



St. John's Parish

16 Church Street
Waterbury, CT 06708
(203) 754-3116

a member of the Episcopal
Diocese of Connecticut

FROM THE CONVENTION

**An eyewitness account of the actions taken
at the historic 74th General Convention of
the Episcopal Church, USA, held in
Minneapolis, MN, August 2003**

**Written by the Rev. Dr. James G. Bradley
Rector, St. John's Parish, Waterbury, Connecticut USA**

**Jim's diary begins with the sermon he preached at St. John's, on the Eve of the
Convention.**

July 27, 2003

Why I'm an Episcopalian....

This little book is called 101 Reasons to be an Episcopalian. Since much of what I want to say today is about the Episcopal Church, I'm going to read several of them to you as we go along.

87 by a woman priest from Florida: "We don't have all the answers and we welcome others who love the questions."

86 by a laywoman in Rochester: "Catholic, without the pope and with women; protestant without the gloom...."

Tomorrow at 9:55 a.m., God willing and the creek don't rise, I'll be on an airplane headed to Minneapolis, Minnesota and the General Convention of the Episcopal Church as one of our Diocese's 4 clergy deputies.

I want you to know this: I am both proud and humbled to be one of the four priests representing the Diocese of Connecticut at the General Convention. Proud and humbled—both at the same time.... Both together.... Just like that....

Reason # 52: "this is the only church that is as lovingly loony as your family." Mary Lyons, Diocese of Olympia

#80—a layman from Atlanta: "We don't quiz you on your beliefs before worshipping with you."

What I want to tell you about the General Convention of our church is this (it's a quote from Dame Julian of Norwich): "All will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well...."

That's not the message you will hear in the news media about the goings-on at General Convention. What you will hear—unless you log on the St. John's web site and get my “reports” from the Convention—is this: the church is in a mess it can't get out of...everything is falling apart...the Episcopal Church is about to split asunder and blow up like a cheap balloon.

My advice is this: don't listen to that negative stuff.
My mantra is this: “all will be well....”

In today's gospel, Jesus walks on water.

Twenty years ago or more now, one of my favorite poets, the late Denise Levertov, said this: “The crisis of faith is the crisis of imagination. If we cannot imagine walking on the waters, how can we meet Jesus there?”

Denise Levertov said that at a conference of poets and theologians. For my money, you couldn't beat that combination—poets and theologians...people who anguish over “language” and people who fret about “God”. Poets and theologians—now you're talking....

Let's cut to the chase—the real issue facing the General Convention, in one way or another, is the issue of homosexuality.

There is a remarkable amount of disagreement within the Episcopal Church about homosexuality. And that disagreement will come to the General Convention in several ways. It will come up over the confirmation of the election of Gene Robinson as the next bishop of New Hampshire. Gene Robinson has been a priest for 30 years. He is currently the assistant to the Bishop of New Hampshire. He heads committees for the national church. He happens to be a gay man in a committed relationship with another man.

There are 10 other elections of Bishops that will come to the General Convention. Not since the 1870's has the larger church overruled the choice of a Diocese as their bishop. And the 10 other bishops elected in the last 3 months will be approved by General Convention without debate and unanimously. But not Gene Robinson....

If I were a betting man, I'd say the odds of Gene Robinson being approved by General Convention are 4 to 1 in favor. And when that happens you will read and hear how the Episcopal Church is about to fly apart and self-destruct.

I would urge you not to believe that.

I would urge you to believe this instead: “all will be well....”

One thing the Episcopal Church is blessed with in abundance is “imagination.” We will walk on the waters.... And all will be well....

#32 by Elizabeth Geitz, a Canon at the Cathedral of the Diocese of New Jersey: “The Episcopal Church taught me that Jesus came to challenge, not just comfort; to overturn, not maintain; to love, not judge; to include, not cast aside.

Most likely the Convention will also vote on whether or not to ask the Standing Liturgical Commission to prepare a ritual for the blessing of committed relationships outside of marriage. No matter what you hear in the media—General Convention is not voting to approve “gay marriages”.

“Marriage” is a function of the state, not the church, so General Convention has no say in “marriage law”. Because of Connecticut state law, an Episcopal priest can legally sign a marriage license as an “agent of the state”. What I do, as a priest, in a marriage, is ask God’s blessing on the commitment and fidelity of the man and woman. What General Convention will most likely consider is whether there should be a service to bless the monogamous, faithful, life-long relationship of two people that is not marriage. The resolution is, in one way, separating what the “church does” from what the “state does.” If that resolution passes—and I’d put the odds at 2 to 1 in favor of it passing—the church will develop, over the next three years, a ritual to bless “relationships” other than marriage.

If that resolution passes, you will hear that Liberals and Conservatives are about to tear our church apart. I’d urge you to suspend your judgment and remember this: “all will be well, all manner of things will be well....”

11, Barbara Ross, Diocese of Oregon: “At our best, Episcopalians can respectfully disagree about a great many things—and still break bread together.”

#13, by Carter Heyward of Massachusetts, one of the first 7 women ordained a priest...before the General Convention approved women’s ordination: “We believe that love without justice is sentimentality.”

There is a sense of *deja vu* about all the media hype about this year’s General Convention. The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, critics said, were about to implode and fragment a quarter of a century ago over revision of the Prayer Book and the ordination of women.

And it is true that a small number of Episcopalians chose to leave the church after those changes. But the great schism nay-sayers predicted did not happen. We had the patience and imagination to walk on stormy waters. And, if we in the Episcopal Church can find—in the midst of great conflict and disagreement—if we can find “our better selves” we can walk on waters again.

The secret to our “imagination” as a church is that we Episcopalians—deep-down, value “each other” more than we cling to our divisions. And we are, as a church, dominated by a commitment to Justice.

Reason #62 of the 101 reasons to be an Episcopalian comes from Nancy Vogel of the Diocese of Vermont: “Despite or perhaps because of our present disagreements in the Episcopal Church I am reminded that God calls us all together because we aren’t WHOLE without each other.”

Reason #68, a lay person from New York: “I love our church because we don’t think UNITY means UNIFORMITY.”

“All will be well” with us, if we can cling to our passionate commitment to “be together” in the midst of deep differences. We Episcopalians are the only denomination that is practiced at that. Somehow, over our history, we have found the imagination necessary to “belong to each other” even though we disagree. This is a “lovingly loony” church. You don’t have to leave your questions or your intellect or your deeply-held opinions outside the door to be here and share in the sacrament with each other.

We Episcopalians define our “identity” by our worship instead of our dogma. When Queen Elizabeth the First was asked, centuries ago, if members of her church should cross themselves during the Eucharist, she said, wise beyond words: “none must, all may, some should....”

That is the openness and inclusiveness that is one-half of the genius and glory of our church. The other half of that genius and glory is this: we are the most “democratic” church in Christendom. We make our decisions on small matters and great matters by “voting”.

I was “elected” nearly 15 years ago to be your Rector. We “elect” our bishops. The Presiding Bishop of the Church is “elected” by the other bishops. The deputies to General Convention are “elected” to vote for their Dioceses by their Diocesan Conventions. You “elect” the vestry members that make the decisions about St. John’s. And the Vestry makes decisions by “voting”.

The Episcopal Church is a unique American institution, formed at the very same time as our nation by some of the same people. And the founders of our Church understood the wisdom of the founders of our nation—the way to make decisions is by voting...majority rules.... Here in the United States and here in the Episcopal Church, we don’t believe “unity” means “uniformity”. We vote on difficult issues. Then we move on, unified but not uniform. And we deeply, profoundly value the “loyal opposition”.

An “inclusive democracy” is what the Episcopal Church is. The “loyal opposition” is greatly valued by the majority. That was true for those who opposed women’s ordination and the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. It will be true two weeks from now toward those who are disappointed, broken and angry about whatever happens at General Convention. They will be loved. They will be comforted. They will be included. Without them, the church will not be whole.

“All will be well...” It will take a while and some few may choose to leave the church if I’m correct about how the votes will go. But those who are happy about the “votes” won’t want anyone who is unhappy about the “votes” to leave. If they leave it will be their choice and their leaving will be mourned greatly.

And this church will go on. We will welcome all to taste and see how sweet the Lord's Body and Blood truly is. We will value everyone, no matter what they think or believe. We will never require "uniformity" to have "unity". And we will stand for love and justice—love and justice and the wonder of God.

That will not change. Not one iota, not one.

And all will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well....

Diary Entry Number 1

July 28, 2003: Heading West...

Every great journey, we all know, begins with a single step. Mine was tripping over my sandals on the way to the bathroom at 5:20 a.m. on July 28, 2003. Every great trip begins with a small trip, I always say.

Bern drove me up to Bradley Airport and on the way I remembered how my father once flew into that same airport, late in his life, and the stewardess, God bless her, said to him, "Mr. Bradley, we're coming into your airport now..."

Dad told me that story over and over, so happy that he had "an airport" to call his own.

Coming to Minneapolis, I have the same feeling—this General Convention in some way, belongs to me. I don't mean that in a possessive way—it's simply this...I have some say in what is going to happen in this General Convention. I have a vote. It is mine....

Checking in at the curb, the Caribbean worker said to me, "Hey, why are you going to Minnesota?"

"I'm going to the Convention of the Episcopal Church," I responded.

His co-worker, another island man, asked: "Are you a church man?"

"Yes," I told him, "yes, I am."

"Well God bless you," he responded heartily, "God bless you all."

You can't beat that kind of send off. You couldn't beat it with a stick. You couldn't "make up" that kind of blessing at the beginning of something. It was just what it was—spontaneous, profoundly meant, honest and valued.

"God bless us all..." is going to be one of my mantras for this General Convention.

I ran into Bishop Curry in the lobby of Delta Airlines. While we were talking we saw Mark Santucci walk by. Later, through security and down to the gate, we ran into Ellen Tilliotson and Barbara and Dexter Cheney and Rose Eagen and Bishop Ramos and his wife and Gene Latimer and Beth Pantilitis—who, at 20 is one of the youngest Deputies to this Convention. And there we were, waiting for a plane to Cincinnati—three of the four clergy Deputies from Connecticut and three of the four lay Deputies and two of the three Bishops. Here, on the east coast of this wondrous nation, we were about to climb on what is—to my mind—nothing more than a glorified and enormous tin can that can fly, and head off the middle of this land—the plains of the Mid-west—to make decisions that will form and shape this church I love for ages to come.

Three hours plus on a layover in Cincinnati is enough, I assure you! But what was great was discovering other Episcopalians who had flown in from around the south and east and were waiting for the same connection at the same gate. The Episcopal Church is only 2 _ million people—so somebody in our group knew someone in one of the other groups. A deputy from Mississippi wondered out loud how many Episcopalians were going to be on our plane.

“Why don’t we call out, ‘The Lord be with you’ and see what happens, someone suggested.

Things get flat quick outside of Cincinnati. The geometric look of the Midwest from 31,000 feet always amazes me. Everything is blocks and squares—even the cities you fly over have neat, regular grids—so different from the seemingly endless forests of Pennsylvania and West Virginia and the snaking, turning roads there. The Church reflects the country—great diversity, deep differences. Minneapolis, for better or worse, will be a place where those differences meet and perhaps clash. However, our church is not only a reflection of our differences—it is a reflection of our unity as a “people”—a community of faith that shares in the same cup and the same bread, drawn together and made whole by who we are and whose we are...a people of God, joined in common worship. I’m putting my money on that connection rather than on what tears us apart. At 31,000 feet over Ohio, our politics and theology don’t seem to matter much. We will all land together or all go down in flame and wreckage together. Being nearly 6 miles above the fray gives you a different perspective.

We landed in Minnesota “together” and straggled around what was a much larger airport than I’d imagined to find the shuttle buses to city. Two elevators and a lot of walking later, 7 Connecticut folks were in a van with one lady from Northern Indiana on our way to the Double Tree Suites. Since we got on the highway at 5 p.m.—6 p.m. on the East Coast—I’d been up nearly 12 hours and found myself in rush hour traffic! Our driver was from India but the radio station he had on was “Christian rock”. “At least we know our driver is a Christian,” I said to Mark. But as it turns out, rush hour in Minneapolis is a much more polite experience than back East. (Stereotypes are always dangerous, but there is, in every “stereotype” something true that should be valued. The Midwest is different from the East Coast. People are invariably, almost maddeningly polite and

deferential. And the “mix” of people in Minneapolis is different from Waterbury. I was walking down the wonderful urban “mall” area a block from our hotel with two other folks from Connecticut. Ellen nudged me and said, “stop staring at all the blonde people.” Until she said that, I hadn’t consciously realized what I was doing. But she was right—lot’s more Nordic looking folks here. And it is unrelentingly clean and neat. People pay attention to the “walk/don’t walk” signs. Drivers stop when the light turns yellow. It is a cultural thing—the Midwest is different.

When we got to the Doubletree Suites, one of the hotels the General Convention placed Deputations in, Bishop Rowthorne and his wife, Ann, old friends of mine, were in the lobby. One of the things I am astonished about is how many people I know are here. I would normally think, “I don’t know a lot of people in the church”. General Convention proves me wrong.

Ellen and I went to dinner after walking the streets for nearly an hour. Ellen grew up in North Dakota and came to Minneapolis as a teenager to buy her “college clothes”. Minneapolis is, for a vast area of the Midwest, what New York City is to us—“the city”. There is a great deal of “civic art” here—lots of fountains and art work on the streets. It is remarkably civilized and urban. On my first night here, the city impresses me greatly.

As we were entering a sea-food restaurant, we met Bishop Smith and Kate. So we shared some great fish together and talked about the Convention and how things were going. In the hour we spent there, three other bishops walked by our table, requiring Drew and Kate to get up and hug and then introduce them to us. Like I said, this is a small church. Lots of connections and ways of knowing other people show up. General Convention is like a “family reunion” for a pretty large family....

The restaurant was so crowded with Episcopalians that we were all late for the first “Connecticut Caucus” of Deputies and Bishops. There were lots of stories and rumors and gossip to share. Again, like a family—that’s what this church is...a big family. The “buzz”, of course, is about the confirmation of Gene Robinson as New Hampshire’s next bishop. There are so many things that will come before this convention, but whether or not Gene Robinson will be approved as the first openly gay bishop in a committed, life-long relationship is the crux of it all. Everything else will flow out of that decision and the church we “will be” depends on what happens about Gene. Gene is a remarkable and able and loving man. If anything, he may be too sweet to be a bishop. But he will be a great bishop—everyone who knows him agrees on that. And his confirmation will be the moment of truth for this Convention and this Church. We will do many other things that are more “important” and will make a bigger difference in the world. But Gene’s confirmation vote is what the whole world will be watching. It is the elephant in the room that we all acknowledge and recognize. History, fickle as she is, will remember that vote above all the others. Connecticut’s representation is solidly in Gene’s camp. The vote will be 4-0 among the clergy, 4-0 among the laity and Bishop Smith will vote “yes” as well. Some of our delegation

wear buttons that say “Ask me about Gene”, in his support. Gene Robinson, I saw today, has on a button that says, “I’m Gene.”

Next door to our hotel is the British Pub. Beth and Ellen and Mark and Ted Molligan and I went over for a beer. They have almost as many beers as the White House Pub in London, where my son worked for six months right after college. My son is taking the bar exam in New York Tuesday and Wednesday while I’m far away. I’m thinking about him and praying for him even as I involve myself more and more in what’s happening here.

My room: so you won’t worry about me, you need to know I’m staying 12 nights in a room bigger than Josh’s apartment in New York! I have a sitting room with a couch, chair, desk and 32 inch TV. There’s a refrigerator, microwave oven and coffee maker across from the bathroom. Then I have two double beds and another 32 inch TV! This is called a “single” at the Doubletree!

I watched TV, started writing this and then went to bed.

I’ve “come West” and I’m beginning to feel how important this Convention experience is going to be. July 29—Day One...So it begins...

It takes a while for something as cumbersome as the General Convention to get started. Today is the “day before”...and, in stops and starts, it all begins.

The committees, where the bulk of the work of General Convention gets done, has meetings in the morning. As a first time delegate, I didn’t get a committee assignment. So I spent the morning walking on one of the treadmills in the work out center on my floor of the hotel—a center that many gyms would be proud to have! I also took the opportunity to “walk the perimeter” around the hotel and Convention Center and getting the lay of the land (very “flat” land, if I hadn’t mentioned that). I tend to be nervous in a topography that resembles nothing as much as a pool table. I’m a child of the mountains and what the glaciers of the Ice Age gave New England was Block Island, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. What it gave Minnesota was 10,000 lakes and a view of the horizon—if the buildings were out of the way—that goes on nearly forever.

I wander around the exhibit hall for a couple of hours. Every “interest group” and special ministry in the Episcopal Church has a booth, as well as booths hawking books, jewelry, vestments, icons and everything else you can imagine that has to do with churches. There’s even a group that manufactures columbariums—and someone from that company will call us about our columbarium project. It’s a remarkable way of encountering the “whole church”. Just walking around the exhibition hall, which is about the size of Waterbury’s Green, educates you about how vast and diverse and remarkable this church of ours is.

The real stuff doesn’t start until tomorrow, but there was an orientation for the Deputies that included an address by Frank Griswold, our Presiding Bishop and George Werner, the President of the House of Deputies.

We have two “houses”—the House of Deputies (all the priests and lay people from each of the 118 dioceses of the Episcopal Church and the House of Bishops, active and retired. Frank and George addresses a “joint meeting” of the Houses—not unlike the joint session of Congress for the President’s State of Union address. Both speeches were grave and upbeat at the same time—reflecting, I think, the nature of this General Convention. We have grave and serious issues before us. And, we have remarkable possibilities available to us.

I can’t tell you how excited and hopeful I am about this Convention. The time is ripe for the Episcopal Church to move boldly and with confidence into the future we can create. And, hanging over all that is the danger we are in because of one terribly divisive issue.

The Chinese character for “crisis” is a combination of two characters—danger and possibility. Both the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies reflected on the “danger” of this moment in time for the church and the remarkable “possibilities” before us.

That is what I’d urge you to hold on to for these 12 days of the General Convention of our wondrous, loony, holy church—there is so much possibility available to us. We are on the edge of something remarkable. The time is ripe and right for the Episcopal Church to become something attractive and desirable to many more people than we’ve ever served before. The church exists, I said in a recent sermon, “for those who aren’t here yet.” And that is true, so true. What may come out of this General Convention is the possibility that those “who aren’t here yet” will seek and find our church as the very thing their souls have been longing for.

That’s a possibility we could call miraculous.

Lots of people to run into and greet and catch up with. This is the key of the “family reunion” part of all the “family reunion” of all this. I am astonished by the number of familiar faces and memories I had forgotten that those familiar faces and warm embraces bring back for me.

I had dinner in the hotel with two of the lay deputies and Karin Hamilton, who edits The Good News, our diocesan newspaper. We talked, as all the thousands of Episcopal folks in Minneapolis were doubtless talking over dinner, about Gene Robinson and the gay issues. But those considerations are so much more ephemeral and passing that much else on the Convention’s plate that it is both sad and urgent that we have those conversations. This General Convention will rise and fall on the issues that the media is hungry to deal with. Much else that is much more vital and decisive will be done here. Time will tell if the “nine day wonder” of the gay issue will determine all. We scatter across the city for committee meetings. I need to stop and email this to Harriet and Steve and then, sometime tonight, find my bed.

Tomorrow it begins in earnest.

I’m so happy and excited to be a part of all this.

Diary Entry Number 2

Wish you were here...

Day Two—the beginning of the beginning I do wish you were here, just like the postcards you’ve gotten over the years from friends in far away places with strange sounding names. I wish you could have been with me today—this first “legislative” day of General Convention # 74 of this church we all love. There is something magic and, since magic is essentially “other” from reality, there is something awesome and not a little scary going on here in Minneapolis.

Fear is not a “good” thing, but it is a remarkable motivator—it makes us look at ourselves in a new way.

I was up early to go to the fitness center here on the 4th floor of the Double Tree Hotel. I walked on the treadmill for 45 minutes—just over 3 miles without moving an inch, really. Did a few minutes of weights and 150 sit-ups—still convinced I can develop some abdominal muscles—before eating breakfast and heading off to the Convention Center for the first real day of Convention.

We began—as we will begin every day of Convention—with Eucharist and conversation. The Deputies, Alternates, Bishops, Episcopal Church Women (who are also meeting for their convention), the Youth Presence and members of the National Church Staff sit at tables for 10 in an enormous room at the Convention Center. To give you an idea of how many people that is, I’m at Table 140 and there are at least a hundred tables beyond that. I was at a table with deputies from Kentucky, Northern California, Easton, El Camino, and the Stewardship officer from the National Church. There were four empty seats at Table 140, perhaps we’ll meet them tomorrow.

The choir of St. Mark’s Cathedral and a brass ensemble provided the music. About 2000 people worshipped together at that Eucharist. There is a huge screen—I mean “huge”, 100 feet by 75 feet, that “huge—behind the altar that, for 10 minutes before and after the service was the backdrop for projected art work by a group of Episcopal artists known as The Episcopal Church in the Visual Arts that served as the Prelude and Postlude, accompanied by the Brass. I wish you could have been there, no kidding. I have no words to describe how astonishing that was.

The Presiding Bishop preached and celebrated. It was the feast day of William Wilberforce, the anti-slavery evangelical Anglican from the 18th century. The reading from Ephesians was the part where in Christ there is no longer “Jew or Greek, male or female, free or slave....” The Presiding Bishop’s sermon dealt with our fears in this Convention—and, obviously, all our fears have to do with the homosexual issues and the Confirmation of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. The pity of that is that none of the other things this Convention does will be reported widely. And we are up to serious things—I’m really getting the sense of that. It is a privilege to be a part of such an important and weighty body. I am humbled by the responsibility the Convention of the Diocese of Connecticut elected me to perform. And yet—on this first “real” day of Convention—all thoughts are turned to Gene Robinson...that vote is what all the

focus is right now because it will come on Sunday and the rest of the Convention's life revolves around that vote.

But the worship today began to outweigh the "significance" of all that. We Episcopalians are at our best in worship and today's Eucharist was remarkable, astounding, deeply moving. The worship on Sunday will be 5 times as large—10,000 people or more. Imagine that! Imagine breaking bread and sharing wine with 10,000 brothers and sisters from all over the country and the world. That's where we shine—we Episcopalians—when we are worshipping together.

Then the House of Bishops and House of Deputies went into their first sessions. It is mind-numbing to "jump start" a legislative body this large. We spent two hours doing all the "busy work" that is needed to get the House of Deputies up and running—elections of presiding officers, rules of order, sending a lay and clergy members of the House over to the House of Bishops to inform them we are "organized" and ready to proceed with the business of the Church, receiving two bishops to tell us that the House of Bishops is "somewhat organized" as Bill Swing, the Bishop of California told us. Bill Swing is a West Virginia boy. When I was a new priest in Charleston, Bill was in the northern panhandle of the state Wierton, I think. He's the Bishop who ordained Jennifer Hornbeck, who some of you remember as one of our seminarians. (Speaking of "our seminarians", Michael Battle, who was a seminarian at St. John's back in 1989-90, my first year as your Rector, is now a Professor at Duke University's School of Theology and will be the preacher at one of the morning Eucharists at this General Convention. We folk of St. John's should never doubt or forget how connected we are to the life of the larger church. Only ten preachers will preach at this General Convention—and the Presiding Bishop will give three of those sermons—so, one of the eight preachers at this gathering of the church will be Michael Battle, who you helped train and educate. Amazing, isn't it, how the connections in this remarkable and catholic church go on. I'll track Michael down this week and talk with him. Amazing. You should be proud.

We spent the first legislative day getting things started. There was really very little real "legislation" to do. Resolutions can come from 4 different places: commissions and committees of the national church submit resolutions about their work and mission; a diocese can "memorialize" General Convention and send resolutions; any bishop can submit a resolution and any delegate as well. All resolutions go to a committee of the General Convention where they are either defeated or passed on to one of the Houses. If a House approves a resolution, it is sent to the other house which must pass it in the identical language for it to become a part of the report of the General Convention and carried out. If one house makes a change, there is a conference committee to try to reach agreement so it can be brought for another vote. Here at the beginning all the resolutions are still in committees, so we don't have much to do on the floor of the House. That will change as committees begin to report out their findings.

So today we were still gearing up.

After lunch I went to a hearing of the Ministry Committee that is considering a massive re-writing of Canon 3, sometimes called "the ordination canon". Among other things, the new

Canon would give dioceses more latitude in deciding how long the ordination process should take and shorten the minimum time between steps. The current timing was designed to fit perfectly into the three years of seminary. However, not everyone begins seminary as a postulant for holy orders—so the three year process begins, for some folks, after finishing part or all of seminary. The new canon would shorten the whole thing—if a Diocese wished—to 18 months. In addition, the new canon proposes “direct ordination” to the priesthood—those who feel called to be priests would not spend the 6 months to a year as a deacon that is now required. It is a complicated piece of legislation which will doubtlessly be amended and tinkered with a great deal.

The Cathedral of St. Mark hosted the Integrity Mass at 7 p.m. Integrity, as most of you know, is a national organization for Gay, Lesbian, bi-sexual and transgendered folks and their friends and supporters. The Connecticut chapter of Integrity meets at St. John’s and I am their chaplain. There is a Eucharist and discussion the second Sunday of each month at 5:30 p.m. I arrange for a different priest to celebrate and lead the discussion each month. All three of our bishops have visited the Integrity group in the past couple of years.

The Cathedral was packed—between 1200 and 1300 people. The bishop suffragan of Massachusetts was the preacher and about 50 gay and lesbian priests con-celebrated. It was a glorious and joyful celebration in spite of the presence of a dozen or so Minneapolis police in case there was a demonstration or protest.

There are a handful of protesters shadowing the Convention. One I saw today was screaming at people outside the convention center. He was quoting scriptures and held a sign that said, on one side, “The Wages of Sin is Death” and on the other side “AIDS is the Cure.” An announcement in the House of Deputies warned us to make no eye contact and not to engage in conversation with these demonstrators. They have been know to attempt to provoke a physical confrontation and then bring a lawsuit against whoever tussles with them. There is a great deal of hatred and anger in the voices of those few—most of whom are associated with a non-denominational “church” in Kansas whose website is called “Death to Fags.com.” The Secretary of the House said that she tried to deal with them by telling herself that it was just Jesus in a really disturbing disguise! It’s not easy to do that when someone is cursing, name calling and quoting scripture in one breath!

At 10 p.m. the deputies and bishops from Connecticut met to discuss what all we’d been doing and what legislation was nearing completion and could be brought to the floor. Bishop Smith is a member of Program, Budget and Finance—obviously one of the most important committees. They work constantly throughout the Convention because resolutions get passed that have financial ramifications and the 3-year budget is being constantly revised and tinkered with.

When I finally got to bed—without anything to eat besides the finger food after the service at the Cathedral—I suddenly realized how busy I’d been, even though things are just warming up. It can only get “busier” by the day now....

Diary Entry Number 3

The time has come... (Thursday July 31)

Tomorrow morning at 7:30 is the first hearing on the question of the blessing of gay unions. The General Convention would dearly love to have the amount of media coverage we're getting about the issues of mission and evangelism and ministry before us. However, this is the Convention that will be asked to confirm the first openly gay bishop in a committed relationship and will vote on creating a liturgy to bless relationships outside of marriage. I flipped on CNN and there they were—outside the Convention Center—talking about Gene Robinson and the blessings.

There are several daily papers circulating at Convention. The Convention Daily is put out by the National Church. There is a liberal news sheet and a conservative counterpart. The best of them all is printed by the Diocese of Virginia and is called "Center Aisle". The Virginia paper is what might be called "the radical middle" and, as its name indicates, "Center Aisle" represents the view of the moderates of the church. Moderates are by far the largest group in the church though they get very little media coverage.

The interesting and revealing thing is that Center Aisle has, for two days, supported the confirmation of Gene Robinson on the basis that a diocese has the right to elect who it wishes and Bishop-elect Robinson has a remarkable career in the church. If he weren't in a committed relationship with another man, he'd have been a bishop long ago. He was almost elected in Rochester two years ago. Also, Center Aisle editorialized that sexuality matters are not "essential" to the faith, clearing the way to allowing blessings of same sex unions from the most reasonable and centrist voice of all the daily reports at General Convention.

*"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things.
Of shoes and ships and sealing wax,
Of cabbages and kings.
Of why the sea is boiling hot,
And whether pigs have wings."
—Lewis Carroll*

Gene Robinson will come to the House of Deputies on Sunday (the Deputies must approve the election of bishops first, before the bishops themselves). The Liturgical Committee will report on the blessing resolution by Monday. Mercifully, the circus will be over and we'll still have several days to do other things, not weighed down by the anxiety around those two issues. This weekend the General Convention has issued over 350 press credentials—normally there are 40! I've seen Gene several times, trailed by cameras and a dozen news people...and his two body guards, provided by the Diocese of Los Angeles. I said to him last night, "it's like Gene TV." He laughed and shook his head.

I will vote "yes" on Gene Robinson, as will the entire Connecticut Deputation. My vote will be "yes" on the other 9 bishop-elects too. Gene has said over and over again, "I don't want to be a 'gay bishop', I want to be a 'good bishop'." And he will be. He's a good and humble man. You'd like him if you knew him. I believe he will be approved decisively in the House of Bishops—80 to 28

or so. The House of Deputies will be closer, but he will be approved there too. (That's my prediction and I pray I don't have to eat my words.) I suspect a handful of Deputies will walk out after that and won't be around for the vote on blessings. I'm not ready to predict that vote yet. I will vote "yes" on that resolution as well. For me, it is not a matter of "doctrine" but a "pastoral" matter. I am hard pressed to withhold the blessings of the church from those who are committed to fidelity, monogamy and life-long relationships. In a way, the seeking of a blessing for gay unions is the most "conservative" issue before this Convention. Here are Christians asking the church to add a blessing to their commitment to faithfulness and commitment. When's the last time you heard of a "liberation movement" asking to be held accountable for their observance of family values? That's what "marriage" is for straight folks—a way of being held accountable for their promises and vows. And that's what those who wish to claim the blessing for relationships outside of marriage are asking of the church. "Let us make our vows to each other within the limits and restrictions of life-long faithfulness to each other," is what they're saying. Looking at it that way—that there are Christians who want the church to hold them accountable—I couldn't find it in myself to say "no".

The "Center Aisle" put it best: "We have no agreed upon theology or clear doctrine on sexuality." That's the "moderate" view. And when there is no clarity, the Episcopal Church tends to err on the side of permissibility. That's what makes us who we are—the ability to find the via media—the "middle way" and to include people on both sides of the issues. That is the living out of parataxis—the inclusion of both/and rather than the exclusion of either/or. No priest would ever be "required" to bless a relationship other than marriage. (Priests aren't "required" to perform marriages they don't approve of either.) But, since we Episcopalians define ourselves by our worship, if such blessings are going to be done (and they are being done) there should be a uniform liturgy for such blessings.

I wish I could say that's my 'last word' on these issues. But it won't be. I want to tell you about other things—about how remarkable this experience is, how faithful the Convention is to God and our call to be Christ's Body in this world, how astonishing the very structure of it all is, how wondrous the worship has been, how fabulous and joyous it is to find people from my past, things like that.

A priest from Delaware came up to me today and introduced himself. I faintly remembered his name. He had been a counselor at Peterkin—West Virginia's Episcopal Camp—when I was the head of Junior High Camp there. He told me that one of the reasons he went to seminary was because of the experience of that camp—how much our clergy staff trusted the kids and treated them as responsible people, how we challenged the kids and the counselors to be bigger than their frailties. I was so choked up that all I could do was hug him.

An elderly Deputy from Ohio came to Connecticut's tables looking for me and one of our Deputies took me over to him. He'd visited Charleston, West Virginia back in the late 1970's and came to St. James, where I was the Vicar. All these years later he remembered the warm welcome he'd gotten there and told me about a sermon I couldn't for the life of me remember preaching.

My friend from college—Jorge Gutierrez—is a Deputy from Rochester. We were so close that our families went on vacation together when both Jorge and I were priests in West Virginia. We had dinner tonight, laughing like we always do. Jorge is the craziest and most profound priest I know—both at the same time and probably in the same way. What a privilege and joy to be with him.

There have been dozens of reunions like that. General Convention is the “family reunion” of this loony, wonderful family that is our church.

I’ll be writing more about things like that—and about the progress of the legislation and about the worship—in the days to come.

We all have nametags in pouches we wear around our necks. All over Minneapolis you run into folks with those distinctive nametags. You’re never far from an old friend or a new friend....That, in and of itself, would make this all worthwhile. We all need to realize we are surrounded by brothers and sisters—children of our God.

They just don’t have nametags....

We all need family. And what General Convention is teaching me is that “family” is only as far away as the next person you pass....

Diary Entry Number 4

Friday, August 1

It is already very late—after midnight Central Time—but if I don’t write something tonight I’ll be hopelessly behind and won’t be able to catch up. Not unlike the House of Deputies—we’re a day and a half behind, which means next Friday, the last day of General Convention, we’ll be working fast and furious just to finish the legislation.

I’m begun to “get” what this is all about. It’s about moving the legislation through—voting up or down—moving to the next of over 300 resolutions, some extremely vital and some simply necessary to pass to enable the Episcopal Church to function for another 3 years. But I have suddenly realized that our purpose is to “do the work” that allows the church to work for another three years. Since we meet so seldom, in the natural scheme of things, there is much to do in what now seems like a short time.

Today began, as all days will begin until Tuesday, with hearings by the 21 committees dealing with legislation. I went to the hearing on the Consecration of Gene Robinson as the next bishop of New Hampshire. There were probably 500 people there at 7 a.m. in a room for 300. A TV was set up in a huge hallway and a room for 100 people had sound from the hearing next door pumped in. That’s where I was. The hearing was extremely civil and respectful. There are many in the church who sincerely oppose the election of Gene. Pro and Con speakers alternated for almost two hours as the Committee on the Consecration of Bishops listened. The vote in the House of Deputies—where all Bishop elections go to first—will be Sunday afternoon. The

committee will report it out, most likely with a recommendation to approve. There will be 825 Deputies, over 400 press passes and as many folks who can fit in the room—probably 2500—for that debate and vote. And much of what happens after Sunday will be determined by whether or not a gay man in a committed relationship is approved to be Bishop of New Hampshire. It will be a historic moment, whatever the vote. If the Deputies reject, the Bishops will never vote on Gene's election. If the Deputies approve it will go to the House of Bishops on Monday.

One thing that is painfully obvious at the Convention is that those opposing Gene are severely distressed and feel under siege. There is a general tension in the air in the Convention Center, at the hearings, in the streets and hotel lobbies that won't change until the vote on Sunday. It isn't helped by protestors, whose ranks have swollen to more than two dozen, who stand across the street from the Convention Center and shout at deputies and bishops as we leave, waving signs that are so hateful they are vile. It's the gay issue that most enflames them, but they also call out to every woman priest—"take that collar off, you hussy of Satan." It's hard to listen to that each day, several times, and not be provoked.

Worship continues to hold us together. The daily Eucharist today took 4 _ hours! After the Presiding Bishop's sermon, there was a "morning of Prayer" with several options. Some people went to a sing along with the Moravian Church—who we might vote to have full communion with. Others went to hear Malcolm Boyd read poetry to jazz music. Still others walked a labyrinth that has been cut into the grass outside the Convention Center. Others went to sing with Horace Boyer, the editor of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. (Not done yet!) there was a session on Justice and Prayer, a room where a choir was singing Gregorian chant and several other options as well. At noon, we reassembled in the worship hall and completed the Eucharist. Prayer and worship is what we Episcopalians do best and we best do a lot of it over the next week! Somehow I believe our worship can give us a center that will hold in the midst of the difficult and divisive decisions we will be making.

The afternoon legislative session began to pick up speed. We dealt with issues about the location of the next two General Conventions, stem cell research, evangelism efforts, foreign mission work and canonical changes. I'm becoming more and more astounded at how complicated it is to get something as large and unwieldy as the General Convention to work. Besides delegates and bishops there are nearly a hundred staff people working in the secretariat's of the Deputies and the Houses and hundred's more volunteers and the several hundred people involved in the display hall. But fueled by worship and friendship, it rolls along....

Speaking of friends—I keep bumping into people from the past. Rodge and Rosie Wood are here, working in the Family of Clergy booth. Rodge went to seminary with me. He was older than most of us—sort of our Uncle—and is already retired for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. In his retirement, he has moved to Cross Lanes, West Virginia and is the priest-in-charge of St. James Church, Charleston, the first parish I served! I keep telling you this is a little church....

Many Deputies and Bishops went straight from our sessions to the Hyatt to get seats for the 7:30 meeting of the Liturgy and Prayer Book Committee who were holding open hearings on the blessing of life-long unions outside of marriage. The ballroom held nearly 600 and by 7 it was packed and there were 300 people in the hall watching on monitors. Another old friend of mine,

Frank Wade—who was in West Virginia when I was and is now the Rector of St. Alban's Church in Washington, D.C. (the parish church on the grounds of the National Cathedral)—is the chair of that committee. Two members of the committee began with 10 minute presentations pro and con and then the committee heard from people who had signed up to speak on the two sides of the issue. I was the last witness heard from—it just turned out that way because of the time, not because after I spoke everyone suddenly agreed with each other! Then the two committee members who began summed up what they heard “from the other side”. The committee had prayer and singing at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Again, in the midst of the debate over the most emotional issue of the Convention, it was our prayer and worship that united us across our differences. We sang some of the Tszai chants we use at St. John's and the chanting of that many people in an enclosed room was glorious. We can't agree on issues but we sure do four part harmony well...All in all it was the most civil and passionate discussion of same sex unions I've ever heard. The crowd sat in rapt silence during it all—there were no applause or groans or responses to any of the speakers (I did get two good laughs in my two minutes—not a bad average). There was a respect and deep listening in the room that will make us better able to cling to and belong to each other once the vote is taken.

There is a sense of civility, for the most part, among the Deputies. Our differences are joked at in a good hearted way. A Deputy from Massachusetts (one of the most liberal dioceses in the church) made a point in a discussion on the floor and was followed by a Deputy from Fort Worth (perhaps the most conservative diocese). The Fort Worth priest said, “I hope the roof of this hall is sufficiently reinforced because I rise to agree with the Deputy from Massachusetts.” The House erupted in laughter.

There is a formality to the proceedings that I find a bit quaint. When a Deputy goes to one of the 8 microphones around the floor, the President will say, “For what reason does the Deputy rise to address this House?” It's kind of amusing to me, but the formality keeps us in mind of the gravity of some of what we are doing, how decisions here will affect the life of our church for years to come.

After people left their committee meetings at 10 p.m., the folks from Connecticut gathered to caucus and catch everyone up and what we had seen and heard. Bishop Smith didn't get back because his committee—Program, Budget and Finances (called P B and F by everyone) went longer than hoped. Their job shifts each day as different resolutions requiring funding are passed.

Everyone from Connecticut whose in Minneapolis is invited to the caucus and though these suites are big, it gets a little close with more than a dozen people in the room! But the discussion is lively—earnest and good-humored at the same time. I am profoundly impressed by the dedication and commitment of our Deputies and Bishops. It is good to end the day with them.

But my day didn't end at 11. I was down in the lobby getting a stamp when Beth, our 20-year-old Deputy—one of the youngest Deputies at Convention—came along. We sat in the lounge and listened to a jazz trio. Three other young Deputies from three different dioceses called Beth on her cell phone and then came by. It was remarkable to talk with these four young Christians—and they don't hesitate to use that term. They are deeply committed to the Episcopal Church and yet—despite the fact that Convention today voted to make ministry to young people

and children the top priority of the next three years—Beth and her friends don't feel listened to. They told me people cut them off when they're speaking in committees and their suggestions are mostly ignored. Yesterday the House approved changing the date of the 2006 General Convention from August to early June. The "youth presence" (a group of teen-agers seated on the floor with seat and voice but no vote) and the younger Deputies are furious. The high school kids might still be in school and college graduations will be around then. Never mind that people who teach public school or have children graduating will be cut off from being Deputies if that date is fixed. The excuse was that the church could save \$150,000 on the Convention by having it earlier and getting better rates in the pre-convention month of June. But there is a real hypocrisy to making Young People a priority for the church then making being part of General Convention difficult for them.

The four of them went to Beth's room to plot how to get this issue reopened and changed. They will either feel the wonder of "making a difference" if they can get the Bishops to defeat the date change—and they're working on getting the Bishops to allow them to speak to that House—or else they will feel marginalized and ignored. How often the church "says" one thing and "does" another! Here are young people totally dedicated to the church, in spite of the pressures of their peers and the culture. (Beth told me only one of two of her friends are Christians at all.) Yet, though giving lip-service to wanting to include youth, the church's action, at this point, rejects their needs.

I'll keep you up to date on how that goes.

Diary Entry Number 5

Saturday, August 2

(A note to anyone still reading these pieces on St. John's website: I apologize for the style and grammar of all this. I've been writing this on the run, whenever I could squeeze out a few minutes in my room with the laptop Barbara Curry loaned me because I couldn't trust my old one. So, either thank or blame Barbara for the fact that these stolen moments are being recorded. For example: on first Friday, I woke up at 5:45 and went to bed at 1:30 a.m. on Saturday. And I didn't eat a single meal on Friday sitting down at a table. The General Convention of the Episcopal Church provides almost no free time. So, you do the grammar and the style. I'm just writing and emailing this stuff as fast as I can, whenever I can....)

I was so tired on Saturday I decided to take my time getting to the Convention Center. The Lord was in charge because I walked into the Eucharist just as the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry (not to be confused with either Barbara Curry or Connecticut's Bishop Jim Curry) began his sermon. Bp. Curry of North Carolina preached what I believe to be the best sermon I've ever heard. God has richly blessed the people of North Carolina—the center of the state since there are the dioceses of Western and Eastern North Carolina as well. Bp. Curry's sermon was interrupted by applause 5 times and I found myself weeping three separate times. Have I said that worship is what we Episcopalians do best? I know I have. And Michael Curry's sermon is the high-light of the Convention for me so far. He was preaching about the "mission of the church" and what he said defies and goes far beyond our disagreements to what makes us One—commitment to Jesus and his ministry and mission in the world that is so full of pain and suffering and longing and need. I

told our “Bishop Curry” that the next time he visited St. John’s I wanted a sermon like North Carolina’s Bishop Curry preached today. He said he would do that. I’ll hold him to it....

It’s remarkable that a sermon could so transform such an event as the General Convention. But I believe Michael Curry did that. There was a sweetness of Spirit in the short session the House of Deputies had today. I never look at the schedule because I sit with people who do—so I was astonished to know we would only meet until 1 p.m. and then have the rest of Saturday off. That’s the first free afternoon of the Convention—and the last! So I cruised the remarkable display hall—over 200 exhibitions—and had a long lunch on the roof of the Brit Pub with Rodge Wood, my dear friend. Rodge was mostly in the shade but I was totally in the sun for two hours as we talked and laughed. So my face is a tad sunburned. The wind has been blowing ever since we got to Minneapolis—not the usual August here—and the humidity is very low; so I didn’t realize the sun was burning me.

The two things to do tonight were to go to the Connecticut reception downstairs in our hotel and the Virginia Seminary banquet at the Minneapolis Club. There are probably 30 people here from Connecticut. I got to greet my “new rector”, Sandy Strainer, the just elected Rector of St. Peter’s, Cheshire, two blocks from my home. Sandy was the assistant to the Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale and her husband is a new transitional deacon. Bishop Walmsley was there and Bishop Rowthorne and Bishop Coleridge and our three current bishops. Too many bishops for one room, so I left for the Virginia Seminary dinner.

I walked the 6 blocks with six people who went to seminary at Berkley, whose dinner was in the same place. Something you might not know: where a priest went to seminary becomes a big deal in their relationship with other priests. We’re little tribes and the tribes divided and sat around different camp fires this night of General Convention. My Berkley friends went to their dinner on the ground floor of the Minneapolis Club while I went to VTS’s dinner on the second floor. As we entered the building, one of the Berkley folks said, “we’re on the ground floor because Berkley is the foundation of the church.” I replied, “maybe so, but Virginia Seminary is closer to heaven....” We really are “tribes”, we priests, based on seminary background. When I was in West Virginia, the last day of clergy conference was a softball game between priests from Virginia Seminary and priests from “the World, the Flesh and the Devil”. While I was a priest in West Virginia, I was surrounded by other VTS priests. Here in Connecticut, there are more priests from Berkley and EDS in Cambridge and General Seminary in New York City. We VTS guys are the little “tribe”—but tonight I was with 200 other VTS priests. The tribe gathered. We celebrated and were glad. And we “knew” we were the best seminary.

All eight seminaries had their dinners tonight. And we all think our seminary is the best and brightest. Priests are really hung up on all that. You probably didn’t know how “tribal” priests are. Now you do.

Tomorrow I will worship with what I’m told will be 12,000 Episcopalians. That’s a few more than will be at St. John’s. Then, after lunch, the House of Deputies will debate and vote on the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. We have already approved six new bishops. It has taken a total of less than a minute. No kidding—six votes and send our approval to the House of Bishops. Bishop elect Robinson’s vote will take over an hour and a lot of debate

and when that is over the Episcopal Church may be living into a future that wouldn't have happened anyway. For all those other new bishops we just voted. But for Gene we will vote by orders—lay and clergy—and he must win a majority of the laity votes and the clergy votes. But 825 people will cast only 206 votes because we will vote by diocese. The four lay Deputies in each Diocese will vote. For example: if the vote among the laity in Connecticut's deputation is 4-0 or 3-1, Connecticut will cast a "yes vote" in the laity. The same is true among our four clergy deputies. But a vote of 2-2 is registered as a "divided vote"—which counts as a "no". So one-half plus one of the diocese's lay members must vote "yes" for Gene's consecration to be approved. The same for the clergy votes. So, this is what could happen:

There are 103 dioceses. This could happen:

51 Dioceses vote "yes"

26 vote 4-0= 104 yes; 0 no

25 vote 3-1= 75 yes; 25 no

52 Dioceses vote "no"

26 vote 2-2= 52 yes; 52 no

13 vote 1-3= 13 yes; 39 no

13 vote 0-4= 0 yes; 52 no

"Yes" votes =244; "No" votes =168—59% yes and the results is "No".

That's a moderate count. What if the 51 voting "yes" were 4-0 and the other 52 dioceses voted 2-2. The vote would be, in the popular vote, 308-104, nearly 75% "yes" and yet the vote would be "no". And what if one order voted 103 at 4-0 and the other order voted 52-51 at 2-2 and 4-0. The popular vote would be 620-108 yet the vote would be "No"! The way we vote thwarts the will of a super majority.

That's just the way it is.

And tomorrow we will know. (You'll know how it turned out before you read this) and, whatever happens, we will be formed and transformed. God bless you. Pray for us at the General Convention as we struggle with our angels and seek to do what God wants....

Diary Entry Number 6

Sunday, August 3 SUPER SUNDAY...

I had Eucharist this morning with 9000 people. There was a choir of 350, a small orchestra, a rock band and over a hundred hand bell ringers. Add to that some 300 bishops and probably 1000 priests and you begin to get the sense of vastness of that service. The worship hall is—I walked it off just to see—larger than a football field. And today it was packed, chock-full of every stripe and hue and type of Episcopalian. O Lord, what a morning....

If you need any proof of the broadness of this church we all love, here it is—the preacher was a bishop from Nigeria, Josiah Idowu-Fearon. Bishop Idowu-Fearon's archbishop—his "boss" more or less—is the Archbishop who called Bishop-elect Gene Robinson of New Hampshire "an

abomination.” One might think Josiah wouldn’t be the ideal choice to preach at the only Sunday Eucharist of the General Convention. But that’s how broad and inclusive our church is. So, on the day that Gene Robinson’s consecration was approved by the House of Deputies (more later on that), the preacher at our church’s celebration of the Lord’s Day was a bishop from a part of the Anglican Communion that has grave difficulties with what we’re doing here in Minneapolis.

The sermon, to tell the truth, wasn’t all that compelling. But it was civil about our disagreements and called us back to the thing that makes us One in the Spirit—our connection to each other through our connection to the God who created us out of love. That part is actually from the sermon yesterday by Bp. Michael Curry of North Carolina. Bishop Curry said (and I’m paraphrasing, though closely): A few years ago I had a startling revelation. I realized that God didn’t create me because God needed me. God doesn’t “need me”. God is God. God doesn’t “need” anything. And God didn’t create you because God needs you. What is it we believe in? Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Do you think you’re better company than that? No, God didn’t create you and me because God “needs” us. God created you and me because God loves us....

If I were into giving advice, I would advise you to dwell on that for a while. Meditate on it. Consider it. Wonder about it. Let it get into your heart and mind and the marrow of your bones. God created you because God loves you.... Imagine that. Imagine that. If you can imagine it, it will transform you.

The music at today’s Eucharist was...well, what do you imagine music would be like with an organ, orchestra, rock band and 350 choir members! Yeah, like that. (Note to Bob Havery—I’m bringing back a copy of every day’s worship for your joy and to steal ideas from!)

Here are some numbers to remember: 63-32-13; 65-31-12.

Those were the votes, by Dioceses for the confirmation of V. Eugene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. In the lay order 63 dioceses voted “yes” while 32 voted “no” and 13 dioceses had a 2-2 vote, called “split” by the General Convention. Among the clergy, the vote was 65 “yes”, 31 “no” and 12 dioceses “split” 2 to 2. Tomorrow, Monday, the confirmation goes to the House of Bishops; but, today, history was made. The clergy and laity of the General Convention approved the election of a gay man in a committed relationship as a Bishop of this Apostolic Succession Catholic Church.

History. Clear and simple. And it happened today in Minneapolis—the same city where, in 1976, the Episcopal Church voted to ordain women. History again in Minneapolis.

I fully realize that there are members of this church—and members of St. John’s—who will be deeply troubled by what happened today. And, to them, I say this: “Let the church be the church, fear not. Gene Robinson was elected by the Diocese of New Hampshire. That election was fair and legal and right. Today the Deputies of the 108 of our church voted 6-4—about 60% in favor of Gene Robinson to be the next bishop of New Hampshire. Let the church be the church. All will be well. Above all, fear not. Fear is the opposite of Faith.”

The vote occurred like this. It was a special order of business for the House. We had a prayer. Then the Committee for the Consecration of Bishops recommended that the resolution be approved. Then there was a minority report against the adoption of the resolution. Before we voted, the chaplain of the House of Deputies led us in prayer—about 5 minutes of silence, when you could feel the prayer wrapping us together. Then we voted, each Deputy signing his or her name beside their vote on a sheet for each Deputation. After the votes were collected, we prayed again. Then we did the business of the church for about 45 minutes, until the votes were tabulated. After one vote on an issue none of us will remember, the Secretary of the House of Deputies, Rosemary Sullivan—a priest from Virginia—announced that the ballots were counted and certified.

Then the President of the House, George Werner, a retired Dean of the Cathedral in Pittsburgh, reminded the House and the 2000 folks in the gallery and the press, that the decorum of the House of Deputies and the rules of order we follow, prohibit any “demonstration”—that is, no applause are allowed unless the chair suspends the rules of order to honor someone. In the same way, no expressions of negative response are allowed. Then Rosemary read the results in the antique fashion such votes by order are reported in the House of Deputies. She read the “split” votes and the “no” votes by Dioceses in alphabetical order, first in the lay order and then the clergy order. She read none of the “yes” votes. Alaska is first....

So, she went through the list, reading ONLY the “split” (2-2 votes) and “no” votes. There are, remember, 108 dioceses in the church. The roll call of those votes that were against Gene Robinson or “split” and therefore counting as “no” went on for over 5 minutes. Since I didn’t have a list of dioceses in front of me, I was furiously writing down those negative results, realizing, from time to time, that we’d skipped several dioceses between results—meaning those were “yes” votes. It was only when she got to Western Louisiana that I knew we were through. The lay vote was announced first: 63 “yes”, 32 “no”, 13 “split”. “The lay order,” she said, “approves resolution C045.” Then she continued: “In the clerical order there are 65 ‘yes’, 31 ‘no’ and 12 ‘split’,”

She stepped away from the podium and George Werner said, “the House of Deputies approves of resolution C045.” There was not a sound in that vast and cavernous room. Not a sound. It was breathless and silent. I began to think I could hear my heart beat. Then George took a moment of personal privilege from the chair. “I have never been so proud to be a part of this House,” he said. “We have comported ourselves in a way that gives dignity and honor and integrity to the church and to God. I thank you for your respect for each other and for this House. And now I call on the chaplain to lead us in prayer....”

More silence—absolute quiet—and a short, dignified prayer for those who have restrained their joy and those who are in deep pain. And the House adjourned for the day.

*

The silence engulfed us, flowed over us, filled us and filled the room. Usually, when the House adjourns, there is a screech of metal chair legs from over 800 chairs being pushed back on a

concrete floor. It may just be my imagination, but all those people seemed to rise without noise. And the usual cacophony of voices was absent. The silence prevailed. People in the Connecticut deputation hugged each other slowly and without words. All around that vast room tears flowed silently—in deep, unspeakable joy and in profound pain. There was no gaiety, no celebration. In those deputations where the “no” votes were in a minority, people comforted each other. Colorado voted 7-1 in favor. They sit next to us. None of the 7 smiled and all of them came over to Ephraim Ratner—an old friend of mine from my years in New Haven, who sits next to me—and touched his arm or shook his hand. Ephraim is one of the most conservative priests in our whole church and the one “no” for Colorado. None of the 7 left without in some way acknowledging his pain.

There is something almost eerie about nearly 3000 people leaving a room where something remarkable, historic, wondrous has just happened and no one was speaking above a whisper and most people spoke not at all.

That mood continued through the night. Walking the streets of Minneapolis, where many restaurants have outside seating, there was no sign of partisan feelings. I went to dinner with Rodge and Rosie Wood, my old dear friends. At the place we stopped, I noticed three people from West Virginia at a table together. One priest and lay person who voted “no” and one priest who voted “yes”. West Virginia, I’m saddened to say, were “split” in the clergy and “no” in the laity. Obviously Kurt had come to be with Art and Ruth, to break bread with them at the end of what was one of the most remarkable moments in the history of the Episcopal Church. I’m sure Ruth and Art were devastated and Kurt was elated. But Kurt restrained his joy in the presence of the others’ loss. I went over to greet them and embraced Art, who was, when I was a deacon in West Virginia, my supervisor. I deeply respect and acknowledge him. He is a person of integrity and deep convictions. I hurt for him...and in that way of dear friends, I know, through his pain, he rejoiced for me.

All around the city, many such encounters were occurring. It is the best of times and the worst of times. And we, as a church, have taken one of the two steps needed to transform the church. Transformation, in case you haven’t noticed, carries a price. That price was extracted today. And our response as human beings and, I believe, as a “church”...heart-felt and genuine...was hugs and silence.

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Just before the vote I was outside the Convention Center and a young priest from Oklahoma came over to the group I was standing with. She said, “can you believe there are no demonstrators here? We’re about to take the vote they came to oppose and they’re not here!”

She was right. Our friends from Kansas were nowhere to be seen. Then I glanced at her name tag: Kathleen Murray, alternate from Oklahoma, it said.

I thought my head and heart would explode. “Kathy,” I said. Then I said it again: “Kathy”...and again....”Kathy....”

When I was a priest in West Virginia, I served on four Junior High Camp faculties at Peterkin, the diocesan camp. The last two of those camps, I was the leader. And of the hundreds of kids I met and worked with and knew and loved in those years, the one that has stuck in my craw and my heart was Kathy Murray.

Her older brother was psychotic, as I remember—a drug addict at best! Her parents were in the midst of a brutal divorce, using Kathy as the battering ram for their attacks on each other. She was crazed, confused, profoundly pained, a little suicidal and one of the greatest kids I ever met.

She was there at Peterkin those two years I led Junior High Camp. The other faculty members were Jorge Gutierrez, who I mentioned before, now the Rector of a church in Corning, New York and a Deputy to this Convention from the diocese of Rochester. Also on that staff was Jim Waggoner, now the Bishop of the Diocese of Spokane. Before I leave here, I'm going to get a picture of Jim and Jorge and Kathy and me so I can show you when I get home.

When she read my name tag—hey, I look a lot different and a bit older than I did in 1978 and 1979!—we fell into each others arms. Through a tear or two and laughter that bordered on sublime, we found each other again—no longer a adolescent and a young Turk of a priest. A grown woman and a man of—may I be kind to myself?—nearly late middle age. And the missing years evaporated in the salt of our tears and the joy of our hearts. Neither of us ever imagined such a reunion in such a place as Minnesota on such a historic day.

We've talked several times since then and the most humbling thing she's told me is this: "Of all the great things about seeing you again, the greatest thing is that seeing you reminds me of how screwed up I was back then and how you wouldn't give up on me...."

I kept up with Kathy for several years after that last camp. Then, as things happen, I lost her to life. I had no idea what had happened for her, but she was always in my heart. Now, here she is, all new and wondrous to me, a priest in the church I love, and next year she plans to start medical school—either in Oklahoma or West Virginia—to become a doctor-priest. We have much to catch up about and will do that a bit here, in the next few days. And there is email now, that wasn't here in the 70's, so maybe, if God is good, I won't lose her again.

Kathy told me something that broke my heart and filled it to. I gave her a copy of *The Little Prince* all these years ago, and wrote something I don't remember but she did in it about how she could be "tamed" when the time was right (if you haven't read the book ask me about the "tamed" part...). She kept that book for years. And after she was a priest, she knew a young person as hopeless and helpless as she had been. "I just put my name below yours in what you wrote," she told me, "and I gave that kid that book. I'd had it long enough. And I told her the words you wrote were the words from me I wanted her to have...."

Somewhere out there, with a kid Kathy's lost touch with, is a book with words of love and affirmation now passed along. I don't remember those words, but Kathy does. And when she forgets them, there is another who will remember. I'm not sure, but if I think about it long enough, I think there's something there about love and community and the gospel itself....

It doesn't get much better than that.

Diary Entry Number 7

Monday, August 4 The storm after the calm...

Monday, day 7 of the 74th General Convention of the Church I love.

On the seventh day, according to Genesis, God "rested". On the seventh day of this Convention, all hell broke loose.

After Eucharist, the House convened and the Secretary, as she always does, read us messages from the House of Bishops. In this legislative mode, we communicate with each other about what we've done and they've done so we can be clear about what's left to be done. In all that, she read to us three letters: one from Douglas Thurner, the current Bishop of New Hampshire; one from the Standing Committee of New Hampshire, awakened in the early morning with a conference call; and one from Frank Griswold, the Presiding Bishop.

Remember I told you about my friend Ephraim who the other deputies from Colorado comforted after the vote yesterday? Well, he came onto the floor as if he just won the Lotto and it was a perfect day on the beach. I was confused that he wasn't still distressed by what we had done in approving the election of Gene Robinson. Something was not making sense.

But when Rosemary Sullivan read those letters, I knew why Ephraim was so chipper. I'm going to try to do this simply and clearly, which may not be possible. I've written about David Virtue and his deck of cards with the "hit list" of the radical right of the church displayed on them. He's part of this tangled tale. Tom Ely, the Bishop of Vermont, a long-time friend and one of the most progressive bishops in the House of Bishops, had received a phone call from a man he knew accusing Gene Robinson of "fondling him" at a meeting of Province One several years ago. Tom, because we are a church of full disclosure, had to report that call to the House of Bishops. At the same time, David Virtue had sent an e-mail to some of the most conservative bishops telling them that on Gene Robinson's web-site, there was a link to a pornographic gay web site. So, in the blinking of an eye, after the decision of the House of Deputies and before the Bishops voted to approve or deny Gene's consecration, two never before heard charges were lodged against him.

Whatever you've heard in the media—and remember, my sermon the Sunday before I left for Minneapolis warned you not to listen to the media—let me try to tell you what I know first hand and second hand.

*Those two accusations, questioning Gene Robinson's integrity—which has, to this moment, NEVER been an issue—came to the House of Bishops.

*Doug Thurner, the current bishop of New Hampshire, who Gene was elected to succeed, immediately took the floor of the House of Bishops and demanded that the Presiding Bishop appoint a committee to investigate and report back on these allegations so that Gene might be exonerated and the vote on his consecration might proceed.

*The Presiding Bishop appointed the Bishop of Western Massachusetts, a deeply respected conservative in the church, to head the investigation and report back “within 48 hours” regarding his findings.

*Since then, from half-a-dozen bishops, I have heard that the web-site has been investigated by experts and that link was “hacked” onto Gene’s website and that by morning they will know, for certain, who did the hacking and that criminal charges will be filed.

*What is known about the young man who has accused Gene of misconduct is this: he was turned down for the ordination process in Vermont and Los Angeles, if not other dioceses. That should not prejudice you or indicate anything other than fact.

*Gene Robinson admits that he knows his accuser and denies absolutely any misconduct toward him.

*Bern told me today that she’s heard Dr. Kendall Harmon, a clergy deputy from South Carolina interviewed before the House of Deputies vote. Dr. Harmon, who is one of the most aggressive opponents of Gene Robinson’s election, was asked what would happen if Gene was approved. Bern told me (and I’ve heard this from at least a half-dozen other folks here in Minneapolis) that Dr. Harmon replied that he wasn’t willing to reveal the strategy of the right, but there would be (this is the quote!) “some surprises.”

This is all me—not fact—but, from my point of view, the “surprises” have arrived. And, given Ephraim’s cheeriness today, I can only imagine that the extreme Right of the church knew this was coming. Those I trust tell me that, as messy and hateful and vile as this is, all will be well.

Time will tell. Whatever you hear in the media, hear this as well, these charges are out of desperation and, I believe with all my heart, they will be exposed as false, as a last ditch effort to derail the consecration of Gene Robinson. Time will tell.

The mood and ambiance of the Convention has shifted dramatically. We have moved away from civility and respect. Mud has been slung. What seemed to be a church able to endure even this historic disagreement is now a church at deep odds with itself. The people eating dinner together tonight are grouped by conviction and not compassion.

Some line has been crossed. Art Bennett, my friend from West Virginia who voted against Gene Robinson sought me out today at a break in the business of the house. “This is crap,” he said. Even those conservatives who genuinely agonize over these issues are offended and angered by the extremes of the Radical Right within our church. Yesterday I was deeply committed to being compassionate and loving to those who I disagree with. Right now (and I pray time and circumstance will alter my opinion) the door couldn’t hit them in the back fast enough as they leave the church.

We are talking about a very small minority—percentages are inappropriate—but I would say less than 1 % of the Deputies and a larger number of the Bishops (12 of 108 with jurisdiction—bishops of dioceses) are involved in this campaign to block Gene’s consecration. Time will tell. Tune in tomorrow and the next day for what I notice....

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So much else is going on here. Much good is being done. I wanted to end this rather distressing day with something remarkable. We passed Resolution D039 on the Budget priorities for the Triennial (the next three years of our church). Here's what they are. Read them and rejoice.

1. Young Adults and Youth

...intentional inclusion and full incorporation in the thinking, work, worship and structure of the Church.

2. Reconciliation and Evangelism

...participating in God's mission of reconciliation of all things to Christ and proclaiming the Gospel to those who are not yet members of the church.

3. Congregational Transformation

...commitment to leadership development, spiritual growth, dynamic and inclusive worship, greater diversity and mission.

4. Justice and Peace

...for all God's creation and reaching out to the dispossessed, imprisoned and otherwise voiceless needy.

5. Partnerships

...with other parts of the Anglican Communion and within the ecumenical and interfaith partners.

That's a powerful statement of putting our \$146 million budget where our mouths are: youth, evangelism, reconciliation, congregational transformation, justice and peace and partnerships with other people of faith.

That's about as good as it gets.

Fear not.

Fear is the opposite of Faith.

All will be well and all will be well and all manner of things will be well.

Diary Entry Number 8

Tuesday, August 5—the Eve of the Transfiguration

Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain with him. And there he was transfigured—the gospel description is like nothing so much as it's like Jesus glowing from the inside out, lit with the glory of God, meeting with Moses and Elijah—the “Law” and the “Prophets”—the wholeness of Judaism. And, the gospels tell us, to no one's surprise, the disciples were terrified when the cloud of unknowing covered them. And their response, when they had recovered from their fear, was to build three “booths”—three “churches”, in our terms...or monuments or permanent markers—to commemorate the moment and freeze it forever in stone.

Jesus had something else in mind. He went back down the mountain to the real world to ministry and mission in a new and transfigured way.

It couldn't have been more appropriate that the Episcopal Church stepped out of the dance of most of the other Christian bodies in the world—including the vast majority of Anglicans—on the Eve of the Transfiguration.

I walked away from the Convention Center with Bishop Jim Curry. We had embraced in the hallway—in humility and solemnity—and as we walked through the streets of Minneapolis, we talked about the history we had just witnessed. And, at one point, Jim said, “Well, we’ve got a new church.” And I replied, “I can’t wait to see what it looks like....”

Twenty seven years ago, the General Convention met in Minneapolis and approved the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. Today, again in Minneapolis, the House of Bishops concurred with the House of Deputies and consented to the consecration of V. Eugene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire—the first bishop to be openly gay and living in a committed relationship with another man. It must be the breeze off the Mississippi River...or the deep blue skies...or perhaps, the Holy Spirit, working in ways we will never quite comprehend, that makes Minneapolis the place where the Episcopal Church gets transfigured and made new.

We have “defined” ourselves in an unambiguous way. We Episcopalians are the truly inclusive church. Many will not like that and more will find it attractive. What this Convention is about, more than even the homosexual issues, is evangelism. We have passed resolution after resolution about the 20/20 plan. That is about doubling the size of the Episcopal Church by the year 2020. Our church is a church absolutely committed to growing and bring into the Body of Christ the young, the ethnic, the unchurched, the seekers. And today, our bishops concurred with the House of Deputies to clearly and definitively “define” who we are. We are the inclusive church, the church open to all people, the church dedicated and committed to hospitality and the gospel of Christ.

So, my day. I switched credentials with Mark Santucci, the Rector of the church in Mystic. He became a Deputy and I became an Alternate. He got to sit in my seat and cast my votes in the House of Deputies and I got to wander around and go to the gallery of the House of Bishops,.

The General Convention worries about such things as “credentials”. In order to let Mark go to the floor (no one but Deputies can be on the floor. Pages stop anyone who doesn't have a Deputy badge from entering the floor of the House) we needed a form filled out and signed by the head of our deputation, then we took that form and our name tags to the area that verifies credentials. Mark got a pre-printed Deputy badge, since all deputations let the alternate go to the floor at some point, and I got a pre-printed Alternate badge. Mark left for the House of Deputies and I went to sit in the gallery of the House of Bishops.

The bishops do things much differently than we do. We sit at rows of straight tables, all facing the podium, with 8 microphones scattered in the aisles. The bishops sit around round tables with

a microphone at each table. They are less formal than we are, being smaller and more contained., And they clear legislation much faster than the Deputies do.

One of the things the Bishops did today was to take away the vote of retired bishops. The retired bishops still have seat and voice in the House, if this resolution passes the House of Deputies, but will not vote. There are only 107 bishops “with jurisdiction”—which means bishops who are the head of a Diocese or other jurisdiction, like the bishop of the chaplains of the Armed Forces. But there are over 300 living bishops of our church. This decision is to remove the vote of retired bishops. Our two suffragan bishops will still have votes. This resolution was sponsored by 50 retired bishops who want to disenfranchise themselves. Since it is a change in the Constitution of the church, it requires a second vote at the next General Convention. Changes to the Constitution and canons of the church must be approved by two consecutive General Conventions. Add that to the antique “votes by order” I talked about in an earlier essay, and you can see how difficult it is to transfigure this church. Which isn’t all bad, not at all—but frustrating from time to time. What it means is that when we make a radical transformation, it requires a super majority rather than just a simple majority.

Worship today was in the style of the Native Americans of our church. Since Minnesota has a large Native American population, it was appropriate and good. The Bishop of Minnesota celebrated and the Bishop of Alaska preached. Both of them are fluent in at least one Native American language. The music for the service was provided by a Native American choir and a group of drummers. There was no organ or orchestra or piano or guitar today...and the service, in it’s sparseness and solemnity, was one of the highlights of our breaking of bread and sharing of wine. There are those in our church who stayed away because the service incorporated Native American customs and some find that to be pagan. I found the incorporation of Indian rituals deeply moving. It was a wondrous and Great Spirit filled service.

I spent the day with the Bishops. In the morning, the Presiding Bishop turned over the chair to the vice-president, Bishop Williams, while the PB went to consult with Bishop Scrouton of Western Massachusetts, who was the person in charge of investigating the two charges against Gene Robinson. The Bishop of Western Massachusetts is a very respected and quite conservative bishop. This is what you need to know if the media wasn’t clear about it: **THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CHARGES AGAINST GENE ROBINSON WERE DEMANDED BY THE BISHOP AND STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE AND BY GENE ROBINSON HIMSELF.** I fear that you don’t know from the media that it was the accused who demanded the investigation so he could be exonerated. At the end of the morning session of the House of Bishops, when the Presiding Bishop returned, he said, simply, “at 2:30 this House will reconvene to hear the report of the Bishop of Western Massachusetts and then move on to a vote for consent for the bishop-elect of New Hampshire.”

So, everyone knew the allegations against Gene were spurious and the bishops were ready to vote. But we had to wait.

The way the vote was taken is important. Since there are only 200 or so seats in the gallery of the House of Bishops rather than the 2000 or so seats behind the House of Deputies, anyone wanting a seat had to go to an area of the Convention Center and sit in one of a like number of chairs set

up there. The meeting of the House of Bishops was also close-circuited into a large hall. But I wanted to be there, in the room, so I sat in one of those chairs for almost 3 hours, until the bishops were ready for us.

First of all, the bishop of Western Massachusetts reported to the bishops that both allegations were false and scurrilous and that there was no reason not to continue toward consent. And I was really proud of our church and how we handled accusations transparently and openly. The website accusation was easily disproven. The man who accused Canon Robinson of inappropriate behavior did not, though he was asked twice, want to pursue the allegations. He felt “listened to” and affirmed.

The only accusation he had was that twice, after he initiated a conversation with Gene, that Gene touched him on his forearm and back while answering his question. Think about that for a moment. If I touched your arm and back while talking with you would you be offended? Would my hand on your arm and shoulder be inappropriate? The accuser obviously reconsidered and Gene was exonerated by the investigation of that charge and the even less defensible charge that Canon Robinson was involved with a website that linked to pornography. Gene ended his relationship with the group, “Outright”, in 1999 and the website was not started until 2002!

I’m very happy—and maybe you should be too—that our church has a process to deal with accusations and takes the supposed victim seriously and does all this in public. I’m proud to be a member of that kind of church. It is another part of our efforts to be “the inclusive church”—honoring and responding to charges of misconduct and ministering to both the alleged victim and the alleged offender.

The bishops had been in prayer for half-an-hour before we were allowed in their chamber. The Presiding Bishop announced that they had anointed each other around their tables and laid hands on each other in healing prayer. The next half hour was spent in an Ignation exercise of discernment. Each table was asked to make a list, first, of all the reasons “not” to consent to Canon Robinson’s consecration as a bishop. After 15 minutes they then listed all the reasons “to” consent. Then there was exactly one hour of open conversation—pro and con on the question. Though only 108 bishops were eligible to vote, all of them took part in the conversation, since the bishops believe in a collective wisdom of the House. It’s unclear whether anyone’s mind was changed in the discussion time or the 15 minutes of silent prayer that preceded the actual vote; however the passion, on both sides, was sometimes provocative and sometimes moving.

The funniest thing said was by Paul Marshall, bishop of Bethlehem. He said he knew Gene Robinson was a good man and quoted Ben Johnson who said “Anyone worthy to go to heaven is surely worthy to be a bishop....”

Most powerful were what retired Bishop Ted Eastman and the Bishop of Rhode Island said. Ted Eastman, who as an active bishop, was somewhat conservative on sexual issues said, “I didn’t intend to say anything today but when I looked at my list of reasons of why not and why to, I realized all the reasons ‘no’ were out of fear and all the reasons ‘yes’ were out of hope. Christ calls us to hope, not fear....”

Bishop Wolf had not made up her mind prior to Convention and was rumored to be leaning toward “no”. When she stood to speak, the other bishops seemed to listen especially intently. “I had not made a public statement on this issue and really didn’t know how to vote. However, just last night, I thought of my people” (Bishop Wolf grew up Jewish) “and how God brought them from slavery to the Promised Land—but not before we passed through the Wilderness. Whatever the vote on this issue, our church is going to be in the Wilderness for a while. And if I’m going to be in the Wilderness, I want Gene Robinson there with me. I will prayerfully vote in the affirmative.”

Several bishops said quite clearly that if Robinson was affirmed they would be forced to decide whether to leave the church. One quite clearly called Gene Robinson a sinner. The divide between the supporters and opponents was clear and deep. None of those in the middle spoke. It was patently clear that there was little room for negotiation or agreement. This vote was going to profoundly divide the bishops.

The consent forms were passed out, filled in and then turned into the secretary. Then, after a short break, the bishops did other business for nearly an hour. At the end of the day, the Presiding Bishop said, “of 107 bishops eligible to vote, 62 have given consent.”

Eight more than needed. Because of the rules of the House, the announcement was made in total silence. The Presiding Bishop then invited Bishop Duncan to address the House. He and 15 other of the over 200 bishops present, went to the front of the room and, in essence, declared this decision apostate. It was a long and bitter statement, threatening to bring in the Primates of the other Anglican Churches to intervene in our church and saying they were out of communion with the General Convention.

Those Bishops declared their intention to leave the building to gather and consider what they would do next. The Presiding Bishop prevailed on them to stay for prayer before leaving. Michael Battle—our old friend—is the chaplain of the House of Bishops. He led us in singing “Ubi Caritas” and then prayed for those “in joy and those in sorrow.”

Then, suddenly, it was over.

Though only 200 were watching, the proceedings were being televised on a huge screen in the worship hall. So, all at once, there were several thousand people streaming out of the Convention Center. Some were weeping in pain, more in joy. It was too soon to know what to think, what to feel, what to know....

(I wrote the last page or so on the floor of the House on Tuesday late afternoon while we were trying to catch up to where we had to be. An evening session is on the schedule each night of the rest of Convention, if we need it. But while I was writing and paying some modicum of attention—most of the legislation was pretty straightforward or else canonical changes necessary for the functioning of the church for the next three years. We had to finish everything that had been initiated in our House so the Bishops could have it tomorrow. We’ve dealt with very little of the legislation that originated with the Bishops—every resolution starts one place or another...for example, the consent for new bishops always starts with the deputy and anything to

do with worship or Prayer Book always starts with the Bishops...and since both Houses have to concur before anything is official, today was the deadline for sending resolutions to the other House. Everything we'll do from now on is to deal with what the Bishops have already passed and decide to concur or reject or amend and send back to them. The third option is a problem because time is running out and if both Houses don't agree on something, even if one house passed it, then it dies. From now on it's seeing if we can agree with the Bishops and them with us.)

Yesterday and today we elected members of the Executive Council—the body that is like the vestry of the Episcopal Church. They meet four or five times a year to carry on the work that the General Convention approved. Ted Mollegen, one of Connecticut's lay deputies, was one of those elected. The members of the Executive Council are terribly important since there are three years of things to do before we meet again as General Convention.

One of the odd things about Monday and today has been the remarkable, almost painful restraint shown by the pro-Gene Robinson Deputies and Bishops. Because of how agonizing it has been for the real fundamentalists in our church, we have been especially conscious of the feelings of the moderate conservatives who have no intention to leave the church but could be painted in the broad brush strokes with their more conservative colleagues. So there is no open celebration of the historic consent for Gene Robinson's consecration. The Connecticut group is hysterically happy, but we're in the hotel with the Fort Worth group so we can't be dancing in the halls.

I spoke to a priest from Fort Worth last night. "How are you guys doing?" I asked him in the lobby. "Not well," he said. "We won't get over this for a long time."

I told him that I knew we were from very different places in the church but that I was praying for him and I very much wanted to be in the same church with him. He teared up and told me how much that meant. We embraced for a moment—two total strangers from the opposite out lands of this wondrous church. It's not healed. It won't be. But I meant what I said, I do want him in this "new church" that has been transfigured in Minneapolis.

I've heard how many of you are delighted with how the convention has gone. Some have sent me wonderful emails—I had 45 emails today alone and a good number of them were from folks back home. And I would caution you and me to realize that there are those at St. John's who are not rejoicing. There are those who are confused and hurt and upset, feeling their church has moved further than they are prepared to go. I would urge kindness and gentleness and openness toward anyone who doesn't understand how the Episcopal Church has chosen hope over fear.

Restraint is a virtue. And the remarkable thing about the Convention is how those who "won"—and it's impossible not to think of it that way on some level—are trying for all they are worth to be "good winners". If this is truly a transfigured church—committed to outreach and evangelism and welcoming to all—that means we must be especially welcoming to those who do not agree. We must be more committed to our passionate longing to belong to each other than we are to our differences and our disagreements. That is for me, the "narrow door" Jesus says we must enter. In order to be broad and inclusive and hospitable to all, I must be willing to embrace and love "all"—especially those who do not share my joy.

Today (Tuesday) at our meeting, Gene Robinson was escorted to the podium by the deputation from New Hampshire and introduced to the House of Deputies. It is a formality we do for all new bishops. My old friend, Ephraim, did stand up when Bishop-elect Robinson was brought into the House. But he did not applaud. And after Gene was introduced, Ephraim joined about 60 deputies at a microphone to read a statement much like the ones read by the 18 bishops in that House. This statement was even harsher and more judgmental than the one of the Bishops. And it ended with the announcement that some of the Deputies would be leaving the Convention and Minneapolis now and that most of them would leave the floor of the House for the rest of the day for a time of prayer and repentance. We were told in no uncertain terms, that we were no longer a part of Christ's church and there was no way to fix that.

Ephraim was one of the ones who left for good. He had sat next to me in the Colorado deputation and I do care for him though I find his opinions and theology toxic. He came back to turn in his badge to the chair of his deputation. He extended his hand to me and I embraced him instead. I told him "Godspeed" and he gave me a sad little smile before he walked away from the Transfigured Church. It was hard. And the remaining Colorado folks—they lost an alternate as well—are shaken and lost. One of them said, "there's an empty place at the table."

Our role, as a Transfigured Church, is to model the wilderness, to model brokenness for the rest of the universal church and for the culture and for the world. It is Christ's "broken" Body that is shared and which feeds the hungers of God's world. And we are broken now. Transfigured surely and made new, but broken in the process. And, just as in the Eucharist, it is the broken body that is shared, for a time now, in a wilderness newness always brings, we must be Christ's broken Body.

I look so forward to breaking bread with you on Sunday. I need that and long for that. I am joyful in a deep down way, but restrained and cautious and ready for the wilderness. You must be careful what you take into the desert. You can carry only what you need and no more for the desert is an unyielding place.

But we need very little for the journey. All we need is "hope" instead of "fear." All we need is "joy" instead of resentment. All we need is openness and inclusion and hospitality to gather other pilgrims to us as we sojourn in this wilderness place for a while, waiting for God to reveal to us what this Transfigured Church will be like...waiting patiently for the time when we will enter the Promised Land and find God's glory there.....

I love you so. And never more than now. Shalom and gentleness to you. Be kind, be true, be of good cheer, do not be afraid. All will be well. God did not bring us out this far into the wild and desert place to leave us alone. God is with us now as never before. And from the mount of our transfiguration, we must now go into the world and share the gifts we have been so graciously given. Alleluia! Fear not. All will be well.

Diary Entry Number 9

Thursday, August 7 ALMOST HOME...the second Thursday

This is a very long time to live in a place away from home. Yesterday, making some dinner arrangements with some friends, I said, "I need to go home first...." You've been in Minneapolis too long when you start calling the Doubletree Suites "home"! Especially since I've only been here to sleep. There's been no sitting around with friends in my sitting room. I haven't sat down in the living room yet, except at the computer. In fact, I've used the furniture in this room to stack up stuff I want to send home—we each can Fed Ex one box of stuff at the Diocese's expense.

But it's almost over. Tomorrow is the last legislative day and most of what is left is housekeeping—approving or killing legislation that originated with the Bishops. And they'll be doing the same with those left over pieces from the House of Deputies. Today we passed the \$147 million budget for the next three years. The national church asks the dioceses for 21% of their income over the first \$100,000—which makes 12.5% look reasonable! Over 60 of the 108 dioceses pay the 21% and Connecticut pays over that—only one of 5 dioceses that do. Those five deputations were asked to stand today to be acknowledged for our generosity. It makes me want to come home and figure out how to meet our 12.5% asking! (One thing I noticed, most of the more conservative dioceses—Fort Worth, Quincy, Springfield, Texas, the Florida dioceses—are all far below the 21% mark.

Which brings me to something you need to know—something that I'm sure the media hasn't said (though both Bern and Steve Minkler told me the media coverage has been better than I expected—but I've had no time to watch any of it) the major split in the church arrived here split. There has been an alternative Eucharist every morning at the same time of the General Convention Eucharist across the street from the Convention Center in a huge Lutheran church. The folks who stood up and protested at Gene Robinson's consent in both houses haven't been worshipping with the rest of us for these two weeks. We have not had "common prayer" with them. The majority of the Convention—including most of the "conservatives", God bless and protect them, have worshipped together, broken bread together, every day. But the far-right of the church haven't been with us. We were broken when we arrived. And, for Anglicans, not being able to worship together is de facto schism. For some of those over at Central Lutheran church every morning, it was because we were doing some Rite Three liturgies—like the one we'll do Sunday when I'm "home"—and mostly because there were women bishops celebrating or women preaching. But for most of those across the street, it was the sexuality issues that kept them from common prayer. They chose—before any of the votes—to shun the vast majority of the Convention and the church.

The Bishop of Springfield said, during the debate over Gene Robinson's consent, that "I used to believe we weren't all on the same page...now I wonder if we're even in the same library." There were two "libraries"—to spaces for worship—at this convention from the first day. We were not "united", which is the far-right's code word for "not in agreement with them", for a long time before this convention. The bishop of Springfield was even scheduled to celebrate one of the Convention's Eucharists.

But the phrase about God that says, “like a mother you did not neglect your children” was part of that prayer and he wouldn’t participate. This Convention and the decisions on Gene Robinson and blessings DID NOT split the church. The church was split long before those votes. What has happened in Minneapolis was that our Church became in an undeniable way what the people who objected knew it was for a long time. The left and center of the Episcopal Church claimed their identity in Minneapolis. The ones who objected have been waiting for this moment — waiting for the time when the “real Episcopal Church” would have the courage to declare itself as The Inclusive Church. They’ve been waiting for years, hoping for this opportunity to walk away and cast judgment and blame and have their moment in the sun.

The real Episcopal Church has finally spoken. Those who threaten schism and may or may not choose to leave have had one foot out the door and one foot on the banana peel of their own fundamentalism for years. It will be messy and strident and shrill for a while now. Expect it. They will try to have the larger Anglican Church intervene in the Episcopal Church’s democracy. Pray for our Presiding Bishop, Frank Griswold, because he will be besieged in the coming months. Pray that he will maintain the deep spirituality of his life to face the days ahead.

Today’s preacher was Michael Battle, one time seminarian at St. John’s, now a professor at Duke Divinity School and chaplain to the House of Bishops. The music was provided by the best gospel choir I’ve ever, ever heard—the choir of United Deliverance Temple in Minneapolis. Their director, Bretta Nelson, looked, for all the world, like Whoopie Goldberg. And the most remarkable thing about this African American choir was that one of their soloists had that blonde hair I’ve come to equate with Minneapolis! An integrated gospel choir. They were perfect for an Episcopal gathering. Inclusion and diversity defines this church of ours. Praise God! Mike’s text was Matthew 13.44-52, some of the parables of the Kingdom. It’s the part about “the Kingdom of God is like...

*a treasure hidden in a field that someone finds and sells all they own for it...

*a merchant in search of fine pearls who finds the pearl of great price and sells all he owns for it...

*the net cast into the sea that catches all manner of fish and then the fishers sort the good from the bad....”

Then Jesus asks the disciples, “do you understand all this?”

And when they answer “yes”, he tells them, “to be trained for the Kingdom is like the head of a household who brings out of his/her treasure what is old and what is new....”

He confronted us with wondering about what we have to give up and sell to get the greater good God has for us—the treasure, the pearl, the catch of fish. And he wondered with us about how we are to separate what is good from what is bad and how to bring out of our tradition what is “old” while embracing what is “new”.

It’s one of those sermons I’ve heard that I’ve wished I’d preached. And since each sermon at General Convention is finished by 15 minutes of conversation around our round tables, Michael asked us “what we have to give up and let go of” to let the Spirit move. I had one of those rare

and wondrous epiphanies while wrestling with that question. What I have to give up is my anger and bad feelings toward those far-right guys who threaten the church with schism. I've let them get inside of me and make me uncharitable and even hostile toward their fundamentalism. I've got to let that go and let the Spirit move. I've got to let them be who they are and not fret about it. I've got to let go of the "old" church and embrace the "new" church—the church that is emerging, coming into being, being transfigured. I truly want those fundamentalists to be with me...I really do, no kidding. But I've got to let go of my needs and let them be who they are and do what they have to do and then lean into the new wind that is blowing in The Inclusive Church.

(So, when I woke up this morning I had an odd pain in my lower stomach. I called Bern and when we talked I told her about it and she, as my attending physician, told me it might be a bladder or urinary tract infection and I should go see about it. Before the Eucharist I went to the First Aid booth and they told me the same thing Bern had—maybe she does have some medical knowledge!—and after Eucharist I told the head of our Deputation that I was going to the urgent care unit at Hennipen County Medical Center and I'd be back. It was too late to let the alternate sit in for me.

HCMC is about 12 blocks from the Convention Center. But this is Minnesota and we're on the edge of the Great Plains. Everything is flat here and city blocks are even longer than in Manhattan. It was over a miles walk, but what I noticed was that the pain went away when I walked and came back when I stopped for a walk/don't walk signs. Not a bad metaphor for the church—the pain happens when you don't move. Moving brings relief. A little forced, I'll admit, but hey, I've been in pain, don't expect parables of the Kingdom from me!

After several hours of exams and tests, the doctor told me they had ruled out all but two possible things. Either I would start vomiting within a few hours and what I had was a stomach virus they'd treated half-a-dozen folks from Convention for or—if I didn't start vomiting, I'd somehow pulled a muscle while sitting down for two weeks—hey, medicine isn't an absolute science! It's been more than 12 hours and I'm feeling fine except for the pain—when I'm not walking—of a pulled muscle.)

I missed the morning session but was back in my seat by the time things started again in the afternoon. I bought a New York Times—which costs less in Minneapolis than Connecticut...go figure that—and saw a great article in the Times about Convention. If you read that, they got one thing wrong in the headline. The headline said: "Episcopal Church Leaders Reject Proposal for Same Sex Union Liturgy." Actually, they were "literally" right, but being right isn't always being accurate.

What the Bishops rejected was the proposal for a liturgy for same-sex unions to be included in either The Book of Occasional Services (the intent of the original proposal) or Enriching our Worship (the intent of the resolution when it came to them from the Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music). The distinction there is subtle and blatantly Anglican. A priest can use any service in the Book of Occasional Services without permission. Using a liturgy from Enriching Our Worship requires the permission of the bishop. The committee made the proposal more palatable to bishops who oppose the idea since no priest in their diocese could use the liturgy without expressed opinion.

But the bishops fiddled with the resolution (called C051) and wrote a substitution that was even more acceptable to more bishops. This is what Center Aisle, the daily Convention publication of the Diocese of Virginia said about all that: “With no fanfare and great gentility, the House of Bishops took up the proposal on the blessing of same-sex unions, and in the course of 90 minutes of debate, managed to get this divisive issue just right.”

What the bishops did, under the leadership of Catherine Roskam, Suffragan Bishop of New York (an extremely liberal bishop) and Peter Lee, Bishop of Virginia (the definition of a “centrist” or moderate in the church) was this: they crafted a substitute that acknowledged that anyone who performed a union outside of the legal bonds of marriage was “within the doctrine and discipline of the church”. We Episcopalians have never established a clear and definable “doctrine and discipline” regarding homosexual relationships. In the absence of such a doctrine, those who celebrate same-sex unions have nothing to be “without”!

So, it all goes to the individual bishops. If a bishop, as some already have, allows blessings, then they are valid. If a bishop will not allow them, they will not occur and if they do will not have the sanction of the church. The substitute resolution clearly affirms that gay and lesbian Christians are fully part of the Body of Christ and that unions between same-sex partners have, do and will take place and that those unions are not forbidden. Both the Women’s Caucus and Integrity agreed that the substitution was not all they wanted but surely enough. The strife is over. The battle, if you have to see it that way, is finally won. One of the fundamentalists in the church said, just before he left, “this church will never be the same again.” Today in the debate over the substitute resolution, a gay priest said, “the church will never be the same again. Praise God!”

Frank Wade, the chair of the Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music committee said that we Episcopalians are at our best when our legislation is “descriptive” rather than “proscriptive.” The resolution is “Anglicanism” at it’s best—providing for both/and rather than either/or.

The bishops approved the resolution by voice vote and, not unexpectedly, the House of Deputies voted by Orders for the second and last time of this Convention—the first being to consent to Canon Robinson’s ordination. The vote was this: in the Lay Order: 58 dioceses “yes”, 38 “no” and 12 dioceses “divided”. In the Clergy Order the vote was 62 “yes”, 34 “no” and 12 “divided”.

(A “Episcopal democracy” aside—here’s where the way we vote by diocese is misleading. Seven of the “no” votes in both orders came from the seven Caribbean Dioceses. Put together, the total number of Episcopalians in those 7 dioceses is less than in Connecticut alone. But they have 7 votes in both orders while Connecticut has only one. This is not a “one person/one vote democracy by any means. Take out those dioceses and the “divided votes” since they merely cancel themselves out and the vote was 58-31 and 62-27. But, to be fair, if you subtract the seven dioceses of New England—all of whom were yes in both order—the votes would have been 51-38-12 and 54-34-12. Without New England the margin of victory in the lay order would have been, counting “Divided” votes as “no”, only one vote in the lay order and only 8 votes in the clerical order. So, it looks different however you choose to look at it. Take out the Caribbean diocese and the “divided” votes and it’s a landslide. Take out New England and leave in the

“divided” votes and it squeaks by. This is a “messy” church because it is a democracy. If you don’t like democracy, with all it’s weird imperfections, you won’t like this church.)

So, when it was over, some of the same people who walked out yesterday but came back today, walked out again. It wasn’t nearly as dramatic. And if you want a great story, one of the women clergy deputies from Albany (in the category of Fort Worth and Pittsburgh for being conservative) stopped on her way out, after addressing the House with her pain, and embraced Beth, one of Connecticut’s Deputies. She and Beth and Barbara Cheney had jigger-bugged in the aisle yesterday when some Beatle’s songs were played at the end of the budget presentation. Beth hugged her and the woman from Albany whispered, “I still want to dance...I’ll be back....”

Fear not. Neither be afraid. All will be well. We are now a part of The Inclusive and Welcoming Church. The agony of 3 decades in this church over the homosexual issues is over and done. Now we can move on and become the church God is calling us to be: radically open, unrelentingly hospitable, committed to mission and ministry and evangelism. We will be, as I’ve said, “in the wilderness”. But just as there is no Easter without Good Friday, there is no Promised Land without a Wilderness.

Be not afraid, Fear not. All will be well. This is a church committed to inclusion and hospitality like no church ever has been. We are Catholic in worship and being and Protestant in our commitment to being the counter-culture that offers hope and faith and promise as a corrective to fear and anxiety and hate.

What will all this have to do with us, back home at St. John’s? I don’t know. I can’t imagine. Free people and people of faith never know what will happen next. Only those oppressed and enslaved and without faith can predict tomorrow, because for them, tomorrow will look a lot like today looked. For free people, liberated people, Jesus people, people of hope and promise and possibility and faith—for us, the Spirit of Truth will lead us into that place we’ve never been before and welcome us there with the blessings of God.

I can’t tell you how transforming being here at the General Convention has been for me personally and spiritually and in the nature of my being. I’ll write once more from here. And I invite you to be at the Eucharist at St. John’s Sunday when we’ll celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration and I’ll begin to report to you about where I have been, what I have seen, how I have experienced a church vaster and more diverse than even I could have imagined. I will try to say something about how there are no strangers in this church and no outcasts. I will try to say something about how wondrous and faithful and true this church is. Bring friends. It is us, as a church, at our best. Be there on Sunday. I want to share my heart with you....

I’m almost home. I’ve missed you so. I can’t wait to welcome you to the table and to share God’s Word with you again....