

# JOURNAL OF THE GENERAL CONVENTION

**of the Protestant Episcopal Church  
in the United States of America**

**-otherwise known as**

**the episcopal church**

*Held in Denver, Colorado, from September Ninth to Twentieth,  
inclusive, in the Year of Our Lord 1979*

1979

THIRD DAY

PORT ST. LUCIE, FLORIDA  
OCTOBER 3, 1977

The Presiding Bishop called the House to order at 9:08 a.m.  
The Bishop of Nebraska read the Lesson.  
The Presiding Bishop led the House in Prayers.

**Birthday Greetings to Bishop and Mrs. John E. Hines**

The Bishop Coadjutor of Newark moved birthday greetings be sent to Bishop and Mrs. John E. Hines. Seconded by the Bishop of Washington. The motion carried unanimously.

**Motion carried**

The text was as follows:

“The 188th meeting of the House of Bishops assembled in Port St. Lucie, Florida on October 3, 1977, sends its love, best wishes and congratulations to John and Helen Hines on the occasion of your mutual 67th birthday. We give thanks to God for your lives and your leadership among us and wish you godspeed in the years ahead.”

**Office of a Bishop**

The Bishop of Montana, Chairman of the Committee on Pastoral Development, introduced the Committee's report on the Office of a Bishop. He introduced the Bishop of Rochester, who spoke on the Committee's work.

The Bishop of Rochester then introduced:

1. The Rev. David R. Covell, Jr., Director of the Ecumenical Consultants, Inc., who spoke to the response bishops had made to individual questionnaires.
2. Mr. Samuel Seiffer was introduced to review the findings as a result of the questionnaire returns.
3. Ms. Adair Lummis made additional commentary on the report which was before the House.

The Bishop of Rochester called upon Bishop Richards to outline group procedures for group meetings, which were to follow.

The Presiding Bishop recessed the House at 10:30 a.m. to go to group meetings.

The Presiding Bishop reconvened the House of Bishops at 2:08 P.M.

**Marriage and Ordination of Homosexuals**

The Bishop of Ohio, Chairman of the Committee on Theology, presented the committee's report entitled “The Marriage and Ordination of Homosexuals.”

The House of Bishops recognizes that during this triennium a Joint Commission of the General Convention has been instructed to explore the problem of human

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sexuality. While we await the report of this Commission two years hence, questions on human sexuality vex and perplex the Church today.

Bishops, commissioned as pastors and teachers of the Church, charged with interpreting the canons, and serving as chief liturgical officers in a diocese, are asked on occasion to rule on the use of the marriage service for persons of the same sex. Bishops, likewise, as guides for prospective ordinands and as the ordaining minister, have encountered in the past, and may in the future encounter, persons seeking ordination who acknowledge their homosexual orientation and, in some instances, overt homosexual behaviour.

### CONCERNING HOLY MATRIMONY

Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the understanding of sex is rooted in the conviction that the divine image in humanity is incomplete without both man and woman. Hence, the aim of sexuality, as understood in Christian terms, is not merely satisfaction or procreation but completeness. Interpersonal completeness – “The two shall become one” – is the ancient prescription, a union of differences. This does not mean simply genital differences, but differences of personality, temperament, social function, aspiration – all gathered into the symbol of “two shall become one.”

The biblical understanding rejects homosexual practice. Heterosexual sex is clearly and repeatedly affirmed as God’s will for humanity. The teaching of Jesus about marriage, the teaching of Paul and other biblical writers are unanimous and undeviating in portraying heterosexual love as God’s will and therefore good and normative, at the same time keeping in mind our Lord’s recognition (*cf.* Matthew 19:12) that there is also virtue in the celibate life. It is clear from Scripture that heterosexual marriage is unanimously affirmed and that homosexual activity is condemned. It is not clear from Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual orientation, but the Christian message of redemption and sanctification is one of graceful acceptance leading to graceful wholeness for all people.

The Church, therefore, is right to confine its nuptial blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage. Homosexual unions witness to incompleteness. For the Church to institutionalize by liturgical action a relationship that violates its own teaching about sex is inadmissible.

The Church’s liturgical action is corporate. It is also public. It witnesses to what the Church stands for – and to what it advocates as good for society as a whole.

With respect to the question of ordaining homosexuals it is crucial to distinguish between (a) an advocating and/or practicing (wilful and habitual) homosexual and, (b) one with a dominant homosexual orientation only.

In the case of an advocating and/or practicing (wilful and habitual) homosexual, ordination is inadmissible; first, because ordination is a corporate act which proclaims our understanding of ministry, the Church thereby sets forth its values, not simply for itself, but in evangelistic terms for the social order. The ordination of an advocating and/or practicing homosexual, therefore, involves the Church in a public denial of its own theological and moral norms on sexuality.

Second, one of the vows required of an ordinand commits him or her to the fashioning of personal (and family or community) life after the manner of Christ so as to be an example to the Church.

The ordination of an advocating and/or practicing homosexual would require the Church’s sanction of such a life style, not only as acceptable, but worthy of

emulation. Our present understanding of biblical and theological truth would make this impossible.

In our consideration of the two issues above, we call the attention of all Christians to the resolution of the 65th General Convention which expressed its conviction

“that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church”

and that, furthermore, they

“are entitled to equal protection of the laws with all other citizens, and calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality.”

With dismay and with shock we note the deprivation of civil rights and the development of mass hysteria in parts of this country directed against persons known as homosexuals.

The same Gospel which persuades us that homosexuality is not an acceptable practice for Christians also compels us to treat every person of any sexual orientation as a child of God, entitled to our pastoral concern and guarantees his or her civil rights.

#### **Minority Report on Homosexuality**

The Bishop of California then presented the Minority report for the Committee on Theology entitled “Statement on Homosexuality Presented by the Rt. Rev. Kilmer Myers as the Minority Report of the Theology Committee.”

The Bishops of Utah and New York requested that their names be added to the Minority Report of the Theology Committee.

The 1976 General Convention adopted the following resolution: “...it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern of the Church.”

While this resolution rules out all cruel attacks on homosexual men and women, it makes no judgement concerning the homosexual expression of sexuality. Rather, the Church at large was requested to study and deepen its understanding of human sexuality including homosexuality in preparation for the Denver Convention of 1979.

Our Lord’s promise is to guide His Church always. We can depend on that. As we search for God’s will we must make difficult decisions. Most of these relate to the question: “What behavior can be judged appropriate for homosexual persons?” Specifically, can we accept open and honest homosexual relationships as morally good? Can we accept the ordination of individuals who openly acknowledge their homosexual identity: or, to put it another way, is homosexuality sinful?

Sometimes it certainly is. But is it sinful in and of itself? And, if so, at what point? When two members of the same sex hold hands? Embrace? Kiss? or is genital activity the sole criterion? Certainly homosexual *behavior* is *sometimes* sinful. But, sometimes heterosexual behavior also is sinful. Gays in very large numbers we have with us. We always have. Shall we refuse to baptize them? Refuse them the Holy Communion? Shall we, instead, burn them? (Note the derivation of the word ‘faggot’!) If we say ‘no’ to Baptism and Eucharist and if we say ‘yes’ to Levitical penalty, we shall not be talking much about Jesus of Nazareth – at least as through the years many have come to understand His life, His message, His posture, His demeanor, and His end.

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Sexual promiscuity cannot be condoned in any form. It is destructive and dehumanizing. It should be our conviction that persons, male or female, who earnestly desire to give loving expression to their innate humanity – even if they relate sexually to another of the same sex – are persons acceptable to the God who sold all He had in order to buy the world (us).

The foundational sacrament of the Christian Church is Baptism. If, for example, a person comes to a clergy person desiring Holy Baptism stating that he/she is a homosexual living with a homosexual partner and planning to continue to do so, what should be the response of that clergy person? It is our conviction that *any* condition or circumstance which *ipso facto* would bar *any* person from ordination would also make that person ineligible to receive the *primary* sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. All the other sacraments flow from these. Is it our intent then to 'withdraw' Baptism from such persons? To excommunicate them? If we cannot ordain them, then they should not seek Baptism. Nor, indeed, can we admit them to the Table of the Lord. And, if human sexuality – admittedly a gray area in this modern day – becomes a criterion for Baptism and admittance to the Eucharist, we in truth are in grave trouble. Once again we are required to raise the question of Law and Grace. If a person can be baptized and admitted to the Holy Communion, he or she (the personal call to ministry by the Holy Spirit and the consent of the Church being present) can be ordained to the ministry of the Catholic Church. We see no alternative. Indeed, we welcome this new insight as yet another bond and Christian step toward the liberation of all God's people for humanness at its highest level.

Jesus was a sexual person. He could not have been a human being were He not. It is clear from the Gospel accounts that He had an honest, open relationship with both men and women. Given the social conditioning of His day and time, this was most unusual, especially with regard to women, and probably was a favor leading to the event of His death. Our assumption about His sexual life is that He was a celibate throughout His short time among us. We do know, however, that the highest objective of His life and ministry was fidelity to 'the other,' the neighbor. His teachings (as in the Sermon on the Mount and in the Parables) all point to this. Everything was for 'the other.' Nothing was to be held back – even life itself. The wholeness of His love, united as it was with the love of His Father, was directed toward others – even those whom the dogs despised, the outcast, the 'godforsaken,' those outside the 'hedge of Israel.' Confronted, then, with this Parable of God, this Jesus of Nazareth, we find ourselves in a totally new relationship with our fellow human beings. If, for example, one among us were to be homosexual and a loving, open, accepting person, we would say he would be far nearer to this Jesus, now the Risen Jesus Christ, than any heterosexual person who hates, despises, and uses others. It is humanness that matters. To be a Christian is to be radically human. The model for humanness is Jesus.

To stand up for the radically human, *i.e.* Christian, always is costly. It can result in loss of position, standing, the respect of many – even those in one's own family. And yet there is a deep yearning in millions of human hearts that the Church of Christ return to its foundational beginnings. Those beginnings are rooted in the life, the teaching, the demeanor, the posture, the end of the Jew, the man from Nazareth. This beloved Founder did not declare Himself on every human issue. But we do know what His directions were. They were to show us that God's cause is man's cause. And God's cause is our full humanization. It is with that revolutionary matter – that revolution about God and about humanity – that we are called to struggle. We may make terrible mistakes, as His children often have in the past and

in this generation. Yet the greatest mistake we could possibly make would be *not* to struggle. Does Jesus go too far? Does He ask too much? Is this unqualified, unconditional love of 'the other' (the Prodigal Son) unsupportable in ordinary, rational life? Of course, it is! And so we must be dangerously different – if we are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, the Jew, the One who was chosen to arise from death, and is exalted now at the right hand of God.

Having said all this, it seems appropriate to suggest specific directions and actions for the Church.

We fully recognize that the position we take here with respect to homosexual persons, whether male or female, does not reflect the views generally held in the Church. While there is, to be sure, a growing disposition to accept these persons in a pastoral manner as Children of God, they nevertheless often are looked upon as deviants (*i.e.*, from the sexual norm of the majority of humans) or even as perverted, as unnatural. Clearly it is not the homosexuality of persons which disturbs most of us as pastors in the Church; it is the homosexual act, the genital expression of homosexual love. These acts have been regarded as outside the 'natural order.' Some modern theologians, *e.g.* Karl Barth, have maintained this point of view. (Given this perspective, one must responsibly ask whether, indeed, celibacy is in the 'natural order'.) Other theologians, Baum and Pittenger for example, have maintained that the traditional natural-theology-view of human nature is too static and fixed. They argue for a more open, developmental, process-view of human nature. For them, it is the opening up of humanness, after the model of Jesus, the acceptance of 'the other', the responsibility and sensitivity toward 'the other' which matters – not Aristotelian or Thomistic theory of the orders of creation. It is *human* that He made us. That, we think, is the biblical *prius*.

Why some persons are sexually oriented toward the same sex appears to be a mystery. But such persons exist; they were born, just as left-handed persons were born. Our options – in the face of this – are: 1) to reject them; 2) to accept them as persons, but *not* accept their homosexual life-style; and 3) to accept their life-style (including their responsible genital expression of it) *without making any claims* about its equality with heterosexual life-styles yet recognizing that a minority of human beings are oriented in this direction.

If we now or in the future accept the third option, attitudes toward sexual lifestyles in our congregations will need to change. The public kiss of greeting, holding hands, dancing with the appropriate partner at the parish dance by homosexual persons, must come to be accepted by the dominant heterosexual group. Otherwise, a merely theoretical acceptance of this life-style would be utterly hypocritical.

We do not see this happening in the Church at large nor in our own Diocese in the near future, save perhaps in a few parishes. But we believe from the depths of our souls that we must begin now to enable it to happen where it may. Sooner or later it must take place if we take seriously the demand of Jesus Christ that we become radically human.

If we now or in the future accept the third option we need to be specific about homosexual men or women who are ministers in the Church. They must be persons of good character; they never should flaunt their sexuality; should they have a companion they should not dissemble the fact; their ethical standards in such a union should be no different from those of their heterosexual brothers and sisters in Christ with whom all are united in Baptism. Once again, the fullest possible realization of humanness, patterned after the humanity of Jesus, is the goal –

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together with the realization that in a fallen world this plenitude is quite impossible and that, therefore, we *all* must through ourselves upon that grace of God revealed by and embodied in the historic personhood of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Acceptance of the third option will move us into unknown ethical and social territory. Yet, did we know what the levelling of relations between whites and black former slaves would do to white society? I know and you know that it was and is and will be increasingly liberating and humanizing – for both blacks and whites.

As we continue to wrestle with the meaning of the historical ministry and risen presence of the Christ who in Hans Kung's phrase equated God's cause with man's cause we remember that the people about whom we speak are our people. They are our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters, our husbands and wives, our neices and nephews. They are baptized. They are the friend for whom we are to lay down our life. They are the gentiles with whom Peter learned to eat. Together we are the Body of Christ.

The spirit of reconciliation is magnanimous. Yet, the spirit of reconciliation to homosexuals does not exist. The Church's ministry to those who dissent with the decisions of the Church concerning the ordination of women has been affirmed by the Bishops. Let us now affirm the Church's mission to be reconciled to this unknown body of men and women who are homosexual.

The Bishop of Ohio moved the adoption of the Statement of the Committee on Theology. The motion was seconded by the Bishop of West Missouri.

The Bishop Coadjutor of Newark moved the adoption of the following amendment.

That the following phrase in the first paragraph in the section called "Concerning Holy Matrimony":

"but all the differences biological and cultural that distinguish male and female" be substituted for "but differences of personality, temperament, social function, aspiration..."

The amendment was seconded by the Bishop of Southern Ohio.

**Amendment adopted**

The Bishop of South Carolina moved that the last sentence of paragraph four be deleted. It reads as follows:

"It is not clear from Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual orientation, but the Christian message of redemption and sanctification is one of graceful acceptance leading to graceful wholeness for all people."

The amendment was seconded by the Bishop of North Carolina. Following discussion, the amendment failed.

**Amendment failed**

The Bishop of Nevada moved the following substitute motion:

That the report of the Committee on Theology be received by the House of Bishops. The motion was seconded by Bishop Swift.

**Motion defeated**

The Bishop of Michigan moved the adoption of the following substitute motion for the Report of the Committee on Theology.

In September 1976 the 65th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, meeting in Minneapolis, approved three resolutions as follows:

1. That homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with other persons upon the love, acceptance and pastoral concern and care of the Church.
2. Homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the law with all other citizens and the Church should work for such changes in our society, and
3. That the Church in general engage in serious study and dialogue in the area of human sexuality (including homosexuality) as it pertains to various aspects of life, particularly living styles, employment, housing and education.

While we as a Church await the results of this study to which we have committed ourselves, we wish to state for clarification that neither the Episcopal Church as a corporate body, nor we as bishops, have ever endorsed, condoned or encouraged sexual activity between homosexual persons. Similarly, we have never approved the *misuse* of one's homosexuality any more than we approve the *misuse* of one's heterosexuality and this includes molestation of another, solicitation of another, or any form of promiscuity.

What we have done and are trying to do is to be involved in what many thoughtful Christians today believe to be a crucial issue, deserving of the Church's attention and pastoral care. We believe that the Church manifesting the love of Christians for all persons has a responsibility to enter into dialogue and discussion in order to provide a voice for minority and powerless groups within any Christian Society who need desperately to be heard. Such an attitude we believe, makes it possible for each of us as concerned Christians to learn something of other persons in our own community. By supporting all members of the Church where they are and where they exist with an understanding and compassion for one another we may enable each other to discover a deeper relationship with Christians. We do not think we accomplish this by making denunciatory and condemnatory judgments on people who are striving hard to be committed Christians.

In the meantime let us remember that the Gospel of Jesus Christ compels us to treat every person of any sexual orientation as a child of God entitled to our pastoral concern and guaranteed his or her civil rights.

The motion was seconded by Bishop Swift.

The Bishop of the Central Gulf Coast moved that the substitute motion be tabled. The motion to table was seconded by the Bishop of Mississippi.

**Motion to table carried**

The Bishop Suffragan of Dallas moved the adoption of the following amendment:

That the words "divine image in humanity" be replaced with the words "human nature as created by God" in the third paragraph.

The amendment was seconded by the Bishop of Georgia.

**Amendment failed**

The Bishop of Quincy moved the adoption of the following amendment:

"The same Gospel which leads us to the above conclusion also compels" be substituted for the words "The same Gospel which persuades us that homosexuality is not an acceptable practice for Christians also"

Following discussion the amendment carried.

**Amendment adopted**



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The original motion as amended by the House of Bishops was then presented to the House by the Bishop of Ohio as the resolution:

The House of Bishops recognizes that during this triennium a Joint Commission of the General Convention has been instructed to explore the problem of human sexuality. While we await the report of this Commission two years hence, questions on human sexuality vex and perplex the Church today.

Bishops, commissioned as pastors and teachers of the Church, charged with interpreting the canons, and serving as chief liturgical officers in a diocese, are asked on occasion to rule on the use of the marriage service for persons of the same sex. Bishops, likewise, as guides for prospective ordinands and as the ordaining minister, have encountered in the past, and may in the future encounter, persons seeking ordination who acknowledge their homosexual orientation and, in some instances, overt homosexual behaviour.

### CONCERNING HOLY MATRIMONY

Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the understanding of sex is rooted in the conviction that the divine image in humanity is incomplete without both man and woman. Hence, the aim of sexuality, as understood in Christian terms, is not merely satisfaction or procreation but completeness. Interpersonal completeness – “The two shall become one” – is the ancient prescription, a union of differences. This does not mean simply genital differences, but all the differences biological and cultural that distinguish male and female all gathered into the symbol of “two shall become one.”

The biblical understanding rejects homosexual practice. Heterosexual sex is clearly and repeatedly affirmed as God’s will for humanity. The teaching of Jesus about marriage, the teaching of Paul and other biblical writers are unanimous and undeviating in portraying heterosexual love as God’s will and therefore good and normative at the same time keeping in mind our Lord’s recognition (cf. Matthew 19:12) that there is also virtue in the celibate life. It is clear from Scripture that heterosexual marriage is unanimously affirmed and that homosexual activity is condemned. It is not clear from Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual orientation, but the Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual orientation, but the Christian message of redemption and sanctification is one of graceful acceptance leading to graceful wholeness for all people.

The Church, therefore, is right to confine its nuptial blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage. Homosexual unions witness to incompleteness. For the Church to institutionalize by liturgical action a relationship that violates its own teaching about sex is inadmissible.

The Church’s liturgical action is corporate. It is also public. It witnesses to what the Church stands for – and to what it advocates as good for society as a whole.

### CONCERNING THE ORDINATION OF HOMOSEXUALS

With respect to the question of ordaining homosexuals it is crucial to distinguish between (a) an advocating and/or practicing – (wilful and habitual) homosexual and, (b) one with a dominant homosexual orientation only.

In the case of an advocating and/or practicing homosexual, ordination is inadmissible; First, because ordination is a corporate act which proclaims our understanding of ministry, the Church thereby sets forth its values, not simply for itself, but in evangelistic terms for the social order. The ordination of an advocating