

“I Need \$10.00!”

By Eddie Vance

So said the Diocese of Easton’s Nancy Dick (Emmanuel, Chestertown), on Monday afternoon, 27 April, 2009, to the annual Synod meeting of the Episcopal Church’s Province 3, in Martinsburg, West Virginia.

The context was an after-lunch exercise, sponsored by the Episcopal Church’s General Convention House of Deputies, in which Synod attendees--General Convention Deputies and Alternates, diocesan reps to Synod, bishops, visitors, guests, and innocent bystanders--were instructed in the academic discipline of Public Narrative, as developed by Harvard University Professor Marshall Ganz and administered to Synod by a Harvard graduate student. Nancy was one of three table group selectees of 100 total participants who were asked to restate to the larger room assembled their ministry action presentations, vis a vis “in two minutes or less, what beneficial, concrete action are you requesting?” Nancy reported that she had read a recent “Sports Illustrated” article detailing the benefits of the inexpensive bed netting used by African women, men, and children as effective barriers to the mosquitoes that infect humans with malaria. “Nets for Life,” a program affiliated with Episcopal Relief and Development (www.er-d.org), donates such nets to African sisters and brothers in dire need, for, while malaria is largely preventable, it remains the cause of much human suffering, as there are never enough nets. Nancy invited 100 Synod attendees to give \$10.00 each, as \$1,000.00 would purchase 100 invaluable mosquito nets for the inhabitants of a distant village.

By the end of Nancy’s compelling two minutes of floor time, her fellow Synod attendees were waving \$10.00 bills at her, and, to her credit, she accepted readily the impromptu donations! The gift-giving continued throughout Monday evening; the offering from Tuesday morning’s Eucharist was collected “for Nancy’s nets,” as well, and in less than 18 hours, \$1,200.00 was donated by the Synod for this very ad hoc iteration of an extremely important charity. This incredible experience was shared by an enthusiastic gathering of ordinary, sympathetic souls, all of whom were privileged to respond to a distinct need AND to participate in the birth of the legend that is Nancy Dick, Easton’s own!

Other Synod activities included presentations by Dr. Bonnie Anderson, House of Deputies President, by Rev. Dr. Gregory S. Straub, Executive Officer and Secretary of the General Convention, by a member of the Presiding Bishop’s staff, by a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance, and by Bp. Neff Powell (SW VA), Province 3 President, as well as Province 3’s business meeting and workshops by the Church Pension Fund and by Integrity (integrityusa.org).

Synod attendees from the Diocese of Easton (dioceseofeaston.org) included Carol Sullivan, Eleanor & Waller Hairston, Ruth & Lou Kemp, Dorothy Lewis, Jane Morgan, Naneese Hawthorne, Chuck Walthall, Tom Egeberg, and Greg Straub.

Now, what is a Synod, what is Province 3, and why does any of this matter to Episcopalians on the Easter Shore of Maryland?

Good questions!

In order, the answers are:

A synod is a church council.

Province 3 (province3.org) is one of nine geographic regions of the Episcopal Church (episcopalchurch.org). Provinces are larger than dioceses but smaller than the “national church,” and they function as important mission and ministry opportunities for witness, sharing, fellowship, networking, combining resources, support, and communication. Province 3 was granted authority by the Constitution and Canons for the government of the Episcopal Church, and it exists to further the mission of the Episcopal Church by coordinating the interdependent ministries of its thirteen dioceses in a spirit of mutual responsibility. Network Ministries of Province 3 include Anti-Racism, Christian Education, Church Periodical Club, Commission on Ministry, Episcopal Church Women, Companion Relationship, Evangelism/Congregational Development, Health Ministries, Higher Education, Justice and Peace, United Thank Offering, and Youth Ministries. Each Network Ministry has a volunteer coordinator. Members of Executive Council are elected by and report to Province 3. Province 3 elects its officers (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and Secretary). The President appoints a paid Coordinator. There are thirteen Provincial Council Representatives, one from each member diocese. Each diocese sends three Representatives, two lay and one clergy, to Synod. The Province 3 Council meets semi-annually with the provincial officers and the provincial network ministry coordinators, all of whom attend Synod annually, also. The thirteen dioceses contribute annual apportionments to Province 3, and Province 3 receives annual grants from the Episcopal Church. In turn, Province 3 grants are distributed throughout its thirteen dioceses via the Network Ministries structure. Diocese of Easton youth have attended Province 3’s two most recent pre-Episcopal Youth Events, Carol Sullivan and Frieda Malcolm are Network Ministry Coordinators, and Bp. Shand is very active in Province 3. Rev. Barbara Seras, Province 3 Coordinator, has attended, addressed, and exhibited at several Diocese of Easton conventions. And Rev. Paul Winters serves as Easton’s liaison Province 3’s Anti-Racism Network.

Thirteen mid-Atlantic dioceses from five states and the District of Columbia comprise Province 3--Bethlehem (PA), Central Pennsylvania, Delaware, Easton, Maryland, Northwestern Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh, Southern Virginia, Southwestern Virginia, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Links to all twelve of Easton’s Province 3 neighbor dioceses may be found at Easton’s web site home page.

In recent years, Province 3 has provided much prayerful support to the Diocese of Pittsburgh, as it underwent years of turmoil pertaining to its status within the Episcopal Church. As of fall 2008, Pittsburgh is in the early stages of reconciliation with the Episcopal Church. Its Synod delegation received an unprecedented, heartfelt standing ovation in late-April as they were introduced to Synod by Province 3 President Neff Powell. Our Pittsburgh sisters and brothers were welcomed warmly to Synod, and “back

to Province 3 and the Episcopal Church!”

All of this matters to Episcopalians on the Shore because it is the Church, and the Episcopal Church is even more compelling in spring 2009, as it prepares for its 76th General Convention, Wednesday, 8 July - Friday, 17 July, in Anaheim, California. Ubuntu, African for “I in You and You in Me,” is the theme of General Convention 2009. (An alternate translation of Ubuntu is “I Am Because You Are.”)

The Episcopal Church’s General Convention (episcopalchurch.org/gc2009.htm), meeting since 1785, is the Church’s governing body.

Meeting every three years, the Houses of Deputies and Bishops gather bicamerally to deliberate, to study, to pray, to discern, to seek God’s will for the Church, to debate, to proclaim unconditional love to a weary and broken world, to legislate, and to lead.

111 dioceses send their deputies and their bishops to be with hundreds of volunteers, exhibitors, visitors, guests, observers, reporters, local hosts, ecumenical partners, employees, and staff at what is really a very large family reunion, among many other things.

Bonnie Anderson (Michigan) is President of the House of Deputies. Most Rev. Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori is Presiding Bishop. Rev. Greg Straub is Executive Officer and Secretary. Rev. David Michaud (St. Andrew’s, Princess Anne) is a returning Secretariat volunteer. Each legislative house has vice-presidents, chaplains, parliamentarians, and other officers, and legislative committees, committee Chairs, Co-Chairs, and Secretaries.

The current draft of the convention calendar (episcopalchurch.org/documents.GC2009ScheduleDraft8) calls for 19 legislative sessions, 13 committee meeting sessions, 3 Program, Budget and Finance hearings, 3 Joint Sessions of Convention, the first of which is the Presentation to Convention by the President of the House of Deputies and the Presiding Bishop, Provincial Caucuses, daily Community Eucharists, 4 Mission Conversations utilizing Public Narrative, 5 orientation sessions, 7/5-7/7 (one each for Volunteer Supervisors and Secretariat, Legislative Committee Officers and Legislative Aides, new Deputies and Alternates, all Deputies and Alternates, and Bishops), seminary dinners, the UTO Ingathering, the ECW Event, provincial gatherings, other committee hearings, the bishops’ dinner, and so on. The day before Convention, Tuesday, 7 July, begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 9 p.m. The ten days of Convention begin at 7:00 or 7:30 and they end at 9:00 or 10:00. Legislative Committee officers have a meeting on Monday afternoon, 6 July. There are myriad unofficial events and gatherings during Convention, too.

First-time Deputies and Alternates will experience an expanded program of education, nurture, and orientation regarding the nuts and bolts of General Convention; included in this new approach is the fact that no first-timers were appointed to serve on any legislative committees.

Among the observers and invited guests representing various provinces of the Worldwide Anglican Communion, of which the Episcopal Church is a member in good standing, will be the Most Rev. and Right Honorable Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury.

General Convention 2009 will: pass a 9-figure budget for the triennium 2010-2012; receive reports and resolutions from legislative committees; vote yea or nay re consenting to recent episcopal elections; consider proposed amendments to Titles III and IV (the Episcopal Church's disciplinary canons); debate the Church's position with respect to human suffering, manmade and natural disasters, justice and peace, world mission, stewardship, evangelism, social and urban affairs, ecumenism (including a Full Communion Proposal with the Moravian Church in America, a la the historic, 2003 document between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), liturgy and music, access to ordination, education (Christian and secular), an Anglican Covenant, compliance with the Windsor Report, the Anglican Communion, prayer book revision, Lambeth Conference 2008, the economy, unemployment, health ministries and health care, the blessing of same-gender unions, the Great Commission, the Baptismal Covenant, and the unqualified, loving ministry of Jesus.

Documents pertaining to General Convention 2009--"Preparing for General Convention," the Bishop and Deputy Handbook (in English, Spanish, and French), Resolution Guidelines, the Public Narrative Project Workshop Participant Guide, the Draft Budget and Mission Statement of The Executive Council to The 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, and "The Blue Book, etc."--are available at the various, above-listed web addresses.

Easton's deputation is Nancy Dick (Co-Chair), Eddie Vance (Christ Church, Denton), Kathleen Wise (Christ Church, Cambridge), Bonnie Caudell (All Hallows, Snow Hill), Atif Gaddis (St. Peter's, Salisbury), Rev. Canon Heather Cook (Chair), Very Rev. Frieda Malcolm (St. Alban's, Salisbury), Very Rev. Charlie Osberger (Wye Parish), Rev. Mike Reddig (Christ Church, Cambridge), Rev. Dr. David Green (Christ Church, Kent Island), and Bp. Shand.

Committee assignments are as follows: Nancy Dick, Social and Urban Affairs (Secretary); Kathleen Wise, Education; Charlie Osberger, World Mission; Eddie Vance, Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations; Bp. Shand, Stewardship and Development (Co-Chair).

The deputation and Bp. Shand met in April and in May, and the General Convention "Blue Books" (aka "Report to The 76th General Convention") arrived in May; on Tuesday evening, 16 June, 7:00, all are invited to the Prayer Vigil and Reception at Trinity Cathedral, at which the deputation and Bp. Shand will be in attendance.

After Convention, all are invited to be with the deputation and Bp. Shand on Wednesday evening, 22 July, 7:00, at Emmanuel, Chestertown, and on Thursday evening, 23 July, 7:00, at St. Paul's, Vienna.

Whether or not you find yourself in Anaheim this July--and it is the case that anyone may register to attend General Convention, and that the majority of both Houses' legislative sessions, most committees' meetings and hearings, and all of the worship sessions are open to all--know that with God's help the Church will assemble in peace, conduct its business faithfully and in order, pray with and for one another, seek the mind of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit, ask tough questions and live with messy answers, agree to disagree when necessary, listen, hear, and then depart in peace until General Convention 2012.

There will be laughter and there will be tears.

There will be agreements and disagreements.

There will be moments of joy and moments of disappointment.

And there will be tactics and strategies, trial balloons, rhetoric, maneuvering, posturing, arm-twisting, saber-rattling, and political machinations.

The Church is a human institution, after all.

The Episcopal Church is criticized from within and from without, it makes the news and it gets more than its share of headlines, it wrestles for all to see with some very touchy subjects, and, speaking relatively, it is small.

How could a church that bridges Catholicism and Protestantism, that lives in tension on the Via Media, that honors scripture, reason, and tradition, that seeks and serves Christ in all persons, that strives for justice and peace among all people, and that respects the dignity of every human being, be anything but?

Take pride in the Episcopal Church.

As always, pray for the Church.

Please.

Thank you.

Amen.