

The 78th General Convention The Episcopal Church

June 23-July 3, 2015 Salt Lake City, Utah



It's the bottom of the 9th. The score is tied at 3-3. Bases are loaded with two outs. And up comes a batter. The one with the worst record, wouldn't you know it! Sighing, you settle deeper in your seat and prepare yourself for overtime. You don't want to leave even though it's late. This game will determine who goes on to the playoffs. You've supported this team the whole season long. They need to know that you are here and rooting for them, win or lose. But a win sure would be nice.

The pitcher winds up and throws. You watch the ball and the batter – and with disbelief you hear that distinctive “crack” and the ball goes to the far outfield, just at the wall. The fielder dives but can't quite catch it on the first bounce. And the crowd- including you- goes crazy as those on base come home- but wait, the hitter still has to round the bases and come home.

Legs pumping, the hitter runs and then begins the slide into home as the ball is thrown from far out to the catcher in hopes of making it before the runner does. Everyone is on their feet- watching, waiting. The ball gets to the catcher's mitt, the runner slide home- but is the runner safe? Is the game over?

Home is that place where, for most of us, we are safe. We know that we are loved. We are surrounded by what is familiar, even when we move often. It's that place we yearn for when we are far away.

Rev. Gregory Straub reminds us that “home” is one of the most powerful words in the English language.¹ We have just completed the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church. For those who have been going to convention for years, it is like old home week. Familiar faces, familiar work to be done. For those for whom this was their first convention, it probably took a few days to learn the ropes. To learn where things were, who to ask for what and to settle into assigned roles such as deputy or even bishop or volunteer. To watch and to become, over the 12 days, a member of a family- noisy, contentious, but hopefully loving and welcoming.

This year's General Convention was momentous in several ways. It was the General Convention which would elect a new Presiding Bishop to serve for 9 years. We were electing someone to follow Katharine Jefferts Schori, the first female head of an Anglican Communion body. We call her Presiding Bishop but in our Anglican partners' terminology, she is our “Primate” meaning the head of a particular Anglican Communion partner. Bishop Schori faced disapproval by many, including instances when Primates from Africa refused to participate in meetings where she would be attending. A slap in the face both to her individually and to The Episcopal Church. And her election as Presiding Bishop is not the only issue on which The Episcopal Church differs from the wider Anglican Communion.

¹ <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/general-convention-july-2-rev-gregory-straub>

This just past General Convention also considered the structure of The Episcopal Church and marriage as well as many other resolutions (some 400 in all, I believe). As with any Convention, there are some resolutions a deputy supports and others that a deputy does not support. Trusting the process means trusting the result to the Holy Spirit, especially in those instances where the decision of the body voting is not what you or I chose as our vote.

Over the next months, we will talk together about several of the outcomes from this year's General Convention. I invite you to be present in September when we consider what the resolutions relating to marriage mean for us- for each one of us and for St. John's and for the Diocese of Indianapolis. This, too, is an issue on which people differ. Recalling our Baptismal Covenant vows to treat each of with respect and accord each person dignity will be paramount for those discussions.

If you have not already done so, I encourage you to "You Tube" or "Facebook" Michael Curry and to watch and listen to some of his sermons. He will be a quite different Presiding Bishop than anyone who served before him. I hope you will keep an open heart and mind as we begin to get to know him and his leadership.

During each General Convention, worship offers a chance to come together and to set aside- at least for an hour- the differences in understanding of God's will for God's people that sometimes have threatened to tear us apart. To see ourselves, gathered in community, as being "home in the Lord." A place where, at its best, we can argue and disagree as we strive to discern God's will for God's people. Even as we disagree, we still sit side-by-side in chairs and we stand side-by-side while we receive the body and blood of Christ. We are renewed as we are sent forth into the world- or at least back into committees and hearings and floor debates and votes that will help determine what we are and what we are becoming as the body of Christ.

For some, home means a particular place- a particular structure and ground. You may have heard the phrase: the old home place – a particular building, a particular address- that means home to you. Think about Scarlett in *Gone with the Wind*- she does whatever she can to preserve and protect Tara- her home.

For some, home is more about people regardless of location. The Episcopal Church, through the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies, authorized the sale of "815" – the building in New York City where the church headquarters has been located for many years, at the prior General Convention. The report of the group assigned in 2012 to consider where to move the headquarters came to a conclusion that I find baffling after 3 years of study and discussion: they could not make a recommendation. So, for now anyway, we can still refer to "815" when talking about headquarters physical location for The Episcopal Church. I believe our Presiding Bishop-elect, Michael Curry, will concur with me that the physical building does not ultimately matter even as I wish we would move out of New York for lots of different reasons. Fundamentally, though, what matters is that we continue to gather together remembering that where your heart is, there your treasure is also. Where your heart is- there is home.

Dr. Straub also told a story about a woman walking into the parish where he served as rector. As a lay person, she had the freedom to seek a church home that felt right to her. She told Dr. Straub

that she had just moved to town and was looking for a place where she could worship. She had one criteria above all that had to be met. The church had to be sufficiently “prayed in.” She had to feel, from sitting in the pew on a weekday when no one else was around, that this was a place where people prayed – for themselves, yes, but also for the needs of the world. A place where prayer was important. Straub wryly admitted that when this conversation happened the church had been prayed in for over 200 years! As it turned out, the woman was satisfied that the church had been adequately prayed in and she made it her church home. We could say the same about St. John’s as we begin to approach our 200th birthday.

Dr. Straub reminded those of us at General Convention that “houses, whether human habitations, places of worship, or convention centers, are just empty space until we make them our own. We invest our homes, whether residence, church or convention center with our precious emotions that include memories of our past, love for the people we associate with them, and hopes for the future.” God is waiting to be asked into our home.

In Second Samuel we read about the Ark of the Covenant being returned to the people of Israel. The Ark represented the place where God was believed to live. David, the King of Israel, is rebuilding and restoring the life of Israel by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. Jerusalem now becomes both the administrative and the religious center for the people of God. They are at home in the Lord.

Finding your home in God is worthy of celebration. David was leaping and dancing- although a king, he was also a child of God. David was not afraid to set aside the perquisites of his office to worship God. To give God praise and thanks. To shout for joy with thanksgiving that God had been returned to God’s rightful place in the hearts and minds of the people. The return of the Ark was worthy of celebration and to each David gave a cake of bread, a portion of meat and a cake of raisins. Food that many people did not normally have.

Home, at its best, is the place where we come together despite our differences. Home is the place where we can ask questions, where we can find ways to love and serve the Lord through outreach and mission. A place where sitting in the pew on a weekday you can still tell that this is a place that has been prayed in over the years. Welcome home.