

General Convention UTO Ingathering
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Ubuntu and Mission
Mission of the Church

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People get ready for General Convention in different ways. I didn't notice any of the staff go on retreat, but two of them did drive a truck filled with electronics across the country two weeks ago. I think most of us – deputies, bishops, staff, volunteers, and our hosts here in LA – were scurrying around, trying to get all the work done before we left home. The House of Bishop/Deputies list-serve was pretty entertaining as this Convention approached, although I missed the banter of the Verbosians. Before the last General Convention that group identified themselves as the wordy ones who posted the most, and they scheduled a face to face gathering in Columbus. I'm not sure what's happened to them, but their verbal siblings are still posting!

The list was filled with advice about what to bring. A senior deputy led off advice about lots of things, like how to get your socks dry after washing them in the hotel sink. There were many reminders about what to remember: pictures and icons for your table space, chargers for all your portable electronics, dollar bills or coins for your housekeepers, and energy bars for a speedy breakfast.

Many of us heard another version of this gospel last Sunday, when we were thinking about what to put in our suitcases: “no purse, no bag, no sandals.” We're supposed to depend on the hospitality of those we meet. One of the list-serve posts included a reminder that Anaheim is not out in the middle of nowhere, there are stores here, and there are local deputies and volunteers, ready to help. But the gospel remains, to challenge us all – travel light.

Episcopalians are like Boy Scouts – we like to be ready, with prayer book, hymnal, and bulletin in hand, and a Swiss army knife in our back pocket to open the wine bottle. I was reminded yesterday at lunch that nineteenth century missionaries often shipped their goods out in a coffin, not expecting to return – they may have cut some ties with home, but they still took plenty of cultural baggage. This very Convention is a testimony to our love for order, our desire to process and organize and structure our lives together. The challenge is that structure or culture can become an idol, an image of our lust for control. Jesus isn't interested in taking extra rations or all the comforts of home or in making hotel reservations for every stop on the journey.

Jesus simply sends the crowd out, tells them to travel light, and to expect hospitality. Their job is to share their hosts' tables, heal wherever they go, and announce peace and the reign of God.

Travel light. When you leave this place, how much more stuff will you have than when you arrived? You can ship the papers home, but are you open enough to receive what is offered here – from Verbosians, from the housekeeper in your hotel room, the deputy across the aisle, an international or ecumenical visitor, or the person who beats you to the microphone? What will you put down or leave behind in order to receive

what's being offered? Traveling light has a great deal to do with expecting to find the presence of God, expecting gracious welcome, hospitality, and the image of God in those you meet.

A few weeks ago I met a youth group from Simpsonville, SC, on a pilgrimage to New York. They told me about their interactions as they were traveling around the city. They were stopping anybody they could, giving high fives. Their interruptions actually generated loads of positive and engaging responses from the commuters and workers they met who ordinarily look straight ahead. These kids simply received whatever was offered – a smile, a question, even the few who turned away. Their plan for the next day was to put out a sign that said, “free hugs.”

Jesus sends out 70 to do just that – to interrupt the day to day lives of their hosts, to heal people who probably didn't expect it, and to offer shocking news – the reign of God is already here. If they don't receive peace, they're just supposed to move on – there are other people and places where it can be offered. The 70 just GO, and they go *ahead* of Jesus. They're not following him around, they're the advance team, the roadies, like our convention manager and the band of technical gurus who have worked hard to make this a hospitable place where we can enjoy whatever is set before us, whether fellowship or resolutions.

Are you ready to be sent? Are you ready to go ahead of Jesus, to prepare the way? The advance team's expected to find evidence of the presence of God before they begin to talk about Jesus or the reign of God. They have to test the welcome because they can't share news of what they have not found. We aren't strangers and aliens any more, as Paul reminds us, and it's the task of missionaries to discover and proclaim that good news of loving welcome in Jesus.

Paul was a master at expecting hospitality, even in jail. Roland Allen was a more recent light traveler, who worked in China in the late 1800s. He read Paul carefully, and he insisted that his job was to bring the scriptures and the sacraments, and then get out of the way. His work took root, and grew and flourished, often quietly, until the church in China today has become what he suggested: self-sustaining, self-propagating, self-governing. It has even taken those principles as part of its name – the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Individual congregations may have liturgical and theological leanings that we might recognize as Anglican or Methodist or Pentecostal, but the church as a whole has traveled lightly enough to take root in a different culture and context.

How much of a burden is culture or structure? Can we receive what is offered, can we announce peace or heal, with a bit less of it? This church can not be all things to all people, except through all its members. These human faces become the living image of God to a hurting world, pronouncing peace, healing, and making one. This body can only do that work through those who are sent out, having been fed for service, now fit for mission. Traveling light includes the willingness to share ministry, and discover the gifts of others.

The offering that we receive today is a sacrament of traveling light. When we hold something lightly, we're much more able to offer it freely, like sharing peace – if you find it, great, if not, let it go and move on. The United Thank Offering is a sacramental sign of inward gratitude for what is, turned to outward and visible mission. This sign will go to Puerto Rico and Tanzania, to Liberia and Alaska. It may even come back to the Diocese of Los Angeles, which knows something about feeding, healing, and

the reign of God, like Mama's Kitchen and Mama's Hot Tamales, where people eager for abundant life learn cooking skills, feed others, and discover healing in the process. Claro que el reino de Dios esta muy cerca.

All over this church, and beyond, God's people are feeding, and healing, and announcing peace and the reign of God. The First Nations Kitchen in Minneapolis welcomes Native Americans to a meal of traditional and healthy foods, in a healing community. Teaching ministries heal deprivation and hopelessness in Boston, Taiwan, and Quito. Physical illness is being healed in the clinics of la diocesis de la Republica Dominicana y la diocesis de Honduras, in the nursing school of Haiti, through elder care in Native communities in Alabama and Minnesota, in the hospitals in Oregon, Texas, Long Island, and Jerusalem. Camping ministries in the Central Gulf Coast, West Texas, California, and Mississippi teach children and adults to travel light and to eat whatever is set before them.

Mission is our life, and it is a life spent on the road, traveling light, anticipating hospitality, and sharing what we have.

When we're dismissed at the end of this service, most of us will not go very far out into the world, though some will travel to that other temple just down the road. Can you announce peace to someone wearing mouse ears? Will you heal in Disneyland? You can even enjoy a meal of junk food, although a little monastic moderation might be in order – you don't have to eat ALL of what they set before you!

In the coming days of this convention, what welcome will you offer, and what will you receive? You're sent to be an interrupter of the world's "business as usual," and you are sent to be interrupted. The reign of God, the commonwealth of God is breaking in, whether we're ready or not. Where will you announce peace? How will you heal? Eat what is set before you this morning and then go out there and become sacrament – sacrament - of the Reign of God.