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From Liverpool: Linked to You as ‘Jesus People’

by The Rt. Rev. Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool, England



Here in the Diocese of Liverpool, England, we greatly value our companion link to The Episcopal Church through the Diocese of Virginia. As a relatively new diocesan bishop, it has been my privilege to visit Virginia and to connect with the diocesan leadership, and also to stay at Virginia Theological Seminary for my pre-installation retreat. It is very good to be in the same Communion as you.

Like many in the United Kingdom, I've been following the news of General Convention with great interest from across the ocean. I give my warmest congratulations to Michael Curry as he prepares to become your presiding bishop, and my thanks to Katharine Jefferts Schori for her work in the world Church in that role.

In the Diocese of Liverpool, we minister in some of the most deprived areas of the UK. Under God, we aim to pray and work for a bigger Church here, so that we can make a bigger difference. Church growth and Kingdom work are indivisible for us. More people knowing Jesus; more justice in the world. That's our journey.

On this journey, I was encouraged by the final words of Bishop Katharine's sermon at the opening Eucharist a few days ago: "Follow Jesus into the neighborhoods. Travel light." And by Bishop Michael, who

said: "We are part of the Jesus movement, and nothing can stop the movement of God's love in this world." I'm glad to be in relationship with you as unashamed Jesus people.

But for us, just as for you, naming the name of Jesus is, of course, more than wearing a button. It means making a difference. To struggle for inclusion, justice and peace brings us alongside sisters and brothers of goodwill from many traditions.

In my years as Church of England's national mission and evangelism adviser, I would always commend the verse from 1 Peter as the evangelistic mandate for this generation, and the evangelistic moment: "Always be ready with an explanation for anyone who asks you for the shape of the hope that is in you."

When that moment comes, it's time to name the name of Jesus boldly and simply and joyfully and clearly – Jesus, our Lord and our friend. Until that moment comes, it's time to demonstrate our love for the world for which Jesus died and to earn the right to speak.

In the UK, we remember Bishop John Taylor of Winchester, who said: "Mission is finding out what God is doing, and joining in." With such a missiology, the division between evangelism and social action is artificial, unhelpful and false.

I am glad, and proud, to be in relationship with you as Jesus people who understand the holistic nature of our mission. May God bless you as your convention continues.

Encountering *Dios*: My Bilingual Worship Experience

by Aisha Huertas Michel, Communications Director, Diocese of Virginia

When I was 12 years old, I moved from Puerto Rico to the mainland of the United States. I remember being super excited to be part of a new, "cool" world. But from that moment, I also remember the struggle that began as I tried to integrate myself into my new community. I remember experiencing micro-aggressions because of the way I looked and spoke. I also remember praying and asking God to just let me fit in and to allow me to be just like everyone else.

I lived with that struggle well into my 20s and, for the most part, I succeeded at fitting in. At the very least I thought, I succeeded at making my accent barely noticeable.

But then something happened. I began to notice the struggle of my brothers and sisters in Latino/Hispanic communities within this new, "cool" world. I noticed, too, the struggle of other immigrants to live up to the promise of the American dream without losing touch of the culture and language that had so much influenced them.

I do not know exactly when my epiphany took place, but suddenly, I was less cautious with my accent. I began to look forward to the hot, summer sun that always enhances the darkness of my skin. I began unashamedly embracing the things that made me uniquely me. And I began to appreciate the importance of first language and culture in how we experience life.

I had one of these "aha," "yes, I get this" moments earlier this week as I sat in the bilingual Eucharist at General Convention. As Bishop Katharine began celebrating the Eucharist in Spanish, my heart leapt, and I was instantly taken back to my earliest encounters with God – sort of like certain smells and sounds bring us back to our earliest happy memories. I stood there with hundreds of people but, in that instant, it was just God and me – God as I knew him way back when, with the unshakable faith of a little girl.

It struck me then how often we the Church neglect to consider the importance of language and culture in the worship experience. We either fall into the lot of, "oh, well, the majority of our congregation speaks

English, so it is not a good use of our time to translate the service," or we think, "well, they understand English, so all is good."

But, the thing is, the experience of worship is more than just understanding the exact words or getting the gist of what is happening. Worship is allowing God to speak to your heart, to completely overtake you in that moment and to feel the presence of no one but the Holy Spirit. And, for me, as I am also certain is the case with other non-native English speakers, the way for that to happen in its most awe-inspiring form is to hear the words and the name of God in the way I first heard his name and understood his power – "Dios."

As I gather with other Christians to make important decisions about the future of our Church, I am grateful that someone still made time to ensure that, in the most sacred of moments, I could hear the voice of Dios without distraction and in an all-consuming way. As we continue to engage in conversation about immigrant communities inside and outside the Church, and as we aim to enrich our own personal journeys with God, we should all seek those opportunities to have the most intimate of moments with God.



I Have Called You by Name: Utah on Track to End Chronic Homelessness

by Jeffrey Stevenson, staff writer, native Utahan

As we travel between the Convention Center and our respective hotels, we have all seen our brothers and sisters on the street asking for “a little bit of help.” Based on this experience, you might think that Utah has a significant homeless population. But the state of Utah is helping the chronically homeless in a way that could become the nationwide model for serving the “least of these.”

In 2005, Utah approved a 10-year plan to end chronic and veteran homelessness. Through the “Housing First” model program, the state provided housing to any chronically homeless person who wanted it. Not only did Utah provide a place to live, but also services to help the homeless return to the “real world” and stay there. Previous homeless housing efforts required participants to attend programs before placing persons in housing; otherwise the housing was temporary. These approaches were not effective.

The current focus on chronic homelessness led me to ask two basic questions: How is it defined? And what led to new emphasis being paid to this sector of the homeless population?

Utah has defined this population as people who have lived in a place not meant for long-term habitation (e.g., a shelter or on the street) for more than 12 consecutive months or during three occasions over three years.

According to *Comprehensive Report on Homelessness, State of Utah 2014*, there are practical reasons for why new attention should be paid to the chronically homeless. While this group accounts for only 5 percent of the entire homeless population, it requires more than 50 percent of the resources allocated to homelessness in Utah.

For every chronically homeless person housed, there is a significant savings to community social service programs, which can then serve an additional 2.4 temporarily homeless individuals. More importantly, the chronically homeless – who often no longer remember what it is to live

in a home – are most at risk. They often need care for easily preventable conditions. Without housing, they have little chance of escaping the clutches of mental illness or addiction – the latter often used as a way to self-medicate the former.

According to a recent article in the Los Angeles Times, Utah has reduced the chronically homeless population by 91 percent on a path to reach “functional zero.” By favoring pragmatism over politics, the state reduced the population from 1,764 to 178. Utah no longer tracks the homeless by numbers but rather knows the name of every chronically homeless Utahan.

So how can the Church help? You might have noticed the red “parking meters” around the Convention Center—especially interesting because they are not near any parking spots. These red “parking meters” are actually a fund-raising effort by a local organization called Homeless Outreach Service Team. It’s an effort to move the community in Salt Lake City into a partnership with the police and homeless service providers and to connect the homeless with social services.

The success of Utah’s chronic homeless initiative speaks to the value of Christian charity, whether or not Utahans call it that. These children of God have been given homes with no strings attached, no expectation and without moral judgment. That act of kindness has resulted in many of the chronically homeless finding work, seeking medical help and establishing productive lives for themselves.

As fortunate guests in this city, we can show our support for these efforts by donating our change. Beyond that, General Convention attendees should take Utah’s example back with them, so that our own communities – many of them with homeless people in sight but “invisible” – can begin to call their homeless by name, rather than by a too-large number.



A Short List for Convention Take-Aways

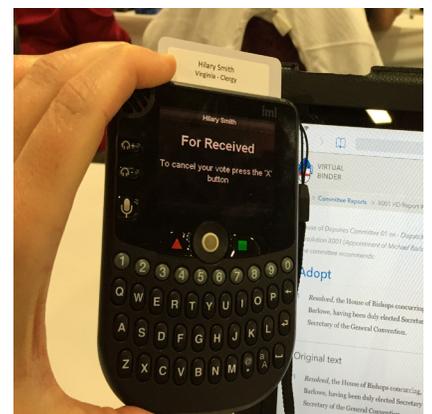
By The Rev. Mary Brennan Thorpe
Director of Transition Ministry, Diocese of Virginia

Looking for helpful ideas to take home from General Convention that might apply to your parish? Here’s a short list:

- 1) When you have an idea, be open to the possibility that your vision may need tweaking to be viable. If you cannot be flexible, you probably will not get what you propose.
- 2) Try to think of the questions that a committee or vestry may have and be prepared to answer them. Do not be surprised that there will be questions, particularly if funds are involved.
- 3) If you are seeking resources (e.g., funds, use of the church building, staff or clergy time), expect to be asked questions about how those resources will serve the mission you have proposed, how effectively the ministry will impact the targeted need, and if this is a one-time activity or an ongoing one. Those who are involved in the allocation of resources sometimes have to make hard choices. The greater the clarity you can provide about the whys, whats, and how much, the higher the likelihood that your proposal will be approved.

- 4) Pray. When General Convention is at its best, we see the ever-surprising work of the Holy Spirit: finding consensus where there appeared to be none, discerning creative solutions to seeming limitations, discovering shared passions. It happens in parishes too. Prayer softens hearts and opens minds.

God willing, what is done at General Convention helps those in the pews, providing the framework for what we do “on the ground.” What we do in the parish gives life to what the convention hopes to facilitate. Whether large or small, do the work wisely, prayerfully and strategically for all of God’s people.



A Question of Context: Do Churches Need a Universal Media Strategy?

The best evangelism being done on Twitter and in other media spaces is coming from voices doing or encountering the work, worship and service of Episcopalians in their communities. If the House of Bishops votes down B009 after the House of Deputies has passed it, it will not be a ruling against the use of Twitter by Church folks, but rather a refocus on questions of communication: What is unique to our place in the world as a Church? How do we tell our story in a way that maintains our identity, but tries new things? [Read more about digital evangelism online at centeraisle.net.](http://www.centeraisle.net)

