

Bishop Scarfe's report from General Convention 6-20-06

"It's a girl," says the latest badge fashion to be sported around General Convention. Within 24 hours of the surprise election of Katherine Jefferts Schori as the next Presiding Bishop, the badges were appearing. I think it is true to say that few people thought that this would be the time for our first female Presiding Bishop. For the electing Bishops, however, the signs of possibility appeared at our Spring House of Bishops where Bishop Jefferts Schori's presentation at the conversation with all of the nominees was considered striking and began to turn people to pay serious attention. I certainly began to believe it was a possibility.

Our day on Sunday as bishops began with Eucharist with all of the Convention. In a special dismissal we were asked to leave first and go on buses to Trinity Cathedral several blocks away from the Convention Center. The Church was cordoned off with police yellow tape, but unlike Philadelphia, the site of the last election, there was an absence of media or crowd attention.

We filed into the Church. Around the walls of the sanctuary was the timeline of the history of Women's ministry in the Episcopal Church, a coincidental but poignant occurrence. Iowa's Barbara Schlachter is the Chair of the Standing Commission on Women's Ministry and had created the timeline with help from members of Christ Church, Cedar Rapids. It had been dedicated earlier in the week of Convention in recognition of the thirty-year anniversary of women's ordination to the priesthood. At the end of the day, Mark Andrus, Bishop-elect of California, and I placed an additional reference to the end of the timeline: Katherine Jefferts Schori elected Presiding Bishop, June 18, 2006!

The election took place in an atmosphere of prayer and reflection, interspersed with hymn singing. The five ballots took four hours to complete, and then we waited for the response of the House of Deputies that took up another two hours. The balloting focused on two people from the second ballot onwards. Bishop Jefferts Schori took an early lead, but was quickly "caught" by Bishop Parsley. A shift appeared in the third ballot, where Bishop Jefferts Schori seemed to have gathered new impetus from votes moving from other bishops clearly no longer in the running.

There was minimum evidence of politicking in between the ballots. Most of the time, we stayed quietly and reverently in our pews. As the third ballot was being counted we broke for lunch. People were respectfully and gently inquiring as to the welfare of the various candidates as they mingled among us. The care of one another as bishops is an aspect of this House of Bishops that does not get the recognition it deserves. It is the fruit of several years of increased meetings and intentional small group ministry, and it is fine example to the rest of the Church.

By the fourth ballot there were only two candidates with substantial votes and Bishop Jefferts Schori seemed to move within a few votes of election. When I began to see the

retired Bishops, some who were known for their more conservative stances in current Episcopal issues, come up to greet Bishop Jefferts Schori, I gathered that history was about to happen. And it did, in that economy of God by which she received the exact number of votes needed for election. The Spirit had surprised us again.

Episcopalians in Iowa have experienced firsthand the ministry of our new Presiding Bishop elect as she was keynote speaker and preacher at the Convention in 2001 as you moved into your own Episcopal election year. She will continue to offer that deeply centered spirituality that has marked our Presiding Bishop's leadership under Bishop Griswold being very much a devotee to desert spirituality.

She comes from the deserts of Nevada, but also from the experience of a diocese of vast contrast, with many small churches developed over time in total ministry models on the one hand, but the fastest growing icon of secular life – Las Vegas on the other. There she has worked on creating a different way of doing church to meet the demands of such a population. Her professional life as an oceanographer and university teacher before ordination has given her a serious sense of the precariousness of life on the planet. It is my hope that she will lead us to play a leading part in the stewardship of God's creation.

She was one of the few bishops to attend our budget hearing at this Convention and make an appeal to lend ourselves to the fulfillment of our part of working for the UN Millennium Development Goals as our response to the Gospel, especially Luke 4: 16. In her own diocese she had led the members to do significant work in Kenya at a time when the Kenyan Church is not very happy with us. In fact reconciliation continues to be one of her themes of ministry, as well as mission.

For me it is the very speed of her life's accomplishments as an ordained person that is most intriguing and hopeful. She would be the first to say that it all takes her breath away. I take great hope in this, for it means that her ministry will be dependent on the One who created it, the Holy Spirit of God. This is how each of our lives in Christ should be. How it all works out incarnationally we have yet to see, but I trust that we will offer our prayers to God on her behalf. As she said to the bishops in her acceptance statement immediately after recollecting herself at the announcement of the election, "we all do this (ministry) together – you are not off the hook!"

Today (Tuesday) we march into the heart of the Windsor Report resolutions, and that as they say is probably another story yet to be told. Pray for us.

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