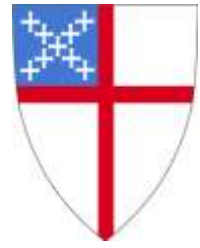




# Open Minds



The Newsletter of  
**Albany Via Media**  
January, 2012

## A Word from the Editors

Although this issue of *Open Minds* follows the last one by just one month, there is enough news to justify this “special edition.” In it, we report the principal results of the Board’s 10 December meeting, at which we elected officers and outlined AVM’s plans for 2012. We also present an extended summary of the October “Wishes and Ways” meeting in Saranac Lake and tell what we know about a potentially important discussion of Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (aka DEPO) that took place at the Spiritual Life Center on Wednesday, December 14.

The new year promises to be a big one for our Episcopal Church. In all probability, this summer’s General Convention will take further steps toward full inclusion of LGBT Episcopalians in the life of the Church. It will also almost certainly reject the proposed Anglican Communion Covenant, wholly or in part. Both steps would increase the distance between the Church’s policies and practices and those of the Diocese of Albany.

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We Dodds got into Albany Via Media in 2003 by asking a question: “How can we help?” Some of you have asked the same question of us. Here are three suggestions: Speak up. Sign up. Cough up.

*Speak up.* Many of you have contributed to AVM’s Facebook page. Please keep doing so, but also write letters to our website ([albanyviamedia.org](http://albanyviamedia.org)) and add comments to our blog, “Openly Episcopal in Albany.” Have you read a good book or heard about an event that might interest others? Pass the word!

*Sign up.* If you don't belong to AVM, please join. If you are a member, tell friends about us and encourage them to add their voices to ours. The more mainstream Episcopalians are heard, the harder it will be for our conservative-evangelical bishop to ignore us. A new, simplified application form posted on our website makes it easier than ever to sign up.

*Cough up.* During Bonnie Anderson's visit to Albany three Januarys ago, Bob said that we of AVM, like the Beatles, "get by with a little help from our friends." That remains true, and it's why we have never had a system of dues. However our underfed bank balance sharply makes it hard to import speakers who live far away and/or need to be paid. We have hosted exciting speakers (Louie Crew, Bonnie Anderson, Frank Wade+, and Tobias Haller +) in the past, and we intend invite more such people. We also hope to add forward-thinking theologians (e.g. Marcus Borg), who would fill a gaping hole in Albany's adult education program but are unlikely to be invited to the Cathedral or Christ the King. Finally, we hope, one day, to bring +Gene Robinson to shed much needed light on the Diocese of Albany. Bishop Robinson is game, if we can get past a too obvious political barrier.

Please send checks made out to Albany Via Media to John White, AVM Treasurer, at 10 North Main Avenue, Albany, NY 12203.

However much or little you decide to follow these three suggestions, we and the AVM Board hope 2012 will bring you good health and fortune. Happy New Year!

*Bob and Marya Dodd*

Editors

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## **December Board Meeting**

The Albany Via Media Board met at St. Paul's, Albany, on Saturday, December 10, to elect officers and make plans for 2012. Two new Board members, Barbara Wisnom and Valerie Thompson added fresh ideas and energy to what proved to be a lively, productive meeting.

Absent competition, the present officers of the Board were re-elected to one year terms. They are: Robert Dodd (President), Anita Ford (Vice President), John White (Treasurer), and Dennis Wisnom (Secretary). Bill Hammond will continue to serve as our Webmaster and Marya and Bob Dodd will continue to edit *Open Minds*.

In an attempt to streamline Board business, we have established five committees: Legislative, headed by Keith St. John; Finance, chaired by our Treasurer, John White; Program, led by Vice President Anita Ford; Documents, chaired by Barbara Wisnom; and Communications, chaired by Bill Hammond.

The Documents Committee needs an explanation. Several Board members have suggested that AVM's bylaws and other important documents be updated to reflect changes in our organization and its surroundings. Barbara Wisdom brings long experience in AVM to that task. Mary Lawthers and Valerie Thompson, both new to AVM, will contribute fresh perspectives.

The Legislative Committee holds center stage now, for it must choose among several Convention resolutions that Keith St. John has prepared. Because some of them recommend canonical changes, including revision or removal of the homophobic canons emplaced in 2008, the Committee is working against a short deadline (9 March) imposed by the diocese. Discussion of these resolutions will be important components of our early spring programs.

The Program Committee will organize AVM activities for the year. These will include at least two gatherings like the very successful "Wishes and Ways," which took place in Saranac Lake two months ago. Using the same indaba-like format, we shall bring together lay persons and clergy in different parts of the vast Diocese of Albany, for example the Catskill-Mohawk region and the upper Hudson region. (If your parish and priest would like to host such a meeting, please tell Anita Ford at [aniford@aol.com](mailto:aniford@aol.com) as soon as possible!)

## ***Wishes and Ways: A Summary***

The last issue of *Open Minds* included a brief report on a gathering of 49 Episcopalians at St. Luke's in Saranac Lake on Saturday, October 22. The purpose of that meeting, entitled "Wishes and Ways," was to translate the unease felt by many mainstream Episcopalians in the Diocese of Albany into specific aspirations (i.e. our "Wishes") and to consider means by which they might be achieved ("Ways").

Those who gathered at St. Luke's, most of them from parishes in the Northern Adirondack and St. Lawrence Deaneries, and all but two lay persons, were distributed among six tables. Mentors at each table, most of them AVM Board members, provided information, facilitated discussion, and made notes on which the present summary is based. The Rev. Ann Gaillard and Robert Dodd, AVM's President, co-chaired the meeting.

An important conclusion drawn from this gathering and a similar but smaller meeting during the 2011 Diocesan Convention is that this sort of get-together is badly needed in the Diocese of Albany. It brings together people who have common concerns but have been kept apart by geography and diocesan policies and practices. The AVM Board intends to sponsor more such meetings this year, in various parts of the diocese.

*As you read this report, please ask yourself how it squares with your experience and opinions. If you think your parish would like to host a similar gathering, please contact Anita Ford ([aniford@aol.com](mailto:aniford@aol.com)), AVM's Vice President and Chair of our Program Committee.*

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*Our gathering at St. Luke's was structured to give equal time to "Wishes" and "Ways." We hoped to end the first hour with a short, prioritized list of wishes on which to focus our later discussion of tactics. We emerged instead with a long wish list, which Bob Dodd organized by categories to produce this report, a copy of which has been sent to Bishop Love.<sup>1</sup>*

## ***Wishes***

***Better communication*** is needed: 1) between parishes, e.g. by sharing newsletters and notices of events of mutual interest; 2) between the Bishop and parishes; 3) with Province II and the national Church through the diocese. The diocese now provides too little information from the wider Church and no effective channel from parishioner to Bishop. (There is, for example, no "Letters to the Editor" in *The Albany Episcopalian*).

Energized deaneries might promote parish-to-parish communication, but more effort by the laity is needed too.

Open the Cathedral and Spiritual Life Center to speakers and programs with diverse theological perspectives, not just those that conform to the views of the diocesan leadership.

One group urges the Bishop to pass letters from the Presiding Bishop and General Convention to parishes and ask that those letters, like his, be read to congregations.

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<sup>1</sup> This report and a cover letter were sent on November 14. To date, Bishop Love has neither acknowledged nor responded to them.

***Clerical appointments.*** We want the Bishop to: 1) allow more local initiative in identifying and calling priests and deacons; 2) permit recruitment of candidates with varied theological views and from all accredited Episcopal seminaries, not just conservative schools; 3) eliminate a diocesan “loyalty test” for clerical candidates, if such in fact exists; 4) work toward an environment in which priests feel free to express diverse views openly and without fear.

***Relations with the national Church.*** We want the diocese to: 1) follow the national Church in encouraging full discussion of such issues as the roles and rights of LGBT’s; 2) eliminate *all* homophobic canons; 3) provide programs and events at the Cathedral and Spiritual Life Center to cover the whole theological range of the Episcopal Church.

***Diocesan Convention.*** In the interest of economy and to encourage wider representation of parishes and lay persons: 1) limit the business portion of the Diocesan Convention to Saturday; and/or 2) decouple the business meeting from the rest of the Convention and return it to the see city.

Other Convention issues that need attention are the very narrow theological focus of workshops and speakers; denial of even minimal space for groups such as AVM; and such parliamentary anomalies as unauthorized rewriting of resolutions and acceptance of last-minute drop-in resolutions, which preclude consultation between delegates and their parishes.

***Recognition.*** Underlying all of these specific wishes is a desire by all who are now marginalized for reasons of theology and/or sexual preference to be recognized as full members of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany and encouraged to participate in it at all levels.

## ***Ways***

*Means proposed to address our concerns fall into three categories that we may call “communication,” “legislation, and “confrontation.” In the best case, we would communicate our wishes to the Bishop and work with him to obtain all or part of what we desire. In the worst, we would use whatever means are needed to achieve our ends on our own.*

***Communication.*** 1) Continue and improve the means that AVM now uses (website, blog, Facebook, *Open Minds* ) to inform people throughout the diocese. 2) Hold more gatherings like this one to bring people together for common effort. 3) Offer informative programs (e.g. the recent Haller lecture, and speakers from The Episcopal Church and Province II) that are not now available in the Diocese of Albany. 4) Communicate, in writing or person, with the Bishop and other diocesan leaders.

Other suggestions include identifying like-minded persons in your parish; advertising interesting events in nearby dioceses; and giving the press news as it becomes available.

*Some other suggestions for communication grade into confrontation and are described below.*

***Legislative.*** *It has been all but impossible in this diocese to pass progressive resolutions at Convention or elect liberal or moderate persons to diocesan positions. That said:*

Every parish is entitled to send as many as three lay deputies to Convention, and every parish should send at least one. Because a parish gets just one lay ballot in a vote by orders, it is well to send either *one* deputy or *three* deputies. Two may cancel each other, leaving the parish voteless.

The position of Convention deputy often is, but should not be, a throw-away. Volunteer to serve yourself, or take pains to choose a person or persons who will truly represent your parish.

Obvious targets for Convention resolutions are the three homophobic canons, Parish Choice, and the nature and location of Convention. But check the ground rules for canonical changes carefully. They are very restrictive.

*Frustrated by past experiences, many mainstream Episcopalians simply avoid the Diocesan Convention. It's understandable, but remember: **No go means no voice!***

***Confrontational.*** *This section might be entitled, following one set of notes, "How to make the diocese listen." Here are some tactics to try:*

If you write to the Bishop and get no reply, write again. If ignored again, copy the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies. Other pressure points: letters to newspapers, blogs, and social media; radio or television interviews.

Consider requesting DEPO [Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight], a means by which a parish in one diocese receives pastoral care from a bishop in another diocese. This must be worked out with the two bishops.

Withhold financial support. Any individual can restrict his/her pledge to use in and for the parish. A parish can also use strict definition of its "operating budget" to calculate how

much of its income is not taxable. Sending just one deputy to Convention and for just Saturday (when most business is done) both saves money and, in a modest way, denies support.

One set of notes included the suggestion “Occupy the Spiritual Life Center” and, in parentheses, “Tongue in cheek!” In another set, “Tongue in cheek!” was omitted.

*Although more “ways” are available through the national Church, we should hope that conditions in the Diocese of Albany never justify recourse to them.*

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## **DEPO for Albany?**

On November 14, a half dozen priests met with Bishop William Love and Bishop Gladstone Adams of Central New York to discuss the possibility of Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight (aka DEPO) for their parishes. Also present were Beth Strickland, Albany’s Deployment Officer, and Paul Hartt+, who heads its Standing Committee. We know little more about the meeting – lay persons were not included, and the clergy were sworn to silence – but rumor has it that there may be more such meetings. Hence it is worthwhile to learn something about it. What is DEPO? How has it worked elsewhere? Might it be useful in Albany?

*What is it?* In 1994 and 2004, the Church of England and the Episcopal Church faced similar crises over issues concerning human sexuality. In the earlier case, the Synod’s decision to ordain women left many of those who opposed it at loggerheads with bishops who approved. The Church of England responded by setting up a system of Provincial Episcopal Visitors, appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. The PEV’s (or “flying bishops”) ministered to the spiritual needs of those dissidents. A decade later, when the Diocese of New Hampshire elected and the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention approved an openly gay bishop, the Episcopal House of Bishops met a firestorm of objections by producing a document, “Caring for All the Churches,” which was appended to the Anglican Communion’s Windsor Report. In it, they proposed a six-step process for Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight of dissident parishes.

DEPO’s goal is reconciliation. The process begins with meetings between representatives of a dissident parish and its diocesan bishop to work out differences. If these fail, the bishop invites another diocesan who is acceptable to the dissidents to give them pastoral care while attempts to reconcile continue. Further steps, if needed, may include appeals to other bishops at the provincial or national level.

As laid out by the House of Bishops, a DEPO plan “shall include expectations of all parties, especially mutual accountability. The plan shall be for a stated period of time with regular reviews.” It is important to note that a diocesan bishop delegates only pastoral responsibility to an alternate, not administrative control. Those parishes that are placed under alternative oversight retain all financial and other obligations to their own diocese.

*How well has it worked?* The short answer is not very. The experience of the Diocese of Connecticut is a case in point. Five of six parishes that opposed +Gene Robinson’s election and installation left The Episcopal Church and filed lawsuits against the previous Bishop of Connecticut. A sixth, St. Paul’s in Darien, has been in conversation with Connecticut’s present Bishop, Dr. Ian Douglas, and Albany’s Bishop Love concerning the possibility of DEPO, but St. Paul’s ended negotiations in late October by suing the diocese and The Episcopal Church.

*And for Albany?* When asked what priests would get from DEPO, one of them replied, “A pastor!” What a parish would gain is less clear, given that the diocesan bishop gets to set the conditions for DEPO. Indeed, a parish might find itself more constrained with DEPO than without it.

For this reason and in the interest of transparency, it is important that lay leaders of interested parishes be involved in future discussions of DEPO, as the House of Bishops clearly meant them to be. The Windsor Report proclaimed that, “What touches all should be decided by all.” In this respect, the Report was right!

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## Good Reads

***Speaking Christian:  
Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power  
and How They Can Be Restored***

by Marcus J. Borg

(Available from Amazon.com in print and e-book format)

This very readable book by Marcus Borg is a follow-on to his popular *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time* (2001). It is well organized and clearly written, a pleasure to read and full of valuable insights for thinking Christians. Appropriate for small group study, it even includes a discussion guide with questions for each chapter.

So many words that we as Christians use in worship and discussion are actually confusing and stumbling blocks to understanding. Even after several university courses on the Bible and world religions as well as years of church activities and 4 years of EFM (Education for Ministry) training I find myself wanting to know just what we mean when we talk about concepts like “Salvation,” “Sin,” “The Rapture,” “Heaven and Hell,” and “Atonement.” As the author points out one part of Christianity relates to these words very literally while a great many other Christians have other understandings producing virtually two religions. This book points out the problem and compares more recent meaning of Christian language with more traditional and biblical meanings. Bringing our way of “speaking Christian” into the 21<sup>st</sup> century reinvigorates the words and helps the confused believer and the “turned off” seeker read with clarity.

Other books that I’ve enjoyed recently and recommend are:

*Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible ...* by Bart D. Ehrman.

*Re-Claiming the Bible for a Non-Religious World* by +John Shelby Spong.

This book by Bishop Spong is a very clear and approachable “survey” of all the books of the Bible. He explores each book and reveals its meaning and origin, putting it into its context. I sure wish I had this book when I was in “Bib Lit” as a college sophomore!

And just for fun: a series of books called *The Liturgical Mysteries* by Mark Schweizer, including *The Christmas Cantata* and *The Soprano Wore Falsettos*. This series of zany stories about a police detective who is also the organist of his Episcopal church is good for snorts and laughs.

Marya Dodd

