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# REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON HOLINESS IN RELATIONSHIPS AND THE BLESSING OF SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

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Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

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of it, is to misunderstand the very nature of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup> The Word of God is alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). We must be open to new interpretations, yet at the same time there must be some consistency of interpretation as well, if our interpretation as a whole is to have integrity; the difficulty is agreeing on precisely what should remain consistent. Finally, we must keep in mind that not all of Scripture is intended as legal code. “Different Scriptures function in ... different ways, according to context, genre,” and other factors.<sup>3</sup>

## **Marriage & Holiness in Scripture**

### ***A Scriptural Argument for the Holiness of Traditional Marriage***

From Genesis 2:1 onwards, marriage is where holy sexual relationships traditionally happen. Other sexual behaviors, such as polygamy, adultery, and homosexual behavior, are described in the Bible, but are not prescribed as holy.<sup>4</sup> Because a monogamous marriage between a man and a woman exists in the Garden of Eden, many maintain that this is the prescribed behavior for all sexual relationships, a part of the natural order of God’s creation. The institution of marriage exists prior to any legal arrangement, in the natural order established by God in creation. This is why Eve is referred to as Adam’s wife in Genesis 2:25. Heterosexual fidelity in marriage is seen as holy; anything that violates or compromises this fidelity is seen as unholy: sexual relationships before marriage, extramarital relationships, polygamy, bestiality, or sexual relations between two people of the same gender.

In the Bible, it is impossible to be considered holy before God and violate in any way the natural order of marriage established in creation. However, the mere fact of being single does not violate the order of God’s creation; Jesus and some disciples were not married, yet holy before God. The Garden of Eden is a model of holiness in nature and in human behavior; it is free from sin, and the institution of marriage exists as part of this holy world. This is not to say that the individuals in a marriage are holy and free from sin. As George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury, said in a 1997 address at Virginia

Theological Seminary, “I don’t find any justification from the Bible or the entire Christian tradition, for sexual activity outside of marriage.”<sup>5</sup>

In Genesis 1:27, “God created human beings in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” In this first creation story, human sexuality, male and female, is good because it reflects the image of God. In Genesis 1:28, God says to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful and increase; fill the earth.” To some, it is clear that in this story, procreation is an important part of sexuality, perhaps the most important part.

In the second creation story of Genesis 2:21-22, we read that male and female are made for each other, in that God created Eve out of Adam’s rib. A sexually undifferentiated human, Adam, is split into two sexually differentiated beings. Marriage is treated here as a reunion of two complementary sexual others, a re-construction of the sexual unity of the original Adam.<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:24 says, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife and the two become one.” In the Bible, this fact of the natural created order that men and women in their bodies are made for one another, is more important than any emotional feelings or sexual passions.

According to this view, two males or two females in a sexual union would not restore the created order of one-flesh-ness that is required in the second creation story. The heterosexual reality of our bodies as shown in our human anatomy reveals God’s plan for sexuality. The one-flesh idea refers to the human body as it exists in nature, but also includes the whole entity that the male and the female become together, not only bodily, but in emotional and other ways as well. The holiness of marriage entails the wholeness of the man and woman coming together as one flesh: holiness is related to wholeness.

### ***A Scriptural Argument for Holiness in Same-sex Relationships***

Scripture celebrates some relationships that do not fit traditional marriage. For example, though Genesis 2:25 refers to Eve as Adam’s wife, many traditionalists would not consider a relationship like theirs to be “married” today, since they did not have a

ceremony. David was considered holy before God, when he was single and when he was with Jonathan. In the Song of Songs, the Bible celebrates two young lovers who are most likely unmarried, since society disapproved of their love (Song of Songs 1:6, 5:7).<sup>7</sup>

In Genesis, the Bible simply uses a common example of a man and a woman and does not intend to prescribe any one form of sexual congress as being more appropriate or blessed. We cannot argue on the basis of an assumption of what was *not* said. For example, the Bible mentions dogs, not cats—does God not like cats?

Genesis emphasizes “the creation of human beings as a whole (‘let them have dominion,’). The first human serves as a microcosm for all human beings.” So when Genesis 1:28 urges us to “be fruitful and multiply,” this commandment thus “belongs to the species as a whole, not to each individual.” Single, celibate, and childless persons—including Jesus—are not disobedient sinners, unnatural or unholy.<sup>8</sup>

The argument of genital complementarity should not be used to exclude same-sex relationships. “Male and female” does not refer to an anatomical “fit”—Hebrew does not have specific words for genitalia. “When Adam sees Eve, he does not celebrate her otherness but her sameness....If achieving anatomical complementarity were the primary point, Adam would not really need Eve.”<sup>9</sup> The emphasis here is on the fact that Adam and Eve are of the same flesh.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Laban greets Jacob with Adam’s words: “Surely you are my bone and my flesh” (Genesis 29:14). So, it is reasonable to conclude that “one flesh” means kinship, not sex.

It can be argued that the second creation story focuses on companionship, not procreation, as the most important part of sexuality. If the statement “it is not good that the man be alone,” is true for people in general, then it is as true for homosexuals as for heterosexuals. If God’s intent in creation is to provide for companionship, that companionship must lead to commitment in order to be holy. To say that no same-gender relationship can be a marriage, because all same-gender erotic love must be “fornication” (*porneia*), is to take for granted something that has yet to be proven. Covenantal relationships can exist between two adults, whatever their gender. Many would argue that forcing a gay person into an opposite-gender marriage would be as

profane as forcing a heterosexual person into a same-gender marriage. It is an affront to each of the two people: first, it denies to the gay person the intimate companions/he needs and desires; second, it frustrates the reasonable expectations of the unwitting spouse.<sup>11</sup>

Paul invites us to consider whether a person's ethical conduct exhibits the fruit of the spirit, or whether it more closely resembles the vices he calls "works of the flesh." The immorality, debauchery, and licentiousness that he condemns, bear no resemblance to the exclusively committed same-gender relationships that we must assess today. Gay and lesbian couples (and families) who are living lives of integrity deserve our support and blessing. By the grace of God, these couples are just as capable as heterosexual couples of modeling a desire and devotion worth consecration.<sup>12</sup>

### **Scriptural Texts That May Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

"The word *homosexuality* is never used in Scripture. Nothing is said about homosexual *orientation* as understood through modern science, nor is anything said about a loving relationship of two same-sex persons who have covenanted to be life partners."<sup>13</sup> Scripture uses terms that are more specific than "homosexuality" or "homosexuals." "In every case, Biblical prohibitions refer to one-sided and exploitative behavior, not nuptial love."<sup>14</sup> In the Biblical world, for a man to be penetrated was an insult, a humiliation, an act of domination. It disqualified him from military service.

### ***Genesis 19: 1-16, Jude 7: Sodom and Gomorrah***

#### **Genesis 19: 1-16**

##### **The Depravity of Sodom**

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the square." But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men

of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they replied, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door.

### **Jude 7**

Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.

### **An Argument That These Texts Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

This story is about gang rape and inhospitality, but also about homosexual behavior. The men in the town want to rape two male angels. Jude 7, in recounting this passage, indicated that the actions involved were unnatural. The Sodom and Gomorrah story about homosexual gang rape certainly differs from modern, committed homosexual relationships. Rape can never be equated with a loving, monogamous relationship. But as Jude makes clear, part of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is that they indulged in "unnatural lusts." While the story is a warning against rape and inhospitality, it is also a warning against homosexual behavior. Homosexual behavior is an essential part of the story.

### **An Argument That These Texts Do Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is often portrayed as a warning against debauchery, primarily against sexuality between men. Some believe that these verses do not resemble a modern male-male relationship at all; nor do these verses concern



lesbian relationships. "Except for the lone voice of Jude 7, the rest of the Bible comments on the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as the sin of greed."<sup>15</sup> Scholars even debate whether the Hebrew word, translated as "know," is used here as a sexual euphemism; it serves as such a euphemism no more than 11 times out of 1000+ times "know" is used in the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup> These verses are concerned with inhospitality to travelers (a violation of strong Middle Eastern social mores) and humiliation by violence; the use of the term "outcry" (18:20-1, 19:13) points to a general abuse of justice (male-male rape, not sex).<sup>17</sup> In Matthew 10:14-15 and Luke 10:10-12, Jesus compares inhospitality to his disciples with Sodom and Gomorrah.

In fact, Ezekiel 16:48-9 speaks to the "guilt of ... Sodom: pride, gluttony" because Sodom "did not aid the poor and needy." Isaiah 1:10-17, 3:9, Jeremiah 23:14; and Zephaniah 2:8-11 all refer to Sodom as featuring injustice, oppression, partiality, adultery, lies, evil. The term "Sodom" came to be used to refer to the time before Noah when people were indifferent to God. Wisdom 19:13 speaks of the sin of Sodom as "bitter hatred of strangers" and "making slaves of guests."<sup>18</sup> 2 Peter 2:4-6 mentions wicked Sodom, but without any sexual offence.

### ***Leviticus 18:22-23, 18:26-30, 20:13: The Holiness Code***

#### **Leviticus 18:22-23**

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.

#### **Leviticus 18:26-30**

But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled); otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people. So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the Lord your God.

**Leviticus 20:13**

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.

**An Argument That These Texts Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

As part of the holiness law of the Old Testament, Leviticus 18 deals with prohibitions against sexual behaviors outside of marriage. It includes a long list of sexual behaviors that are prohibited: incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and adultery. A key part of the chapter is verse 23, “nor may a woman submit herself to intercourse with an animal; that is a violation of nature.”<sup>19</sup> In verse 22, we see that one must not lie with a man as with a woman, which is also a violation of nature. The holiness of sex has to conform to the natural order that God established in creation.

Some interpret this passage to be about unclean but not immoral sexual practices. While true, they may also be immoral practices. The word “abomination” refers to the violation of nature (a man lying with a man), not other cultural or religious taboos such as promiscuous sex or cult prostitution (see below). In no sense can the word abomination be construed as a positive endorsement of homosexuality.

**An Argument That These Texts Do Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

Some scholars write that the purpose of these passages is to set apart God’s chosen people (as circumcision does). Leviticus does *not* use the Hebrew word for *sin* to describe gay acts. Nor do the ancient Greek translations use the Greek word for sin (as is the case in other passages).

Homogenital acts identified a person with the Gentiles, who engaged in them; therefore, those acts were considered religious idolatry, a betrayal of the Jewish religion. This passage is not an ethical or moral argument, but a religious commentary. One contemporary parallel is that Catholics used to require no meat on Fridays year-round, not just during Lent — to violate this tradition was a mortal sin.<sup>20</sup> There is no sex act today that has the *religious* associations to which Leviticus objected.

Men are admonished here not to bring sexual dishonor to themselves or others. “To lie with” in Hebrew Scripture refers not to the *manner* of the act, but to the specific *context* of the act. It connotes a promiscuous, extramarital, heedless sexual liaison.<sup>21</sup>

“Abominable” meant “unclean” (see examples in Leviticus 20:25-6), not “intrinsically evil.” All violations of the Holiness Code are “abominations” (Leviticus 8:26-30), such as round haircuts, cattle inbreeding, harvesting fruit trees before the fifth year, wearing fabric blends, tattoos, and sex during menstruation; yet we consider that these no longer apply today. The Bible also refers to other activities or attitudes as abominations<sup>22</sup> for which we, as a society, do not exclude or condemn people today.<sup>23</sup> In fact, eating ostrich (Leviticus 11:13-19) is today praised for its health benefits. As Johnson contended, “There are few laws that operate without reasonable exceptions.”<sup>24</sup>

Lastly, Leviticus does not mention female-female relationships. “This silence about ... lesbianism is telling, underscoring the fact that the concern is with protecting male dignity, not protecting women or any particular marital ideal.”<sup>25</sup> If *all* same-sex activity was to be avoided, why prohibit only certain male-male acts?

### ***Deuteronomy 23:17, 1 Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46: Condemnation of temple prostitutes***

#### **Deuteronomy 23:17**

None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute.

#### **1 Kings 14:24**

there were also male temple prostitutes in the land. They committed all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.

#### **1 Kings 15:12**

He put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made.

#### **1 Kings 22:46**

The remnant of the male temple prostitutes who were still in the land from the days of his father Asa, he exterminated.

Scholars believe there were gross errors in translating the term “sodomite” and that the New Revised Standard Version, quoted above, translates the passage more accurately. In these texts, the Jewish kings were trying to keep Israel holy by eliminating idolatry and temple prostitution. Temple prostitutes were not acceptable, no matter what their sexual orientation.

One type of temple prostitution was men who received sex from other men. Such practices exist in pagan cults. It is a very real possibility that these texts refer to homosexual prostitution.

### ***Mark 10:2-12, Matthew 19:3-12: Jesus' teaching on divorce***

#### **Mark 10:2-12**

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

#### **Matthew 19:3-12**

Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but at the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another commits adultery.”

His disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

### **An Argument That These Texts Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

Both of these passages report on Jesus' teachings about the subject of divorce, and both contain similar content. Jesus is asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Jesus' answer, according to Mark, includes the important words in verse 6, "but in the beginning, at the creation, 'God made them male and female.'" With these words, Jesus re-affirms the creation account as the norm for sexual behavior. In verses 7 and 8 Jesus continues along this theme "that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and the two become one flesh." Then Jesus says, "it follows they are no longer two individuals: they are one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, man must not separate." In this teaching on divorce, Jesus is saying that all divorce is sinful because it breaks a union established by God in creation between a man and a woman and makes it clear that all divorce is against the will of God.

Some scholars note that this passage of Jesus' teachings has implications for other types of sexual behaviors as well. Here, Jesus is ruling out the practice of polygamy as an ethical option. These scholars believe that he is also ruling out the practice of homosexual behavior as an ethical option. Since Jesus is the ultimate standard of revelation in the Bible, and he declares the Genesis 2 creation story to be the norm for sexuality, then it must be normative for all sexual relationships.

The Matthew 19 version declares that "unchastity" is allowable grounds for divorce. Jesus sets a high standard for human sexual behavior in both of these passages, but it is also clear from the way he treated the woman caught in adultery that he dealt with people who violated this standard in a very loving and pastoral way. Many believe that we, in the church, do not have the authority to overturn the ethical

teachings of Jesus; it is our calling to implement these teachings in the loving and pastoral way that Jesus did.

### **An Argument That These Texts Do Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

In Matthew 19:10-12, Jesus explains why not everyone *has to marry*. The verses create a strong argument against remarriage after divorce, but not necessarily an argument for complementarity of men and women. From this perspective, Jesus' purpose is not to affirm heterosexual marriage as the only approved sexual experience; he does not say that two people of the same sex cannot love each other. Jesus also states in Matthew 19:11 that celibacy "is a course that not everyone can accept, but only those for whom God has appointed it;" thus it is unreasonable to expect that all gay men and women have been given the gift of celibacy.

### ***Romans 1:18-32: The exchange of natural intercourse for unnatural intercourse***

#### **Romans 1:18-32**

##### **The Guilt of Humankind**

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving

up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practise such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practise them.

### **An Argument That This Text Condemns Same-Sex Relations**

Paul is clear in this section of his letter to the church in Rome that he is talking about how God is known in creation. In verse 20, he says, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”<sup>26</sup> Man and woman are two of the things that God has made in creation, and God's will is made known in how man and woman complement each other. Paul is referring to Genesis 2 in this Romans passage, and what is natural is sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. What is unnatural is when this intercourse is exchanged for same-sex intercourse. Paul is not concerned here with heterosexuals engaged in homosexual activity as going against their sexual nature; he is concerned that any homosexual behavior is contrary to the created order established by God. The word “nature”, used by Paul is *physis*, - the natural order of things - and when Paul says that sexual relations are unnatural, the word “unnatural” is *para physin* - against the natural order.<sup>27</sup>

### **An Argument That This Text Does Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

In the original Greek, and the world of Paul, this passage does not strongly or obviously condemn same-sex acts as it is often made out to be. Paul uses “degrading passions” and “shameless acts” in this text; both refer to social disapproval, but neither has an ethical connotation. Paul did *not* use the words for “ethically wrong” here. Words for “ungodliness and wickedness” do occur in Romans 1: 18, 29-31, but there is

no mention of sex acts. Does verse 28 speak at all to two gay men or lesbians who *do* acknowledge God?<sup>28</sup>

Paul does not use the word “nature” as we use “nature,” in the abstract; he means something specific, such as “consistent with the kind of person one is,” or “what is characteristic to a situation.” Nor does “natural” mean “created.” In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul invites readers to “discern for yourselves” what is natural or unnatural. The Greek *paraphysiken* should not be translated as “unnatural,” but as paranormal, extraordinary, or metaphysical (*beside, more than, beyond*, the ordinary). Therefore, “unnatural” relations equals engaging in practices other than the usual ones. Roman aristocracy was, in practice, often bisexual and appallingly promiscuous. Paul’s statement “is so sweeping” that he cannot be “directing his comments to a small minority” (gays), but is condemning “the whole Gentile world,” calling them idolaters and sexual deviants.<sup>29</sup>

Still, “unnatural” does not imply ethical condemnation. Even God acts “unnaturally” (Romans 11:24) when grafting a wild tree onto a cultivated tree. “Unnatural intercourse” did not mean to Paul only what it means today: it meant *variant* sexual practices, including a number of heterosexual practices and positions, sex during menstruation, and sex between a woman and an uncircumcised man.<sup>30</sup>

It may be that Paul is referring to heterosexuals who perform homosexual acts, “against their nature.” The Greek word often translated as “intercourse” actually means “use, usage.”<sup>31</sup> “Intercourse” in English implies reciprocity—a mutual, peer relationship—but in the Greek it does not. Paul is not discussing an equal relationship, but hedonistic sexual practices of pagan peoples who do not acknowledge God; male-male sex may have been considered the most extreme form of heterosexual lust.<sup>32</sup>

Likewise, Paul may also be referring to “inordinate desire of females within marriage.”<sup>33</sup> There is no need to read lesbianism into Romans 1: 26-7; the verses are parallel only in that both men and women could be involved in something “beyond the ordinary.” If Romans 1:26 refers to lesbianism,<sup>34</sup> further explanation is needed because lesbianism was not a major topic of discussion in the Greco-Roman world. It is



mentioned nowhere else in the Bible, with only a handful of references to it in *all* existing ancient texts. Why would Paul have made an issue of lesbianism here? If it is important, why is it never mentioned again?<sup>35</sup>

Paul wrote Romans to appeal to both Jewish and Gentile Christians, while keeping them in harmony. He starts by condemning the Gentiles; then he takes to task the Jewish Christians (Romans 2:17), followed by the Gentile Christians. He did not want false issues to divide them (Romans 14:14). Paul used homogeneity to make his point that Jewish law is irrelevant in Christ because in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., it was a safe topic. He couldn't talk about clean and unclean foods because debates over foods and circumcision were still splitting Christian communities. "The point of the list seems to be that all of humanity, having engaged in one or more of these sins, is radically dependent on the grace of God."<sup>36</sup>

It might be concluded that Paul is not addressing healthy, committed same-sex relationships here. The burden of proof rests on those claiming that Romans 1:26 refers to lesbian sex *and* is an *ethical* condemnation of it. What sense would the case against homosexuality make if only male, not female, activity is condemned?

### ***1 Corinthians 6:9-11: Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God***

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

### **An Argument That This Text Condemns Same-Sex Relations**

Paul lists a number of sins that will prevent a person from inheriting God's kingdom. Among these are the sexual sins of fornicators (all who have sex outside of marriage), adulterers, the *malakoi* (a Greek word for soft men who play the sexual role of women) and *arsenokoitai* (the Greek word for the penetrating man in this relationship). The *malakoi* need not necessarily be male prostitutes as is sometimes translated into English, nor need they necessarily be boys. If Paul had been primarily

concerned with prostitution or pederasty as some commentators have suggested, he could have used words to describe these relationships. In this viewpoint, it is clear that Paul sees homosexual activity as well as other types of sexual activity outside of marriage as being incompatible with God's kingdom.<sup>37</sup>

### **An Argument That This Text Does Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

These verses refer to male prostitutes (not slaves), as those taking the passive role, and their male customers taking the active role in sex. "Neither the sexually immoral (*pornoi*), nor idolaters, nor adulterers (*moichoi*), nor soft men (*malakoi*), nor males who lie with males (*arsenokoitai*) will inherit the kingdom of God."<sup>38</sup> Until the Reformation (or the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for Catholic Bibles), *malakoi* was translated as "masturbators" (or, as one author<sup>39</sup> has noted, "...as prejudices changed, so have translations"). "Soft" could refer to "loose," wanton, lewd, unrestrained heterosexuals; the Greek word cannot be applied to women. Since Paul says "this is what some of you used to be", some think that Paul refers to *heterosexuals* who engaged in homosexual acts. The terms probably condemn pederasty ("Greek love"—exploitative, abusive male sex between a Roman superior and a male subordinate) and lust.<sup>40</sup>

### ***1 Timothy 1:8-11: The law is good if one uses it legitimately***

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave-traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

### **An Argument That This Text Condemns Same-Sex Relations**

Paul has another list of behaviors that are contrary to God's moral law in the Gospel. This list in verse 10 includes the sexual sins of fornication and homosexual intercourse. The Greek word again is *arsenokotai*, a male sexual penetrator of another male. The fornication and the homosexual behavior of this passage are wrong because they are outside the marital union established by God in creation.

## **An Argument That This Text Does Not Condemn Same-Sex Relations**

These verses refer to male sexual slave trade, “an especially pernicious feature of Roman life:”<sup>41</sup> “for murders, fornicators (*pornoi*), sodomites (*arsenokoitai*), slave traders (*andrapodistai*), liars, perjurers....” *Andrapodistai* has been translated as kidnappers, slave traders, or procurers—“men who sell boys or girls into slavery at brothels.”<sup>42</sup> Some scholars believe the three terms refer to: (1) male prostitutes or sex slaves, (2) men who buy them, and (3) slave dealers who procure them. Together, these three categories are persons who break the commandment against adultery; this passage does not refer to committed same-sex relationships.<sup>43</sup> Again, it may be concluded that the Greek words do not refer to women; therefore, they do not condemn lesbianism.

## **Scriptures That May Portray Positive Roles of Gays and Lesbians**

One view is that there are no positive roles in Scripture for any sexual relationship outside of heterosexual marriage, so there are no positive role models for homosexual behavior in Scripture. Contrary to this view, however, others do see positive examples in Scripture of non-conforming sexuality, including homosexuality.

For decades, gay and lesbian Christians have seen themselves in the story of David and Jonathan, or in Ruth’s interactions with Naomi. Some have asked whether any of these heroes were gay, and received a resounding “no” for an answer. Yet in the past 15 years, some scholars have indeed published evidence supporting one homosexual interpretation or another for a few Scripture passages.

Granted, Scripture never says that any person is homosexual, whether in a positive or a negative light. Nor does Scripture state that David and Jonathan were lovers, or that Ruth’s love for Naomi was erotic. Nevertheless, these passages resonate deeply with Christian gays and lesbians, who identify with these characters in Scripture.

If David and Jonathan were lovers, how would we expect Scripture to discuss their relationship? Given the time and place that these passages were written, it is unlikely that Scripture would tell their story any more explicitly.

Likewise, it is unlikely that Scripture would describe a physical relationship between two women, even if it existed. There are only a few places in all of Scripture where a conversation between two women is even recorded—what women did in the absence of men was irrelevant, unless it directly affected a man’s interest.<sup>44</sup>

Under Old Testament law as interpreted by many scholars, anyone with nonconforming sexuality was excluded from God’s plan or God’s temple; this included homosexuals (cf. Leviticus discussion on pp. 11-13, above) and men with damaged reproductive organs (Deut 23:1), which would include most, if not all, eunuchs. Yet there are also instances later in Scripture where eunuchs are portrayed in a positive light, and even offered salvation. There is some debate regarding several aspects of eunuchs in the ancient world: eunuchs may or may not have been homosexual; eunuchs may not have been castrated; and at least some castrated men have been capable of intercourse, though not of ejaculation; modern studies find that one-third of castrated men could engage in intercourse.<sup>45</sup> Thus, Scripture mentioning eunuchs may have bearing on the inclusion in the church of gay men as well as lesbians and other persons whose sexuality is outside the heterosexual norm.

### ***1 Samuel 18-20: David and Jonathan***

David and Jonathan were “more than” brothers. 1 Samuel 20:30 seems to use code words for a sexual relationship: “you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness;” the words “shame” and “nakedness” are common biblical ways of talking about sex.<sup>46</sup> “The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt,” (1 Samuel 18:1-4). The relationship fits the then-common model of military lovers (Sumeria, Sparta, mid-East); this type of relationship was so common that it would not have to be noted explicitly. However, years later, David and Jonathan married women according to Jewish rule, to increase Jewish population and provide heirs. When Jonathan died, David wept, saying, “I grieve for

you, Jonathan my brother; you were most dear to me; your love for me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.”

Some scholars would go further, and say that Saul was a jealous lover of David, not merely a rival for power, (1 Samuel 16:21ff).<sup>47</sup>

Later in life, David did lust after and pursue Bathsheba, but that might be a case for David being bisexual, not a case for him being exclusively heterosexual.

### **A Response**

David’s close relationship with King Saul’s son Jonathan was forged on the battlefield when the real dangers of being killed can cause men to bond in a powerful way. The bonding of two souls in these circumstances does not imply any bodily bonding or romantic attraction.

When David receives word of Jonathan’s death in battle, he looks back over Jonathan’s life and says of his friend “your love for me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women.” David is referring to Jonathan’s courageous acts of love in war and friendship, not to a sexual relationship.

But the most compelling evidence against David being involved in a homosexual relationship is that we know his sexual orientation. In 2 Samuel 11-12, David’s lusting after Bathsheba, his plotting to get her and his adultery with her all shows a man of a strong heterosexual orientation.

### ***Daniel 1:9: “God caused the [palace] master to look on Daniel with kindness and goodwill.”***

Some translate this passage as “with devoted love.” There is serious speculation that the court servants or “eunuchs” of the ancient Middle East were homosexual men, not necessarily castrated—and that Daniel’s career at court was partly advanced by a sexual liaison with the palace master.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Matthew 19:10-12: The role of eunuchs***

His disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only

those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”

Jesus includes people who differ from the sexual norm in the kingdom of heaven.

This passage represents a radical departure from Deut. 23:1, “no man whose testicles have been crushed or whose organ has been cut off may become a member of the assembly of the Lord.”

The most common version of eunuchs in the Roman world were those “who have been made eunuchs by others”—who had been castrated and turned into servants and sex slaves. Isaiah 39:7 makes a promise to Israelites who have been carried off and made eunuchs by foreign captors—they will have a heritage greater than the children they’re unable to sire. Isaiah 56:4-5 promises that if they hold fast to the covenant, they will be given a name whose lineage will never be cut off.<sup>49</sup>

## A Response

In his series of lectures titled, *The World of Byzantium*, Dr. Kenneth W. Harl of Tulane University observed that the eunuch was a valuable asset to monarchies and empires and served in many positions with great responsibilities. The reason for this was that one could not trust the safety of such an exalted figure as one’s king, pharaoh, or Caesar with mere mortals. Eunuchs were usually captured slaves, separated from family and cultural ties. They were well treated and richly rewarded, but also were safe because they could never rule. Hence, they would not be a threat to the reigning monarch.

Hart stated that the Moslems, when they overran the Eastern Empire, did not know what to do with eunuchs at first, and only later decided to use them to guard their harems the way they had previously guarded their rulers.<sup>50</sup>

The Hebrew and Greek words for eunuch are from the word, “to emasculate.”<sup>51</sup> Almost always, the word “eunuch” refers to a castrated male, a chamberlain for women's quarters in the royal household. However, there were some married eunuchs

(Gen 39:1), but Potiphar may not be literally a eunuch, as the word may indicate his office only.

In the New Testament, the term eunuch can also be used in a metaphysical and not a physical sense, to be a eunuch for Christ's sake (Matthew 19:12). These metaphysical eunuchs voluntarily give up using their reproductive powers to better serve the kingdom.

So, the word eunuch can refer to a castrated male, an office, or voluntary celibacy for spiritual purposes. Eunuchs were outcasts from the Jewish community. It is clear that Jesus wanted to reach out to these outcasts, but it is also clear that in doing so he was not endorsing sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

### ***Ruth 1:6-17: Where you go, I will go***

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said,  
 "Do not press me to leave you  
 or to turn back from following you!  
 Where you go, I will go;

where you lodge, I will lodge;  
 your people shall be my people,  
 and your God my God.  
 Where you die, I will die—  
 there will I be buried.  
 May the Lord do thus and so to me,  
 and more as well,  
 if even death parts me from you!”

This passage is often read during marriage services, yet applies to two women who have a covenantal relationship. This passage uses the language of Genesis 2:24: Ruth refuses to “leave” Naomi and insists on “cleaving” to her.<sup>52</sup> Some scholars think theirs is a lesbian relationship.<sup>53</sup> However, this relationship does not seem to refer to lesbianism, since Ruth eventually marries a man. Yet the man takes care of both women, so Naomi is saved through her covenant with Ruth.

## **A Response**

In the Middle East, people can show nonsexual love for each other by kissing. The ancient church had the kiss of peace, which is the basis for “passing the peace” in church today.

In this story, the kissing is not sexual, the relationship is not romantic, and the covenant is one of loyalty, not sexual love. Making a covenant with a person does not necessarily imply having a sexual relationship.

## ***Matthew 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10: Jesus heals the centurion’s slave***

### **Matthew 8:5-13**

#### **Jesus Heals a Centurion’s Servant**

When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralysed, in terrible distress.” And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go’, and he goes, and to another, ‘Come’, and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this’, and the slave does it.” When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him,



“Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.

## **Luke 7:1-10**

### **Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant**

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go’, and he goes, and to another, ‘Come’, and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this’, and the slave does it.” When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

It is very likely that the centurion was so concerned about this slave, at least in part, because they had a sexual relationship. One of the functions a slave would perform for a Roman soldier was sexual gratification;<sup>54</sup> the word “slave” was synonymous with being a sexual object. The Greek *pais* is the root of “pederasty,” which was *not* necessarily sex with a minor. Astonishingly, Jesus does not rebuke the centurion, either for having a slave or for how he treats the slave.<sup>55</sup>

### **Acts 8:38: Philip baptizes a eunuch**

He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

Philip baptizes the Ethiopian eunuch, even though under the law, “his nonconforming sexuality bars him from the covenant.”<sup>56</sup>

## **A Response**

None of the above examples are a positive role model for homosexual relationships or other sexual relationships. They are examples of non-sexual holy relationships.

## **Love in Scripture**

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.” Christianity is about sharing the love of God with all people. We are called to love all people because God loves all people, no matter what sexual orientation. Holiness must be connected to the love of God as revealed in Jesus Christ, for God is love. In Ephesians 5:25-28 we are told, “husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind - yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own body. “He who loves his wife, loves himself.” In Ephesians 31 and 32, Paul compares this love of Christ for the church with the love of a man and a woman becoming one flesh. Love, if it is true love, must be the love of Christ, a love of giving one’s self to another. Our goal is to love all people and to do so within the order that God has established for us in creation.

## **Can We Find in Scripture Potential for Holiness for Gay and Lesbian Relationships?**

One commentary notes that:

Jesus would not score high on a test measuring commitment to today’s notion of “family values” when he tells his disciples to *leave* their traditional families.... What is valued is not biological procreation but godly association. Being Jesus’ follower has little to do with whether one’s family follows conventional patterns of family ties, and everything to do with what and who one is living for. Jesus’ vision of God’s reign includes calling into question certain

societal conventions concerning marriage. So why are those same conventions being used by some of his followers today to exclude gay and lesbian people from the full benefits of community?<sup>57</sup>

There are numerous examples in the New Testament of groups and individuals being included in the Christian community, despite earlier exclusion according to Old Testament law. For example, Acts 10:15 states, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." What matters is not ritual purity, but justice and righteousness.<sup>58</sup> Or as in 1 Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 5:6, "circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying ... is everything." The council of elders and apostles decreed that circumcision was unnecessary: they understood that God did not reject the uncircumcised, that they too could be just and holy. Eventually, non-Jews were not required to follow the dietary laws of Judaism; purity requirements were part of being a Jew, not part of being a faithful person worthy of the kingdom of heaven. In stating that "a person is a Jew who is one inwardly" (Romans 2:29) and "in the Lord Jesus, nothing is unclean in itself" (Romans 14:14), Paul redefines what it means to be God's chosen people.<sup>59</sup>

Finally, the most striking claim for fully including all sexual orientations in the church is made by Galatians 3:28, "there is ... no longer male *and* female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>60</sup> Note that Paul does not say "no longer male *or* female." This phrase quotes from Genesis 1:27, "*male and female* he created them." Radically, the reality of gender itself is being declared irrelevant within the community of the gospel. Gender roles and expectations, "gender complementarity," and gender identity need no longer determine the identity of the baptized. Connecting Galatians 3:28 and Genesis 1:27, Gregory of Nyssa argued that gender distinctions did not exist prior to the Fall, would not exist after resurrection, and could be transgressed in the present, in anticipation of the age to come.

Galatians 5:14-26 and Romans 13:8-10 remind us that "the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" and to "live by the Spirit and not by the flesh;" "there is no law" with regard to the fruits of the Spirit.

If a committed, monogamous, faith-filled relationship of a gay or lesbian couple gives evidence of the “fruit of the spirit” the couple should be fully included in the life of the church.

As the early church saw fit to include Gentiles, even though it meant going against the clear meaning of the circumcision Scriptures, the church today might honor the presence of the Spirit and include the covenantal love expressed by committed gays and lesbians. “When anyone finds a suitable life partner, it is appropriate for the community to give them its blessing. For they have become one bone, one flesh.”<sup>61</sup>

### **A Response**

While it is true that monogamous, homosexual relationships are closer to the one-flesh model of Genesis 2 than promiscuous homosexual relationships, some believe that any homosexual relationship violates the created order of Genesis 2 so cannot be considered holy. Celibate homosexuals can lead a holy life; undoubtedly, many of the greatest saints of the church have been homosexuals. But homosexual intercourse cannot be reconciled with holiness as understood in Scripture. Paul condemns all sexual relations outside of marriage.

### **Conclusion**

Any discussion of holiness in relationships must of necessity be both broad and complex because there are two or more distinct interpretations of the scriptural language involved. Also, there is disagreement regarding a number of Biblical examples that can be cited to make a case for either condemning or blessing same-sex relationships.

## Section 2 - Church History and Tradition

This section reports the results of the research that the Task force conducted on how the topics of marriage, the role of lesbians and gays in the church, and the nature of blessings have been approached over time by the Episcopal Church. We will present first how the church has treated marriage. Then we will discuss how the roles of gays and lesbians have changed both in society and in the Episcopal Church since World War II. Finally, we will note how the Episcopal Church has understood and practiced the nature of blessings.

### The Church's Teaching on Marriage

"Dearly beloved, we have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony." This is one of the most recognized phrases in the English language. The phrase was first penned by the eminent liturgist, theologian and Archbishop, Thomas Cranmer in the first Book of Common Prayer (BCP, 1549). Cranmer's words are so familiar now that it is hard to imagine how truly radical they were in their time. Inasmuch as the Church teaches and believes what it prays, it is crucial that we understand what is being said in these paragraphs as we discuss the Church's teaching and beliefs on marriage. That teaching can be characterized in four ways: (1) Reformed, (2) Catholic, (3) Biblical, and (4) Practical, as set out below.

#### ***Reformed***

The marriage service as a whole represents substantial changes being stressed in theology and teaching of the church during the Reformation. The location of the marriage ceremony was changed. Prior to 1549, weddings would have been performed in the narthex of the church. Local custom dictated the marriage ceremony, and the clergy merely blessed the union. A rubric in Cranmer's BCP moved the ceremony into the sanctuary: "the persons to be married *shall come into the body of the Church,*"

[*emphasis added*]. Marriage was being incorporated into the ministry life of the church, not just an adjunct celebration of village life.

Marriage became an outward and societally important expression of Christian faith. In particular, it was an expression of this newly reformed faith. This move gave liturgical expression to the teaching in Ephesians 5, that marriage is a reflection of the relationship Christ has with his Church. Within a limited sphere, the bride and groom were raised to the level of ministers of the Gospel and their marriage became a microcosm of the Church.

Prior to the Reformation, holiness and readiness for Church ministry were determined by vows of poverty, chastity, celibacy and obedience. The Reformation took the locus of spirituality away from the monasteries and teaching orders and centered it in local parishes and homes. The Reformation removed the requirement of celibacy as a qualification for ministry outside the monastery and inserted vows and promises that reflect those made at ordination. The idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ was being instituted through a most intimate institution.

### ***Catholic***

The Reformers were emphatic about limiting the sacraments to the two instituted by Christ: Baptism and the Eucharist. In 1215, the church catholic defined marriage as a sacrament. This thinking taught that married couples should become ministers of the Gospel in their familial relationships.<sup>62</sup> Even with the Oxford and Liturgical Renewal movements, the emphases of the Marriage Rite have not substantially changed in almost 500 years. Today, marrying couples still must sign a declaration of intent affirming the Church’s understanding of marriage before the ceremony can be conducted.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Biblical***

The two opening paragraphs of the marriage service are profoundly informed by Scripture, referencing the marriage passages in the Bible. The phrase, “Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people,” is a brilliant, summary phrase that

captures the thrust of Scripture, including the prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, the Apocrypha, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Corinthians, the Pastorals, Jude and Revelation.

Cranmer saw a common thread referencing the love of God mediated through word and covenant. Although it could be entered into for any number of reasons, marriage was a binding covenant, ordained by God. The overarching reality was grace; the attending virtues included the vows, possessions, heart and body, and the character traits associated with holiness. Romance and affection may have been anticipated, but they were not the primary motivation until much later.

### ***Practical***

There are four practical expectations of marriage in the second paragraph of the prologue in the BCP: mutual joy, mutual help and comfort, procreation and nurture of children (when it is God's will), and holiness. The BCP teaches that marriage is God's idea, and that it was intended for the good of humanity. It is to our benefit because, "it is not good for a man to be alone," (Genesis 2).

"Help and comfort" is also from Genesis. When he needed help, Adam reviewed all of the traits of the animals but found none able to be a true helper. Therefore, God created Eve, who does, indeed, fit the description.

The third is "procreation and nurture of children." Married couples are to create their own, individuated homes. In these homes there may be children. Marriages take on the ministry of evangelizing these children in the "...nurture, knowledge and love of the Lord."

The fourth expectation is "holiness." Because of its divine origin, Christian marriage is to be set apart from all other human attachments. Therefore, "*...it is to be entered into reverently, discreetly, soberly and in the fear of God.*"<sup>64</sup>

### ***The Decline and Defense of Marriage***

The marriage service in the BCP served for centuries to be the Church's teaching, and underscored the value of marriage in Western society and throughout the world.

However, many researchers and scholars seem to think marriage between one man and one woman reached its nadir in the 1950s. Since then, the value of the classical teaching on marriage as found in the BCP has been both challenged and vociferously defended.

There has been a profound cultural shift over the last 50 years: traditional marriage is seen by many as an inadequate and overly restrictive institution. For many others, this shift is not seen as social progress but rather as “secular individualism,” focusing away from religion and social traditionalism and towards a faith in political activism, personal independence, tolerance for diverse lifestyles, and “rational” self interest.

The Episcopal Church has seen strident efforts, some successful and some unsuccessful, to alter, refocus, or ignore its teaching on marriage and related issues, such as divorce, remarriage, chastity, celibacy, and adultery. Many within the church argue that substantially changing the marriage rite, its meaning, or its boundaries, challenges the authority of Scripture and Church tradition and detracts from more intentional strategies such as preparation, maintenance, and enrichment of marriage. Others argue that the hallmark of a holy relationship is not heterosexuality, but a monogamy, commitment, and Christian faith.

Here in the Diocese of San Diego, we find ourselves in community, living through this dynamic tension of opposing perspectives on marriage and blessing rites, and yet committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ and ministry to each other and the world in which we live.

## **The Changing Role of Lesbians and Gay Men in the Church**

The role of lesbians and gays in the Church is changing in conjunction with changes in society’s attitudes toward gays and lesbians in the United States and their roles in American society. Change within the Church is more limited than change within secular society because Episcopal canon law, on this issue, has not kept pace with changes in U.S. law. However, since 1967, General Conventions have repeatedly



authorized dialogues and studies regarding the theology and psychological aspects of homosexuality and adopted a variety of resolutions regarding sexuality, homosexuality, civil rights, ordination, and same-sex relationships.

Following is an attempt to describe the changes in the secular world regarding gays and lesbians in American society while noting parallel or similar changes, or lack of change, in the circumstances of gays and lesbians in the Church.

It was not until after World War II that significant events began to occur regarding human rights, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights and sexuality in America as well as within the Church.

Society	Year	Church
First lasting gay men's group, Mattachine Society, established.	1950	
First lasting lesbian group, Daughters of Bilitis, established.	1955	
Frank Kameny argues 1 <sup>st</sup> U.S. civil-rights case based on sexual orientation, in the U.S. Supreme Court, disputing that homosexuals are a federal "security risk."	1961	
Illinois first state to decriminalize homosexual acts between consenting adults.	1962	
	1964	General Convention resolves to gather data, formulate studies, and make recommendations on the Christian understanding of sexuality.
Frank Kameny and his re-formed Mattachine Society picket the White House and the Pentagon to focus attention on gay rights.	1965	
First "gay" march held in front of Independence Hall, Philadelphia.		
	1967	General Convention resolves to initiate studies to express Christian attitudes toward homosexuality.
Stonewall riot in New York City (first occasion of gays and lesbians fighting back against gov't.-sponsored persecution of homosexuals).	1969	
Gay Liberation Front founded (first organization to use "gay" in its name).		
<i>The Advocate</i> becomes the first national gay and lesbian publication.		
Gay-rights parades held in several cities.	1971	
American Psychiatric Association removes	1973	

homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

	1974	Integrity founded (The Church's first homosexual support and advocacy group).
	1975	House of Bishops adopts "Dialogue with Homophile Community" resolution.
	1976	General Convention resolves to study the matter of ordination of homosexual persons; Also resolves that homosexual persons are "children of God" entitled to equal protection under the law.
	1977	Bishop of New York ordains an avowed lesbian, subsequently issues statement of regret at having upset his fellow Bishops. Executive Council expresses hope that no Bishop will ordain or license a professing and practicing homosexual until the issue is resolved at General Convention. The Church's Committee on Theology issues report stating the Church is right to confine the nuptial blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage.
California Proposition 6 defeated (would have banned gay teachers from public schools). Harvey Milk becomes first openly gay man elected to public office in a major city (San Francisco).	1978	
	1979	Standing Committee issues report on human sexuality with few agreements and no conclusions: "...there is not one position that has emerged; rather there is a diversity of opinion, particularly on the ordinations of homosexual persons." House of Bishops affirms traditional teachings of the Church on marriage, marriage fidelity, and sexual chastity; candidates for ordination are expected to conform to the standard. (NOTE: This position has not been overturned by subsequent General Conventions.)
Wisconsin first state to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Gary Studds (MA) becomes first serving member of Congress to "come out."	1982	General Convention reaffirmed homosexuals are children of God, entitled to full civil rights.
	1985	General Convention enjoins dioceses to become involved in the ongoing dialogue regarding gays and lesbians.
Barney Frank becomes second openly gay serving member of Congress. ACT UP gay AIDS activism coalition formed.	1987	
	1989	Assistant Bishop of New Jersey ordains a gay man living openly with another man.
	1990	Presiding Bishop's Council of Advice disassociates

		itself from the Bishop of New Jersey's action in carrying out the ordination.
	1991	Human Affairs Commission unanimous that humans are not meant to be alone, and gay relationships provide comfort and support. General Convention resolves to "reconcile discontinuity between the teaching that sexual expression is appropriate only in marriage, and the experience of many members of this body."
"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy instituted for the U.S. Armed Forces.	1993	General Convention acknowledges the extent to which the whole Church "groans in travail, waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit."
	1994	88 bishops sign "Statement of Koinonia," affirming their support for ordained gays and lesbians. General Convention resolves that no rites honoring the love and commitment between persons of the same sex be developed until authorized by General Convention.
President Clinton signs Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA); bans federal recognition of same-sex marriage, authorizes states to do the same.	1996	
Tammy Baldwin (WI) becomes first "out" lesbian elected to Congress.	1998	Lambeth Convention called upon the Episcopal Church (USA) to repent from its views and actions regarding homosexuality and same-sex marriage.
Vermont becomes first state to legalize same-sex civil unions.	2000	General Convention calls upon the Church to acknowledge and protect same-sex couples in the Church.
The <i>New York Times</i> begins to publish commitment/wedding announcements for same-sex couples.	2002	
U. S. Supreme Court rules sodomy laws unconstitutional.	2003	General Convention confirms the consecration of openly gay Bishop Gene Robinson; resolves: "local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions."
Massachusetts begins issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.		Windsor Report concludes "the Episcopal Church (USA) has acted in ways incompatible with the communion principle of interdependence and our fellowship together has suffered. A number of primates and provinces declared themselves in an impaired relationship with the Episcopal Church (USA) which has caused deep offence to many and is invited to express its regret."
Connecticut legalizes same-sex civil unions.	2005	

New Jersey legalizes same-sex civil unions.

2006 Katharine Jefferts Schori becomes first female Presiding Bishop.

General Convention reaffirms historical support of gays and lesbians as children of God entitled to full civil rights; opposes any state or federal constitutional amendment that prohibits same-sex civil marriage or civil union; agrees to temporarily refrain from consecrating any further homosexual bishops.

New Hampshire legalizes same-sex civil unions.

2008

California Supreme Court rules same-sex couples have a right to marry.

Connecticut legalizes same-sex marriage.

Jared Polis (CO) becomes third openly gay man elected to Congress.

California passes Proposition 8, writing an opposite-sex-only definition of marriage into its constitution.

On-line dating service eHarmony agrees to serve gays and lesbians.

President-elect Obama refers to "gay" people in his acceptance speech.

President's website advocates full civil unions and federal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) couples, as well as repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," and opposes a ban on same-sex marriage.

2009

Iowa Supreme Court legalizes same-sex marriage.

Vermont legalizes same-sex marriage.

Maine legalizes same-sex marriage.

New Hampshire legalizes same-sex marriage.

California Supreme Court upholds Proposition 8 but allows same-sex marriages to stand as legal.

### ***Changes in Secular Society and the Church***

While secular society seems to be slowly moving toward inclusion of civil and human rights for all persons, the Episcopal Church appears to be moving at an even slower pace. There is no lack of guidance and direction from General Conventions and the House of Bishops regarding love and acceptance of all persons, and the affirmation of gay and lesbian persons as "children of God" within the church. But beyond this love and acceptance, just what have been the changing roles of lesbians and gays in the Church since the 1940s, and for that matter, the changing roles of gays and lesbians in secular society?

### **Changes in Secular Society**

- Support organizations formed
- The “Gay Rights” movement
- Homosexuality is no longer illegal
- Homosexuality is no longer a mental disorder
- Discrimination on the basis of homosexuality is outlawed
- Sodomy laws ruled unconstitutional
- Gays and lesbians allowed to serve in the military, though not openly.
- Openly gay and lesbian persons elected to Congress
- Same-sex civil unions recognized in some states
- Same-sex marriage recognized in at least six states.

### **Changes in the Church**

- 45 years of study and discernment
- The Church has become sensitive to the needs of the gay and lesbian community
- A gay rights group founded within the Episcopal Church
- Openly lesbian and gay priests ordained
- Gays and lesbians recognized as “children of God”
- The Church demands equal protection under the law for gays and lesbians
- Openly gay bishop consecrated
- The Church opposes civil law prohibiting same-sex unions.

There remains, however, a strained relationship with the greater Anglican Communion over the issues of same-sex unions and ordination of homosexual persons. Specifically, within the Church there is a chasm between beliefs and opinions on these same issues, a chasm that will only be bridged by continued dialogue and further prayer, study and discernment of these divisive issues.

## The Role of Blessings in the Episcopal Church

The call for a blessing is power-laden. “Blessing” denotes a covenantal relationship between God and each of us. When we call for a blessing, we are asking for the presence of God, and for God’s favor or “grace;” that the blessing will result in a setting apart as sacred that which is blessed. As Christians, we believe that the relationship between human beings and God cannot be separated. God’s creation of human beings created relationship between God and man; God’s creation of two human beings also created relationships between us as beings. We humans may choose to sever or ignore our relationship with God, but the relationship is everlasting. God never withdraws from us.

God’s blessing or grace does not depend on our merit, because it is a gift to us as believers in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When the Church chooses to “bless” someone or some thing, the Church is entering that covenanted relationship and blesses God in return by giving thanks.

All forms of love – *agape*, *eros*, and *filios* – can be holy. Our own *Book of Occasional Services*, as approved by General Convention in 1994, provides for a wide variety of liturgical resources including blessings of pregnant women, marriage anniversaries, reaffirmation of ordination vows, healing, and other life events, such as the purchase of a car or a home.

As God created us, we are relational creatures. And it is the quality of our relationships that determines the quality of our lives. Through intimate relationships, we come to know and experience God in ways we would not otherwise. The married relationships blessed by God through the Church are those which are faithful and monogamous.

Christian heterosexuals and homosexuals both desire to be married in a way that allows them to live faithfully. Both desire to create family relationships recognized by the church, which allow their children to learn faithfulness, love, and acceptance. The

Church community becomes the means by which the family, parents and children alike, contributes to its faith, and from which it draws its strength.

### **Implications of Church History and Tradition Related to Sexuality and Marriage**

Over the last 25 years, by actions of General Convention, the Episcopal Church has approached recognition of same-sex relationships, with early emphasis on dialogue and understanding and later recognizing same-sex civil unions. Yet confusion exists. The 1994 General Convention action prohibiting same-sex rites seems to be in conflict with the 2003 General Convention action recognizing those dioceses and churches using such liturgies as operating within the bounds of our common life.

In our own diocese, it is often misunderstood that same-sex marriages and blessings have *not* been approved by our bishop; the bishop's opposition to California Proposition 8 (2008), which repealed same-sex civil marriage, was also misunderstood as support for same-sex blessings and marriage in the church.

The Episcopal Church relies on the BCP definition of marriage as an exchange of vows between a man and a woman, for the purpose of "love, honor, comfort, and faithfulness." Those who seek same-sex blessings or same-sex marriage request that existing liturgies be adapted and trial liturgies adopted, as they have been regarding other issues and BCP changes several times in the past. These trial liturgies give us opportunities to discover the best ways of honoring our covenant with God through our worship.<sup>65</sup>

The idea that church is a safe place to disagree is attractive, but living it out is difficult. Doing so requires that we expand our boundaries of acceptance to include those we do not understand, or with whom we do not agree, on matters of great importance, because we do agree on matters of the *greatest* importance – the love and salvation offered by Jesus Christ. While we may disagree over the definition of marriage, and how Scripture regarding divorce and sexuality is understood, we agree on our common mission to relieve suffering, and to celebrate the Eucharist.

Honoring the integrity and holiness of gay couples and their families, while also honoring the deep traditions of the church is possible if same-sex marriage or blessing is seen as a “means of grace” as reflected in Scripture.

Blessing a same-sex relationship provides a context for a structured, faith-centered commitment to another person, and witnesses God’s commitment to us, as the human beings God created, sexuality and all.



### **Section 3 – Practical, Pastoral, and Sacramental Theology**

The third section of our report presents our analysis of how pastors and parishioners are called to minister to coupled but unmarried people, including lesbians and gay men, within their parishes. The section is divided into three parts, reflecting the concerns that our enabling resolution asked us to address. The first part examines societal trends in forming unmarried partnerships, the second part examines pastoral responses to unmarried couples, and the third part considers the canonical and sacramental nature of both marriage and blessings.

#### **Practical Considerations**

We acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships. And be it further resolved, we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.<sup>66</sup>

Trends in marriage and cohabitation have shown great change over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Practically speaking, marriage has been evolving into an institution of choice – to marry or not. Since 2005, households of married couples have been the minority; 51% of women are living without a spouse. Over the past four decades, cohabiting has increased. Many American young adults spend part of their lives living together outside of marriage. It is estimated that 25% of unmarried women ages 25 – 39 are living with a partner; an additional 25% have lived with a partner at some time in the past.

More than half of all first marriages are now preceded by living together, compared to almost none 50 years ago. Some young people believe that living together before marriage helps them avoid a bad marriage and subsequent divorce. Their concern is that 40% - 50% of marriages end in divorce. This opinion is countered by studies showing no evidence that those who cohabit before marriage will have stronger

marriages than those who do not. Furthermore, studies show that cohabitation before marriage leads to a greater incidence of divorce.<sup>67</sup>

Married heterosexual couples with children now constitute less than 25% of U. S. households. Marriage has declined among all groups, but more so among lower-income couples. This statistic may indicate marriage is becoming an institution for only more educated and higher-income groups of people.

Cohabitation is an alternative to marriage for many, including working class and poor families, people who are less religious, those who have been divorced, and those who have experienced fatherlessness, parental divorce, or parental discord in childhood. When couples marry, one or both may lose benefits such as medical coverage, Social Security or other insurance. Overall, young adults decide to marry because they feel the time is right, rather than because of societal pressure to marry.

Older couples may come together after divorce or the death of a spouse. They often have already experienced the companionship, commitment, and community of a long marriage. They cite avoiding loneliness and other emotional benefits as reason to cohabit. Since they commonly have grown children, they avoid conflict with their children regarding finances and other inheritance complications by remaining unmarried. Their families often feel better knowing their parents are not alone.

Gay and lesbian couples have always existed as part of most communities, but in the last 30 years or so have become more visible. Some of them have raised or are raising children, either from previous marriages or relationships, or through reproductive technology, adoption, or foster care. They play active roles in their professions, their children's education, and their neighborhoods. Gay and lesbian couples exhibit the same dedication and interest in their families as do heterosexual couples. Many are involved in places of worship. As a book published by the California Council of Churches has noted:

Gay and Lesbian persons have long been in committed relationships with no legal protection, and have encountered many problems because they lacked legal status in their relationships. Civil unions have been compared to the

“separate but equal provisions that were dismantled in the era of racial civil rights” legal action. Domestic partner benefits have added necessary and critical protective provisions, yet remain different, are different from state to state, and do not have the same permanence.<sup>68</sup>

In considering the role of the Church, a task force of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont explained, “We believe our congregations ought to be able to support and uphold the relationship of commitment of all their members. We see this as a ‘conservative’ move that promotes the stability of families and holds all couples accountable to the traditional values of fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, open communication and holy love.”<sup>69</sup>

There has been growing support for gay marriage and civil unions – civil unions more than marriage. According to a 2008 *Newsweek* poll, 52% of Americans opposed a ban on same-sex marriage and 43% favored such a ban. When asked about state measures, 45% said they would vote for an amendment outlawing gay marriage in their states, and 49% said they would oppose it. More people than ever before approve of gay legal rights – inheritance, health insurance and employee benefits, Social Security, hospital-visitation rights, adoption rights, and open military service for lesbian and gay individuals.<sup>70</sup> As shown in Section 2 of this report (pp. 35-38), some states have granted more of these rights to gay couples who register as domestic partners. On the other hand, many states have passed legislation banning same-sex marriage or civil unions.

A key factor in these policy debates has been the difference in the public’s consciousness between “sexual orientation” and “sexual preference,” which are terms that differ by the degree of choice involved. Many lesbian and gay individuals believe that their same-sex attraction has not been a choice that they made, either consciously or unconsciously. Their only decision was whether to act on feelings that they could not change.<sup>71</sup>

This decision often provokes internal conflict. Throughout past decades, lesbians and gay men have related childhood experiences as victims of anti-gay epithets, bullying, and physical violence in schools throughout the country.<sup>72</sup> And so,

acknowledging one's identity is usually difficult, because of a desire to avoid further bullying and other negative consequences. It has been said that if one is gay, the most difficult person to come out to is oneself. Some may choose to keep their orientation hidden, but those who have struggled through this period of discernment report a great relief in coming out.

Some also may be confused about their sexuality and may seek therapy to sort out that confusion. Others may seek therapy in an attempt to lead a heterosexual lifestyle.<sup>73</sup> Still others, particularly men, live a heterosexual lifestyle but seek out sexual encounters with others of the same sex.<sup>74</sup>

As a Church, we acknowledge the worth of lesbian and gay people, but from one parish to another there are disagreements about the conditions under which these individuals are welcomed. Lesbian and gay people bring with them many gifts, but they also bring unique challenges for both clergy and parishioners. We shall explore some of these challenges in the section that follows.

## **Pastoral Theology**

Often lost amidst the lengthy moral, theological and other discussions about human sexuality are the actual people to whom we are referring. These persons are not abstractions but living, breathing human beings created by the same Creator of us all. These often-abused individuals want and need God's Word, God's protection, and God's grace.

Granted, like far too many people in these times, those actively seeking God are becoming scarcer. Many citizens of the U. S. and other developed countries feel that God is irrelevant. Gay and lesbian seekers are an even smaller percentage of Christendom than they are in society as a whole.

Many gays and lesbians have left the church in anger because they felt unwelcome, but there are also many who have remained in the Church. Today, there are millions of gay Christians, just as always, only now they are more visible. They are committed, dedicated believers, but they are also acutely aware that they are not

welcome in every parish. They understand that there are even those fellow Christians who would deny them a seat at the Lord's Table unless they are willing to repent of "sins" which they do not believe they have committed. Gays and lesbians may well feel that the slogan, "Love the sinner, hate the sin" is only applied to them.

Christ invites us to leave our bad habits and follow him. Gay and lesbian Christians approach the throne of grace with as much baggage as anyone else. Many lesbians and gays continue to wonder if the Church will be there to care for them, or if it will continue to require that they check their sexual identity at the door before there is any real welcome.

As an established religious organization, the Episcopal Church has some things to say about the pastoral care of its members. Title I, Canon 17 states, "No one shall be denied rights, status or access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified in the Canons." One of those "otherwise specified" caveats appears, for example, in Canon 18, where marriage, Holy Matrimony, is defined as "a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman."

Many lesbian and gay couples within the Church have been together for decades and have faithfully attended services and paid their pledges. But many also worry that if one of them becomes ill, their parish priest may not visit and pray with them. The same worry may exist for anniversary celebrations or baptisms. They would certainly feel reticent to seek pastoral counseling if one of the pair is having sexual or fidelity issues. Depending on the priest, the place, the issue, and other factors, gays and lesbians know that the response from their clergy can vary widely.

While this report deals mostly with matters surrounding the blessing of same-sex relationships, Task force members discussed other kinds of relationships as well. Blessing these other relationships, such as opposite-sex couples who choose not to marry for financial reasons, requires a response from the Church that allows everyone to feel respected, cared for, and loved.

Sexual relations outside of marriage are contrary to the Church's teaching. Nevertheless, that teaching cannot be the only response to these couples seeking the Church's counsel. A considerable amount of time will likely be required to discern the circumstances of each individual situation.

Certainly, marriage remains the Church's ideal for sexual relationships. How the Church responds to other committed monogamous sexual relationships is still controversial. Some task force members believe the Church should be open to blessing these relationships, while others believe to do so would undermine the institution of marriage. There is agreement however, that the Church is called to advocate for change when civil policies impose financial penalties on those who marry.

Once it can be determined that a request of the Church, made by a couple who find themselves unable to be married due to any number of reasons, is based on all other factors supporting a loving, life-long union, our duty lies in the support of that relationship including, possibly, the blessing of that relationship.

No one is suggesting here that clergy members should discard their moral compasses. Let us reinforce the teaching that, inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is the duty of all Christians to lead others to Christ and affirm them positively as children of God. The consistent message of the Living Word is that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Generally it seems that the wiser choice would be to err on the side of love and acceptance rather than judgment and exclusion. Pastoral theology can be a thing of great complexity or as simple as the Great Commandment. At the very least we should be a Church of compassion and understanding for all, regardless of circumstances.

## **Sacramental Theology**

### ***What Is a Sacrament?***

Sacrament is "a word derived from the Latin word *sacramentum* which was used to translate the Greek word for 'mystery.' Sacraments are the means by which Christians partake in the mystery of Christ. The fundamental mystery is the Incarnation of Christ and, depending on that, the Church, his Body, through which he communicates

himself to humankind. This communication is accomplished through Symbolic acts (i.e. Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism) interpreted by the Gospel and the response of faith.”<sup>75</sup>

*An Outline of the Faith* in the BCP further defines the sacraments as “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”<sup>76</sup> The two great sacraments of the Gospel are Holy Eucharist and Holy Baptism. There are, in addition, five sacramental rites that “evolved in the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>77</sup> They are Confirmation, Ordination, Holy Matrimony, Reconciliation of a Penitent, and Unction of the Sick. These rites differ from the great sacraments in that “they are not necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and the Eucharist are.”<sup>78</sup>

The last of the sacramental rites to evolve was Holy Matrimony (the Church established exclusive jurisdiction over matrimony in the 12<sup>th</sup> century). *An Outline of the Faith* defines Holy Matrimony as “Christian marriage, in which the man and woman enter into a life-long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows.”<sup>79</sup> The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in the BCP sets the ceremony in the context of the bond and covenant established by God in creation, reflected in the many covenantal relationships which God established with humankind over time, and fulfilled in the presence of Jesus Christ among us. The wording of the Celebration is explicit – what is being celebrated and blessed is the joining together of a man and a woman.

### ***The Purposes of Matrimony: Fidelity, Procreation, and Union***

“The purpose of matrimony has traditionally been understood as threefold: fidelity, the procreation of children, and union of the parties in marriage.”<sup>80</sup> Fidelity is defined as loyalty or faithfulness. Partners in the marital relationship pledge faithfulness and loyalty to one another (to live in monogamous relationship), “forsaking all others,” until “parted by death.” Procreation, within marriage, is understood as being the function of the love between partners and God’s will. Within the bounds of love and God’s will are a number of procreative possibilities for couples including the choice to not to have children (for reasons of health or age), the choice to adopt

children, and the choice of the number of children to bear, assuming the ability to provide for their “nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.” The Rev. R. David Cox wrote that marriage “is the most complete, most intimate relationship any two human beings can have,” “a union in multiple senses,” including intimate sharing of the body, the emotions, and the spirit. With such intimacy also comes vulnerability or the ability to be wounded. What sustains the couple within this vulnerability is love and trust which “allows the union to grow even stronger.”<sup>81</sup>

### ***What Does Canon Law Provide?***

Title I, Canon 17, Section 5: No one shall be denied rights, status or access to an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by Canons.

Title I, Canon 18, Section 1: Every Member of the clergy of this Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing creation of the civil status of marriage, and also to the laws of this Church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

Title I, Canon 18, Section 2: Before solemnizing a marriage the Member of the Clergy shall have ascertained:

That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according to the laws of the State.

That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with intent that it be lifelong.

As prescribed in the Canon law of the Episcopal Church, in *An Outline of the Faith*, and in *The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage*, marriage is the union of a man and a woman. While civil marriage may be legal in a number of state jurisdictions, unless or until the Episcopal Church changes both its legal and sacramental understanding and definition of what types of partners may be married, Holy Matrimony will not be a sacramental option for same-sex couples. Despite the inclusiveness in Canon 17, same-sex couples are barred by Canon 18 from full participation in the worship life of the Church when it comes to Holy Matrimony, and Canon law does not provide for any alternative.



### ***What Is Meant By "Blessing?"***

"Blessing" has been defined as "the authoritative pronouncement of God's favor... In Christian practice, blessing finds a frequent place in liturgy, especially in the blessing of the elements in consecration and the blessing of the people at the end of the Mass."<sup>82</sup> In Holy Matrimony, the formal name of the service is "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage," the conclusion of which is "The Blessing of the Marriage." The 1979 version of the BCP also provides for "The Blessing of a Civil Marriage."

*The Book of Occasional Services* provides blessings for the seasons of the liturgical year, blessings in the home at Epiphany and Easter, and blessings over food at Easter. Outside of blessings prescribed in our liturgical books, many people say a blessing over meals and we often say, "God bless you," when a person sneezes.

So, what is a "blessing," from a theological perspective? If a blessing is the pronouncement of God's favor, does that also imply God's approval? Blessings appear to have one function in liturgy (the act of consecration or to make holy) and another in the context of the blessing of a home. In such a blessing, homes are not made holy in the way that a church is dedicated or consecrated as holy space. What is happening when a home is blessed? Could it be that we are inviting God's favor in the hope that we'll be worthy of such favor and that we'll make every effort to align our lives with God's will? If so, the function of the blessing is to remind the ones blessed of who we are and whose we are. By grace, we receive the blessing of God with the expectation or hope that we'll live our lives oriented toward God. The blessing is intended to be relational, a two-way street.

### ***Can There Be a Local Option? And What Would It Mean to Bless a Same-Sex Relationship in the Context of Worship?***

The polity of the Episcopal Church is such that diocesan bishops have enormous independence and latitude over the liturgical affairs within their jurisdictions. A variety of supplemental liturgies are in common use throughout the Church, including alternative Eucharistic prayers, public services of healing, and the burial of a child, just to cite a few. Beyond those prescribed and published, it is common for priests to

employ worship forms from other parts of the Anglican Communion, other faith traditions, or newly developed forms, with permission from their bishop. This practice meets with the approval of some bishops and is discouraged by others. The local option in such matters already exists.

Several dioceses within our Church have authorized the use of rites for the blessing of same-sex unions on a trial basis, including the Episcopal Dioceses of Vermont, California, and Los Angeles. Each has done so after extensive study, prayer, reflection, debate, and communication. In order to clear the path for such practice, these dioceses have undertaken a thorough examination of the issues from the standpoints of Scripture, theology, tradition, culture, and practice. While the authorization of such rites may not be greeted with the approval of all within any given diocese, it must be said that conflicting points of view are held in respectful tension with an understanding that further conversation and examination of the practice will ensue. It is further understood that not all priests will be willing to participate in such blessings and that they should not be compelled to do so.

To bless a same-sex union within a locally authorized jurisdiction of the Church is to allow the blessing to be both holy, at the level of God's favor, and relational. The Bishop's Task force on Marriage in the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles calls upon the Church to view the blessing in the light of a "life-long covenant" and to prepare for it as such. According to the report of that Task force:

In the case of the sacramental blessing of life-long covenants, two people who have developed a committed relationship with one another come before God and the community of faith. They publicly vow and express their intention to live together in a life-long covenantal relationship. This relationship is covenantal insofar as the two persons make promises to one another that they will support and nurture one another without condition.<sup>83</sup>

In deciding to bless an opposite-sex relationship, clergy expect to find the following qualities: love, lifelong covenantal faithfulness, monogamy, intentionality, promise, mutual support, and on-going, life-giving nurture. Clergy would expect to find

these same qualities in potentially blessing same-sex relationships. Were such a blessing to be offered, it would be in the context of public worship, with those in attendance serving as godly witnesses to that which God has blessed, and authorized by the local bishop. In the words of the Diocese of Los Angeles report, "The priest/officiant hears these vows and blesses the union in the name of God and on behalf of the church."<sup>84</sup> This would constitute a sacramental, holy, act -- one that brings the blessed couple into deeper relationship with God and the Body of Christ.