

# Globalization and Economics

## Episcopalians Chart Path for an Accountable Global Table

By Kevin Jones and Jennifer Morazes

IN LUKE 14:7-11, Jesus shares a parable while having dinner with a leader of the Pharisees. In this parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus urges those present not to always choose the most distinguished place at the table. He ends the parable with simple yet profound words, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Jesus spoke not only of positions at a physical table, but also the status attached to those positions, and how the seating arrangements actually influenced the course of relationships around the table: who could speak, who could not, and who had the final say.

In the current global scheme, the United States sits at the most distinguished place at the table. Few would dispute this observation; the effect of this position upon the global landscape generates much debate within and outside of the United States, as reflected by both the pre- and now post-Iraq war discourse. After September 11, 2001, the Episcopal Church's response to how globalization affects economic justice began to change. The spurred fear and reflection have led to a subtle but significant change that is showing up at the parish level, at the diocesan level and at the national level in the form of a resolution to be presented to General Convention this year. The central question for consideration addresses Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet: How do we acknowledge our actual positions around the global table and, particularly as members of the Episcopal Church, USA, hold ourselves accountable to our international partners in ways that foster true, just relationships?

### A new movement: the Cambridge Consultation

Three years ago, at the 73rd General Convention, the church passed resolution D033, which urged dioceses and congregations to contribute to international development programs and support micro-credit initiatives. The specific action called for was to set aside 0.7 percent of diocesan budgets to be spent on sustainable development in impoverished areas. Only in one diocese was that goal enacted.

This year a follow-up resolution has been prepared by the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns, calling on the church to support the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of

eight yardsticks for improvement matched against what are arguably the planet's toughest challenges: poverty, education, gender equality, child mortality, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, global partnership and the environment.

Moreover, a coalition has recently formed to monitor these issues of economic justice and globalization, and to increase and monitor involvement around the church — a resolution is being prepared to call for each diocese to report to the whole Episcopal Church on its progress toward those goals.

That pressure is only one aspect of a wave of accountability and involvement that's emerging on globalization issues. The numbers haven't really changed — the numbers of dying, the economic disparity of the haves and have-nots — except in becoming more appalling. What has changed has been people's willingness to get involved, to see their role in saving the world while some forces seem bent on destroying it.

Much of the most vital action is occurring at the local level. In Massachusetts, the one diocese to actually find a way to carve out that 0.7 percent of its budget to address global poverty, taking that action has become a viral thing. It's passing on and self-replicating, so that several parishes and even individuals are following suit and adjusting their budgets.

With the movement taking hold in Massachusetts, it's not surprising that the group calling for greater accountability, the Cambridge Consultation ([www.cambridgeconsultation.org](http://www.cambridgeconsultation.org)), has arisen there. It includes retired bishops, noted academics, theologians, and veteran Capitol Hill activists, and has helped to get famed economist Jeffrey Sachs to speak to General Convention on July 31st.

Though it involves people from coast to coast, it's not the only grassroots group forming in the Episcopal Church that's engaging the world and its faith in a new way. The Alliance of Episcopal Parishes is leading a campaign to make the topic of AIDS in Africa a front-burner issue in the American church, and already has more than 25 parishes, Episcopal Relief and Development, and many church activists on board.

### Journeying toward justice

Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold was responding to the same move of the spirit in his recent *Episcopal*

*Life* column titled “Global Responsibility” (May 2003) when he addressed our American complicity in economic injustice and the church’s need, especially at a time of war, to do something about it. As he said:

“Jesus also tells us that to whom much has been given much will be expected. We are the wealthiest nation in the world. I can well understand the deep resentment of Christians in other nations at the fact that our foreign aid spending, in proportion to our wealth, is last in the world in support of fighting poverty and promoting development in the poorest parts of the globe. I believe that, as Americans, we are possessed of enormously generous spirits. Our policies need to reflect our national spirit of generosity and caring rather than being limited to the immediate concerns of particular interest groups.”

But how do we think about creating these new relationships, about addressing our positions at the global table and changing places to make the relationships at this table more just, more equitable, more accountable, and — more Christian? Looking to our mentors in Acts of the Apostles, we find Philip (Acts 8:26-40) as an example, helping us to answer the practical question of how we love those we may not yet know, or someone not always in proximity to us. In this story, Philip is visited by an angel who tells him to “Get up and go.” So, Philip got up and went. In his journey, he meets someone unfamiliar to him — an Ethiopian eunuch. The instructions the angel gives Philip upon encountering the Ethiopian are clear: “Go join him.” Their journey ends with a mutual baptism; the Ethiopian is baptized with water and new knowledge, Philip is “baptized” with new understanding and faith. The example of Philip in this story is one of table-rearranging faith: We address these relationships in our willingness to “get up and go” and by taking a journey together, exchanging, rather than imposing, knowledge and understanding.

Currently, the new level of journeying and of engagement with the themes of globalization and economic justice (and its presenting issue of the pandemic of AIDS in Africa) are taking at least three forms in a local context: conversion and epiphany; a change in the way money flows; and involvement in mission projects, something that can happen in a church fellowship hall on a Sunday morning.

Greg Shaw exemplifies the epiphany and conversion aspect. A former speechwriter in the Reagan administration and a self-described believer in a bootstrap ethos that “anyone can reach the top if they work hard enough,” the long-time Episcopalian realized in a ghetto in Kenya that his relationship with the world had to change. While serving as the advance man for the AIDS in Africa tour of Jimmy Carter and Bill Gates, Sr., he saw a 3-year-old girl, the same age as his daughter, squatting on a stump and eating a piece of rotting fruit. He realized that for that AIDS orphan there was no bootstrap path upward. Shaw suddenly knew that some of his deepest beliefs about power and money and his part in the exchange had been altered. His epiphanic understanding of the relationship of the Gospel and justice led him to be the driving force behind the formation of the Alliance.

### Creating change locally

The Diocese of Massachusetts exemplifies the powerful, viral effect of

changing beliefs about the role of money. A realization grew there of the church’s gospel responsibility to address the economic abuses that accompany the process of globalization; this shift in mindset caused a structural change in the way the diocese spends its money. Rather than proposing a “CROP Walk” or “Christmas charity” once-a-year fund drive for world poverty, church activists targeted the diocesan budget committee. They were successful in carving out a line item in the budget for efforts to combat global poverty.

The great victory of that systemic change is that the battle, once won, should not have to be fought each year. Money for economic justice will appear as a discrete line item in the annual budget, acquiring the protection of bureaucratic inertia. Each year it will become not a notable triumph but simply part of the baseline for operations. It will become accepted as normative reality, part of the wallpaper of the diocese’s life. Victories like these are essential because they allow the precious energy of activists to move on to the next project.

And that brings up the final level of activity that’s emerging: In the parish, among small groups of lay people, ad hoc cooperation is taking place with non-governmental organizations (NGO’s). Howard Webber, part of the group that got the Diocese of Massachusetts to alter its budget, is designing home health-care kits for African AIDS victims that could be prepared by a congregation after an adult education forum. The kits would be partly assembled by professionals at an NGO, with church members adding the rest from items in their kitchens and medicine cabinets. The value of this communal, thoughtful action is that it serves the same function that wrapping bandages did during World War II; it makes the connection between the crisis and the home front literally physical and present.

That’s identification with the problem, the first of three criteria named by Paul Schervish, a Boston College academic who’s a leading researcher on the reasons why people give money. Conversations that will take place within the small groups making those kits fulfills his second requirement: association. He argues that in order to create a sustainable, mutually satisfying effort, it’s essential to gather with other people who believe the same thing and take the same actions. Schervish’s final benchmark is impact: knowing that your contribution is going to make a difference. That can be accomplished by telling stories about specific people who will receive the kits.

As the example of Greg Shaw makes clear, the interconnections between economics, globalization and AIDS will only be realized when the problem becomes personal; when people in rich places understand the impact of our actions on the rest of the world. That’s when we realize we need to change the way our money is being spent. And that’s when a diocese, parish or individual can take the leap of combating poverty through allocating 0.7 percent of a budget to sustainable development efforts.

Through these journeys at different levels of the church, we have the capacity to address and reconfigure the relationships at the global table. As the teaching of Jesus and the example of Philip show us, the state and quality of our global relationships are matters of Christian concern: How we relate internationally determines whether the banquet will be one of scarcity for many or plenty for all. ●

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