

194th Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina

Friday and Saturday of this past week Carl Edwards, Karen Ladd, Sarah Wilson and Bev Donaldson represented St Bartholomew's at the 194th Convention of the Diocese of North Carolina. The convention was held at the sprawling M. C. Benton Convention Center in Winston-Salem. .

On Friday morning the convention had barely gotten underway when a representative of the organization *Stop Hunger Now* asked for volunteers to package 100,000 packets of dehydrated food to be sent to Haiti. Each packet contained enough food for one person for one day. The organization had been distributing this food before the earthquake and was able to continue on the first day after the quake. When were we being asked to do this work? "Now, during the convention." was the answer. Where were we going to do it? The answer was "in the room next door". At that moment, about one quarter of the assembled delegates, including our Vicar and Lay leader quickly and quietly got up and left the room. One of the Suffragen Bishops made a joke about there being no one left in the room. Sarah and I were left to deal with the election of various nominees for office and a dozen or so proposals which would be debated and voted later in the day. From the wall "next door" we could hear intermittent bells, gongs and huzzahs as the total of packaged goods rose. By lunch break we were informed that the total completed was only 69,000. Fresh blood was needed the packaging would continue through Friday and Saturday or until the job was done.

I didn't get my chance to volunteer until Saturday morning. I went into the room put a hairnet on and was post haste put into a packing unit of which there were four or five in the room. There were tables with odd looking hoppers placed at strategic intervals, pallets of bagged rice and other supplies and people bustling about in small groups like, well, ants, termites, or bees. Everyone had a task and was busily engaged in performing that function. It didn't take long for me to be noticed. I was assigned the task of opening a small plastic bag underneath a hopper mouth and removing it when full. To my right a volunteer put a cup of dehydrated soy in the top of the hopper, to my left came a tablespoon of dehydrated vegetables; in front of me another person threw in a "pill" about the size of a laundry detergent tablet. This was vitamins in a vegetable broth base, I was told. Finally, a cup of uncooked rice was added by the fourth volunteer. There were various persons designated as "runners" who serviced our team. Some runners replenished our stocks; others took the product to a weigh station. My job,

routine as it was, was critical. Its function set the pace for the work. “Soy, Vegetables, Pill, Rice” was the rhythm interrupted occasionally by a question. “Did that one get a pill?” Occasionally, there was the command “Pill”, “Rice”. There was some light hearted banter going on between Pill and Rice, no other names, about holding up the line. The filled bags went into plastic box containers, that held about 6-8 bags. The cry of “Runner” brought assistance, sometimes literally on the run; sometimes the runners anticipated our needs. Filled boxes were removed and empty boxes provided. Calls of “Rice”, “Soy”, and “Bags” brought yet other help. There was a microphone in the work room that broadcasted the proceedings in the proceedings and comment about the delegates getting off their duffs and doing some work. Occasionally there was an accident. Soy spilled, rice spilled. Not wasted, the contaminated grains went into “animal feed”. There was a rhythm to it, and the pace didn’t let up. One of the Bishops came in to hearten the troops. It was indeed a well meant effort and appreciated, but we ignored him. A “Listen Up” was called. One of the soldier bees announced that we were approaching the 100,000 goal. We were to use up all supplies that were already opened. No new bags would be opened. After two hours of this I asked for relief. Scratch that, I begged for relief.

The convention went on and did its business. A lot of things happened.

- Bishop Curry gave his Pastoral Address on the theme of *100,000 Ways to Say Welcome*. Yes, we are proceeding with and intensifying the “All are Welcome” theme. It has morphed into “Welcome is not Benign.” Next year, Stephanie Spellers, the author of “Radical Welcome” will speak at convention and also hold a workshop.
- Rob Radtke gives a keynote speech on the work of Episcopal Relief and Development. The Episcopal Cathedral and all of the administrative offices have been destroyed in Haiti.
- The Episcopal Farmworker Ministry presented a slide show of its work with North Carolina migrant farm laborers. This is modern day slavery. At Eucharist the ministry was recognized and honored for its work with migrant farm workers in NC.
- The Bishop called for us to recommit and expand the ministry of Deacons in the Diocese.
- The “Fair Share” proposal was adopted. It will go into effect next year, 2011.

- The Committee on Marriage published a book entitled “Writings on Marriage”. This is a direct result of a tasking from last year’s programs. It does reaffirm the clergy’s custom of signing (governmental) marriage certificates.
- The Diocesan Web Site has undergone a face lift. It is now user friendly. You can locate churches geographically with the use of Google map techniques. It also has the Convention available for viewing. (Just like bird cam.)
- The CY 2011 budget was flat lined at a 5% reduction, all except the Regionalization program which will go ahead as planned.
- The Diocese’s \$40M investment fund suffered in the recession but has recovered nicely. Most securities have been switched into conservative and relatively safe fixed income funds.
- In the future, printing costs will be reduced by encouraging the user to down load info directly from the site. St Bart’s is ahead of the curve on that one.

All in all, it was a rather subdued session. There just didn’t seem to be excessive argumentation or heated discussion. It appeared to be a time of contemplation, motivated by the disaster in Haiti and the desperate plight of the farm workers. Maybe that’s a good thing.

We attended Eucharist at St Paul’s Church a mile or so away from the site of the Convention. Two buses were provided to shuttle us back and forth. One of them was a van from St Paul’s. We drove into a neighborhood lined with Victorian mansions very reminiscent of Cape May. There snugly nestled into this neighborhood was a very large Victorian gothic St Paul’s. The church seats 750 people and was completed in 1928 with funds donated by members of the Reynolds Co. One immediately notices the beautiful set of blue stained glass windows at clerestory level. The church was already full when we arrived so we marched up to the front of the Gospel side where the lectern was guarded by the compulsory brass Eagle and found an open pew, seating ourselves as it turned out, directly in front of the wives of the Bishops. I went to look for Carl who came in separately. I didn’t find him and when I returned to our pew there was Carl deep in conversation with Mrs. Curry who had spotted him and flagged him down. The organist was pumping out music apparently at full bore and certainly at full volume. One of the parishioners commented that whatever this organist plays, he plays at full volume. The clergy processed in full regalia and we all sing lustily.

Bishop Curry gave the sermon as usual vigorous and animated. This Bishop has passed his tenth anniversary in office. He was elected at age 47 and is now 56. He was elected on the 11th ballot on the 11th day. He tells us that the NC lottery sold out these numbers afterwards. I am amazed when he tells us this, but everything about this Bishop amazes me. We sing "The Lord's Prayer" holding hands. We sing at every opportunity. We sing with joy. I have always been of the "let the organ drown me out" school. Carl who sits besides me sings high range of tenor almost a falsetto. "Counter-tenor?" I ask him. We sing the closing anthem. Mrs. Curry comments that she hasn't heard real singing in church "for awhile". I wonder if perhaps I've been too loud. We all smile, except Sarah, who beams.

Beverly Donaldson