

## **From Bishop Johnson at General Convention in Columbus, Ohio**

Day 4 in Columbus June 14, 2006

While much of note happened today, this will be brief as I am writing at 12:03 a.m. (technically on Day 5 in Columbus.) I just walked in from my last meeting of the day. In the course of the day now well past, I joined others for a Eucharist and sermon both in Spanish. Happily, the sermon was provided in English translation, but the passion of the priest who shared her thoughts on the texts for the day came through even before I read along with her. I met with Dispatch of Business for the day's planning. I was privileged to meet Harriet Near, ECW president, when I arranged a time for her to come to the House of Bishops tomorrow to deliver greetings from the ECW Triennial gathering.

During the morning Legislative Session, the 18-member provincial Youth Presence was introduced. The spokesman for the group described what, for him, was a significant moment in his spiritual journey as an 18-year-old. It occurred a couple of years ago at the Episcopal Youth Event (EYE) at Berea College in Kentucky. Our diocese was represented at the Province IV Youth Event the next year also held at Berea. The Youth Presence speaker recalled that during his EYE experience that he joined with a group of bishops, priests, deacons, and lay persons—young and old—to dig a ditch as part of a mission project to help improve living conditions for a Kentucky community. In the midst of the dig, it occurred to him that God can use mud (even the digging of a ditch) to preach the gospel. This insight led him to engage more closely with God and others in his journey in faith. General Convention is composed of people each with such stories to tell of how God has worked in our lives. Come Holy Spirit and give us the stories we need to tell and those we need to hear that in the end You may be glorified. Amen.

The House of Bishops was in Legislative Session before and after lunch. I took a long walk at the lunch break, attended an afternoon hearing on the consent proceedings for a new bishop-elect, gave my first report of this Convention to the House of Bishops on behalf of the Joint Nominating Committee of which I serve as Vice-chair. After we adjourned the Legislative Session, I met with a bishop on a special project I have undertaken on behalf of the House of Bishops. I also attended the CREDO reception. This is particularly important and a source of Holy Satisfaction for all of us in West Tennessee given the work that our own Bill Craddock does in leading the CREDO efforts to bring health and balance to clergy lives. Also present were Norm Shaw (husband of our Communications Officer, Christi Shaw) and many other Memphis CREDO staff persons.

I attended the hearing of the Special Committee on the Anglican Communion until 8:45 p.m. Without exaggeration, it appeared to me that well over 1,000 people were present for the gathering. The comments in support and against various aspects of the report of the Special Commission on the Anglican Communion were fairly evenly distributed between the speakers at the hearing. To summarize, I cite as best as I can recall the comments from two of the most well-known proponents of the varying positions presented. Bishop Bob Duncan (Pittsburg) said that “the task is impossible to hold together the conservative and progressive wings of the Episcopal Church... We have

reached an impossible moment in holding it together.” Bishop Gene Robinson had a different perspective on the question really behind the meeting and the Convention in which we were all participants. In essence, he asked “do we recognize the light of Christ in the lives of gay persons?” He went on to say that “The homosexual agenda is Jesus Christ.” There were moderate voices between these two more overtly opposing views, but the edges of the hearing witnesses spoke to one or the other perspective with passion, clarity and, at times, some eloquence. One person noted that “our Communion is evolving” and that this Windsor process invites our brothers and sisters to walk with us through that time of evolution. He ended by recalling the well-known observation, “Conversation leads to conversion.” While the meeting went until 10:00 p.m., I slipped out at 9:00 p.m. in time to order dinner. Rene Somodevilla and Barkley Thompson joined me. However, our orders didn’t get delivered until 9:30 p.m. so I gave mine to a person who joined us while we were waiting. Then I was off to my last meeting (scheduled to begin at 9:30 p.m.) of the evening. It ended about 11:50 p.m. Thus endeth another day with milk and cookies from the hidden stash in our hotel room. And a blessed good night to you all.

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