



The Editor's Versicle

Pulp Friction

The Record

The Record, a diocesan edition of *Episcopal Life*, presents news of the Diocese of Michigan.

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Life was topsy-turvy in February—*Episcopal Life* that is.

A year ago, Jerry Hames retired as longtime (first and only) editor of the newspaper founded in 1990 for and about the Episcopal Church. The canon for Episcopal Church communication, Bob Williams, announced in April last year that the department would allow some time to pass before seeking a new editor.

During the remainder of 2007, the communication department at the Episcopal Church Center underwent a metamorphosis, christening *Episcopal Life* Media, dispensing new staffing assignments and then shifting the department's director and his administrative oversight from New York to Los Angeles.

An impressive, comprehensive Web presence was launched under the heading of *Episcopal Life* Online (see <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/elife>) while a committee of the whole managed the monthly issues of the newspaper.

Episcopal Life maintains a printing partnership with 36 diocesan newspapers that account for 80 percent of the circulation. *The Record* Editorial Board and editor decided in 1995 that *The Record* would be a printing partner, which is why readers receive both newspapers each month.

A number of the diocesan editors were alarmed—yours included—when on February 22, just a few weeks after the position of editor had been posted, an announcement came forth that the position would not be filled.

As it turns out, an editor for *Episcopal Life* had never been in the top tier of staff positions when the 2008 budget priorities were constructed. In fact, from what I can determine, the position was never in the 2008 budget at all. When the department's director attempted to add the position to the already-stretched Episcopal Church budget in February, the Administration and Finance Committee turned him down.

After ten days of frenetic reaction

by Episcopal Communicators of all stripes, the communication department reversed its announcement and reinstated the position of editor of the newspaper.

So, why do we need a newspaper and an editor?

I have participated in the conversation—and the consternation—surrounding this issue over the past few months. To be clear, for me, the issue was about whether *Episcopal Life* was becoming a “house organ” for certain levels of the church's leadership. In December, I wrote to the *Episcopal Life* Board of Governors and wrapped my plea to prevent the full absorption of *Episcopal Life* into the public relations strategy of the Episcopal Church around the following argument.

“I need *Episcopal Life* to be the flagship of editorial independence, a shining example of a newspaper capable of reflecting the breadth of the Episcopal Church, not merely the leadership at its head. Explaining the views of the leadership is an important task, but best performed by other capable arms within the communication strategy.

“As a diocesan editor, I need *Episcopal Life* to establish and hold the line on journalistic integrity ... or I will lose ground in fighting for the distinction in my own diocesan newspaper.

“I need an editor of *Episcopal Life* who relishes newspapers and will fight for the historical editorial independence that accompanies them. As wrap editors, we are not a loose confederation of church newsletters. We need to know that we are part of something larger than our own regional squabbles and internecine diocesan conflicts, and that we share a commitment to journalism with integrity.”

I have no reason to believe that my appeal three months earlier carried any weight whatsoever before the announcement in February to

not fill the editor's position—and thereby, *de facto*, absorb the newspaper into the Church media stream. I do know that following the announcement, voices of dissent grew both in numbers and in clarity—and the management team and the communication department reversed its decision on March 3, announcing the editor's search would resume.

On the surface, the recent discontent appears to be over methods of delivery: Web vs. newsprint. Computer vs. home delivery. Some might even say (they do!), modern technology vs. the past.

If understood properly, however, the difference of opinion is about community, and the ways in which effective communication can nurture it. We need to ask what vehicles of communication exist to allow and encourage the breadth of the community to communicate.

Newspapers with a broad editorial policy share the historic challenge to do just this, and electronic and Web technologies do not prohibit a similar level of community engagement. Equally, both mediums can fall short in their mission to involve and inspire the whole community.

The question remains, when the topsy-turvy ride over the future of *Episcopal Life* settles, will we have a newspaper that strives to be a resource for the person in the pew or a strategic tool for headquarters?

I believe *Episcopal Life* needs an editor who can balance the oftentimes differing needs of the Episcopal Church Center leadership with those of the publication's readers, and then present news and information “without fear or favor”—which has been an editorial objective and guiding principle of the newspaper since its founding 18 years ago.

In 2008, I have asked the editorial board to assess the quality of *The Record's* news coverage as well as the future of our relationship with *Episcopal Life*. We need your help in this review. What do you, the readers, need from these two newspapers?