



PREFACE  
A.D. 2018

The Episcopal Church is quite different than it was on the eve of the last General Convention, just three years ago. There is a hopefulness, an energy, and a sense of direction that have made our many challenges and cultural vicissitudes seem less daunting.

Perhaps this new optimism arises from reclaiming our identity as – in the words of the Presiding Bishop – “the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement.” Perhaps this new energy comes from repudiating an ecclesial culture where some were said to value loyalty more than competence. Perhaps this new direction comes from a recovered commitment to consultation, collaboration, and diverse opinion.

Whatever its causes, I have seen this new life in many forms this past triennium: in the recovery of Executive Council’s voice in the leadership of the church; in the daily, named prayers for one another among the officers and senior staff; in the spiritual calmness amid the complexities of decision-making; in the creative and often courageous work of the task forces, commissions, and other interim bodies of General Convention; and in the quiet faithfulness of Episcopalians in our communities and churches. We seem to be more in harmony with truth and reality, and less inclined toward manufacturing facsimiles.

That’s no small attribute in a political environment that echoes Pilate’s infamous question, and where “reality” has often been manipulated for partisan ends or personal power.

Furthermore, we live in a time when even determining reality may be difficult. For example, what is the real *Blue Book*? Is it the paperback edition that some of you hold in your hands, courtesy of printing-on-demand? Is it the digital images on the Virtual Binder, brought into view through algorithmic manipulation of 0s, 1s, and 2s? Is it the research, experience, deliberation, and prayer that formed the thoughts and recommendations captured by the digits?

For that matter, why a “Blue” Book at all, let alone a particular shade called International Klein Blue (IKB)? It might seem a conceit to have any color associated with something that only incidentally will be seen in the physical world.



The reason lies in one particular aspect of the fascinating narrative of Yves Klein's invention of IKB – and, admittedly, one only a painter might love: Klein invented a paint where the matrix allows the intensity of the pigment to luminesce. In other words, IKB allows the true color to shine forth; rather than approximating a color, IKB expresses the reality of that color.

I see IKB as a symbol for this past triennium. We began an ecclesial renewal by embracing a liberating humility: that we are the matrix, and not the pigment; that the luminescence is not from us, but from the living God – seen most fully in the person of Jesus. We are remembering that all we do – our worship, our mission, our service, our witness – are windows from which the True Light may shine.

Such humility allows us to imagine, with confidence, a path through the cacophonous perils of our times. The reports presented to the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention are testimony to that truth and reality.

Faithfully,

*Michael Barclay*



## Acknowledgements

Although preparation for the triennial gathering of the Church at General Convention is but a part of the work of the extraordinary people in the Executive Office of the General Convention (GCO), these past months have been a creative blur of activity. In the excitement and challenges of coordinating the many strands, pieces, and processes that come together to support the Church's collective decision-making, the GCO has been abuzz with software testing, survey development, *Blue Book* preparations and editing, contract negotiations, hotel and volunteer coordination, and a thousand and one other activities that come together to prepare our Church for a time and space where the Spirit can freely move.

As we gather in Austin, I hope you will join me in thanking the amazing staff of the General Convention:

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- Brian Murray *Staff Assistant for Meetings*
- Laura Castells-Ortlieb *Administrative Assistant*
- Twila Rios *Manager of Digital Information Systems*

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Finally, to President Jennings and Presiding Bishop Curry; to the members of the Executive Council and the various Interim Bodies of the General Convention; and to the talented staff of The Episcopal Church: thank you for your creativity, energy, faithfulness, and commitment to the work of the General Convention. May God continue to bless us and church we love.