

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

Day 7 in Columbus June 17, 2006

The morning began with a meeting of Dispatch of Business in preparation of today's agenda and of tomorrow's final planning for the election of the 26<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop. We are scheduled to go to the election following tomorrow morning's community Eucharist. We will be sequestered until the election is completed and the House of Deputies concurs with the election. Our work on Dispatch is to plan for contingencies and anticipate what might go wrong. So we have Plan B and other "what if" scenarios for the day depending on when the election is completed. I for one am going to take a novel with me. Sometimes the time between ballots can be a bit tedious.

Today's worship was the triennial United Thank Offering ingathering at which representatives from each Province of The Episcopal Church presented their contributions. The preacher was Dr. Jenny Te Paa of the Anglican Consultative Council. I want to have a copy of her sermon posted on the diocesan website for others to read. I agreed with most of her presentation. At the same time, I was both challenged and discomfited by certain of her comments. I want to get the actual text in front of me before commenting on it in more detail.

In the Eucharist, we sang a hymn set to a traditional Japanese setting. It was haunting for its oriental lilt and for the words that recalled again our convention theme, "Come and Grow." "Praise to God, praise to God, for the greenness of the trees, for the beauty of the flow'rs, for the blueness of the sky, for the greatness of the sea. Praise to God, praise to God, now and forevermore. / Thanks to God, thanks to God, for the gift of friends in Christ, for the church, our house of faith, for the gift of wondrous love, for the gift of endless grace. Thanks to God, thanks to God, now and forevermore. / Sing to God, sing to God, for the grace of Jesus Christ, for the love of parent God, for the comfort and the strength of the Spirit, holy God. Sing to God, sing to God, now and forevermore." These simple words set within their haunting melody presented a moment of contemplation, thanksgiving and awareness.

After the Eucharistic celebration, there was little time for legislation in the course of the day. Nominees for Presiding Bishop were presented in a joint session of both Houses. While the House of Deputies honored their retiring President, Dean George Werner, the House of Bishops honored (and roasted) eleven retiring bishops during the course of a lovely dinner celebration as is our custom. Following the dinner, over 1,000 deputies, bishops and guests gathered to honor Presiding Bishop Griswold and Phoebe Griswold for their nine years of faithful service and commitment to God's work of reconciliation and care for men, women and children around the world. It was poignant, fun and inspiring.

The legislation we were able to deal with today was fairly straightforward. I won some and I lost some. Yet, even in "losing" I recognized the intent of the side that prevailed as being about the desire to accomplish God's good news for people who were otherwise likely to be left out or at least marginalized. So I cannot really say I "lost" anything but a

vote. In the long run, I may just have to wait and see where and how God's spirit will work through that particular decision reached by the Convention.

Come to think of it, instead of a novel for tomorrow's election, I think I will take a book by Susan Monk Kidd that has been my night time reading of late. It may be more appropriate to the occasion of discernment tomorrow foretells than the murder mystery I have also been reading. Kidd's book is titled, *When the Heart Waits* with a subtitle, "Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions." Among the many gems the text offers for contemplation is the following, "The fullness of one's soul evolves slowly. We're asked to go within to gestate the newness God is trying to form; we're asked to collaborate with grace. That doesn't mean that grace isn't a gift. Nor does it mean that the deliberate process of waiting *produces* grace. But waiting *does* provide the time and space necessary for grace to happen. Spirit needs a container to pour itself into. Grace needs an arena in which to incarnate. Waiting can be such a place, if we allow it."

With this in mind, I close tonight with one additional reflection: Waiting can be an arena for grace if I am talking about my own waiting, my own hollowing out so that I might become a container for God's Spirit. Such waiting may well be an arena and container of grace for others as well. But, I can only open myself to waiting. I cannot demand it of any one else. This is a common fallacy that we hear addressed by many on all sides of what ever issue we are addressing at any given time. The fallacy is to expect or think that we can demand that someone else can be required to wait or, for that matter, not to wait. The only one we can require to wait is ourselves. Others may need to go on if they are ready or they may need to wait longer if they are not. But I can offer myself to wait, and I pray for a waiting heart.

God willing, I go tomorrow to Trinity Church, Columbus, Ohio to wait in the presence of brother and sister bishops. In their own way, they too will listen for the grace of the Spirit to lead us to God's choice for our new Presiding Bishop. This same rhythm of wait, be opened, be filled with grace and respond in faith is repeated over and over again. It is repeated throughout the Convention on each matter that comes before us. Sometimes I wait... Sometimes I don't. I imagine that it is the same with others. But for now, I pray the spirit of grace will come to lead and guide me in each of the choices I will make. I invite others to this time of waiting too. Not that this is a passive time. What I am asking of myself and inviting others to do is to actively open ourselves to God's grace. This is anything but passive. This may be the most uncontrollable choice we can make. It is definitely the most faithful. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

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