



The Daily Opinion Journal of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia

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Issue One

The Power of the Center: A Letter from Bishop Shannon Johnston



Blessings to you from the Diocese of Virginia, as Center Aisle begins daily coverage of our sixth successive General Convention. We like to consider this opinion journal to be a gift to the General Church, and we have been gratified by the positive response you have given us over the past 15 years.

Undoubtedly passions and rhetoric will flare over

the next 10 days. They already have in connection with the Task Force on Marriage's proposal to take a canonical route to marriage equality, rather than the constitutional route we favor. There will be room in our daily print publication and on our website for a wide array of views on these and other important issues.

But as General Convention officially begins its deliberations, I'd like to write about the important role we continue to see for Center Aisle, as well as some changes you will note from our approach in the past.

For starters, our print edition is slimmer than before, befitting our "green" convention. You'll also discover that our digital presence at www.centeraisle.net is more robust than ever, with commentary and essays from all over the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. As I mentioned, there is also room for you to participate in the ongoing discussions, through our digital forums.

None of these changes impacts our core role. Though the Episcopal Church of 2015 is not the same as the Episcopal Church of 2000, I believe the need for a voice from the "center" is as important as ever – perhaps more important. I began reading Center Aisle before I came to the Diocese of Virginia, when I served as a deputy from the Diocese of Mississippi. What impressed me then, and continues to impress me

now, is the vital need for a voice that recognizes how much stronger the ties are that bind us than are the disagreements that divide us.

The "center" in Center Aisle is not the midpoint of a line between the left and the right. It's not a place for mushy moderation or papered-over agreements. The "center" is the core of a circle - the foundational core that unites us at the foot of the cross. That's the core that's more fundamental than any resolution or amendment. The powerful traditions of Anglicanism don't call on us to foster artificial agreements across the board. Indeed, agreement is overrated! They call on us to live into our disagreements, while continuing to join one another at the communion rail to disagree better.

We will use the Center Aisle lens to focus on many of the issues at this convention that call on us to remember the fundamentals that unite us. Among those topics will be several that have to do with how we, as a unique community of faith, go about making decisions in ways that honor our disagreements and that celebrate the ties that bind us.

They will include the election of a new presiding bishop; the question of how the sacred union of marriage should be defined in the 21st century; the significant calls for reform and innovation from the Task Force for Re-Imagining the Episcopal Church; and the impact of our decisions on our fellow provinces in the Anglican Communion. You'll find out more about those issues in an accompanying editorial that is part of this edition.

It is a full plate, and much is riding on not only what we decide during these 10 days in Salt Lake City, but how we decide it. The staff of Center Aisle looks forward to working, reflecting and praying with you during this important time together. There are so many opportunities and blessings that lie before us.

Faithfully,

The Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston
Bishop of Virginia

More on centeraisle.net

The Presiding Bishop Nominees: An Experienced, Visionary Field: Center Aisle profiles the nominees.

Oh, My Heart Breaks: Prayers for Emanuel AME Church: The Rev. Dr. Dorothy White, chaplain of St. Catherine's School, Richmond, Va., gives an invocation to GC78 following the Charleston shootings.

The Parish to Presiding Bishop Pipeline: Is There Institutional Sexism in the PB Nomination?: Gail Goldsmith, staff writer, offers a data-driven opinion on the landscape facing women priests.

8 Things to Know as You Prepare to Land in the Land of Zion: Jeffrey Stevenson, staff writer, native Utahan and former Mormon, tells GC78 what we need to know about SLC, including navigating relative to the Mormon Temple and where to find coffee on Sundays.

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Center Aisle: Four of the Issues We Care About

Amid the hundreds of resolutions, studies and trial liturgies that will come before the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, four will go a long way toward defining our days together in Salt Lake City. Center Aisle will take a particularly focused look at this short list as the discussions proceed, and will welcome your views as well. They are:

Marriage Equality: Much time will be devoted to discerning how our Church should define marriage in the 21st century. A key part of that discussion will deal with, not where we should go, but how we should get there.

Center Aisle believes that the strongest witness to marriage equality would come from the constitutional process of changing the Book of Common Prayer. This approach would require approval from two successive General Conventions.

The canonical approach proposed by the Task Force on Marriage would produce a quicker result, since it would involve only one General Convention. But it would leave the new definition of marriage vulnerable to challenges, legal and otherwise. If marriage should indeed be “equal” (as we believe it should), then it should be addressed in the “equal fashion” required of all constitutional changes.

TREC: The Task Force on Re-Imagining the Episcopal Church (TREC) has come up with an array of interesting and substantive proposals. The stage is set for a series of important discussions. We support some, though not all, of the task force’s proposals.



For example, the call for a unicameral General Convention leaves us unconvinced. The unique ministry of bishops, as reflected in their ordination vows, is best represented in a collaborative but separate House.

There is certainly room for greater efficiencies and more sharing of ideas and perspectives. But a two-House General Convention remains the most accurate reflection of the richly distinctive ministries within the Church.

A New Presiding Bishop: We are impressed by the field of nominees. Any one of the four bishops would be a strong choice.

The Church needs a leader who will draw from our rich traditions, while helping us to connect with a broader community that is more secular and less attached to organizations than previous generations have been.

The Anglican Communion: We should never fall victim to the misperception that we are making decisions in isolation as a national church. The Episcopal Church is a province of the Anglican Communion, and those treasured ties to provinces all over the world always should be considered in the decisions we make and in the way we go about making those decisions.

That’s our short list. We look forward to offering an array of opinions on those and other issues – in our print product and on our website. Now, on with the discussion!

Oh, My Heart Breaks: Prayers for Emanuel AME Church

The Rev. Dr. Dorothy White is the chaplain of St. Catherine’s School, Richmond, Va. This invocation was originally posted on Thursday, June 18.



Yesterday, heinous aggression and hatred walked into consecrated space and took away the most sacred gift that we have: life. The culmination of being raised in an atmosphere of disrespect for human life manifested itself in the heart of a young man. Broken and confused, he walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in

Charleston and took life from his fellow brothers and sisters. One made in the image of God destroyed others made in the image of God.

I sat, and in a moment the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama came to my mind. On September 15, 1963, the culmination of being raised in an atmosphere of hatred manifested itself in a bomb that destroyed innocent lives.

As I sat I was reminded of words Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the funeral of Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, and Cynthia Diane Wesley, three of the four children who were murdered at Sixteenth Street Baptist.

“They died between the sacred walls of the church of God and they were discussing the eternal meaning of love.”

So how can we respond?

As our bishops and deputies gather to share in the 78th General Convention, I would urge that you take time and focus on “those things that break the heart of God.” Loving as God loves is not without challenge. Loving as God loves will stretch our lives to such a degree that only a Holy God can make possible.

As a young girl, in times of hardship, when revenge and anger seemed like the best answer, my parents would lead us to pray. And they would keep saying, “Let us pray.” There were times that they even had to remind each other that the avenue of lasting change is always paved with prayer.

Go to centeraisle.net to read this article in its entirety.

8 Things to Know as You Prepare to Land in the Land of Zion, Salt Lake City

By Jeffrey Stevenson, staff writer, postulant in the Diocese of Virginia, native Utahian and former Mormon.

#8. Navigating Salt Lake City is easy: You always know where you are in relation to the Temple.

Starting at the Salt Lake Temple, the streets increase at each block by a factor of 100. This means, if you are on the corner of 400 E and 300 S (locals would say 4th East & 3rd South), you are four blocks east and three blocks south of the Temple. This even holds true in the suburbs. If you are at 90000 S 200 E, you are 90 blocks south and two blocks east of the Temple. So, if you know where you need to go in relation to the Temple, it’s easy. If you don’t, see #1.

#7. No one talks about the city’s namesake.

“Lake, what lake?” The Great Salt Lake might as well be a void in space; most Utahans have nothing to do

with it. It’s also 75 miles long and about 35 miles wide, making it bigger than the state of Delaware. And, like the name suggests, it’s salty. This means floating in the Great Salt Lake is effortless but smelly. If you ask a local about a tour to the Salt Lake, they are going to give you a funny look and tell you to go to Park City. If you want to experience the lake, its Wikipedia page is a great place to start.

#6. If you’re driving, look both ways.

Everyone thinks that his or her state has the worst drivers. But coming from Washington, D.C., I feel as though I can say with some confidence that Utah drivers do not like to follow the rules. If you are waiting on a red light, do not hit the gas when it turns green . . .

Go to centeraisle.net to read this article in its entirety.

