

## **Spin Cycle**

*Rev. Susan Russell, HRC Religion Council, April 5, 2006*

I think we've all had it happen: one minute the washer is happily turning dirty laundry into clean clothes and the next there's the telltale thump-thump-thump-THUMP of the spin cycle spinning crooked. The only solution is to get up, lift the lid, rearrange the wet laundry and start over again.

Well, it happened to me today. Only it wasn't the spin cycle on my washing machine -- it was the spin cycle on the Anglican News Machine. One minute I was happily working at home, getting Holy Week texts in order and coming up with a Good Friday sermon title ahead of the noon-today-or-else deadline and the next I was getting calls and emails by the drove from reporters about the "U-Turn" the Episcopal Church was about to make on gay inclusion -- thump, thump, thump, THUMP!

The only solution was to get up, "lift the lid" and check out what was spinning around in there. Turns out the "big story" was: based on the comments of Baby Bishop +Kirk Smith in his "from the airport" email on the report the House of Bishops heard on the recommendations forthcoming from the Special Commission on the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion ... as picked up by Jonathan Petre in the London Telegraph and cast as "the mind of the House of Bishops" rather than "the opinion of One Bishop" ... and jumped on by other press folk as "breaking news" ... which it was not!

So I spent the next while "rearranging the laundry" in one phone call after the other:

No, there is nothing new to indicate that the Episcopal Church is about to Stop Backing Gay Clergy .

Our House of Bishops in its Covenant Statement demonstrated no stomach for any "moratoria" that impacts only LGBT vocations.

We expect that the recommendations of the special commission will affirm that position while continuing to offer regret for the impact of our actions and commitment to the communion-wide listening process.

And it's likely to get worse before it gets better. As the anxiety mounts in the days between now and the 75th General Convention so will the frequency of the spin cycles. Last week it was Ruth Gledhill's blog speculations picked up by David Virtue as "The Times of London Reports" ... followed by a flurry of articles on the "ultimatums presented by the Bishop of Exeter to the House of Bishops on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury." Once again, one bishop's opinion miraculously turned into fact certain. Thump-thump-thump-THUMP.

Then it was the "LEAC poll" non-story. A "secret poll" commissioned by an overtly partisan "traditionalist" contingent headquartered in Maryland and responded to by barely 1/4 of the 300 bishops polled led to articles like the Dakota Voice piece entitled: Most

Episcopalian Bishops Would Oppose Church Stance . Never mind that the conclusion based on the opinion of 56% of the 27% who self-selected into a biased survey -- never let the facts get in the way of a good story. Thump-thump-thump-THUMP. And on it goes. "Un-spinning" the spin cycle could be a full time job – in fact, I get emails from folks who think it should be: mine! Thanks but no thanks.

The energy and resources it would take to debunk every out of control rumor and respond to every opinion-morphing-into-fact boggles the mind ... but more importantly, I think, would numb the soul. Those manufacturing facts and exploiting rumors are doing so toward a strategic goal: producing fear and anxiety in the-church-at-large in order to polarize it around this one issue and distract it from its larger mission and ministry.

The truth is none of us truly know what will happen in Columbus and beyond until we get there. And when we get there our job will be the same as it has been: to speak the truth in love and trust that the same Spirit has "brought us thus far on the way" will continue to lead us into God's future ... an inch at a time.

And when all else fails, remember to pray the Collect of the Day from Lent V:

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Blessings,  
*Susan*