

multiple understandings and interpretations held by thoughtful people. There are at least three major perspectives: (1) Homosexuality is constitutional, i.e., an unchangeable given. Some believe this form of sexuality is a gift of God and therefore good in and of itself. As a gift of God, homosexuality is to be accepted and affirmed by those of this sexuality and those who support them. Others argue that even if a given, homosexual behavior is nonetheless an offense against nature and may be contrary to the will of God. (2) Homosexuality is a psychological reality that might be changed through therapy. (3) Homosexuality is a social construct of gender identification and therefore malleable.

[5.8] Regardless of the origin of homosexuality, there are at least two contrary positions regarding homosexual intimacy: (1) Homosexual genital expression is always sinful and is not acceptable within the Christian ethic. (2) Some homosexual genital expression is legitimate and Christians should lend pastoral support for such relationships. Neither the complexities nor the issues end here.

[5.9] Some understand the conflict sparked around homosexuality to be a matter of justice calling for redress of grievances and violence suffered by homosexual persons at the hands of both Church and society. Others see it as a pastoral issue, calling for compassion. Some believe that the intent of long-term faithful relationships among homosexual persons should be adequate grounds for normalizing them. For others intent does not address the issue. In a world in which all things have been corrupted by sin, neither our affections nor our intentions alone can be dispositive. Some see questions about homosexuality linked to questions about heterosexuality, while others object vigorously to making such connections. Some believe there is in homosexuality an inherent disposition to promiscuity, which undermines any argument that such unions should be blessed. Others are offended at this suggestion, and point to the high rate of heterosexual promiscuity in reply. Still others feel the Church is paralyzed by debates about this issue which distract us from pressing needs for attention to mission. Others would say this is an integral part of our mission.

[5.10] To overcome the painful disagreement present among us over these matters some believe compromise is necessary to preserve the unity and peace of the Church, while others believe that compromise with the truth as they understand it is not possible.

6. Questions about Same-Sex Blessings

[6.0] The question before the Church is whether some homosexual relationships are, like some heterosexual relationships, open to the blessing of God through the Church, or are they always inherently sinful? And for those who believe that at least certain homosexual practices are sinful, the question must be raised, "how sinful"?

[6.1] We have insisted there are no doctrinal grounds for inhospitality to homosexual persons as members of the Church. What then are the grounds for refusing to bless the relationships of homosexual couples who are prepared to commit themselves to the same standards and vows as do heterosexual couples?

[6.2] The Episcopal Church is committed "to support" those whose relationships of sexual intimacy are other than those of marriage. As noted above, it calls all such persons, whether heterosexual or homosexual, to standards of life-long

commitment, "characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication" and the kind of "holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" (Resolution D039, from the 73rd General Convention). The question remains, does extending this support include pronouncing the Church's blessing on such relationships?

[6.5] Liturgy provides cohesion for the Anglican Communion, and it is through our liturgies that we define what we most deeply believe as Christians. Because at this time we are nowhere near consensus in the Church regarding the blessing of homosexual relationships, we cannot recommend authorizing the development of new rites for such blessings.

[6.6] For these reasons, we urge the greatest caution as the Church continues to seek the mind of Christ in these matters. This will require a diligent and perhaps painful willingness on the part of the Church to engage in focused conversation among all of us, and openness to the guidance and movement of the Holy Spirit. We urge the Church to cherish all members of the Body of Christ without fail, and to seek always for the fullness and diversity of that unity we are called to in Christ (Rom. 12:4-8).

[6.7] We call upon the Church to develop and provide pastoral support and spiritual guidance and specifically to provide prayers as we wrestle and discern the will of God with regard to human sexuality and its various expressions.

7. Questions about Ordination

[7.0] There is a subset of questions that needs further exploration. Chief among them is whether unmarried, non-celibate persons, heterosexual or homosexual, should be ordained. In our polity, ordination is at the discretion of the bishop as overseer in the community of faith with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee. Sexual discipline and holiness of life must be a very serious consideration for bishops, Standing Committees, and Commissions on Ministry as they discern what constitutes a "wholesome example to all people" (BCP 544).

[7.1] We affirm the responsibility of Dioceses to discern and raise up fit persons for the ministry of word and sacrament to build up the body of Christ in that place. We call on bishops and Standing Committees to be respectful of the ways in which decisions made in one Diocese have ramifications on others. We remind all that ordination is for the whole Church.

8. Living in Disagreement

[8.0] Our present conclusion is that equally sincere Christians, equally committed to an orthodox understanding of the Faith we share, equally looking to Scripture for guidance on this issue, are deeply divided regarding questions with respect to homosexuality. It will be crucial for all parties in this debate to ask God's blessing on their ever-deepening conversion in Christ, and to pray for God's love and forgiveness to be granted to all. Faithfulness and the courage to offer love and acceptance to those with whom we disagree is the great need of the moment.

[8.1] For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that the Episcopal Church refrain from any attempt to "settle" the matter legislatively. For a season at least, we must acknowledge and live with the great pain and discomfort of our

disagreements. The act of trusting those with whom we disagree intensely bears witness to the reconciling power of God, which is always beyond our imagining. Sensitive restraint and mutual forbearance is needed rather than a vote that might "win" the argument for some and leave others seemingly rejected. "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness" (James 1:19–20).

[8.2] At the Lambeth Conference in 1998, the bishops of the Anglican Communion addressed questions of human sexuality. Although overshadowed by a controversial Resolution on Homosexuality, the report, *Human Sexuality*, was well crafted, and we believe it remains relevant to the present discussion. We share the principal conclusions of the report:

Clearly some expressions of sexuality are inherently contrary to the Christian way and are sinful. Such unacceptable expressions of sexuality include promiscuity, prostitution, incest, pornography, pedophilia, predatory sexual behavior, and sadomasochism (all of which may be heterosexual and homosexual), adultery, violence against women and in families, rape and female circumcision. From a Christian perspective these forms of sexual expression remain sinful in any context. We are particularly concerned about the pressures on young people to engage in sexual activity at an early age, and we urge our churches to teach the virtue of abstinence.

All human relationships need the transforming power of Christ which is available to all, and particularly when we fall short of biblical norms. We must confess that we are not of one mind about homosexuality. Our variety of understanding encompasses:

- i) Those who believe homosexual orientation is a disorder, but that through the grace of Christ people can be changed, although not without pain and struggle.
- ii) Those who believe that relationships between people of the same gender should not include genital expression, that this is the clear teaching of the Bible and of the Church universal, and that such activity (if unrepented of) is a barrier to the Kingdom of God.
- iii) Those who believe that committed homosexual relationships fall short of the biblical norm, but are to be preferred to relationships that are anonymous and transient.
- iv) Those who believe that the Church should accept and support or bless monogamous covenant relationships between homosexual people and that they may be ordained.

We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions that are raised. There is much that we do not understand.

(*Called to Full Humanity*, Section 1 Report, pages, 16, 17)

[8.3] We encourage the continuing examination of God's gift of human sexuality. We urge Church leaders everywhere, both within our own household of faith and in other denominations, to join us in seeking the mind of Christ and the wisdom of God. But the responsibility for doing so is not reserved to theologians and

ecclesiastical leaders alone. All those who bear the name of Christ share such responsibility. We believe that by patience, prayer, and continuing study, with forbearance and charity for all, God will guide the Church through this season of conflict to a place of reconciliation and peace for all. Let us support each other in love and prayer.

*Guide us, O God, in our continuing consideration of human sexuality to be responsive to and respectful of all persons, their ideas and experience. Convert and empower us to listen penitently and, with humility, to speak honestly with one another. Set our disagreements within the mutual knowledge and love which we experience in you as Holy Trinity. Whenever we experience fear, anger, or mistrust with one another, gives us new hope and consolation in your never-failing love for your children. In all things, let us submit our ideas to your thoughts, our desires to your will, and our actions to your purpose. In our diversity as members of the Body of Christ, help us find our way, through Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer.
Amen.*