

*Seek and you shall find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you.*

There have been times during this long pandemic and even longer non quite post-pandemic time when it's been pretty hard to find the energy, the vitality, the hope because of the way every church has been affected.

Most of us have prayed about this. We've been knock knock knocking on heaven's door. We've asked God where the church is headed, some have asked how we can get back to "where we were".

We've asked the Spirit for a sign that—in the words of Julian of Norwich, "All will be well, all will be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

I got that sign—in a huge way—in the place I least expected it: at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

It wasn't an auspicious start: more than a ¼ of the delegates cancelled due to Covid. We would need to wear N95 masks at convention all the time, no food was allowed on the floor of the house—imagine over 800 hungry hungry deputies together with no munchies.

And worst of all—there would be no singing at worship!

Needless to say, I wasn't looking forward to it, and I told you that. But here's what I have to say to you: *never underestimate the Holy Spirit.*

The Convention was compelling in a way I never expected. It was filled with people excited to be a part of this diverse, spirited, sometimes contentious, more often loving, opinionated, conciliatory, thinking, praying group of people known as the Episcopal Church—or as our Presiding Bishop often says: the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement.

I've never been in a room filled with so many people of so many ages, stages, races and beliefs who tried so hard to respect the dignity of every human being, and brimmed with concern for all God's children.

The discussions were lively. We talked about and listened to testimony regarding the indigenous boarding schools abuses that have come to light-- from people directly affected. If some of the deputies mistakenly thought that the heinous things that happened in them only happened in Canada, they were disabused of that notion quickly.

Not only did the authorities in our country take reservation children from their families against their will, they didn't allow them to speak in their native language or dress in tribal dress. These children couldn't worship God in their own ways, and they suffered all manner of abuse—resulting in the deaths of some of those children's, life-long trauma in others. These abuses didn't happen long ago, but until 1976 in this state. So-- we listened as people broke down while describing their experience of being told it was not ok to be anything other than white in America. It was difficult to hear. But it began a healing process that we hope to build on in the next few years.

We watched the joyous reunion of two dioceses that had been forced to split over some of their churches leaving the Episcopal Church to align with the African bishops- and watching the state of Texas take their properties and give them to the ones who left, something that hasn't happened anywhere else. The former diocese of Fort Worth, now the Diocese of North Texas—joyfully reunited with the Diocese of Texas. The deputations from both dioceses were invited to the front where everyone cheered. There were many tears.

The youngest task force, comprised of people who ranged in ages from 27-50, gave the most uplifting and hope-filled report of the entire convention. At the end, all 800+ of us surged to our feet in applause. I wish I could play it for you, so you could hear it, too—but it's not yet posted. I'll post it when it becomes available.

We elected a new President of the house of deputies: a wonderful, articulate and energetic Latina woman named Julia Ayala Harris. We also elected her vice president: a native American named Rachel Taber- Hamilton. You may recognize that name: she was on the short slate for bishop of Maine.

We had a long discussion about the location of our next General Convention—which is currently Louisville, KY. We talked about the ramifications of the *Rowe v Wade* vote and the fact that KY has trigger laws already in effect. We discussed how those laws could affect women's health, and even could endanger lives. The debate was full of great feeling—on both sides—but it was never disrespectful. Everyone there seemed to embrace the fact that there are many voices in one church. We may not always agree, but we will always listen with respect. It was remarkable to watch.

We talked about the Episcopal churches around the world, heard a tearful thank you from a young deputy from Puerto Rico as he thanked the President of the HOD for making Episcopalians in Puerto Rico really believe that we are all ONE CHURCH.

We talked about Prayer Book revision. Don't worry, it's not going anywhere soon. But we did ratify and make available the plethora of liturgical resources that have been adopted since 1979: burial rites for children, marriage rites for the LGBTQ community, 3 hymnals that supplement the 1982 Hymnal, additional Eucharistic Prayers and prayers for supplementary liturgy like lesser feasts and fasts.

You know, when our church has different colors, genders, sexualities, neurodiversities – not to mention high church, low church, and everything in between—this was a good compromise for the health of us all.

Did I mention the worship? It was great—despite a lack of singing. But we did have instruments and drumming—which was cool. I particularly loved the simply excellent preaching.

It was a Convention of racial and indigenous reconciliation, of care for creation, of respecting our differences while at the same time relishing them.

We were all there: white folks, people of color, old, middle aged, young, gay, queer, straight, conservative, evangelical, progressive, tall, short, serious and hilarious (and that last one was the parliamentarian-- of all people!)

And through it all I began to see the Spirit at work: people committed to justice, reconciliation, care of everyone. Truly it could be said—it was a school of love.

As I later said to our Bishop: it was compelling. It was sometimes hard, and sometimes hilarious. We debated with each other, and we worshipped side by side. We laughed and cried with each other. We were very different sometimes, but never apart. We were one in the Spirit, we were one in the Lord. It was life changing.

And every one of you should submit your name to be a deputy to General Convention. You will not regret it.

Perhaps we should stop worrying about what will happen next in the church, because the Spirit will surprise us. When that door is opened to us-- the future is never what we think it will be. It's more. Amen.