

Thoughts on Leaving General Convention

*By Susanne Watson Epting,
Executive Director, NAAD*

I've retreated to the safety and quiet of my room for prayers this afternoon. I've been thinking about all the postings that demand equality for deacons, all the thoughts about how we might be used in liturgy and, after at least a little time to think, I'd like to respond.

Deacons were respected and used well in General Convention liturgies. There was a



different spirit, I believe, about our participation, and a genuine gratitude among liturgy planners for our competent presence here. Louise Thibodaux (Alabama) and Thalia Johnson (Michigan) helped coordinate Communion Stations daily. I briefed and debriefed with the liturgy team and oversaw prayer writing. So we did well -- glitches aside.

The Prayers of the People were done each day by a small group which included: Kit Tate from the Diocese of Southwest Florida; Margaret Trezevant from the Diocese of California; Cindy Fribourgh from the Diocese of Arkansas, and myself. We received many comments of appreciation.

Joyce Hardy and Cindy Fribourgh went above and beyond at the booth. Joyce was particularly good at bringing anyone close to the booth in to take our deacon quiz and talk about the diaconate. I have just finished counting the slips from those who entered our drawing (for autographed copies of Ormonde's book "Deacons in the Liturgy") and have counted over 400 who took the quiz. They included all the ministers of the church, and

they included individuals from different countries and continents. Joyce and Cindy did you proud, along with numerous other individuals who took their turn in the booth: Maureen Hagen, Aileen Aidnik, John Cummins, Louise Thibodaux, Rod Dugliss, Jim Visger, and others that I know I'm not remembering.

Over twenty deacons were deputies or alternates. And our senior deputy from Long Island, Betty Belasco, served when the Archbishop of Canterbury was here because I knew that Betty would not be overwhelmed, would serve us well, and wouldn't take any bull!

I think we have much to celebrate.

But I leave Convention with a heavy heart. When I wasn't doing what I'd been asked to do by Convention staff, I was meeting with deacons over lunch or coffee. And I was walking the space and listening to conversations with the Prayers of the People in mind. This is what I know:

Those who attend Convention are those who have the time and money to do so.

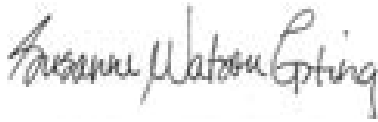
Deacons voices (which means in many ways, those we serve) are not often among those that are heard in testimony in any of the legislative committees. Sisters and brothers in Christ, please work at the local level with your deputies and bishops. If we are not deputies and alternates, at least we can help speak to the issues, on a national level, around which we have knowledge and passion. Please keep yourselves educated on what is coming before the church.

Finally, it is clear that we are still very much a trickle down church at times like this. Simply the words used to describe decisions made in adopting the budget like: "We need to do things on a diocesan level instead of a national one," indicate to me that the church still doesn't understand how much does go on locally and how to best support it. Decisions about the budget still keep those who make the most in salary protected, rather than encouraging everyone to share the pain. It is one thing to make hard decisions and share in the sacrifice. It is another to make decisions asking other people to sacrifice (like the numerous staff people who lost their livelihoods on a moment's notice here) without much pastoral foresight, even though chaplains were offered after the news was broken. We will shorten General Convention by a few days in 2012, and we will use less paper. But

are we really deciding for mission vs. maintenance in our institutional actions? I'm not yet convinced.

I know that I'll spend time examining my own life and how I think that relates to all of you, and to the poor, as I leave this place. Rest assured, we did pretty well here on your behalf, but maybe next time we need to bring the poor with us.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Suzanne Watson Goring". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Blessings,".