

## Here, Kitty, Kitty!

By Susan Fawcett

The nominees for presiding bishop may not be granting interviews this week. But that didn't stop *Center Aisle*. We began to think creatively about how to get to know them better. The answer was as clear as Fido's gaze at dinnertime: Ask them about their favorite animals. Read on.

Bishop Henry Parsley of Alabama considers himself a dog person, especially after owning two springer spaniels – St. George I and St. George II. After sharing his home with Flannery, a 3-year-old Maine coon cat, however, Parsley has seen the virtue of owning (or being owned by) cats. "This cat thinks she's a dog," Parsley says. "She gets us up every day at 4:30 a.m., which is good for our prayer life."

Bishop Charles Jenkins of Louisiana shares his home with Lucy, a mixed-breed dog known to be partial to the diocesan camps. Jenkins also has a keen sense of pastoral care for pets and their owners. Recently, he performed the burial office for Baines, a yellow Labrador retriever and longtime companion of Bishop Rayford High Jr. of Texas. "I didn't know the dog was Episcopalian until I saw how much he paid for the funeral," says Jenkins. "Baines was a very high-church retriever. That's unusual for Texas dogs."

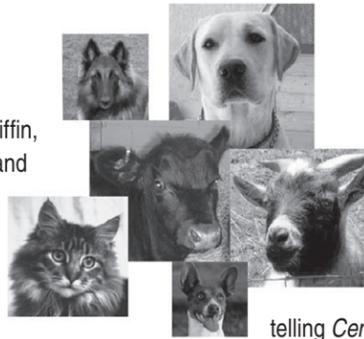
Bishop Stacy Sauls of Lexington is the

proud owner of three dogs. Griffin, a yellow Lab, is 12 years old, and stays youthful with the help of Annie, a 3-year-old chocolate Lab. Sauls' family also has adopted his late mother's beloved rat terrier, Dottie.

Despite her small stature, the bishop reports that Dottie keeps the two larger dogs in line. Additionally, Dottie's name evidently derives from her spotted coat, and not from her intellectual capacity.

Bishop Neil Alexander of Atlanta is also a Labrador owner: He is blessed to live with Chelsea, an 8-year-old black Lab. Alexander reports that Chelsea is half-American and half-Kenyan, a fact that may point to a deep commitment to international awareness on the part of the bishop, especially if he had any hand in helping Chelsea's parents make the long trek necessary for their courtship.

Bishop Francisco Duque-Gomez received his dog, Quiera, five years ago as a gift. Just a puppy then, Quiera has grown to be a large – very large – Belgian shepherd. Guardians of the flock, Belgian shepherds are known for their watchfulness and diligence – qualities that



undoubtedly make Quiera a worthy companion for a bishop.

Though she has had many household pets over the years, Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori of Nevada made a point of

telling *Center Aisle* about her experience with goat herding. "We kept goats for better than 20 years in Oregon," she said. Goats evidently helped Jefferts-Schori cut down on lawn mowing. Though a few particular goats were given Christian names, the bishop noted that they were most often called "Stew," "Roast," and "Chop."

Bishop Edwin Gulick of Kentucky also has experience with livestock: In 1963 his Black Angus steer earned championship status. Since his cattle days, however, he has enjoyed domestic animals as well. Notable among them was Ashley, a cat of 19 years whose unique charm has thus far proved to be irreplaceable for the Gulick family.

Will any of this information about the nominees and their pets influence your vote? Perhaps that depends on whether you think the new presiding bishop should be most adept at training dogs or herding cats. •

### Bienvenido!

*Nisterio Hispanic La Iglesia Episcopal* sponsored a band to welcome those attending General Convention on Tuesday morning. Led by Sandra Montes, a veteran performer at EYE and other Episcopal events, the five-person band offered rumba and Caribbean-flavored music to those passing by the front of the Hyatt Regency Columbus. According to reports they plan to welcome Episcopal Conventioneers each morning throughout Convention. We don't know where, but odds are you'll hear them.



Paul Carmona

*Worship is central to our week together at General Convention. Center Aisle will share snippets of sermons, hymns and prayers from those services.*

"I've been noticing all our baggage—backpacks, totes, roller carts, full of our binders, papers...symbols of our hopes, spilling out from our hearts. We're carrying the overflow of our hopes around on our backs while we're here, and when we're done, they'll flow with us back out into the world to bring our dreams to fruition."

JENNIFER BASKERVILLE-BURROWS,  
CHAPLAIN TO THE HOUSE OF DEPUTIES  
NOONDAY PRAYERS, JUNE 15, 2006



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

### Perspective

## One Man's Inclusion, Another Man's Exclusion

By The Rev. John Ohmer

I sat down this week with the bishops of New Hampshire and Pittsburgh. The separate interviews challenged three widely held assumptions in our church.

Assumption Number One: Bishops Robinson and Duncan represent the extremes of the gay rights/homosexuality issue, with strident gay activism on one side and stubborn conservative entrenchment on the other.

Both bishops were gracious in responding to my interview requests. Each of them sat with me for nearly a half-hour and thoughtfully answered all my questions. Both of them not only traded cell phone numbers with me, but worked the interview into their hectic meeting and travel schedules.

That's the first thing to say because one of the greatest sins in this whole sexuality debate is how dehumanized and caricatured these two men have become.

We've fallen into a habit of projecting everything we don't like about conservatives onto Bishop Duncan and everything we don't like about liberals onto Bishop Robinson. But the reality of the two men – at least as I experienced them in my interviews – is far more nuanced and complicated.

In talking to both men, you get the feeling that they feel trapped and typecast in roles they would just as soon break out – but cannot. The

momentum is too great.

For example, guess which bishop said this to me: "In the very public role I'm playing, it would be easy to fall into my own agenda rather than God's agenda, and both those who support me and those who oppose me try to put me in that position."

And which one said: "I ask the Lord Jesus that he would keep me faithful and loving in all I do, no matter the cost"?

Don't know? I'll tell you, but first:

Assumption Number Two: It is important to get beyond this issue in order to focus on mission.

I started out my interviews by asking the exact same question: "What do you think it would take to get through this time of intense disagreement to a point where we can focus on mission?"

When you ask Bishop Robinson that question, he challenges the underlying assumption. The issues surround his consecration *are* about mission, he says, because "this is about God's love for all his children and that is a part of the message we are called to spread."

When you ask Bishop Duncan that question, he also challenges the assumption and says that the consecration issues *are* about mission, because they present the Episcopal Church with a clear *Perspective continued on THREE*

*For additional and expanded analysis and opinions, visit us at [www.centeraisle.net](http://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.*

**"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.*

June 17, 2006

Issue Five

*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.*

### Editorial

## Can We Talk?

Don't worry about getting lost in those mind-boggling debates over Church and Communion structure. There's good news about Windsor: It's really about relationships, conversations and process – in other words, about how we Anglicans talk to one another.

That's the essence of much of what the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, has said in conversations following his testimony to Committee 26 this week.

How does the archbishop rate our consultation with the Communion on Gene Robinson? Weak. He's right. We regret that and need to do better. And we will, thanks to the Communion listening process that's about to get under way. Local conversations throughout the 38 Provinces will be monitored and shared.

But don't expect a summing up next week – or next year. *Talk continued on TWO*

### Editorial

## A Date with the Methodists

Everywhere you turn at General Convention, you bump into another metaphor for marriage. There are, of course, the "broken vows" between the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. But now, finally, there's a romantic metaphor that really hits the mark.

The proposed interim agreement on Eucharistic sharing with the United Methodist Church would not really be a marriage, argued one bishop this week. It's more like a first date.

*Methodists continued on THREE*



Letter 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.

Oppose Israel/Palestine Resolutions

I sincerely hope that all of Virginia's deputies to the General Convention will oppose pending resolutions relating to Israel and Palestine unless they are significantly modified to bring more balance.

It is not enough, in the words of A011, to call for "the end of all violence and its crippling impact on Israeli and Palestinian societies," and "the eradication of the sin of anti-Semitism," while demanding the dismantlement of the wall Israel is building to separate itself from the West Bank and the dismantlement of all Israeli settlements.

To be really balanced, the resolutions would also demand, at the least: an end to Palestinian terrorism, which is the root cause of violence in the region; Palestinian recognition of Israel, rather than simply endorsing the "rightful existence of the State of Israel"; and an end to Palestinian educational materials that promote such libelous forgeries as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and their replacement with textbooks that speak to the Holocaust of the Jews and the legitimacy of Israel.

The Episcopal Church brings no credit upon itself by promoting one-sided, simplistic solutions to what is a complicated situation in which both sides must be expected to make concessions in the interests of a lasting peace.

CLEVE CORLETT
GRACE Church, Alexandria

CAMERA Responds

One question that Center Aisle left unasked in its interview with Bishop Riah is if it is appropriate for the Episcopal Church to ask Israel to take

down the security barrier without explicitly asking the Palestinians to stop the terror attacks that prompted its construction.

This is exactly what the initial draft of A012 does and yet it escaped the notice of Bishop Riah.

Hopefully the General Convention will wake up before it is too late and correct this error.

DEXTER VAN ZILE
CHRISTIAN MEDIA ANALYST, CAMERA

Windsor: No Moratorium

A moratorium will not give us extra time. It will be three years until the next General Convention, no matter what. There is a false dichotomy being bruited about: either we continue to do justice to God's gay and lesbian children or we do mission and ministry.

Right now, and since the Episcopal Church first affirmed the worth of gay and lesbian people over 30 year ago in General Convention, we have been doing mission and ministry, both as the general church and here at home. Our diocese has been planting churches, giving Mustard Seed grants, sending newly confirmed young people on short-term missions, sending Lauren Stanley to Sudan, working with the Diocese of Renk. That's only the short list. I fail to see how working honestly and progressively with issues around human sexuality precludes mission and ministry.

Oh, I forget, there are those who ceased supporting the work of the church financially over these issues. But that's not the gay and lesbian members of the church, is it?

CYNTHIA GILLIATT
HARRISONBURG

Windsor: Relish Discussion

This is in loving response to William Sulik of Springfield, who feels those on one side of the current controversy want to "drive out" those who disagree with them.

Although I supported the consecration of Bishop Robinson, prior to that action I was

content and at peace in my parish with those who wouldn't support such an action. I never thought of creating or joining an alternate authority if Bishop Robinson or someone else like him hadn't ever been consecrated. I was joyful in fellowship of those with whom I disagreed on this issue and with those in agreement.

Sadly, after Bishop Robinson's consecration, people on both sides of the aisle left due to the strident actions of those in opposition. I relish theological debates and continue to conduct them via e-mail with a former parishioner who left because he said he didn't want people like me to have to leave their beloved parish.

I wonder if Mr. Sulik strongly supports adherence to the sections of the Windsor Report that ask bishops to respect demarcation lines as much as he seems to support the sections with which he otherwise advocates strong agreement?

If Mr. Sulik was my fellow parishioner, I would relish time with him to discuss and debate, and to spend time discerning our Lord's Word together in a place where neither one of us feels compelled to leave.

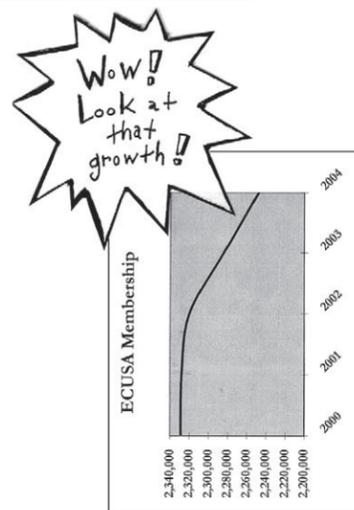
BILL MEHR
FREDERICKSBURG, VA.

Talk continued

On one topic before the Communion, a proposed Anglican Covenant, the secretary general of the Anglican Consultative Council has predicted that discussions could go on for six to eight years.

Too long? Not when the conversation is as rich as we expect it to be.

OffCenter



Church Hears Young Adults

By The Rev. Holly Antolini

They hailed from Los Angeles to Maine. One teaches physics; others are heading to seminary. But the racially diverse group was resoundingly one in saying that General Convention is addressing their concerns – pointing them toward a vision for the Episcopal Church, despite barriers to full inclusion.

Late one evening this week, Center Aisle gathered in a circle with 17 young adults attending Convention. Here's some of what we heard:

Becky Gettel, who heads Children's and Youth Ministries at St. John's Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Rhode Island, broke the ice. "I was an observer in Denver at the 73rd General Convention. This time, in spite of all the worry about the Anglican Communion, it feels like there's a spirit of calm at the center. It feels good!"

"It's early yet, but I'm incredibly encouraged," said the Rev. Stephanie Spellers, Minister of Radical Welcome at St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston. She observed that at the Program, Budget and Finance hearing the day before,

the majority of the testimony focused on the Millennium Development Goals. "When the world looks at us, they're going to see our passionate concern for justice and the poor and living Jesus' mission in the world. This is the witness of the church in the 21st century."

Barriers at the parish level were acknowledged. Some spoke of congregations that offer needed sacramental life, but fall short on the kind of koinonia young adults seek. Kate Ketchum, active in the college chaplaincy and the Episcopal Peace Fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis, described one way to meet that need. "We've been connecting online and across congregational and denominational boundaries as young adults – if by 'young adult' you mean people younger than 45 and hungry for a space to ask theological and spiritual questions. We meet outside church," she said.

The Rev. Calvin Sanborn from Hallowell, Maine, and the Rev. Adam Trambley from Warren, Pa., shared concerns about their small, rural

congregations and the tendency to compete anxiously for members and resources. "We've got to figure out a way for small congregations to get outside the walls of their buildings – and outside the attitudinal walls those buildings erect in the minds of the worshippers – and find new ways to share mission!" said Sanborn. "It's the work for justice that needs our energy!"

Many in the group nodded in agreement when Molly Harrington of Atlanta attested to the ongoing pain and challenge of claiming her identity as an Asian woman in a congregation with no other Asians. "And even in the anti-racism training I attended!" she cried, "When I spoke up about being the minority minority, no-one seemed to hear me! I've got to find a way to claim my identity, so that you can claim yours!"

Despite the challenges, the group was eager for more discussion about the positive message and mission from this Convention.

Methodists continued

And goodness knows, we trust each other to behave ourselves by maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Resolution A055 proposes that we stay in the conversation with the Methodists by spending more time together in worship and prayer. Neither vows nor concessions (liturgical or otherwise) would be involved.

Let's make room for the Holy Spirit to move between Episcopalians and Methodists by continuing the conversation. We'll find out later if any wedding bells are in our future.

Perspective continued

choice between: (a) being a church "which is progressive in relationship to a culture in which there is love without truth," or (b) coming back to its senses and "re-entering the boundaries of catholic/evangelical faith."

In other words, to both bishops, this issue is not a distraction from our mission, it is part and parcel of our mission. To misunderstand that is to sell both sides short.

Assumption Number Three: Reconciliation is possible if we just keep at it.

There's an assumption that seems to underlie most of the preaching and legislative process out here: that reconciliation is possible if we just keep trying.

I'm not sure I'm ready to give up on that assumption myself: that if we just keep talking ... if we all just keep coming to the altar together ... if we all just focus on the bigger picture or focus on what we have in common ... then things eventually will work out.

But what begins to emerge as you listen, really listen, to Bishops Duncan and Robinson is that they are not using different language to talk about the same church. They are talking about different churches.

How do you reconcile two points of view when one man's inclusiveness is another man's exclusion – when the movement of non-celibate gays into all levels of ministry is seen, by definition, as either a move toward, or away from, its gospel center?

"You do not hear gays and lesbians say, 'get out of my church,'" Bishop Robinson told me. "I want Peter Akinola in my church; the problem is, Peter Akinola does not want me in his church."

"Our manner of speech says, 'include everyone,'" Bishop Duncan told me, "but our manner of action is to force you to do it the majority way. In 1997, it became mandatory in all dioceses to include women clergy. That change had been made just 30 years before. What kind of 'inclusive' church is that? It is inclusive of those who hold the new view."

It is Gene Robinson who prays not to fall into his own agenda rather than God's agenda, and it is Bishop Duncan who prays that he be kept faithful and loving in all he does.

And so perhaps the last assumption that needs to fall is that God can't encourage both their efforts, and answer both their prayers, at the same time.



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