A summer of celebration!

This summer St. John in the Wilderness celebrated its 160th anniversary in many ways. On June 24, St John the Baptist Day, we started early at the Copake Iron Works with coffee and snacks, then walked in a parade led by a bagpiper to our Church grounds. There a blessing was given at the Pomeroy family gravesite honoring the founders of the Iron Works and our church. Following a special 10:00 am Eucharist a reception was held on the church lawn.

We had another successful Country Fair and Auction in July, our biggest fund raiser of the year. Winds in the Wilderness had a record crowd on a Wednesday in late August. Regular Bake Sales at the West Copake KOA raised money and helped introduce St John to a wider community.

What a great summer of celebration!

Thoughts from the Wilderness

We’ve had a great summer here at St. John in the Wilderness! In my last Thoughts from the Wilderness article in July I highlighted our wonderful 160th Anniversary celebration on June 24th with gratitude to many who made it such a grand success! Since then we’ve had another successful Country Fair & Auction and Pork BBQ! Thank you to C F & A Chair, Elen Freeston for her great work of leadership with the Fair and thank you to all who worked hard to make it a success – and a fun time for many! Also a big thank you to Bob and Karen Flynn, Bob Callahan, and Kent Kay
who brought us another delicious pork BBQ the day after the C F & A!

We also hosted excellent Jazz Vespers services this summer, beautiful chamber music from *Winds in the Wilderness*, and a very good play directed by Carl Ritchie. And we were one of the centers of activity for another vibrant Copake Falls Day in August. Thank you to all the members and friends of St. John's who make us a dynamic hub of community life as well as a vibrant center of worship and ministry.

Our congregation is growing which is atypical these days when almost all denominations are shrinking and the fastest growing segment of those polled about their religious status are those who answer: “none”.

We could worry about the meaning and ramifications of shrinking numbers of people involved with organized religion. Those of us who are ordained and do ministry full-time could be tempted to worry about it even more. Presbyterian minister Christopher A. Henry quotes a recent article by Paul Vitello in the New York Times: “The findings have surfaced with ominous regularity over the last few years, and with little notice: Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.”

Henry adds that the article “describes the crisis of overwork among ministers and the prevalence of ‘boundary issues’—problems they have when they are too easily overtaken by the urgency of other people’s needs.”

Those stats are another thing one could worry about! But perhaps we don’t need to as much here at St. John’s. As I continue to love, serve, and minister to you all, you continue to love, serve, and minister to your rector. I think one of the reasons St. John in the Wilderness is vital and growing is precisely because this dynamic is present here!

I am aware though, that I need to maintain my disciplined regimen of prayerful Scripture study (for me, The Divine Office, e.g. Morning Prayer) and daily contemplative or centering prayer. I recommend one or both (or something similar) to each of us on a daily basis. We all need the grace and strength of God received in daily spiritual practices. These kinds of spiritual disciplines (inspired by God in the first place) give God a chance to remind us of his love for us and keep us growing in faith in him, his love, and his goodness. One opportunity for this is our Wednesday, 3 p.m. Divine Reading/Centering Prayer Group here at the rectory.

When we remember that God is loving and merciful to us – and doesn’t expect us to be perfect or to be someone other than the unique, wonderful persons we are—then we can pass that love and mercy on to others more easily. And that’s what it’s all about brothers and sisters.

*In peace, John+

---

**Senior Warden’s Report**

Welcome to Autumn one and all. This has always been a season of warmth and nesting for me with a vague overtone of melancholy. I believe that many react the same way. It is certainly a breathtakingly beautiful time of year here in the northeast, but it also carries with it the inevitable

---

**A Voice in the Wilderness**

Editors: Louise and Dale Peterson

Please send submissions including news of church members to petersonlouise@gmail.com

Upcoming issues:
2012: November 18.
2013: January 27.

*Please submit reports, articles and news items two weeks prior to the issue date. Thanks!*
approach of winter.

We are fortunate to have a vibrant and active community here at Church of St. John in the Wilderness with plans for some new and exciting activities being coordinated for us by several of our younger congregants. The Harvest Fest, with help and support from the rest of us and the community, I am confident, will be a fun and successful event. If you are interested in pitching in, contact Regina Shea or Rebecca Gerrard who are planning and Chairing the event. (See page 7 for more information.)

As you have all heard by now, the Bishop will be visiting on September 23, 2012. We are only visited once every three years so it is an important event and we encourage everyone to attend. There will only be one service on that Sunday, the 10 am. I look forward to seeing everyone there.

In case the information has not spread, the bell tower repair contracts are signed and work will commence early next spring. Materials for the job will be purchased now and over the winter so that the work, once started, will be able to proceed uninterrupted. It has been a long process, but care was taken that the work be done in accordance with the original design and true to the vision of the architect. We are the stewards of an important, historic building and have a responsibility to preserve that building for generations to come. The community has been very generous in helping us with those intentions for which we are very grateful.

The Vestry continues to work in the interest of St. John’s. For those of you who are unaware, the vestry works as the stewards of the church. We meet once a month to decide how things are paid and how to budget the limited resources that we have to cover the church expenses. It is a voting body and vestry members serve a three year term. Senior and Junior Warden serve two years. The Junior Warden moves up to the Senior Warden position. I say all of this now because January will be here before you know it and I thought perhaps now would be a good time to ponder running to serve on the Vestry. We love seeing new blood and it is helpful for all of us to understand and appreciate the “nuts and bolts” issues that present themselves in keeping a church community moving forward.

Happy Fall everyone. See you in church.

Elen Freeston, Senior Warden

Sunday School Report

At this time of year I’d normally be announcing the start of Sunday School but the truth is we have been meeting all summer long. I decided to try this out because we had so many young children attending regularly – I didn’t want to break the momentum! Well, it turned out to be a lot of fun. I had two little guys, Ryan & Joe, who are from Queens NY and are staying over at the KOA Campground for the summer (and some of the Fall). It was really great getting to know them and their parents. They quickly became part of our Parish family. I’m going to miss them when they head south for the winter months; the good news is that they are planning on coming back to our area again next year!

Throughout the year we have welcomed well over 10 children at the Sunday School, but not all at one time. That is my goal this year – to gather these children together on a weekly basis. With the Fall season just around the corner, I’ll be sending letters out to the parents (or grandparents) of these children inviting them back on a regular basis, outlining the activities for the coming year. I ask all parishioners to “spread the word” that we have an up-and-coming nursery school and Sunday school. For the nursery school age children we will be planning a parent-rotation type of schedule. That way there will be two adults with the children every Sunday.

It is going to be a fun-filled & activity–filled year ahead. I have some new material and new books for the children. We will be starting with Old Testament adventures, next will be stories of some very interesting & colorful Saints as we move towards All Saints Day. There will be corresponding art projects. Most importantly we will be emphasizing the overall lessons of Love, Kindness, Honesty, and being good Stewards of our
Parade from Copake Iron Works starts the 160th anniversary celebration on June 24

Members of the Pomeroy family joined the parade

Photos: Ralph Platt, May Paddock
Ceremony at the Pomeroy gravesite

Reception on the lawn following the 10:00 am Eucharist
environment. Our group is settling into the Undercroft as our permanent space. I’ll be making it a brighter and more inspiring area for them. I want to thank Regina, Hope, Rebecca & Rosanne for all their donations of items to our Sunday school. I’d also like to thank them for their assistance throughout the year! They are always willing to give a hand when it gets hectic. As I have said in years past, we are blessed with many loving & generous individuals

Keep our little Sunday School in your thoughts & prayers and spread the word that we are a “gentler, kinder” group where children can learn about the love of God, our Father & about Jesus – and have fun doing it.

Love & Peace,
Wendy Langlois

Portrait of Edie Frogatt

Before I even got out my first question to Edie for this portrait, she said to me, “You know, Lucy, I really love our little church…it is like a family home.” Thus began our visit and as usual, with Edie, it was lots of fun!

Edie was born on January 15, 1922 in New York where she attended Christ Church at 71st and Broadway. As a little girl, she came up to the Church of the Heavenly Rest’s summer camp in Copake Falls called “The Rest.” The camp was housed in 2 large homes (no longer standing) on the property where the cabins owned by Taconic State Park now are located. She came up to the camp with her Mother and sisters Kay, Bea, and Honey. Edie fondly remembers swimming in the pool, going up once a week to the ore-bed for swimming with the counselors, and saluting the flag. She said, “It was a lovely way to spend the summer.”

Eventually the family rented houses in Copake Falls, and then in 1967, she and her
towards All Saints Day. There will be corresponding art projects. Most importantly we will be emphasizing the overall lessons of Love, Kindness, Honesty, and being good Stewards of our environment. Our group is settling into the Undercroft as our permanent space. I'll be making it a more brighter and inspiring area for them. I want to thank Regina, Hope, Rebecca & Rosanne for all their donations of items to our Sunday school. I'd also like to thank them for their assistance throughout the year! They are always willing to give a hand when it gets hectic. As I have said in years past, we are blessed with many loving & generous individuals. Keep our little Sunday School in your thoughts & prayers and spread the word that we are a "gentler, kinder" group where children can learn about the love of God, our Father & about Jesus – and have fun doing it.

Love & Peace,
Wendy Langlois

Portrait of Edie Frogatt

Before I even got out my first question to Edie for this portrait, she said to me, "You know, Lucy, I really love our little church…it is like a family home." Thus began our visit and as usual, with Edie, it was lots of fun!

Edie was born on January 15, 1922 in New York where she attended Christ Church at 71st and Broadway. As a little girl, she came up to the Church of the Heavenly Rest's summer camp in Copake Falls called "The Rest." The camp was housed in 2 large homes (no longer standing) on the property where the cabins owned by Taconic State Park now are located. She came up to the camp with her Mother and sisters Kay, Bea, and Honey. Edie fondly remembers swimming in the pool, going up once a week to the ore-bed for swimming with the counselors, and saluting the flag. She said, "It was a lovely way to spend the summer.

Eventually the family rented houses in Copake Falls, and then in 1967, she and her husband Frank bought the home where she lives now. She and Frank had 2 girls, Jane Holdridge (Ancram) and Barbara Adams (Slingerlands). Both girls were married at St. John's by Fr. Byers. She is the proud grandparent of Jeremy, Ethan, Sarah and Jamie, and great grandparent of Bradley and Samantha. Edie has been a loyal member of St. John's over the years. She joins her family at St. John's including Jane Holdridge, Susan Mollo, Bob Callahan, Bob and Karen Flynn, Peg Anderson and Wendy Langlois.

Edie has been active in her community for many years. She is a long-time member of St. John's (secretary of Episcopal Church Women, ECW, for many years), Republican Club, Eastern Stars, Copake Grange, Copake Falls Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary, and the social club, Young at Heart.

Just this winter, she celebrated her 90th Birthday with a gala party, complete with a bag-piper in honor of her Scottish heritage, at the Copake Park Community Building. The party was an open house, but she said most of the guests were having such a good time that they stayed on for the whole time. Edie remarked that for a 90 year old woman, she has quite the social life; in July she attended her grandson Jeremy's wedding, and now is looking forward to her great grand-daughter Samantha's christening at St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Albany this fall. Her favorite song is Irving Berlin's "Always" sung at her wedding. Somehow the words to this song fit Edie with her
husband Frank bought the home where she lives now. She and Frank had 2 girls, Jane Holdridge, (Ancram) and Barbara Adams (Slingerlands). Both girls were married at St. John’s by Fr. Byers. She is the proud grandparent of Jeremy, Ethan, Sarah and Jamie, and great grandparent of Bradley and Samantha. Edie has been a loyal member of St. John’s over the years. She joins her family at St. John’s including Jane Holdridge, Susan Mollo, Bob Callahan, Bob and Karen Flynn, Peg Anderson and Wendy Langlois.

Edie has been active in her community for many years. She is a long-time member of St. John’s (secretary of Episcopal Church Women, ECW, for many years), Republican Club, Eastern Stars, Copake Grange, Copake Falls Fire Company Ladies Auxiliary, and the social club, Young at Heart.

Just this winter, she celebrated her 90\textsuperscript{th} Birthday with a gala party, complete with a bag-piper in honor of her Scottish heritage, at the Copake Park Community Building. The party was an open house, but she said most of the guests were having such a good time that they stayed on for the whole time. Edie remarked that for a 90 year old woman, she has quite the social life; in July she attended her grandson Jeremy’s wedding, and now is looking forward to her great-granddaughter Samantha’s christening at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church in Albany this fall. Her favorite song is Irving Berlin’s “Always” sung at her wedding. Somehow the words to this song fit Edie with her love and devotion to her family and friends, and love returned to her by all who know her:

“I’ll be loving you Always,
With a love that’s true Always,
When the things you’ve planned,
Need a helping hand,
I will understand Always,
Days may not be fair Always,
That’s when I’ll be there Always,
Not for just an hour,
Not for just a day,
Not for just a year,
But Always.

Lucy Eldridge

Rev. Leonel L. Mitchell (1930-2012)

Babs Croteau reports that former Rector of St. John’s, The Rev. Leonel L. Mitchell died on May 23, 2012. He was Rector from June 1, 1956 to August 31, 1959. He officiated at the wedding of Babs and Hank Croteau.

Notes of condolence can be sent to his wife, Beverly Mitchell, at 1711 Hoover Ave., South Bend, Indiana 46615 and would be very much appreciated. Mrs. Mitchell has remained a member of our Birthday Candle Fund.

Following his time at St. John’s, Rev Mitchell had a distinguished career as a liturgical scholar and teacher. An obituary from the Episcopal News Service follows:

Liturgical scholar, teacher Leonel Mitchell dies

The Rev. Canon Leonel Mitchell, whose words echo at every Baptism held in an Episcopal church, died May 23 after a short illness.

Mitchell, 81, drafted the Thanksgiving over the Water prayer for the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, restoring what one commentator called “allusions” to “the primary biblical archetypes” that previous version of the prayer book had eliminated.

Mitchell was influential in many ways over the 1979 version of the prayer book, and its introduction to the church. His “Liturgical Change: How Much Do We Need?” was “highly recommended” as a “concise study course for parish use” when the Draft Proposed
Book of Common Prayer was released in February 1976 for study in parishes. The draft prayer book was subsequently approved by the General Convention in 1976 and received final approval three years later.

Mitchell’s liturgical influence extended after the prayer book revision years, as seminarians, theologians and others read and studied his many books, essays and other writings, especially his 1985 book “Praying Shapes Believing: A Theological Commentary on the Book of Common Prayer.”

Praying shapes believing, he wrote, because “worship, religious activity in all of its aspects – what we do and how we do it, as well as what we say and how we say it – underlies religious belief.”

The introduction of the 1979 prayer book was not without controversy, yet Mitchell argued in his book that “we change and the world changes, and we approach God with new problems and new questions.”

“The language of theology must be able to hear and respond to these new experiences without changing its age-old witness to the Eternal and Unchanging God,” he wrote.

Mitchell said the theology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer “faithful to the tradition” and was “a theology we can believe and teach to people today.”

Perhaps echoing Mitchell’s belief that we and the world change, his family, friends and others influenced by his life posted comments on his Facebook page as word of his death spread.

“I learned so much from Lee, both inside and outside his classroom,” the Rev. Frank W. Hughes, vicar of Trinity Episcopal Church in Columbus, Georgia, wrote. “He was a fine scholar, a patient teacher, and a wise counselor, as well as a friend.”

After his daughter, Anne Gair-Macmichael, wrote a farewell message to her father, Catharine Phillips responded with sympathy, saying “your Dad was a huge part of my priestly formation.”

Mitchell was born in New York and received an undergraduate degree from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He received a bachelor’s degree in sacred theology from Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University and master’s degree in sacred theology and a doctorate in theology from the General Seminary in New York.

He became a deacon and priest in 1954, and served parishes in New York before teaching at both the University of Notre Dame and the Episcopal Church-affiliated Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. He was the canon theologian at the Cathedral of St. James in South Bend, Indiana at the time of his death.

Mitchell is survived by his wife, Beverly, and their children, David and Anne, and their families.

Bell Tower Report

This is a report prepared for foundations which have generously contributed to the Bell Tower Fund. It gives a good overview of the project and its current status.

Raise the Bell Tower Fund Report, September 15, 2012

The Project

The historic Church of St. John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls, New York, embarked on a project to repair its Bell Tower in 2010. In 2009 a condition survey was done by Clark Engineering and it was noted that the Bell Tower was in need of extensive repair due to the process of dry rot. In the fall of 2010 it was determined that a major campaign to raise money for this project should be conducted. A fund raising effort to support the repair entitled, “Raise the Bell Tower Fund,” was begun as a quiet campaign. In the spring of 2011, the public phase of the campaign was launched at a benefit Community Rectory Dinner on May 15, 2011. Subsequently, the campaign has raised a total of $49,823. We have received significant support from parishioners, community members, Trinity Church Wall Street, Berkshire Taconic.
Community Foundation, Sacred Sites of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, and the Hudson River Bank & Trust Co. Foundation.

Due to the historic nature of the church, considered one of the finest examples of Richard Upjohn’s (1802-1878) rural churches in America, the Vestry hired an architectural firm, Landmark Consulting LLC, which specializes in historic preservation. Landmark advised the church as to the most appropriate preservation minded way to proceed. Scaffolding was erected in mid-November 2011. Aaron Gaylord, preservation contractor of AG Carpentry, and John and Kim Alvarez of Landmark Consulting made a complete inspection of the Bell Tower. Landmark subsequently wrote a report including drawings and specifications for the project.

In its report, Landmark Consulting recommended that the Bell Tower should be repaired in place, replacing those wooden elements that have been damaged by weather exposure while retaining as much as possible of the existing original fabric. This approach has the dual advantage of preserving the building’s historical integrity as well as saving the expense and potential risk of taking down the entire tower and getting it to an offsite building for repair. (After consulting various photographs from the 1920’s, some changes will be made to bring the Bell Tower back to its original configuration. Also, it was recommended to put on a copper roof over the Bell Tower).

The Building and Grounds Committee of the church, headed by Hank Croteau, conducted a bidding process with several contractors in the spring of 2012. Aaron Gaylord of AG Carpentry, of Chatham, NY, is the selected contractor and after negotiation on various terms, a contract was signed by both parties in September 2012. Procurement of materials including timber in unique dimension will start this fall. On-site work is projected to begin in the spring of 2013.

Perhaps the most notable accomplishment of this past year is increased parish and community-wide awareness of the historic and aesthetic importance of the church and its 160 years ties to the community. As part of the fund raising campaign, several events have been held with wide community involvement, written appeals sent to parish and community members, and publicity in local newspapers surrounding the Raise the Bell Tower campaign. A festive Hand Bell Concert presented on December 11, 2011 by the Salisbury Congregational Church to benefit the Bell Tower Fund was a great success attracting a wide and appreciative audience. The Hand Bell Choir returned in May of 2012 for a second concert to contribute generously to the Raise the Bell Tower Fund.

We have reached out to our immediate community of Copake Falls, by asking for support from local organizations. As a result, we have received support from the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society and from the Copake Falls Day Committee. The church is part of the Copake Historic Iron Works District, designated in 2007 as part of the National Register of Historic Places. (The founder of the church, Lemuel Pomeroy, was also founder of the Copake Iron Works in 1845).

St. John’s celebrated its 160th Anniversary on June 24, 2012. The entire community of Copake Falls received invitations to join in the celebration which included a parade from the Copake Iron Works to the church accompanied by a bag-piper from the Berkshire Highlanders and members of the American Pomeroy Historic Genealogical Association, prayers at the Pomeroy cemetery, a special sermon by Fr. John Thompson with prayers from the 1850s, and an exhibition of historical documents related to the founding of the church, followed by a festive reception.

On a yearly basis, the church serves the population of eastern Columbia County and beyond through church services and programs, (2500 persons), use of our facilities for outside groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (700) meetings of the Harlem Valley Rail Trail Association (100), Winds in the Wilderness chamber music concerts (400), plays (250), Copake Falls Day events, (600) Jazz Vespers (150), barbecues, church suppers, and special services such as Blue Christmas (500), annual Country Fair and Auction, (1000) with a total estimate of individuals served in Columbia County at approximately 6200.

Financial Information
- Total amount of the Bell tower Fund to date (including Pledges) is $49,823.62.
- At this point, the Raise the Bell Tower Fund totals $45,573.62. The estimated cost of the project as indicated in the contract with AG Carpentry is $45,000.
- Many of the expenses for this project have been donated, including graphic work for invitations, posters, etc, receptions and dinner expenses. Paid expenses are $3,750 (Landmark Consultants) and $400 (Aaron Gaylord, for scaffolding), for a total of $4,150.
- The Vestry is now raising additional funds to cover a contingency fee of $8,000 for the project. The Vestry is asking our donors to give an additional gift to the Raise the Bell Tower Fund (large or small) to meet this contingency fee. The Vestry will be very grateful for the continued support of this important project.

Exciting News from ECW

The ECW September 4th meeting to honor working women was an exciting evening. There were 15 present and all enjoyed sandwiches, a cold soup, salad and delicious desserts. The women voted to change the meeting time to 6:30 pm and have a brown bag supper. The next meeting will be October 2nd at 6:30 pm. Please bring your own Brown Bag Supper. Madeline Nicholson and Babs Croteau spoke on the past and present projects ECW works on.

September is usually UTO collection and in October Susan Mollo will head up our Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritans Purse, better known as Shoe Box Gifts for Children all over the world. In November we have in the past collected donations for Christmas Friends. Babs Croteau will not be available to be a part of Christmas Friends. A volunteer is needed to Chair this. Babs explained how it works, etc and is available to answer questions if there are any.

In December ECW usually shops and delivers shut in gifts to Church members. A volunteer to Chair this is needed. The next item to be settled is our Christmas party. Babs booked (as requested at June meeting) The Pond for December 2nd. If the ladies wish to change this they need to cancel the Pond ASAP.

Bishop Love will visit St. John’s September 23rd at 10:00 am. Peggy Anderson will chair the ECW coffee hour that day. Please contact Peggy to volunteer at 329-1575.

More exciting events are October 7th Fall Festival and Bless the Animals and the Bell Choir on December 9th in combo with Copake Falls Winter Walk. These events will be written in detail elsewhere in this Voice.

There will be an Election of ECW Officers. The Officers to be elected are---

President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and UTO Chairman.

Please attend and support ECW.

Happy Birthday was sung to Jane Peck and Ginny Boughton.

Thank you Madeline Nicholson and Betsy Garrett for all your help and support. Thank you Rev. Thompson for your prayers, attendance and support.

Babs Croteau
851-9040
babsc@fairpoint.net

Beyond Copake Falls

General Convention 2012 is now history. As the Presiding Bishop wrote in her post-Convention message to the Church, it “offered new and creative responses to the call of the gospel in our day.” As examples, she cited “gracious and pastoral responses to polarizing issues, as well as a new honesty about the need for change.”
General Convention began with hundreds of resolutions. In the end, it approved several dozen on a wide range of topics, from the Israeli-Arab conflict and global warming to blessings for deceased pets. I focus here on three approved resolutions that are particularly meaningful for the future of The Episcopal Church: a response to the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant, formation of a commission to recommend major changes in the structure of the Church, and authorization of a liturgy for blessing same sex unions.

The Covenant. No one expected the Episcopal Church to embrace a document that even the Church of England has refused to endorse. The question before General Convention convened in Indianapolis was, rather, whether TEC would just say “no” to it or approve its descriptive sections and reject the proscriptive fourth part. In the end, General Convention chose a third course. It elected to take no position on the document in its present form, but express willingness to keep discussion of it going.

Although this course might be seen as “Anglican fudge” or “kicking the can down the road,” I believe it was prudent. It keeps us in conversation with the rest of the Anglican Communion. It burns no bridges and may, perhaps, offer opportunities to repair those that were damaged or destroyed during the struggles of the last decade.

Restructuring the Church. It is no secret that The Episcopal Church suffers from declining numbers, particularly among the young. Neither this problem nor insufficient income is unique to TEC: As Diana Butler Bass shows in her most recent book, Christianity after Religion, all mainline denominations and even most evangelical churches are losing members and financial support. (Bass suggests that this broad decline in Christian churches signifies a fourth Great Awakening, one at least as profound as that which spawned the social gospel and pentecostal movements early in the last century. I recommend her excellent book to those who are interested in the recent history of, and prospects for, Christianity. However questions about TEC’s

specific problems are bubbling up from the grass roots: Is our corporate structure too complex? Do we need two legislative houses? Are we spending too much money with too little effect? Such questions can no longer be ignored.

The Presiding Bishop addressed TEC’s problems in a recent letter to the Church. “We’re looking for a 21st century Episcopal Church that can adapt and respond to a myriad of varied local contexts and missional opportunities,” she says. “We’ve begun to realize, pretty widely across the Church, that the way we’ve ‘done church’ for the last century or more no longer fits many of our contexts. We haven’t been terribly effective at evangelism with unchurched populations; we haven’t been terribly effective at retaining the children born to Episcopal parents; family structures are changing and our ability to address the needs of those families has not kept pace, whether we’re talking about ECWs and women in the workforce, or single-parent families, or special needs children.”

Bishop Katharine sees our Church’s immediate future as a time to be nimble. “Nimbleness,” she says, “has something to do with creative risk-taking; it may have a playful character that is also profoundly creative, and it partakes of joy.” She sees the next few years as challenging but exciting.

General Convention decided that the problems that face the Church are wide and deep enough to require a fresh new approach. It therefore directed the Presiding Bishop and the new President of the House of Deputies, the Rev. Gay Clarke Jennings, to appoint a special 24-member commission. Its charge is to consult widely at all levels in the Church and present recommendations for structural changes for consideration by the 2015 General Convention.

It is not now clear how “wide consultation” will be interpreted in the Diocese of Albany, where earlier appeals for lay input on such issues as the Covenant and same sex marriage went unanswered. Albany Via Media will try to promote discussion by inviting speakers from the wider Church and holding informal conversations like the “Wishes and Ways” gathering in Saranac Lake that I described in the November, 2011 issue of A Voice.

1 Bass suggests that this broad decline in Christian churches signifies a fourth Great Awakening, one at least as profound as that which spawned the social gospel and pentecostal movements early in the last century. I recommend her excellent book to those who are interested in the recent history of, and prospects for, Christianity.

2 AVM plans to hold another gathering at St. Andrew’s, Albany, on Saturday afternoon, 20 October. Planning for this event is in the early stages, but the tentative title is “Beyond
**Same Sex Blessings.** In the May, 2012 issue of *A Voice*, I described how Marya and I enjoyed the Province II Synod this spring. We had a chance to participate in a sample rite for blessing same sex unions, an experience that we found deeply moving.

The good news for Episcopalians who support full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual persons in every area of church life is that General Convention Resolution A049 approved such a rite for use by congregations on a trial basis beginning in Advent, 2012. The bad news for progressives in conservative dioceses like Albany is that use of the rite requires the permission of a diocesan bishop.

Albany’s entire General Convention delegation voted against Resolution A049. After it passed, most of the deputies from the Diocese of South Carolina left the Convention, and a dozen Communion Partner bishops – our own +Love and +Herzog among them – signed a statement of dissent. The “Indianapolis Statement” says, in part, “We believe that the rite subverts the teaching of the Book of Common Prayer, places The Episcopal Church outside the mainstream of Christian faith and practice, and creates further distance between this Church and the Anglican Communion along with other Christian churches.” On July 12, Albany’s bishops and deputies sent an echo of this statement to our diocese.

The fifth of seven bullet points in the Indianapolis Statement says, “We are grateful that the rite, as approved by General Convention, contains provisions that protect diocesan bishops and parish priests who cannot for the sake of conscience authorize or use the liturgy.” Fair enough, but sadly, those provisions do nothing for priests in Albany and dioceses of similar mind set who desire, for the sake of conscience, to perform the rite for couples in their care.

In the section of her recent letter on Resolution A049, the Presiding Bishop said, “The use of this rite is open to local option, in the same way we often think about private confession: ‘all may, some should, none must.’” This formula works in every other Episcopal diocese in New York State and most dioceses in the Episcopal Church. In the Diocese of Albany, a narrow canon that was passed in 2008 in anticipation of New York’s approval of same sex marriage shortens it to “None may.”

---

**Love, Bonnie**

Last spring, I told the congregation of St. John’s that Albany Via Media planned to host Dr. Bonnie Anderson, President of the House of Deputies, at a meeting this fall. Those of you who remember Bonnie’s exciting January, 2008 program, “Can We Talk?” were delighted by the prospect of another visit. All of us were disappointed when she announced, shortly before General Convention, that she would not seek a third six year term as President but would lay down her gavel at the end of General Convention.

I’ve been in e-mail touch with Bonnie recently, both to thank her for her firm support of Albany’s progressive minority for the last six years and to find out whether a fall visit to Albany was still in her plans. Here is part of her reply, which she invited me to share:

“Albany I love. You are faithful, committed, more than willing to speak up, use the resources you have to do what needs to be done. You are my kind of people. I know we talked about a visit from me and it is something I looked forward to.”

Bonnie is still decompressing after six very busy years as President of the HOD, and she suggests that we revisit the question of another trip to Albany early next year. She hopes to write about several topics – “ministry of the laity, and characteristics of faith, and the circular power model of Jesus” – any of which would make an interesting program.

“In the meantime,” she says, “please keep in touch, use this email address as much as you want, and please pass my love along to the Holy People of God of Albany.”

If you’ve wondered why we of Albany Via Media call Dr. Anderson “Our Bonnie,” wonder no more. She’s has been and remains one of our favorite people!

Bob Dodd

---

*General Convention 2012: The Way Forward.*
**Events in the Wilderness**

**September 23.** 10:00 am Eucharist. William Love, Bishop of Albany

**October 7.** Starting at noon. Harvest Fest. See insert for details

**December 9.** 3:30 pm Hand bell concert to benefit the Bell Tower Fund.

Watch the Sunday bulletin for a full schedule of Advent and Christmas events.

### Weekly events

**Sunday.** 8:00 am, Spoken Eucharist. 10:00 am Choral Eucharist. Sunday school at 10:00 am.

**Wednesday, 3:00 pm.** Divine Reading / Contemplative Prayer meeting.