

Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality (1994-1997)

MEMBERSHIP

Bishops

The Rt. Rev. Craig B. Anderson (New York) *Co-Chair*
The Rt. Rev. Stephen H. Jecko (Florida) replaced
The Rt. Rev. J. Clark Grew (Ohio)
The Rt. Rev. Mary Adelia R. McLeod (Vermont)
The Rt. Rev. Roger J. White (Milwaukee)

Clergy

The Rev. Jane N. Garrett (Vermont) *Co-Chair*
The Rev. Rayford B. High (Texas)

Lay Persons

Pan Adams (Arkansas)
J. P. Causey, Jr., Esq. (Virginia)
Fred H. Ellis, III (Pittsburgh)
Elisabeth H. Noland (Rio Grande)
Nancy P. Rayfield (Indianapolis) *Treasurer*
Deborah J. Stokes (Southern Ohio)

Committee representatives at General Convention

Bishop Craig B. Anderson and Deputy Jane N. Garrett are authorized to receive non-substantive amendments to this report.

The Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa served as liaison with the Episcopal Church Center staff. Deacon Claudia M. Wilson assisted with the preparation of the committee's report.

SUMMARY OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK (all members concurring)

What We Did

The committee was appointed by the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies in accordance with Resolution B012a of the 1994 General Convention. During the 1994-1997 triennium, the committee met five times:

- once in Columbus OH, where we heard presentations on dialogue from, and had discussions with, Roger Boltz of Episcopalians United and Madeleine Glynn Trichel, Director of the Interfaith Center for Peace in Columbus;
- once in Minneapolis MN, where we conferred with the Presiding Bishop, the President of the House of Deputies, members of the Structure Committee, and other Interim Body colleagues;
- once in Nashville TN; and
- twice in New York NY.

At various points in the triennium the committee was in contact with the Rt. Rev. Richard F. Grein, the Rt. Rev. O'Kelley Whitaker, and the Rev. Canon Gene Robinson, who were instrumental in the work done in the previous triennium.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

The committee defined its task and set priorities on the basis of the charge received from General Convention, the work of the 1991: A104sa Committee in the previous triennium, and the wide experience of committee members with dialogue and education in the church. We discerned our charge to be three-fold: 1) To promote continuing dialogue; 2) To provide resources for continuing dialogue; and 3) To report to the 72nd General Convention on whatever dialogue took place.

While *Continuing the Dialogue* is a study document of the House of Bishops approved at the 71st General Convention and is not, therefore, this committee's document, it was from the beginning a foundation resource for our work. We perceived our task at its most fundamental level to be strategic planning for promoting open, trusting, risk-taking dialogue on human sexuality, including its relationship to our humanity, without promoting any particular view on specific aspects of human sexuality. We were also intentional about keeping the process as uncomplicated and nondirective as possible.

To achieve these goals, we:

1. took steps to finalize arrangements already begun by the Presiding Bishop's Office for the publication of *Continuing the Dialogue* by Forward Movement in the fall of 1995; prepared a simple "Discussion Guide" to be published with it and to enable study at the local level without the need for special training; and arranged for the translation of these materials into Spanish;
2. prepared material in English and Spanish on the process of dialogue, including suggested guidelines for conducting dialogues;
3. collected information from many sources, representing various points of view, about other resources for study (both published and forthcoming), and developed an annotated bibliography of resources reflecting a broad spectrum of views on human sexuality. This list was divided into the following subsections: Basic Introduction to Human Sexuality; Biblical; Theology; Christian Spirituality and Pastoral Care; Sexual Ethics; Christian Marriage; Singleness and The Family; Young People; Gay and Lesbian Christians; Ecumenical Resources; and Videos;
4. prepared a list of persons trained by the Whitaker Committee to lead dialogue on human sexuality who were willing to continue to offer their skills to dioceses and congregations;
5. established a network of provincial and diocesan contact persons (appointed by their bishops), to encourage dialogue, disseminate information, and provide feedback about their activities by means of a questionnaire developed by our committee;
6. established contact with Anglican and ecumenical partners to inform them of our work and to hear from them about their own statements, dialogue processes, and resources;
7. sent our materials to bishops, chairs of diocesan deputations to General Convention, provincial and diocesan contact persons, seminary deans, Interim Body members, all primates and provincial secretaries of the Anglican communion, and ecumenical partners. Used a press release, announcement letters, and a posting on QUEST to notify the church of the availability of materials;
8. made some preliminary inquiries about the possibility of producing a discussion-starter video. As a result, we discovered an apparent general lack of interest in funding and producing such a video. The committee decided, instead, to purchase copies of "What's Religion Got to Do With Sex?" a video produced by EcuFilm as part of its Questions of Faith series, which has already been successfully used in some dioceses, and distribute one to each General Convention deputation in 1997; and
9. assembled the feedback received from ECUSA provinces and provinces of the Anglican Communion and ecumenical partners and considered the implications of this information for the future of dialogue on human sexuality.

What We Learned from Our Respondents

In response to the materials sent out by the committee, fifty-three domestic dioceses and two Province IX dioceses reported they had appointed contact persons. Of the remainder, four domestic dioceses informed the committee they would not be appointing anyone. As of January 6, 1997, thirty-six out of fifty-three domestic dioceses with contact persons had reported back to the committee and nine dioceses who did not inform us of the appointment of a contact persons had also reported. Of the forty-five dioceses reporting:

- sixteen reported that something took place that involved or touched several parishes. Of these, the dioceses of El Camino Real, Florida, and Virginia reported the most widespread involvement;
- six reported involvement by one or two parishes or that one or two workshops were held;
- twenty-three reported that nothing happened; and
- ten reported that they planned to do something more before the 1997 General Convention.

What we learned from studying these numbers and the written reports of activity or lack of activity on the diocesan level may be summarized as follows:

1. Mandated dialogue on human sexuality has run its course, and people are weary of being told they have to discuss this topic. Typical responses included the following:

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| South Carolina: | “It was clear that people simply were talked and ‘dialogued’ out on the subject, often feeling that the continuing call for dialogue was another way of saying, ‘Try this often enough and you will get to like it.’” |
| Northwestern Pennsylvania: | “To my knowledge, no congregation of this diocese has participated in a dialogue since Indianapolis. We let each congregation decide whether to proceed and the universal response was that they are dealing with other matters, having engaged in the Human Sexuality Dialogue prior to Indianapolis.” |
| Oregon: | “Unfortunately nothing has happened.” |
| Hawaii: | “Since the original dialogue, nothing has happened in Hawaii on this subject. Our Diocesan Committee stands ready to assist congregations with studies, discussions, etc. We have had no response to date.” |
| Arkansas: | “I have publicized the current publication information in the Bishop’s newsletter <i>The Clericus</i> . I have had only two requests concerning that study and as far as I know nothing has been done, unless they did it individually.” |
| Missouri: | “I think people are tired of the issue. I am.” |

2. Dialogue is often seen as a way of furthering “their” agenda, whoever “they” may be. In addition to fatigue and/or apathy, several respondents indicated a general level of resistance sometimes coupled with suspicion as to the reason why dialogue on human sexuality has been asked for. A few of those responses were:

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| Northwest Texas: | “People are disinterested and think it is part of the agenda of the ‘National Church’ to force homosexual ordination” |
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HUMAN SEXUALITY

- Alaska: "General apathy and real resistance on the part of some clergy and churches."
- Nebraska: "Some were enlightened, but most were angry at the study because of the way it was slanted. No matter what we did it was not right."
- Virginia: "A national level committee is likely to appear like a top-down, agenda-pushing vehicle driven by the general Church."

3. *People are confused about what they are "dialoguing" about.* Several diocesan responses were concerned not with dialogue on human sexuality but with efforts to address issues related to sexual misconduct by clergy (Title IV of the national Canons) and the Church Insurance Company's new mandates about sexual misconduct awareness education.

4. *In a few dioceses, where local initiative and leadership were recruited and the process was personalized, true dialogue did take place and was perceived as beneficial.* The following examples illustrate the success of these local initiatives:

- Atlanta: Host committees (groups of gay, lesbian, and straight couples and singles who meet monthly for dinner and conversation), have continued to meet for the last six years. "The groups began as the outcome of conversations between Bishop Allan and a gay couple and have been multiplying by cell division ever since."
- El Camino Real: A large majority of congregations used a six-week adult education program designed in the diocese. Results and impact varied, but "there is also a general trend of greater awareness, ability to be more open with one another, greater compassion, ability to talk with one another rather than at one another, willingness to rest in the incomplete/undetermined..."
- Western Michigan: Under the leadership of Bishop Lec, the diocese focused its energies on youth and undertook an intense effort to implement the "Journey to Adulthood" curriculum, which is now being used in twenty-four parishes. This curriculum for youth focuses on sexuality, society, and self. "We are providing resources, leader training, guidance, and oversight, all at diocesan expense. It is creating dialogue and support groups among parents, collaboration between parishes, and opening up issues in a remarkable way."
- Vermont: An evening forum on human sexuality was held at the October 1995 diocesan convention, focusing on "theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in rites that honor love and commitment between persons of the same sex and ordination of homosexual persons in committed relationships." This forum was attended by approximately one hundred persons.

Chicago:

In 1995, “we held a Clergy Day of Dialogue which included sharing by people on both sides of the sexuality issue, including one priest who courageously took that opportunity to come out. [In September 1996], we sent three priests to the meeting in California about talking respectfully (one gay man, one liberal, one fundamentalist) and they reported to our Clergy day [in October].”

What We Concluded

In addition to these direct learnings from reading answers from our respondents, the committee in its work and its discussions also came to the following conclusions:

1. *“Dialogue” has become, for many people, a code word for “deadlock” or a synonym for “debate.”* Mandating dialogue is now seen by many as a way of pretending to do something when no real agreement can be reached on what to do. In addition, and all too often, dialogue has been misinterpreted as a synonym for debate, with one side “winning” and the other “losing.” As a result, the true value of dialogue as an evolutionary, open-ended process, and an integral part of our Anglican identity, is not appreciated.
2. *True dialogue cannot be mandated, but it can be encouraged by leadership on the national and diocesan levels.* The experience of our respondents shows that true dialogue, which requires emotional intimacy and trust, most often begins in small groups where people feel safe and can be vulnerable. The establishment of such small-group intimacy can in turn inform what happens in larger groups or even legislatively.
3. *Concerns about sexual misconduct and boundary violations (which are problems) have contributed to the idea that human sexuality itself is a “problem.”* As long as human sexuality is considered a “problem,” or merely a synonym for “sex” or “homosexuality,” people will resist or avoid talking about it. We need to emphasize, instead, the need for dialogue on human sexuality within an ongoing dialogue about the totality of our lives as Christians.

What We Learned from the Anglican Communion and Our Ecumenical Partners

With the assistance of the Rev. Dr. Sheryl Kujawa of the Episcopal Church Center staff, the committee was in contact with all the provinces of the Anglican Communion, sending each a copy of *Continuing the Dialogue*, telling them of our dialogue effort, and soliciting their feedback and information about their own activities. Dr. Kujawa and the Rev. Canon David Perry, also of the Church Center staff, facilitated our contact with our ecumenical partners. In brief, here are the responses we received from these sources:

The Primates of the Anglican Communion

A pastoral letter from the March 16, 1995, meeting of the Primates included this statement on sexuality, which we feel bears quoting at length:

Around the world serious questions relating to human sexuality are being faced by the Church. The traditional response to these questions is to affirm the moral precepts which have come down to us through the tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, we are conscious that within the Church itself there are those whose pattern of sexual expression is at variance with the received Christian moral tradition, but whose lives in other respects demonstrate the marks of genuine Christian character. The issues are deep and complex. They do not always admit of easy, instant answers. A careful process of reflecting on contemporary forms of behavior in the light of the scriptures and the Christian moral tradition is required.

We have to recognize that there are different understandings at present among Christians of equal commitment and faith. We invite every part of the Church to face the questions about sexuality with honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and polarization, in a spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our lives as Christians.

The Church of England

We were sent a copy of the 1991 statement of the Bishops of the General Synod titled *Issues in Human Sexuality* (which has been widely distributed and read on this side of the Atlantic), as well as a new (1995) report of a working party of the Board for Social Responsibility, titled *Something to Celebrate: Valuing Families in Church & Society*. The report, based on extensive consultation with groups and individuals, emphasizes that family life is to be celebrated even though contemporary life subjects it to great stresses. It also commends to the church the needs of persons in cohabiting relationships (and says the phrase "living in sin" is too harsh) and the needs of those in the gay and lesbian community trying to maintain a sense of family within their given life style and orientation.

The Anglican Church of Canada

At their Synod of July 4, 1995, Canadian Anglicans condemned bigotry, violence, and hatred against people because of their sexual orientation, urged parishes and dioceses to "continue, deepen, and adapt" the learning identified and begun by a Task Force on Homosexuality, urged the Most Rev. Michael Peers to encourage dialogue on homosexuality throughout the church, and asked the church's bishops to consider reviewing the sexuality guidelines formulated in 1979. Subsequently, Eric Beresford was appointed coordinator for work on continuing the sexuality dialogue. He has been in touch with our committee and hopes to be present at General Convention in 1997 as an observer.

The Province of Central Africa

The Archbishop of Central Africa thanked us for sending him a copy of *Continuing the Dialogue* and said it would be "some time" before his province would be in a position to "come out with documented research." He added, "it is as we learn to use some of our trained theologians as resource people to Episcopal Synod that we can hope for some written statement. I need not remind you that such discussions invariably will take place in a hostile environment."

The Province of Southern Africa

The Church in Southern Africa sent their 1995 report, *The Church and Human Sexuality*, addressing "broad issues of Christian social ethics," taking into consideration "new insights into the interpretation of the Bible, evidence from the biological and human sciences, and the contemporary context."

The Province of the Southern Cone of America

The Presiding Bishop of the Southern Cone sent a letter and enclosed his statement calling for "a careful and balanced inter-cultural study on sexuality in the light of scripture, and then patient and thoroughly orthodox definition and guidance relevant and adequate for the whole communion."

The Province of New Zealand

Bishop David Coles of New Zealand's Tikanga Pakeha Commission on Sexuality contacted us while on sabbatical in the United States. He asked about our process and materials, from

both the last triennium and the current one. Materials were provided to him and further communication took place by fax after his return to New Zealand.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)

ELCA provided us with all their documents and study materials regarding human sexuality, including a video and video study guide. (Many of our own dioceses reported using Lutheran materials with considerable success.) In November 1996, ELCA's Church Council adopted and circulated to congregations "A Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions," which discusses sexuality in general as well as making observations about single adults, marriage, responsible procreation and parenting, divorce, and some misuses of sexuality (adultery, abuse, promiscuity, prostitution, practices that spread sexually transmitted diseases, pornography, and sexuality in media and advertising). Homosexuality is not addressed because it is not an area of consensus.

United Methodist Church

The April 1996 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, despite support for change from some bishops, voted to retain a statement in their Book of Discipline that holds that homosexuals are people of "sacred worth," but that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The Presbyterian Church

As with the Methodists, Presbyterian dialogue on sexuality has focused on homosexuality. Meeting in early summer 1996, their General Assembly also declined to make changes in their traditional statements.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR THE 1994-97 TRIENNIUM

	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997</i>	
	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Projected</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Income</i>				
General Convention	0	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$50,000
Prior Triennium	21,000	0	0	21,000
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<i>Total</i>	\$21,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$71,000
<i>Expenses</i>				
Consultants	\$250	0	\$700	\$950
Meetings	9,235	8,025	500	17,760
Resource Distribution	10,602	8,156	4,193	22,951
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<i>Total</i>	\$20,087	\$16,181	\$5,393	\$41,661
<i>Total Income/Expenses</i>	\$913	\$8,819	\$19,607	\$29,339

HUMAN SEXUALITY

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMING TRIENNIUM

1. The ongoing dialogue on human sexuality needs to be placed in the context of a broader theological dialogue and sharing regarding our doctrine of humanity within the faith community.
2. Responsibility for facilitating the ongoing dialogue on human sexuality within this church and ecumenically should be vested in a subcommittee of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs or its successor.
3. The ongoing dialogue on human sexuality needs to include reflection on Christian formation issues such as the baptismal covenant and education of our children and young people.
4. The ongoing dialogue on human sexuality must be fostered on the local level through recruitment and training of diocesan and parish leaders and support for local initiatives. Further top-down mandates will not succeed and may, in fact, inhibit true dialogue.
5. The ongoing dialogue on human sexuality needs to be widened to make even greater use of ecumenical materials.
6. The resource list (bibliography and filmography) initially prepared by this committee needs to be updated and circulated regularly.

RESOLUTION

Resolution A071 Promote Voluntary Dialogue on Human Sexuality

- 1 *Resolved*, the House of _____ concurring, That the 72nd General Convention commend the
- 2 process of voluntary dialogue as an effective and appropriate process for Episcopalians to use in
- 3 facing questions about sexuality “with honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation
- 4 and polarization, in a spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our
- 5 lives as Christians”¹; and be it further
- 6 *Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Human Affairs, or its successor, through a special
- 7 subcommittee, promote the continuing use of dialogue as a process for facing questions about
- 8 human sexuality and provide resources for continuing the dialogue.

¹ Pastoral Letter from the Primates of the Anglican Communion, March 16, 1995.