

THE CALL

The Reverend Adam S. Linton, Rector

AUGUST 2006

Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd

2374 Grant Avenue, Ogden, Utah 84401

Rector's Reflections

Dear Friends,

In this time of post-General Convention reflection, I note an all-too-frequent use of caricature in discussions of the various disagreements among Anglicans and Episcopalians. Reading and hearing about ourselves in the media is, most often, both discouraging and misleading. Subtlety, process, and nuance are seldom, if ever, captured by headline or sound bite.

A happy exception to this pattern is reprinted (with permission, of course) in this issue of *The Call*. Its author is a newspaper editor and active member of our church from Fredericksburg, Virginia. The title of Mr. Jones' piece, "Episcopalians Still Talking," doesn't have the "zing" of many others that I've seen, but it does have the notable advantage of giving an accurate clue to reality. His perspective is that, as Frank Griswold has often put it, of our "diverse center" that actually comprises the far greater part of our faith community.

One would think, though, judging by most representations, that there is no such place – that, instead, our church is made up of two radical, warring camps: 1) one (the majority), "ultra-progressive," which is said to be socially affirming, but which has also simply abandoned classic Christian belief, worship, and devotion, adopting instead, a drifting, merely contemporary feel-good spirituality; and, 2) another (the minority), "ultra-traditional," styled as keeping the exclusive adherence to anything remotely recognizable as historic Christianity, but also holding to a rigid, package-deal social agenda on gender, sexuality, and just about everything else. Both camps are hermetically sealed, so to speak. Nothing can disturb their respective sets of comprehensive assurance. In neither is it ever really okay to say, "I'm not sure about this one," or "I'm still working that out."

The truth is that, by far, the majority of Episcopalians, if presented with two such options, would check "Neither of the above." I personally suspect, as well, that the common currency of the above picture – regarding what's available out there in terms of church, is why so many these days

simply decline participation in the Christianity project altogether.

For all of us, perhaps it would be healthful to probe the purposes (or fears) behind the various caricatures that we use. Lack of real confidence, deep down, in some of those ostensible assurances of ours? Writing others off? Giving ourselves permission not to think in less-than-comfortable zones? I am convinced that it is Jesus Christ, Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen, who has set us free from the captivities of such dynamics. Jesus has something better in mind, doesn't he? Something better, accomplished and made possible in himself – for all of us, for the church, and for the world.

I've found this "diverse center" in Christ to be a gracious place; not insipid, but lively and life-giving. Some may have concluded that it just isn't possible. I respond, "Come and see." (John 1:46)

Blessings.

Adam †

Unpacking

As some of you know, David and I have been simplifying our lives lately. With our children grown, and both of us busy, our house has become more of a stopping off point – a place where carry out chores, rather than a retreat or a place to entertain. So, we have sold our house and many of our furnishings. (Thanks to some of you, this was easier than we expected!)

It's been an exhilarating experience. We're happy knowing that family and friends have adopted many of the things, which had been ours. We have enjoyed the shedding of items and, for us, the sense of freedom this brings.

After the garage sale, David and I counted the money we made. I said something about how the dollar amount was generous, but it didn't seem like all that much for years of collecting. David just smiled, and then he said, "Well, I guess it shows the real value of all those things we've been

holding on to.” Wow! He’s right of course. Keeping in mind that it’s all just “stuff” is the reason we’re simplifying in the first place.

How come it’s so easy for the ‘wants’ to quickly become the ‘needs’ in our lives? Much of the summer lectionary has approached this question too. Throughout July we read about Jesus sending the disciples out to spread the Good News with not much more than the clothes on their backs (Mk6:7-13); or being reminded by the Apostle Paul that no one should have too much or too little (2Cor. 8:15). These are words for me to keep close to my heart.

David jokes with our kids that we are ridding them of much of the work they would have to do after we’re gone. Any treasures they want – they can have now. Interestingly, there is little we are shedding that they have requested.

People unburden their lives in different ways. David and I are finding, with God’s help, the way that seems best for us. A thorough inventory – a good clean out – both in our surroundings and spiritually, is our current path. Whatever new open spaces we find inside our apartment – or inside ourselves – we want to be more mindful of what we collect this time.

Blessings
Claudia †

Episcopalians Still Talking

Episcopalians still talking, still looking for a future together

Comment by Ed Jones

Despite disagreements, there’s room for optimism in the Episcopal Church

It’s hard to say whether the doomsayers or the media are in the lead when it comes to proclaiming the breakup of the Episcopal Church. All that’s clear is that there’s a powerful need for context, precision, and, frankly, for everyone to take a deep breath.

Having witnessed the majority power of the diverse center at the Episcopalians’ triennial convention in Columbus, Ohio, last month, I’m exasperated – but not surprised – at how those who see themselves as being on the left or right are getting more than their fair share of publicity.

They are being aided and abetted by some (not all) journalists, who seem to be more interjecting oomph into their stories than in mastering the nuances of church talk.

The bottom line from Columbus is that, through earnest, heartfelt compromise, Episcopalians opted to stick together – to continue a prayerful pilgrimage despite deep divisions over issues of human sexuality.

Yet some of the reports you may have heard or seen make it sound as if the Episcopal Church has veered into a death spiral, with liberals and conservatives taking turns administering the last rites.

At the center of all this spiritual hullabaloo are two mild-mannered, ultrasmart leaders of the church – Gene Robinson, the openly gay bishop of New Hampshire, and Presiding Bishop-elect Katharine Jefferts Schori, who consented to Robinson’s election and who in November will become the first female head of a national church in the history of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Though both Robinson and Jefferts Schori have been cited by some as examples of the church’s leftward trend, it would be hard to imagine less combative people.

Robinson was elected bishop three years ago by the New Hampshire Episcopalians with whom he had served for many years. That election was supported by some bishops who felt that, whatever their personal views of Robinson’s lifestyle, New Hampshire Episcopalians were entitled, under the decentralized rules of the national church, to select the bishop they wanted. You might even call that approach a “states’ rights” view of church law.

The key issue, then and now, was whether Robinson’s lifestyle violates a clear standard for service in church leadership.

Jefferts Schori’s six years as bishop have been noteworthy for the strong ties she has built with fellow bishops across the theological spectrum. I must confess that, as someone who believes in the importance of holding our church together, my first reaction to her election was a feeling of dread that we had found one more way to divide the flock – this time on the role of women bishops. But it quickly became clear to me that her election was due not to gender politics but to a feeling among bishops that Jefferts Schori was the best-qualified candidate, spiritually and intellectually, to lead Episcopalians.

Some critics decired the dawn of a wacky, new-age era in the church after she used feminine terms in describing Jesus during a sermon at the General Convention. Yet those images date back hundreds of years in church tradition.

Put it all together, and you have a complicated story that’s being told in simplistic terms.

Twisted facts.

Here are a few of the flawed premises you may have read about so far:

Six dioceses of the Episcopal Church have decided to leave the church in the wake of last month’s General convention.

Actually, the leader of these conservatives has pointedly noted that they are not proposing to leave the church. Indeed, they hope that, at some point, they will be recognized by the worldwide Anglican Communion as the “true” Episcopal Church of the United States.

These six dioceses (and perhaps another five or six over the next few weeks) have asked for someone other than Jefferts Schori to work with them.

Since several dioceses had similar problems with the current presiding bishop, Frank Griswold, the new request may be more formal, but it would, in essence, continue the existing system.

And remember: If 11 dioceses request this alternative oversight, there are another 100 that have not made such a request.

The archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, has proposed an Anglican Covenant that could force the Episcopal Church to vote “nay” on gay bishops if it wants to remain a full member of the communion.

Not exactly. The archbishop has lent support to the 2004 proposal for an Anglican Covenant, or statement of mutually held core beliefs – an idea that has received tentative support from many quarters of the church (though not from the conservative Nigerian church, which recently referred to liberal positions on human sexuality as a “cancer”).

The formation of such a covenant would require years of discussion and voting by the 38 provinces, or national churches, of the Anglican Communion (of which the Episcopal Church U.S.A. is one). The best estimates range from four to 10 years.

It’s impossible to know at this stage what specific provisions would be included in such a covenant. Indeed, the archbishop has endorsed an intensive “listening process” in the communion on issues of human sexuality that is just beginning.

Lastly, though the archbishop is the titular head of Anglicans, the communion is extremely decentralized. Far from possessing papal powers, the archbishop is one of four “instruments of unity.”

So rather than setting up a definite yea-or-nay test for Episcopalians on gay bishops, the archbishop’s call would trigger a years-long pilgrimage for listening and discussion, which *might* result in a covenant that some provinces would sign as “constituent members” and that others would not sign, becoming “members in association” with the communion.

Two of the biggest churches in the Diocese of Virginia have decided to leave the diocese.

Incorrect. Truro Church and The Falls Church are participating in a diocesan discussion about their concerns over the national church’s course. Truro has called for a 40-day “discernment period” this fall to consider its future. The Falls Church hosted a congregational meeting last week on the same topic.

But neither has made a decision to leave the diocese.

I could go on. But you get the idea.

A real divide

Divisions in the Episcopal Church, and in other denominations, are real and deep when it comes to issues of human sexuality. There is still a chance that a formal split among Episcopalians will occur.

But the doomsday scenarios snagging the headlines are premature, at best. The risk to the church is that the distorted messages being circulated will contribute to a fracture.

Episcopalians, and Anglicans generally, have built a tradition of tolerance and inclusiveness. They have been bridge-builders between communities of faith. They have opened their doors to alienated persons of all types.

They share a history, a liturgy, and a core belief in the good news of Jesus Christ. They don’t share a rigid dogma.

Compromises on issues of human sexuality at last month’s General Convention have opened the door for those who disagree on some issues to focus on more fundamental areas of agreement. Indeed, the dramatic final day of the convention was a miracle of bridging gaps that seemed unbridgeable, thereby spoiling the hopes of those who yearned for schism.

The convention expressed its “regret” for contributing to the breached bonds of communion, without saying that it repented the consent to Robinson’s election – a repentance that would have been dishonest for many of those in Columbus to express.

The convention asked key bodies in the church not to consent to the election of any candidates for bishop whose “manner of life” (a not-so-subtle reference to living in a same-gender union) would cause strains in the communion.

The convention also expressed its willingness to explore the possibility of an Anglican Covenant.

With those compromises approved, many in the church now look forward to working with the new presiding bishop on her No. 1 priority – alleviating the world’s most desperate poverty.

The Episcopal Church sent a powerful message in Columbus that doesn’t translate easily into zippy quotes. But it deserves to be told.

(Reprinted in *The Call* with permission. Ed Jones, *The Free Lance-Star*, Fredericksburg, VA.)

Mr. Jones is editor of *The Free Lance-Star*. He served as editor of *Center Aisle*, a daily newspaper published by the Diocese of Virginia during the Episcopal General Convention.

Episcopal Youth

Sunday, August 20

We will meet at the Roy Aquatic Center @ 3:00pm and stay until closing (6:00pm).

Cost: \$5

Bring: suit, towel, sunscreen, water.

Jesus at the Movies

Tuttle Hall, Good Shepherd Church
 Sunday, August 27
 5:00pm – 7:00pm

Adam will be offering a presentation of the workshop he presented at the ECW Triennial in Columbus, Ohio, "Jesus at the Movies." This is a look with viewing of film clips and discussions of the various ways that Christ has been portrayed in film, from the 1929 silent *King of Kings* by Cecil B. DeMille up through Martin Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* and Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* (both of these controversial in their own ways), including, as well, *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* from the seventies.

Study Group Schedule Set

For anyone interested in getting a head start on the reading for next month's return to the regular study group schedule, we will begin September 12 with Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. We will be using the translation by Richard Peavar and Larissa Volokhonsky, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. ISBN: 0374528373.

Sessions will meet Tuesdays at 7:00pm and Thursdays at 12:45pm in the parlor. We will discuss "From the Author," Book One, "A Nice Little Family" and Book Two, "An Inappropriate Gathering" during our first session. Please refer to the September issue of *The Call* for the remainder of the schedule. Hope to see you there.

A Reminder from the Editor

Our Program Year begins next month, with a full schedule of classes, events, special presentations, and social activities. Please be sure to submit all happenings to me by **AUGUST 20**. You may reach me by phone, send me an email, or drop your submissions in my box in the parish office. Thanks for your help. – Betsy.
 745-0417
 bguyon801@msn.com

August Birthdays...

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP)

2. Cecele Cox
3. Jim Pierce, Leslie Taylor
4. John Cox
6. Marion Lloyd, Ginny Crolla
7. Daniel Wilde
10. Evelyn McCoy
11. Lucy Bevan, Richard Nelson.
12. Cora Loomis, Richard Lowe
14. Kathy Stretch
18. Lila Small, Sylvia Doe
19. Victoria Skiver
21. Dan Parrish
22. Rhonda Gill
23. Rick Anderson, Jay Stretch
24. Betsy Bauter, Nancy Groshart

August Anniversaries

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their lives. Amen (BCP)

2. John & Jodi Patterson
4. David & Tricia Dirks
12. Adam & Karyn Johnston
28. John & Cecele Cox, Bob & Jan Hall

Christian Education Workshop

"Getting Real About Christian Education"
 Saturday, August 12, from 10am to 2pm
 at Good Shepherd

Join with other parents, teachers, volunteers and others in your region curious to explore values and vision for education, formation and spiritual development for everyone, but especially our children and youth.

Facilitators: Ms. Karen Cramer-Van Winkle, Diocesan Youth Coordinator and the Rev. Jessica Hatch, diocesan Education / Resource Officer. To register contact Linda @ 392-8168.