

# **The Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing**

## **Report to the 156<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California**



June, 2005

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# **The Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing Report to the 156<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California**

## **Introduction**

At the 155<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, Bishop William Swing announced the creation of a Task Force on Marriage and Blessing to consider a variety of issues related to the status of marriage and the blessing of same-gender covenants in Church and society. The Task Force has met regularly for prayerful study of the questions raised in the Bishop's charge to us. This report summarizes our sense of the state of the Diocese on these issues, and contains our recommendations for further action in the form of three resolutions for consideration by this Convention (see Attachment A).

As part of our discernment process, we prepared a study packet for use in congregations during Eastertide exploring five themes: the history and context of the current conversation about marriage and blessing in the Diocese of California, the relationship between civil marriage and sacramental marriage, the Gospel as common ground for discussion, the pastoral care of couples, and the relationship between marriage and same-gender covenants. At least 31 congregations have made use of this resource, and their feedback has informed our deliberations. The study packet represents well the Task Force's approach to these issues, and we commend it for continued use throughout the Diocese (see Attachment B).

While congregational feedback was an important resource for our work, we wish to be clear that this report and recommendations reflects the prayerful discernment of the Task Force, building on the work of previous diocesan task forces as well as that of the wider Church. Due attention was given to the relevant biblical, theological, and liturgical scholarship that is readily available. At least since the publication fifty years ago of D. Sherwin Bailey's landmark study, *Homosexuality in the Western Christian Tradition*, the Church has engaged in prodigious study and conversation about human sexuality. The Task Force did not feel it necessary to recapitulate this fifty year history in our own work, but rather to distill the sense of the faithful people of the Diocese of California and to restate our practice and convictions in the context of the current state of affairs in the Anglican Communion.

## **The Anglican Communion**

With respect to the current crisis within the Anglican Communion regarding these matters, the Task Force concluded that differences in our understanding and practice of marriage and blessing same-gender covenants do not undermine the doctrinal foundations of the Church's life and faith. Everyone party to this conversation within the Episcopal Church affirms the Apostles' creed as the Baptismal Symbol and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith. Furthermore, while there are clearly differences of biblical interpretation with respect to these issues, there is deeply shared agreement concerning the authority of Holy Scripture as the rule and ultimate standard of

faith “containing all things necessary to salvation.” Our common ground is the good news of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Thus, differences of opinion regarding theological understandings of marriage and same-gender covenants, and the appropriateness of liturgical forms for their blessing, are not a basis for schism or excommunication. This is a conversation among sisters and brothers in Christ, who sometimes disagree. This disagreement is just that – disagreement: not apostasy or heresy or conformity or dissent. It is simply a disagreement among adults who share responsibility for proclaiming the good news of God in word and deed. We can agree to disagree, trusting the Holy Spirit to continue to lead us into all truth.

### **The Diocese of California**

In terms of the understanding and practice of the Diocese of California, the Task Force affirms that both marriage between a man and a woman and same-gender covenants are Christian vocations, particular ways in which some people are called to live out their baptismal promises. We call for a single ethical standard for both heterosexual and same-gender couples, “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” (Resolution D039 of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention). We also affirm that as Christian vocations, both types of covenant deserve the Church’s blessing. In blessing marriages and same-gender covenants, we recognize the sacramental nature of these relationships, their capacity to convey the grace of God’s self-giving love to the world as well as to the couple.

These affirmations represent the “diverse center” of belief and practice within the Diocese of California as reflected by congregational feedback. There are those who believe that homosexual behavior is a sin and that blessing same-gender covenants is an unconscionable departure from biblical revelation and long-standing tradition. There also are those who believe that anything less than equal access to the marriage rite, for both opposite-gender and same-gender couples, violates the sacramental integrity of the Body of Christ. Between these two perspectives there lies a widely shared consensus that the Diocese should move forward with an authorized rite(s) for the blessing of same-gender covenants, and guidelines for implementation in those congregations that are ready to receive it. Such a policy should reflect a single ethical standard for all couples who seek the Church’s blessing.

The Task Force acknowledges that while there is widespread consensus within the Diocese of California as to the appropriateness of blessing same-gender covenants, there remains a diversity of opinion regarding the relationship between marriage and same-gender covenants. Should the legal protections and responsibilities afforded by civil marriage be provided to same-gender couples (and their children) through access to civil marriage or access to civil unions? What options are available to clergy and/or congregations who are uncomfortable with ordained ministers authorizing marriage licenses on behalf of the State? What are the theological implications of the Church providing different sacramental rites for different classes of the baptized (that is,

distinguishing between marriage and same-gender covenants)? These are among the questions requiring further exploration and conversation throughout the Diocese.

The Task Force identified as a major area of concern the preparation of couples to covenant together and receive the Church's blessing, as well as ongoing support for them as they live out their vocation as a couple in Christian community. We observe that there is little understanding of the congregation's role and responsibility with respect to the preparation and ongoing support of couples, and the preparation provided by the clergy varies greatly. In what ways are marriage and same-gender covenants vocations that advance the Church's mission? How are they rooted in baptism? How can the Church best help Christian couples cope with the social and economic forces that are making committed relationships of all kinds so tenuous in our culture?

We note that congregations that have decided to bless same-gender couples have done so after undergoing an extensive communal discernment process that included the preparation of the couple for the blessing rite. One of the gifts of this discernment process has been a renewed appreciation for the benefits of preparation for both couples and congregations, and the recovery of the role of the congregation in both marriage and blessing rites. We strongly urge the Diocese to discern and disseminate "best practices" in this area of our common life, and to reclaim marriage and blessing rites as being of and for the Church's mission.

### **Recommendations**

To that end, the Task Force calls for the creation of a Commission on Marriage and Blessing. Our theological, liturgical, and pastoral work on these issues would benefit from a Diocesan structure capable of carrying forward the charge of this Task Force, including developing and disseminating resources for congregations and clergy to better prepare, bless, and support couples in their Christian vocation. The Church will continue to grapple with the questions raised by the relationship between marriage and same-gender covenants, and the rapidly changing cultural context in which they are situated. The Diocese of California is particularly well placed and equipped to offer the wider Church a wealth of experience and expertise on these matters, and to advance the conversation that currently seems to be at an impasse within the Anglican Communion.

Consistent with previous resolutions of this Convention, the Task Force also calls for the development of a Diocesan rite(s) for the blessing of same-gender covenants and guidelines for its use, to be presented at the 158<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention for authorization by the bishop. The use of any such rite would remain a matter of episcopal discretion. This request is rooted in our character as a people of common prayer, and our desire to ensure a rite(s) in continuity with the foundational sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, which give shape to all our worship, commitment, and service. It also serves to affirm the long-standing practice of blessing same-gender covenants in our Diocese, and to make our experience available to the wider Church. This is particularly important since the Episcopal Church has recognized "that local faith communities are operating within

the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions” (Resolution D051 of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention).

We offer this report and accompanying resolutions to this 156<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California with gratitude for the opportunity to be of service to our brothers and sisters, and for the leadership of our bishop in making this opportunity available to us. We have found our deliberations a gift and commend the blessing of holy conversation to you all.

Respectfully submitted,



The Rev. John Kirkley,  
Task Force Co-Chair



The Rev. Dr. Katherine Lehman,  
Task Force Co-Chair

Members of the Bishop’s Task Force on Marriage and Blessing

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The Rev. Christine Leigh-Taylor, *St. Ambrose Church, Foster City*  
The Rev. David Lui, *Church of the Incarnation, San Francisco*  
The Rev. Thomas Skillings, *St. Paul’s Church, Burlingame*

## **Selected quotations from congregational feedback**

*God of compassion whose name is Love, you have created all people in their diversity: Open our minds and hearts and bring us to common understanding, that we may welcome and celebrate all loving unions which reflect your relationship with your people; in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.* - **parishioners from Good Shepherd, Belmont**

*. . . the diocese should move forward with the blessing of same-sex relationships. In that I am still solidly in the “yes” camp. Where I am confused is in what the actual vision of the endpoint should be. I know we cannot stop with “separate and unequal,” for that is what a “mere” blessing would be.* – **parishioner from All Saints, San Francisco**

*We have 20 plus years of blessing same gender relationships in this diocese. This is a good thing and we wish we knew more about their success and the types of rites used in the past. Faith communities could do a better job in nurturing all adult relationships . . . There needs to be a consensus in the Diocese before we even bring a resolution to Diocesan Convention . . . a general sense that we should bless same gender relationships while not referring to the rite as “marriage.”* – **parishioners from Church of the Epiphany, San Carlos**

*It is profoundly disturbing to me that, when I was searching for a congregation in the Diocese of California and I was also searching for a parish in which my partner and I could have our relationship blessed, I found a parish that said they only blessed same sex couples that had been members of the congregation for many years . . . many agnostic heterosexual friends of mine had married in this same parish despite not being members of the congregation at all.* – **parishioner from Holy Innocents, San Francisco**

*“What are we learning from Episcopal gay and lesbian committed relationships?” I am learning that they are like heterosexual couples with the same problems and joys. Why should we, as devoted Christians, choose to differentiate among God’s children, none of whom are the same, as to who is eligible to receive the sacraments of the church?* - **parishioner from Church of the Incarnation, San Francisco**

*Overemphasis on wedding ceremony tends to go without long-term commitment of the congregation. Too much focus on romance and good feelings, rather than nurturing couples through joy and crisis with awareness of the realities of long-term married life. The overemphasis on individualism in our society hampers the maturing process of building teamwork that makes effective married life possible.* – **parishioners from St. Augustine’s Church, Oakland**

*The physical bodies of a man and a woman are compatible for procreation (of offspring). This was God’s work. How can there be justification for a man to lie with a man, or woman with a woman in contradiction of God’s creation? Such unions are a sin, pure and simple.* – **parishioner from Church of the Holy Innocents, Corte Madera**

*The idea that blessing is both an “ordination” of what is [already there] and also a “calling out and sending forth” – this was new to me.* – **parishioner from St. Giles’ Church, Moraga**

*Would like to see “marriage” be term used for all unions – not blessing: Recognition of value of relationship – no difference in fullness of relationship between hetero and same sex relationships.* – **parishioners from Church of the Resurrection, Pleasant Hill**

## **Attachment A: Resolutions**

### **Resolution One: Commission on Marriage and Blessing**

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California recommend that the Bishop establish a Commission on Marriage and Blessing to continue the work of the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing appointed at the 155th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, and to present its final report to the 161st Convention of this Diocese, after which the Commission shall cease to exist; and be it further

RESOLVED, that \$5,000 be allocated in the 2006 diocesan budget to fund the work of the Commission.

#### *Explanation:*

*In addition to the issues relating specifically to a rite or rites for blessing same-gender unions, the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing (2004/2005) has raised and only begun to work with other issues that call for further reflection. The task force quickly learned its work was not only about the wedding/liturgical blessing but about the marriage/union that follows the ceremony—the couple's actually living together in the context of a community of faith, along with catechesis and formation, nurturing, and mentoring all covenanted, loving, committed relationships.*

*We have tabled, for now, questions about whether clergy should act as agents of the state. The commission might well consider such concerns in the coming years.*

*The five-year life of the commission is designed to respond to actions at the next two General Conventions (2006 & 2009). A sunset clause offers hope that the Commission will respond positively to a time certain deadline, and continuation of the new Commission after Diocesan Convention in 2010 would require further action by the Bishop, diocesan council, or diocesan convention.*



## **Resolution Two: Resources for Catechesis with Couples and Communities of Faith**

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California direct the Commission on Marriage and Blessing to develop, for distribution at the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, resources relating to the ethics and pastoral theology of lifelong committed relationships in order to:

- a. foster the discernment and articulation of the ways in which marriages and same-gender unions manifest and strengthen Christian discipleship by encouraging a better understanding of the Christian vocation to lifelong union as grounded in the Baptismal Covenant, and thereby
- b. help to offset the causes and influences that contribute to the fragile state of marriage and other lifelong unions in our current culture, and
- c. help local congregations understand their proper role in supporting and nurturing such relationships, and
- d. prepare couples seeking marriage or other rites of blessing, and support them in their continuing life together.

*Explanation:*

*The clergy are required to prepare couples when they seek rites of blessing. Furthermore, couples require support in their continuing life together. And the faith community must learn its role in nurturing such relationships.*

*(The 158th Convention of the Diocese of California will be in 2007.)*

### **Resolution Three: The Liturgical Covenanting, Blessing, and Sending Forth of Couples in Committed Same-Sex Relationships**

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, building on the Bishop's long-standing practice permitting the blessing of same-gender unions in this Diocese, direct the Commission on Liturgy and Music and the Commission on Marriage and Blessing to jointly prepare for consideration by the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California a rite or rites which formalize the blessing of same-gender unions in the Diocese of California, together with a policy for the use of said rite or rites.

#### *Explanation:*

*It is anticipated that the rite or rites will reflect the context of a couple and a community of faith, for the liturgical covenanting, blessing, and sending forth of same-gender couples in committed relationships "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" [Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention], together with a policy for the use of said rite or rites.*

*(The 158th Convention of the Diocese of California will be in 2007.)*

# **The Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing**

## **Resource Guide**



March 2005

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**The ‘New Westminster Rite’** follows page 42. When downloading Task Force materials from the diocesan web site, this portion must be downloaded separately.

**Appreciative Inquiry** Article from Pacific Church News follows the New Westminster Rite. When downloading Task Force materials from the diocesan web site, this portion must be downloaded separately.

## Statement from the Co-Chairs

March, 2005

Dear Members of the Diocese of California:

These materials are sent to you by the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing. Since last October, we have worked to follow through on the charge we received in Bishop Swing's address to the 2004 convention. The enclosed introductory statement provides a summary of diocesan practice during his episcopate, as well as the draft of the general recommendation we intend to present to the diocesan convention next fall. The bishop's charge and a timeline of actions taken in the diocese and by general conventions of the Episcopal Church during the past quarter century are attached.

We hope that congregations in the diocese will use these materials during Eastertide, in order to participate in the consideration process with us. We ask you to commit to the group process and then to give us your feedback by Trinity Sunday. Your views will be taken into consideration during our final phase, when we will draft recommendations and resolutions for consideration by the diocesan convention next October. The deadline for submission of resolutions determines our schedule.

This resource packet is designed to be used as five one-hour sessions. Each session includes a reflection paper, reflection questions, and a conversation process. We have grouped issues under similarity headings: (1) distinctions between marriage and same-sex unions, (2) distinctions between the roles of the church and the state in contracting marriages and same-sex unions, (3) the pastoral response required by the church for those seeking to live faithfully in marriages and same-sex unions, and (4) the gospel as common ground for reflection on these issues. These clusters are prefaced by an introductory statement with our charge.

The final session includes a feedback instrument. We ask your group to complete it and return it to us by Trinity Sunday, May 22. If you would like additional consultation and support from the task force as you proceed in your congregational conversation, please be in touch with those task force members nearby in your deanery. The task force membership roster is also attached to this packet.

This information is also available at our website: <http://blessingtaskforce.diocal.org/>

Faithfully,



The Rev. John Kirkley  
Co-Chair



The Rev. Dr. Katherine Lehman  
Co-Chair

## **Members of Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing**

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St. Ambrose, Foster City

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## Session 1

# Introductory Statement of the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage & Blessing, 2004/2005

### Task Force Charge

Bishop William Swing appointed the Task Force on Marriage and Blessing at the 155<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention with the following charge:

*Address such issues as: Is marriage in trouble? What responsibility for marriage's problems is caused by heterosexuals? By homosexuals? Is the proposed federal Constitutional Amendment necessary? Should the church remove itself from marrying any couple and let the government marry couples while the church blesses them? Should the Diocese of California have a rite for blessing same-sex couples? What are we learning from Episcopal gay and lesbian committed relationships? From those couples adopting children? Consider the implications of the Windsor Report. Any other pertinent issues? This Marriage and Blessing Task Force will be co-chaired by the Rev. John Kirkley and the Rev. Dr. Katherine Lehman. I have instructed them to use their best discernment on these matters and to prepare resolutions for us to address at the 156th Diocesan Convention.*

This introduction and its outcome are designed to focus the attention of the 2005 Diocesan Convention on the reasons for taking this step together at this time.

### Historical Background

The 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention, meeting in Minneapolis in 2003, recognized that the blessing of same-sex<sup>1</sup> unions was being authorized and celebrated in a variety of dioceses and congregations, under the direction of their bishops,<sup>2</sup> as provided in the Book of Common Prayer.<sup>3</sup> That same body acted to consent to the election of Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, upholding for the first time at the episcopal level of church leadership a baptized and ordained person living in a committed same-sex partnership. These 2003 General Convention actions acknowledged the pastoral necessity of those asking the church to grant its gay and lesbian members equal access to its liturgical and communal resources and asking the church to support the intention of those same-sex couples who wish to live in vowed, faithful, and intimate relationships.

At the 155<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention in 2004, in addition to calling for the formation of this Task Force, Bishop Swing announced his retirement, effective in the spring of 2006, and called for the election of his successor. Thereupon the Diocese entered into the preliminary phases of an episcopal search process. Consequently, it is incumbent upon us as bishop and people together to present ourselves as the Diocese of California — our faith and practice over the last quarter century, as clearly as possible, in the profile we will provide to prospective candidates for this episcopal office.

Since 1983, when clergy recommend ritual blessing of baptized members Bishop Swing, on a case by case basis, has permitted the blessing of same sex unions in the Diocese of California. During that time the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, meeting triennially, and the Diocese of California, meeting annually, have continued to affirm the full inclusion of homosexual persons in the liturgy, life, and leadership of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> The Task Force uses the term 'same-sex' throughout its work in keeping with what has become common parlance, although 'same-gender' is believed by many to be the better term.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution C051

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B, Prayer Book rubric.

## **Reasons for Proceeding at This Time**

Tensions remain between word and deed on matters of full access to the liturgy and life of the church. This task force is concerned with how we may best address and manage such discrepancies as we seek to respond more fully to the pastoral needs of our members. It is now time to acknowledge in convention our diocesan practice of 22 years. Our response to this pastoral need has been made in good faith. It has been our custom and our understanding with our bishop. As a transition issue, affirming our long-standing customary will faithfully mirror us in the search process we have begun. To acknowledge who we are and have been will assist us to move forward in relationship with a new bishop, who will retain authority over liturgical matters. We need to speak clearly our mind and heart on the matter. We need to be fully known as we are, without equivocation.

Some explanation is necessary to frame our response to the bishop's charge of 2004 and our recommendation to the 2005 diocesan convention. In the process of background review, we discovered a wealth of resources, developed in the Diocese of California and elsewhere in the national church, regarding the array of concerns we were to address. For that reason, we used the resources at our disposal and did not re-invent work that has already been done. Also, we invited the congregations of the diocese into the reflection process during Eastertide and have considered their feedback in our response.

## **Sacramental Roots**

Finally, Bishop Swing's expressed care to distinguish any rite of blessing for same-sex unions from the rite for the Blessing and Celebration of a Marriage<sup>4</sup> merits special remark. Presently the precondition for marriage by canon and most civil law stipulates the union between a man and a woman. Therefore a liturgical distinction between rites must necessarily remain until such time as civil and canonical definitions may be revised. However, it is the conviction of the task force that any fundamental resemblance between the marriage rite and a proposed rite for the celebration and blessing of a same-sex union would find its roots in their common derivation from the foundational sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, the rites that shape all our worship, commitment, and service.

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<sup>4</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, page 423.



## Process for Conversation: Session 1

*When taking notes, please be sure to indicate which session you are considering.*

*Please give each person present an opportunity to respond without cross-talk before engaging in discussion.*

1. In this session, what most parallels your own lived experience in a positive way? What seems new or strange?
2. What in this session do you disagree with most?
3. What in this session challenges you to grow?
4. What in this session brings you the greatest sense of promise or hope?
5. What do you see as the costs associated with suggestions made in this session?

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## Session 2

# Citizens of Two Realms: The Separation of Church and State

### Relationship: Civil Marriage and Sacramental Marriage

The state is charged with the legal requirements for marriage. The clergy is charged with the religious ramifications of marriage. History has intertwined the role of the state and the church and currently there are some who would keep them intertwined. Many clergy and lay leaders would feel more comfortable in returning state functions to the state and asking the couple to come to the church for the marriage blessing.

States license couples according to the unique laws of each state. The state's job is then complete. Society and government grant rights<sup>5</sup> to married couples which are not available to single people or non-married couples. Married couples are charged with specific responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

The church views a couple as an icon of the union of all life in Christ. Marriage is recognized as an example of the fulfillment of the church's mission, "to restore *all* people to unity with God and each other in Christ."<sup>7</sup> It is a vocation to a lifelong holy union. Participation reflects a theological understanding of the body of Christ, which acknowledges our baptismal covenant and eucharistic communion. The church sanctifies marriage by pronouncing God's blessing upon it, and by seeing it as evidence of God's will at work in the world. A couple's relationship is sustained and renewed through Christ the mediator. The rite of holy matrimony — the act of celebrating and blessing a marriage — is but one moment in the couple's ongoing relationship with each other and with the church.

During the past year, many states have started constitutionally defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. Same-sex marriages are legal in many countries including Belgium, Holland, Canada and Spain. In the United States, same-sex couples in Massachusetts can legally wed. Many in the Diocese of California have come to think of marriage in broader terms that move beyond the state's traditional definition. Emphasis is on the couple's love and commitment to one another and to the church, rather than on the gender of the individuals. This is evidenced by the holy unions of same-sex couples celebrated in many parishes without any standard liturgy.

Church and state were not separate at the inception of the Church of England. Marriage in the church was both sacred and secular. The United States constitution separated church and state and gave jurisdiction over marriage to each state. As the various territories joined the new United States of America, the Episcopal Church formed individual relationships with each emerging state, and this was noted in the rubrics for the 1786 *Book of Common Prayer*. The 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* required each couple to conform to the laws of the particular state in regard to licensing the union for legal purposes. This continues to be the case today. In California, we are bound by the canons to conform to the state requirements for licensing; i.e., no liturgical act can produce a *legal* marriage between same-sex partners. However, the law does not prevent the church from blessing or otherwise ritualizing any form of human relationship.

The legal parameters set by the state for licensing or recognition of marriage are well defined. Religious and legal events pertaining to marriage will continue, but this does not prevent the church from extending its ministry to all baptized Christians. "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."<sup>8</sup> We are all—lay and ordained—citizens of two realms: the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of this earthly world. Clergy have been entrusted with a particular legal responsibility. We recognize God's grace in faithful loving relationships and believe no Christian living in a faithful and life-

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of rights granted to married heterosexual couples include: immigration and residency priority for spouses from other countries; access to Social Security after spouse's death; the right to custody of children after divorce; visitation rights for non-biological children; ability to transfer property from one spouse to another without transfer tax consequences.

<sup>6</sup> For example, issues relating to debt and medical decision-making

<sup>7</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, page 855 (italics ours).

<sup>8</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, Catechism, page 855.

long union should be denied the church's blessing. We have seen God's grace in the relationships of lesbian, gay and heterosexual persons and believe the rites of celebrating and blessing holy unions should extend to all couples...regardless of the position of the civil authority.

In the Episcopal Church everyone's part in the story of salvation is heard and celebrated. God's work in the lives of all people is recognized. Uniquely in its local setting, and in the larger context of the United States, with its constant struggle to define separation of church and state, the Diocese of California is called to express its unity in the body of Christ by giving regular liturgical form to the wider Christian understandings of marriage.

## Process for Conversation: Session 2

*When taking notes, please be sure to indicate which session you are considering.*

*Please give each person present an opportunity to respond without cross-talk before engaging in discussion.*

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### Session 3

## **The Gospel: Common Ground for Discussion and Discernment**

### **Together...We Are One**

We are in common faith in God's work in Christ and committed to follow Jesus as Lord. We are reconciled to God. All who are involved in this conversation love God and through faith, we are children of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all going to be in heaven together.

### **Jesus: Key to the Gospels?**

The good news is the Gospel and it leads us forward as we are challenged with difficult decisions. We also note the Gospel is more than the four accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Though these books are called Gospels, they are really witnesses to a greater reality: the living Word, Jesus. As Christians, we believe that Jesus' ministry and message — his life, death and resurrection — are the keys to understanding both the words of scripture and God's plan for human beings. In a real sense, Jesus is the Gospel.

The law was given through Moses. Jesus Christ brought grace and truth. It is God the only Son who has made God known.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus has little to say specifically, about marriage and he says nothing at all about homosexuality. Sexuality is not Jesus' or Paul's main concern. Jesus is proclaiming the good news of God's reconciliation with humankind and calling people to a new way of life. By stepping back from a legalistic focus relating to a few unrelated passages and looking instead to this primary Gospel message we can find common ground.

### **Ramifications of the Gospel**

*1) God is reconciling the world to God's own self in Jesus Christ.*

The Gospel is about God's love for humankind and his passion to be united with people. Jesus' ministry and message provide a sign of God's great love and deep desire to share the fullness of life with all.

"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly."<sup>10</sup> The radical thing about Jesus' ministry was that he reached out both to people in the mainstream<sup>11</sup> and to those on the edges.<sup>12</sup> Jesus touched both Jews and Gentiles and men and women. The call, echoed throughout the New Testament, is of God wanting to be reconciled to all people.

Daily, reaching out and reconciliation are repeated in many of our churches and all are invited to the Lord's table. We are reminded of the need to be gracious as the Lord is gracious: We stand-in for the host, we don't get to decide who is invited, we get to welcome them.

As Christians, we often fail to live into Jesus' radical hospitality and generosity of spirit — with single people, gay and lesbian people, young people, or any who are different from us. We sometimes forget that in the Baptismal Covenant we agree to "seek Christ in all persons, loving (our) neighbor as (ourselves)."<sup>13</sup>

The culmination of God's passion for reconciliation is Jesus' own work of reconciliation through his death and resurrection. In Jesus, God makes possible an ever deepening relationship between people and God. We are offered forgiveness and reconciliation through faith. We are united with God not because of what

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<sup>9</sup> John 1:18

<sup>10</sup> John 10:10

<sup>11</sup> Nicodemus the Pharisee is one example.

<sup>12</sup> Mathew the tax collector and the woman at the well are two examples.

<sup>13</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, page 302.

we do, but because of what God has done in Christ. “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

*2) We are called to follow Jesus through self-giving love.*

The Gospel is also a call to repent, which means to turn around. In the familiar Summary of the Law, Jesus issues an invitation to transform our ways of thinking and living based on love of God and neighbor: Jesus said, “The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”<sup>15</sup>

The Gospel is about leaving behind old ways of selfish living and about learning to love as Jesus loves. Yet Gospel love is not, primarily, about the feelings we have but about the choices we make. Paul describes love in this way: Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.<sup>16</sup>

Gospel love can express itself in countless ways. As Christians heed the call to love and serve, we are transformed inwardly and outwardly. In Gospel terms, committed Christian relationships become venues where self-giving love is learned and practiced. The most popular reading at Christian weddings reflects this kind of loving: Love is patient and kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things; believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.<sup>17</sup>

### **Understanding Christian Relationship: An Expression of the Gospel**

The Gospel of Jesus contains the good news that we are accepted and loved just as we are. We are called to be transformed in the loving image of Christ. Marriage and same-sex unions can be places where the Gospel is lived out in a powerful way.

In committed Christian relationships the reconciliation of God is reflected in the love, acceptance, and affirmation each partner gives to the other. In respecting the dignity of the other every day and in practicing forgiveness as we have been forgiven, God’s grace given through Christ is made real. The reality of God’s grace lived out in committed relationship makes that relationship holy. This holy grace is not meant for the couple alone, but also that such grace lived out may overflow to the world around the couple: Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair.<sup>18</sup>

Christians living in a committed relationship also find a place to live out the self-forgetful love of Christ. In a real sense a committed relationship can be a school for Christ-like love. We learn about sacrifice for the sake of the beloved and about the kind of faithfulness that Jesus has for us.

In the end, the measure of any Christian relationship is the extent to which that relationship nurtures life in Christ. When marriages and same-sex unions are grounded in the Gospel, the blessings we are considering are not some sort of ‘right’ or ‘spiritual insurance policy’ for the relationship. Instead, the blessings are a facet of the call of Christian couples to holy, Christ-centered, life-giving relationship.

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 5:1

<sup>15</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, page 351, from Mark 12:29–31

<sup>16</sup> Philippians 2:4–7

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

<sup>18</sup> *Book of Common Prayer*, page 429.



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## Process for Conversation: Session 3

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## **Session 4**

# **Pastoral Care: Same Sex Union and Marriage**

### **Is Traditional Marriage in Trouble?**

During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that marriage rates in the United States declined by nearly half. Divorce rates doubled.

Marriage is part of a greater change in relationships that has occurred over the past two generations. Formerly, a man's income was sufficient to support a family. Convenient birth control, women as wage-earners in their own right, and widespread acceptance of cohabitation and deliberate single status have also contributed to our understanding of changing couple dynamics. The traditional nuclear family of working husband, housewife and two-and-a-half children living under an umbrella of legal marriage has undergone significant change during the last decades.

### **Experience in the Episcopal Church and in the Diocese of California**

Between 1980 and 2002, the Episcopal Church's annual data shows that marriages in Episcopal Churches declined 50% on the national level and 66% in the Diocese of California. This decline cannot be attributed to the size of our Church because average Sunday attendance dropped only slightly in the same period.

The only familial relationship covenants recognized in the 1976/1979 *Book of Common Prayer* are marriage, the birth of a child, and adoption. In the case of marriage, one or both partners might have been married before, requiring special approval from the diocesan bishop to assure that legal divorce has occurred.

Faithful Episcopalians in our diocese and throughout the Episcopal Church have committed to same-gender relationships, whether or not the Church has blessed or officially recognized them. In the absence of formal rites to celebrate these unions, consenting bishops have allowed the development of appropriate ceremonies. In the Diocese of California, Bishop Swing at one time required that entire congregations embark on a study of the meaning of intimate commitment before granting approval of a same-sex celebration. More recently, he has authorized blessing of 'abiding relationships.' There is no accurate record of the number of same-sex blessings performed in the Diocese of California or in the wider Episcopal Church. Our Bishop has repeatedly affirmed his current stance of 'no policy.' In his charge to this task force he has expressed willingness to consider establishing a clear policy.

### **Marriage Ceremonies in the Diocese of California**

Clergy in the Diocese of California take a variety of approaches to officiating at wedding ceremonies. Some limit their involvement strictly to members of the congregation in which they serve, others view officiating at weddings as an opportunity for evangelism, and still others see weddings as sources of income for the congregation.

Furthermore, the Episcopal Church has no uniform course of pastoral counseling leading to marriage or other unions; all is left to the discretion of the officiating clergy. Some clergy insist on a discernment process with five or more sessions with the couple to explore assumptions and attitudes toward such topics as friendship, money, religion, politics, conflict, children, and sex. Other clergy limit their attention to the logistics of the rite itself.

### **'The Wedding' Itself as Misplaced Focus**

Two individuals who are intent on a lifelong union actually join themselves, one to the other. The rite celebrated in a church makes the unity public and declares it holy. As a church, we are remiss anytime we direct all our attention to this single liturgical act — 'the wedding' — without providing adequate

education and support regarding life in a Godly commitment. An intimate long-term Christian union is not merely between two people; it is rather a complex interrelationship between individuals, a supporting community, and God. If such vows were exchanged between the couple, the local congregation and the church at-large, as we do in baptism, we would articulate our promise to nurture couples through both joy and crisis...both in the short term and the long term.

### **The Church: Preparing and Nurturing Covenanted Relationships?**

Whenever a congregation or clergy treat marriage/union lightly, they miss a significant opportunity for Christian formation. Intimate, lasting relationship between two people should reflect the love between God and all people. Congregations should treat the intention of two people to enter into this kind of relationship as a welcoming, long-term commitment. Counseling with a pastor should be a process of honest discovery and training for the work that the couple's life together entails. The couple needs to understand that love involves effort expended on behalf of another, and that forgiveness and forgiven-ness are cornerstones of mutual life. Furthermore, wise counseling will prepare each partner for healthy expectations. Preparation is successful when the couple and the clergy experience a sense of confidence that the bond they are creating is Godly and strong.

There are many ways in which the community of faith could and should support couples.<sup>19</sup> Any parish serious about nurturing development in holy relationship could develop creative and affirming ways that fit its congregational character.

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<sup>19</sup> For example, there might be congregational "sponsors" of the couple joining in marriage/union, on-going meetings with the rector or support group, or "ember letters" to the pastor.

## Process for Conversation: Session 4

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## **Session 5**

# **The Relationship Between Marriage and Same Sex Unions**

### **The Episcopal Church in Conversation**

Every General Convention of the Episcopal Church since 1991 has passed at least one resolution relating to marriage, holy union, and/or human sexuality. No General Convention resolution after 1991 has referred to marriage explicitly as the *only* appropriate venue for two adults to live in a lifelong, committed union. However, each resolution has spoken of the marital relationship between husband and wife.

### **We Uphold Values**

The Church has strongly voted in its General Convention to hold its members accountable to the values characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful and honest communication “and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God...and we denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members” — both in marriage and other life-long committed relationships. Additionally, the church pledged to provide for them prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them.”

Values are both explicit and implicit in the marriage rite found in *The Book of Common Prayer* and in the Church Canons but they are not, and need not be, lived out solely in heterosexual marriage. We are reminded, “such relationships exist throughout the church.” The blessing of covenanted same-sex unions offers an additional way for the Church to lift up and teach about Godly relationship. Both unions can embody and articulate the Church’s role in affirming and supporting good and Godly relationships. This is the experience in the Diocese of California, where many congregations have benefited from the ministry and witness of lay and ordained gay people.

Same sex-couples, who have come to the church seeking God’s blessing, do so having experienced grace in their relationships. In coming to a public religious arena to offer thanks, they are taking seriously their relationship with God and with each other. This is a matter of most profound sacramental theology.

### **Marriage and Same Sex Relationships: Similar and Different, One From the Other**

Married straight couples and same-sex couples share the same values this church has set forth for life-long committed relationships. Unmarried straight and same-sex couples desire experience they see in married couples, and seek a sense of ‘family,’ whether or not the couple is rearing children; the acknowledgement, support and responsibilities set forth by the church and state for traditional families; and healthy and loving sexual expression, to name a few. The Prayers of the People in the *Book of Common Prayer* marriage rite ask God to “grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows...find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed.” All God’s people (gay and straight) benefit from the ministry of committed couples. Our experience is that same-sex unions also provide a gospel witness.

While there are many similarities between straight couples and same-sex couples, there are also ways in which marriage and same-sex unions are unique. For one, straight couples have a culturally and legally privileged status in most states and countries. Such privileges not only make marriage fiscally appealing, they give partners in relationship a particular kind of monetary insurance in relation to the state. A Christian heterosexual couple also sees their marriage as a vocation and as a sacrament to show forth God’s love. This sacrament of heterosexual marriage is sacred to countless husbands and wives who have experienced God’s forgiveness, grace, and healing within their marital relationship.

Differences between same-sex and straight couples seem to lie within inherent gender differences experienced in the heterosexual relationship. Other differences relate to the traditional roles and cultural norms of man and woman, husband and wife — norms and roles that homosexual couples do not experience in quite the same way. In all of this, we see both biological and cultural realities in play.



Sexuality, in terms of sex role behavior at least, has increasingly come to be appreciated on a continuum, rather than as within two neatly described, entirely complementary categories. Gender and sex role differences vary from culture to culture and, truly, even from couple to couple, as tradition-defined sex roles are typically worked out in each particular relationship. The uniqueness of each and every couple, lesbian, gay, or straight, is often as mysterious as life itself. It might be helpful to consider how all individuals and couples, gay and straight, can best manifest the image of God — with blessing, support, and encouragement from the Christian community.

### **Do Same Sex Unions Pose a Threat to Heterosexual Marriage?**

Who gets to use the word marriage? Concerns about this question are often rooted in state and church definitions of marriage. There are many members of this task force who would support legal changes to allow same-sex couples to enter into formal and legal marriage. At the same time, some people express reservations. However, the Bishop of California has not charged this Task Force with answering questions relating to gay marriage *per se* but with considering questions related to the blessing of same-sex unions. It remains for the church and state over time to solve the nomenclature issue.

Members of this Task Force agree that same-sex couples should be able to have their relationships blessed liturgically and they should be afforded the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities afforded heterosexual married couples by the state. Additionally, the church should provide the same support, encouragement, and pastoral care for all. The church, in proactively supporting, encouraging, and caring pastorally for same-sex couples, offers the best hope for same-sex unions to be successful in the vows they make to each other.

### **A Common Call: Justice**

Heterosexual and homosexual communities hold differences of opinion relating to the form and language of the blessing of marriages and unions. Some same-sex couples prefer to adapt the language of the marriage rite if only because of the familiarity and beauty of the current rite's language and its expression of the traditional values of good relationship. Other couples desire entirely new rites, preferring to step aside from the ancient property language on which the marriage rite is, in part, based. Some straight couples also would like to see the current marriage rite reframed in terms that are released entirely from its origins in property law.

In one congregation in the Diocese of California, a straight couple was the first to request use of a rite developed by that community for same-sex couples. At the same time, some straight couples insist that rites for same-sex blessings should not 'look like marriage' or the marriage rite, which they see as the particular purview of a man and a woman. The issue isn't that rites for blessing same-sex unions resemble the marriage rite, but that both rites 'look like' and are, in fact, based upon the foundational rites of the church—Holy Eucharist and Baptism—which is as it should be.

In referring to the variety of points of view about nomenclature and rites, we should stress that this Task Force and the Diocese of California, while leaning toward more progressive views in these matters, recognizes the variety of opinions and perspectives in the Episcopal Church and in the culture in which we live. Whatever our individual views on the specific details of these matters, let us agree in our commitment to fulfill God's call to us through the prophet Micah "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."<sup>20</sup>

### **A Single Standard for Blessing**

To date, many clergy in the Diocese of California have understood our Bishop to require that same-sex couples who request a blessing ceremony must have been together for a significant period of time. Seen in one light, the Bishop grants clergy the authority to bless something that already exists. The language of the marriage rite, however, is rather like a calling out and sending forth — an ordination, if you will. This

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<sup>20</sup> Micah 6:8

language does not take into account, in like manner, the reality that many straight couples receiving the marriage blessing have also been together — in fact, have experienced lovemaking and have lived together — for a significant time prior to their marriage. This has become the typical case rather than the exception. This is the only example we can think of wherein the church is considering providing unique rites for people engaged in like relationships. For example, we all share one Baptism and one Eucharist. If there are, however, distinct rites for straight marriage and same-sex unions, we hope to see a single standard in the church's expectations of couples, straight and same-sex — particularly with regard to premarital and pre-union counseling. Further, we believe that both the marriage rite and a rite of blessing for same-sex couples should include both a sense of blessing something that already exists and also of calling forth/sending out.

In all cases, one aspect of the 'something new' that is added ritually and liturgically is a sense of a corporate "Amen," which is made explicit by the very public-ness of the rites. This public nature enhances the vocational dimension of covenanted relationships and expresses a sense that the relationship is to be lived out for the common and public good. The rite itself, be it the celebration and blessing of the marriage of a woman and man or the union of a same-sex couple, is merely the tip of the relationship iceberg. The relationship exists as vocation and mission not only for the good of the partners and their family, but also for the common good, upholding the social order, and building up the community of faith.

### **We Learn: Covenanted Relationships**

Using again the language of General Convention, we are learning from committed relationships the values of "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection, and respect, careful, honest communication, and...holy love." We are seeing in both same-sex and heterosexual relationships the image of God. We might too easily assume that straight married couples manifest these values and God's image primarily to other straight married couples and that same-sex couples provide such ministry predominantly to other same-sex couples. The joyful reality, however, is that all godly relationships minister to the whole people of God, single/widowed/divorced or married/partnered. Gay people want their relationships blessed, in part, because they have found themselves blessed by the ministry of married couples they admire. Similarly, heterosexual couples often experience blessing and positive challenge by the examples of good relationship witnessed in gay and lesbian couples. Blessing is both a noun and a verb! The ministry of committed relationship is shared by the entire community and is the responsibility of all couples, gay and straight.

We have not yet learned what we might receive from truly valued and blessed same-sex relationships. Even in the Diocese of California, we have tended to hide same-sex unions under the proverbial bushel basket. The title and public nature of the BCP marriage rite — The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage — implies an important message: we can bless in private but we cannot celebrate in private! We have barely scratched the surface of the blessings we might all realize in living among same-sex couples in church-sanctioned and blessed relationships. What joy are we likely to discover? What new lessons might we learn about love and about God's intentions for us today? We encourage one another, in considering the blessing of same-sex unions, to imagine room for the Holy Spirit to act amongst us all — room for couples to flourish with the blessing and support of the Church.

### **Experience: Parenting**

Same-sex couples in loving, committed union desire essentially the same things that straight married couples desire. For some single-sex couples this includes, when it is God's will, parenting and the nurture of children in the knowledge and love of the Lord. The diocese is experiencing the benefits of good parenting by both straight married couples and same-sex couples.

The stories we hear from same-sex families tell us that family life in their households is very typical. Some have been single parents. Some same-sex couples have incorporated children from previous marriages to form new families. Some have adopted children. Some have had to work hard to form families through the adoption process or the act of giving birth. In today's typical household where both parents have careers outside the home, parents learn that it truly does take a village to raise a child — extended family, friends, neighbors, childcare professionals, teachers and the like are critical for all families. The same might be asserted for families with a stay-at-home mom or dad. Is the experience of 'being family' in same-sex

households very different from those in households with heterosexual parents? Not really.

If there is one way in which same-sex households are different, it is that households with two straight parents are more culturally valued and acknowledged by the church and society than same-sex households. The same, of course, can be said about single parent households. We believe the church's role to be one of supporting families of all sorts and conditions, to help parents meet the challenges of parenting and to help children meet the challenges of growing up, and to celebrate and honor the diversity in today's church and world.

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## Process for Conversation: Session 5

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### Online Resources

[http://www.claimingtheblessing.org/docs/CTBTheology\(Final\).pdf](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org/docs/CTBTheology(Final).pdf)

The Claiming the Blessing theology statement provides an Anglican theological perspective on the blessing of same-sex unions.

<http://www.integrityusa.org/samesexblessings/sclm2000.pdf>

The Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music includes several brief essays on aspects of the question of blessing same-sex unions. It recommends local option with respect to the authorization of such blessings, i.e. leaving it to the discretion of diocesan bishops.

<http://windsor2004.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/downloads/windsor2004full.pdf>

The Windsor Report is the report of the Lambeth Commission created by the Archbishop of Canterbury in response to the tensions in the Anglican Communion over the consecration of the Bishop of New Hampshire and the authorization to bless same-sex unions in the Diocese of New Westminster, Canada.

<http://www.oasiscalifornia.org/windorresources.html>

The Oasis/California website has links to a number of reflections on the Windsor Report, as well as a helpful congregational study packet developed by the Diocese of North Carolina.

[http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/ethicalperspectives/gay\\_marriage.html](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/ethicalperspectives/gay_marriage.html)

This article provides a Roman Catholic perspective on gay marriage.

<http://www.ucc.org/justice/marriage.htm>

This web site includes a variety of resources for engaging the question of marriage and blessing same-sex unions produced by the United Church of Christ.

<http://www.integrityusa.org/samesexblessings/index.htm>

Integrity U.S.A. hosts a web page with links to diocesan rites and policies regarding the blessing of same-sex unions, as well as links to a number of reflection papers.

<http://www.diocal.org/downloads/HolyRelationships.pdf>

*The California Report: Holy Relationships and the Authority of Scripture* is the Diocese of California's response to the 1998 Lambeth Conference resolution that declared "homosexuality is incompatible with scripture."

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## Appendix A: Chronology of Resolutions on Marriage and Same-Sex Unions and Partial Lesbian and Gay History in the Diocese of California and Beyond

*From the Oasis/California website and Episcopal Church archives*

- 1964 Study of human sexuality begun under Bishop Pike
- 1965 Study of human sexuality continued under Bishop Myers
- 1974 Integrity founded
- 1976 Using language it will reaffirm in 1979 and 1982, General Convention states

“Homosexuals are children of God, contributing members of church and society, and deserving of equal rights.”

- 1978 Diocesan study guide for congregations on human sexuality and family
- 1979 Bishop Myers receives Integrity award  
Bishop Swing elected and consecrated
- 1980 Diocesan task force on human sexuality appointed
- 1981 The Parsonage founded as ministry of reconciliation
- 1982 Diocesan Convention resolution passed recommending use of proposed rite entitled

### The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant of Love

- 1983 Bishop Swing forms theology group in response  
Clergy conference deliberation yields current diocesan practice, and Bishop Swing says  
  
“A door has to be open for the Spirit to lead us into further truth.”
- 1984 Bishop, Liturgical Commission, and Parsonage review the rite  
  
Presiding Bishop Browning promises, “There will be no outcasts.”
- 1985 General Convention  
  
“urge[s] each diocese of this Church to find an effective way to foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, to provide pastoral support, and to give life to the claim of homosexual persons ‘upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral care and concern of the Church’ as recognized by the General Convention Resolution in 1976.”
- 1987 Study document on proposed rite issued by Bishop’s theology group
- 1988 General Convention passes resolution  
  
“strongly urg[ing] each diocese and congregation to provide opportunities for open dialogue on human sexuality, in which we, as members of this Church, both heterosexual and homosexual, may study, pray, listen to, and share our convictions and concerns, our search for stable, loving, and committed relationships, and our journey toward wholeness and holiness.”
- 1991 Diocesan Convention passes resolution recommending use of proposed rite  
General Convention

- “affirm[s] that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous ‘union of husband and wife.’”*
- 1994 General Convention adds ‘sexual orientation’ to non-discriminatory clause in the canon relating to access to ordination process and
- “affirm[s] the teaching of the Church that the normative context for sexual intimacy is lifelong, heterosexual, monogamous marriage.”*
- 1995 The Parsonage is reformed as Oasis/California  
1997 General Convention hears same-sex blessings report from Liturgical Commission, and Presiding Bishop Griswold calls for healing divisions of human sexuality. General Convention also
- “affirm[s] the sacredness of Christian marriage between one man and one woman with intent of life-long relationship”*
- and
- “recogniz[es] the importance of lifelong commitment to and fidelity in the marital relationship between husband and wife.”*
- Lambeth Conference passes substitute for committee report on sexuality  
Bishop Swing calls for diocesan response to Lambeth statement
- Holy Relationships and the Authority of Scripture* produced
- 2000 Diocese of California takes its Lambeth response to General Convention
- General Convention, in reference to couples living in marriage and other lifelong committed relationships, says
- “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”*
- and
- “We denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members.”*
- and commits to
- “Hold all its members accountable to these values, and [to] provide for them prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them.”*
- 2002/3 *Claiming the Blessing* conference (11/02) and document prepared (Spring 03)  
2003 General Convention consents to the election of the Rev. V. Gene Robinson, a gay man living in a long-term, committed union, as Bishop of New Hampshire and recognizes unity in Christ and diversity of practice, reaffirming the ‘values’ language from General Convention 2000, and recognizing
- “That such relationships exist throughout the church”*
- and

*“that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.”*

2004      In his address to Diocesan Convention on October 23, Bishop Swing announces the formation of a Task Force on Marriage & Blessing to report its findings to the 2005 Diocesan Convention.

## **Appendix B:**

### **Prayer Book Rubric for Special Occasions for Which No Service Has Been Provided**

From *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 13

Concerning the Service of the Church

In addition to these services and the other rites contained in this Book, other forms set forth by authority within this Church may be used. Also, subject to the direction of the bishop, special devotions taken from this Book, or from Holy Scripture, may be used when the needs of the congregation so require.

For special days of fasting and thanksgiving, appointed by civil or Church authority, and for special occasions for which no service or prayer has been provided in this Book, the bishop may set forth such forms as are fitting to the occasion.

**Appendix C:**  
**73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church**  
**Resolution D039: Human Sexuality: Issues Related to Sexuality and Relationships**

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, that the members of the 73rd General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts and creative energies for mission, and be it further

Resolved, We acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in the Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in the 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, and be it further

Resolved, We denounce promiscuity, exploitation and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members, and be it further

Resolved, This Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them, and be it further

Resolved, We acknowledge that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position, and be it further

Resolved, That in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to that call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we reaffirm the imperative to promote conversation between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

**Appendix D:**  
**74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church**  
**C051: Blessing of Committed Same-Gender Relationships**

*Incorporates the themes of Diocese of California Resolution C002*

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, that the 74th General Convention affirms the following:

1. That our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate.
2. That we reaffirm Resolution A069 of the 65th General Convention (1976) that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church”.
3. That, in our understanding of homosexual persons, differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions; and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same.
4. That we reaffirm Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention (2000), that “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”, and that such relationships exist throughout the church.
5. That we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.
6. That we commit ourselves, and call our church, in the spirit of Resolution A104 of the 70th General Convention (1991), to continued prayer, study, and discernment on the pastoral care for gay and lesbian persons, to include the compilation and development by a special commission organized and appointed by the Presiding Bishop of resources to facilitate as wide a conversation of discernment as possible throughout the church.
7. That our baptism into Jesus Christ is inseparable from our communion with one another, and we commit ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion and, among dioceses, a diversity of pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us.
8. That it is a matter of faith that our Lord longs for our unity as his disciples, and for us this entails living within the boundaries of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. We believe this discipline expresses faithfulness to our polity and that it will facilitate the conversation we seek not only in The Episcopal Church, but also in the wider Anglican Communion and beyond.

## **Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing Individual Feedback**

*Please return to: Diocesan House, 1055 Taylor Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 no later than Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2005, or, if you have participated in group conversations, your facilitator will collate your responses with others from your group.*

1. Name of Congregation/Group:
2. Your Name:
3. What was the best thing about the study packet in terms of how you responded to it?
4. What was the most important thing about the study packet in terms of how you responded to it?
5. Where did you connect most powerfully with the study packet materials? Where did you find yourself in these materials?
6. Where did you find it difficult to connect with the study packet materials? Where did you feel 'bumped out?'
7. In terms of your response to the study packet, what specific feedback do you wish to provide regarding issues raised in:

Session One: Introductory Statement

Session Two: Citizens of Two Realms

Session Three: The Gospel as Common Ground

Session Four: Pastoral Care

Session Five: The Relationship Between Marriage and Same-Sex Unions

*Please attach additional pages as necessary.*

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## **Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing Congregational (or Other Group) Feedback**

*Please return to: Diocesan House, 1055 Taylor Street, San Francisco, CA 94108 no later than Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2005. The person who facilitated the congregational study process should complete this feedback form.*

1. Name of Congregation or Group:
2. Name of Facilitator:
3. In what setting did you use these materials? (circle all that apply)  
  
*rector's forum series   youth group series                      adult education series*  
*one-day workshop                      elder ministry series                      other:*
4. How many people participated in the study process?
5. What was the best thing about the study packet in terms of how your congregation/group responded to it?
6. What was the most important thing about the study packet in terms of how your congregation/group responded to it?
7. Where did your congregation/group connect most powerfully with the study packet materials? Where did it find itself in these materials?
8. Where did your congregation/group find it difficult to connect with the study packet materials? Where did it feel 'bumped out'?
9. In terms of your congregation's/group's response to the study packet, what specific feedback do you wish to provide regarding issues raised in:

Session One: Introductory Statement

Session Two: Citizens of Two Realms

Session Three: The Gospel as Common Ground

Session Four: Pastoral Care

Session Five: The Relationship Between Marriage and Same-Sex Unions

*Please attach additional pages as necessary.*

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