the margins of public debate. We regret this tendency, but we are committed to charity and civility in dealing with our misunderstandings and our differences of opinion. We pledge ourselves to bear patiently with one another's differences, in the belief that God patiently bears with each of us and calls us to love each other as God loves us.

We acknowledge a variety of differences among faithful Episcopalians, and we are grateful to be members of a church that not only welcomes but joyfully accommodates such a wide spectrum of perspectives and opinions. We believe the determination to persevere with one another in patience and forbearance is in itself a ministry to a world that often has difficulty in dealing with serious differences of opinion.

We affirm the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, and we



Gary Jones

recognize that our different opinions on difficult social issues often stem not from varying degrees of reverence for the Bible, but from varying ways of interpreting the Bible.

We recognize an important aspect of the human condition—that in this

mortal life, we understand the things of God only in part. This leads us to value diversity of opinion and perspectives in our church, because we need each other's partial understanding in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of God's truth. Church councils have erred in the past, and they will err in the future. We are less concerned with always making right decisions than we are with making decisions as prayerfully and faithfully as possible, in a spirit of charity and humility.

So many of our Episcopal churches are strong, vibrant, and alive in the Holy Spirit. No church is perfect, but we want all people to know what we so deeply and joyfully feel: that God is at work in wonderful ways in our parish, our diocese, and in the Episcopal Church, and that those concerns that occasionally divide us are secondary to the deeper fundamentals that unite us. •

"Where can I find the Center Aisle?"

By about 6:45 each morning, you can find it on the General Convention info desk in the lobby of your hotel. You also can find it in the Convention Center on the desk near the volunteer kiosk by the main escalators. And of course, we're distributing by hand each morning around town and outside the Convention Center.

Editorial

Hope for Our Future?

General Convention finally is growing up.

After years of tempestuous infighting on sexuality and how we relate to the rest of the Anglican Communion, we finally seem to have learned how to talk with and listen to each other with respect and maturity.

Opening with a powerful call to listen carefully, Special Legislative Committee 26's hearing last night was characterized by calmly passionate testimony from across the spectrum of the Episcopal Church.

The high turnout – 1,500 in the ballroom and 200 standing outside – reflected the passionate voices yearning to be *continued on THREE*

Editorial

A Lot More Work Needed

It's been a long haul for those working on Title IV reforms. And they still have a ways to go.

The 2000 General Convention formed the Task Force on Disciplinary Policies and Procedures to research and develop a revision of Title IV. Since that time, the Task Force has worked diligently on developing the theology of the disciplinary canons. In the process, they've interviewed Episcopalians across all of the dioceses. Their goal has been to craft new canons.

What's come out of these efforts? Nothing less than a complete rewrite of the Title, an honest attempt to end the informal approaches taken by many dioceses, often in an attempt to avoid invoking Title IV canons.

The proposed *continued on TWO*

Letters to the Editor

We're interested in our opinions—and yours!

E-mail your comments, analyses and reactions to centeraisle@thediocese.net or bring them to our offices in Room 30 on the third floor of the Columbus Renaissance Hotel.

Candor is welcome. So is brevity. Shoot for 80 words or less.

Continued Response to Tipping Point

Thank you for a practical approach to seeking and serving Christ in all people. Very few of us from Virginia will be in Columbus this week, but many of us travel throughout the year. As you so rightly point out, to most of us \$5 a day while traveling is not much, only slightly more than the cost of a visit to the corner espresso bar. Perhaps with your encouragement we can all leave that \$5 for the housekeeping staff on the nightstands of our hotels. What a difference that small gesture could make if all Virginians chose to do so!

MIRRIAM OMAN
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

A very hearty "Bravo!" to the Rev. John Ohmer for his editorial "The Tipping Point." The calculus

of poverty, especially among the working poor, rarely receives the kind of practical attention he suggests. I will pray that everyone reading his words will heed them. What a tremendous difference could be made, and not just at the General Convention, but whenever and wherever people travel.

KIMBERLEY HEATHERINGTON
FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

Keep it up

Just read the first issue. I can't say enough good words about it: Crisp, clear, unifying, faithful to the gospel of the reconciling love of our Lord Jesus. You are in my prayers to keep up this very good work.

CHARLES SYDNOR
WESTMORELAND COUNTY, VIRGINIA

For additional and expanded analysis and opinions, visit us at www.centeraisle.net. Or subscribe to our daily e-mail push at <http://www.centeraisle.net/listserv.html>. We'll send out a notice each night when the next day's content is ready for viewing.

OffCenter



"The House of Deputies reiterates that Millennium Development Goals have nothing to do with the World Cup."



Bishop Lee



Jones



Ohmer



Stanley



Antolini



Fawcett



Kerr



Getlein

Center Aisle: Published by The Diocese of Virginia; The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee, *Bishop*

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Work continued

revisions have been met by harsh opposition. Concerns have been raised over questions of polity, episcopal authority, cost, and especially the role of lay leaders and how they are to be disciplined. All are valid concerns, and all must be addressed.

The proposals have potential – but they need work.

There's no question that the disciplinary canons are not applied evenly across the Church. They often leave clergy in a "no-win" situation. Task Force Chair Catherine Waynick, the Bishop of Indianapolis, is right to take issue with those who claim we "don't need to change anything because that would be an awful place to go." Says Bishop Waynick, that "is like putting up a billboard that says, 'Avoid Hell,' rather than one saying, 'Seek Life in Christ.'"

The bottom line is that the current Title IV needs work. Rather than rejecting all of the efforts thus far, the Task Force needs to continue working. If it cannot come up with a revision that will garner support now, then it should be given a mandate to continue its work. •

Committee hearings, resolutions and such

By the time most of you read this, you already will have left the morning's committee hearings.

For the latest on the day's hearings and resolution status go to:

Resolution Status Report

www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/resolution_status_report.pdf

Today's Legislative Sessions

www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/Hearing_List_Summary_6-15.pdf

Virginia Voices

Hungry for Good News

By The Rev. Sue Eaves

In *Virginia Voices*, Center Aisle features the diverse viewpoints of the deputation from the Diocese of Virginia on key issues facing General Convention. Today Sue Eaves, rector of St. Thomas' Church, Richmond, gives her impressions of the meaning of the baptismal covenant in the context of Convention.

General Convention physically puts the world right in front of your eyes. The cab driver from the airport had been born in Ethiopia and had left California to escape gang violence. A man with no arms sits on the sidewalk begging. The invisible poor make our beds and cook our meals. There are 2,492 pairs of boots lined up on the grass to represent the number of American soldiers killed so far in the war. (That number has grown since the boot exhibit was installed three days ago.)

We are a world hungry for good news. All are



In addition to combat boots, thousands of civilian shoes representing Iraqi civilian deaths contribute to the magnitude of the "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit at the Capitol. The exhibit, which ended yesterday, was sponsored in part by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship.

God's children and all want to be heard.

Right now Convention seems caught in the

tension between weary acquiescence if it will stop the bickering and the welling up of a renewed sense of the mission before us. Our biggest temptation is to choose the need of one group over another – to set priorities, to weigh the merits of a need based on likely outcomes, to worry away at one issue only to ignore or neglect others, or deal only with issues that cause no disruption. These are not options.

In our baptismal covenant, we promise to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." In this setting, it means paying attention without discrimination, deep listening to those with whom you agree or disagree, a genuine loving of the other, trusting that the Holy Spirit is showing up and moving forward and moving on. •

Future continued

heard, as well as the desire by many others to open their hearts to hear their brothers and sisters.

The spirit in the room reflected a strong desire to remain in the Anglican Communion and to comply with Windsor (although questions remain as to what Windsor really says).

However, some of the suggestions were wildly divergent, ranging from a recommendation for a complete moratorium on new bishops until 2009 to walking apart from the rest of the Anglican Communion.

A key moment took place when Pittsburgh Bishop Robert Duncan spoke and was immediately followed by New Hampshire Bishop V. Gene Robinson. Duncan said this "could be an impossible moment in holding the Communion together," while Robinson declared, "I am not an abomination. ... Our homosexual agenda is Jesus Christ."

While many called for clarity in the resolutions, others warned that we should not go too far down that path, instead arguing that these resolutions are provisional responses in the Windsor conversation.

The debate is far from over but once again, we see hope for our future. •

The Real Future of the Church

By Lauren R. Stanley

Five resolutions before General Convention could determine the future of the Episcopal Church throughout the Anglican Communion. Not one of these resolutions has to do with Windsor, episcopal pastoral oversight or human sexuality.

Instead, they deal with missionaries, mission trips and cross-cultural education. They are resolutions – A113, A114, A115, A116 and A117 – that expand our missionary presence throughout the world, a presence that incarnates the relationship between our churches and those overseas.

The House of Deputies already has passed some of the resolutions, and the Bishops are likely to follow suit. What's still needed are dollars.

Some of the money would go for our Appointed Missionaries and Volunteers for Mission (approximately 80 in 30 countries) who face increased health-care, travel and insurance costs (A113).

There's a need to fund mentoring and pastoral care for our Young Adult Service Corps members. Also, the Standing Commission on World Mission wants to increase the number of YASC missionaries from 10 to 15 each year (both A114).

More educational materials are needed for preparing missionaries (A115). More funding is sought for short-term missions (A116). And there is a call for providing cross-cultural and international opportunities for our seminarians (A117).

There have been rumblings from across the Communion that one reason we are having problems talking to each other is because we don't understand each other. The presence of our missionaries overseas builds the relationships we need in order to live together in communion.

Our missionaries are our ambassadors on the ground, providing the face and heart of the Episcopal Church to the rest of the world. Living on the front lines of this church's relationships with the rest of the Anglican Communion, these missionaries deserve all the support the Church can provide.

We must find a way to add to the triennium budget the funding needed to increase our missionary presence – \$4,223,000. Our relationships with our Anglican sisters and brothers around the world could depend on this. •

