

The Archives of the Episcopal Church
Research Report: Educational Materials Relating to the Revision of the Marriage Canon
August 17, 2010

The record suggests a very uneven pattern of official requests and actual teaching products or other study materials on marriage and the Church's canonical teachings for both the 1946 and the 1973 revisions. The history is marked by the Church's uncertainty about which bodies should be responsible for coordinating the educational effort and confusion over the appropriate protocols for establishing an official Church teaching or canonical interpretation.

The Church's record in preparing educational materials on marriage was more solid in the earlier periods when the basis of Christian marriage was not substantially questioned by cultural shifts. The earliest official educational statements are created at the time of the formation of the National Council in 1921. One such work, entitled, *Keeping Troth, a Bulletin of the Association for the Sanctity of Marriage*, was a short booklet that included sections on "Responsibility of Christian Ministers" and the "Position of the Episcopal Church". Later, the National Council published Canon 43 separately along with *Outlines of Marriage Instructions* to implement Canon 41 (requiring clergy to give instruction on Matrimony) that went into effect January 1, 1932.¹

The 1946 Revision

The educational component was anticipated from the beginning of the 1946 revision process. In 1943, the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony proposed two canonical bodies to oversee instruction and to counsel and advise clergy in administering the marriage canons.² The proposal did not pass.

The 1943 Commission also reported on diocesan study committees that were given study the draft canons and asked to report their opinions on marriage to the Commission.³ Three years later, the Commission reported their findings in favor of a revision to the marriage canons, which "did not express the mind of Christ or the welfare of society." At the time of the 1946 revision, the Commission asked, "recognized scholars to write papers dealing with the basic principles upon which the Church's attitudes should rest...."⁴ The tracts were originally printed as individual pamphlets and later collated and widely distributed as *Five Essays on Marriage*.⁵

Educational Efforts in the 1950s

In 1951 the Commission prepared a pamphlet, *Marriage in the Episcopal Church*, and engaged Forward Movement to publish it.⁶ The Commission also wanted to publish convenient excerpt copies of the

¹Another related item is Gavin, Frank, John. M. Glenn, and Charles C. Marshall, et al. *An Introduction to the Study of Canon 41 Introduction to the Study of Canon 41*, 1937.

²Report of the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony, *Journal*, 1943. p. 435-443.

³Neither a record of what was sent to the diocesan committees, nor their responses could be located.

⁴Report of the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony, *Journal*, 1946. pp. 442-449.

⁵B.S. Easton, F.A. Pottle et al. *Five Essays on Marriage*. The Cloister Press, c. 1950 [reprint]. 60 pages.

⁶Commission on Holy Matrimony. *Marriage in the Episcopal Church*. Forward Movement, 1951. The Archives also possess a heavily marked draft of the publication, *Marriage in the Episcopal Church*, which includes several sections on marriage counseling, remarriage, and annulment and divorce that were cut from the pamphlet.

marriage Canons 16 and 17 for wider distribution and awareness, but found unexplained resistance from the National Council departments and staff.

In their 1952 report, the Joint Commission to Report Recommendations as to Amendments to Canons on Holy Matrimony concluded from a questionnaire sent to diocesan chancellors that "the principal weakness of the Canons is the lack of authorized facilities through which to obtain crystallization of thought leading to increasingly reasonable uniformity of interpretation." One recommendation called attention to the fact that General Convention left interpretation of the canon to each bishop of the Church without any central body to guide him.⁷

The Commission noted that the real need in revision is, "widespread knowledge, not only of their content, but also of the teaching of the Church upon which they are based." They reported the educational requirement of the Canon is often, "too little and too late" and that, "the solution of marital difficulties which beset society today lies in fuller instruction long before a marriage takes place." The Commission cited *Marriage in the Episcopal Church* as the prime example of a teaching document and expressed concern that it was not being more widely distributed.

The 1955 General Convention adopted a resolution calling for the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony to, "draw up a statement on Holy Matrimony in harmony with The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer" for presentation to the 1958 General Convention and the Lambeth Conference. In 1958, the Joint Commission reported on a draft statement, which they submitted to the House of Bishops for endorsement. The House declined and asked that only the canons be sent to Lambeth. The Joint Commission replied by submitting both the canons and a separately prepared statement by Bishop Stephen Bayne, which was printed in the 1958 Journal.⁸ The 1958 report to Convention also noted that Dr. Henning had created a bibliography of resources on marriage that was submitted to "the Church press."⁹

Transition to a new Marriage Canon

Despite numerous Convention requests asking the Church to provide educational materials on marriage, the effort was lackluster due largely to a lack of coordination. In their triennial plan for 1968-1970, the Joint Commission on Family Life stated that they, "made several attempts to get at the situation in this Church" on divorce and remarriage but, "[a]ll attempts have been rebuffed with the suggestions that this is a matter of individual attitude and practice on the part of bishops and clergy and many do not wish to have it examined."¹⁰

⁷Report of the Joint Commission to Report Recommendations as to Amendments to Canons on Holy Matrimony, *Journal*, 1952. pp. 392.

⁸Report of the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony, *Journal*, 1958. pp. 492-50. The Commission's minutes of March 1958 report that, "It was the consensus of the members present that it was the best analysis and explanation of our Marriage Canons which has yet been made..."

⁹RG 10: Records of the Joint Commission on Holy Matrimony. "Books and Pamphlets—An Unofficial List". c. 1958. The bibliography lacks authentication as Henning's work, but evidence suggests that a draft if not final version in the records of the Commission.

¹⁰RG 151: Records of the Joint Committee on Family Life. "Family Life Agenda 1968-1970" c. 1968.

In 1964, the Joint Commission on Human Affairs sponsored a pamphlet entitled, *The Family in a Rapidly Changing Culture*.¹¹ The Commission successfully proposed a resolution asking, "the appropriate units of the Executive Council to gather data, formulate studies, and make specific recommendations...on the Christian understanding of sexual behavior," and, "That special attention be given to the existing premarital- and marriage-counseling resources within the Church, and to the development of training programs for the Church, utilizing professional agencies, so that the Church may more adequately minister in these areas."¹²

In 1967 the Commission reported on two new documents prepared at their request. The Joint Staff Committee of Family Life of the Executive Council created, *A Report of an Inquiry into Church-related Marriage-and-Family-Counseling Resources* and a private working paper.¹³ The Commission cited the clergy's need for training in personal counseling and the need for a "wide range" of educational resources for the laity. "Premarital-counseling resources" were listed as one of the three areas the Commission concentrated their efforts during the triennium and noted that, "It is the expectation of the Joint Commission that papers, enlarging on the subjects treated in this Report, will be published and made available to the Church generally for study and action."

In 1967, the Commission once again called on Executive Council to create and publish more material on marriage with a resolution asking them, "to initiate studies to determine the attitude of the Church with respect to...divorce and re-marriage" and to develop an educational program. No record or staff office was identified in the archives with materials on these subjects.

1973 Revision and Aftermath

In 1973, the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs reported on their task to revise the marriage canons on which, "there is currently no consensus in the Church." To that end, the Commission published a discussion piece by the Rev. John H. Snow of Massachusetts entitled, "Christian Marriage and Family Life".¹⁴

It was not until 1982 that the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health approached the subject again in any detail with a six page statement on marriage in their General Convention report.¹⁵ The Commission's resolution 1982-A069 asked each diocese to appoint a special Commission on Marriage to examine current diocesan policies and practices including the counseling, advice, and educational procedures and report back.¹⁶ Another educational measure was requested in resolution 1982-A064:

¹¹Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs. *The Family in a Rapidly Changing Culture*. 1962.

¹²Report of the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs, *Journal*, 1964. pp. 651-657.

¹³RG 308: Reports and Studies Collection. Joint Staff Committee on Family Life. Report of an Inquiry into Church-Related Marriage and Family Counseling Resources. See also the Report of the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs, *Journal*, 1967. App-22. The private discussion paper cited herein is entitled: "A Study on Christianity and Human Sexuality."

¹⁴The thrust of the Church's educational efforts on marriage appear to have been outside the official bodies. In 1979 General Convention passed two resolutions commending the work of Episcopal Marriage Encounter and Episcopal Engaged Encounter for their contributions in this area.

¹⁵Report of the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs and Health, *Journal*, 1982. pp. 134-140.

¹⁶A very brief report from the Standing Commission in 1988 stated that 24 dioceses had formed special commissions on marriage.

"That the clergy identify responsible persons in their community who can provide information in the relevant areas concerning marriage and reproduction in the modern world, serve the educational needs of clergy and laity, and be resource persons for information sources and education opportunities...."¹⁷ In a repeat of the post-1946 revision, responsibility for education moved from a church-wide center of coordination to the local church.

Related efforts were carried out informally, including a Family Life Conference in 1981 and another in 1990, although these gatherings focused on issues of the changing nature of the modern family and far less on marriage. Though previous efforts to prod diocesan activity were of middling success, General Convention passed resolution 1991-B032 calling for an "Ecumenical and Common Marriage Policy" in every diocese. The policy enumerated six commitments relating to marriage preparation, counseling, and Church teaching. The resolution called on Episcopal Church Center offices to furnish educational resources.

In 1997 General Convention passed resolutions that both affirmed traditional concepts of marriage and urged expanded understanding of committed relationships. Resolution 1997-D071, *Recognizing Lifelong Commitment and Fidelity in Marital Relationships* stipulated, "That all congregations are urged to support and develop ways to encourage and maintain healthier marriages..." Resolution 1997-A071 affirmed the work of the Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality to continue the work they began by disseminating a study document *Continuing the Dialogue*, and a companion guide, "to enable study at the local level without the need for special training...."¹⁸

In 2003, General Convention passed resolution 2003-D036, which asked Executive Council to collect and report on the local Church results of two previous resolutions:

- 1982-A069, *Encourage Dioceses to Establish Commission on Marriage*. The Archives found no documentation to verify that Council collected or reported on the marriage commissions.
- 1997-D071, *Recognizing Lifelong Commitment and Fidelity in Marital Relationships*. In lieu of measuring local church efforts as requested by the 1997 resolution, Executive Council asked the Standing Commission on National Concerns to, "initiate a process leading to a Church-wide conversation on the subject of marriage..." by asking, "to prepare an annotated bibliography for a church-wide conversation on the subject of marriage."¹⁹

In 2009, General Convention adopted resolution C014, Theological Study of Christian Marriage, which requested, "a task force...to identify and explore key theological and historical dimensions of marriages." The task force is to, "develop and design tools for theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level..."²⁰ The task force is to report back to General Convention in 2012.

¹⁷ *Journal*, 1982. pp. C-102 and C-156.

¹⁸ House of Bishops. *Continuing the Dialogue*. Forward Movement, 1995. 126 pgs.

¹⁹ Records of the Executive Council. Minutes, June 2004. According to the Standing Commission, the bibliography was created by soliciting dioceses, bishops, seminaries, and the appropriate listserves for members of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies and was published online at www.episcopalchurch.org.

²⁰ General Convention Office Website as of 08-16-2010: <http://gc2009.org/ViewLegislation/>

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