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# The Parish Paper

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Sexagesima (Second Sunday before Lent)

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## **DIOCESAN DIVERSITY**

The 185th Convention of the Diocese of Georgia convened in Albany, hosted by St. Paul's Church, in whose handsome and spacious late Victorian building we met for worship. Besides the clergy, St. John's delegation (including alternates) was comprised of Ty Butler, Mildred Derst, Skip Jennings, Jane Pressly, Neil Victor, and Patti Victor. The Convention passed quietly, with routine business taking up much of the agenda. A modestly positive step was the adoption – without debate or contrary votes – of a resolution requesting the Bishop to appoint a commission "representative of the diversity of the diocese" to conduct and encourage the study of the proposed Anglican Covenant and to report back to the next Convention.

There are two points to keep in mind about this commission's work. First, thanks to the recent Diocesan Survey, we now have some objective measure of what Diocesan diversity actually means, so we must hope for a commission reflective not only of this range of opinion but also of its relative weight. Second, the proposed Anglican Covenant, whose final draft is expected this spring, was one of the Windsor Report's major recommendations, and is intended to sustain both the self-governing autonomy of the provinces (the constituent member churches) and also their interdependence within the proper constraints of the bonds of affection. Since the American Church has a record of demanding the privileges of membership without accepting its obligations or any constraint on its freedom of action, we must hope that the new commission will lead a major change in these rather blinkered attitudes.

In particular, the commission might well keep in mind one of the Survey findings. Although sixty per cent agreed that "as a denomination, we are in agreement more often than not on matters of tradition, liturgy, music, theology, faith etc.", almost thirty-six per cent did not – a number which makes that sixty per cent look like wishful thinking. It looks very much like the kind of majority that hopes the dissenting minority will just shut up.

The Bishop Search Committee also reported on their progress to date. Nominations for bishop closed in January, and there are now thirty names under consideration. These will be whittled down by the Committee to a short-list of five or six. These candidates will be announced late in the spring, and they are expected to visit the diocese in the summer, in preparation for the Electoral Convention in Dublin on September 12.

## BENEDICITE

Every year from Septuagesima to Easter Eve, the canticle called Benedicite, omnia opera Domini is recited after the first Lesson at Morning Prayer. (The title is usually pronounced Ben-na-DIE-see-tee.) The name comes from the opening words of the Latin version, "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye [the Lord]". The text of the Benedicite is a paraphrase of Psalm 148, found in one of the Apocryphal additions to Daniel, where it is presented as the "Song of the Three Young Children" – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – in the burning fiery furnace. (The alternative canticle, Benedictus es, Domine, is also from the same passage.) The best explanation of its meaning in the liturgy of Septuagesima and Lent is given by an old teacher of mine, Dr. Wayne Hankey: "The Benedicite is the praise of creation sung in the fiery furnace ignited to destroy the singers. They come forth glorious. The Benedicite is thus appropriate to the purifying discipline of fasting in which we turn away from the creation in order to love it rightly, and coming to know the superlative greatness of its Creator, return to a right and strong relation to God, to his creation, and to ourselves as creatures" (Common Prayer, Volume 1, Introduction, p. viii). In singing Benedicite, we learn that all creatures have their proper end and use in relation to the Creator's praise.

**The Rev'd. Gavin G. Dunbar**

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