

TASK FORCE ON THE STUDY OF MARRIAGE

Membership

Ms. Joan Geiszler-Ludlum, <i>Chair</i>	East Carolina, IV	2018
The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, <i>Vice-Chair</i>	Chicago, V	2018
The Rev. Philip Dinwiddie, <i>Secretary</i>	Michigan, V	2018
The Rev. Stannard Baker	Vermont, I	2018
The Rt. Rev. Thomas Clark Ely	Vermont, I	2018
The Rev. Gianetta Hayes-Martin	California, VIII	2018
The Rev. Carlye Hughes	Fort Worth, VII	2018
The Rev. Canon Jordan Hylden	Dallas, VII	2018
The Rev. Dr. Ruth A. Myers	California, VIII	2018
The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller	Milwaukee, V	2018
The Rev. Canon Humphrey Paulino	Venezuela, IX	2018
The Rev. Canon Susan Russell	Los Angeles, VIII	2018
Ms. Deborah J. Stokes	Southern Ohio, V	2018
The Rt. Rev. Brian Thom	Idaho, VIII	2018
Ms. Melodie Woerman	Kansas, VII	2018
The Most Rev. Michael Bruce Curry, <i>Ex-Officio</i>	North Carolina, IV	2018
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, <i>Ex-Officio</i>	Ohio V	2018
Mr. Christopher Hayes, <i>Liaison, Standing Commission on Structure, Governance, Constitution and Canons</i>	California, VIII	
Mr. Drew Nathaniel Keane, <i>Liaison, Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music</i>	Georgia, IV	

CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP

Mr. James Ellis resigned in late 2016 and was replaced by the Rev. Carlye Hughes. Ms. Joan Geiszler-Ludlum became Chair and the Rev. Brian Taylor became Vice Chair in December 2016 at Taylor's request.

REPRESENTATION AT GENERAL CONVENTION

Bishop Brian Thom and Deputy Phil Dinwiddie are authorized to receive non-substantive amendments to this report at General Convention.

Mandate

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 78th General Convention requests dioceses and parishes use the study materials on marriage provided in the last triennium by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, namely the “Dearly Beloved” toolkit and the appended essays in their Blue Book report to this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention directs the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint jointly an expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage to continue this work, consisting of not more than fifteen (15) people, including theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, and educators, who represent the cultural and theological diversity in the Church; membership should include some of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage appointed in 2012, some from dioceses outside the United States, and young adults; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force explore further those contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium, specifically regarding those who choose to remain single; unmarried persons in intimate relationships; couples who cohabitate either in preparation for, or as an alternative to, marriage; couples who desire a blessing from the Church but not marriage; parenting by single or and/or unmarried persons; differing forms of family and household such as those including same-sex parenting, adoption, and racial diversity; and differences in marriage patterns between ethnic and racial groups; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult with (i) individuals and couples within these groups about their experience of faith and church life; and (ii) the results of diocesan and parochial study of "Dearly Beloved" toolkit; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives on these matters, and develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church and which include responses from theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, social scientists, and educators who are not members of the expanded Task Force, and whose perspectives represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force study and monitor, in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church; the continuing debate about clergy acting as agents of the state in officiating at marriages; and any other matters related to marriage by action of or referral by this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force report and make recommendations to the 79th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represents the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church.

Summary of Work

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE TASK FORCE ON THE STUDY OF MARRIAGE 2012-2015

The 77th General Convention in 2012 formed the initial Task Force on the Study of Marriage to explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage and develop tools for

theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level. The Task Force responded with seven essays: A Biblical and Theological Framework for Thinking about Marriage; Christian Marriage as Vocation; A History of Christian Marriage; Marriage as a Rite of Passage; The Marriage Canon: History and Critique; Agents of the state: A Question for Discernment; and Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages. These essays appeared as Appendix 1 to the Task Force’s 2015 Blue Book Report and as an accessible PDF file.

In addition, the Task Force produced “Dearly Beloved: A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage”, a curriculum for local groups, parishes and dioceses to facilitate discussion of marriage in all its dimensions and in the context of changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures of these times. “Dearly Beloved” consists of one-page summaries and discussion questions based on the essays prepared by the Task Force. The Dearly Beloved Toolkit appeared as Appendix 2 to the Task Force’s 2015 Blue Book Report and as an accessible PDF file.

The 77th General Convention also asked the Task Force to address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same-sex couple in states where authorized, in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music [SCLM] and the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons [SCCC]. Tracking the increasing number of states making same-sex marriage available, SCLM proposed to authorize use of liturgies for same-sex marriage. In support of the liturgies, the Task Force proposed a rewrite of the marriage Canon (Canon I.18) making it:

- Ordered more practically in terms of pastoral practice;
- Focused on the actual vows made in The Book of Common Prayer marriage rite, rather than on the purposes of marriage in general;
- Reflective of the theological views expressed in the Task Force’s study and essays; and
- By using gender-neutral language, responsive to both Resolution 2012-A050’s charge that the Task Force “address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same-sex couple in states that authorize such,” and to Resolution 2012-D091, referred to the Task Force.

WORK DONE DURING THE 2015-2018 TRIENNium

MEETINGS

Generous funding from General Convention enabled the Task Force to meet in person four (4) times: twice in Baltimore, MD on November 18-21, 2015 and March 27-30, 2017, which also facilitated consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music; and two (2) Task Force working meetings in Chicago September 27-29, 2016 and Salt Lake City, Utah August 28-30, 2017. In addition, work was conducted via email, a dedicated General Convention Office site, working group conference calls and eleven (11) video teleconferences: 2/24/16, 3/18/16, 6/20/16, 8/30/16, 2/24/17, 4/27/17, 5/31/17, 6/29/17, 8/3/17, 11/9/17, and 11/28/17.

The Task Force also sought conversation with a wide range of Episcopalians through social media, press releases to update the wider Church on the work in progress, a Facebook page that received one thousand six hundred (1,600) likes and four thousand three hundred (4,300) visits during this triennium, and targeted surveys to solicit and receive responses to questions about relationships, impact of the trial liturgies, responses to draft essays and the use and impact of the “Dearly Beloved” toolkit for local discussion.

HOW THE TASK FORCE DID ITS WORK

The expansive charge called for the Task Force to look at a broad range of relationships and households other than marriage that currently reflect the experience of one half of society and Church today, by means of a wide range of methodologies, disciplines and perspectives. At the same time, the Task Force is charged with the exploration of particular issues regarding marriage: the impact of the marriage of same-sex couples on our Church, and the relationship between Church and state in officiating marriages.

The Task Force organized the assigned work into four (4) working groups, based upon the various tasks defined for the Task Force by Resolution 2015-A037 (shown in quotations):

1. Pastoral: “consult with individuals and groups” across a variety of relationships statuses “about their experience of faith and church life.”
2. Ecclesial: “study and monitor ... the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church” and promote and study the use and impact of the “Dearly Beloved” toolkit presented by the previous Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 77th General Convention in 2012.
3. Academic: “explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives” on the contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium; “develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church”; and “provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represents the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church”.
4. Functional: explore, study and monitor the continuing debate about clergy acting in dual roles on behalf of Church and State when officiating marriages.

A summary of the work of each task group follows here.

1. Pastoral Working Group

In order to fulfill Resolution 2015-A037’s charge to “consult with individuals and groups” across a variety of relationships statuses “about their experience of faith and church life,” the Pastoral Working Group did the following:

- a. **Collect Stories:** The Pastoral Working Group tasks included small group meetings to gather stories, a Deputy/Bishop-wide survey, and individual interviews. After fruitful discussion in person and electronically, which included issues related to how data was collected, issues of bias,

how to elicit useful responses, groups to contact, etc., the Pastoral Working Group created a template/guideline for small group discussions. These took place between November 2015 and September 2016, using the following one-page discussion template:

The *Task Force on the Study of Marriage* of the General Convention of The Episcopal Church was charged to work during the triennium between General Convention 2015 in Salt Lake City and General Convention 2018 in Austin, Texas, reporting to the 2018 General Convention. We were formed as a result of Resolution 2015-A050, *Create Taskforce on the Study of Marriage*, which passed at the 2015 General Convention. The enabling language is as follows:

Resolution Text (Original)

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint a task force of not more than twelve (12) people, consisting of theologians, liturgists, pastors, and educators, to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage; and **be it further Resolved, That the task force consider issues raised by changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures**, including legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships between two (2) people of the same sex, in the U.S. and other countries where The Episcopal Church is located; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force develop tools for theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level... (emphasis added)

The subcommittee on Pastoral issues will focus its work on collecting data, information and personal stories about the variety of intimate relationships that exist in and out of our Church. The Episcopal Church in 2000 passed a resolution that describes what we believe intimate relationships to be: ... *such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.* We know that marriage norms are changing rapidly. Listen to this piece from *A Prairie Home Companion* (link follows this paragraph), from the Valentine's Day show of 2016. It states the changes better and in more entertaining fashion than any words could here. http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/listen/?date=2016/02/13&identifier=apm_audio/phc/segments/2016/02/13/phc_segment_09_20160213_128.mp3 (audio no longer available as of 11/30/2017)

Please think of intimate, committed – even sacred – relationships of “*fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection, respect, careful, honest communication* – that are filled with *holy love*, which you have known, witnessed, or of which you are aware. Reflect on those relationships for a moment and then respond to these questions:

1. Share (write or record) a brief story of such a relationship - formative for or important to you - that exists or existed inside or outside of traditional marriage.
2. How you respond to the above description?
3. What should the church's response be to these relationships?

b. Conduct a Survey: The Pastoral Working Group, after reviewing the responses from these discussions, decided that a survey sent to all Convention Deputies and Bishops would garner the broad response needed to gather a variety of relationship stories. We received one hundred and seventy (170) responses to the Relationship Survey, available in both English and Spanish, conducted between September 2016 and May 2017. The responses included:

- One hundred and fifty-seven (157) narrative responses to the following question (Question 1) which were woven into the Task Force's essays as illustrative material: *"Please tell us about a committed or intimate relationship – including dedication to singleness or commitment to an intentional religious community – in which you are involved, or of which you are aware, and how this has had a significant (positive or negative) impact on your life."*
- Sixty-eight (68) responses to the following questions (Question 2 & 3) which inform the Task Force's mandate to "study and monitor ... the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church ...": *"Was The Episcopal Church (or other church), diocese, or parish/congregation helpful to this relationship? If not helpful – or marginally helpful – how could the church have done better to support or nurture the relationship described?"*
- Fifty-seven (57) narrative responses to this question, added late in the fall of 2016: *"Since December 2015 the Episcopal Church has made marriage liturgies equally available to both opposite and same sex couples. Can you share a personal story of the impact this has had on you, your congregation or your diocese?"*

The respondents to the survey represented a broad range of provinces, ages, and relationships. The responses were narrative; respondents were asked to write about their own relationships or about relationships of which they were aware. Responses included a variety of theological and political opinions on marriage and relationship. We received close to one hundred and sixty (160) of these accounts. Sixty (60) percent of the responses were written from the perspective of a male, and forty (40) percent female. Eighty-three (83) percent described marriages (both opposite sex and same sex), while twelve (12) percent wrote about committed, non-married couples, with three (3) percent describing other forms of relationship, and two (2) percent writing about singleness. Fifty-five (55) percent described a heterosexual relationship, thirty-eight (38) percent a LGBT relationship, and seven (7) percent other (transgender, single, etc.). Relationships described ranged in age from eighteen (18) to seventy-five (75) +, with the largest group of stories about couples between thirty-six (36) and sixty-five (65) years old. There were three (3) responses from Province IX. Persons of color are notably underrepresented among the stories received. The Pastoral Working Group sought additional responses from phone interviews. One respondent felt that individual interviews would be a better way of reaching a diverse constituency. The individual interviews that took place were helpful and meaningful. The Working Group also reached out, as time permitted, to groups within The Episcopal Church representing diverse peoples.

After reviewing the responses, the Pastoral Working Group worked with the Academic Working Group to identify excerpts which illustrate the essays found in the Appendix to this report. All responses may be accessed by following this link: [Survey Responses Impact of Liturgies \(PDF\)](https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21046) (<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21046>)

2. Ecclesial Working Group

In order to fulfill Resolution 2015-A037's charge to "study and monitor ... the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church," the Ecclesial Working Group did the following:

- a. Determined with certainty the policy of every diocesan bishop regarding the marriage of same-sex couples in his or her diocese, as well as the provisions for access that were made by those who do not permit it (in accordance with Resolution 2015 A054).
- b. Gathered information from a sample of congregations that either agree or disagree with the decision of its diocesan bishop on the marriage of same-sex couples, seeking comment about any impact this has had on the life of the congregation.
- c. Asked for comments from the Episcopal Church bishops of Province IX (consisting of seven (7) dioceses in the Caribbean, Central America and South America), provinces of the Anglican Communion and the churches with which The Episcopal Church is in full communion or partnership, on the impact of the adoption of Resolution A-054 on the Church.

Here is a summary of the results of this work.

Policies of diocesan bishops

The Task Force collected data from the one hundred and one (101) domestic dioceses on the implementation of the use of the trial liturgies for marriage authorized by General Convention Resolution 2015 A054. The Episcopal Church includes ten (10) dioceses in civil legal jurisdictions that do not allow marriage for same-sex couples. Since Church Canons require compliance with both civil and canonical requirements for marriage, the trial liturgies for marriage are not authorized for use in those dioceses.

Results show:

- Ninety-three (93) bishops have authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage
- Seventy-three (73) authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage without conditions
- Twenty (20) authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage with varying conditions
- Eleven (11) - concurrent approval of rector and Vestry (Colorado, Eau Claire, Europe, Fond du Lac, Michigan, Milwaukee, Northern Indiana, South Dakota, Southern Virginia, West Texas, West Virginia)
- Three (3) - approval of Vestry and permission of the bishop (Alabama, East Tennessee, Oklahoma)
- Two (2) - completion of a parish study/discernment process (Texas, Upper South Carolina)

- One (1) - approval of the bishop (Southwest Florida)
- Three (3) - use of only one (1) of the three (3) rites (Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia). NOTE: there was no agreement among these three (3) dioceses on which trial liturgy was authorized.
- Eight (8) bishops (Albany, Central Florida, Dallas, Florida, North Dakota, Springfield, Tennessee and the Virgin Islands) have not authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage
- Five (5) of these bishops (Albany, Central Florida, Dallas, Springfield, Tennessee) prohibited their use by clergy canonically resident in those dioceses, whether within or outside of the diocese

Provision for access

The Task Force then researched how the eight (8) dioceses declining to authorize the use of the trial liturgies responded to the portion of Resolution 2015 A054 that directed that bishops “will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies.”

In North Dakota, the diocesan bishop has provided DEPO [Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight] for a parish requesting access to the liturgies, and in Central Florida the diocesan bishop has “an informal agreement” with the bishop of Southeast Florida for pastoral provision when the need arises. In Albany, Dallas, Florida and Tennessee, the diocesan bishop has instructed same-sex couples seeking access to these liturgies to go to a neighboring diocese. Albany, Central Florida, Dallas, Springfield and Tennessee explicitly forbade diocesan clergy from presiding at marriages using the trial liturgies outside the diocese. The Task Force found no data on provisions being made for couples to have access to these liturgies for the Virgin Islands.

In summary, the Task Force found that ninety-three (93) out of one hundred and one (101) dioceses are using the marriage liturgies authorized by Resolution 2015 A054. As noted in the Resolution, “it remains within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to preside at any rite.” In the eight (8) dioceses where the bishops with jurisdiction have not given permission for use of the authorized rites, some have been active in providing a pastoral path for couples, in fulfillment of the charge by General Convention to “make provision for all couples to have access to these liturgies.” Others among this group have thus far been inactive in this regard; leaving it to couples to find on their own another place where they might celebrate their marriage. All responses are summarized in an Excel spreadsheet which may be accessed by following this link: [Diocesan Marriage Policies \(Excel spreadsheet\)](https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21044).
(<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21044>)

Response from the Bishops of Province IX

A request for comment was made to the bishops of the seven (7) dioceses that comprise Province IX of The Episcopal Church: Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador Central, Ecuador Littoral, Honduras, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. The Task Force received a statement that was signed by six (6) bishops (five (5) diocesan and one (1) retired) representing the dioceses of Ecuador Littoral, Ecuador Central, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Honduras. The bishops of Colombia and Puerto Rico did not sign the statement.

Their approximately five hundred (500) word response begins by expressing distress at what they call the “disregard of the call to embrace and affirm what is established in the Holy Scriptures; practices that now threaten to tear apart and further dividing the Church.” Proposed revisions to the Book of Common Prayer marriage rite, they caution, means that “our Church will be forced to accept social and cultural practices that have no Biblical basis.” They conclude, “If the Church approves these changes, they are greatly deepening the breach, the division and the Ninth Province will have to learn to walk alone.” The full statement is available in both Spanish and English at this link: [Responses Province IX Bishops \(PDF\)](https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21043) .

(<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21043>)

Response from Communion across Difference

The Task Force contacted the “Communion across Difference” bishops group to invite a narrative reflection on the implementation and impact of the trial liturgies for marriage during the triennium. The group had not met and were not able to comment.

Information from sample congregations

The Task Force determined that a survey of all congregations in The Episcopal Church to monitor and study the impact was not feasible, given the cost both to undertake it and to interpret the results. Therefore, it was decided to ask a sample of sixteen (16) congregations, of various sizes and locations, to answer questions about the impact on them of the action of General Convention to permit marriage of same-sex couples.

The Task Force asked four (4) congregations in each of these categories to respond to a questionnaire:

- ❖ Congregations that support the marriage of same-sex couples in a diocese where the bishop authorizes use of the rites (Congregation yes, Bishop yes)
- ❖ Congregations that do not support the marriage of same-sex couples in a diocese where the bishop does not authorize use of the rites (Congregation no, Bishop no)
- ❖ Congregations that support the marriage of same-sex couples in a diocese where the bishop does not authorize use of the rites (Congregation yes, Bishop no)
- ❖ Congregations that do not support the marriage of same-sex couples in a diocese where the bishop authorizes use of the rites (Congregation no, Bishop yes)

In the end, the Task Force received replies from two (2) of the four (4) congregations in each of the four (4) categories.

The Task Force asked for comments from both the priest who is in charge of the congregation and the senior warden. In some cases, replies came from both, and in other cases, only the priest replied. In a few instances, the senior warden said the priest’s response matched theirs so agreed in total with it.

The Task Force realizes that the overwhelming majority of bishops (92 percent) allow the marriage of same-sex couples in his or her diocese, and that fifty (50) percent of the dioceses included in this look at sample congregations are part of the eight (8) percent that do not. However, this was done to explore the issue of impact on individual congregations from every side of the bishop-and-congregation dynamic.

Here is a summary of the responses, by category.

Congregation yes, Bishop yes

Not surprisingly, the congregations in this category report that overwhelming majorities of members support the marriage of same-sex couples and thus find the bishop's position to be favorable. One priest said marriage of same-sex couples has been helpful to that congregation and has furthered its mission.

The other priest, while supporting marriage equality, said there has been a growing loss of public debate about theological issues in that diocese, representing a loss of divergent voices. The priest also said that with their bishop granting approval, the issue was pushed to the local level, placing the burden and responsibility for a decision to parish clergy, a situation the person called "shameful."

Congregation no, Bishop no

There was a wider divergence of opinion on marriage of same-sex couples in this category than in instances where the congregation and bishop are in agreement. Each of the two (2) reporting congregations said membership was divided on the issue, with twenty (20) to thirty (30) percent in favor and another thirty (30) percent or more strongly opposed, with the remainder in between but tending against the marriage of same-sex couples.

In one instance, the priest and the senior warden held different opinions about the correctness and desirability of the marriage of same-sex couples in The Episcopal Church. In both congregations, however, there was deep concern about negative effects if marriage equality was authorized throughout The Episcopal Church or in that diocese, especially if the decision on whether to provide it was left to the local level. They liked that the bishop's action removed them from the decision-making process.

Congregation yes, Bishop no

Both congregations said that being in the minority in their diocese was frustrating and hurtful. In one case it was so difficult that the congregation sought episcopal oversight by another bishop. The other reported that their minority status was hard to tolerate.

One priest reported feeling snubbed by others in the diocese, and the other said that not being able to offer marriage to same-sex couples is hurting that congregation's capacity to grow in membership.

Both priests said that the issue was dividing their diocese and expressed deep regret that they were prevented from offering rites they want for the people of their congregations.

Congregation no, Bishop yes

Both priests reporting said their congregation was steadfast in the decision not to use the liturgies authorized to marry same-sex couples, with their membership in full or near-full agreement with them.

They report that the position of their diocese, and The Episcopal Church as a whole, is tolerated in their congregation, so long as they are not forced to go along with it. Both congregations reported that they would lose both members and revenue if required to marry same-sex couples, describing the issue overall as an unhelpful distraction.

Comments from other Anglican provinces and full-communion partners

The Ecclesial Working Group sent requests for comments to each province of the Anglican Communion, all five (5) of The Episcopal Church's full communion ecumenical partners, and to the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Unity, Faith, and Order.

All were asked to reply to this question: From your perspective and specific setting, what has been the impact of The Episcopal Church's authorization and use of liturgical rites for same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex unions on "the Church"? Responses ranged from one (1) sentence to eight (8) pages. Seven (7) Anglican Communion provinces responded: the Anglican Church of Australia, the Anglican Church of Congo, the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Anglican Church of Tanzania and the Anglican Church of West Africa.

Three full-communion ecumenical partners responded: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Moravian Church, Northern Province and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. The Church of Wales and the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Unity, Faith, and Order promised a fuller response would be sent, but they were not available in time to be part of this report.

Results showed:

- Six (6) of the reporting Anglican Communion provinces say the action has had a negative impact in their context, or that they do not approve of the marriage of same-sex couples (the Anglican Church of Australia, the Anglican Church of Congo, the Church of England, the Episcopal Church of Sudan, the Anglican Church of Tanzania and the Anglican Church of West Africa)
- One (1) province said the action has had a positive impact and it has taken similar action itself (the Scottish Episcopal Church)

- All of the full-communion ecumenical partners said the action has had a positive impact (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Moravian Church, Northern Province, and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht)

All responses may be accessed by following these links: [Responses Anglican Communion Provinces \(PDF\)](#) and [Responses Ecumenical Partners \(PDF\)](#) and [Response IASCUFO \(PDF\)](#).

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21045>

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21049>

<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21042>

“Dearly Beloved” Toolkit: Use and Impact

In order to fulfill their second responsibility, as set forth in the enabling resolution, to monitor the results of diocesan and parochial study of “Dearly Beloved” toolkit, the Ecclesial Working Group made available a survey with two (2) purposes: to determine if and how the toolkit was used in the previous triennium, and to let those unfamiliar with the resource learn more by explaining the toolkit and providing a link to download it in the survey’s introduction.

The survey was made available in both English and Spanish. The English version was completed by five hundred and seventy-three (573) people; the Spanish version, by fourteen (14) people. In both instances the majority of respondents were priests, followed by lay people, then bishops, deacons and others. Additionally, the majority of respondents in both surveys were reporting on behalf of a congregation, followed by a diocese or another group. The totality of data that was compiled through this research may be accessed at the following link: [Toolkit Survey – English](#) or [Toolkit Survey – Spanish](#). (English: <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21047>, Spanish: <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21048>)

English-language version

When asked if they had used the toolkit, eighty-seven (87) people (17.5 percent) said yes. Three hundred and thirty-three (333) people (66.9 percent) replied no. The remainder – seventy-eight (78) people or 15.7 percent – did not know. (The numbers do not add up to five hundred and seventy-three (573) respondents, because not everyone chose to answer every question.)

Those who indicated they had not used it were asked to give a reason. One hundred and ten (110) people said they did not know about it, forty-nine (49) said they had used a different resource on marriage instead and one hundred and thirty-six (136) said it was not suitable for use with their group. A variety of reasons were given for non-usage, but two (2) reasons had multiple replies: thirty-three (33) people said they didn’t use it because they opposed the marriage of same-sex couples, and thirty (30) said their group already was in support. Seventy-three (73) people gave other reasons.

Of those who described their group’s experience in using the toolkit, the largest segments of respondents indicated it was helpful: it was of overall value to their group (40 people), provided a frank forum for discussions (39 people), was a positive experience (38 people), provided new information about how the Church thinks about marriage (33 people), fostered a sense of charity

toward others during discussions (31 people) and helped people of different opinions respect each other more (27 people).

When asked for the toolkit's weaknesses, several answers described it as lengthy, wordy, cumbersome or filled with too much Church language. Not being available in Spanish was seen as a drawback.

Spanish-language version

The small number of respondents to the Spanish-language version makes it difficult to categorize answers, but these items stand out:

- Respondents came from: Colombia (2 people), Honduras (2 people), Dominican Republic (1 person), Puerto Rico (1 person) and the United States (1 person).
- Four (4) people said they had used the toolkit, four (4) had not used it and one (1) didn't know about its use. Of those who did not use it, three (3) said it was because they didn't know about it, and one (1) person said they had used different materials.
- Of those who described their group's experience in using the toolkit, two (2) said it was a positive experience, and one (1) person each said it was of overall general value, provided new information about how the Bible describes marriage, provided new information about how the Church thinks about marriage, provided a frank forum for discussions, changed minds on some aspect of marriage or blessings in the church and created a sense of schism among participants.
- One respondent said a weakness of the toolkit was that it did not pay attention to Latin culture.

3. Academic Working Group

In response to Resolution 2015-A037's charges to

- "explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives" on the contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium;
- "develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church"; and
- "provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represents the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church,"

The Task Force created an Academic Working Group, which accomplished the following:

- a. **Collect Resources:** Following the directive to "include responses from theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, social scientists and educators who are not members of the expanded Task Force, and whose perspectives represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church;" the Academic Working Group began by inviting faculty from every Episcopal seminary to

suggest resources as well as additional scholars, pastors and educators to contact. The Academic Group received recommendations for more than one hundred (100) books and articles; one-third of these were on the topic of sexuality, particularly same-sex relationships. Of particular note, the faculty of Nashotah House submitted an annotated bibliography of thirty-six (36) items. The committee reviewed each of these books and articles in preparation for developing a series of essays.

- b. Write Essays:** Drawing from the resources it had gathered as well as the essays prepared by the Task Force in the previous triennium, the Academic Working Group drafted short essays addressing contemporary trends and norms identified in Resolution 2015-A037: “those who choose to remain single; unmarried persons in intimate relationships; couples who cohabitate either in preparation for, or as an alternative to, marriage; couples who desire a blessing from the Church but not marriage; parenting by single and/or unmarried persons; differing forms of family and household such as those including same-sex parenting, adoption, and racial diversity; and differences in marriage patterns between ethnic and racial groups.” The Task Force reviewed first drafts of these essays at its meeting in September 2016. In response to extensive feedback from the Task Force, the Academic Working Group reorganized and revised the essays.
- c. Solicit Responses to Essays:** At its March 2017 meeting, the Task Force discussed the revised essays. Moved by the stories from the surveys conducted by the Pastoral Working Group, the Task Force decided to incorporate a few of these personal narratives to illustrate the matters explored in the essays. After further revisions, in May 2017 the Task Force sent the essays to faculty at every Episcopal seminary, to other respondents identified when resources had been collected, and to additional respondents recommended by other members of the Task Force.
- d. Refine Essays based upon responses:** The Task Force received responses from twenty (20) individuals or organizations, and reviewed this feedback at its August 2017 meeting. Following that meeting, the Task Force refined and re-ordered the essays. Feedback not incorporated into the essays was summarized in a separate “Responses to the Essays.”

The essays are included in the proposed “Liturgical Resources Two (2)” appended to this Task Force report. Because the essays build on the work of the previous Task Force, particularly the essay “Changing Trends and Norms in Marriage,” the Task Force is recommending that the earlier essays also be published in Liturgical Resources 2.¹ An annotated bibliography provides the resources the Academic Working Group found to be especially helpful in its work. Since most of the contemporary trends and norms studied this triennium do not concern the relationships and marriages of same-sex couples, the bibliography does not include works devoted solely or primarily to this topic, although several of the items address this subject and provide additional references.

We encourage congregations, dioceses, and individuals to study these materials and draw upon them as a pastoral resource. Each of the essays includes a number of questions for consideration.

The questions appended to the essay “Culture, Ethnicity, and Marriage” are intended especially for couples and for clergy to use when preparing couples for marriage or counseling married couples. As an additional resource for study, Liturgical Resources 2 includes “Dearly Beloved: A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage” developed by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium.

- e. Propose a resolution to respond to a pastoral need:** The Task Force’s study of couples who desire the Church’s blessing but not marriage identified a pastoral need of couples for whom the consequences of a legal civil marriage would pose a significant threat to their well-being. An older person who receives a deceased spouse’s pension would lose the pension benefits upon remarriage and could be left destitute upon the death of a subsequent spouse. Undocumented immigrants may be deported when presenting identification needed to obtain a marriage license. An essay in the proposed new volume of “Enriching Our Worship” explores these issues. The Task Force is also proposing “The Blessing of a Relationship,” intended solely as a religious rite of blessing for couples in such circumstances, and proposes the resolution [“Ao86 Authorizing Rites to Bless Relationships,”](#) (see below).

The Task Force’s study included recognition of the growing number of persons entering into sexually intimate relationships other than marriage. This Task Force recommends that the General Convention establish a Task Force to develop resources that offer pastoral guidance and teaching about relationships involving sexual intimacy, and proposes the resolution [“Ao87 Develop Relationship Pastoral Resources”](#) (see below).

4. Functional Working Group

Directed to explore, study and monitor the debate about clergy acting on behalf of both the Church and the State when officiating marriages, the Task Force examined the historical role of the Church in officiating marriage over time, studied the current debate and arrived at a different approach by recasting the role of the clergy as agent and advocate for the couple. The full essay appears in Liturgical Resources 2, appended to this report.

RESOLUTIONS

The Task Force wrote three (3) resolutions for action by the 79th General Convention.

1. The first proposed resolution, [Ao85 Trial Use of Marriage Liturgies](#) (see below), presents a road map for General Convention to fulfill forty (40) years of promises of full inclusion in the life of The Episcopal Church for LGBTQ+ individuals. The proposal:

- extends trial use of liturgies first authorized by the 78th General Convention for the 2018-21 triennium: “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage,” “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage 2,” and “An Order for Marriage 2” (as revised and appended to the report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 79th General Convention);
- amends for trial use “Concerning the Service” for the Book of Common Prayer liturgies, “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage”;
- adds Rite 1 and Rite 2 versions of a Preface for Marriage 2, and
- amends and expands the Catechism’s section “Other Sacramental Rites” concerning marriage.

The resolution outlines how General Convention might proceed to make these proposals permanent additions and revisions to the Book of Common Prayer [BCP]:

- 1) extend the period of trial use,
- 2) adopt these additions and alterations, at which time they would be added to future printings of the BCP, or
- 3) determine some other course of action.

Trial use is governed by Article X of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church and Canon II.3.6. “Trial use” means that the Church is considering these for inclusion in The Book of Common Prayer. To be added to the Prayer Book, two (2) successive General Conventions must authorize the liturgies in identical form.

Some suggested to the Task Force that the 79th General Convention could treat the action of the 78th General Convention as the first reading to add the authorized trial liturgies to the Book of Common Prayer. The Task Force declined to embrace this view because:

- the liturgies for trial use were neither presented nor proposed for the first reading to the 78th General Convention and did not include the required resolve that it be sent timely to the Secretary of the Convention of every Diocese to be made known to the next Diocesan Convention meeting;
- the liturgies for trial use need some period of use with systematic survey and study to assure that these not only read well but also pray well in actual use;

- additional concurrent changes in the rubrics, the prefaces and the catechism are needed to make clear that marriage is available to any couple.
- The resolution calls for the trial liturgies for marriage along with other materials for marriage to be published and made available electronically in Liturgical Resources 2 which appears in the Supplemental Materials section of this report.

2. The second proposed resolution, [Ao86 Authorize Rites to Bless Relationships](#) (see below), proposes adding two (2) liturgies to the “[Enriching Our Worship](#)” series.

(<https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21231>). The 78th General Convention authorized for use “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” as revised from the liturgy first authorized by the 77th General Convention. That liturgy has been published in Liturgical Resources 1, and the Task Force recommends that it now be added to the “[Enriching Our Worship](#)” series.

The Task Force proposes a second liturgy for inclusion in the “[Enriching Our Worship](#)” series, “The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship”, responding to study of contemporary trends and the expressed experiences of Episcopalians who desire to form and formalize a lifelong, monogamous and unconditional relationship, other than marriage, in particular circumstances. The Task Force has adapted this liturgy from “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, recognizing that a rite that closely resembles marriage could create civil legal difficulties for some couples. Both liturgies appear in the Supplemental Materials section of this report.

As the Task Force on the Study of Marriage studied trends in marriage today and listened to the experiences of Episcopalians, the Task Force heard a desire that “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” be available throughout The Episcopal Church for:

1. Couples who desire to form and to formalize a relationship that is monogamous, unconditional, and lifelong, but is nevertheless something different than a marriage in that it does not include the merging of property, finances, or other legal encumbrances. In this, they have in mind the needs and rights of children of a former marriage; a desire to honor the work and intention of their former spouse; a need to maintain their ability to uphold the financial obligations and commitments of their household; and a desire to maintain their ability to support themselves with shelter, food, and health care, recognizing that a new marriage would cut off the benefits they receive from their former spouse, and if their subsequent marriage should end in death or divorce, they would be left without any pension or health care.
2. Couples for whom the requirement to furnish identification to obtain a marriage license could result in civil legal penalties including deportation, because of their immigration status. The Task Force on the Study of Marriage has revised “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant,” recognizing that a rite that closely resembles marriage could create civil legal difficulties for some couples. The proposed liturgy, “The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship,” would be included in the “[Enriching Our Worship](#)” series. The Task Force strongly encourages couples contemplating using this rite for a blessing of their relationship to seek civil legal counsel before the celebration.

3. The third proposed resolution, [Ao87 Develop Relationship Pastoral Resources](#) (see below), recognizes the rising rate and number of U. S. adults in sexually intimate relationships other than marriage and calls for the development of resources that provide spiritual, teaching and pastoral guidance for these relationships.

Proposed Resolutions

RESOLUTION Ao85 TRIAL USE OF MARRIAGE LITURGIES

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention, in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canons II.3.6, authorize for trial use as additions to The Book of Common Prayer (to be inserted following page 438) “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage,” “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage 2,” and “An Order for Marriage 2” (as revised and appended to the report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 79th General Convention), beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2018; and be it further,

Resolved, That paragraph 1 of “Concerning the Service” regarding “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage” (Book of Common Prayer page 422) be amended for trial use in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6 to read as follows:

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between ~~a man and a woman~~ two people in the presence of God. In The Episcopal Church it is required that one (1), at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two (2) witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the Canons of this Church. And be it further

Resolved, That the following Preface for Marriage 2 be authorized for trial use as an addition to The Book of Common Prayer (to be inserted on page 349) in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6:

Because in the marriage of two (2) people in faithful love, thou dost reveal unto us the joy and abundant life thou sharest with thy Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost. And be it further

Resolved, That the following Preface for Marriage 2 be authorized for trial use as an addition to The Book of Common Prayer (to be inserted on page 381) in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canons II.3.6:

Because in the marriage of two (2) people in faithful love, you reveal the joy and abundant life you share with your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And be it further

Resolved, That the section “Other Sacramental Rites” in “An Outline of the Faith commonly called the Catechism” in The Book of Common Prayer (page 861) be amended for trial use in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canons II.3.6 to read as follows:

Q. What is Holy Matrimony?

A. Holy Matrimony is Christian marriage, in which two (2) ~~people the woman and man~~ enter into a life-long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows.

Q. What is required of those to be married?

A. It is required of those to be married that at least one (1) member of the couple be baptized and that they have been instructed that Christian marriage is an unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful and lifelong commitment intended for the couple's mutual joy, for the help and comfort given to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. And be it further

Resolved, That these additions and alterations to The Book of Common Prayer authorized for trial use by this Convention are understood to be for the period between the 79th and 80th General Conventions, with the option to 1) extend the period of trial use, 2) adopt on second reading, without amendment, these materials as additions/alterations to The Book of Common Prayer; or 3) take some other course of action as determined by the 80th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That these alterations and additions be published in "Liturgical Resources 2" (as appended to the report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage); and be it further

Resolved, That bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision, will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have reasonable and convenient access to these trial liturgies; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops continue the work of leading the Church in comprehensive engagement with these materials and continue to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the provision of Canon I.18.7 applies by extension to these liturgies authorized for trial use, namely, "It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage"; and be it further

Resolved, That the provisions of Canon I.19.3 regarding marriage after divorce apply equally to these liturgies authorized for trial use, in accordance with guidelines established by each diocese; and be it further

Resolved, That this Church continue to honor theological diversity in regard to matters of human sexuality; and that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her theological support for or objection to the 79th General Convention's action pertaining to this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That in accordance with Article X of the Constitution, notice of this resolution “be sent within six (6) months to the Secretary of the Convention of every Diocese, to be made known to the Diocesan Convention at its next meeting”; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention direct the Secretary of General Convention and the Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer, in consultation with the outgoing Chair of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage and the Chairs of the Legislative Committees to whom this legislation is referred, to finalize and arrange with Church Publishing for the publication (in English, Spanish, and French) of the material contained in “Liturgical Resources 2” as approved by the 79th General Convention; the General Convention Office to make these materials available electronically at no cost no later than the first Sunday of Advent 2018.

EXPLANATION

For over forty (40) years The Episcopal Church has been discussing the place of same-sex couples in its common life. During this time, some dioceses and congregations gradually began offering liturgical blessings of the lifelong monogamous relationships of same-sex couples. In 2000, the General Convention adopted Resolution D039 (subsequently reaffirmed by successive General Conventions) expressing the Church’s understanding and expectation that marriage and other life-long committed relationships “will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.”

The 2012 General Convention authorized liturgical resources for “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” (Resolution 2012-A049), and three (3) years later the 2015 General Convention authorized the trial use of two (2) liturgies for marriage, available for use by all couples (“The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2”), as well as the continued use of “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” (Resolution 2015-A054).

With the June 2015 United States Supreme Court decision permitting the civil marriage of same-sex couples anywhere in the United States, same-sex couples have been able to have their marriages solemnized in domestic dioceses of The Episcopal Church in conformity with both the laws of the State and the Canons of the Church (Canon I.18.1). “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” allows the blessing of same-sex couples in civil jurisdictions where their marriage is not permitted by civil law, and authorization for use of this liturgy is not changed by these provisions for trial use of liturgies for marriage.

In a survey of U.S. dioceses in 2017, the Task Force on the Study of Marriage learned that ninety-three (93) Bishops with jurisdiction authorized the trial use of the marriage liturgies. Seventy-three (73) of those bishops authorized their use with no conditions. Twenty (20) bishops authorized their use with some conditions. Of those twenty (20), twelve (12) required Vestry approvals, two (2) required Vestry approval and permission of the Bishop, one (1) required approval of the Bishop, two (2) required a parish discernment process and three (3) authorized only one of the available rites. Eight (8) bishops did not allow the trial use of the marriage liturgies. These liturgies have been widely used throughout the Church, and this resolution brings these liturgies before this Convention for continued trial use, with additional proposed revisions of The Book of Common Prayer [BCP].

This resolution authorizes additions to the Book of Common Prayer, including,

1. Two (2) liturgies for marriage available to all couples: “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2”
2. “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage 2”
3. “An Order for Marriage 2,” a flexible order of service similar to “An Order for Marriage” in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (pp. 435-36).

These liturgical materials would be authorized for trial use in accordance with Article X of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church and Canon II.3.6. “Trial use” means that the Church is considering these for inclusion in The Book of Common Prayer. To be added to the Prayer Book, two (2) successive General Conventions must authorize the liturgies in identical form. As additions to the Prayer Book, these liturgies would not replace the current BCP liturgies “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage,” “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage,” and “An Order for Marriage.”

Canon II. 3.6(a) allows General Convention to specify any special terms or conditions under which such trial use shall be carried out. This resolution requires bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority (or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision) to make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have reasonable and convenient access to these trial liturgies.

During the period of trial use, the liturgies and other revised materials would be published in “Liturgical Resources 2,” but they would not appear in new printings of The Book of Common Prayer. The 80th General Convention, in 2021, could 1) extend the period of trial use, 2) adopt these additions and alterations, at which time they would be added to future printings of the BCP or 3) determine some other course of action.

In addition to the liturgies to be added to The Book of Common Prayer, this resolution would change one (1) rubric and add one (1) liturgical text in order to recognize marriage between same-sex couples. The description of marriage in the section “Concerning the Service” (BCP p. 422) would be revised to state that marriage is a covenant between “two people” rather than between “a man and a woman.” An additional Proper Preface for use at a nuptial Eucharist is proposed for both Rite I and Rite II.

The Catechism would also be revised to state that Christian marriage involves “two people,” rather than “the man and the woman.” A second question about marriage would be added (just as a second question about Confirmation explains the requirements of those to be confirmed) to indicate the Canonical requirements for marriage, including instruction in the purposes of Christian marriage.

This resolution provides guidance for implementing trial use. Given that we are now considering revision of The Book of Common Prayer, it is important as ever that bishops provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of the Church and that they lead the Church in engaging with these materials. The provisions acknowledging that any member of the clergy may decline to solemnize or bless a marriage (Canon I.18.7) and that the provisions regarding marriage after divorce (Canon I.19.3) apply to the use of the trial liturgies were also in the 2015 Resolution, along with an assurance that no one in the Church, lay person, bishop, priest, or deacon, shall suffer any coercion or penalty because of theological support for or opposition to the blessing or marriage of same-sex couples.

The final resolve provides the mechanism for publishing and making this material available to the Church.

RESOLUTION A086 AUTHORIZE RITES TO BLESS RELATIONSHIPS

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention authorize “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” (as appended to the report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage), authorized for use by the 78th General Convention, to be added to the “Enriching Our Worship” series, for use in jurisdictions of the Episcopal Church in which 1) the couple desiring marriage are of the same sex; and 2) the civil jurisdiction in which the marriage would occur does not allow marriage of same-sex persons; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention authorize “The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship” (as appended to the report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage) for inclusion in the “Enriching Our Worship” series; and be it further

Resolved, That “The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship” shall not be used for mere convenience. It may be used 1) by couples who desire to form and to formalize a relationship with one another that is monogamous, unconditional and lifelong, but is nevertheless something different than a marriage in that it does not include the merging of property, finances or other legal encumbrances; and 2) by couples for whom the requirement to furnish identification to obtain a marriage license could result in legal penalties including deportation, because of their immigration status; and be it further

Resolved, That these rites are to be used under the direction of a bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority; and be it further

Resolved, That it shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to officiate at any rite of blessing defined herein; and be it further

Resolved, That this Church continue to honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality, and that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her conscientious objection to or support for these rites; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention direct the Secretary of General Convention and the Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer, in consultation with the outgoing Chair of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage and the Chairs of the Legislative Committees to whom this legislation is referred, to finalize and arrange with Church Publishing for the publication (in English, Spanish, and French) of the material contained in “Enriching Our Worship” as approved by the 79th General Convention; the General Convention Office to make these materials available electronically at no cost no later than the first Sunday of Advent 2018.

EXPLANATION

In response to Resolution 2009-C056, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” as a rite for blessing same-sex relationships. The rite was authorized for use by the 2012 General Convention (Resolution 2012-A049), then revised and authorized for use by the 2015 General Convention (Resolution 2015-A054). This rite is intended for use only in jurisdictions of The Episcopal Church in which 1) the couple desiring marriage are of the same sex; and 2) the civil jurisdiction in which the marriage would occur does not allow marriage of same-sex persons. This resolution proposes that this rite be included in the Enriching Our Worship series.

RESOLUTION A087 DEVELOP RELATIONSHIP PASTORAL RESOURCES

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That the 79th General Convention acknowledge and minister to the growing number of persons entering into sexually intimate relationships other than marriage by calling for the development of resources that provide pastoral guidance and teaching on relationships that involve sexual expression; and be it further

Resolved, That the following statement guide the development of these resources: “Qualities of relationship that ground in faithfulness the expression of sexual intimacy include: fidelity, monogamy, commitment, mutual affection, mutual respect, careful and honest communication, physical maturity, emotional maturity, mutual consent, and the holy love which enables those in intimate relationships to see in each other the image of God”; and be it further

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention provide guidance to persons seeking to honor God’s call in all aspects of their lives by calling for the development of resources, including but not limited to spiritual practices, to aid individuals and couples in discerning their vocation to relationship, be it to singleness, celibacy, marriage and/or parenting; and be it further

Resolved, That the Presiding Officers of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies appoint jointly a task force to develop these resources; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force report and offer these resources to the 80th General Convention for their consideration; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

In 2016, the number of U.S. adults in cohabiting relationships was eighteen (18) million persons. This represents an increase in cohabiters of twenty-nine (29) percent over a nine (9) year period. In 2016, persons aged fifty (50) and older accounted for twenty-three (23) percent of cohabiters, or roughly 4.1 million persons. This represents a seventy-five (75) percent increase in older cohabiters over a nine (9) year period.* Over the past fifty (50) years cohabitation in the U.S. has increased nearly nine hundred (900) percent.** Clearly the number of persons in sexually intimate relationships outside of marriage is increasing rapidly. Yet when it comes to nuanced and sensitive guidance and teaching regarding sexual intimacy, many people feel largely alone, having found the Church’s counsel to remain sexually abstinent outside of marriage, insufficient and unreflective of their experience of the holy in relationship. This resolution calls on the church to develop resources that provide pastoral guidance and teaching on relationships that involve sexual expression. These resources may be used by individuals or couples, they may be used by Church small groups or in college chaplaincies, they may be used by middle-aged or mature Christians who are seeking guidance and direction as they seek to live in a way that is both faithful to God and expressive of the love and commitment they deeply feel.

In the work of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in this triennium, a number of qualities have come to the fore that ground the expression of sexual intimacy in faithfulness. This resolution directs a task force to use these qualities as a foundation to guide the development of pastoral guidance and teaching on relationships that involve sexual expression.

God's call pervades all aspects of our lives, including our relationships. We may have a vocation to a state of relationship, be it singleness, celibacy or marriage; we may be called to form particular relationships with specific people, as God called Joseph, Guardian of Our Lord, to be Mary's husband (Matthew 1:18-25). Parenthood was once taken for granted as an inseparable part of marriage, but is now a choice—one that can sometimes involve the physically, emotionally, and financially costly processes of adoption or assisted reproduction. As with any vocation, God's call to relationship requires careful, ongoing discernment. Also, God's call to us can change over the course of our lives. A person called to singleness as a young adult may be called to marriage in middle age, or a person called to marriage may be called to singleness after the death of a spouse. This resolution would lead to the creation of resources, including spiritual practices of listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit, that can be used by individuals and couples, with the help of their faith communities, to discern their vocation to relationship.

* Pew Research Center: "Number of U.S. adults cohabiting with a partner continues to rise, especially among those 50 and older. Renee Stepler. April 6, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/number-of-u-s-adults-cohabiting-with-a-partner-continues-to-rise-especially-among-those-50-and-older/> last accessed November 11, 2017.

** Reports to the 79th General Convention, otherwise known as the 2015 Blue Book Reports. Report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage: Essay 7, Section 5. Page 575.

Continuance Recommendation

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage has faithfully fulfilled the charges given its iterations over two (2) triennia. The doctrine and practice of marriage and other relationships marked by sexual intimacy may never be settled once and for all and will need continuous attention. Full marriage equality for same-sex couples will not be complete until the liturgies for marriage reflect gender neutrality and are added to the Book of Common Prayer. Positioning these liturgies in other liturgical resources continues to send the message of separate and not equal to LGBTQ+. Continued study and monitoring of the implementation and use of the trial liturgies to their inclusion in the Book of Common Prayer is necessary to reach the full measure of inclusion. The Task Force suggests that existing interim bodies are well equipped to see the work of the past forty (40) years through to its conclusion.

End Notes

"I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing," Liturgical Resources 1 (Church Publishing, 2012), includes the liturgy and other resources for blessing same-sex relationships that the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed during the 2009-2012 triennium. The revised and expanded edition (Church Publishing, 2015) includes the liturgies for marriage authorized for trial use by the 2015 General Convention.

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As presented to the 79th General Convention, 2018

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I. Introduction

The materials in this volume were developed by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music between 2009 and 2015, by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage appointed after the 2012 General Convention, and by an expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage appointed after the 2015 General Convention. The rites of “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” were first authorized for trial use in 2015 by the 78th General Convention.

Liturgical Resources

In 2009, the General Convention of The Episcopal Church directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) to “collect and develop theological and liturgical resources” for blessing same-sex relationships (Resolution 2009-Co56). The commission developed “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant,” which the 2012 General Convention authorized for provisional use (Resolution 2012-A049).

During the next triennium (2012-2015), the SCLM prepared an adaptation of the 2012 liturgy that can be used for the marriage of any couple (“The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage”), as well as “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” a gender-neutral adaptation of the marriage rite in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. The 2015 General Convention authorized both liturgies for trial use. The same convention revised the marriage canon to allow clergy to solemnize a marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by The Episcopal Church (Canon I.18.1).

Resolution 2015-A037 directed the expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage, in consultation with the SCLM, to study and monitor the impact of the marriage of same-sex couples on The Episcopal Church, and to make recommendations to the 79th General Convention. The task force heard concerns about “separate but equal” rites, that is, that rites not included in *The Book of Common Prayer* are not of equal status with those that are. Accordingly, the task force recommends that the 79th General Convention authorize these liturgies for trial use as additions to *The Book of Common Prayer*.

In order to recognize marriage between same-sex couples, the task force also proposes a revision of the rubric “Concerning the Service” of The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, along with an additional Proper Preface for Marriage, for use in eucharistic prayers (Rite I and Rite II) at a nuptial eucharist. In addition, the task force proposes a revision to the Catechism to state that Christian marriage involves two people, rather than specifying a man and a woman, and adds a question

concerning the requirements for those seeking to be married in The Episcopal Church, similar to a question about the requirements for those to be confirmed.

Essays

As the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed liturgical resources for blessing same-sex relationships, it faced repeated questions about marriage. In response, the commission recommended to the 2012 General Convention the creation of a task force on the study of marriage. The task force that convened from 2012-2015 addressed the question, “What might The Episcopal Church have to say to today’s world as to what makes a marriage Christian and holy?” Their research and reflection led to seven essays, which were presented to the 2015 General Convention.

The task force identified a number of contemporary trends and norms in marriage and family life, and the 2015 General Convention directed an expanded task force to continue to study those trends and norms. This latter task force developed a series of short essays to invite reflection about marriage and human sexuality, along with a list of resources for further study. The collections of essays from both task forces (2012-2015 and 2015-2018) are included in this volume.

The 2015 General Convention also directed the expanded task force to study the debate about clergy acting as “agents of the state” at marriages. In response, the task force prepared an essay that includes historical background and contemporary perspectives, and concludes with a suggestion to consider clergy as “agents of the couple,” acting as advocates for those entering both the sacred and civil commitments of marriage.

A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage created in 2012 began its work by created a toolkit for the study of marriage that was released in June 2014. An updated version of the toolkit was included in the report of the task force to the 2015 General Convention, and the convention requested that congregations and dioceses use the toolkit.

Pastoral Resources

The material for premarital preparation was originally developed as part of the resources for blessing same-sex relationships prepared by the SCLM during the 2009-2012 triennium. It has been revised to be suitable for use with any couple preparing for marriage. While Canon I.18.3(c) requires that couples be instructed “in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage,” the use of these resources for preparation is not required.

Conclusion

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage offers this material to The Episcopal Church in the hopes that these resources will enable us as Christians to deepen our understanding of marriage and will strengthen our witness to the Gospel.

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage
December 2017

II. LITURGICAL RESOURCES proposed for trial use

as presented to the 79th General Convention

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* Prepared by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, 2015-2018

** Prepared by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, 2012-2015

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

Concerning the Service

Note: This paragraph is proposed for trial use as an amendment of paragraph 1, Concerning the Service, BCP p. 422.

Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between two people in the presence of God. In The Episcopal Church it is required that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2

Concerning the Service

At least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian; the ceremony must be attested by at least two witnesses; and the marriage must conform to the laws of the State.

A priest or a bishop normally presides at the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing the nuptial blessing, and of celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the charge, ask for the Declaration of Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

Where it is permitted by civil law that deacons may perform marriages, and no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may use the service which follows, omitting the nuptial blessing which follows The Prayers.

It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay persons.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of *N. N.*), the full names of the persons to be married are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

Additional Directions are on page xxx.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2

At the time appointed, the persons to be married, with their witnesses, assemble in the church or some other appropriate place.

During their entrance, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Then the Celebrant, facing the people and the persons to be married, addresses the congregation and says

Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of N. and N. in Holy Matrimony. The joining of two people in a life of mutual fidelity signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and so it is worthy of being honored among all people.

The union of two people in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the gift of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Into this holy union N. N. and N. N. now come to be joined.

If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

Then the Celebrant says to the persons to be married

I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of you knows any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully, and in accordance with God's Word, you do now confess it.

The Declaration of Consent

The Celebrant says to one member of the couple, then to the other

N., will you have this woman/man/person to be your wife/husband/spouse; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Answer I will.

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?

People We will.

If there is to be a presentation or a giving in marriage, it takes place at this time.

See Additional Directions, p. xxx.

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may follow.

The Ministry of the Word

The Celebrant then says to the people

People The Lord be with you.
 And also with you.
Celebrant Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have created humankind in your image: Look mercifully upon N. and N. who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. Other readings from Scripture suitable for the occasion may be used. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.

Genesis 1:26–28 (*Male and female he created them*)
Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7 (*Many waters cannot quench love*)
Tobit 8:5b–8 (*New English Bible*) (*That she and I may grow old together*)

1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (*Love is patient and kind*)
Ephesians 3:14–19 (*The Father from whom every family is named*)
Ephesians 5:1–2 (*Walk in love, as Christ loved us*)
Colossians 3:12–17 (*Love which binds everything together in harmony*)
1 John 4:7–16 (*Let us love one another, for love is of God*)

Between the Readings, a psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are Psalm 67, Psalm 127, and Psalm 128.

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says

People The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to_____.
 Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Matthew 5:1–10 (*The Beatitudes*)
Matthew 5:13–16 (*You are the light ... Let your light so shine*)
Matthew 7:21, 24–29 (*Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock*)
John 15:9–12 (*Love one another as I have loved you*)

After the Gospel, the Reader says

People The Gospel of the Lord.
 Praise to you, Lord Christ.

A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

The Marriage

Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the right hand of the other and says

In the Name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband/spouse,
to have and to hold from this day forward,

for better for worse, for richer for poorer,
in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
until we are parted by death.
This is my solemn vow.

The Priest may ask God's blessing on rings as follows

Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows
by which N. and N. have bound themselves to each other;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The giver places the ring on the ring finger of the other's hand and says

N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow,
and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you,
in the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit [or in the Name of God].

Then the Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says

Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows,
with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings,
I pronounce that they are wed to one another,
in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People Amen.

The Prayers

All standing, the Celebrant says

Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

People and Celebrant

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following prayers, to which the People respond, saying, Amen. If there is not to be a Communion, one or more of the prayers may be omitted.

Leader

Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially upon N. and N. whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony. *Amen.*

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. *Amen.*

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their life. *Amen.*

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. *Amen.*

Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. *Amen.*

Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. *Amen.*

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. *Amen.*

Grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. *Amen.*

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Blessing of the Marriage

The People remain standing. The couple kneel, and the Priest says one of the following prayers

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of two people in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon N. and N. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

or this

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The couple still kneeling, the Priest adds this blessing

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. Amen.

The Peace

The Celebrant may say to the People

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People

And also with you.

The newly married couple then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the wedding party leaves the church. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

At the Eucharist

The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the newly married couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Preface of Marriage 2, or of the Season

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly married couple receive Communion first, after the ministers.

In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious:
We give you thanks for binding us together
in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood
of your Son Jesus Christ.
Grant that by your Holy Spirit,
N. and N., now joined in Holy Matrimony,
may become one in heart and soul,
live in fidelity and peace,
and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the wedding party leaves the church, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Additional Directions for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2

If Banns are to be published, the following form is used

I publish the Banns of Marriage between N. N. of _____ and N. N. of _____.

If any of you know just cause why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are bidden to declare it. This is the first [or second, or third] time of asking.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (2) may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist. This service then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

After the Declaration of Consent, if there is to be a giving in marriage, or presentation, the Celebrant asks,

Who presents [gives] these two people to be married to each other?

The appropriate answer is, “I do.” If more than one person responds, they do so together.

For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple to be married remain where they may conveniently hear the reading of Scripture. They may approach the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the Blessing of the Marriage.

It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may be provided for the wedding party, so that all may be seated for the Lessons and the homily.

The Apostles’ Creed may be recited after the Lessons, or after the homily, if there is one.

When desired, some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of the ring.

At the Offertory, it is desirable that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by the newly married persons. They may then remain before the Lord’s Table and receive Holy Communion before other members of the congregation.

The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage

Concerning the Service

This rite is appropriately celebrated in the context of the Holy Eucharist and may take place at the principal Sunday Liturgy. This rite then replaces the Ministry of the Word. A bishop or priest normally presides. Parallel texts from *Enriching Our Worship 1* are included as options for elements of this rite.

At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian, and the marriage shall conform to the laws of the state and canons of this church.

Two or more presenters, who may be friends, parents, family members, or drawn from the local assembly, may present the couple to the presider and the assembly.

As indicated in the opening address, the consent, and the blessing of the rings, the rite may be modified for use with a couple who have previously made a lifelong commitment to one another.

The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage

The Word of God

Gathering

The couple joins the assembly.

A hymn of praise, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played. The

Presider says the following, the People standing

Presider	Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People	Blessed be God, now and for ever. Amen.

In place of the above may be said

Presider	Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.
People	Glory to God for ever and ever.

From Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Presider	Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People	The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In place of the above may be said

Presider	Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People	Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Then may be said

Presider	Beloved, let us love one another,
People	For love is of God.
Presider	Whoever does not love does not know God,
People	For God is love.
Presider	Since God so loves us,
People	Let us love one another.

The Presider may address the assembly in these words

Dear friends in Christ, or Dearly beloved,
in the name of God and the Church
we have come together today with N. N. and N. N.,
to witness the vows they make,
committing themselves to one another

in marriage [according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction of X].
 Forsaking all others,
 they will bind themselves to one another
 in a covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love,
 remaining true to one another in heart, body, and mind,
 as long as they both shall live.

The lifelong commitment of marriage
 is not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly,
 but responsibly and with reverence.
 Let us pray, then, that God will give them the strength
 to remain steadfast in what they vow this day.
 Let us also pray for the generosity
 to support them in the commitment they undertake
 and for the wisdom to see God at work in their life together.

Or this, for those who have previously made a lifelong commitment to one another

Dear friends in Christ, or Dearly beloved,
 in the name of God and the Church
 we have come together today with N. N. and N. N.
 to witness the sacred vows they make this day
 as they are married
 [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X],
 and reaffirm their commitment to one another.
 Forsaking all others,
 they will renew their covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love,
 remaining true to one another in heart, body, and mind,
 as long as they both shall live.

Let us pray, then, that God will give them the strength
 to remain steadfast in what they vow this day.
 Let us also pray for the generosity
 to support them in the commitment they undertake,
 and for the wisdom to see God at work in their life together.

The Collect of the Day

<i>Presider</i>	The Lord be with you.	or	God be with you.
<i>People</i>	And also with you.		
<i>Presider</i>	Let us pray.		

The Presider says one of the following Collects

God of abundance:
 assist by your grace N. and N.,
 whose covenant of love and fidelity we witness this day.
 Grant them your protection, that with firm resolve
 they may honor and keep the vows they make;
 through Jesus Christ our Savior,

who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

or this

Almighty and everliving God:
look tenderly upon N. and N.,
who stand before you in the company of your Church.
Let their life together bring them great joy.
Grant them so to love selflessly and live humbly,
that they may be to one another and to the world
a witness and a sign of your never-failing love and care;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, to the ages of ages. Amen.

or this

O God, faithful and true,
whose steadfast love endures for ever:
we give you thanks for sustaining N. and N. in the life they share
and for bringing them to this day.
Nurture them and fill them with joy in their life
together, continuing the good work you have begun in
them;
and grant us, with them, a dwelling place eternal in the heavens
where all your people will share the joy of perfect love,
and where you, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

or this, for those who bring children

Holy Trinity, one God,
three Persons perfect in unity and equal in majesty:
Draw together with bonds of love and affection
N. and N., who with *their families*
seek to live in harmony and forbearance all their days,
that their joining together will be to us
a reflection of that perfect communion
which is your very essence and life,
O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
who live and reign in glory everlasting. Amen.

The Lessons

The people sit. Then one or more of the following passages of Scripture is read. If the Holy Communion is to be celebrated, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the Readings. When the blessing is celebrated in the context of the Sunday Eucharist, the Readings of the Sunday are used, except with the permission of the Bishop.

Ruth 1:16–17
1 Samuel 18:1b, 3; 20:16–17; 42a;
or 1 Samuel 18:1–4

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7
Micah 4:1–4

Romans 12:9–18

1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13

2 Corinthians 5:17–20

Galatians 5:14, 22–26

Ephesians 3:14–21

Colossians 3:12–17

1 John 3:18–24

1 John 4:7–16, 21

When a biblical passage other than one from the Gospels is to be read, the Reader announces it with these words

Reader A Reading from _____.

After the Reading, the Reader may say

 The Word of the Lord.
or Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.
or Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

People Thanks be to God.

Between the Readings, a psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are Psalm 65, Psalm 67, Psalm 85:7–13, Psalm 98, Psalm 100, Psalm 126, Psalm 127, Psalm 133, Psalm 148, and Psalm 149:1–5.

Appropriate passages from the Gospels are

Matthew 5:1–16

Mark 12:28–34

Luke 6:32–38

John 15:9–17

John 17:1–2, 18–26

All standing, the Deacon or Priest reads the Gospel, first saying

 The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to_____.
or The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to_____.

People Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

 The Gospel of the Lord.
People Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

The Witnessing of the Vows and the Blessing of the Covenant

The couple comes before the assembly. If there is to be a presentation, the presenters stand with the couple, and the Presider says to them

Presider Who presents N. and N., as they seek the blessing of God and the Church on their love and life together?

Presenters We do.

Presider Will you love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and do all in your power to stand with them in the life they will share?

Presenters We will.

The Presider then addresses the couple, saying

N. and N., you have come before God and the Church to exchange *and renew* solemn vows

with one another and to ask God's blessing.

The Presider addresses one member of the couple, saying

Presider N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?

Answer I do.

Presider Will you *continue* to live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?

Answer I will, with God's help.

The Presider addresses the other member of the couple, saying

Presider N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?

Answer I do.

Presider Will you *continue* to live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?

Answer I will, with God's help.

The assembly stands, the couple faces the People, and the Presider addresses them, saying

Presider Will all of you gathered to witness these vows do all in your power to uphold and honor this couple in the covenant they make?

People We will.

Presider Will you pray for them, especially in times of trouble, and celebrate with them in times of joy?

People We will.

The Prayers

The Presider then introduces the prayers

Presider Then let us pray for N. and N. in their life together and for the concerns of this community.

A Deacon or another leader bids prayers for the couple.

Prayers for the Church and for the world, for the concerns of the local community, for those who suffer or face trouble, and for the departed are also appropriate. If the rite takes place in the principal Sunday worship of the congregation, the rubric concerning the Prayers of the People on page 359 of the Book of Common Prayer is followed.

Adaptations or insertions may be made to the form that follows. A bar in the margin indicates a bidding that may be omitted.

Leader For N. and N., seeking your blessing and the blessing of your holy people;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For a spirit of loving-kindness to shelter them all their days;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For friends to support them and communities to enfold them;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For peace in their home and love in their family;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For the grace and wisdom to care for the children you entrust to them [or may entrust to them];

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For the honesty to acknowledge when they hurt each other, and the humility to seek each other's forgiveness and yours;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For the outpouring of your love through their work and witness;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For the strength to keep the vows each of us has made;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

The leader may add one or more of the following biddings

Leader For all who have been reborn and made new in the waters of Baptism;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For those who lead and serve in communities of faith;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For those who seek justice, peace, and concord among nations;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For those who are sick or suffering, homeless or poor;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For victims of violence and those who inflict it;

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

Leader For communion with all who have died [especially those whom we remember this day: _____];

Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People Hear our prayer.

The Presider concludes the Prayers with the following or another appropriate Collect

Giver of every gift, source of all goodness,
hear the prayers we bring before you for N. and N., who
seek your blessing this day.
Strengthen them as they share in the saving work of Jesus, and
bring about for them and for all you have created
the fullness of life he promised,
who now lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

If the Eucharist is to follow, the Lord's Prayer is omitted here.

Leader As our Savior Christ has taught us,
we now pray,
People Our Father in heaven,
and hallowed be your Name,
Leader your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us,
we are bold to say,
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

N. and N. have shown to one another and the world
their love and faithfulness.

Bless now these rings, that from this day forward
they may be signs of the vows N. and N. have exchanged
in your presence and in the communion of your Church,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement

The Presider joins the right hands of the couple and says

Now that N. and N. have exchanged vows of love and fidelity
in the presence of God and the Church,
I pronounce that they are married
[according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X].
and bound to one another
as long as they both shall live. Amen.

Blessing of the Couple

As the couple stands or kneels, the Presider invokes God's blessing upon them, saying

Let us pray.

Most gracious God,
we praise you for the tender mercy and unfailing
care revealed to us in Jesus the Christ
and for the great joy and comfort bestowed upon
us in the gift of human love.
We give you thanks for N. and N.,
and the covenant of faithfulness they have made.
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit upon them.
Keep them in your steadfast love;
protect them from all danger;
fill them with your wisdom and peace;
lead them in holy service to each other and the world.

The Presider continues with one of the following

God the Father,
God the Son,
God the Holy Spirit,
bless, preserve, and keep you
and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace,
that you may please God in body and soul.
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity
manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior,
and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet,
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

or this

God, the holy and undivided Trinity,
bless, preserve, and keep you,

and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace,
that you may please God in body and soul.
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity
manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior,
and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet,
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

The Peace

The Presider bids the Peace.

Presider The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

In place of the above may be said

Presider The peace of Christ be always with you.
People And also with you.

*The liturgy continues with the Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is not celebrated, the Presider blesses the people.
The Deacon, or in the absence of a Deacon, the Priest, dismisses them.*

At the Eucharist

The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

The following proper preface may be said

Because in the giving of two people to each other in faithful love
you reveal the joy and abundant life you share
with your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The following postcommunion prayer may be said

God our strength and joy,
we thank you for the communion of our life together,
for the example of holy love that you give us in N. and N.,
and for the Sacrament of the Body and Blood
of our Savior Jesus Christ.
Grant that it may renew our hope
and nourish us for the work you set before us
to witness to the presence of Christ in the world,
through the power of your Spirit,
and to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Blessing of a Civil Marriage 2

The rite begins as prescribed for celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, using the Collect and Lessons appointed in the Marriage service.

After the Gospel (and homily), the couple stand before the Celebrant, who addresses them in these or similar words

N. and N., you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and of his Church upon your marriage. I require, therefore, that you promise, with the help of God, to fulfill the obligations which Christian Marriage demands.

The Celebrant then addresses one member of the couple, then the other, saying

N., you have taken N. to be your wife/husband/spouse. Do you promise to love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, to be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Answer I do.

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will you who have witnessed these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?

People We will.

If rings are to be blessed, the members of the couple extend their hands toward the Priest [or Bishop], who says

Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows by which N. and N. have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People Amen.

The service continues with The Prayers on page xxx.

An Order for Marriage 2

If it is desired to celebrate a marriage otherwise than as provided on page 423 of The Book of Common Prayer, or in the trial-use liturgies “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” or “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” this Order is used.

Normally, the celebrant is a priest or bishop. Where permitted by civil law, and when no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may function as celebrant, but does not pronounce a nuptial blessing.

The laws of the State and the Canons of this Church having been complied with, the couple, together with their witnesses, families, and friends assemble in the church or in some other convenient place.

1. The teaching of the Church concerning Holy Matrimony, as it is declared in the formularies and Canons of this Church, is briefly stated.
2. The intention of the couple to enter the state of matrimony, and their free consent, is publicly ascertained.
3. One or more Readings, one of which is always from Holy Scripture, may precede the exchange of vows. If there is to be a Communion, a Reading from the Gospel is always included.
4. The vows are exchanged, using the following form In the Name of God,
 I, N., take you, N., to be my
 wife/husband/spouse, to have and to hold
 from this day forward,
 for better for worse, for richer for poorer,
 in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
 until we are parted by death.
 This is my solemn vow.
 or this
 I, N., take thee N., to my wedded
 wife/husband/spouse, to have and to hold from
 this day forward,
 for better for worse, for richer for poorer,
 in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
 till death us do part, according to God’s holy
 ordinance; and thereto I plight [or give] thee my
 troth.
5. The Celebrant declares the union of the couple, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
6. Prayers are offered for the couple, for their life together, for the Christian community, and for the world.
7. A priest or bishop pronounces a solemn blessing upon the couple.
8. If there is no Communion, the service concludes with the Peace, the couple first greeting each other. The Peace may be exchanged throughout the assembly.
9. If there is to be a Communion, the service continues with the Peace and the Offertory. The Holy Eucharist may be celebrated either according to Rite One or Rite Two, or according to the Order on page 401 of the Book of Common Prayer 1979.

Prefaces for Marriage

Note: The following Proper Preface is proposed for trial use as an addition to the Prefaces for Rite I, BCP p. 349.

Marriage 2

Because in the marriage of two people in faithful love thou dost reveal unto us the joy and abundant life thou sharest with thy Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost.

Note: The following Proper Preface is proposed for trial use as an addition to the Prefaces for Rite II, BCP p. 381.

Marriage 2

Because in the marriage of two people in faithful love you reveal the joy and abundant life you share with your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

An Outline of the Faith

Note: These paragraphs are proposed for trial use as an amendment of the section on Holy Matrimony in An Outline of the Faith (also known as the Catechism), BCP p. 861.

- Q. What is Holy Matrimony?
- A. Holy Matrimony is Christian marriage, in which two people enter into a life-long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows.
- Q. What is required of those to be married?
- A. It is required of those to be married that at least one member of the couple be baptized and that they have been instructed that Christian marriage is an unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful and lifelong commitment intended for the couple's mutual joy, for the help and comfort given to each other in prosperity and adversity, and when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God.

III. Essays: Christian Perspectives on Marriages and Family Life Today

prepared by the
Task Force on the Study of Marriage 2015-2018

Contents

Introduction: Christian Perspectives on Marriages and Family Life Today
Biblical and Theological Foundations for Relationships
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Introduction: Christian Perspectives on Marriages and Family Life Today

Six years ago, the 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church created a Task Force on the Study of Marriage charged with exploring “biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage,” and to “consider issues raised by changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures” (Resolution 2012-A050). The task force produced several essays, including one on “Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages.” In its executive summary, the task force reported:

The main issue that we identified for our reflection as a church has to do with the current drop in marriage rates, and for those who do marry, a delay until a later age than ever before.

Cohabitation, as a temporary option or alternative to marriage, is significantly on the rise.

The task force also explored “differences in marriage trends among groups identified by race and ethnicity: African Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans.”¹

The 2015 General Convention called for an expanded task force to continue this work, including further exploration of “those contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium,” and to “explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives on these matters, and develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church and which include responses from theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, social scientists, and educators who are not members of the expanded Task Force, and whose perspectives represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church” (Resolution 2015-A037).

The task force has responded to this charge by producing a series of short essays that are intended to invite reflection and conversation about marriage, intimate human relationships, and human sexuality from a Christian perspective. The essays in this series build on the essays produced by the earlier task force, and they rely on the data in the essay “Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages.”

In summer 2017, the task force sent first drafts of these essays to scholars, pastors, and educators and invited responses. The twenty replies we received informed the final revisions of the essays. A final essay lists the respondents and summarizes the critiques and suggestions that were not incorporated into the essays.

The task force also circulated a survey in fall 2016 that invited Episcopalians to tell us about their experiences of marriage and other intimate human relationships. We have incorporated a few of these responses in the essays to illustrate some of the realities of marriage, singleness, and family life in our contemporary contexts.

¹ Introduction, Appendix 1: Essays on Marriage, in Report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 78th General Convention (Reports to General Convention, 1976-2015, Archives of the Episcopal Church), p. 12, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/2015/bb_2015-R044.pdf (accessed 8/19/17). Essay 7, “Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages,” is on pp. 88-98 of the report. The essays are included below in their entirety.

We encourage congregations and other groups to discuss these essays. Several questions for reflection follow each essay, and a bibliography offers resources for further study.

Over the centuries, Anglicans have developed theology that is rooted in Scripture, draws upon the breadth of Christian tradition, and is in dialogue with its contemporary context. These brief essays seek to do the same. They offer a foundation for a Christian understanding of human relationships, and they explore how we understand God to be at work in the complexity of intimate human relationships, including marriage, in our time, in the various contexts in which the Episcopal Church is located today. We invite Episcopalians to join us in this theological reflection, seeking to understand the blessings of lifelong committed relationships and to discern how to respond pastorally to individuals and couples in the midst of changing social and cultural norms.

Biblical and Theological Foundations for Relationships

Even before we are born, we are in relationship, as God knits us together in our mother's womb (*Psalms 139:13*). We grow and develop in a network of relationships, including but not limited to family, friendship, and marriage. Because we are created in the image of God (*Genesis 1:27-28*), human beings are created for relationship.

Christians understand ourselves to be drawn into relationship with God and with one another through Christ. Faith in the incarnate Word awakens us to the promise of right relationship that is God's desire for all humankind.

"The heart of Christian faith is the encounter with the God of Jesus Christ who makes possible both our union with God and communion with each other. In this encounter God invites people to share in divine life and grace through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; at the same time, we are called to live in new relationship with one other, as we are gathered together by the Spirit into the body of Christ."¹

God's love is revealed in Jesus, the Word who became flesh and lived among us (*John 1:14*). From Jesus, we learn that loving God with our whole being is integrally connected with loving our neighbor as ourselves (*Matthew 22:36-40*). In his life and teaching, Jesus taught and embodied the love of neighbor commanded in Jewish Law (*Leviticus 19:18*). Jesus enacted God's self-giving love, for example, by feeding the multitudes (*Matthew 15:32-38*). After taking on the role of a servant and washing the feet of his disciples (*John 13:1-15*), Jesus then gave his disciples a new commandment: to love one another as he loved them (*John 13:34-35*).

Loving one another is not limited to family or the Christian community, as the Baptismal Covenant in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* indicates: "Will you seek and serve Christ in *all persons*, loving your

¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *Christian Century* (July 15-22, 1992), 679.

neighbor as yourself?” (p. 305) Love of neighbor requires concern for the whole human family: “Will you strive for justice and peace among *all people*, and respect the dignity of every *human being*?” (p. 305) The Baptismal Covenant thus calls us to a way of life that is not only loving but also liberating and life-giving.

We make these baptismal promises in response to the affirmation of faith (the Apostles’ Creed) that proclaims God’s mission of creating, redeeming, and sanctifying love for the world. Through baptism, we become members of a community of faith that recognizes God at work in the world, from the beginning of creation to the promised new creation, a community that extends through time as the communion of saints. Baptism signifies God’s claim on us as beloved children of God and marks us as Christ’s own (BCP p. 308). Our participation in baptism and eucharist sustains us in our relationships with people and communities throughout the world, and with all creation.²

While Christians strive to love as Christ loved us, following the way of Jesus is difficult. All too often Christians fall short as we wrestle with the evil powers of this world and our own sinful desires (BCP p. 302), as the Baptismal Covenant recognizes: “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” (BCP p. 304)

Like Christians today, the earliest Christian communities struggled to fulfill Jesus’ new commandment of love. Writing to the Christian community in Corinth, a community that was divided among themselves (*I Corinthians 1:11-12*), the apostle Paul exhorted them to recognize their unity in the body of Christ through baptism (*I Corinthians 12:12-13*), then called them to love one another. In a passage frequently read at wedding ceremonies, though originally intended for the entire Christian community at Corinth, Paul explained, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (*I Corinthians 13:4-7*)

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul made clear that our love for one another is to be a selfless love that is rooted in Christ’s incarnation. “Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who... emptied himself... being born in human likeness.” (*Philippians 2:2-7*) God’s self-giving love, revealed most especially in the incarnation, not only casts down the mighty, it also lifts up the lowly (*The Song of Mary, Luke 1:46-55*; see also *The Song of Hannah, I Samuel 2:1-10*).

It is evident in Jewish teaching that this love extends beyond our family and nearest neighbors. The Law of Moses states, “You also shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (*Deuteronomy 10:19*), a principle that Jesus extended in radical ways when he redefined his family not as those with whom he shared ties of blood but as those “who hear the word of God and do it” (*Luke*

² “Faith, Hope, and Love: Theological Resources for Blessing Same-Sex Relationships,” in “*I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing*,” Liturgical Resources 1, revised and expanded edition (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2015), 39-43.

8:21, also *Matthew 12:50 and Mark 3:35*) and taught that those who would be children of God must care at great personal cost for those whom they have been taught are unworthy of such attention (*Luke 10:25-37*).

Like all human beings, Christians do not always live in the way of love. Striving for power or position, jealousy, factionalism, destructive uses of substances, spiritual manipulation, and loveless or indiscriminate sexual behavior are just a few of the ways that relationships are distorted and sinful. When Christians fail to live in the way of love, they can seek forgiveness from one another, and from God, an essential part of baptismal living. Christians are able to acknowledge their faults and seek forgiveness through Jesus Christ, who makes known God's love and offers forgiveness of sins.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to be present among us, saving us from sin, seeking communion with us and all creation, drawing us toward the promised new creation. The fruit of the Spirit, the apostle Paul tells us, is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (*Galatians 5:22-23*). Those who live by the Spirit grow in holiness of life as they embody these qualities in their relationships, including marriage and family.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) Is there anything of Jesus' own character or teachings that has taught you something about "right relationship" in your life?
- 2) The church speaks of "communion with God and one another." In the Eucharist, do you sense a communion with God and other people? If so, what is that like? How has this affected how you are in relationship with others?
- 3) We are urged to "love and serve one another as Christ loved and served us." Can you think of times when Christ's example of love and service affected your love and service to others?
- 4) How have you tried to live out the Baptismal Covenant's call to "resist evil" in yourself and/or the world around you?
- 5) Do you sense a connection between God's forgiveness of you and your forgiving or being forgiven by others in relationship? If so, what is that like?

Culture, Ethnicity, and Marriage

Resolution 2015-A037 asked the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to “explore... differences in marriage patterns between ethnic and racial groups.”¹ An early effort to summarize data on marriage patterns among differing racial and ethnic groups ran into two insurmountable problems. First was the impossibility of including all the racial and ethnic groups present in The Episcopal Church.² Second, and more significant, was the overwhelmingly negative response from many on the Task Force, who found that this approach reinforced harmful, offensive stereotypes. Especially in a time of increased harassment of and hate crimes against non-white persons, we believed it was irresponsible and un-Christian to add to the burden of racism that people of color bear.³ A third important factor was that the Task Force had already addressed the data in the previous triennium. The Blue Book report of 2015 discussed varying relationship patterns among different groups throughout The Episcopal Church.⁴ Therefore, this essay takes up what was largely unexamined in 2015: the importance of understanding power and culture. We seek to offer the Church a tool that could be valuable to couples and to clergy ministering with them, and so we turned to the need for cultural competency among all people interacting with couples, including the partners themselves.

We start with the simple definition found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Culture is “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.” Culture is dynamic and fluid; elders and peers transmit culture to us across the span of our lifetimes. For our purposes, culture shapes the norms and expectations of individuals, couples, and families. Culture is one more element to consider during premarital counseling. A focus on culture might expand the work done with couples with respect to their family of origin. For couples in an interracial or inter-cultural relationship, and for families formed by interracial adoption, the development of cultural competency is both a product of the relationship and vital to its strength. A Swedish woman married to an American man says:

I’ve been married to the same man for 48½ years (½ is important according to my granddaughter), and we’ve had our ups and downs—some of the downs as a result of my

¹ Resolution 2015-A037, “Appoint an Expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage,” https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2015-A037 (accessed March 30, 2017). Some of the racial and ethnic differences in marriage patterns are explored in “Essay Seven: Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages,” *Essays on Marriage*, appendix to the Report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 78th General Convention (2015), 575-78, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/2015/bb_2015-R044.pdf (accessed March 30, 2017).

² Our denomination consists of congregations in more than a dozen countries, and the Task Force’s best efforts to solicit input from the whole Episcopal Church, in all its geographical, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity, unfortunately did not yield responses from Province IX.

³ Southern Poverty Law Center, “Hate Groups Increase for Second Consecutive Year as Trump Electrifies Radical Right,” February 15, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/02/15/hate-groups-increase-second-consecutive-year-trump-electrifies-radical-right> (accessed March 25, 2017).

⁴ Task Force on the Study of Marriage, Blue Book 2015, pp. 93ff, <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/12485.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2017).

massive culture shock when arriving in the US as a newly-wed in 1968....The only person I could be myself with was my husband...⁵

Everyone is part of a culture; it conditions what we think of as normal. For those who are part of a majority culture, their distinctive cultural identity may be unexamined, and all other cultures are thought of as “abnormal” or “other.” For some it may take time and encouragement to see and name their cultural heritage, especially for those who are accustomed to thinking of culture as something other people have, or who have limited experience with a diversity of cultures. Traveling to a different region or country can help us to see our own culture, as we recognize that “they do things differently here.” By encouraging couples and clergy to explore their cultures, we hope our work will be useful across all racial and ethnic groups.

Every marriage is a complex interplay of culture, family systems, and individual personalities. We offer these questions for couples to consider, for clergy to use when preparing couples for marriage or counseling married couples—really, for anyone to use in a variety of contexts in deepening their own cultural competency.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) What would you name as your culture or ethnicity? What makes you glad to be a part of that culture or ethnicity? What are the challenges of that culture or ethnicity? In what ways is your culture or ethnicity the same as that of your spouse, and in what ways is it different?
- 2) What norms and expectations of family relationship and marriage are familiar to you from your own family of origin, geography, and culture or ethnicity?
- 3) What have you learned from your culture or ethnicity about gender roles? Money? Sexuality? Raising children? Religion?
- 4) How does racism—the intersection of prejudice and power—affect your daily life? What advantages have you received as a result of your race or ethnicity, and how does that affect your daily life? If you are married or preparing for marriage, what support would you welcome from your spouse as you live with racism, and what would you resist? If your spouse is from a different race or ethnicity, what do they need to know and understand to keep you and themselves safe? How does your experience of power in your cultural context compare to that of your partner? What do you need your spouse to know about your experience of power or authority?

⁵ This story is taken from narratives obtained through a survey on relationships circulated throughout The Episcopal Church in fall, winter, and spring of 2016-17 by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage. We were moved by these glimpses of relationship, and they have allowed writers of this series of essays to add a personal context. Through stories we are led to deeper truths about relationship and a profound appreciation of each writer’s dignity. We understand that each story is a glimpse of one person’s experience and realize that there are many stories to tell.

- 5) In your cultural or ethnic context, what role do parents expect to play in their grown child's marriage? Do your parents expect you to care for them and/or live with them as they grow older? If you are married or preparing for marriage, how involved will your parents be in the lives of your children? Are there special roles that family members are expected to play, either in your wedding ceremony or in your life as a couple?
- 6) How is emotion communicated in your culture or ethnicity?
- 7) How is conflict addressed, or not addressed, in your culture or ethnicity?
- 8) What attitudes towards alcohol, licit or illicit substance use, gambling, etc. have you absorbed from your culture or ethnicity?
- 9) What role do honor and shame play in your culture or ethnicity? What's the worst thing that could happen to a person of your culture or ethnicity?
- 10) How are holidays celebrated in your culture or ethnicity? What cultural or ethnic traditions are most important to you?
- 11) In what ways are the norms of your culture or ethnicity congruent with Christian teachings? Where is your culture or ethnicity in conflict with Christianity, and how do you navigate those areas?
- 12) What would a person need to know about your culture or ethnicity to understand you?
- 13) What gifts might your culture or ethnicity give to your friendships and relationships? To your marriage? To your spouse? To your children?
- 14) What parts of your cultural or ethnic norms do you wish to keep in your life together? What parts would you like to change or leave behind?

Householding

For Christians, the Holy Trinity is an important foundation for understanding relationships. In the Trinity, each member gives to the others and receives from them, creating a dynamic whole that honors and upholds the unique personhood of each. This ideal of community is reflected in the real relationships of human households in which our shared lives, loves, and responsibilities create an atmosphere that is sacred and sanctifying.¹

In a household that manifests the holiness of the triune God, two or more people join in a common life in which they practice love of neighbor.² By sharing space, meals, fellowship, labor, and love, and through the behaviors fostered by such sharing, including mutual service, hospitality, mercy, kindness, gentleness and self-control, the shared life can foster mutual affection and generosity of spirit.³ As members of a household participate in giving and receiving love with one another, they may grow in the love of God, and their love may extend beyond their household.

Households also provide opportunity to practice forgiveness and reconciliation. In the nearness of a household, its members—finite, imperfect, sinful human creatures—inevitably fail from time to time to treat each other with the love of neighbor that God require. For example, the marriage service in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer includes this prayer for the couple: “Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other’s forgiveness and yours” (p. 429). Bishop Thomas Breidenthal cautions that this prayer does not condone physical or emotional abuse but rather is concerned with “ordinary, everyday unpleasantness: the petty, unkind acts we commit even against those we love, simply because we are self-centered and sinful.”⁴ By seeking and offering forgiveness, members of a household can participate in God’s mission “to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (BCP p. 855).

Marriage

Christian marriage, as understood today, embodies an equality and mutual service that demonstrate the transformative power of holy householding. Expression of this can be found throughout the liturgies approved for marriage and in The Episcopal Church’s teaching on marriage as laid out in the canonical Declaration of Intention signed by a couple prior to the solemnization of their marriage:

We understand the teaching of the church that God’s purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God’s will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional,

¹ Thomas Breidenthal, *Christian Households* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1997), p. 159.

² Some single persons identify themselves as a household. See the accompanying essay on Singleness for more on this subject.

³ Breidenthal, *Christian Households*, pp. 1-2, 16.

⁴ Thomas Breidenthal, *Sacred Unions: A New Guide to Lifelong Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006), p. 101.

mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.⁵ The lifelong nature of this commitment is key to the couple's continuing growth in holiness, as a man married to his wife for 33 years explains:

In those years we have had times of liking one another and times of hating one another, times of deep and passionate lust for one another and times when the flames of passion have burned cool and low. But through it all we have remained deeply and profoundly in love with one another. This kind of lasting love is, I believe, a choice. I didn't choose to fall in love with my wife, but I have chosen to remain in love with her. Why? Because she helps me become more of the person God intended me to be. She challenges me to reach beyond what I thought I could grasp and to discover the true extent of my reach. She sees me with eyes that are not limited by my poor vision, not clouded by the pain and self-doubt that builds up in life. And being seen through her eyes allows me to achieve more than I would have without her present in my world.⁶

The church's teaching on marriage applies to all couples marrying in The Episcopal Church, including same-sex couples. After several decades of grassroots change and official action, the 2015 General Convention authorized two trial-use liturgies for marriage that can be used by any couple, same-sex or different-sex, with the permission and under the direction of the diocesan bishop. However, our church is not of one mind on this; for example, one married man comments,

There is a significant number of people who do not believe that tradition or the Bible supports marriage between two people of the same sex. It may be appropriate for civil rights but dubious for the church. I know a priest whose vestry asked him to leave because he would not perform a same-sex marriage.

Although Episcopalians and other Christians have different theological understandings of human sexuality, including same-sex relationships, the Convention directed bishops to make provision for all couples seeking to be married in the Episcopal Church to have access to these liturgies.⁷ This has allowed same-sex couples in longtime relationships to solemnize their marriages in church. A man who recently married his husband on the fifteenth anniversary of the date they first met describes their relationship:

I understand our relationship to be God-given, and sacred. Ours is a committed, monogamous and life-long relationship based upon mutual love and respect. People who know us understand that we bring out the best in each other and those around us. In this sense we live sacramentally as a married couple symbolizing through our love for each other the love that God has for the Church and the World.

⁵ Canon I.18.4, *The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2015).

⁶ The stories found in this essay are taken from narratives contained in a survey on relationship circulated throughout The Episcopal Church in fall, winter, and spring of 2016-17 by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage. We were moved by these glimpses of relationship, and they have allowed writers of each of these essays to add a personal context. Through stories we are led to deeper truths about relationship and a profound appreciation of each writer's dignity. We understand that each story is a glimpse of one person's experience and realize that there are many stories to tell.

⁷ Resolution 2015-A054, "Authorize for Trial Use Marriage and Blessing Rites Contained in 'Liturgical Resources I,'" https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2015-A054.

As a “natural estate,” marriage is created by the intention and vows of a couple to one another, apart from any liturgy of the Church or license by the State. The State’s license provides legal protections for the couple, while in the sacramental rite of marriage, the couple make a public commitment to one another and receive the community’s prayer and support as well as “the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows” (BCP p. 861). In addition, the Church’s canonical requirements for marriage ensure that the couple is instructed “in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties, and responsibilities of marriage.”⁸ Thus, Christian marriage is to be recommended and affirmed.

Yet Christian marriage is not the only form of household in which participants can experience God’s blessing. Moreover, abuse is never God’s will, and marriage is not appropriate in relationships that are abusive or exploitative. In the realm of healthy relationships, households take many forms in addition to marriage, and commitments to love, service, and a common life come in many forms.

Cohabitation

In cohabitation, a couple form a household based on implicit or explicit promises to contribute to their common good, share responsibilities, influence one another, and ease one another’s burdens. The union of household may be “for as long as we can” or “for as far as we can see.” The couple may understand the arrangement as a time of discernment about marriage, as an alternative to marriage, or as a prelude to marriage, in which the partners come to know themselves as they grow in knowledge and love of another. Such cohabitation of intimate sexual partners is increasingly common, challenging the church to respond pastorally while also affirming norms for relationship.

In 2000, the General Convention acknowledged couples living in lifelong committed relationships other than marriage and identified qualities expected of these couples as well as married couples: “fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.”⁹ These characteristics can also provide norms for the relationships of cohabiting couples who have not made a lifelong commitment to each other. A couple who make an examined choice to cohabit and seek to build a loving and life-giving relationship marked by these characteristics may experience God’s blessing in their relationship.

The church might consider various pastoral and/or liturgical responses to couples who cohabit. Recognizing the number of Christian couples who live together before marriage, Adrian Thatcher proposes a pastoral approach: “to thank God for the marital values their togetherness already expresses, and to guide them to the solemnization and deepening of those values in the sacrament of Christian marriage.”¹⁰ Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests different forms of covenantal vows for sexual friendships: temporary vows, for younger cohabiting couples who are “not yet ready for

⁸ Canon I.18.3c

⁹ Resolution 2000-Do39, “Acknowledge Relationships Other Than Marriage and Existence of Disagreement on the Church’s Teaching,” https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2000-Do39. The resolution also states that these same characteristics apply to other lifelong committed relationships.

¹⁰ Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 135-36.

permanent commitment personally or economically,” and life vows, for those making a lifelong commitment.¹¹ Michael Lawler and Todd Salzman distinguish between non-nuptial and nuptial cohabiters. For the latter group, who are committed to marry one another, Salzman and Lawler call for a process of nuptial commitment, beginning with a public betrothal ceremony, followed by “nuptial cohabitation” and eventually, a wedding ceremony.¹²

Some cohabiting couples in some legal jurisdictions do not desire any kind of church blessing of their relationship because the state may then consider them to be legally married. The church should be sensitive to this concern.

Households with Children

In a household with children the dynamics of householding take on new dimensions. Adults enter a household with one another as equals in authority, but parents and children have different levels of authority to ensure the healthy upbringing of children. Beyond these differences in authority, many aspects of a household remain the same when adults and children are involved. All can serve, love, and support in ways appropriate to their maturity and capacity. All serve the common good by their participation in the household. New depths of wonder and partnership can be revealed between parents as they partner to raise a child. Sharing roles, stepping in when the other is overwhelmed, communicating joys and concerns associated with the child — all of these open new ways for Christ to be revealed and realized in the household. At the same time raising children is hard work; all parents need the church’s support and affirmation.

While the church and society have not always been supportive of same-sex couples raising children, social-science research over the past quarter century has yielded overwhelming evidence “that children of same-sex parents do not differ from those of heterosexual or single parents on a range of social and behavioral outcomes.”¹³ Same-sex as well as different-sex parents face similar concerns, “such as providing appropriate structure for children, while also being warm and accepting, setting limits, teaching open and honest communication, healthy conflict resolution, and monitoring of child’s peer network and extracurricular activities.” However, same-sex parents and their children may face challenges because of social stigma and disagreement with extended family members about the validity of the couple’s relationship.¹⁴

¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 200), p. 215. In the course of this work the Task Force has heard a desire for a form of life vows for i) older couples who desire to form and to formalize a relationship that is monogamous, unconditional, and lifelong, but is nevertheless something different than a marriage in that it does not include the merging of property, finances, or other legal encumbrances, and for ii) couples for whom the requirement to furnish identification to obtain a marriage license could result in state penalties including deportation, because of their immigration status.

¹² Michael G. Lawler and Todd A. Salzman, “People Beginning Sexual Experience,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 566, 568-70.

¹³ Robert Preidt, “‘Overwhelming’ Evidence That Same-Sex Parenting Won’t Harm Kids,” *US News and World Report*, June 26, 2015, <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/articles/2015/06/26/overwhelming-evidence-that-same-sex-parenting-wont-harm-kids>.

¹⁴ Deanna Linville and Maya O’Neil, “Same Sex Parents and Their Children” (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy), http://www.aamft.org/imis15/aamft/Content/Consumer_Updates/Same-sex_Parents_and_Their_Children.aspx.

The loving self-sacrifice associated with parenting is as true in the adoptive household as it is in every child-rearing household. Perhaps because adoption happens only when parents explicitly desire a child and pursue that good, many adoptive households bring special benefits of engagement and preparation to their child-rearing. In many of these households, children are read to more often and are encouraged more often to participate in extracurricular activities.¹⁵

Parenting can be especially challenging for a single parent raising one or more children. While some become single parents by choice, for others divorce or the death of a partner may result in the necessity of single-parenting. Single parents do not have the support of a partner with whom to share responsibility, and divorced parents may face particular challenges of co-parenting with a former spouse. Thus the support and affirmation of extended family and community, including the church community, becomes especially important. A great-grandmother reports:

Of my three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, only one was born to parents married to each other. We would have preferred that our children and grandson had made different decisions about sexual intimacy and becoming parents. But when faced with unplanned pregnancies, we chose to welcome the births and support these new families. We cherish our grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and their parents (our children and grandson) have grown as they have faced the challenges and joys of parenting.

Many families in our communities are blended, including step-parents and children from previous relationships. Blending families is often hard work, but it can also be richly rewarding, as a woman who has been married for 52 years reports:

We raised three of his children from a previous (extremely unhappy) marriage, and two boys of our own. All have turned out to be strong, wonderful people. This marriage has been very positive and happy, and I am glad to have been married to my husband.

Insights into Householding

Living together shapes us. Whether the household is formed by marriage, cohabitation, parenting, or in some other way, such as monastic communities, roommates, or multigenerational families, the intimacies that come from close contact can create networks of trust and mutuality in which the fruit of the Spirit¹⁶ can be known and shared.

Whatever the form of household, its members have the potential to experience God's grace in their relationships, for God follows love just as surely as love follows God. What is telling is not the type of household we consider, but its nature. Do the members willingly engage love and service? Is the preciousness of all members honored? Is the household free of promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness?¹⁷ Are patience and kindness manifest? Or is the household marked by envy, boasting, arrogance, or rudeness? Do members insist on their own way? Are they irritable or resentful? Do they

¹⁵ Sharon Vandivere, Karin Malm, and Laura Radel, "Adoption USA: A Chartbook Based on the 2007 National Survey of Adoptive Parents" (US Department of Health and Human Services) <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdf-report/adoption-usa-chartbook-based-2007-national-survey-adoptive-parents>.

¹⁶ Galatians 5:22-23

¹⁷ Resolution 2000-D039.

rejoice in wrongdoing, or do they rejoice in the truth?¹⁸ No household will perfectly manifest the love of God, for surely all sin. A commitment to acknowledge occasions of hurt and to seek one another's forgiveness, and God's, is key to growth in holiness.

In the intimacy and mutual responsibility of a household, Christians have an opportunity to participate in God's self-giving love, which is demonstrated in the communion of persons in the triune God. As the members of the household practice love of neighbor, recognizing others in the household as their nearest neighbors, they may deepen their relationships not only with one another but also with God.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) What pastoral response and guidance should the church offer to persons who are cohabitating, or are considering cohabitation?
- 2) How can the church support families who are raising children?
- 3) What employment practices (e.g. health care, paid family leave, child care, living wage) should the church adopt to support its employees and their families? What public policies should the church advocate to support families?
- 4) When an unmarried woman becomes pregnant unintentionally, what factors should be weighed in making a moral choice about adoption, abortion, or raising the child as a single parent? What pastoral response and guidance can the church offer to the pregnant woman as she considers this choice, and to the man who has fathered the child?
- 5) For a woman or man considering becoming a single parent through pregnancy, adoption, or foster parenting, what guidance can the church offer? Under what circumstances is intentional single-parenting a just, moral choice?
- 6) The Church teaches that Christian Marriage has the qualities of fidelity, monogamy, and lifelong commitment.
 - a) Why is emotional and sexual faithfulness essential for a Christian Marriage?
 - b) Why is the covenantal relationship between two parties (and two parties only—commonly called monogamy) essential for a Christian Marriage?
 - c) Why is lifelong commitment essential for a Christian Marriage?
- 7) For people considering intimate relationships that do not have all three qualities of fidelity, monogamy, and lifelong commitment, or for people already in such relationships, what pastoral response and guidance should the church offer?

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 13.

Singleness

Any commentary on single people is inherently challenging because of the diversity present within singleness.¹ Single people may choose to be single and understand this choice as a call from God. Others are unattached involuntarily, either via the death of a spouse, a divorce not of their choosing, physical or mental illness that complicates being in relationship, not having found a partner, or any number of reasons. A single person's primary relationships may be with their family, their friends, an intentional or monastic community, their children and grandchildren, or any combination thereof. Single people may live alone, with roommates, or with family. Adults of all ages can be single. Although society and the church often assume singleness to be a temporary state, a kind of "pre-married" phase, it may last for decades or the entirety of a person's life. Many of the older adults in our congregations will be single for the rest of their lives after the loss of a spouse. Singleness should not then be viewed as a waiting period or as a state less desirable than marriage; it is not "tragic, embarrassing and freakish," as one single priest describes the common stereotype of single people.² Singleness is hardly unusual in our time, for that matter. The United States Census Bureau reported in 2015 that 49.7 percent of people age 15 and older were either never married, widowed, divorced, or separated.³ For some Christians, singleness can be a vocation to which God calls a person for a season or for life. For others, it is a source of grief and pain, a state they would never have chosen for themselves. And for some, singleness brings both advantages and disadvantages, just as marriage does for some couples. One single person explains:

I am single and celibate. Having been this way for most of my life I can't say whether this is more positive or more negative than any other status. It has been simpler, I suspect, in some ways, I only have my own opinion to consider when discerning a move or a change. On the other hand, it can be lonely; and has been more difficult since my parents and brother have all died—I always appreciated a friendly voice on the phone (or in person) of someone who has known me all my life.⁴

Theological reflection on singleness has attempted to lift up the positive qualities of singleness, in contrast to common stereotypes of single people as desperate, lonely, and miserable. Such theological reflection tends to consider singleness from the individualistic viewpoint of white American culture. For example, singleness, to Marie Theresa Coombs and Francis Kelly Nemeck, is a middle course between marriage and celibacy (a vowed state of abstaining from all sexual and

¹ A good, though dated, illustration of this diversity is the narratives in Kay Collier-Slone, *Single in the Church: New Ways to Minister with 52% of God's People* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1992), 2-7.

² Stephanie Couvela, *Celebrating Celibacy: Sexuality, Intimacy and Wholeness for the Single Adult* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2007), author's biography.

³ This age category is defined by the Census Bureau. This figure includes unmarried adults who cohabit with a romantic partner, who are not considered single for the purposes of this essay. United States Census Bureau, "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2015: Adults," <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2015A.html> (accessed September 3, 2016).

⁴ This story is taken from narratives obtained through a survey on relationships circulated throughout The Episcopal Church in fall, winter, and spring of 2016-17 by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage. We were moved by these glimpses of relationship, and they have allowed writers of this series of essays to add a personal context. Through stories we are led to deeper truths about relationship and a profound appreciation of each writer's dignity. We understand that each story is a glimpse of one person's experience and realize that there are many stories to tell.

romantic relationships); a person who has chosen to be single for the sake of Christ and the Gospel possesses an independence that gives them the freedom for complete dependence on God.⁵ Stephanie Couvela asserts that the freedom of celibacy is, at its best, “freedom for a full and creative life.”⁶ Wesley Hill finds that friendship is the appropriate form of love for him as a gay Christian committed to celibacy, and indeed, many single people possess the spiritual gift of being a remarkable friend.⁷ Single people bring many other gifts to the church: self-sufficiency, the creativity born of independence, and often the time and emotional energy to commit to their faith communities that can be in short supply for couples, especially those with young children. The apostle Paul recognized that the devotion of single people to the affairs of the Lord held the Corinthian church together (1 Cor 7:32-35). The Episcopal Church would benefit from perspectives on singleness drawn from cultures that emphasize community or family over the individual.

Singleness does not have to mean aloneness. These authors all stress the universal human need for intimacy and particularly for physical touch, which single people may find it difficult to fulfill.⁸ Everyone requires meaningful human interactions to counteract loneliness and isolation. Many single people receive these interactions through their families, especially in cultures that prize close extended family systems. Some single people are in romantic relationships, yet live by themselves. For other single persons, faith communities can be important in meeting this fundamental need. The sacramentality of human touch found in the exchange of the Peace, the hand of blessing laid on the shoulder, and the hug at coffee hour may be of particular emotional significance for a single person. This may be the only physical touch they receive over the course of the week.

Singleness inevitably raises questions of sexual ethics, and the Task Force’s essay “Sexual Intimacy: A Complex Gift” addresses this in more depth. Here, it should be acknowledged that single people have a variety of experiences of sexuality, both with a partner and with themselves, and some single people find grace in sexual intimacy. Pastors, theologians, and ethicists might ask, “What does a healthy theology and ethic of sexuality look like for a single person? How does sexuality fit into holiness of life for a single Christian?” The Task Force essay “Theological Foundations for Christian Relationships” provides a starting point for this kind of reflection.

Though nearly half the population is unmarried, churches often appear unmindful of single people. Any survey of profiles prepared by congregations searching for clergy reveals that parishes’ most sought-after demographic is families with young children. This seems to be the consequence of our denominational anxiety about the shrinking and aging of The Episcopal Church: if our Sunday schools and youth groups are full, it must mean that the church isn’t failing and it has a future. Yet the often-relentless focus on families with young children sends a message to anyone who does not fit that mold. In a culture in which “family” often means “married couple with children,” website banners that declare “We love families! All families welcome!” can inadvertently communicate to single people, as well as couples without children or with grown children, that they are unwanted in the

⁵ Marie Theresa Coombs and Francis Kelly Nemeck, *Discerning Vocations to Marriage, Celibacy and Singlehood* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 186-190.

⁶ Couvela, 17.

⁷ Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015).

⁸ Coombs and Nemeck, 198; Couvela, 12.

church. Significant resources devoted to family ministry while nothing is offered for adults without children tell a similar story. Congregations, dioceses, and The Episcopal Church must be vigilant that our tag line—The Episcopal Church Welcomes You—does not become a lie for half the population. The vision of church communities that Couvela holds, “where marriages are strengthened and enriched by friends from outside, where single people can find closeness and touch, where children can have friendships with adults as they grow in faith,” is possible only if we acknowledge and celebrate the single people in our midst.⁹

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) In a culture centered around the nuclear family, how does the church acknowledge the dignity of singleness?
- 2) How does the church teach young people about intimate relationships? What does the church teach young people about intimate relationships?
- 3) In what ways is it possible for sexual intimacy to be a means of grace for a single person?
- 4) What practices of discernment can the church provide to people considering the vocations of singleness, marriage, or celibacy? How do we listen for God’s call to us regarding intimate relationships?

⁹ Couvela, 25.

Sexual Intimacy - A Complex Gift

During the course of our work, members of the Task Force for the Study of Marriage began to see the subject of sexual intimacy required further study and reflection. While this topic may be broached within the context of preparation for Holy Matrimony, current trends suggest the need to expand the church's teaching and thinking beyond marriage preparation.

Census data reported 6 million households maintained by unmarried couples in 2006.¹ By 2016 the same type of households had increased to 7.2 million.² Coupled with the growing numbers of single adults³ in the United States, the need to provide discussion and potentially guidelines for sexual intimacy seems warranted.

The Task Force is not of one mind about how the church might engage the subject of sexual intimacy. Nor do we have adequate data to confirm the trends cited above in dioceses beyond the United States of America. Still, we see a growing need to teach, counsel, and prepare single individuals, unmarried couples, and married couples to contemplate sexual intimacy as religious people.

When the church considers Holy Scripture for marriage preparation, the church could do the same in teaching and counseling about sexual intimacy for adults. For example, the description of "naked and were not ashamed" could be as important as citing the "one flesh" of the man and his wife in the second chapter of Genesis (*Genesis* 2:25). Further, a wealth of poetic descriptions of erotic love is found in the Song of Songs. Even if the poems of two lovers found in this book are read as symbolism or metaphor, the poetry remains a sensitive and sensual description of sexual intimacy. Passages such as these may give us insight about God's vision for sexual intimacy.

If we were to consider sexual intimacy a blessing, given by God for the good of God's people, then this blessing is a complex gift. A gift able to bestow joy, deepen love, give pleasure, and kindle the holy in relationship. Like so many of God's gifts, this gift can be more than we could think to ask or imagine on our own. Yet unlike other gifts, this one requires maturity, consent, vulnerability, and respect for one's self, and respect for another person. For some, this blessing or gift may require compassionate and skilled teaching from the church.

The church seems to have an understandable desire to speak a single truth for all, or even for a majority, as sexuality is discussed, taught, and addressed in church governance. Still, circumstances require nuanced teaching and theology in response to the variety of situations presented by consenting adults. Sexual expression includes a wide range of behaviors from a casual one-time

¹ United States Census Bureau, "American Community Survey: 2006: Unmarried Partnered Households by Sex of Partner," <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed November 5, 2017).

² United States Census Bureau, "American Community Survey: 2016: Unmarried Partnered Households by Sex of Partner," <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk> (accessed November 5, 2017).

³ United States Census Bureau, "Facts For Figures: Unmarried and Single Americans Week: Sept. 18-24, 2016," <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/cb16-ff18.html>, (accessed November 5, 2017).

encounter to a life-long committed relationship where sexual intimacy is one of many types of intimacy.

For some Christians, sexual intimacy is only to be expressed within monogamous heterosexual marriage.⁴ From this perspective the gift of sexual intimacy is one of the blessings of marriage. The bodily expression is underscored in the first English Book of Common Prayer (1549). Thomas Cranmer, himself a married man, included among the purposes of marriage, “mutual society, help, and comfort... both in prosperity and adversity.” At the giving of the ring the husband said to his wife, “With my body, I thee worship.”

For others, sexual intimacy outside of marriage can be an experience of grace.⁵ An unmarried woman in a long-time relationship wrote of a robust love life with her partner. “We functioned as a true pair in many ways... that was an aspect of life lacking for me basically all my years... There are people who merely want companionship — a domestic or activity partner. I, however, believe that most of us yearn to be chosen by one other person, and to transcend convenience and/or convention by knowing and being known intimately and uniquely. Such relationships give each partner wings.”⁶

Whether sexual relationships are between married or unmarried people, sexual intimacy can be a blessing drawing a couple into deeper bonds of trust, love, vulnerability, and holiness.⁷ Such intimacy can also be a source of sorrow, a tool for manipulation, and a method of exploitation. By saying nothing to those in sexually intimate relationships who are not married, the church endorses this grace as only meant for and experienced by married people. It may also assume that all married people have healthy consensual sexual relationships. The church could promote a healthy and holy approach to sexual intimacy with teaching, guidance, and pastoral care for this complex gift.

Resolution D039 - 2000, sets an expectation that life-long committed relationships are to “be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.” Further, the resolution denounces “promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members.” In it the church pledges “to hold all its members accountable

⁴ “My understanding of sexual ethics has been that, regardless of whether it’s gay or straight, sex outside marriage is wrong.” Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, interview with Dominic Lawson, “So Many Crosses to Bear,” thetimes.co.uk, March 17, 2013.

⁵ “An absolute declaration that every sexual partnership must conform to the pattern of commitment or else have the nature of sin and nothing else is unreal and silly.” Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” 10th Michael Harding Memorial Address, Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality, , 1989, reprinted in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 315-16.

⁶ This story is taken from narratives obtained through a survey on relationships circulated throughout The Episcopal Church in fall, winter, and spring of 2016-17 by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage. We were moved by these glimpses of relationship, and they have allowed writers of this series of essays to add a personal context. Through stories we are led to deeper truths about relationship and a profound appreciation of each writer’s dignity. We understand that each story is a glimpse of one person’s experience and realize that there are many stories to tell.

⁷ Williams, “The Body’s Grace.”

to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement, and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them.”

For those seeking guidance for the expression of sexual intimacy, the values held in this resolution have the potential to inform, support, and guide decision making. This resolution also can provide direction to the church as it seeks to develop pastoral and formational resources regarding sexual intimacy.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 1) In what ways does Holy Scripture inform your experience of sexual intimacy?
- 2) How have you experienced sexual intimacy as a God’s blessing or gift to you? to your relationship?
- 3) What does the existence of sexual pleasure teach us about being made in the image of God?
- 4) What should the Church teach about sexual intimacy for married and unmarried people?
- 5) How should the church teach young people about the gift of sexual intimacy and the right use of this gift?
- 6) What support from the Church is needed by older adults in sexually intimate relationships?

Responses to the Essays

In the summer of 2017, an early draft of these essays was shared with the faculty of all ten Episcopal seminaries and an additional group of theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, social scientists, and educators¹ from a broad range of backgrounds for feedback. Twenty individuals or organizations offered responses:

- 1) Thomas Breidenthal, Bishop of Southern Ohio
- 2) Isaiah Brokenleg, MDiv student (Diocese of Fond du lac), Church Divinity School of the Pacific
- 3) Matthew Burdette, Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Dallas
- 4) Chad Gandiya, Bishop of Harare, Zimbabwe (whose archdeacon responded to each of the questions)
- 5) Mary Gray-Reeves, Bishop of El Camino Real
- 6) Scott Gunn, Executive Director of Forward Movement
- 7) Tobias Haller, 2012-2015 task force member
- 8) Wesley Hill, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Trinity School for Ministry
- 9) Anne Hodges-Copple, Bishop Suffragan, Diocese of North Carolina
- 10) Deon Johnson, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brighton, MI
- 11) Lam Chun Wai, Vice Principal and Lecturer in Liturgical Studies, Ming Hua Theological College, Hong Kong
- 12) Robert MacSwain, Associate Professor of Theology, School of Theology, University of the South
- 13) Dale B. Martin, Woolsey Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, Yale University
- 14) Kevin Moroney, Associate Professor of Liturgics, General Theological Seminary
- 15) Jane Patterson, Associate Professor of New Testament, & Director of Community Care, Seminary of the Southwest
- 16) Jenny Te Paa Daniel, Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia
- 17) Adrian Thatcher, Honorary Professor in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter, UK; Honorary Fellow in Medical Humanities in the Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, UK
- 18) Kwasi Thornell, Lecturer in Pastoral Theology, Church Divinity School of the Pacific
- 19) Gerald West, Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa
- 20) The faculty of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific

Responses fell into three general categories:

- A. Appreciations of the work;

¹ 2015-A037 Continue the work of the Task Force; Resolve 5.

- B. Critiques and suggestions that were incorporated into the final essays;
- C. Critiques and suggestions not incorporated into the essays, which are summarized and paraphrased in the six sections below.

1. Personal narratives appear elevated.

Many responders commented on the personal narratives interspersed throughout the essays. Some supported their use. Others wondered:

- Are the personal narratives too supportive of the points in the essays?
- Do the personal narratives paint too rosy a picture of some kinds of relationship, not adequately expressing the challenges some may face?
- Are the personal essays given too central a position in the essays?
- Are the personal narratives truly representational?
- Is there enough balance in the narratives, as between pro and con, male and female, young and old, success and failure in relationship, heterosexual and same-sex, married and unmarried, various cultures, various regions of the church, et cetera?

2. The church should stand for something.

Some responders expressed concern about the approach of the essays, wishing they had taken on a mantle of moral teaching:

- These essays do not speak in a clear moral voice.
- In a regressive world, the church needs to stand for something.
- The very concept of “contemporary trends and norms” is troubling.
- Human society’s whims are irrelevant to the calling of the church.
- We should question the validity of contemporary norms.
- We should question where contemporary norms are originating.
- Human life and human sexuality have a specific purpose: we are made for a reason; we are given the gift of sexual expression for a reason.
- Why does a person’s sense of “experiencing a blessing” through a certain life-choice, life-style, or activity matter?
- God creates goods for a specific purpose.
- When we misuse these goods harm is done.
- These goods and their purpose have been fully revealed to the Church.
- Our job is not discernment but duty.

3. Culture: strengths and challenges

In these essays, an entire piece is dedicated to culture. Some responders were grateful for essay’s approach, while others expressed concerns:

- Culture is the problem. Culture is relative, while God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
- The Church will lose its moorings if we begin comparing cultures and bowing to cultural dictates.

- The Church should speak in a clear voice across all cultures.
- In the generation of these essays were enough voices across cultures heard? If not, that undermines the work that has been done.
- The Church is not separate from culture; the Church is and has always been a part of culture.
- Culture is of primary importance if you want to appreciate the richness and diversity of the Body of Christ.
- Aspects of culture can profoundly affect relationships—power dynamics, unique social pressures, effects of continued racism, stressors related to one’s living environment, historical injustices, and more. These elements could have been included in the essays.

4. When is sexual intimacy appropriate?

These essays consider foundations for relationship and sexual intimacy. Responders had a number of thoughts in these areas:

- The Church should teach that sexual intimacy is only ever appropriate between married persons.
- The Church should teach that sexual expression between same-sex persons is never acceptable; people with such attraction should concentrate on having lots of good friendships.
- The Church should teach that sexual intimacy is acceptable between persons when their relationship is on a trajectory toward marriage.
- Sexuality is not a particular “gift,” but part of the broad giftedness of being human.
- Is “consent” the only firm moral norm underlying the essays?
- What must be present in a relationship for the Church to be able to call sexual expression in that relationship good?
- Do the promises, character, or intent of a relationship determine when sexual expression is appropriate?

5. Regarding pregnancy

These essays do not consider the potential of pregnancy and childbirth, several responders noted:

- Discussions of sexual intimacy should always keep in mind the serious implication of pregnancy.
- Becoming a single parent by choice is an immoral and unjust decision with serious negative implications for the child.
- Marriage is better for the raising of children than cohabitation or separated households. The Church should stand for this.

6. Marriage and sanctification

Several responders expressed a desire to probe Christian Marriage more deeply to understand what makes it special:

- What makes marriage so special among human relationships?
- What makes marriage sacred?
- What makes marriage sanctifying?
- Grace might be found in other kinds of relationships, but it is a sure bet in Christian marriage.
- If we could understand the spiritual process underlying marriage we could open doors in our attempt to understand how God is at work in other forms of relationship.

For Further Reading: Marriage, Family, and Sexuality

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The Danger of a Single Story." TED talk, July 2009, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story. "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Adichie calls us to seek out alternative stories—particularly important when we consider marriage and family patterns across different races, ethnicities, and cultures.
- Bradbury, John, and Susannah Cornwall, eds. *Thinking again about Marriage: Key Theological Questions*. London: SCM Press, 2016. The essays in this book explore biblical, historical, theological, and liturgical perspectives on marriage, gender, and sexuality. The authors represent a broad ecumenical spectrum of theologians, pastors, and a social worker.
- Breidenthal, Thomas E. *Christian Households: Sanctification of Nearness*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997. Breidenthal draws upon scripture and, to a lesser extent, Christian tradition to develop a theology of the Christian household, and he proposes criteria to determine which forms of household are holy.
- Breidenthal, Thomas E. *Sacred Unions: A New Guide to Lifelong Commitment*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2006. Building on his earlier work on Christian households, Breidenthal considers romantic love as a form of love of neighbor. He explores precedents in Scripture and Christian tradition for a positive value of romantic love based on the command to love one's neighbor and discusses disciplines necessary to build a lifelong relationship.
- Cahill, Lisa Sowle. *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Cahill seeks to draw together scripture, ethics, and contemporary approaches, like feminism and postmodernism, and apply them to sexual ethics.
- Choplin, Leslie, and Jenny Beaumont. *These Are Our Bodies: Talking Faith and Sexuality at Church and Home*. New York: Church Publishing, 2016. This resource offers a guide to conversation about sexuality from theological, ethical biological, and practical perspectives. In addition to a foundation book for educators, clergy, parents, youth leaders, and others, the program includes leader's guides, participant books, and parent guides designed for use with different age levels.
- Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender, and the Quest for God*. New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015. Coakley suggests that we need to re-examine our theology of desire, understanding eros in a broad sense, which goes beyond simple sexual attraction to a desire for the good in society, the good for the poor, and a desire for God. This theological grounding, she suggests, will help get us out of a binary conflict on sexual issues.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel & Grau, 2015. This book-length letter from a father to his son illustrates the stress that racism puts on black Americans' marriages and families while challenging common stereotypes of African-Americans.
- Coontz, Stephanie. *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*. New York: Viking, 2005. This history of marriage speaks to marriage in the ancient world, in early Christianity, and up to the present time, including especially the "Love Revolution" which brought a new paradigm to the purpose of marriage (and new questions).

- DeGenova, Mary Kay, ed. *Families in Cultural Context: Strengths and Challenges in Diversity*. McGraw Hill, 1997. This textbook, with chapters written by different authors, offers a comparative view of families from different ethnic groups. Chapters explore changes and adaptations made by families following their immigration into the US.
- Demo, David, Katherine Allen, and Mark Fine, eds. *The Handbook of Family Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. This textbook discusses different aspects of family, including race, socioeconomic status, family structure, sexual orientation, and gender. Each chapter introduces recent research and theoretical developments; the book does not consider religion.
- Edin, Kathryn, and Maria Kefalas. *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. This sociological study of three high-poverty neighborhoods—one largely white, one Hispanic, one African-American—in Philadelphia with high rates of unmarried mothers argues that poor women value marriage so highly that they are reluctant to enter into it, having realistically assessed that the men in their lives are not strong prospects for a lifelong commitment.
- Farley, Margaret. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics*. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- Haller, Tobias. *What About Sex? A Little Book of Guidance*. Church Publishing 2015. This book draws upon Scripture as well as science and psychology to discuss how we use our bodies sexually.
- Hill, Wesley. *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015. Part memoir, part biblical and theological reflection. Hill diagnoses our modern condition as one of loneliness, in which traditional communal and familial bonds have in large part broken down, leaving the sexual bond and the nuclear family to carry much more weight than they should have to bear. Hill calls on the church to be a genuine family, a community in which the sexual and marital bonds can take their place among other committed and communal forms of love.
- Hymowitz, Kay, Jason S. Carroll, W. Bradford Wilcox, and Kelleen Kaye. *Knot Yet: The Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America*. University of Virginia: The National Marriage Project, 2013. <http://nationalmarriageproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/KnotYet-FinalForWeb.pdf>. This study considers why American twenty-somethings are delaying the age of marriage and the benefits and costs of this delay. It concludes that America must bring childbearing and marriage back into sync.
- Jeal, Roy R., ed. *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010. This collection of essays, originally presented at the St. Margaret's Consultation on Doctrine, Liturgy, and Preaching held at St. Margaret's Anglican Church in Winnipeg, Canada in 2008, considers human sexuality and marriage from a theological standpoint.
- Lerman, Robert I., and W. Bradford Wilcox. *For Richer, For Poorer: How Family Structures Economic Success in America*. Institute for Family Studies, American Enterprise Institute, 2014. http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/IFS-ForRicherForPoorer-Final_Web.pdf. American Enterprise Institute policy paper advocating for marriage, as better for children, partners, and the family.
- Long, Kimberly Bracken. *From This Day Forward: Rethinking the Christian Wedding*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016. Addressing the question of whether the church should be in

the “wedding business,” Long argues for marriage as part of the church's mission. Includes historical overview of marriage.

McCarthy, David Matzko. *Sex and Love in the Home*. New edition. London: SCM Press, 2004. From his Roman Catholic perspective, the McCarthy critiques a “closed suburban home” and argues instead for “an open, socially reproductive household” interdependent with its neighbors, standing in contrast to the market economy.

McCleneghan, Bromleigh. *Good Christian Sex: Why Chastity Isn't the Only Option—And Other Things the Bible Says about Sex*. New York: HarperOne, 2016. McCleneghan, a pastor serving a congregation in the United Church of Christ, brings Scripture into conversation with the work of theologians, ethicists, and psychologists, to offer a positive view of human sexuality and explore how Christians can practice their sexuality in light of their faith.

McGoldrick, Monica, Elizabeth A. Carter, and Nydia Garcia-Perez. *The Expanding Family Life Cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*. This textbook for family therapists offers perspectives on human development and developmental tasks, taking account of societal changes influencing life-cycle patterns; it does not offer a theological perspective.

Prichard, Robert W. *Cohabiting Couples and Cold Feet: A Practical Marriage-Preparation Guide for Clergy*. New York: Church Publishing, 2008. The first part of this book delves deeply into statistics about relationships, marriage, cohabitation, etc. in the United States. The second part looks at the process of encountering, pastoring, counseling and performing services for people seeking marriage in the Episcopal Church.

Rogers, Eugene F., Jr., ed. *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. This is a collection of readings from both classical and contemporary sources, encompassing Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant sources. Rogers provides a brief introduction for each. The focus is the question of what marriage is for, beyond procreation of children and legitimation of sexual intercourse. The resources he includes present marriages as signs to the community of the faithful of God's reconciliation, and sexuality as a means of sanctification that draws us into God's life.

Sawhill, Isabel V. *Generation Unbound: Drifting into Sex and Parenthood without Marriage*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2014. Sawhill explores changing patterns of marriage and family, focusing on increase in single parenting, but does not offer a theological perspective. She attempts to offer an even-handed assessment, considering perspectives of both “traditionalists” and “village builders,” and argues for two-parent families.

Thatcher, Adrian. *Marriage after Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times*. Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1999. Thatcher offers a vision for Christian marriage that is based in Scripture and history and responds to contemporary social and cultural changes.

Thatcher, Adrian, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. This comprehensive collection of essays explores gender and sexuality in scripture and Christian tradition, as well as providing perspectives from other faiths and offering insights from biology and social sciences.

Thatcher, Adrian. *Theology and Families*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007. Thatcher considers how Christian faith and theology can contribute to the thriving of families and children.

Witte, John, Jr. *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*. Second edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012. Study of the interplay of law, theology, and marriage from classical times through the Reformation. Traces “the millennium-long reduction of marriage from a complex spiritual, social, contractual, and natural institution into a simple, private contract with freedom of entrance, exercise, and exit for husband and wife alike.” Extended discussion of the theology of marriage in patristic, medieval Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, and Enlightenment traditions.

Witte, John, Jr. *The Sins of the Fathers: The Law and Theology of Illegitimacy Reconsidered*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Witte applies his legal and historical acumen to the development of a “doctrine of illegitimacy,” for which he finds no biblical justification. He argues that early Christian and rabbinical teaching did not stigmatize illegitimacy, and that a doctrine of illegitimacy developed in medieval Roman canon law. Witte calls for more attention to adoption as well as stronger laws to require birth parents, absent adoption, to support children born out of wedlock.

Clergy, Church and State: A Continuing Debate

The first Task Force on the Study of Marriage presented an essay titled, “Agent of the State: A Question for Discernment” in its report to the 78th General Convention.¹ This essay presented a series of topics for consideration in discussing the dual role of clergy in marriage, acting on behalf of both the church as an officiant in the sacramental rite of marriage and on behalf of the state as an authorized officiant to certify and register a marriage.

Predating the debate about legalizing marriage of same-sex couples, clergy would occasionally assert their discomfort in acting on behalf of the state in signing marriage licenses and at times would declare the church should not be in “the marriage business.” Some of this discussion reflected views in support of the separation of church and state and a desire to disentangle the sacramental from the secular view of marriage. During the preceding triennium, there was some discussion, chiefly among clergy, centered around responses to the increasing number of court decisions extending marriage to same-sex couples. Some clergy were voicing their support for marriage for same-sex couples by pledging not to officiate at any marriages until all could be married. Others were responding to perceived pressure to change their deeply held views that marriage of same-sex couples is wrong, whether theologically or legally based. The latter group expressed their view in The Marriage Pledge: refusing to sign government issued marriage licenses and agreeing only to bless a civil marriage in opposition to the definition of marriage from “one man, one woman” to two people of same or opposite sex.

Anne Hodges-Copple described her discernment of her role in officiating marriages, considering these questions:

¹ Appendix 1: Essays on Marriage, in Report of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 78th General Convention (Reports to General Convention, 1976-2015, Archives of the Episcopal Church), pp. 85-87, https://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/gc_reports/reports/2015/bb_2015-R044.pdf (accessed 8/19/17).

- As a priest, if I sign a marriage license, issued by the county clerk, am I acting as an agent of the State?
- If I refuse to sign such a license have I afforded some greater measure of justice to all couples who seek God's nuptial blessing?
- If I sign a marriage license have I privileged some married couples over others?
- If I decline to sign a marriage license will I give couples a great "teachable moment" about the importance of separation between Church and State?
- Do I need to protect the Sacrament of Marriage from the tarnish of the State's interference?²

Hodges-Copple's discernment led her to continue to sign state licenses for couples whose marriages she officiates.

Missing in this list of questions is discernment in community, the traditional way The Episcopal Church seeks to understand how God may be leading us in new directions. Such discernment ought to include lay leadership as well as clergy. The laity, after all, are the ones who bear the burden when the clergy decline to officiate a marriage, a burden rarely acknowledged when the clergy stand on their personal principles.

History: Church, State and Marriage

Who has the power to declare a marriage valid: the Church or secular authorities?³ There is no consistent answer across the scope of Western Christianity. In some times and places, civil authorities have held sole jurisdiction over marriage matters. In others, marriage was the province exclusively of the Church. In still others—as in the contemporary United States, where judges or clergy may solemnize a marriage—secular and religious authorities shared authority over marriage.

In the first several centuries of Christianity, marriage was strictly a civil matter, and clergy had a limited role, if at all, in the formation of marriage. Patristic writers did not demand that secular authorities should submit to the Church in marriage cases, but rather exhorted Christians to obey the secular laws.⁴ No liturgies related to marriage survive before the late fourth or early fifth century, when clergy began blessing the couple or the marriage bed, but not solemnizing the marriage itself.⁵ Even when the Church did claim jurisdiction over marriage formation, neither a public wedding liturgy nor a priest was required to contract a valid marriage. Twelfth-century canon law held that "a valid marriage might be contracted either by the free and voluntary exchange of present consent between parties of legal age who were free to marry each other, or by the free and voluntary exchange of future consent between two parties legally able to marry each other, if that consent was ratified by

² Anne Hodges-Copple, "Signing Marriage Licenses? Yes," in Greg Jones, ed., *Writings on Marriage: The Journal of the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage, Convention Edition* (Raleigh: The Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, 2009), p. 99.

³ "Secular authorities" and "civil authorities" are used here in acknowledgment that "state" is an anachronistic term before at least the seventeenth century.

⁴ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Secular Reality and Saving Mystery*, vol. 2, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Scheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 54-55.

⁵ Philip L. Reynolds, "Marrying and Its Documentation in Pre-Modern Europe: Consent, Celebration, and Property," in Philip L. Reynolds and John Witte, Jr., ed., *To Have and to Hold: Marrying and Its Documentation in Western Christendom, 400-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 19.

subsequent sexual intercourse.”⁶ The canons also decreed that banns should be proclaimed and a marriage should be solemnized *in facie ecclesiae*; a couple could be disciplined for not following the rules, but the Church still recognized their marriage as valid.⁷ In their insistence on vows made in the present tense (“I take you to be my wife...”), Peter Lombard and other scholastics may have been trying to teach the laity how to contract a marriage properly without a priest.⁸

Yet couples continued to marry with little involvement of the Church. Florentine couples in the Renaissance usually exchanged vows in the bride’s home, then the bride and her goods, the groom, and their friends processed to his house, where a priest might bless the marriage bed. That was the extent of the Church’s role in marriage formation.⁹ A compromise between Christian and civil authorities evolved in nineteenth-century Spanish and Mexican Texas, where the state recognized only Roman Catholic marriage ceremonies officiated by a priest, but most Anglo settlements did not have a priest. Stephen F. Austin proposed, and civil authorities agreed, to the solution of marriage by bond: the couple signed a marriage contract obligating them to have a priest solemnize their vows as soon as possible, or else pay a substantial fine.¹⁰ This separation between civil marriage and a church wedding is the norm in modern-day France, where a couple must marry in a civil ceremony for their marriage to be legally binding; most couples hold a religious service the following day.

The understanding of marriage as a sacrament evolved in the early twelfth century among scholastics in Paris.¹¹ Peter Lombard clarified the concept of sacramentality and applied it to marriage; Thomas Aquinas argued that the couple’s exchange of consent conferred grace.¹² The 1563 Tridentine decree on marriage, *Tametsi*, held that marriage is one of the seven sacraments, confirming local synodical statements dating back to 1184.¹³ As the medieval Western Church came to understand marriage as a sacrament, it also gained exclusive jurisdiction over marriage. Historians disagree on when this happened; dates range from the ninth century to the thirteenth.¹⁴ Regardless of the date, R. H. Helmholz, the authority on this subject, cautions against thinking of the jurisdiction question as a contest between civil and ecclesiastical structures. He asserts, “It was not a question of competition between secular and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. The problem was to ensure that ordinary marriage disputes went to any court at all. The real hurdle was the persistent idea that people could regulate marriages for themselves.”¹⁵ Examples abound of medieval people who contracted marriages of

⁶ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 334.

⁷ R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 524.

⁸ Reynolds, “Marrying and Its Documentation in Pre-Modern Europe,” p. 27.

⁹ Thomas Kuehn, “Contracting Marriage in Renaissance Florence,” in Philip L. Reynolds and John Witte, Jr., *To have and to Hold: Marrying and Its Documentation in Western Christendom, 400-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 394, 396-400.

¹⁰ Hans W. Baade, “Form of Marriage in Spanish North America,” *Cornell Law Review*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1975), p. 8.

¹¹ Reynolds, “Marrying and Its Documentation in Pre-Modern Europe,” p. 9.

¹² Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, pp. 270, 433.

¹³ John Witte, Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), p. 106.

¹⁴ Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 127, 140; Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, pp. 223, 319.

¹⁵ Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England*, p. 5.

dubious legality outside the purview of any authority, secular or religious. Any children born in such unions were likely illegitimate. Once a question was raised about the legality of a marriage—which often happened after the couple were estranged—the parties could find themselves unable to marry anyone else. This put women in particular at economic risk. In these circumstances, Helmholz implies, the church’s willingness to assume jurisdiction over marriage cases was a benefit to the civil authorities. The Church was the only universal sovereign in the medieval West, and few medieval monarchs could claim either the Church’s universal reach or its administrative capacity.¹⁶ It should not surprise us that medieval authorities determined that church courts were better suited to investigate and judge matrimonial cases.

This history suggests that it is inaccurate to frame the question of authority over marriage as church versus the secular authorities. For most of Western Christianity, this was not an adversarial relationship, but something closer to a partnership. Both church and civil authorities preferred public wedding ceremonies because both had an interest in knowing who was married to whom: the Church wished to identify fornication and adultery and reify the concept of marriage as a sacrament; secular authorities needed to determine the property rights established through marriage.¹⁷ Both church and civil authorities also had an interest in protecting unwitting spouses and innocent children from bigamists. Who was supervising the formation of marriage mattered less than that some authority was doing so. In this context, clergy may be seen less as agents of the state and more as agents of the couple, ensuring that their marriage was valid in the eyes of any authority.

Agent of the State or Agent for the Couple?

Arriving at an understanding that the historic interplay between clergy and civil authority has been one of mutually-beneficial partnership and appreciating the intent and context of recent concerns about clergy feeling tainted or somehow compromised by their partnership with the State in marriage, the Task Force is open to consider the role of clergy in a new way.

In a memorandum offered by Christopher Hayes, Chancellor of the Diocese of California, the Task Force received the image of clergy as advocates for the marrying couple—agents of *the couple*, as Chancellor Hayes described it.

He likens the role of a wedding officiant to that of an Officer of the Court. As an attorney, identified as an agent of any court, he is empowered to act in the *name* of the court, but only *on behalf* of his client. The court authorizes his role, but any and all work done is in support of his client’s best interests, not the court’s.

Therefore, extending this analogy, the Task Force is convinced to offer the clergy of our Church the more appropriate assertion that they actually serve as agents, or advocates, of the marrying couple. Clergy vouch for the marriage partners to the civil authority that all necessities for a marriage contract have been completed. Recognition as agents of the couple is consistent with the traditional role of clergy in marriage: as officiants, the clergy do not marry the couple; the couple marries

¹⁶ Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract*, p. 97.

¹⁷ Lawrence Stone, *The Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 54.

themselves with the blessing of the Church and the State. The requirements for the State to recognize a marriage include consent of two persons to marry, freely, seriously and plainly expressed by each in the presence of the other and in the presence of a defined officiant, and with a declaration by the officiant that the persons are married. Likewise the Marriage Canon requires the couple to assert each is legally free to marry and consent to do so “freely, without fraud, coercion or mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation” (Canon I.18.3[a]). Signing the State-issued marriage license merely verifies to the State official that a marriage ceremony between the two named people occurred on a specific date at a specific time and place, just as entering the required information into the Parish register certifies to the Church that the marriage took place.

Clergy are not enforcers of contract law, but rather are advocates for the persons entering into both sacred and civil commitments. Indeed, as signatories of marriage licenses, clergy enjoy the confidence expressed by civil authorities (for centuries) in their ability to provide helpful discernment to the couple as well as secure the necessities of a marriage contract.

Anecdotally, most clergy’s issues around officiating at marriages have more to do with unpleasant or compromising wedding experiences than they do with complicity in any state legality. Clergy experiences of being dismissed by wedding planners, exploited by exuberant parents, disrespected by unchurched guests, along with abuse of parish property and holy spaces, all contribute to reluctance on the part of some clergy to participate in a marriage ceremony.

Some of these experiences can be ameliorated:

- Establish and publish written guidelines and policies for weddings that honor the sacred space and the sacred occasion;
- Train one or two members of the congregation to act as wedding planners and require couples to make their arrangements through them;
- Engage the Vestry in setting building use guidelines, including weddings;
- Educate the congregation regularly on all marriage requirements and policies;
- Develop and commit to a robust pre-marital counseling plan.

This more expansive frame of reference invites the Church not to step away from these opportunities, but rather to engage them more deeply. To recommit to formation of each couple, as well as the community they come from, the cleric fulfills her or his basic calling to be a pastor and teacher. Therefore, the Task Force invites the Church not to distance or withdraw from its views on the importance of marriage, but rather renew its commitment to the words of the opening address of the marriage rite:

Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God. (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 423)

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- Brundage, James A., *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)
- Hayes, Christopher, "Agents of the State," Memo to the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, August 30, 2016
- Helmholz, R. H., *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974)
- Helmholz, R. H., *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*, Vol. 1, *The Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
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IV. Essays on Marriage

prepared by the
Task Force on the Study of Marriage 2012-2015

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The full text of the Liturgical Resources 2 can be found at the below link.

[Liturgical Resources 2 - Full Text](#)

V. Dear Beloved: A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage

prepared by the
Task Force on the Study of Marriage 2012-2015

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The full text of the Liturgical Resources 2 can be found at the below link.

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VI. Pastoral Resources for Preparing Couples for Marriage

adapted from

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4. Model Congregational Guidelines

* Prepared by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, 2009-2012

Pre-Marital Preparation: Introduction

Below is a guideline for a five-session, pre-marital preparation that may be used along with the materials described above. These materials were originally prepared by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music during the 2009-2012 triennium as part of its work of developing theological and liturgical resources for blessing same-sex relationships. They have been revised for use with any couple

Pre-marital preparation sets as its goal the strengthening of a lifelong, monogamous partnership rooted in Christ. General Convention Resolution 2000-Do39 addresses the hope—the Church’s and the couple’s—for such relationships:

Resolved, That we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God; and be it further

Resolved, That we denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members; and be it further

Resolved, That this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement, and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them.

Ideally, sessions last 60 to 90 minutes each, and both partners should be present for all sessions (although the preparer may decide to meet with one of the individuals to address specific issues). Those with experience preparing couples may choose to adapt, combine, or reorder this outline.

Presenters

Presenters are people chosen by the couple to support and present them to the presider and the assembly during the marriage. Presenters may be friends, parents, family members, or drawn from the local congregation. This option gives a voice to important people in the life of the couple during the liturgy and enriches the experience for all present. Presenters can also serve an important role in supporting the couple before and after their marriage ceremony. The selection of a couple mature in their relationship can be particularly helpful to a couple starting life together. The couple, together with the clergy or lay preparer, should talk as soon as possible about selecting presenters, so that the prayerful work of the presenters can begin early on.

Two short handouts provided in this pastoral resource (one for the couple and one for presenters) detail the role of presenters and are intended for use at the conclusion of the initial preparation session. They are designed for use with “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage.” Congregations offering presenters for “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” or “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” can use these handouts by substituting the text of the presentation from the Additional Directions (BCP p. 437; above, p. xx).

Session One: Getting to Know You and an Overview

This session focuses on getting to know one another. It also starts to address the details of the rite, offering the couple and the clergy person an opportunity to study the rites together, looking at their meaning and choices and affirming that the marriage blessing, grounded in God, is given through the Church. Some clergy, however, may prefer to do a very general overview of the rites in this session, then study them more intensely later in the process.

Addressing the practical issues of the marriage at the outset helps to build trust and allows the couple to open themselves to the substance of the next four sessions. By providing even a general overview of the rites, the preparer can address questions and alleviate anxieties about the actual day. The couple and clergy person officiating will need to decide, either in this session or later in the preparation, which rite to use.

Session One includes a great deal of material, some of which may be moved to another session. Handouts for this session include:

- The liturgies “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” (BCP, pp. 422-32); “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” (above, pp. xx-xx); “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” (above, pp. xx-xx)
- 2. *Declaration of Intention* (found at the end of this outline)
- 3. *About Presenters—For the Couple* (found at the end of this outline)
- 4. *Information for Presenters* (found at the end of this outline)

Outline of Session One

- Pray together.
- Get to know one another (varies as to how well the preparer knows the couple).
- Explore the couples’ religious backgrounds, their experiences with the church(es), and their reasons for being in this congregation.
- Reflect on the theological significance of the couple’s relationship. The *Declaration of Intention* and the marriage liturgies may be useful in this discussion. (This reflection might be moved to a later session.)
- Review and ask the couple to sign the *Declaration of Intention*.
- Walk through the marriage rites, raising theological issues and naming liturgical choices:
 - Discuss the eucharist as normative in the service. However, including a celebration of the eucharist may not be appropriate if only one member of the couple is Christian.
 - Emphasize the difference between a civil service and the ecclesial blessing that is part of the marriage service.
 - Answer general questions regarding details of the service and the Church’s practice.
 - Introduce the possibility of presenters.

At the end of the session, provide written handouts and suggest “homework” topics for the couple to think about for Sessions Two and Three:

- Families of origin and growing up in them

- What worked and didn't work so well in their families of origin (this topic may also influence work in Session Four)
- Family church/religious history as well as each individual's history—positive and negative—with the church/religion
- Marriages of family members, particularly parents
 - Parents' ways of dealing with conflict
 - Parents' styles of child-rearing
 - Family tolerance of children's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Session Two: Learning from the Past, Part 1

This session provides a time for one member of the couple to speak and for the other to listen. Session Two opens with prayer, then looks back to focus upon the relationship of one partner with his/her family of origin, including exploring the marriage(s) of his/her parents and siblings and, if possible, grandparents and close friends. This discussion includes what the individual would or would not replicate from the past in his/her own ongoing and future relationships, particularly the relationship that is to be blessed. In addition, the individual can look at levels of acceptance of his/her relationship by his/her family and at other issues from family of origin and childhood.

The guiding assumption underlying this analysis is that certain issues are replicated from generation to generation, and that, once the issues are identified, individuals can choose to continue those patterns or deliberately alter them. This session works most effectively if the conversation flows naturally, rather than following a rigid interview, and if it includes the following important areas:

- Family: number and birth order of siblings
- Money: its role and influence in the family
- Sex: attitudes in family of origin about monogamy, fidelity, and the role of sex in relationship
- Alcohol and drugs: their places within the family as children grew
- In-laws: relationship with in-laws and greater family
- Children:
 - agreement or disagreement between parents about child-rearing
 - the individual's feelings about being a child in his/her family
- Conflict: parents' methods of arguing and disagreeing.

As the conversation concludes, the preparer invites the individual to identify what he/she would or would not replicate in his/her own adult relationship with the life partner. Following that, the silent partner is given the floor to comment on what he/she has heard and learned, especially any surprises.

Session Three: Learning from the Past, Part 2

This session continues the look back by extending the chance for the other member of the couple to speak about his/her family of origin. Both members of the couple need the opportunity to explore the topics and to hear each other's stories so that each can learn and appreciate more deeply what the other brings to their relationship.

Session Three, which also begins with prayer, duplicates with the second person the process with the first from Session Two. If time permits at the end, the couple might discuss the impact of family history on their own relationship.

Session Four: Looking to the Future

This session, an opportunity to look at the relationship today and into the future, invites the couple to name areas in the relationship that appear strong and supportive while also opening a space to identify and address areas that may be problematic. Thoughts, questions, and new information from previous sessions may help determine where the couple is today and where their relationship and household may need attention in the future.

After opening with prayer, this session should include discussion of:

- The couple's relationship in general: in-depth exploration of where they have been and where they are now
- Role of sex and intimacy in the relationship (for example, potential changes of sexual behavior as a result of committing to a monogamous relationship)
- Role of alcohol and drugs in the relationship
- Money (for example, household finances and financial planning)
- Legal protections (for example, medical and financial durable powers-of-attorney, wills and living wills, insurance)
- Household roles (for example, who takes out the trash, who keeps the social calendar?)
- Communication:
 - How the couple talks things through
 - What happens when they disagree
- Concerns for the future
- Decision-making as a couple
- Dealing with families as individuals (one's own as well as one's partner's) and as a couple
- Support networks, now and in the future.

Session Four concludes with a discussion of the need for boundaries between generations so that the couples' life as a unit may be seen as distinct from older and younger generations.

Session Five: Liturgical Decisions and Wrap-up

Session Five, focused on the marriage service itself, is an opportunity to make choices for the liturgy, based on the discussion at the first session. The depth of this discussion will be determined by what was or was not addressed in Session One. In addition, as the final session, Session Five serves as a time to consider questions that may have arisen from previous sessions.

Outline of Session Five

- Pray together.
- Address questions and concerns regarding previous sessions and other issues that have arisen.
- Review theological reflections in light of previous sessions and what is to come. The preparer can help the couple connect the spiritual practices of their life as a couple and the “staging” of the service. For example, will they process into the service together or separately, or will they be already in the worship space as the liturgy begins? Will they sit together during the Ministry of the Word or across the aisle from one another?
- Discuss details of the service itself:
 - Scripture (which passages speak particularly to the couple's life together?) and whether non-biblical readings may be included
 - Will the liturgy take place at the congregation's principal weekly celebration? Is celebration of the eucharist to be omitted for pastoral cause?
 - Other liturgical choices, especially:
 - Which collect will be used?
 - For the Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage, which of the two vows will be used?
 - Will rings be exchanged, or, if rings have already been worn, are they to be blessed?
 - What music, if any, will be included? (The couple should consult with the congregation's musician.)
- Discuss presenters and their roles in supporting the couple in the service and in their ongoing life.

In closing, the preparer can assure the couple that they have done hard and important work together, work that is a gift both to the preparer and to the couple. The preparer can express his/her eager anticipation of the couple's marriage and of meeting their close and extended families, seeing them with their friends, and celebrating their relationship in the sight of God.

Handouts

1. *Declaration of Intention*
2. *About Presenters—For the Couple*
3. *Information for Presenters*
4. *Model Congregational Guidelines*

The *Declaration of Intention* requires the replacement of *N.N.* and *N. N.* in the first sentence with the couple's names.

Handouts 2 and 3 are designed for use with the liturgy "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage." These handouts may be modified if one of the other marriage liturgies is to be used.

Handouts 2 through 4 are samples that may be adapted for the use of a specific congregation. In these, "N. Episcopal Church" should be replaced with the congregation's name, and a similar change made for "Episcopal Diocese of X."

Handout 1

Declaration of Intention

(Canon I.18.4)

We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.

Signature

Signature

Date: _____

Sample Handout 2

About Presenters—For the Couple

At N. Episcopal Church, we consider “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” to be a celebration supported by the congregation, much as candidates for baptism are supported by all the members of the Church. Just as those who are baptized are initiated into the full life of the Church, those who receive the Church’s blessing upon their marriage are embraced in a new way in the faith community.

The Marriage Liturgy

The presentation takes place immediately after the sermon, as follows:

The couple comes before the assembly. If there is to be a presentation, the presenters stand with the couple, and the Presider says to them

Presider Who presents N. and N. as they seek the blessing of God and the Church on their love and life together?

Presenters We do.

Presider Will you love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and do all in your power to stand with them in the life they will share?

Presenters We will.

Choosing Presenters

There are a variety of possibilities for choosing presenters who will stand with you and present you at the liturgy. It can be helpful to choose at least one member of this faith community to walk with you through this process. If you are new to the congregation, the priest (or other person designated) can help you discern whom you might consider. The selection of a couple mature in their relationship can be particularly helpful if you are just beginning your life together. Often, couples will choose their own parents, children, or other supportive family members to be their presenters.

Presenters can pray for you during the period of preparation before your marriage, keep you connected to the congregation, and continue to support you in your ongoing covenanted life together.

Finally, in choosing, remember that these people will stand with you during the liturgy and present you at this rite. Also remember that, immediately after you are presented, the entire congregation will vow to support you as you, in turn, become a blessing and bear grace to the entire congregation.

Because presenters serve an important role before and after the marriage, you and your clergyperson should talk early about selecting presenters, so that your prayerful partnership may begin as soon as possible.

Sample Handout 3
Information for Presenters

At N. Episcopal Church, we consider “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” to be a celebration supported by the congregation, much as candidates for baptism are supported by all the members of the Church. Just as those who are baptized are initiated into the full life of the Church, those who receive the Church’s blessing upon their marriage are embraced in a new way in the faith community.

At the marriage, you present the couple to the presider and to the assembly, as follows:

The couple comes before the assembly. If there is to be a presentation, the presenters stand with the couple, and the Presider says to them

Presider Who presents N. and N. as they seek the blessing of God and the Church on their love and life together?

Presenters We do.

Presider Will you love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and do all in your power to stand with them in the life they will share?

Presenters We will.

As a presenter, your role begins even before the marriage. We encourage you to pray for the couple both privately and in the Prayers of the People at Sunday services during their period of preparation. You can continue to support their ongoing life by acknowledging the anniversary of their marriage and offering your presence whenever their household experiences times of difficulty or celebrates occasions of joy. If you are a member of the congregation, you also have a role in keeping them connected to others in the congregation.

As a presenter, you promise to support the couple as they become a blessing and bear grace to their families and friends, the Church, and the world. In this role, then, you are a witness to the blessing given and received in the marriage liturgy and carried forth by the couple into the world.

Sample Handout 4
Model Congregational Guidelines

NOTE: Most congregations adopt some form of marriage policy expressing norms and guidelines for couples preparing for marriage. All congregations may engage in a helpful and fruitful exercise to develop guidelines that reflect the Christian community in which they worship; the guidelines that are developed should apply to all couples. Obviously, such a policy is optional at the discretion of the clergy in consultation with the vestry or bishop's committee. As always with liturgical matters, final decisions are the responsibility of the clergy. Following is a model of a guideline that applies for all couples preparing for marriage. It may be modified to meet specific situations and needs.

Information for Couples Seeking Marriage at N. Episcopal Church

A. Introduction

The Christian community at N. Episcopal Church understands that relationships are complex and that making a lifelong commitment to a relationship through a marriage is a significant, exciting, and wonder-filled event in people's lives. We also believe that a Christian community that agrees to bless such a relationship needs to be intentional about supporting the couple as they prepare for the marriage and as they live out their lives.

We understand that committed, lifelong relationships, whether for gender-and-sexual-minority couples or different-sex/gender couples, are to be outward and visible signs of an inward, spiritual, and God-given love. In this context, N. Episcopal Church seeks to support all couples in their commitment to one another and to help make the love of God more visible for the whole community.

B. Guidelines

The following guidelines have been adopted by the lay and ordained leaders of N. Episcopal Church:

1. As required by the Canons of The Episcopal Church at least one member of a gender-and-sexual-minority couple must be baptized.
2. It is desirable that at least one member of the couple be an active member of this, or some other, Christian community. We hope this membership might include giving serious, prayerful consideration to supporting the congregation through time, talent, and/or treasure.
3. Approximately six months' notice should be given to allow for planning and pastoral preparation.
4. If the couple has no connection with N. Episcopal Church but wishes to have their marriage at N. Episcopal Church or to use the services of N. Episcopal Church's priest:

- they should be able to show that at least one of the couple has active membership in another Episcopal or Christian congregation;
- they need to complete marriage preparation with their own or other clergyperson or a qualified lay preparer;
- they might consider making a financial contribution to N. Episcopal Church in thanksgiving for their marriage and for the ongoing support of the Church, its ministry and mission. A creative formula to calculate this contribution might be to consider a tithe (10 percent) of the budget for the entire celebration. *[Clergy have discretion here, as resources vary greatly from couple to couple. Also, if a couple is returning to Church for the first time, an unconditional welcome may be the best pastoral response.]*

In all cases, it is important that all concerned comply with the laws of the state, the Canons of the Episcopal Church, and the canons and policies of the Episcopal Diocese of X as well as the directives of the diocesan bishop, including compliance with diocesan policies for cases in which the relationship is not the first marriage for one or both people.

The full text of the Liturgical Resources 2 can be found at the below link.

[Liturgical Resources 2 - Full Text](#)

VII. Appendices

Contents

1. Marriage Canons
2. A Review of General Convention Legislation

1. Marriage Canons

From The Episcopal Church, Constitution and Canons, 2015

TITLE I:

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Canon 18: Of the Celebration and Blessing of Marriage

Sec. 1. Every Member of the Clergy of this Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also these canons concerning the solemnization of marriage. Members of the Clergy may solemnize a marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

Sec. 2. The couple shall notify the Member of the Clergy of their intent to marry at least thirty days prior to the solemnization; Provided, that if one of the parties is a member of the Congregation of the Member of the Clergy, or both parties can furnish satisfactory evidence of the need for shortening the time, this requirement can be waived for weighty cause; in which case the Member of the Clergy shall immediately report this action in writing to the Bishop.

Sec. 3. Prior to the solemnization, the Member of the Clergy shall determine:

(a) that both parties have the right to marry according to the laws of the State and consent to do so freely, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation; and

(b) that at least one of the parties is baptized; and

(c) that both parties have been instructed by the Member of the Clergy, or a person known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible, in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage.

Sec. 4. Prior to the solemnization, the parties shall sign the following Declaration of Intention:

We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.

Sec. 5. At least two witnesses shall be present at the solemnization, and together with the Member of the Clergy and the parties, sign the record of the solemnization in the proper register; which record shall include the date and place of the solemnization, the names of the witnesses, the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, Church status, and residence(s).

Sec. 6. A bishop or priest may pronounce a blessing upon a civil marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

Sec. 7. It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage.

CANON 19: Of Regulations Respecting Holy Matrimony:

Concerning Preservation of Marriage, Dissolution of Marriage, and Remarriage

Sec. 1. When marital unity is imperiled by dissension, it shall be the duty, if possible, of either or both parties, before taking legal action, to lay the matter before a Member of the Clergy; it shall be the duty of such Member of the Clergy to act first to protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of those involved and only then, if it be possible, to labor that the parties may be reconciled.

Sec. 2 (a) Any member of this Church whose marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a civil court may apply to the Bishop or Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese in which such person is legally or canonically resident for a judgment as to his or her marital status in the eyes of the Church. Such judgment may be a recognition of the nullity, or of the termination of the said marriage; *Provided*, that no such judgment shall be construed as affecting in any way the legitimacy of children or the civil validity of the former relationship.

(b) Every judgment rendered under this Section shall be in writing and shall be made a matter of permanent record in the Archives of the Diocese.

Sec. 3. No Member of the Clergy of this Church shall solemnize the marriage of any person who has been the husband or wife of any other person then living, nor shall any member of this Church enter into a marriage when either of the contracting parties has been the husband or the wife of any other person then living, except as hereinafter provided:

(a) The Member of the Clergy shall be satisfied by appropriate evidence that the prior marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction.

(b) The Member of the Clergy shall have instructed the parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse, and of any children of the prior marriage.

(c) The Member of the Clergy shall consult with and obtain the consent of the Bishop of the Diocese wherein the Member of the Clergy is canonically resident or the Bishop of the Diocese in which the Member of the Clergy is licensed to officiate prior to, and shall report to that Bishop, the solemnization of any marriage under this Section.

(d) If the proposed marriage is to be solemnized in a jurisdiction other than the one in which the consent has been given, the consent shall be affirmed by the Bishop of that jurisdiction.

Sec. 4. All provisions of Canon I.18 shall, in all cases, apply.

2. A Review of General Convention Legislation

Introduction

The legislative history here shows the development of General Convention deliberations about the place of gay men and lesbians in the life of the Church, particularly with regard to the blessing of their faithful, monogamous, lifelong relationships. Successive conventions have both acknowledged the work of their predecessors and reached new decisions.

Resolution texts are from the website of the Archives of the Episcopal Church:

<http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/acts/>.

Minneapolis, 1976: For the first time, General Convention adopted a resolution that acknowledged and affirmed the presence of persons of homosexual orientation in the Church.

Resolution 1976–A069:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

Anaheim, 1985: General Convention reaffirmed the 1976 resolution and encouraged dioceses to deepen understanding.

Resolution 1985–D082:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 68th General Convention urge each diocese of this Church to find an effective way to foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, to provide pastoral support, and to give life to the claim of homosexual persons “upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral care and concern of the Church” as recognized by the General Convention in 1976.

Phoenix, 1991: General Convention affirmed the traditional understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman, and acknowledged “discontinuity” between that teaching and the experience of many members of the Episcopal Church.

Resolution 1991–A104:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirms that the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous “union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind” “intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord” as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; and be it further

Resolved, That this Church continues to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body; and be it further

Resolved, That this General Convention confesses our failure to lead and to resolve this discontinuity through legislative efforts based upon resolutions directed at singular and various aspects of these issues; and be it further

Resolved, That this General Convention commissions the Bishops and members of each Diocesan Deputation to initiate a means for all congregations in their jurisdiction to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues; and further this General Convention directs the President of each Province to appoint one Bishop, one lay deputy and one clerical deputy in that province to facilitate the process, to receive reports from the dioceses at each meeting of their provincial synod and report to the 71st General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That this General Convention directs the House of Bishops to prepare a Pastoral Teaching prior to the 71st General Convention using the learnings from the diocesan and provincial processes and calling upon such insight as is necessary from theologians, theological ethicists, social scientists and gay and lesbian persons; and that three lay persons and three members of the clergy from the House of Deputies, appointed by the President of the House of Deputies be included in the preparation of this Pastoral Teaching.

Indianapolis, 1994: General Convention added sexual orientation, along with marital status, sex, disabilities, and age as categories to which non-discrimination in Church membership is assured.

Resolution 1994-C020:

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That Title I, Canon 17, Section 5 be amended as follows:

No person shall be denied rights, status [in], or [access to] an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church because of race, color, [or] ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by [this] Canon.

Indianapolis, 1994: General Convention called for a study of “the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex.”

Resolution 1994-C042:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 71st General Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to prepare and present to the 72nd General Convention, as part of the Church’s ongoing dialogue on human sexuality, a report addressing the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex; and be it further

Resolved, That no rites for the honoring of love and commitment between persons of the same sex be developed unless and until the preparation of such rites has been authorized by the General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the sum of \$8,600 be appropriated to support this work, subject to funding considerations.

Philadelphia, 1997: General Convention reaffirmed the traditional understanding of marriage and called for continuing study.

Resolution 1997–C003:

Resolved, That this 72nd General Convention affirm the sacredness of Christian marriage between one man and one woman with intent of life-long relationship; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission to continue its study of theological aspects of committed relationships of same-sex couples, and to issue a full report including recommendations of future steps for the resolution of issues related to such committed relationships no later than November 1999 for consideration at the 73rd General Convention.

Denver, 2000: General Convention acknowledged relationships other than marriage.

Resolution 2000–D039:

Resolved, That the members of the 73rd General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts and creative energies for mission; and be it further

Resolved, That we acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships; and be it further

Resolved, That we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God; and be it further

Resolved, That we denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members; and be it further

Resolved, That this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement, and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them; and be it further

Resolved, That we acknowledge that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position; and be it further

Resolved, That in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to the call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we reaffirm the imperative to promote conversation between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

Minneapolis, 2003: Acknowledging continuing differences, General Convention recognized “that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.”

Resolution 2003–C051:

Resolved, That the 74th General Convention affirm the following:

1. That our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate.
2. That we reaffirm Resolution A069 of the 65th General Convention (1976) that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.”
3. That, in our understanding of homosexual persons, differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions; and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same.
4. That we reaffirm Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention (2000), that “We expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God,” and that such relationships exist throughout the church.
5. That we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.
6. That we commit ourselves, and call our church, in the spirit of Resolution A104 of the 70th General Convention (1991), to continued prayer, study, and discernment on the pastoral care for gay and lesbian persons, to include the compilation and development by a special commission organized and appointed by the Presiding Bishop, of resources to facilitate as wide a conversation of discernment as possible throughout the church.
7. That our baptism into Jesus Christ is inseparable from our communion with one another, and we commit ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion and, among dioceses, a diversity of pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us.
8. That it is a matter of faith that our Lord longs for our unity as his disciples, and for us this entails living within the boundaries of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. We believe this discipline expresses faithfulness to our polity and that it will facilitate the conversation we seek, not only in The Episcopal Church, but also in the wider Anglican Communion and beyond.

Anaheim, 2009: The General Convention directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to “collect and develop theological and liturgical resources” for blessing same-gender relationships.

Resolution 2009–C056:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention acknowledge the changing circumstances in the United States and in other nations, as legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships for gay and lesbian persons is passed in various civil jurisdictions that call forth a renewed pastoral response from this Church, and for an open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same-gender relationships; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, collect and develop theological and liturgical resources, and report to the 77th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, devise an open process for the conduct of its work inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals who are engaged in such theological work, and inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and be it further

Resolved, That the members of this Church be encouraged to engage in this effort.

Indianapolis, 2012: In Resolution A049, the General Convention commended the resource “I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing” for study and use, authorized the liturgy for provisional use, and called for a process of review and further development of the theological resources. In addition, in Resolution A050, the General Convention called for a task force to explore understandings of marriage, including attention to legislation authorizing or forbidding same-sex marriage.

Resolution 2012–A049

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention commend “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing” for study and use in congregations and dioceses of The Episcopal Church, with the following revisions:

Throughout “I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing” change “same-gender” to “same-sex”

Blue Book p. 184: change “Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships” to “Resources for The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant in a Same-Sex Relationship”

Blue Book p. 240: Add rubric after first rubric, stating: “At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian.”

Blue Book p. 240: In paragraph 2, line 1, delete “at least one of whom is baptized”

Blue Book p. 241: In Presider’s address to the assembly, delete “come what may” (paragraph 1, line 9)

Blue Book pp. 241–242: In Presider’s address to the assembly, delete all of paragraph 2 (“Ahead of them ... calls us all to share.”)

Blue Book p. 242: In Presider’s address to the assembly, change “let us pray, then,” (paragraph 3, line 1) to “Therefore, in the name of Christ, let us pray.”

Blue Book p. 245: After the bidding for peace in their home and love in their family, add the following bidding: “For the grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other’s forgiveness and yours: Lord, in your mercy (or Lord, in your goodness) Hear our prayer.”

Blue Book p. 246: Change rubric that begins “After a time of silence” to the following: “The leader may add one or more of the following biddings.”

Blue Book p. 247: In Commitment (both forms) line 7, change “I will honor and keep you” to “I will honor and love you”

Blue Book p. 248: In first form of blessing rings, change line 2 to “as signs of the enduring covenant”

Blue Book p. 248: In Blessing of the Couple, add rubric between first and second paragraphs: “The Presider continues with one of the following”

Blue Book p. 248: In Blessing of the Couple, add third paragraph after the “Amen”: “or this / God, the holy and undivided Trinity, bless, preserve, and keep you, and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace, that you may please God in body and soul. God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet, where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.”

Blue Book p. 257: In paragraph under E. Vocation, change “1 Samuel 18” to “1 Samuel 3”; and be it further

Resolved, That the 77th General Convention authorize for provisional use “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing” beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2012, under the direction and subject to the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops may authorize adaptation of these materials to meet the needs of members of this Church: and be it further

Resolved, that the provision of Canon I.18.4 applies by extension to “Theological Resources for Blessing Same-Sex Relationships,” namely, “It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to” preside at any rite of blessing defined herein; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention honor the theological diversity of this church in regard to matters of human sexuality, and that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her conscientious objection to or support for the 77th General Convention’s action with regard to the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships; and be it further

Resolved, That the theological resource for the blessing of a lifelong covenant be further developed by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music over the 2013–2015 triennium with specific attention to further engagement with scripture and the relevant categories and sources of systematic theology (e.g., creation, sin, grace, salvation, redemption, human nature); and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music include the work of diverse theological perspectives in the further development of the theological resource; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music develop an open process to review “I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing,” inviting responses from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals from throughout The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, and from our ecumenical partners, and report to the 78th General Convention.

Resolution 2012–A050

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint a task force of not more than twelve people, consisting of theologians, liturgists, pastors, and educators, to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage; and be it further,

Resolved, That the task force consult with the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons and The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same-sex couple in states that authorize such; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force consult with couples living in marriage and in other lifelong committed relationships and with single adults, and be it further,

Resolved, That the task force consult with other churches in the Anglican Communion and with our ecumenical partners, and be it further

Resolved, That the task force consider issues raised by changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures, including legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships between two people of the same sex, in the U.S. and other countries where The Episcopal Church is located; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force develop tools for theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level; and be it further

Resolved, That the task force report its progress to the 78th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Salt Lake City, 2015: In Resolution A054, the General Convention authorized two liturgies for marriage for trial use and the use of “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant,” thus allowing the marriage of same-sex couples in civil jurisdictions where such marriages are legal. In addition, Resolution A036 revised the marriage canon (Canon I.18; the revised text appears above in Appendix 2), and Resolution A037 requested dioceses and parishes to use the study materials produced by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage established by the 2012 Convention, and called for an expanded task force to continue to study marriage.

Resolution 2015-A036:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That Canon I.18 is hereby amended to read as follows:

~~CANON 18: Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony~~

Canon 18: Of the Celebration and Blessing of Marriage

Sec. 1. Every Member of the Clergy of this Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also to the laws of this Church governing these canons concerning the solemnization of marriage ~~Holy Matrimony~~. Members of the Clergy may solemnize a marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

Sec. 2. Before solemnizing a marriage the Member of the Clergy shall have ascertained:

- (a) That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according to the laws of the State.
- (b) That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong.
- (c) That both parties freely and knowingly consent to such marriage, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to identity of a partner, or mental reservation.
- (d) That at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism.
- (e) That both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony by the Member of the Clergy, or that they have both received such instruction from persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible.

Sec. 2. The couple shall notify the Member of the Clergy of their intent to marry at least thirty days prior to the solemnization; Provided, that if one of the parties is a member of the Congregation of the Member of the Clergy, or both parties can furnish satisfactory evidence of the need for shortening the time, this requirement can be waived for weighty cause; in which case the Member of the Clergy shall immediately report this action in writing to the Bishop.

Sec. 3. No Member of the Clergy of this Church shall solemnize any marriage unless the following procedures are complied with:

- (a) The intention of the parties to contract marriage shall have been signified to the Member of the Clergy at least thirty days before the service of solemnization; *Provided, that for weighty cause, this requirement may be dispensed with if one of the parties is a member of the Congregation of the Member of the Clergy, or can furnish satisfactory evidence of responsibility. In case the thirty days' notice is waived, the Member of the Clergy shall report such action in writing to the Bishop immediately.*
- (b) There shall be present at least two witnesses to the solemnization of marriage.
- (c) The Member of the Clergy shall record in the proper register the date and place of the marriage, the names of the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, their residences, and their Church status; the witnesses and the Member of the Clergy shall sign the record.
- (d) The Member of the Clergy shall have required that the parties sign the following declaration:
- (e) "We, A.B. and C.D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.
- (f) "We believe that the union of husband and wife, in heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

~~(g) "And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto."~~

Sec. 3. Prior to the solemnization, the Member of the Clergy shall determine:

(a) that both parties have the right to marry according to the laws of the State and consent to do so freely, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation; and

(b) that at least one of the parties is baptized; and

(c) that both parties have been instructed by the Member of the Clergy, or a person known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible, in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage.

Sec. 4. Prior to the solemnization, the parties shall sign the following Declaration of Intention:

We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.

Sec. 5. At least two witnesses shall be present at the solemnization, and together with the Member of the Clergy and the parties, sign the record of the solemnization in the proper register; which record shall include the date and place of the solemnization, the names of the witnesses, the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, Church status, and residence(s).

Sec. 6. A bishop or priest may pronounce a blessing upon a civil marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

~~Sec. 4~~ Sec. 7. It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage.

and be it further

Resolved that this canon shall become effective on the First Sunday of Advent, 2015.

Resolution 2015-A037:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 78th General Convention requests dioceses and parishes use the study materials on marriage provided in the last triennium by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, namely the "Dearly Beloved" toolkit and the appended essays in their Blue Book report to this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention directs the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint jointly an expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage to continue this work, consisting of not more than 15 people, including theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, and

educators, who represent the cultural and theological diversity in the Church; membership should include some of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage appointed in 2012, some from dioceses outside the United States, and young adults; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force explore further those contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium, specifically regarding those who choose to remain single; unmarried persons in intimate relationships; couples who cohabitate either in preparation for, or as an alternative to, marriage; couples who desire a blessing from the Church but not marriage; parenting by single or and/or unmarried persons; differing forms of family and household such as those including same-sex parenting, adoption, and racial diversity; and differences in marriage patterns between ethnic and racial groups; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult with (i) individuals and couples within these groups about their experience of faith and church life; and (ii) the results of diocesan and parochial study of "Dearly Beloved" toolkit; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives on these matters, and develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church and which include responses from theologians, ethicists, pastors, liturgists, social scientists, and educators who are not members of the expanded Task Force, and whose perspectives represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force study and monitor, in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church; the continuing debate about clergy acting as agents of the state in officiating at marriages; and any other matters related to marriage by action of or referral by this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force report and make recommendations to the 79th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represents the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$90,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

Resolution 2015-A054:

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 78th General Convention commend "Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015," as found in the Blue Book, Liturgy Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (BBLSM), pp. 2-151, with the following revisions:

BBLSM p. 84: In The Commitment, change the rubric to read "Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the right hand of the other and says"

BBLSM p.84: After "I N., give myself to you, N." add ", and take you to myself."

BBLSM p. 85: At the Pronouncement, change the rubric to read "The Presider joins the right hands and says"

BBLSM p. 87: In Concerning the Service, change the second paragraph to read “At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian, and the marriage shall conform to the laws of the state and canons of this church.”

BBLSM p. 88: Under Gathering, change the rubric to read “The couple joins the assembly.”

BBLSM p. 89: Change “In marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “In marriage [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”

BBLSM p. 89: Change “Solemnize their marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “are married [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”

BBLSM p.94: After “I N., give myself to you, N.” add “, and take you to myself.”

BBLSM p. 95: At the Pronouncement, change the rubric to read “The Presider joins the right hands of the couple and says”

BBLSM p. 95: Replace “I pronounce that they are married according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “I pronounce that they are married [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”

BBLSM p. 100: At The Marriage, change the rubric to read “Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the right hand of the other and says”

for study and use in congregations and dioceses of The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention authorize for use “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015” (as found in Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, pp. 77-86, as amended)” beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2015; under the direction and with the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention authorize for trial use in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6 “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage,” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015” (as found in Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, pp. 87-105) beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2015. Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies. Trial use is only to be available under the direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops may continue to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the provision of Canon I.18.4* applies by extension to “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” namely, “It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to” preside at any rite contained herein; and be it further

Resolved, That the provisions of Canon I.19.3 regarding marriage after divorce apply equally to all the rites of “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” in accordance with guidelines established by each diocese; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her theological objection to or support for the 78th General Convention's action contained in this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music continue to monitor the use of this material and report to the 79th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention direct the Secretary of General Convention, and the Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer in consultation with the outgoing Chair of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and the Chairs of the Legislative Committees to whom this legislation is referred, to finalize and arrange for the publication with Church Publishing of the material (in English and Spanish) contained in "Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015" as approved by the 78th General Convention, no later than the first Sunday of Advent 2015, these materials to be available electronically at no cost.

*Canon I.18.4 refers to the 2012 Constitution and Canons; a comparable provision is contained in Canon I.18.7 of the 2015 Constitution and Canons.

The full text of the Liturgical Resources 2 can be found at the below link.

[Liturgical Resources 2 - Full Text](#)

MINORITY REPORT

A More Excellent Way? A Minority Report

BY JORDAN HYLDEN

I am grateful to our church's presiding officers for appointing me as a member of this triennium's marriage task force. In our enabling resolution (2015-A037), the General Convention called for appointments that reflect the "theological diversity in the Church." That was judged to include me, as the one appointed (as I take it) to represent those in our church who find the 1979 BCP to be a faithful rendering of the witness of Scripture and the catholic Church on marriage as "a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman" (BCP, 422). I was glad to serve, but felt a need to write this minority report as I cannot affirm what my Task Force colleagues propose, in particular passing on first reading the addition of gender-neutral marriage liturgies to the Prayer Book along with revisions consistent with this to the BCP Catechism. In what follows, I will explain my concerns.

They fall into three chief areas: the nature of the deliberative process we as a church have undertaken; the proposed rites themselves as set within a wider discussion of Prayer Book revision; and the effects that Prayer Book revision at this time may have on our efforts to live into "communion across difference" as one church that includes all Episcopalians, walking together with our Anglican Communion sisters and brothers.

DELIBERATIVE PROCESS CONCERNS

First, I would like to suggest that it was not adequate to General Convention's intent to appoint only one (white, married, heterosexual) person on this Task Force to represent the traditional view. Two to four out of our fifteen would have been better. While my colleagues were gracious, they recognized that my position on the committee was a difficult one. It would have been helpful, I suggest, also to include Episcopalians such as Dr. Wesley Hill, a celibate gay man who has written extensively on marriage and sexuality; and Bishop Lloyd Allen of Honduras, a respected leader in Province IX who holds the traditional view of marriage.

While I was glad to be included, I felt inadequate as a white person to speak for the non-white members of our church who hold a traditional view of marriage. We saw in 2015 that most of our Latin American sisters and brothers in Province IX did not vote in favor of authorizing new rites for same-sex marriage. While one of our number was from Venezuela, he supported the progressive view of marriage; moreover, the political situation in his country prevented him from participating in many of our sessions. I am grateful that the Province IX bishops responded to our invitation to submit a reflection. Their statement makes clear their traditional view of marriage, grounded in Holy Scripture, and urges our church to avoid revising it in our Prayer Book. "If the Church approves these changes," they write, "they are greatly deepening the breach, the division, and the Ninth Province will have to

learn how to walk alone.” These are clearly significant words, and I am troubled by a deliberative process that does not take the time to listen well to the concerns of this community. In recent decades, we in TEC have emphasized our character as a multi-national, diverse church, but I fear that we have not acted this way in our deliberative process, in which native-English-speaking Anglo-Americans seem to do most of the talking and not always enough listening.

I must mention also indigenous and non-white U.S. communities who tend in a more traditional direction. Our survey of congregations included one largely Afro-Caribbean parish, which finds itself a conservative outlier in its largely white and progressive diocese. They reported that they would likely face significant departures and fractures if the BCP marriage service is revised. I imagine there are other similar voices in our church, but I fear that they have not been consulted. We should be wary, I think, of reproducing mistakes from our past. In 2000 (Resolution B034), General Convention apologized for the way in which it effected the transition to the 1979 prayer book, noting that many indigenous peoples experienced this as an occasion of harsh cultural superiority.

As a matter of principle, I submit that whenever our church undertakes revision in a substantial doctrinal matter, we ought to build meaningful conversation into our deliberative process with those who hold the received position, as well as with those who hold it should be revised. This conversation must I think take particular care to listen to the voices of non-white persons and all the nations of TEC. This I think is true not only for marriage, but also for other issues of substance, such as the evergreen question of whether our canons should permit the communion of the unbaptized. Although our enabling resolution (2015: A037) called for this Task Force to “represent the cultural and theological diversity in the Church,” I do not think this intention was realized.

When we do decide to revise our teaching, a genuinely inclusive conversation may allow us to find space for all members and communities of our church. As far as I can tell, all of our Anglican Communion and full-communication ecumenical partners who have moved ahead on some such doctrinal issue in recent years (such as the ELCA, the Church of England, and the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia) have built this kind of conversation into their deliberative process, and the result has been a way forward that allowed most (if not all) to move forward together in good conscience as one church. I submit that if we move forward, we need a more truly inclusive conversation about how we are to live together in “good disagreement” with “communion across difference” as a diverse, multi-national church.

PRAYER BOOK REVISION CONCERNS: PROCESS AND SUBSTANCE

My second chief difficulty concerns the notion of what some call “piecemeal” or “surgical” Prayer Book revision, as set within the larger discussion on revision carried forward by the SCLM.

First, there is the question of whether the Trial Use rites have been sufficiently received in the Church, so as to recommend inclusion in our Prayer Book. I have spoken to several colleagues in TEC who are in favor of revising our practice of marriage, but who are nonetheless not sure that the current Trial Use rites are seasoned enough to merit inclusion in the BCP at this time.

Traditionally, of course, proposals for prayer book revision come from the SCLM, rather than from a special task force. There are good reasons for this. The SCLM as a standing committee is charged with seeing the ‘big picture’ of stewarding our church’s authorized worship, rather than any particular portion thereof. It is unwise, it seems to me, for special task forces to propose their own changes to the Prayer Book. Might we have another task force propose that we add a sentence in the Baptismal Covenant about stewardship of creation? Perhaps we should make this change and many others; but it does not seem wise to publish new Prayer Books every few years to keep up with new “surgical” changes that “we absolutely *must* make”—or so I can already hear it being said.

Speaking for myself, I think that the Cranmerian “Dearly beloved” exhortation in our Prayer Book represents a catholic and ecumenical theology responsive to the whole witness of canonical Scripture, displaying the resonance between creation and covenant in the sacrament of marriage. This I see in the Prayer Book’s dramatic presentation of male and female made in God’s image coming together as one flesh, joined as man and wife, charged to be fruitful and multiply and thereby participate in God’s creative act by passing along God’s gift of life to the next generation (Genesis 1-2); and all of this as mysteriously signifying to us the fruitful union between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5), the countless children of whom number as many as the stars in Abraham’s sky.

From this perspective, I see problems with “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” proposed for inclusion in the BCP:

- The reference to marriage as a bond “established by God in creation” in the “Dearly beloved” exhortation is cut, thus removing the resonance between creation and covenant.
- “Procreation of children” is replaced with “the gift of children.” As the Church of England’s lengthy response to our proposals points out, this arguably is a significant change of the doctrine of marriage.
- The prayer at the Ministry of the Word replaces “you have created us male and female in your image” with “you have created humankind in your image.” This is a distancing from biblical language.
- The recommended Scripture readings are changed; though other readings remain permissible. Gen. 2:4-9, 15-24 is gone (referencing created sexual complementarity: bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; the man shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh); Eph. 5:21-33 is gone, leaving only Eph. 5:1-2 (the cut portion includes submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ, and the citation of Gen. 2:24 [becoming one flesh] as a profound mystery that signifies Christ and the church). Mark 10:6-9, 13-16 is also omitted, which is where Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 (“he made them male and female”) and 2:24 (“one flesh”), saying that what God has joined together let no man separate. Omitting these suggested readings would seem to be an admission that the new rite is in significant tension with the plain sense of those biblical passages.

It would seem that these changes sit uncomfortably with the historic words of Article 20 on the authority of the church: “It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God’s

Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.” In other words: it would seem like authorizing this rite is precisely what Article 20 said that the church does not have authority to do.

To authorize a marriage service as the doctrine and common prayer of our church that would appear to sit in significant tension with Holy Scripture and our Lord is a matter not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly. As the Church of England notes in their official response to the Task Force’s proposals, this would represent “a very big step to have taken unilaterally” that constitutes “a clear divergence from the understanding of marriage held throughout the history of the Christian church itself and by the great majority of Anglicans, and other Christians, today.” If some will conclude that revising our marriage practice is not disobedient to our Lord—and I trust that progressive Christians do not intend to disobey our Lord—then surely they might recognize that there will be other Christians whose consciences are bound in obedience to our Lord as they understand him, not to mention the discernment of the wider Anglican Communion and catholic Church of which we claim to be a part.

As one who conscientiously holds this view under the authority of Scripture, I feel duty-bound to make this case. However, I understand most of my sisters and brothers in TEC are not persuaded by it, and hold their views conscientiously as well, under Scripture as they read it. I also understand that many lesbian and gay persons bear witness that they experience God’s blessing on their lifelong, committed unions, and that the traditional view of marriage has been used by too many Christians to justify unjustifiable discrimination and abuse of same-sex attracted persons. It is my sincere hope that we can find a way to flourish together as faithful members of one church, united against homophobic prejudice, in which we all have a place as beloved children of God.

CONCERNS REGARDING DOCTRINE, “COMMUNION ACROSS DIFFERENCE,” AND ANGLICAN RELATIONS

My final area of concern is to do with the effects Prayer Book revision may have on our own efforts to live into “communion across difference” as Episcopalians (as the 2015 House of Bishops statement expressed it), “walking together” with our Anglican sisters and brothers around the Communion, as our Presiding Bishop committed to at the 2016 Primates’ Meeting.

It is often said that our church puts great stock in the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer is the law of belief. In *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*, Bishop Pierre Whalon writes: “To include a rite, or a text, in a Book of Common Prayer or its functional equivalent is to make *de facto* a doctrinal statement.” Ordinands in our church vow to conform to the “doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church,” and doctrine is defined in our canons as:

“the basic and essential teachings of the Church... to be found in the Canon of Holy Scripture as understood in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds and in the sacramental rites, the Ordinal and Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer” (IV.2).

What the Task Force is proposing then is not just an addition of liturgical options. Rather, the Task Force proposes to change the doctrine of The Episcopal Church.

Other Anglican provinces and full-communion ecumenical partners, as the responses received by this Task Force make clear, have managed to avoid such an all-or-nothing option. The Scottish Episcopal Church, as they tell us, includes its 1929 Prayer Book as only one among several texts authorized by canon that together “set the baseline of doctrine.” We could take such a route, making our 1979 book our historic text alongside of which other authorized texts have their place (as indeed we already do, to some extent, with 1928 and EOW texts, but without sound constitutional and canonical basis). Such a route would arguably take the air out of the zero-sum game of prayer book revision that has in the past proven divisive, allow breathing room for experimentation, and address the concern that anything not in the BCP is of “second-class” status. Many and perhaps most Anglican provinces have already taken this route, including those of England, Scotland, Ireland, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Finally, I see no reason why General Convention mightn’t seek out creative solutions that are responsive both to LGBTQ+ inclusion as this church has discerned it *and* to our resolve to “walk together” as closely as possible with our fellow Anglicans around the world.

Bishop Whalon, in the *Oxford Guide*, goes on to note that “in light of rapid changes in the Communion ... the work of establishing basic theological principles that apply throughout the Anglican world can no longer be evaded.” “Perhaps the way forward,” he suggests, following the lead of Lambeth 1988, “would be a commission ... widely representative of the whole Communion,” which could “issue guidelines for creating and revising Prayer Books,” to which “all the provinces could agree to submit their proposed revisions for judgment.” Such a proposal is I think sound. We have received what we call *The Book of Common Prayer*, rather than created it anew; and we claim in our Catechism to be not just a national denomination but part of the one Church of the creeds: one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

As the Church of England reminds us in their response, “changing doctrine is, we believe, a matter that must be undertaken in a highly consultative and ecumenical manner across the major Christian churches of the world as well as among Anglicans globally.” They note also that our actions in this arena are likely to have consequences for our relationship with the historic see of Canterbury, full communion with which our Constitution understands as constitutive of our Anglican identity. The Anglican Church of Australia adds in their response that “there is little question that changing the doctrine of marriage is a matter of grave consequence, indeed a church dividing matter.” For this reason, they suggest that this issue is “wrongly handled at a doctrinal level if it involves a redefinition of the doctrine of marriage but rightly handled with pastoral and liturgical resources.” I suggest that there may be ways to be responsive to these concerns from most global Anglicans, while also being responsive to the discernment of most Episcopalians at the last General Convention that LGBTQ+ inclusion demanded changes in the liturgical options available in this church.

The experience of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) may prove a helpful guide, as their response sketches out. In their 2009 teaching document “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” the ELCA carefully made space for those whose “bound consciences” lead them to affirm same-sex marriage *and* for those who cannot do so.

The ELCA's more congregation-centered polity would need some translating into our own episcopal polity and catholic ecclesiology, to be sure. Yet it seems clear to me that something along these lines might preserve a space for everyone in our church, taking the air out of the constant all-or-nothing battles that have proven so divisive, and allow us to re-focus our energies on evangelism and mission, as both our Presiding Bishop and the Archbishop of Canterbury invite us to do. As the Church of England urges us to consider, "the quality of provision made for those who dissent from the majority view can mean the difference between bitter splits and continuing to walk together as one church which is large enough to honor difference."

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I note that there are a number of items in the academic essays with which I cannot concur. While our conversations were collegial, the larger Task Force did not judge that some of my concerns and suggestions should be incorporated into the final text. While I regret this, it is likely not possible to formulate a consensus text if one member is of widely divergent views. I also note that I do not concur with the Task Force's proposed resolutions on developing resources for non-marital sexual relationships, and authorizing rites to bless non-marital lifelong relationships.

We have, so it seems to me, a way forward at hand that would allow every Episcopalian in the pews to go on worshiping and praying together, even with our painful divisions and distinctions, until such time as our Lord chastens us all. It would be easier, more tidy, to impose a uniform code upon all dissenters. And it might be easier to finish the secession once and for all, so that we all can live in a church in which everyone agrees with us.

But the Gospel of John testifies that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Being a church full of both grace *and* truth is a difficult and rare thing. If we are to remain Christ's Church, there is no easy way forward—but there may be a "more excellent" way, full of both grace and truth. So I hope.

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