



Different Accents, One Language; Different Houses, One Body

by The Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Diocese of Virginia



Who would have guessed that I would end up talking about the American Civil War with a bishop from another part of the world – in Spanish? The Diocese of Virginia was hosting our brother in Christ and I had the pleasure of showing him our see city. He did not speak English and I didn't speak his native language, so our communication depended on creative

hand signals. Soon, though, we discovered that we both spoke passable Spanish. With that, we found a common language in which we could learn from one another. Our accents were significantly different, but our language was the same.

At General Convention, we speak a common language of mission, but our two houses speak that language with significantly different accents.

During three successive conventions, I spoke our common language with the accent of the House of Deputies. At the last convention, in 2012, I experienced a transition time when my election as bishop was confirmed and I was seated with voice in the House of Bishops. In this convention, I speak with a new accent as a voting member of the House of Bishops.

As part of each house, I have heard and lived the differences. One house experiences sizeable turnover in membership from one convention to the next, while the membership of the other changes slowly. The first house meets once every three years while the second meets twice each year. One is a huge house in which it is not possible to know

every other member, while the other house is small enough that such knowing is the norm. In the larger house, members sit in rows facing forward, while in the other they sit in small groups at round tables. Given these realities, the kinds of relationships that develop in each house are different. The ways debates occur are different. Even the basis for voting is different.

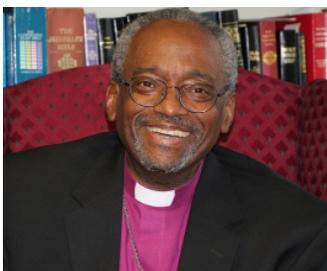
When I was elected a deputy for the first time, I was told that I was not a representative who polled the mind of my diocese in order to mirror the views of its members, but a deputy elected to vote my own conscience. As a bishop, I don't leave my conscience behind, but I hold firmly in mind my vow to guard the faith, unity and discipline of the Church, and to share in the governance of the whole Church, not just my diocese, not just the Episcopal Church.

In all this I have experienced that the House of Deputies goes broad and wide while the House of Bishops goes deep in relationships and in corporate memory. We as a Church need both motivations in our legislative work. We need the distinctive accent of each house. The very differences between the houses have at times made for tension, distrust, even broken relationship – but we need each other. Our common language of mission is clearer, stronger and more beautiful because of the different accents in which it is spoken. I have heard that a unicameral system would still allow for meeting and debate by order, and I will listen prayerfully to the debate on that in the days to come. If it's clear that these distinctive accents could remain in a unicameral system, I could support it. But if a unicameral legislature would monotonize our voices rather than unite them, I urge us to maintain our bicameral structure so that the distinctive accent of each house may long continue to fortify and balance the other.

The Presiding Bishop Nominees: An Experienced, Visionary Field



Thomas Breidenthal



Michael Curry



Ian Douglas



Dabney Smith

Read more about the nominees by visiting www.centeraisle.net

10 Buzzwords We Could Probably Do Without

We've come up with this list of overused Episco-jargon for your enjoyment.

Agile/Fluid/Nimble: For older folks, these words mean what we no longer are. For younger folks, these words mean what no one will let us be. Address the aim, not the feeling associated with the process.

Authenticity: Being authentic is like being classy. If you are, you're probably not talking about it.

Relevance: Ditto authenticity.

Boomers/Millennials: Don't assume a whole age bracket operates as a monolith.

Missional: Seems to be whatever someone decides it means in the moment, leaving ample opportunity for misunderstanding.

Think creatively: This phrase is usually in place of actual creative thinking and/or specifics.

Out of the box: Creativity should really be inside our boxes, not an exception.

We apologize that the last two were actually buzzphrases, not buzzwords. We were thinking outside of the box.



With One Small Step, GC78 Could Give \$250K to the Working Poor

By the Rev. John Ohmer, rector of The Falls Church Episcopal, Falls Church, Va.

Several General Conventions ago – Columbus, 2006 – I wrote a piece for Center Aisle that (I'm happy to say) people actually remember, years later. I've repeated it, with variations since, and even though I'm not attending this General Convention, it seems to bear repeating:

I don't know if The Episcopal Church is good news to the working poor, but you can be, in one small way, while you're in Salt Lake City. And that is, if you're staying in a local hotel, to leave \$5 on your nightstand each morning for the housekeeping staff.

By the time the General Convention is over, you'll have left around \$55. Probably not such a big deal for you, and about what you may be paying for airport parking back home.

Not a big deal to you, and not a big deal if you are the only one doing this.

But do the math: They say that General Convention will draw over 10,000 people to Salt Lake City over the next 10 days. Not all stay the whole time, of course, and not all spend the night in hotels.

So take half that number and say 5,000 people are spending the night there and let's say they spend at least five nights.

If 5,000 people leave \$5 a night, we inject \$25,000 of cash directly into the hands of the working poor each morning; multiply that times five nights, we give \$125,000 by the time we leave.

A less conservative (but completely possible) scenario: If those same 5,000 people leave \$5 a night for 10 nights, we inject a quarter-million dollars into the working poor's economy.

And let's look at it from the perspective of a housekeeper: Housekeepers at the hotels clean, on average, 15 rooms a day. If each hotel

guest on his or her floor left \$5, that housekeeper would take home \$75 income each day.

If the housekeeper is making \$7.25 an hour – the minimum wage in Utah – we're almost doubling her pay.

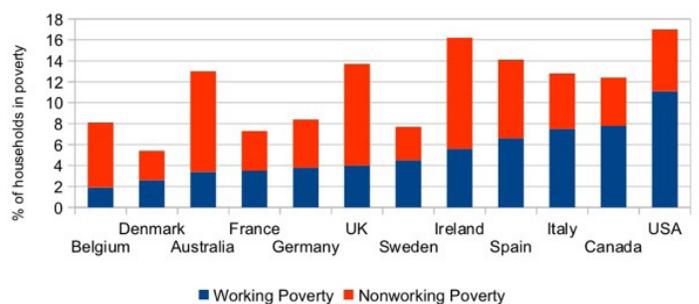
Actions speak louder than words, and I suggest that this simple action – leaving five bucks on the nightstand each night – is a lot more meaningful and powerful than any carefully worded resolution affirming the poor or claiming solidarity with them.

For extra credit, say hello to those housekeepers when you see them, to seek and serve Christ in the face of those who would otherwise be invisible. But as nice as a smile and a warm hello are, they don't buy milk or pay the electricity bill. So leave the five bucks each morning, whether you see the recipient or not.

It's a small price to pay to be good news to the working poor.

Working and Nonworking Poverty

Source: Brady, Fullerton, and Cross (2010)



A Matter of Fairness: Why Should One Diocese Get 40 Times the Voting Power of Another?

by Russ Randle, lay deputy from Virginia

The Taskforce to Re-Imagine the Episcopal Church (TREC) calls for the deputation to be reduced from four clergy and four lay deputies to three clergy and three lay. Russ Randle, chair of the Committee on Social Justice and International Policy, submitted this letter to the Church asking that it first address what he sees as a longstanding problem: unequal representation among the dioceses.



Please consider these comments about our equality in baptism as we decide whether and how to restructure our church to make us better able to preach the Gospel and build God's Kingdom.

Each baptized person is a minister

of the Gospel; we ordain some baptized people to the clergy to carry out specialized ministries. Combining lay and clergy insight, like binocular vision, shows us God's will and our people's needs in greater depth and detail than any single viewpoint can. General Convention's inclusion of lay and clergy orders together demonstrates this insight in practice; it is a critical strand of Episcopal DNA.

We are now trying to reorganize to advance the Gospel better in a world different than our parents knew and vastly different than the world The Episcopal Church faced when we organized in 1785. Our Episcopal DNA, though strong for ministry, has a critical flaw that demands correction if we are to succeed in this restructuring.

This flaw is serious and is both practical and theological. It is present both in our current system of diocesan representation at General Convention and in most current restructuring proposals.

This flaw is the grant to each diocese of the same voting power, regardless of the number of lay people or clergy in each diocese. We do

so even though some dioceses have 40 times as many people and 10 times as many clergy as other dioceses.

Through such geographic blindness, we mute a great many voices that should be heard, while randomly amplifying other voices based on their address. We cloud our discernment of God's will and our people's needs. We demean both our people and clergy based on geography. We contradict claims of equal treatment of the baptized.

From a secular viewpoint, this arrangement is grotesquely unfair. In the United States political system, this disparity in voting power would be an unconstitutional infringement on the right to vote. The standard of one person, one vote, was pronounced by the Supreme Court in Reynolds v. Sims in 1964. That case struck down geographic disparities in voting power similar to those in our current diocesan voting system.

The Episcopal Church is now more than 50 years behind our political system in providing elemental fairness. We have debated this issue in the Church since the 1880s. Our current reform proposals are far more timid in this regard than those from the 1960s, when we unsuccessfully confronted the same disparities.

Unless we make voting representation at General Convention roughly proportional to the numbers of lay people and clergy in each diocese, we contradict our theology of baptism, which says that baptized people are equal before God. We also contradict our theology of ordination, which says that the authority conferred by a valid ordination is the same for each presbyter.

No coherent Christian theology can justify giving one set of baptized people 40 times the voting power of another set simply because of their current residence. Similarly, no valid theology of ordination supports giving a clergyman in one diocese 10 times the voice of a clergywoman in a larger diocese. Neither lay people nor clergy grow wiser or more foolish, holier or more profane, simply by moving from one diocese to another. Folly, wisdom, holiness and sin resolutely ignore geographic boundaries.

If we really believe that people are equal in baptism and that ordination confers the same powers on each presbyter, then it is long past time to fix this problem. Let us make proportional representation an essential part of any restructuring in order to practice what we have been preaching about equality and inclusion.

