

WITNESS MAGAZINE CLAIMING THE BLESSING

Witness Magazine

VOLUME 85  
NUMBER 11  
NOVEMBER 2002

# INSIDE

**Walter Brueggemann on the Gospel vs. Scripture**

**Ethan Flad reports on Johannesburg**

**John Chane on war with Iraq**

**Colleen O'Connor on growing 'welcoming' churches**



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**David Smith-Ferri** lives in Ukiah, Calif., where he is a poet and a stay-at-home dad. He traveled to Iraq for two weeks in July of 1999, and again in Sept.-Oct. of 2002, with the organization, Voices in the Wilderness. He is a Roman Catholic who is drawn most deeply to the tradition of social justice and mysticism in the Christian church. Voices in the Wilderness is a campaign to end the economic sanctions against Iraq. It has taken over 40 delegations of American and British citizens to Iraq to witness the effects of the international embargo and of war on Iraqi society.

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While President Bush spoke at a \$1000-a-plate fund-raiser in the Nashville Convention Center, 400 persons gathered outside in the rain as a witness for peace. The event was organized by the Nashville Interfaith Coalition for Peace. For information on how to do something similar in your community contact Ed Landers, an Episcopal priest who helped organize the Nashville vigil, at 615-353-9996.

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\$35 per year, \$5 per copy.

Foreign subscriptions add \$20 per year.

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## LETTERS

### Don't eat one

In *The Witness'* September 2002 issue, the self-righteous language used by Carol Adams in promoting a vegetarian diet reminded me of the rhetoric employed by the anti-abortionists.

The twisting of the Bible to suit her argument also follows the anti-abortion style. To say that the story about Jesus creating a commotion in the temple might have showed his anger about animals being sold for sacrifices is blatantly dishonest. If the authors and editors of the gospels thought Jesus was concerned about the animals rather than about temple business practices, they could have said so. If Jesus objected to animal sacrifice or to the eating of animals, nobody bothered to write down these views. Both Matthew and Luke suggest that Jesus was accused of being a glutton, not a charge that anyone would be likely to make about a vegan.

In resisting the arguments of the anti-abortionists, some pro-choice advocates came up with an effective bumper sticker: "Against abortion? Don't have one." Perhaps omnivorous people now need something similar: "Against using animals for food? Don't eat one."

I was pleased to note in a *New York Times Magazine* article (9/1/02) that not all vegans sound like anti-abortionists when they talk about their diets. Michael Kline, who made a fortune in data communications, not only follows a raw-food vegetarian diet, but he also has bankrolled an all-raw haute cuisine vegetarian restaurant run by his wife, Roxanne. According to Peggy Orenstein, who wrote the article, Michael Kline insisted that he and his wife are not fanatics: "There is nothing worse than religious vegans trying to change the world."

Maybe anti-abortionists are worse. But not much worse.

Jim Adams  
Cambridge, MA

### A mission with animals

The September 2002 issue on "Recovering our kinship with animals" is the greatest! We (the Community of the Ascension) are a tiny Episcopal Religious Order whose outreach mission is primarily in bird rescue and environmental care. We rescue/rehab/release injured and orphaned wild birds, and also care for many "previously owned" exotic birds on a permanent basis. And we also care for many other animals who have come to live with us: cats, dogs, two horses, two chickens and a rabbit! We have recently moved to a 9-acre home in Somerset County, Md., and one Sister is studying forestry. I believe that we are the only Episcopal order specifically working with animals and the environment. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to find financial support for our animal and environmental activities, other than by working at outside jobs, and sometimes this makes creating a balance difficult! You can find us at <<http://www.dioceseofeaston.org>> and then click on Community of the Ascension.

Sister Mary Winifred, CA  
Upper Fairmount, MD

### War with Iraq?

Jesus declared, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Mat. 5:9). So whose sons shall the warmakers be called?

We should not underestimate the shell-shock effect of 9/11 on the White House and Congress, which could cause some long-range distortion in logical thought processes in government policies. The "war on terrorism" is a compulsive concept, perhaps even a hysterical drive springing from subconscious desperation. Can we avoid being "carried away" by such emotional war-fervor?

John J. Hancock  
St. Bede's Episcopal Church  
Los Angeles, CA

The Episcopal Church Publishing Company, publisher of *The Witness* magazine and related website projects, seeks to give voice to a liberation Gospel of peace and justice and to promote the concrete activism that flows from such a Christianity. Founded in 1917 by Irving Peake Johnson, an Episcopal Church bishop, *The Witness* claims a special mission to Episcopalians and other Anglicans worldwide, while affirming strong partnership with progressives of other faith traditions.

Manuscripts: Writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

# Church's core mission at stake

by Julie A. Wortman

**A**s I write this, email gossip claims that there's a significant wave of sentiment among the Episcopal Church's bishops, probably prompted by this month's Claiming the Blessing conference in St. Louis, that this is not the time to be pressuring for approval of rites of blessing for committed relationships outside of marriage. Everyone knows that these rites would be primarily used by partners in committed same-sex relationships. There are other, more important issues for the church to be addressing, many bishops say, urging that we not get pulled off track from our core mission by this minor, if controversial, issue. And PLEASE, more than one has added with unmistakable irritation and weariness, let's not dignify this as a "justice" issue!

I'm sorry, but I must question the honesty of this stance. The fact is, this withholding of the church's blessing for committed same-sex relationships is a crucial stumbling block to the church's ability to stand clear and unequivocally on behalf of right relationship of all kinds. ("Right relationship" is just another way of saying "justice," by the way, but maybe with a stronger flavor of the flesh-and-blood implications when it is lacking.)

I can't help thinking of the parallel with the U.S. government and the current administration's claim of righteousness in being a global champion of democracy. U.S. willingness to support oppressive regimes in the name of national security, however, makes it just about impossible to convince anyone who is paying attention of our integrity. In a crunch, power and self-interest drives U.S. policy — as they do in the church. It's a disappointing history, but the church has always shown that some of us matter more than others when it comes to the possibility of losing the financial support of bigots, or allocating resources, or calling into question the traditional patriarchal power structure.

I know, I'm fuming here. I've just completed another season of weddings. My partner,

Anne, officiated at one. Friends, family and acquaintances — all parents of the young cohabitating lovers in question (not all embarking on marriage for the first time) — spent hours filling us in on the heart-warming details. The dress, the reception, the honeymoon plans, the anticipated family reunions. And then there were the afterglow debriefings of how great the landmark day had been. Never a moment's doubt that we'd be interested and pleased for this great blessing in their lives despite the discrimination that makes marriage — or even a supplementary rite of blessing — impossible for us.

The unconsciousness of privilege is a marvel.

The church tells Anne and me that if we want it to participate sacramentally in our declaration of love for one another and in our commitment to partner in faithful discipleship to Christian values we are out of luck unless a courageous diocese or a maverick priest risks institutional censure to stand with us. But we don't need or want the heroism. Just some basic respect.

Anne and I have been life partners for close to 18 years. We've known each other for longer, but only we know exactly when we made our covenant of faithful, monogamous, God-celebrating lifelong commitment. No photos, no toasts, no promises of support. But when the time is right, we've agreed, we'll throw a party to celebrate the blessing of our life together. We'll invite all the neighbors and friends and family who have asked us to participate in their "real" weddings and if they want to shower us with gifts, great.

Maybe by that time the church will have caught up with us and provided a rite that will dignify and honor our commitment. I pray that will be so. Because I agree with those bishops who say the church's core mission is at stake. As long as right relationship is denied any, it is denied us all — and everything the church does will be compromised by the omission.

## Free worship resources

Free worship resources for ending hunger. Each fall, thousands of parishes from all communions observe Bread for the World Sunday. FREE bulletin inserts, preaching helps, and prayers are available by calling 1-800-82-BREAD (1-800-822-7323) or visit the Bread for the World website: <[www.bread.org](http://www.bread.org)>.

## Order of Jonathan Daniels

An Episcopal religious community-in-canonical-formation of brothers and sisters; single, partnered and married; either living-in-community or living independently; striving for justice and peace among all people. Contact: Order of Jonathan Daniels, St. Brigit's Hallow, 94 Chatham St., Chatham, N.J., 07928.

## Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs

Episcopal Divinity School seeks a chief development/alumni affairs officer to build a strong team, both at the staff and volunteer levels, to bring its fund-raising and constituent relations programs to a new level of professionalism and productivity. This is a truly unique opportunity for a self-starter to join with colleagues who are committed, both personally and institutionally, to building a program over a multi-year period.

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Episcopal Divinity School, located in Cambridge, MA, adjacent to Harvard University with which it enjoys several coordinate programs and benefits, is one of the oldest Episcopal seminaries in the country. It is a community of scholars in a spiritual setting.

The salary/benefits package will be competitive, with the ability to grow as the program grows. Please send nominations and letters of interest, along with a current resume, to: [vpdevsearch@episdivschool.edu](mailto:vpdevsearch@episdivschool.edu)

# As we went to press...

This news digest was prepared from news and wire reports by *Witness* news editor, Pat McCaughan.

## Jubilee USA acts up

About 700 demonstrators rallied in front of the U.S. Dept. of the Treasury September 28 to demand money for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment and to denounce the policies of the World Bank and the IMF. They later joined a larger rally of about 10,000 at the Sylvan Theatre on the Washington Monument grounds. The feeder rally/march was coordinated by Jubilee USA and ACT-UP.



© Rick Reinhard / Impact Digitals

## ACC passes anti-war resolutions

The Anglican Consultative Council, a widely representative Anglican group of clergy and lay persons from each of the 38 Provinces of the worldwide Anglican Communion, unanimously passed two resolutions regarding proposals for war against Iraq during its recent meeting in Hong Kong. The first resolution expressed opposition to any unilateral action by the U.S. against Iraq. The second resolution affirmed ACC solidarity with the position taken by the Episcopal Church, USA in a statement issued by the church's Presiding Bishop in June 2002.

## Protest swells over Nigerian stoning sentence

Amnesty International representatives stepped up pressure on Nigerian government officials to rescind a death sentence imposed upon Amina Lawal, a 30-year-old woman sentenced to be stoned to death for having sex outside of marriage. Amnesty International delivered opposition petitions signed by 1 million people to Nigerian officials on September 27. The sentence, imposed under Islamic law, or Shariah, has evoked a worldwide outcry. Government and human rights groups worldwide have urged Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's government to intercede on Lawal's behalf. Shariah was introduced in a dozen predominantly Muslim northern states of Nigeria in 2000, shortly after civilian rule replaced military dictatorship. Obasanjo's government has declared Shariah punishments such as beheadings, stonings and amputations unconstitutional. Lawal is the second Nigerian woman to be condemned to death by Islamic courts for having sex out of wedlock. The first, Safiya Hussaini, had her sentence overturned in March on an appeal. For more info about the Amnesty International campaign: <http://www.mertonai.org/amina>

## Topeka church to picket on anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death

Anti-gay Baptist pastor Fred Phelps planned to picket a football game in Fort Collins, Colo., on the Oct. 12 anniversary of the murder of Matthew Shepard. The website of Phelps' church, Westboro Baptist of Topeka, Kan., says the group will picket the University of Wyoming vs. Colorado State football game "in religious protest and warning: 'God is not mocked.'" The website also says that WBC "engages in daily peaceful sidewalk demonstrations opposing the homosexual lifestyle." The group received national attention when it picketed the funeral of Matthew Shepard, a University of Wyoming student who died after being beaten and hung on a fence during a 1998 hate crime in Laramie. A group of local Wyoming Christian leaders has written to Phelps to request that the WBC stay away.



© Marilyn Humphries / Impact Digitals

## LGBT high-school students protest budget cut

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) students and their allies rallied at the Massachusetts State House in late September to protest the Governor's recent budget cuts that eliminated funding for the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian students at the Massachusetts Department of Education. Founded in 1993, the program supported Gay/Straight Alliances in high schools, teacher training and enforcement of the Student's Right Law, which protects students from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Without the Safe Schools Program, students have nowhere to go and no resources to keep them safe from harassment and physical attacks. According to Massachusetts' Youth Risk Behavior Survey, lgbt youth are four times more likely than their heterosexual peers to have attempted suicide in the past year, more than twice as likely to have been injured or threatened with a weapon at school and twice as likely to miss school because they feel unsafe.

## More U.S. parishioners 'charging it' rather than passing the plate

More and more frequently, when U.S. churches pass the collection plate, parishioners are saying: "Charge it." A recent survey indicated that parishioners are growing fonder of paying their monthly donations by credit card. Electronic giving is increasing in numbers and popularity. It is also becoming an increasingly popular way to donate to local parishes and congregations. But some churches object, saying offerings within a service are an integral part of worship.

# South African religious leaders critique Summit, governments

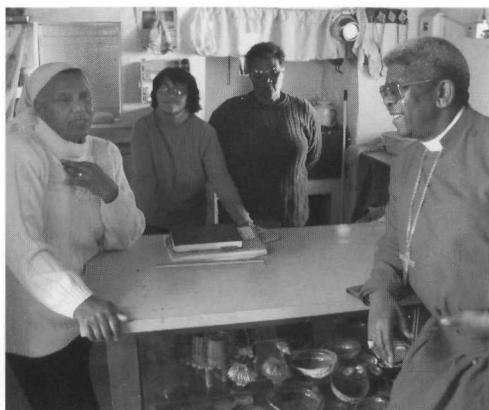
by Ethan Flad

A series of interviews by *The Witness* in August–September 2002 with religious leaders in South Africa reveal an increasing sense of disenchantment with their nation's political leadership.

The conversations were set against the backdrop of the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (WSSD, more info at [www.johannesburgsummit.org](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org)), which was ultimately seen by many to have been a failure. Prior to the Summit, some held high hopes that this international event could finally build effective international mechanisms to address economic, environmental, and health challenges around the world. Even partway through the process, as hopes dwindled, some still tried to remain positive. Dr. Molefe Tsele, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, compared his respect for the working climate to the negative aura that dominated the World Conference Against Racism the previous year. "Anyone who attended Durban knew that it was about to collapse at any point. People who went sought to break it down. Here there are many difficulties, but a good faith effort to address the issues."

However, the strong resistance of the U.S., a handful of other countries, and corporate lobbyists to specific timetables for implementing these goals deeply frustrated many non-governmental representatives. This polarization was fairly predictable. Over the past two years, the U.S. has been lambasted worldwide for taking unilateral positions on a whole range of issues — the Kyoto climate change treaty, the anti-ballistic missile treaty, the WCAR, and other international policy

protocol. The Bush administration's willingness to stake out its own path at the WSSD was nothing new — indeed, the conference itself was a follow-up event to the "Earth Summit" held 10 years prior in Rio de Janeiro, where the same dynamic had been witnessed. In Rio, the U.S. government, ironically then led by the first President Bush, was seen as an isolationist power using obstructionist tactics against treaties to protect biological diversity, slow global warming and create development initiatives. It was not a surprise to hear once again the rhetoric



Ethan Flad

*Archbishop Ndungane visits a craft market in Arniston, a local impoverished fishing village, learning about sustainable development efforts by rural communities.*

of resisting neo-colonialism through plaintive calls for greater action and accountability by the U.S. and other wealthy countries.

So for some observers, the truly interesting dynamic during the Johannesburg Summit was an increasing willingness by people in the Global South to critique their own governments. The Most Rev. Njongonkulu Ndungane, leader of the Anglican Church in the Province of Southern Africa, stated: "We need to see that we have a commitment not just from the North, the developed world, in the areas of debt cancellation, fair trade, and treating the developed world with fairness and equity ... [but] the leadership of the developing world shouldn't privatize children's education, health, food security, and access to clean water, among other things."

This challenge is clearly visible in concerns expressed about the "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) initiated in July 2002 by African heads of state at the G-8 Summit. The Rev. Dr. Mongezi Guma, an Anglican priest who serves as executive director of the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), offered his analysis: "The NEPAD document is schizophrenic; it's as if it were written by two different people. The first part critiques a neo-liberal agenda, and then the second buys into that agenda."

Dr. Tsele was similarly direct in his misgivings: "To us, it's an important distinction that the 'partnership' in NEPAD must be a partnership with the people of the continent first and foremost. ... The criticism we have launched is in marketing, in positioning themselves [African heads of state] to get a buy-in from the North, they left their people behind. NEPAD is an important vision. ... It speaks to what every African knows, that this continent must change. But you can not have people from outside doing it for us. It must come from Africans themselves — not African leaders, ordinary Africans themselves must be committed to see a new Africa."

## The South African situation

1994 marked the end of apartheid in South Africa, with the election of its first democratically chosen government. Despite the thrill of that historical moment, when Nelson Mandela assumed the presidency as leader of the African National Congress (ANC), many religious and community leaders cautioned their citizens and the world community to not expect change to occur too quickly. Apartheid, instituted by the National Party government in 1948, had been legally, socially and psychologically entrenched into the nation for 46 years. There were some who argued that the process of changing the society into a truly free state would take decades as well.

The honeymoon appears to be over. More than eight years into the development of a

post-apartheid nation, some of those religious leaders are increasingly willing to express their unhappiness with a series of policy decisions of the ANC government. The ANC and the country are now led by President Thabo Mbeki, elected in 1999 to be Mandela's successor. During the first couple years of his leadership the historically aligned political left was willing to give the Mbeki government some leeway. However, its decision in 2001 to spend millions of U.S. dollars on military armaments — instead of using that money toward social services — appears to have opened the floodgates to criticism. As Guma said, commenting on the role of the church community, "We must be a force to question the ANC."

The two areas of particular concern are endemic poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. AIDS is an undeniable priority since South Africa has the largest reported number of cases of HIV in the world: Some estimates suggest over 20 percent of its population of 42 million are infected with the virus. Despite this massive problem, a culture of denial and stigmatization prevails. Dr. Denise Ackerman, an Anglican laywoman who teaches at the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch, condemned the government for its role in this morass. "More pernicious than individual denial has been the denial by the South African state that its citizens are trapped in a pandemic." She added sadly, "As the world watches in dismay and people die daily, President Thabo Mbeki and his cabinet have spent more than two years debating 'scientific questions' in regard to HIV/AIDS, opinions which were greatly informed by dissident views on the subject, while refusing virtually free treatment to pregnant women which would greatly reduce the number of infected babies born."

Dr. Tsele concurred, "The government policy is misdirected to the extent that it seeks to pronounce on medical issues, when in actuality very few of them have competency in that. Leave that to doctors to tell us whether this drug is safe or not safe; it's not any minister or politician who knows the difference between drugs." And Archbishop Ndungane summarized in a

matter-of-fact manner, "I think that the leadership of this country has failed the people of this country in not addressing HIV/AIDS [at the WSSD]."

With an estimated 13 million people unemployed, and over a million jobs lost since 1994, the economic scenario is the other obvious agenda item for the nation. The Right Rev. David Beetge, Bishop of Highfelt (a region just northwest of Johannesburg), reported sober statistics to a visiting group of Anglicans. "We are still living under an apartheid economy. Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and to a lesser extent Port Elizabeth have very wealthy regions. My office is only 25 miles from Jo'burg, and we face 37 percent unemployment in that town. Farther into my diocese, my poorest parish community has 90 percent unemployment." The singular challenge of developing an equitable system of economic growth is obvious.

In this context, Archbishop Ndungane questioned the government's priorities in choosing the site for hosting the WSSD. The government conference was held in Sandton, an incredibly wealthy and very white community that sits just a couple miles from Alexandra, a very poor black township. "This Summit was billed as providing improvements in Alexandra, and Alex is still Alex. Yet Sandton's roads and everything were improved. So you ask yourself a question," inquired Ndungane, "Why the choice of Sandton? There are plenty of other places where this could have been held to benefit the people."

Douglas Torr, coordinator of the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg's social responsibility program, is working on a campaign for a Basic Income Grant (BIG). The BIG would provide financial resources — a proposed monthly compensation of 100 Rand (about US\$9) — to every citizen to help them lift themselves out of poverty. He led an effort to develop a "human chain" between Alexandra and Sandton during the Summit, symbolically linking the needs of the poor with the high-level decision-makers, but it was faced with stiff government resistance. "The government has been totally inflexible, there has been no negotiation," said Torr, adding, "We've been

forced to have a march that is entirely in Sandton, entirely in an area of prosperity, entirely outside of big-walled houses." Torr noted that the cost of the BIG initiative would have been easily covered if the government had not spent so much money last year on armaments — and even now the expense is well within reason, if the ANC would show the political will to address this issue.

### **Hope for the future**

Despite these major concerns, and special misgivings about the work being done by the South African government, most religious leaders still offered signs of encouragement. While there was little sense that the documents being produced at the sustainable development summit would themselves create change, "the fact that so many people from various NGOs came to Johannesburg to show concern for the well-being of the voiceless, that in itself is a plus," offered Archbishop Ndungane. In fact, the efforts by Torr and others to create a visible link of humans hearkened back to a vigil held two years ago in the United Kingdom to protest the international debt crisis. Ndungane was there, and cited that story as a witness to what can happen when people truly work together. "I think the Jubilee 2000 movement is a very clear example of how ordinary people can address an issue. It was that human chain in Birmingham, where some 70,000 people stood together while the G-8 were meeting, which forced Tony Blair to come out and listen."

A significant role for the church in a post-apartheid South Africa clearly continues to be one of offering a prophetic voice. "The church has a right and a responsibility to hold up government decisions to a lens of moral scrutiny," said Ndungane. Going forward, its major challenge is just like that of the African leaders in the NEPAD initiative: to not only speak prophetically, but also to bring its people along in the process. Building on the energy of the powerful Jubilee movement, whose ongoing efforts most recently led France to cancel millions of dollars in debt owed by Mali in west Africa, and on a series of small but steady victories in the AIDS pandemic, there is cause for hope.

# Challenge voices for war, Irish urges

by Dan Webster

Challenge "the voices of those who would argue that the war now advocated is reasonable and responsible," urged Carolyn Tanner Irish, the Episcopal bishop of Utah in a pastoral letter sent to 22 congregations in her diocese on the eve of September 11, 2002.

"The stakes are very, very high; ignorance



On the one-year anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks, people gathered for a candlelight vigil at the Brooklyn Heights Promenade overlooking the skyline of lower Manhattan.

and arrogance are pervasive; escalation could become so tempting," she wrote. "Rather than 'going it alone' in a world so clearly interdependent let us renew our commitment to the structures established for peacemaking," she concluded.

The 1952 General Convention of the Episcopal Church USA passed a resolution that concludes, "... we unalterably oppose the idea of so-called 'preventive war.'"

"In the Anglican tradition," wrote Bishop

## LOUIE'S INDEX

Episcopal diocese that gave the highest percent of its budget to support the mission to the world of the Episcopal Church Center in last year reported:  
The Diocese of Newark (28 percent)

Oldest deputy to U.S. Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention:  
Charles Crump (West Tennessee, age 88.9 when convention opens)

Youngest deputy to U.S. Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention:  
Amanda Frank (Alaska, age 16.9)

The senior diocesan bishop in the U.S. Episcopal Church:  
William Swing, Bishop of California (consecrated 1/1/80, could serve until he turns 72 on August 26, 2008)

Number of dioceses that guarantee access to the ordination process without regard to sexual orientation:  
All (by authority of Title 1.17.5 of Canons of the Episcopal Church)

Year first "out" lesbian or gay person was ordained:  
1977 (The Rev. Dr. Ellen Marie Barrett, first co-president of Integrity, by Bishop Paul Moore, Jr., of New York in January 1977, the first month that women could be ordained officially).

Number of Episcopal clergy who hold law degrees:  
12 bishops, 274 priests, 40 deacons

Diocesan bishop who never earned a penny as a priest, but only as a lawyer: Francisco Duque. (Duque worked as a lawyer to support his ministry before being elected Bishop of Colombia in 2001.)

Percent of Episcopal Church priests who have earned academic doctorates:  
5.7 (Ph.D.), 4.1 (D.Min), 0.7 (Th.D.)

Percent of Episcopal Church bishops who have earned academic doctorates:  
2.3 (Ph.D), 7 (D.Min), 1.3 (Th.D.)

Number of Episcopal clergy who are medical doctors: 72 priests, 27 deacons.

Number of Episcopal clergy who have dentistry degrees: 9 priests, 6 deacons

**Last month Louie's Index posed this question:**  
In what sense does the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church also exercise real authority as the Bishop of Rome?

**Here's the answer:**

The Presiding Bishop is the Bishop of the Convocation of American Churches in Europe and as such exercises real authority over the ECUSA parish of St. Paul's within the Walls, the ECUSA parish in Rome. The Presiding Bishop's Suffragan for the Convocation is the Bishop-in-Charge locally, and resides in Paris.

- Who are the female diocesan bishops eligible to be nominated for a full term as Presiding Bishop if elected at the 2006 General Convention?  
*See the December 2002 issue for the answer.*

Witness contributing editor Louie Crew, founder of Integrity and a longtime Episcopal Church leader (he currently sits on the Episcopal Church's Executive Council and is a member of the Diocese of Newark's delegation to General Convention 2003) is a well-known collector and disseminator of statistics and little-known facts about the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. His website is [www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew](http://www.andromeda.rutgers.edu/~lcrew); email him at [LCREW@newark.rutgers.edu](mailto:LCREW@newark.rutgers.edu).

Irish, "the primary statement on war, affirmed and reaffirmed many times since it was passed by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1930, is that '... war as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

Recognizing the approaching anniversary of the "horrific" September 11th attacks Bishop Irish noted, however, that "this anniversary also holds the danger of becoming a time to stoke our feelings of self-righteous indignation and a desire for revenge." "It could, in other words, lead us to support the very kind of violence we have ourselves so recently suffered."

The letter was dated Sept. 4, which on the Episcopal Church calendar is the Feast of Paul Jones, bishop and peace advocate. Jones was the fourth bishop of Utah, 1911–1918. He was forced to resign his office by national church leaders for his pacifist beliefs. Yet he was "sainted" by that same church and given a feast day four years ago as "a sign not only of 20th-century war weariness but also of our capacity to discover non-violent solutions to conflict," wrote the bishop.

## Going local in midcoast Maine

by Holly Lyman Antolini

"Self-reliance, appearing initially in the Bible

and given a distinctly American spin by Henry David Thoreau ... has many positive connotations. It suggests personal responsibility, respect for others, and harmony with nature. And the addition of the word 'community'

to self-reliance underscores that the ultimate objective is a social and caring one. As Neil Seldman of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance emphasizes, all people within a com-

munity should be enabled and empowered."

— Michael Shuman, *Going Local: Creating Self-reliant Communities in a Global Age* (*The Free Press*, 1998)

Katya Bezberodko leaned forward when her turn came to share why she — an 18-year-old headed to college in the fall — was interested in spending every other Tuesday evening of the summer at the Rockland Public Library discussing the local economy in midcoast Maine with a motley collection of citizens ranging from her age up to their 70s. "Contrary to some people's expectations, young people like me are interested in these issues and looking to make change effectively," she shared. "This discussion gives me hope that I can make a difference in conditions in my home community. Look at the hundreds of jobs we're losing in this community with the closing of the Nautica stockroom over on Camden Street! Nautica is not exactly a local business, so what do they care what becomes of those workers? But I do! And when I look around this room and see how this group of citizens is studying hard and making concrete plans to stimulate our local economy, I feel inspired. Reading this book," Katya thumped the volume in her hands, "I've decided, this summer, to major in economics!"

The book is what started us off. It was in the early spring — "mud season" in Maine — and "the small voice ministry" dinner had been small again: just Matt Prindiville (a junior at the University of Maine Farmington in political science) and me, an Episcopal priest and organic gardener. We'd been down to the prayer house on the St. George River for silent meditation. Then we'd prepared and consumed a large amount of home-grown bean gumbo. As we often did, we had spent the whole meal in passionate inquiry about how we could personally contribute to the well-being of our local community — a cluster of small towns around the city of Rockland midway up the coast of Maine. Recently the Wal-Mart in the only strip mall in the Rockland area had attempted to super-size itself. But the community had organized and fought back, shutting the huge store out using a city ordinance limiting square footage. In

the wake of that battle, however, the city council had changed the zoning restriction and no sooner had Wal-Mart given up than Home Depot had colonized the same lot. The community group was helpless to combat it. As Matt and I moseyed to the front door at evening's end, we were lamenting the impact the new national big-box hardware store was going to have on the four healthy local hardware retailers and one statewide hardware store already thriving in our neighborhood.

"Our building dollars will be headed straight out of the state," Matt sighed, when his eye fell on the book, Michael H. Shuman's *Going Local: Creating Self-reliant Communities in a Global Age*, on my shelf. "Hey," he said, "That looks interesting; have you read it? What did you think?" Chagrined, I admitted that I'd bought it the previous fall after a seminar on environmental economics but that, these many months later, it remained unread, victim of my "economics allergy."

"Tell you what," Matt challenged me, "I'll read it if you'll read it!"

He took the book and a few days later, called me in excitement and suggested, "You know, this book is SO practical and clear! I wonder, if we held a book discussion, say, at the local library, whether we could get a group together that would want to tackle an actual project to help grow the local economy in Rockland!?"

We were off and running. A few posters and an article in the local paper later, our group had assembled, meeting every other Tuesday night for two hours all summer, wrestling our way through "economics 101" with the help of the highly approachable Shuman book and a pile of home-baked cookies. Using a "study circle" format, in which the group self-manages its discussion with no "expert" in charge — with Matt and me as nominal convenors, facilitators, and publicists — we addressed three broad questions:

In the rush toward globalization, does our economy in midcoast Maine still serve the best interests of our local community? What helps? What hinders?

As consumers, are we investing in our own community well-being?

Do we know where our money is going

when it leaves our pockets, and how it's being used when it gets there?

We constrained ourselves to apply our learnings as we went to what shared knowledge we could glean from the disparate group about the specifics of our rural fishing and tourist economy. Periodically, we had to re-collect ourselves, as we had a tendency to start ranging over the full scope of the national and global economics, speaking in generalities. As group member Mike Ray, a Green Party activist, carpenter, and Registered Maine Guide, reminded us one night, "This group is not anti-growth; we're not even unilaterally anti-global growth. We're just highly pro-LOCAL growth, because local growth supports a diversified and strong local community. Not only that, it enables us to have a real impact in shaping that growth responsibly from an environmental and human standpoint."

We found the discipline of staying locally focused productive. It kept us concrete and practical, and moved us toward one of our original goals: to discern a specific piece of work for us to tackle to stimulate the "economic multiplier" for local economic growth.

Moreover, our disciplined local focus precipitated a decision to encourage group members to invite "speakers," people active in the local community — legislators, non-

profit activists, local business owners, those pursuing local economic development — to join our discussions. One speaker, Scott Tilton, owner of Weskeag River Shellfish Farms, is building his aquaculture business locally, funded entirely by family and neighbors' investment. He also runs the local Fishing Industry Retraining Project in Rockland, which provides education programs to retrain fishermen forced out of their trade by tighter regulation aimed at preventing overfishing.

Another speaker, Susan Greene, is launching a Time Dollar program through the Coastal Community Action Program. Funded by VISTA, Susan has a year's stipend to help Rockland create a barter exchange system whereby individuals can offer skills and products in return for non-currency "time dollars," which in turn can then be exchanged for services from other participants in the program. "Such local-currency programs," Susan explained, "create healthy communities by connecting neighbors and building trusting relationships. You need your floor sanded; you can offer piano lessons. Maybe the floor sander doesn't care to play the piano, but needs his photos developed. The photo developer is due for some dentistry, and the dentist is the one who's looking to learn to play piano! Each "purchases" the desired service with "time

dollars" they've earned by offering their OWN services to others. You serve your OWN needs and those of others. There's value in reciprocity; you build social capital in the process."

Still other speakers have acquainted us with a myriad of possibilities. Stefan Pakulski, a candidate for state senate, described the potential for communal composting using organic waste from a local corporation. Ron Huber of the non-profit Penobscot Bay Watch proposed an environmentally and economically advantageous integrated resource management of the Penobscot Bay. He also described a community networking effort that succeeded in preventing the building of a marina which would have interfered with the local fishing industry. Kristina King, local columnist, merchandiser, and market grower of fruits and vegetables, introduced us to the Slow Food Movement, which encourages diners to cook slowly and from scratch at home and to enjoy restaurants that feature locally grown and individually prepared foods, rather than grabbing their meals at national fast-food outlets.

Shaped by this twice-monthly conversation, we gradually found ourselves paying increasing attention to where our own consumer dollars were going and "mapping" sources for locally grown foods and locally made products. Little by little, a manageable project idea began to emerge from our conversations and consultations. The summer drew to a close and we dispatched Katya and Matt back to college with our blessings. But the "Going Local" group — charged with energy and still growing — is ready to push on into the fall with a new commitment: to produce a brochure and online directory of locally owned and operated businesses in Knox County, complete with maps and descriptions to guide consumers to buy locally.

We're also aware of our potential to mobilize for advocacy if need be. That big-box Home Depot is still under discussion on the development horizon, and we know that we are becoming an informed citizenry, ready to speak knowledgeably and convincingly about the pros and cons of the different growth prospects in our small city. ●

## IN MEMORIUM



### John S. Winder, Jr.

John Small Winder, Jr., 59, died suddenly of cardiac arrest August 13th at his home in Potomac, Maryland. An environmental activist, Winder had been chair of the Episcopal Ecological Network and of the Environment Committee of the Peace Commission of the Diocese of Washington (D.C.).

Winder was insistent on the need for the church to address environmental concerns, particularly within its justice and peace ministries. He was deeply involved in the national church's "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" (JPIC) initiative and also helped to draft and present resolutions on environmental issues — like endangered species, climate change, recycling, and educational initiatives — at all levels of the church. Many statements now used as policy by our dioceses and congregations owe a debt to Winder's tireless efforts. His prophetic voice will be sorely missed.

# Commentaries

## The time for economic engagement is now

by Dick Gillett

RICHARD PARKER IS A SENIOR FELLOW and economist at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He is also a practicing Episcopalian. At the fall meeting of the House of Bishops last year Parker addressed the topic of globalization, the theme of the bishops' meeting. It was an extraordinary speech, garnering a rare standing ovation from our normally staid prelates. His talk was notable for several reasons. For example, he reminded the bishops that history is important, both in our appreciation of the phenomenon of globalization (in its most recent form — it has been around for at least 500 years), and in recognition that in seemingly bleak periods of our history remarkable rebirths of hope and action have occurred. For example, Parker pointed out close parallels between our own times and 100 years ago in America, when economic and social conditions for ordinary working people were likewise abominable, while the wealthy heaped up riches and expanded their monopolistic practices. But beginning in about 1880 conditions for poor working people sank to such abysmal levels as to arouse the churches. Over the following three decades the churches — the Episcopal Church prominently among them — began to be directly engaged from parish level right on up to top ecclesiastical leadership.

We know this movement as the era of the Social Gospel, when the churches actually influenced the society around it to address the prevailing injustices. Theodore Roosevelt rode this social concern to the presidency in 1901, issuing in an era of social reform.

My own observation is that despite the unrelenting right-wing policies of the Bush administration and the feeling that a large part of the electorate has disengaged from politics, a new wave of engagement with social injustice — one not dissimilar to that of 100 years ago — is already underway. This is preeminently the case in Los Angeles, where Episcopalians from our bishops on down to clergy and parishioners have joined in concerted strategies with other religious bodies and with the community to enact living-wage ordinances and to work in close partnership with progressive unions to win victories for low-wage workers. To me it feels like a "kairos," a holy moment of new birth. And L.A. is not the only place where hope and activism combine in a holy combustible mixture.

Reportedly under consideration by our bishops as a follow-up of the globalization addresses they heard in September 2001 is a pastoral letter on this topic, to be ready for General Convention 2003. That is neither soon enough, nor is it an adequate response by the bishops, especially when one considers both the social and the moral dimensions of our current economic near-meltdown. In 1986, in a period of considerable less urgency for the nation than our own, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a 10-point "Framework of Economic Life" which had notable impact both on the Roman

Catholic Church and beyond, and was reproduced on pocket-sized laminated cards for wide distribution.

But it would be a mistake to wait for episcopal action before we move (nor would our more progressive bishops encourage us to), just as it would likewise be a mistake for parish activists to always wait for vestry approval before acting. The sense of urgency demands much more from both the bishops and us. To adapt Pogo's saying: We have met the enemy, and the remedy! — and it is us.



## A small act of solidarity

by David Smith-Ferri

SOMEHOW, IN RESPONSE to the terrible acts that destroyed the World Trade Center and killed several thousand people, our government is involving our nation in more violence. Instead of helping us mourn effectively and move out of the darkness of violence — the fear, hatred, and withdrawal — our government is holding an unsubstantiated threat of foreign attack before our eyes, where it clouds our vision like a cataract and traps us in the darkness. Instead of leading us in a national examination of conscience, it is leading us into war, promising that military action will bring us into the light of a safer world.

As I read the gospels today, seeking guidance, I am struck by two things. First, Christ's promise to be near, something that even death cannot prevent. Second, by the example he set that we likewise stand alongside people who are in darkness — prisoners, the "naked," the "hungry."

I write this as I prepare to travel with eight other Americans on a Voices in the Wilderness fact-finding delegation to Iraq, a country that faces an imposed and perpetual darkness. A country that has been stripped naked and imprisoned by 12 years of international sanctions. What do the people of Iraq — parents and children, shopkeepers,

teachers, doctors — think about the foreign threat to overthrow their government, a threat made by the most powerful country in the world? How has this threat affected their lives? Whom and what do they reach out to for assurances in the face of this threat? And how will these people be affected if there is an invasion? These are some of the questions I take with me on this trip.

When I was asked to participate in this delegation, the intent to overthrow the Iraqi government was well known. Accepting the invitation would mean standing publicly in opposition to that intention, and traveling to a country that was under threat of invasion. Less well known were the \$10,000 fines that the U.S. government recently assessed on two Americans for bringing medicine to Iraq without permission. More than a slap on the wrist. Suddenly, I was thrown into the dark. What to do?

In the face of this uncertainty, I have reached out for assurances. To begin with, my wife and I have made this decision together. It was not simple or easy. But when I leave for Iraq I know that this is a joint pro-



The Atlantic Life Community and the Dorothy Day Catholic Worker commemorated the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki last August with a civil disobedience action at the White House with a focus on the saber-rattling toward Iraq.

ject. Not only are the consequences of this trip, positive and negative, ones we will share, but so are the belief in its value and the work that makes it possible. In Iraq, I will carry her strength with me. It's one way to guard against the darkness.

Similarly, I go to Iraq as a representative of a "community." When I return, I will show slides and make presentations to people in various communities across northern California. To be vibrant, our communities need all kinds of talent and skills and knowledge. Our diversity is in fact our strength. I travel to Iraq so that I can be a resource to communities here, a small part of the exchange and interchange that make us vibrant. The connection with these communities is another layer of assurance for me.

Lastly, I go to Iraq as a small act of solidarity with the Iraqi people. It is part of living up to the promise to "be nearby" as they face this darkness. This too gives me strength. Standing nearby when someone is facing the darkness always means facing the darkness oneself, and this is always more possible when something vital is at stake.

*(Voices in the Wilderness is a campaign to end the economic sanctions against Iraq. It has taken over 40 delegations of American and British citizens to Iraq to witness the effects of the international embargo and of war on Iraqi society.)*

## Welcoming Jo Anne

by Muffie Moroney

LAST SPRING, several of my friends and I had dinner in San Antonio, Tex., with Louie Crew, Integrity's founder. In light of Integrity's mission — to be the advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) persons in the Episcopal Church, and in turn to represent the church to the lgbt community — I asked Louie about Integrity's resources for understanding transgender concerns. Jo Anne Roberts, a transgender person, had recently joined my parish of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Houston and her arrival turned a theoretical situation into a real and practical one: What can we do and say to welcome Jo Anne into our midst?

William Stringfellow, highly respected lawyer and theologian in the Episcopal Church, and Stephen Jay Gould, renowned professor of zoology, geology, and paleontology at Harvard, have provided some wonderful background material about human differences in general.

In his address, "An Exhortation to Integrity," given at the 1979 national Integrity convention, Stringfellow was speaking about homosexuality, but his comments are relevant to any discussion of other sexualities and identities as well. Some excerpts: "... The issue is not homosexuality but sexuality in any and all of its species and that, as much as I can discern, sexuality is as extensive and diverse as human life itself. There are as many varieties of sexuality as there be human beings. I commend you to consider sexuality in the context of conversion — in the context of the event in which one becomes a new person in Christ. In that event ... all that a particular person is, sexuality along with all else, suffers the death in Christ that inaugurates the new (or renewed) life in Christ. ... But that death in Christ in which we are restored for new life does not involve the denial or suppression or repression of anything that we are as persons. It involves instead the renewal of our persons in the integrity of our own creation in the Word of God. ... The new life in Christ means ... that we have the exceptional freedom to be who we are and, thus, to welcome and affirm our sexuality as a gift, absolved from guilt or embarrassment or shame." (A Keeper of the Word, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, ed., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994, p. 331ff.)

Stephen Jay Gould takes Stringfellow's varieties of sexuality to another level. In the introduction to *Full House* (Harmony Books,

## For a Friend in Travail

by Adrienne Rich

Waking from violence: the surgeon's probe left in the foot  
paralyzing the body from the waist down.

Dark before dawn: wrapped in a shawl, to walk the house  
the Drinking Gourd slung in the northwest,  
half-slice of moon to the south  
through dark panes. A time to speak to you.

*What are you going through?* she said, is the great question.  
Philosopher of oppression, theorist  
of the victories of force.

We write from the marrow of our bones. What she did not  
ask, or tell: how victims save their own lives.

The crawl along the ledge, then the ravelling span of fibre  
strung  
from one side to the other, I've dreamed that too.  
Waking, not sure we made it. Relief, appallment, of waking.  
Consciousness. O, no. To sleep again.  
O to sleep without dreaming.

How day breaks, when it breaks, how clear and light the moon  
melting into moon-colored air  
moist and sweet, here on the western edge.  
Love for the world, and we are part of it.  
How the poppies break from their sealed envelopes  
she did not tell.

What are you going through, there on the other edge?

### FOOTNOTE:

"The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?"  
— Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, 115

— Reprinted from *An Atlas of the Difficult World: Poems 1988–1991*, by Adrienne Rich, © 1991. With permission of the publisher, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.

1996), Gould summarizes his ideas from an earlier work, *Wonderful Life*, and states his conviction that variety — not complexity — is the true measure of excellence: "We must give up a conventional notion of human dominion, but we learn to cherish particulars, of which we are but one ... and to revel in complete ranges, to which we contribute one precious point — a good swap, I would argue, of stale (and false) comfort for broader understanding. It is, indeed, a wonderful life within the full house of our planet's history of organic diversity." Although he is not specifically addressing diversities of human sexuality or gender identity, these would fit comfortably within his thinking.

Both William Stringfellow and Stephen Jay Gould are dead. As far as I know, they did not write about transgendered persons in the Episcopal Church. But Stringfellow and Gould (and others) lead me to believe the following: There is a distinction between gender identity (whether you identify yourself as male or female) and sexual orientation (whether you are sexually attracted to males, females, or both). Transgendered persons (along with heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals) represent but one of many normal kinds of human sexual orientation and gender identity in the rich variety of creation, and within that single category known as transgender, there are as many varieties as there are people. Although being transgendered may be unusual and unfamiliar to us, it is nonetheless normal. In the Christian Church, the gender identity of each transgendered person (as well as the sexual orientation of each heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual person) who seeks the sacrament of baptism is affirmed as integral to that person's identity in Christ Jesus. The Body of Christ inhabits a full house.

## Suddenly I'm an adult?

by Tim McDonald

**W**HAT DO YOU DO as a scared, ashamed, insecure 12-year-old kid who is suddenly thrust by adults into an adult world? There's no regard for your age, your insecurities, your past trauma, or possibly even your innocence. You know you have done something you never thought you would do and hurt or even killed someone you never thought you would hurt — maybe because of the life of abuse you have had, maybe because of anger from a life of neglect, maybe because of the constant barrage of violent videos you watched because no one cared enough to show you anything better. You know you have done something terrible and now you are in this prison where adults took your clothes, made you dress in a jumpsuit while they watched, handcuffed your arms and took hold of you and pushed you into a cell where people yelled vulgar stuff at you. Then they told you that you were never getting out of there because you got a life sentence as an "adult."

This scenario — or some close variation of it — has taken place multiple times in this country in the past few years. The most recent and nationally visible case took place in Pensacola, Fla., where a 13-year-old child and his 14-year-old brother were convicted for the murder of their father. An adult convicted child molester was also tried for the same crime but acquitted, thus dropping the burden for the crime on the chil-

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## A bishop speaks out on the use of military force against Iraq

### Overview:

The heated rhetoric surrounding the use of military action against Iraq in order to remove President Saddam Hussein from power and to eliminate what President Bush has labeled as that nation's hold on "weapons of mass destruction" has sparked debate throughout the world. It seems clear that the present leadership of the United States will accept nothing less than the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein from power and the destruction of all weapons from his military arsenal. Despite openings for continued dialogue and sharing within the Congress and the larger global community in seeking a peaceful and nonviolent solution, the President of the United States seems committed to moving forward with such a military policy. In a very real sense the thesis for war with Iraq is now being defended by the Bush Administration and there is seemingly little hope that the defense of this thesis will be lost in the days ahead.

The history of the current Iraqi government and the cunning and repressive leadership of President Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party are both a constant threat to Middle Eastern stability

and the very health and welfare of the Iraqi people. The reality of the development and use of biological and chemical warfare agents by the Iraqi government and their use in previous military campaigns must be condemned as immoral and inhuman. Such behavior is unacceptable within the context of the world community of nations.

The United States is without doubt the greatest military and economic power in the world today. Its great wealth and rich cultural and ethnic diversity, coupled with the great gift of the Constitution, has engendered distrust, animosity and righteous anger in many nations. Currently captured by the poverty of international debt, rampant unchecked disease, internal political unrest, social violence, religious wars, inadequate or totally lacking educational opportunities, these peoples feel domination by a world power that seems more focused on its own self-interests. Our success as well as our insensitivity and blindness to the crying needs of the larger world have created unparalleled international tensions, especially within the Middle East.

### Statement:

Alexis De Tocqueville said during a visit to America, "America is great because America is good and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great." When we as a people lose sight of the great goodness that has defined who and what we are, and when we fail to seek every alternative other than military intervention to deal with violence, then we will have lost a most precious gift and will ultimately become what we despise the most, a callous and violent nation.

Therefore I call upon the President and Congress of the United States to work with all due speed and with every available resource to resolve the crisis with Iraq using all non-violent means. We as a nation must seek the counsel and support of member nations of the United Nations. Anything less demeans not only the goodness of who we are as Americans but our true greatness as a nation.

I believe with all my heart that Muslims, Christians and Jews are ultimately committed to claiming a God of peace, justice and love. As a Christian I hold fast to the truth revealed in Christ that war is not inevitable, moreover that war ultimately represents a tragic failing in the human condition.

History never lies! Justice seemingly gained through the use of violence only begets more violence and oppression. Nations using weapons of "mass destruction," and we are a nation possessing such weapons, only exacerbate the problems of alienation and hostility that define the human condition in an ever shrinking global community.

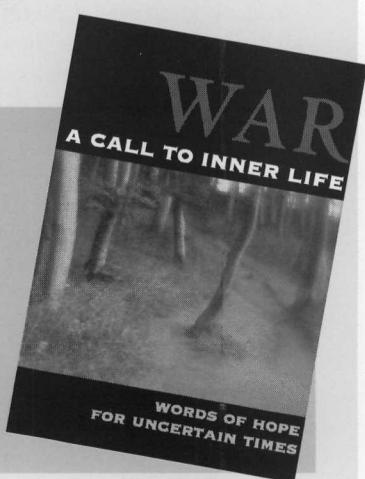
*In Christ's Peace, Power and Love  
The Right Reverend John Bryson Chane  
Episcopal Bishop of Washington*

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dren. Recent U.S. Department of Justice reports indicate that despite falling juvenile crime rates, twice the number of juvenile offenders have been placed in adult prisons in recent years than in previous decades. Reports also show statistics that children imprisoned in adult jails are five times more likely to be beaten and abused by staff and eight times more likely to commit suicide than those in juvenile facilities.

What do these statistics say about us as parents, citizens, voters, and CHRISTIANS? Think about it.

Trying children as adults is denying an obvious truth — children are not adults. They have become involved in some of the same criminal actions that are committed by adults, but they are still not adults and cannot be held to the same degree of culpability. If they are as capable and culpable as adults, why do we not let them become licensed to drive at age 12 or to buy alcohol at age 12, or even to VOTE at age 12? We don't let children engage in activities that are adult-appropriate because they are NOT adults. So why do we allow a prosecutor to arbitrarily decide that a kid has suddenly become an adult? In a judicial system that bases its credibility and honor on being able to determine "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," the practice of trying children as adults is a blatant and criminal denial of that truth. A 12-year-old kid does not think like a 40-year old adult, and neither should he be penalized like an adult. Think about it.

To retain any honor at all, the justice system in this punishment-obsessed country must acknowledge that children are not adults and its laws must be made flexible enough to treat people in an age-appropriate manner.

The sight of a 12-year-old "adult" holding out his hands for handcuffing as he is led away as an "adult" is appalling; it may bring satisfaction to a prosecutor who is basing his next election success on being "tough," but it is a sight that should cause all who call themselves Christians to shout in protest. Nothing good can come from locking children up for the rest of their lives and pretending that they, like bad adults, got what they "deserved."

Think about it, Christians, we can and must do better.

## Living water

by Megan McKenna

Living Water: Baptism as a Way of Life by Klara Tammany  
(Church Publishing Co., 2002)

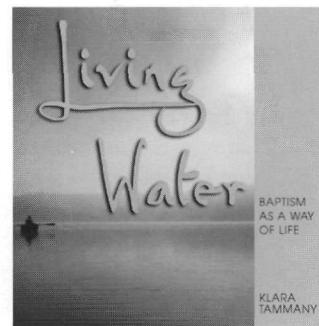
**W**ATER! Our bodies are about 80 percent or more composed of water. The world is almost 4/5<sup>th</sup> water yet a minuscule amount of that is fresh water that humans can drink. It is one of the elements of life, powerful, dangerous in weather and tides and absolutely essential for drinking, cleansing, cooking and other essentials like playing in. When Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well

converse it is over water. He claims that he would give her "living water." For Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus this was a theological concept. The phrase "living water" was a common expression for the Torah, the Word of God in the Scriptures and the law, so Jesus was telling her that he was a fresh, long cold drink of Torah, of the Word of God! And she knew exactly what he was talking about.

Water! It is the primary symbol of Baptism that initiates us into the faith of believers, into a community and a life that is sourced with the Word of God, with the person of Jesus and with the other sacraments and traditions of the Christian religion. Klara Tammany has written a book on baptism as a way of life, a source book or primer that looks at this sacrament as a jumping-off spot into living that is from the beginning fresh water, a fountain in the desert and foundational to Christian life. Specifically, this is a book for those preparing for baptism and their sponsors and those who pass on the riches of a Church to others. But more so it's an adult education book for all believers no matter how long they have been baptized, for it re-introduces them to the ritual and so to the prayers and promises they made or were made in their name as infants. It is filled with stories, reflections, quotes, songs, questions and imaginative suggestions for mulling over familiar words to reveal depth and passionate devotion that sources our daily life as individuals and as members of a faith community. There is theology and theory, booklists and rich resources for music, children's and adult materials, even movies that can be used instructionally and in prayer situations that study and delve more deeply into baptism.

Klara follows the method of gathering, sharing, reflecting and responding within a community setting. The breadth of materials and alternative suggestions leaves lots of leeway for creativity and for structuring sessions to your own people and needs. She discusses the issues of faith, the intergenerational passing on of tradition and practice, the call to justice and peace, the corporal works of mercy and of witnessing to faith individually in moral behavior and as community.

In communities worldwide today, the gift of the water diviner is crucial as never before. With their stick or even their hands and bare feet on the ground they walk the way and sense the energies and the Spirit of water beneath them, releasing and revealing the life-sustaining sources. Klara Tammany has done this for her believing community in the Episcopal Church. But because of its riches it is recommended for any tradition that is searching for this living water and living out their baptisms as a way of life for all to see and desire. Living Water is a long cool drink.



# Claiming the Blessing

***"I will bless you so that you will be a blessing."*** — Genesis 12.2

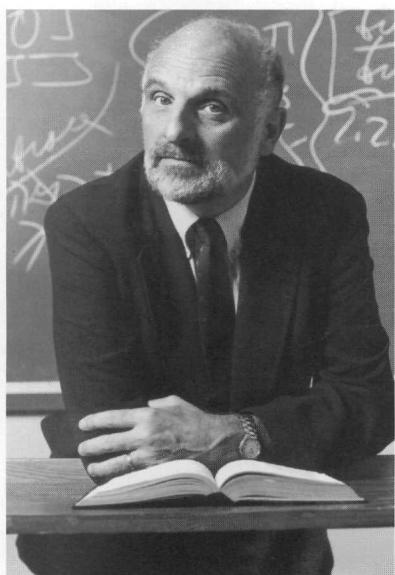
The General Convention of the U.S. Episcopal Church resolved in 1976 that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church." Since that time great strides toward realizing that "full and equal" claim have been taken. But although there are a growing number of places in the church where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) persons are welcomed, affirmed in their ministries and blessed in their committed relationships, there are many more places where lgbt people are still not fully included in the life of the church. A coalition of leading lgbt justice organizations in the Episcopal Church — Integrity, Beyond Inclusion and Oasis ministries — along with numerous individuals, is seeking to claim that blessing of full inclusion for all persons who for whatever reason are currently unable to marry. Called "Claiming the Blessing" ([www.claimingtheblessing.org](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org)), this partnership has committed itself to obtaining approval at the 2003 General Convention of a liturgical blessing, which celebrates the holy love in a faithful sexual relationship, enabling couples in these relationships to see in each other the image of God.

C L A I M I N G   T H E   B L E S S I N G

# THE GOSPEL VS.

## Biblical theology and the debate about rites of blessing An interview with Walter Brueggemann

by Julie A. Wortman



THE WITNESS INTERVIEWED Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann to get his perspective on the controversial issue of whether churches should approve rites of blessing for lifelong, committed relationships outside of marriage. A coalition of groups called Claiming the Blessing is meeting this month in St. Louis to kick off a campaign to win approval for rites at the Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention next summer in Minneapolis. (See [www.claimingtheblessing.org](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org) for how to be involved.)

At the Episcopal Church's 2000 General Convention, the bishops and deputies approved legislation that recognized that there are couples in the church who are living outside of marriage in lifelong committed relationships and that such relationships, if they are marked 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 free of "promiscuity, exploitation and abusiveness," deserve the church's "support, encouragement and pastoral care." But after heated debate they refused to include a provision for the development of rites that would express the church's support of "relationships of mutuality and fidelity other than marriage which mediate the Grace of God."

Walter Brueggemann is the William Marcellus McPheeers Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga. He has been interested in the interpretive issues that lie behind efforts at Old Testament theology. This includes the relation of the Old Testament to the Christian canon, the Christian history of doctrine, Jewish-Christian interaction and the cultural reality of pluralism. He is the widely read author of many books and articles, including *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Fortress Press, 1997) and *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World*, Patrick D. Miller, ed. (Fortress Press, 2000).

**Julie Wortman:** The Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention will be considering a proposal that rites of blessing be developed to support "relationships of mutuality and fidelity other than marriage which mediate the Grace of God." When I asked if you'd be willing to offer your perspective on whether such rites of blessing should be approved, you said that you were just an "exegete" and that maybe we'd want to talk to someone with a "larger horizon" on the issue. What did you mean by that?

**Walter Brueggemann:** I just think that after you do the Bible stuff, there are people who know the whole ethical tradition of the church better than do I. The arguments can't just be made out of the biblical text as such, but they have to be made in the context of how the church has handled the Bible in many other ethical questions.

**Julie Wortman:** But I'm told your views are views that the "movable middle" takes seriously — maybe a big reason is that you're a scholar who writes accessibly, which many scholars don't, but it seems likely that it is also because you're a biblical scholar whose social and political views are grounded in Scripture and ancient tradition. Is it your experience that Scripture is the chief authority for moderate Christians, and is it the chief authority for you?

**Walter Brueggemann:** The answers to both of those questions is, "Yes." It is the chief authority for moderates and it's the chief authority to me as long as one can qualify that to say that it is the chief authority when imaginatively construed in a certain interpretive trajectory.

I incline to think that most people, including the movable moderates, probably make up their minds on other grounds than the Bible, but then they are uneasy if it collides with the Bible or at least they have an eagerness to be shown how it is that the Bible coheres. I don't think, on most of these contested questions, that anybody —

# SCRIPTURE?

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liberal or conservative — really reads right out of the Bible. I think we basically bring hunches to the Bible that arrive in all sorts of ways and then we seek confirmation. And I think that I'm articulate in helping people make those connections with the hunches they already have.

**Julie Wortman:** Do you think lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (lgbt) folks are sinners?

**Walter Brueggemann:** Yes, like we all are. So I think that our sexual interpersonal relationships are enormously hazardous and they are the place where we work out our fears and our anxieties and we do that in many exploitative ways. So I don't think that gays and lesbians and so on are exempt from the kind of temptations that all of us live with.

**Julie Wortman:** Is their struggle for full inclusion in the life of the church a justice struggle?

**Walter Brueggemann:** Yes. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said that the arc of history is bent toward justice. And the parallel statement that I want to make is that the arc of the Gospel is bent toward inclusiveness. And I think that's a kind of elemental conviction through which I then read the text. I suspect a lot of people who share this approach simply sort out the parts of the text that are in the service of inclusion and kind of put aside the parts of the text that move in the other direction.

**Julie Wortman:** And what do you do with those other parts?

**Walter Brueggemann:** Well, I think you have to take them seriously. I think that it is clear that much or all of the Bible is time-bound and much of the Bible is filtered through a rather heavy-duty patriarchal ideology. What all of us have to try to do is to sort out what in that has an evangelical future and what in that really is organized against the Gospel. For me, the conviction from Martin Luther that you have to make a distinction between the Gospel and the Bible is a terribly important one. Of course, what Luther meant by the Gospel is whatever Luther meant. And that's what we all do, so there's a highly subjective dimension to that. But it's very scary now in the church that the Gospel is equated with the Bible, so you get a kind of a biblicalism that is not noticeably informed by the Gospel. And that means that the relation-

ship between the Bible and the Gospel is always going to be contested and I suppose that's what all our churches are doing — they're contesting.

**Julie Wortman:** You've done a lot of work on the Hebrew prophets. What do you think we can learn from the prophets about justice in this particular issue of lgbt people and their quest for justice?

**Walter Brueggemann:** As you know the prophets are largely focused on economic questions, but I suppose that the way I would transpose that is to say that the prophets are concerned with the way in which the powerful take advantage of the vulnerable. When you transpose that into these questions, then obviously gays and lesbians are the vulnerable and the very loud heterosexual community is as exploitative as any of the people that the prophets critiqued. Plus, on sexuality questions you have this tremendous claim of virtue and morality on the heterosexual side, which of course makes heterosexual ideology much more heavy-handed.

**Julie Wortman:** Yeah. This makes me think of an interview you did with former *Witness* editor Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann about four years ago in which you said, "The church has made a centerpiece of our worship how bad we are." It sort of connects with the virtue thing. Can you say something about that again?

**Walter Brueggemann:** That's a judgment I make of my Calvinist liturgics tradition. I never have that feeling in Episcopalianism — even though there's a regular confession of sin, it doesn't seem as weighty as a Calvinist confession of sin. But I incline to think that the weight of God's graciousness readily overrides our guilt and what we ought to talk about is God's grace.

The other conviction I have is that, on the whole, I don't think people are troubled by guilt in our culture. I think they are troubled by chaos. And therefore most of our talk about confession and forgiveness is beside the point. The reason that's important to me is that I have the deep conviction that the adrenaline that gathers around the sexuality issues is not really about sexuality. It is about the unarticulated sense people have that the world is falling apart.

The anxiety about chaos is acute among us. Obviously, 9/11 makes that more so, but it was there before that. The world the

## **Marriage definition discriminatory, court rules**

The opposite-sex definition of marriage is discriminatory and unjustified under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a Quebec Superior Court judge ruled in a landmark decision rendered late Friday. Justice Louise Lemelin echoed an Ontario court ruling in July that said that province's government had to register gay and lesbian marriages. Ontario Superior Court suspended that ruling for two years to give the federal government time to redefine the term marriage.

"The court has . . . sent the message loud and clear to Parliament: Stop discriminating against same-sex couples and respect the Constitution," said John Fisher of the gay-rights lobby group Égale Canada, in a statement.

"We call on Parliament to act now in accordance with the court's decision and allow same-sex couples to marry. How long must Canadians in same-sex relationships wait for equality?"

Madam Justice Lemelin's ruling recognized that the 30-year relationship between plaintiffs Michael Hendricks and Rene LeBoeuf was already a marriage in everything but name.

Lawyers for the Montreal couple had argued that only their sexual orientation had caused them to be given different treatment under the law when it came to marriage.

Catholic and Protestant lobby groups argued that redefining marriage would threaten the institution and said it was clear that the architects of the Constitution intended the union to be between men and women.

But after reviewing jurisprudence pertaining to marriage and common law unions, as well as recent efforts to expand conjugal rights for gays and lesbians, Madam Justice Lemelin found that "the definition of marriage imposes a discriminatory distinction in excluding couples of the same sex."

She said that it would be simple to modify the wording of the Charter from saying marriage is between "a man and a woman" to read "between two persons."

But she left no doubt legislators would have to address the issue.

"The state has the benefit of mechanisms for consultation and diverse methods of easing the dialogue among Canadians," she said. "It can solicit expertise to illuminate [the issue]. Legislators must judge the impact of the changes in respect to social, religious and cultural values to better respond to needs."

Madam Justice Lemelin said she approved of the Ontario court's decision to give the government two years to act and said "the court prefers to leave the initiative to the legislators."

Last May, Quebec Justice Minister Paul Begin tabled a draft bill eliminating the heterosexual wording from the definition of marriage and allowing same-sex partnerships in civil unions, a special status just short of wedlock. Unlike marriages, which fall under federal jurisdiction, civil unions are a provincial responsibility.

A British Columbia judge ruled last October that while Canada discriminates against same-sex couples by refusing to allow them to marry, it is justified under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Law Commission of Canada, in a study released in January, said restrictions on same-sex marriage are discriminatory and should be removed.

Two years ago, Parliament revised several laws to ensure same-sex couples have the same benefits and obligations as other common-law couples, but it excluded same-sex couples from legal marriage.

Many MPs continue to support restricting marriage to heterosexual couples.

If Quebec's legislation is passed, it will join Nova Scotia as the only provinces to recognize civil unions for gays and lesbians, though not marriage. Gay couples can adopt children in Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

In a court proceeding last year, lawyers representing the federal government argued that if same-sex weddings are permitted, marriage as it is now known would be gone.

— Canadian Press

way we have known it is passing away from us and I believe that people have taken the sexuality issue as the place to draw a line and take a stand, but it's not a line or a stand about sexuality. It's about the emotional sense that the world is a very dangerous place. Sexuality is, I think, one way to talk about that.

**Julie Wortman:** That opens up for me something that I heard Peter Gomes say recently about young people at Harvard who are hungry for a life of sacrifice and service. Does that connect with what you're talking about?

**Walter Brueggemann:** I would have some wonderment about whether it's that clean and simple. But people are becoming aware that the recent practices of material consumption are simply destructive for us and they do not contribute to our humanness. And the more people that know that, the more encouraging it is.

**Julie Wortman:** What I was thinking is that the sexuality debate seems so beside the point given the church's call in these times.

**Walter Brueggemann:** Yeah. Well, in my own [Presbyterian] context, I have the sense that continuing to argue about sexuality is almost a deliberate smoke screen to keep from having to talk about anything that gets at the real issues in our own lives.

I think the issues are economic and, you know, many of the great liberals in my church don't want to talk about economics. The reason for that is many of us liberals are also into consumption in a big way. So this is something else you can talk about without threatening them.

**Julie Wortman:** What's the nature of blessing in the Old Testament? How is it used there?

**Walter Brueggemann:** It's used in a lot of ways, but I believe that the primary meaning is that it is the life force of creation that makes abundance possible. If you look at the recital of blessings, for example, in Deuteronomy 28, it's about very mundane material matters. May your livestock prosper. May your bread rise. May your corn grow. So I think it has to do with abundance, productivity, the extravagances of the material world. And a curse then, as in Deuteronomy 28, is that the life force of vitality is withdrawn from us and our future just kind of shrivels up.

**Julie Wortman:** Is that different from the way Jesus would use it in the New Testament? Especially thinking about the Beatitudes?

## CLAIMING THE BLESSING

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**Walter Brueggemann:** No, I think the Beatitudes are exactly that way when it says, you know, blessed are the peacemakers. I think this means the life force of God's creative spirit is with people who live that way. And that they are destined for abundant well-being. So when you talk about a ritual of blessing, it is the church's sacramental act of asserting that this relationship will be a place in which God's generativity is invested.

**Julie Wortman:** So why do you think folks balk at the idea of rites of blessing for same-sex relationships that are free of promiscuity, exploitation and abusiveness and that are marked by "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection, respect, careful honest communication and the holy love that enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God," as they did at the Episcopal Church's 2000 General Convention?

**Walter Brueggemann:** I think it's very complex and it's about anxiety and all of that, but in the light of what I was saying, I think it's a moralistic judgment that people like this are not entitled to well-being. And therefore for the church to sacramentally guarantee well-being for these people is an unearned gift that falls outside the moral calculus.

Now in Presbyterianism the question that's sometimes put to theological articulation is "too many people are being saved!" You don't want all these people saved. That's called universalism. I think it's the same calculus that is articulated by Job's friends, that only the obedient are entitled to well-being. If these relationships are understood to be an act of disobedience, then the church ought not to be asserting well-being for them.

**Julie Wortman:** So there's a logic to the balking?

**Walter Brueggemann:** I think it is a logic. I think it's a logic that's rooted in fear and it's rooted in resentment. It is parallel to welfare reform in which the undeserving poor ought not to get food stamps.

Now, morality does matter and living obediently and responsibly is important. But that is always in tension with the other claim we make that the very fact that we exist as God's creatures gives us some entitlements.

**Julie Wortman:** As a person who bases what he thinks on Scripture, what would you say the biblical standards are for relationships?

**Walter Brueggemann:** Well, I think fidelity. It takes a lot of interpretation, but it's basically to love God and love neighbor. And the first neighbor I suppose we love is the one to whom we make these holy vows. So that has to do with relationships that are honorable and just and faithful and reliable and all that neat stuff. Then you can argue out what all that means. This is relational thinking.

But the sort of thinking that you can establish out of the Book of Leviticus, where so much of this anti-same-sex blessing stance comes from, involves a substantive material sense of contamination that has nothing to do with relationships. To this way of thinking there is a palpable poison that is turned loose in the community that must be resisted. People who think this way cannot take into account the relational dynamics that we're trying to talk about. That way of talking about physical contamination is deeply rooted in the Bible, though, which is a problem.

**Julie Wortman:** There are people who say the situation of lgbt people is analogous to that of the canary in a coal mine.

**Walter Brueggemann:** I've said that in the city homeless people are the canaries, but I think that's right about lgbt people. A general principle is that whoever is the most vulnerable is the canary. That is, it is always the test case about whether we are following Jesus. And then if you extrapolate to say that gays and lesbians are the most vulnerable in this issue, then they are indeed the canary.

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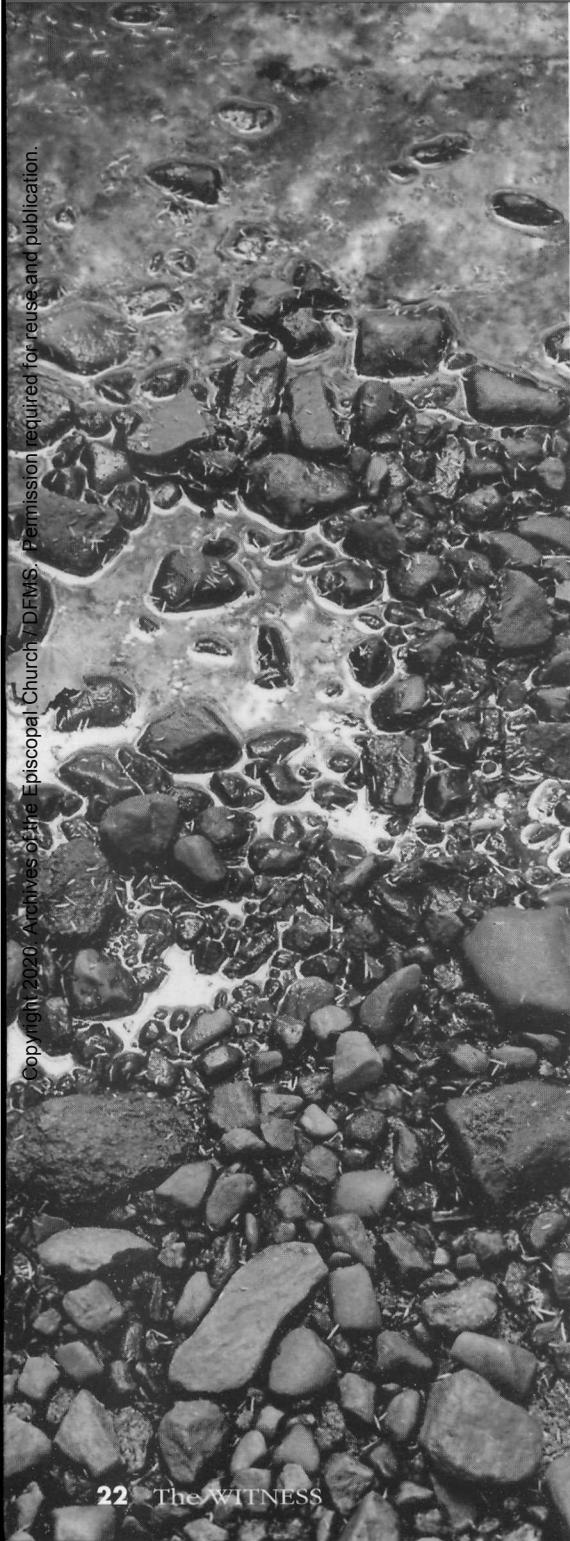
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# WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE



**B**LESSING" is perhaps the most controversial word in the Church's consideration of the treatment of same-sex households in its midst. Because of this fact, we must take great care to be precise about what we mean when we use the word. The following are the building blocks for a theology of blessing: Creation, Covenant, Grace and Sacrament.

Creation itself is the fundamental act of blessing. Creation is a blessing (gift) to humankind from God and humankind blesses (gives thanks to or praises) God in return. The Hebrew word for "blessing," *barak*, means at its core the awesome power of life itself. A fundamental claim of the Bible in regards to creation is that there is enough, in fact an abundance, of creation, and therefore of blessing, to go around.

"Blessing" is a covenantal, relational word. It describes the results of the hallowed, right, just relationship between God and humankind. Blessing is what happens when God and humankind live in covenant. It is important to remember here that the relationships between human beings and the relationship between God and human beings cannot be separated. "Blessing" and "justice" are inseparable biblical concepts.

When we ask for God's blessing, we are asking for God's presence and favor. In Christian terms this favor is what we call "grace," God's disposition toward us that is not dependent upon our merit, but is a sure and certain gift to the believer in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In our tradition, the Sacraments are the primary ways the grace/blessing of God is communicated to us ("a sure and certain means," BCP, p. 857). The two "great" Sacraments "given by Christ" (BCP, p. 858) are Baptism and Eucharist. In them we see

the two fundamental aspects of blessing: the blessing of life from God and the blessing of God for that life.

Five other rites are traditionally known as sacraments, but they are dependent for their meaning on the two sacraments and are not "necessary for all persons." A whole host of other actions in the life of the church, and of individual Christians, are "sacramental" in nature, i.e., they mediate the grace/blessing of God and cause us to give thanks and praise/blessing to God.

In our tradition, priests and bishops have the authority to pronounce God's blessing within the community of faith. They do so not by their own power, but as instruments

## 'Blessing' and 'justice' are inseparable biblical concepts.

of the grace (blessing) of God within the church. Their authority to bless, too, finds its meaning in the two great Sacraments.

When the church chooses "to bless" something it is declaring that this particular person or persons or thing is a gift/blessing from God and his/her/its/their purpose is to live in (or, in the case of things, to assist in) covenanted relationship with God (and with all creation), i.e., to bless God in return.

To bless the relationship between two men or two women is to do this very thing: to declare that this relationship is a blessing from God and that its purpose is to bless God, both within the context of the community of faith. If the church believes that same-sex relationships show forth God's blessing when they are lived in fidelity, mutuality and unconditional love, then this blessing must

# CHURCH TO GIVE ITS BLESSING?

be owned and celebrated and supported in the community of faith.

### **Clearing up some questions:**

*Just what are we blessing when we bless a same-sex relationship?* We are blessing the persons in relationship to one another and the world in which they live. We are blessing the ongoing promise of fidelity and mutuality. We are neither blessing orientation or “lifestyle,” nor blessing particular sexual behaviors. “Orientation” and “lifestyle” are theoretical constructs that cannot possibly be descriptive of any couples’ commitment to one another. And every couple works out their own sexual behaviors that sustain and enhance their commitment. We don’t prescribe that behavior, whether the couple is heterosexual or homosexual, except to say that it must be within the context of mutuality and fidelity.

*Isn’t marriage and same-sex blessing the same thing?* That they are similar is obvious, as is taking monastic vows, i.e., blessing a vocation to (among other things) celibacy. Each (marriage, blessing unions, monastic vows) grounds a relationship that includes sexual expression in public covenant which gives them “a reality not dependent on the contingent thoughts and feelings of the people involved” and “a certain freedom to ‘take time’ to mature and become as profoundly nurturing as they can” (Rowan Williams, “The Body’s Grace,” p. 63). The question remains as to whether “marriage” is appropriately defined as the covenant relationship between a man and a woman only, as is the church’s long tradition. The church

must continue to wrestle with this issue. To wait until it is solved, however, in order to celebrate the blessing of a faithful same-sex relationship is pastorally irresponsible and theologically unnecessary.

*Is same-sex blessing a sacrament?* We can say it is sacramental. Strictly speaking in our tradition there are only two sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist). Five other rites are commonly referred to as sacraments because of the Church’s long experience of them. But in a sacramental understanding of creation, everything in creation has the potential to be sacramental—to mediate the presence/blessing of God. Priests and bishops “pronounce” blessing on those things the community lifts up as showing forth this blessing. The New Testament word for “blessing” is *eulogein*, literally “to speak well of.”

*Can the church withhold blessing?* Certainly, in its official, liturgical sense. Priests and bishops should only “pronounce” blessing over those things or persons the community of faith lifts up as being mediators of blessing. That means that the authority to pronounce blessing over particular persons or things can change over time within a community and vary from community to community, particularly from culture to culture. Our Anglican Communion has long said that the only truly universal “blessings” are Baptism and Eucharist (see the Lambeth Quadrilateral).

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*Prepared by the Claiming the Blessing theology committee: Michael Hopkins, Elizabeth Kaeton, Joseph Lane, Mark Kowalewski, Katie Sherrod*

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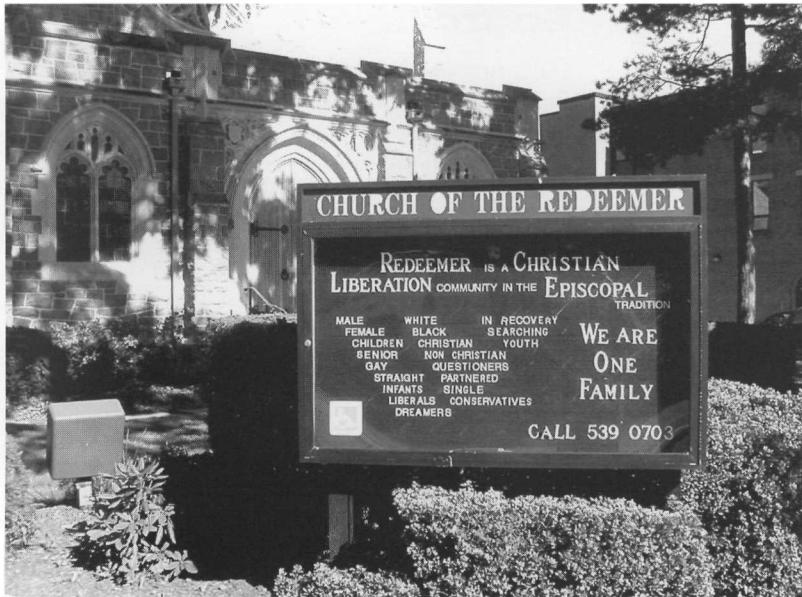
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# SEXUALITY AND



*Church of the Redeemer, Morristown, N.J.*

Does welcoming lgbt people spell disaster or promise for a church hoping to expand its mission?

*By Colleen O'Connor*

**H**ELEN HAVENS WALKED a very fine line when she interviewed for the position of rector at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Houston, Tex. Located in what's considered a conservative diocese, St. Stephen's is also in the heart of a neighborhood called Montrose, home to a vibrant lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (lgbt) community. "I wanted to answer their questions truthfully, but I didn't want to scare them," she says. "I'm sympathetic to gay persons, and I felt the Holy Spirit within me answered the questions."

After landing the job, Havens moved slowly with her new ideas. "I was welcoming to gay people, and I also tried to be sensitive to families," she says. "From time to time, some of the regular guys would say, 'If the church goes gay, I'm outta here.'"

She gently but firmly reiterated her commitment to welcoming all people. Today, membership at St. Stephen's is almost half gay and half straight. The church advertises in gay newspapers, and each year participates in the Gay Pride parade. Recently, their first openly transgender person joined the congregation (see Moroney commentary, p. 13).

"The wonderful thing is that over the years we really have become a marvelous community," Havens says. "Sure, some people have left, but not in droves and not even in handfuls. What's incredible is to see the close relationships that some of the elderly people have with some gays and lesbians."

One church member, who died recently at age 96, developed many friendships with gay and lesbian parishioners. In her late 80s she spent much time at the local hospital's intensive-care unit where a gay church member was dying of AIDS. She wiped his brow with a damp cloth, and sat by his side in true companionship. Later, as she grew older, her gay and lesbian friends took care of her.

"What a beautiful thing, the blessings she got from them," says Havens. "They took her out to dinner, or came to her house and cooked for her."

St. Stephen's, guided by its progressive values, is thriving. They're buying new property, growing their day school, and opening a new community center. "Inclusion has lead to growth," says Havens. "A lot of people who come here say, I want to raise my children in a church that accepts women in positions of key leadership and really

# CHURCH GROWTH

C L A I M I N G T H E B L E S S I N G

includes gay and lesbian people."

## Conservative churches ahead by 19 percent

Havens' church keeps her so busy that she only has time to do this telephone interview at home, after dinner, on the very same day that some very interesting news hits the papers — news that directly contradicts the success story that she's just described. On this day a new 10-year study is released and swiftly picked up by major newspapers across the country. Titled "Religious Congregations & Membership: 2000," the study says that socially conservative churches — like the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the conservative Christian Churches — grew faster than other religious denominations over the past decade, by about 19 percent. Conducted by the Glenmary Research Center and sponsored by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, this study is considered by some scholars to be the most comprehensive analysis of religions available because the U.S. census doesn't ask about religion.

The topic of church growth, however, is becoming as controversial as sex and politics. "We always talk about church growth, but I talk about church depth," says Paul Wilkes, founder of Pastoral Summit, the University of North Carolina group that conducted a two-year study which resulted in the publication, *Excellent Protestant Congregations: The Guide to the Best Places and Practices*. "Your numbers are not really as important as the message lived out in your hearts. If

you've grown from 1,000 to 5,000 members who are bigoted and hateful, who the hell cares?"

With this in mind, many Episcopalians who value the Episcopal Church's reputation as a denomination that tolerates a wide range of beliefs believe that for the Episcopal Church to have a future, it



Phillip Williams, rector, Church of the Redeemer, Morristown, N.J.

must become not more socially conservative, but more progressive. They see how dioceses and congregations treat lgbt people as a potent outward and visible sign of whether that is occurring.

## A church running out of time?

"I fear the church is running out of time," says Kim Byham, a former president of Integrity, and one of the organizers, along with representatives from Oasis ministries and Beyond Inclusion,

of this month's "Claiming the Blessing" conference aimed at promoting Episcopal Church approval of rites of blessing for committed same-sex couples. "The critical thing is not to lag several years behind society because then we cease to take the prophetic role. If you're going to catch the attention of generations under 40, you have to do something that both manifests love and speaks to the gospel message."

Critics, however, warn that authorizing rites of blessing could split the church because conservatives will walk out. They point to the turmoil this past summer when some conservative leaders left the annual synod meeting in the Anglican Church of Canada's Diocese of New Westminster immediately after the diocese's bishop, Michael Ingram, announced that a motion had passed to allow individual parishes in the diocese to bless committed same-gender unions. Immediately, conservative Anglican leaders worldwide — in Africa, England, South America, Asia, Australia and the U.S. — condemned the vote, saying that the entire Anglican Communion could suffer serious damage if the diocese doesn't revoke the decision.

Such warnings are familiar to people like William Swing, the Episcopal Bishop of California, who says he's ordained more gays and lesbians than any other bishop in the history of the Episcopal Church. At the Episcopal Church's General Convention in 2000, however, Swing voted against developing liturgies for committed lgbt relationships. After the vote failed, he told a

## 'Gay Alpha' brings grace — and numbers

by Pat McCaughan

**W**HEN CAROL ANDERSON, rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills, Calif., adapted Alpha, an introductory Christian course with "a bring-it-to-Jesus evangelical label," for gays and lesbians, she advertised the change.

The program's ads, *You don't know from queer until you've tried to be both gay AND Christian*, in nearby communities like West Hollywood have fueled a bring-it-to-All Saints result.

The California parish has experienced phenomenal growth, says Anderson who has added a fourth — and is considering including a fifth — Sunday service.

"The audience for Alpha is increasingly unchurched people or people who have been hurt by the church," says Anderson. "One of the things we've learned is that, regardless of content, what grabs people is the community and this is a real people-at-table-with-people experience."

Professional sports figures, doctors and even pastors bounced from other denominations because of their sexual orientation have discovered grace in the course's Ask! Tell! and welcoming approach.

"We hammer away at grace," says Anderson. "No question is out of bounds and table leaders are trained not to answer questions, but to let discussion happen. You have to wait for people to get beyond anger and rage. They will experience grace before they understand it and it will happen at the table."

"I always make it a point to come in and say, I'm a senior pastor and we want you to know that you are completely and totally welcome here. Often, people cry."

Adapting the course for the gay community involves using the standard Alpha outline, with gay and lesbian teachers and table leaders. The experientially based 10-week sessions explore the validity of faith in daily life. It incorporates personal stories relevant to participants' lives, says Randy Kimmller, parish coordinator of Communications and Adult Baptism.

"It's an encouragement to use your own story, it puts it in a context of who Jesus is for you," says Kimmller, who is also involved in the parish's gay and lesbian ministry.

For example, Anderson contextualizes evil by saying: "evil exists and most of you have experienced it in the way you've been injured emotionally, spiritually, physically ... in the way the church has put you down. A whole lot of nodding goes on with that," she said.

The parish also offers the standard Alpha course and gays are invited to participate in either, but most opt for 'Gay Alpha,'" said Kimmller.

"It works because the kinds of people who come to Gay Alpha basically are church people, maybe 80 percent of them are people who left churches of whatever brand names for all the right reasons.

"Something has happened in their lives that causes them to reconsider the Christian faith. The Gay Alpha course offers safety so they can check it out. They already have church phobia going on. We tell them that everybody in the group is gay and they don't have to explain themselves. It gets a lot of stuff out of the way. It's safe."

During Anderson's 14 years as rector, average Sunday attendance has

## CLAIMING THE BLESSING

reporter that he disagreed with almost everything opponents had said, and agreed with almost everything proponents had said — but that he'd voted against rites of blessing because "in the Episcopal Church we have a chance to go together in a unified way."

Now, two years later, he gives a behind-the-scenes look at what happened. "At the last General Convention, I made a speech on the floor and said, 'There is not a bishop who does not know where we will be 10 years from now. The issue is how do we get there from here, and stay in unity.' No one stood up to challenge that, or challenged me personally afterward. I think the trajectory of conferring complete humanity will finally be extended to homosexuals, just as we had to wrestle with whether black people were really people, and whether women were really people. Now the issue is whether homosexuals are really people. Ultimately, that has to do with incarnation. If God is with us, God is with black people, with women, with gay and lesbian people. If this is so, then in what areas must the church stand and be counted in order to declare its insight?

"The issues in my mind are not issues of ultimately what do we think is right, because I think everyone knows where we're going to end up. The issue is one of timing and inclusiveness in terms of bringing the whole family along, rather than leaving an awful lot of people behind. At the last General Convention there was great fear that if we did something, then the AMIA (Anglican Mission in America) would separate itself further from the Episcopal Church and use that vote as the occasion for them to drive the wedge of schism deeper into the church. At the last convention we showed constraint, and they did it anyway. Therefore the credibility of their position marched out the door."

### 'We have other things to do'

As the battle over same-sex blessings continues, some say the church should take a time-out on the issue. "I'm one to say, 'Forget the voting, let's draw a truce and let's discover what our sense of mission is,'" says Mary MacGregor, senior mission coordinator for the Diocese of Texas. "We have valued the fight a lot more than we've valued the mission, and it's torn us up."

"The real issue," she continues, "is not about church growth, but a Christian community being convicted by their sense of core values and respecting their neighborhood Episcopalian church that may feel just a little bit differently. The reality is that we have a heck of a lot in common."

Still, church growth is very important to the Bishop of Texas, Claude Payne, who assumed leadership in 1995 and is known for his passionate focus on evangelism. "He made a very big point of not focusing on the issue of sexuality," says Carol Barnwell, editor of *The Texas Episcopalian*, the official newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. "Mission became our focus, and everything we've done hinges on that, reaching the unchurched."

Critics may claim that, under the guidance of Payne, these churches are simply ducking the sexuality issue. But that's incorrect, says Barnwell. She cites a conference on sexuality held at Camp Allen in Texas where Robert Ihloff, the liberal Bishop of Maryland, and the Diocese of South Carolina's conservative bishop, Edward Salmon, both gave their opinions. "We had 700 people, and everyone listened, and it went great," Barnwell says. "But I don't think a whole lot of people changed their minds, and we had some disgruntled folks because people weren't saying things their way. We aren't putting a lid on it and not talking about it, but it doesn't take a lot of our energy. It's just that we have other things to do."

His diocese's focus, says Payne, is on making "disciples, not just church members. Discipleship is defined for us in the five promises of the baptismal covenant: developing community, personal spiritual health, evangelism, outreach and working for a more just society. The challenge is daunting and we continue to work for more comprehensive ways to make our missionary outposts (congregations) centers for the making of disciples."

Payne freely admits his traditionalist posture on the sexuality issue, but says he affirms those who differ with him — presumably St. Stephen's Helen Havens, for one — and condemns internal fighting. "My own personal view," he says, "is that the issues which divide will be addressed successfully in God's economy of time by the new disciples being formed and by the broadening of existing disciples as they experience the Holy Spirit's power through reaching outward to others."

At St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Franklin, Tenn., which is thriving, the broadening that inclusiveness brings is key, says the church's rector, Bob Cowperthwaite. The Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee is by reputation a conservative diocese and St. Paul's spans the political spectrum — some parishioners don't show up on the Sundays when a woman preaches and others come only on the Sundays that an African-American retired priest takes the pulpit.

"We have gay folks, but this is big Republican country here," says Cowperthwaite. "Part of what I try to do is to be very welcoming to everybody. We have a lot of good adult programs, with a lot of diversity things. So you might sit down and talk to someone and later find out that this person is very different from you. If a very conservative person finds out they're in a group with a gay person, it's too late because they already have started a relationship, so they're able to overcome some of their forgone conclusions."

Cowperthwaite would like to perform rites of blessing for same-sex couples, but his bishop has not approved this. "We have people in this congregation who've had their unions blessed and I have been present at the ceremony. They understood the position I'm in here, but they invited me to be present. I'd like to be able to do this but I know that people in this congregation would probably leave the church if they

nearly tripled, to 800-900. "And it's a different 800-900 each week," she says.

The 1,600-household parish draws congregants from 40 different zip codes, some commuting nearly an hour for Sunday services and Wednesday night Alpha courses.

About 2 percent of the congregation actually lives in Beverly Hills, a city of 37,000 where 92 percent of the population is Jewish. Anderson oversees a \$2-million budget, a full- and part-time paid staff of 25 and, although she admittedly has "no space to grow," has begun an outreach program to the city.

The growth spurt has included all segments of the population: gays and lesbians, families who want their children committed to church, Gen X-ers. The average age of the congregation is 35 "and is steadily dropping, which is counter-intuitive to the Episcopal Church," says Anderson, 54. She is now considering adding a fifth service, geared toward Gen X-ers.

Much of her approach is counter-intuitive to the Episcopal Church.

"Church as it has been doesn't work any more," says Anderson.

"We're talking on a level people don't understand any more. They don't know what the hell we're talking about; we're talking religion and they're not interested."

She designed a follow-up course for Alpha participants, called Beta, to explore "what it means to be in Christ and alive in Christ," says Anderson, who describes herself as a "militant moderate ... not in the evangelical world but taking a modern approach, biblically centered.

"We believe the stuff that says we have to be engaged with society," said Anderson. "Our biblical priorities are not for or against something. Jesus and Paul were always reaching out to marginalized cultures. Paul was forever adapting the Gospel to culture without losing essence."

The parish has yet to bless a same-sex union but has advanced openly gay candidates for ordination.

"I can sit and tick things off, of creedal beliefs that I think the church needs to be fluid about," says Anderson, naming ordination of women and gays as things that change over time. But other issues, like mercy and justice comprise "the central stuff we care about deeply," she said, referring to the parish's coordinator of Mercy and Justice Ministries Mark Hallahan, who was hired in March.

She also attributes the growth to a multi-faceted approach to good preaching, a commitment to lay ministry and to young people who participate in all areas of parish life, good staff, thinking outside the box and "trusting the Spirit to make clear what's next."

Meanwhile, Anderson, who was ordained to the priesthood in 1977 in the Diocese of New York, hedges about what's next, particularly regarding the blessing of same-sex unions.

"I have been obedient to General Convention for right now," she says. "I haven't blessed a same-sex union but I haven't been passive. We've been quietly moving forward. Last year, at our committed couples gathering, half of the couples were gay. We recently had the first gay couple have a child baptized, and nobody blinked an eye."

# CLAIMING THE BLESSING

found out I was doing that."

## 'We Are One Family'

If careful toleration of different viewpoints about sexuality is creating a climate conducive to church growth in conservative dioceses like Texas and Tennessee, upfront approval of same-sex blessings seems just as favorable an approach despite conservatives' repeated warnings that such approval will lead to schism. In the Diocese of Delaware last year, Bishop Wayne Wright approved same-sex rites of blessing after six years of committee study and debate, writing in a letter to diocesan priests that it "represents growth for our church," and is "an opportunity to reach the broader community."

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St. Peter's in Lewes, Del., is one of the churches in this diocese. Bettylee Carmine, a former vestry member and 50-year parishioner, says the bishop's decision greatly helped their church. "We've grown in leaps and bounds," she says. "Maybe we lost three or four people, but we gained far more. The church has never been this crowded before."

Likewise, embracing rites of blessing for same-sex unions, as part of their holistic policy of inclusion, dramatically spiked the membership at the Church of the Redeemer in Morristown, N.J. "If not for us being who we are, we'd be dead," says the church's rector, Phillip Wilson. "I'm confident that the only reason we're alive now is because of this."

When Wilson arrived in 1987, the Church of the Redeemer was on the brink of death. Membership had dwindled to just 40 people in the pews, pledging \$40,000. "There were two Episcopal churches right across the street from each other, and I thought that unless we created a whole new way of doing business, we may as well go out of it," he says.

Fifteen years later, membership is 400 people who are pledging \$300,000. The great growth spurt started in the late 1980s when Eric Johnson, the son of two church members, was diagnosed with AIDS.

"The church owned the fact that 'AIDS is us,' and a number of people took AIDS buddy training," Wilson says. "We realized we wanted to make this the ministry of the parish." After Eric Johnson died in 1990, the church decided to create the Eric Johnson House, a hospice to help people who are homeless as a result of contracting AIDS. They also created a new vision.

"We moved to define ourselves as liberation community," he says of his congregation, which now intentionally prizes both social and economic liberation.

The sign in front of the church says it all: "We Are One Family." That declaration is followed by a description of people who are welcome: male, female, children, senior, gay,



*AIDS Chapel, Church of the Redeemer, Morristown, N.J.*

straight, infants, liberals, dreamers, white, black, Christian, non-Christian, questioners, partnered, single, conservative, in recovery, searching, and youth.

Inside the church, there are two flags: the black liberation flag and the gay pride flag. There's an AIDS chapel, and a picture of Jesus Christ wearing the AIDS ribbon. A major parish celebration takes place on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day. Same-sex unions are blessed, and there are also same-sex weddings. Both gay and straight members support a men's group and a partners' group. The Inter-Racial Dialogue Group meets monthly to name racism and white privilege in our society, and to promote racial healing. The Adult Forum has invited people of Jewish, Islamic, Voodoo, Buddhist and Native American traditions to speak.

In 2001, the Church of the Redeemer was named one of 300 outstanding Protestant parishes in America in a study funded by the Lilly Foundation. "There's a whole

group of disenfranchised people who've either been bored to death or been brutalized by traditional Christianity," says Wilson. "But they're still spiritually hungry and looking for a community formed around their values of justice."

#### **'Non-standard people welcome here'**

Many churches are building their growth strategies on attracting young people. It's an obvious market niche. Statistics prepared by the Gallup organization, published in 1990 in *The Spiritual Health of the Episcopal Church*, show that nearly 70 percent of church members are over 45 years old. While some youth are attracted to the certainties of conservative evangelicalism, different young people have different beliefs, says Sam Portaro, Episcopal chaplain at the University of Chicago. "To a significant extent, some young adults who are themselves at a very tentative and searching stage in their own lives, respond very favorably to a sense of openness that is communicated by an open attitude to all people," he says.

This past September Portaro explored the effects of the church's generation gap in a two-part lecture called "Mind the Gap: Forming a New Generation of Leadership for an Aging Church," delivered at Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Tex. He drew heavily on the work of Richard Florida, professor of regional economic development at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Mellon University. Florida is author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, which explores why cities like Pittsburgh, Buffalo, New Orleans and Louisville have suffered an economic exodus of talented young tech workers to cities like Austin and Seattle.

"Professor Florida asks a question now familiar to many of us in the church," Portaro told his audience. "Why do some places attract creative people and their vitality while others don't?"

Florida discovered a high correlation between geographical centers of creativity and another researcher's list of geographical

centers of gay men and lesbian women. Defining diversity to include different kinds of music, different kinds of food and unfamiliar kinds of people, Florida notes that the creative class craves real experiences in the world. His conclusion is that talented people seek an environment open to differences.

"Many highly creative people, regardless of ethnic background or sexual orientation, grew up feeling like outsiders, different in some way from most of their schoolmates," Portero noted. "When they are sizing up a new company and community, acceptance of diversity and of gays in particular is a sign that reads 'Non-standard people welcome here.'"

#### **'Freeing up the Episcopal Church to be public about its inclusive nature'**

At St. George's Episcopal Church in Glenn Dale, Md., membership tripled after the rector, Michael Hopkins — another of the organizers of the "Claiming the Blessing" conference — began performing rites of blessing. "In terms of inclusivity, one of the things that blessing means to people is that our commitment to inclusivity is not just words on paper," he says. "We'd never use the word marriage, and we haven't ever sought any publicity for what we do, and we don't do it with any explicit permission from the bishop or anybody."

At St. George's, members literally walk their talk. In October, St. George's Youth Group participated in the annual AIDSWALK in Washington D.C. "Young people who come here certainly want it to be a place where that whole issue is over with, because in the world they live in, sexuality is not much of an issue anymore," he says. "For me, the same-sex blessing movement is not just about this issue. The larger picture is about freeing up the Episcopal Church to be public about its inclusive nature, rather than continuing to project a very tentative image, and a conflicted one." ●



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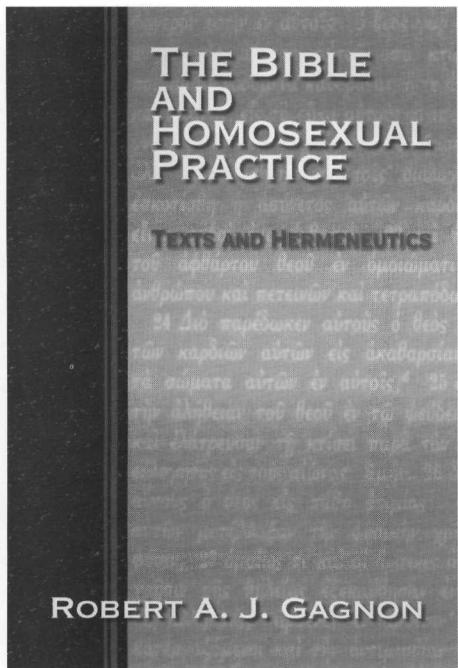
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# The Bible: rule book or witness to God?



## **The Bible and Homosexual Practice:**

### **Texts and Hermeneutics**

by Robert A.J. Gagnon  
(Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.  
520 pages. \$49.00.)

*By Beth Johnson*

LET ME BE CLEAR at the outset about my presuppositions. I believe it unlikely that the church will welcome gay and lesbian Christians into full membership in the church solely or even largely on the basis of exegetical arguments. It has been my experience that people's minds are changed when their hearts are changed, that altered perspectives do not become intellectual until they are existential. The remarkable shift in attitude we have witnessed in the North American church during the past quarter-century has come not from books about the Bible or ethics but as a result

of relationships between gay and straight believers who have borne witness to each other about the grace of God in their lives.

Robert Gagnon's *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* is a book that will impress people who already agree with him and confirm to them the rightness of their position. It is not likely to persuade people who disagree with him to change their minds. That said, it is a book worth knowing about.

Gagnon's is one of three volumes chosen by the United Methodist Publishing House to stimulate conversation about homosexuality in advance of the UMC's 2000 General Conference. *The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality*, edited by Tex Sample and Amy DeLong, and *Where the Spirit Leads: The Evolving Views of United Methodists on Homosexuality*, by James Rutland Wood, appeared that year. But neither is as large or complex a project as Gagnon's, which is why his took over a year longer to produce. Instead of figuring in the Methodist debate, then, Gagnon now contributes to the Presbyterian conversation about Amendment A; an appropriate turn of events since he is himself Presbyterian and serves on the faculty of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. This is an impressive volume, encyclopedic in its scope, detailed in its argumentation, and massive in its documentation. It may well be, as its champions have claimed, that *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* will become the standard academic work against homosexuality. Kenneth Bailey refers to it and its title is featured in the Presbyterian Coalition promotional video currently making the rounds of presbyteries.

In his introduction, Gagnon says he speaks at some personal risk and only for the greater good of the church that is jeopardized by the possibility that moral standards for Chris-

tians might deteriorate to include any state but heterosexual marriage and celibacy. The anxious tone of this introduction is revealing, I think. First, Gagnon acknowledges that he writes from a minority stance both within the guild of biblical scholars and among Presbyterian professors of Bible. Second, he is aware that his position may not carry the day in the church and this strikes him as nothing short of dire. A "potentially irreversible change in the morality of mainline denominations" is at stake. That urgency fuels the tone of every paragraph.

The book contains four chapters that investigate attitudes toward same-sex intercourse in ancient Israel, early Judaism, and the early church. A fifth chapter discusses what Gagnon calls "the hermeneutical relevance" of the exegetical conclusions he draws. There is much here that is familiar to those who know the conversation, and some that is new or at least newly revived.

The bottom line for Gagnon is that the Bible speaks unequivocally and unambiguously of homosexual intercourse as sin. Gagnon treats the texts most commonly invoked (*Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10*), and argues, often quite cogently, that revisionist attempts to redeem those passages are unsuccessful. Similarly, he places on the same level of importance texts that are today frequently excluded from the conversation, such as the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (*Genesis 19:4–11*) and its parallel, the Levite's concubine (*Judges 19:22–25*). Both, he says, manifestly condemn not rape generally but homosexual rape specifically, and so are properly relevant. Gagnon even includes texts that seldom appear in the modern debate, notably the sin of Ham (*Genesis 9:20–27*).

Although it is frequently noted that the New Testament ascribes no comment on the matter to Jesus of Nazareth, Gagnon determines what Jesus must have thought on the basis of his otherwise conventional Jewish attitudes toward sexual ethics and “male-female complementarity,” a value that Gagnon finds ubiquitous in antiquity. There is simply no ancient Israelite, Jewish or Christian writer who endorses any form of “homosexual practice.”

There is much to commend the descriptive task Gagnon undertakes. Although I disagree with his analysis of the *malakos/arsenokoites* debate (1 Corinthians 6:9) and I am not persuaded that first-century moralists cared as much about procreation as Gagnon does, I think he is probably correct about his historical reading of many of the other texts he investigates. What biblical writers said on this subject is not all that difficult to discern, and I too am skeptical about revisionist exegesis. Ancient Jews and Christians were notably concerned to preserve their understanding of sexual purity against the dangers of paganism.

What the Bible means, though, how it should function in our life together, is a much more difficult question, and it is that question that divides us. For Gagnon, the descriptive tasks—what the Bible said in its original historical context—is sufficient to determine what contemporary believers should do. He finds nothing in individual or ecclesiastical life to “override the Bible’s authority” on this matter, and he is characteristically thorough in rejecting arguments to the contrary. The historical task is for me the beginning rather than the end of the theological task. I think we encounter the Bible’s authority not in its static content but in its dynamic power to shape and reshape us as the people of God in the world for which Christ died.

Because this book is not only about the

Bible, but also about how the church interprets the Bible, it features arguments drawn from psychology, sociology and anthropology as well as the fields of history and Bible. Gagnon notes, for example, that although the biblical writers had no concept of sexual orientation, the current debate is very much influenced by it. Although he speaks more often of “urges” than of “orientation,” he operates with a quasi-Freudian theory about homoerotic orientation that is caused by domineering mothers and absent fathers. Behind this scenario of people warped by bad parenting is a kind of Manichean anthropology that sees people (or at least male people) as both enslaved by insatiable lust and possessing infinitely malleable free will, both “intractable” impulses and “the possibility for change.”

I do not know the psychological literature nearly so well as the biblical. But my colleagues in pastoral theology have taught me to be wary of knowing more than can be known about the mysteries of sexual attraction, and to take with some salt claims that orientation can be permanently altered. Gagnon’s book rest solidly on both these questionable assumptions.

The question for Gagnon boils down repeatedly to what did or did not constitute sin in the eyes of our ancestors who produced the Bible. The Bible is thus a rule book in which to find the boundaries of acceptable behavior, rather than a collection of what my colleague Walter Brueggemann calls “truth-telling” texts, witnesses to God in the midst of God’s people. So long as these two profoundly different perceptions of the Bible itself continue to divide us, we will continue to read and interpret it differently. ●

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*This review was originally written for the Covenant Network of Presbyterians ([www.covenantnetwork.org](http://www.covenantnetwork.org)) as a resource in the debate on ordination standards.*

## Ten helpful books related to same-sex unions

### Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies:

*Sexuality and the Household of God*, ed. Charles Hefling (Cowley, 1996).

### Theology and Sexuality: CLASSIC AND

*CONTEMPORARY READINGS*, ed. Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. (Blackwell, 2002).

### For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment

*ENRICH OUR LIVES*, Catherine M. Wallace (Vintage, 1998).

**Gays, Lesbians & Family Values**, Elizabeth A. Say and Mark R. Kowalewski (Pilgrim, 1998).

**Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness**, Thomas F. Breidenthal (Cowley, 1997).

**Homosexuality and Christian Faith**, Walter Wink, ed., (Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

### Gifted by Otherness: Gay and Lesbian

*Christians in the Church*, L. William Countryman and M.R. Ritley (Morehouse, 2001).

### Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New

*Testament and Their Implications for Today*, L. William Countryman (Fortress, 1988).

**Permanent, Faithful, Stable: Christian Same-sex Partnerships**, Jeffrey John (Affirming Catholicism, 2000).

**Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective**, Kelly Brown Douglas (Orbis, 1999).

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*This list was prepared by Michael Hopkins of the Claiming the Blessing coalition.*



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