

IN CELEBRATION OF LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

A WORK IN PROGRESS

(See Appendices)

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9/87*

WILL YOU STRIVE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE AMONG ALL PEOPLE, AND RESPECT THE DIGNITY OF EVERY HUMAN BEING? . . . I WILL, WITH GOD'S HELP.

The Baptismal Covenant

PREAMBLE

Christ's resurrection reminds us of the building of a new Kingdom of God. We are becoming more and more aware of the fragility and uniqueness of the planet we occupy and we are becoming more and more aware of the challenges that face us thereon. As co-creators with God in the continuing evolution of God's creation, we are called work toward the goal of an environment in which all human beings have the opportunity to develop to full potential in relationship with others and with God.

To this end we are called to help our Christian sisters and brothers comprehend the uniqueness and dignity of every human being in God's creation as being inclusive of many integral parts, including sexuality in its several expressions; and to celebrate loving, committed monogamous relationships, including those between woman and man, between lesbian women and between gay men.

INTRODUCTION

An ancient philosopher tells us that we never wade in the same river twice. As a committee called together to consider a long-standing nonfeasance of justice by the Church, we realize that the social scene within which the Church functions alters over the years as does the philosopher's river, sometimes in minute increments, sometimes with great rapidity. In the past decade, there has taken place within the United States an enormous change in society's attitude toward sexuality. Such a change is bound to affect the Church's attitude toward society. The change may make the Church more conservative, or it may open up for the Church new perspectives on the most intimate concerns of its people. Fifteen years ago it would have been almost unheard of for a church task force to consider the lives, gifts and grace of the Church's lesbian and gay members, let alone their relationships. Today it appears to us that the fulness of time (the rolling onward and reshaping of the river) not only makes it an obvious duty of the Church to take up this matter, but makes it a scandal that we have not already done so.

The paper that follows is the honest attempt of a group appointed by the diocesan Bishop, to set forth the action we feel the Church should take in regard to the desire of many same-sex couples to have their unions recognized and honored by the Church of which they are a part. Some early readers of this paper have expressed uneasiness because we have not produced a standard "position paper" on an issue and labelled it as such. We have not vivisected our burning immediate concern into Goals and Objectives nor overloaded it with theological freight. We concisely address theology in the Appendix; our theological assent to the doing of justice, we trust, pervades the whole endeavor.

If religion is indeed, as Augustine states, "the setting in order of love," then the loving doing of justice to an oppressed minority is a profoundly religious act. We would have a tome instead of a brief paper if we tried to set forth an exhaustive theological rationale of our proposal. Given the scale of this paper, it seems appropriate that even so weighty a matter should be handled in the Appendix. In aiming at a particular readership, we assume that an Episcopal audience will be amenable to an approach in line with the prophets' view of justice as the ambience of love rather than being over-occupied with Levitical concern about legalism. If justice is to flow down like water, let us proceed with the dredging of the channels.

This work of ours should be seen as groundbreaking. We stress action, the doing of justice to the oppressed: in other words, our approach is scriptural. Enormous tasks lie ahead of a church that seeks to affirm a full acceptance of gay and lesbian people. We have not discussed in operational detail the colossal educational job of preparing laity and clergy to accept and forward this endeavor. We have also refrained from any attempt to establish liturgical guidelines for the ceremony of honoring same-sex unions. While to many of our respondents preparation of an appropriate liturgy appears the immediate task, to us it seems an undertaking for the future, that may well proceed naturally out of work such as this.

Though the actual writing of this report has been the work of one person, every paragraph is the result of close consultation within our small working group of six people. We have had assistance from a sizeable number of readers who generously responded (some in great detail) when we asked for their reactions to the document at its various stages. The negative comments have been very useful; the positive, tremendously encouraging.

THE 1973 RESOLUTIONS

The Diocese of Michigan, a decade and a half ago, addressed itself to consider the relationship of the Church and the homosexual community.

In 1971 Bishop Emrich set up a Commission on Homosexuality, partially in answer to certain pressures from the gay community in the Detroit area. The members, about 15 in all, worked for almost two years before bringing in a report recommending a much more receptive attitude on the part of the Church toward homosexual people. Under Bishop McGehee, the new Diocesan, this 1973 Report was distributed and widely studied, but its recommendations, although approved by Executive Council, were eventually turned down by Diocesan Convention. The clergy, on a vote by orders, rejected it by a single vote, while among the lay delegates about 60% voted no.

It is appropriate to review our earlier work, and discern by the perspective of the years how well or badly we then addressed similar issues. Two members of the present group also served on the 1973 Commission, and find that a document that seemed brave and far-reaching at the time does not adequately respond to today's situation. We ponder the opening words of the earlier statement: "The Commission was convinced that it was neither necessary nor desirable to seek a new ethic of sexuality for the Church at this time." Can it be that in 1987 that time has come? Later occurs the passage (underlined in the original):

...we contend that it is wrong and presumptuous to deny Christian value to any human relationship which involves attachment to another person in the spirit of sacrificial or self-giving love.

Today it seems clear to us that this statement should have even stronger and certainly more positive expression. It is not enough to refuse "to deny Christian value" to homosexual relationships. Rather, it is necessary to actively support them if we genuinely believe that they can represent the same commitment we discern in the bonded relationship known as marriage.

In the same spirit of love and understanding toward our homosexual sisters and brothers that was evidenced in 1973, we now propose moving beyond the former document's Recommendations, which were as follows:

1. "The Church should take steps to create an atmosphere of openness and understanding about human sexuality and particularly about homosexuality. Programs to assist in this process should be encouraged at all levels: national, diocesan, convocational, and parochial. Such programs should be at the disposal of institutions of learning and in particular our seminaries and church-related schools.
2. "All ministries and professions should be open to otherwise qualified people whatever their sexual orientation. The use that any person makes of sexuality should be open to a reasonable evaluation by individuals competent to judge the relevance of such use to the exercise of the ministry or other profession in question. An oppressive or destructive use of sexuality within personal relationships, whatever the sexual preference or orientation, should give reason to doubt the candidate's fitness for office.
3. "All aspects of the Church's life—education, liturgy, pastoral care, fellowship—should be available to all persons, and not contingent upon those persons' guaranteed heterosexuality. Gatherings for homosexuals on church property should be accepted to the extent that they serve the same purpose as other social gatherings—enabling people to meet in an atmosphere of love and acceptance.
4. "The Church's concern for individuals and a just social order should lead it to speak publicly for repeal of all laws which make criminal offenses of private, voluntary sex acts between mature persons. The Church ought also to oppose police harassment of homosexuals and investigatory practices which sometimes verge upon entrapment. Likewise the Church should speak publicly on behalf of homosexual persons in the area of civil rights legislation. There should be no discrimination against any person in housing, employment, business services, or public accommodations on the grounds of sexual orientation."

Such were the points presented in 1973 in the hope of Diocesan approval. Though widely considered radical at the time, these statements do not now take us far enough. They are supportive rather than celebratory, just and detached rather than joyful. Unless we are sincerely prepared to honor lesbians and gay men as we do heterosexual people, we are denying the vows we affirm at every Baptism. An excerpt from these vows appears at the head of this paper as a motto for our undertaking.

BEYOND 1973

It is evident to this committee today that the above points quoted from the earlier document have almost a negative air to them, as if the writers were prepared to refrain from doing injustice rather than to proclaim liberty through all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof. A flagrant omission is an explicit statement on the honoring of same-sex unions. The time has certainly come to address this injustice.

After sixteen years, we have been called by our Bishop to examine church-and-homosexuality issues in a societal context vastly different from that of the early 1970's. In the interim, the lesbian and gay male population nationally has attained a much greater degree of confidence in itself as evidenced by its public stances on political issues and a firmer grasp of both its rights and its obligations. Yet at the same time, it has been castigated by critics for what they perceive as free-wheeling sexual behavior and a sinful disregard of traditional religious values.

Over the same period neo-conservatives have been gaining political and ideological power. There have come about strange coalitions of fundamentalist TV personalities and populist demagogues at high political level. They have taken up arms against so-called secular humanists and all people who practice sexuality in any but its procreative function. These opportunistic allies have fostered fear and distrust of lesbians and gay men, recommending segregation or worse to restrict their civil liberties and inhibit their public (and private!) behavior.

Since 1980 there has also been the threat of AIDS. We are experiencing the horrible onslaught of a viral disease, largely sexually transmitted and invariably fatal. In this country at this time it chiefly affects homosexual men. They themselves are responding by promoting safer sexual practices. Society at large, building on a deeply ingrained homophobia, still thinks of AIDS as "the gay plague," and in a panic response blocks an adequate understanding of it. (AIDS' almost complete absence among homosexual women has not led to public acclaim of lesbians, however.)

Another factor of contemporary consciousness that affects our understanding of sexual issues is liberation theology. International in scope, it addresses the needs and experience of the powerless wherever they are. In this country, liberation theology has kindled the aspirations of several different groups, notably blacks and feminists, migrant workers and illegal immigrants. It has politicized theology and theologized politics. In thus allying itself with the cause of the powerless, liberation theology has also served the ends of the sexually oppressed as well. Such has not been the case for the Church historically: theologians in general have made woefully few positive contributions to the vexed field of the interpretation of sexuality. Over the centuries most Christian thinkers have stressed the procreative (and hence excusable) aspect and underplayed the

relational and joyous. Yet there is another, and rarer, type of Christian thinking that has affirmed the implications of the creation story: deriving from the fact that we are part of God's good creation. This celebratory response lets us rejoice in who we are, whoever we are. The Committee believes the Church is called upon to celebrate, and celebrate with, all its members. The reader may be struck by the frequency in this document of the concept of celebration. No other term will serve our theological purpose. For us, it designates a deliberate and intentional stance in response to events that stir us deeply, taking us out of ourselves into generous expressiveness of the total person. The term has manifold meaning lying along a continuum from birthday parties to solemn high mass or the St. Matthew Passion. In its most serious manifestation it represents the overwhelming involvement of the human person in the overwhelming sense of the presence of the goodness of God, who gives occasions for lighting birthday candles on one day and altar candles on another. In the latter case, the liturgical milieu detracts in no way from the immediacy of God's presence to us, and our rejoicing therefor. We now affirm the generosity of God in peopling our world with a sexual diversity of God's people: we celebrate the presence of lesbians and gay men in the organic Body of Christ. Moreover, Christians have, in the doctrine of the Incarnation, a further evidence of God's extraordinary love for the world, and God's desire to bring all creation under the sway of redemptive love. From this point of view we find it impossible to maintain that sexuality in the context of tender attentive self-giving love is to be condemned, whether it evinces itself heterosexually or homosexually. Note that we are emphatically not talking about forgiveness — that would imply that we are generously eschewing a "right" to condemn. We are calling for celebration with our brothers and sisters. If the

Church cannot celebrate the Christian life of Christian lesbians and Christian gay men, let it stop promising "full and equal" participation in the community of faith. The homosexual man or lesbian has considerable theological justification for asserting "GOD MADE ME AND GOD DON'T MAKE JUNK," to quote a memorable racially-assertive poster of the militant 60's. Liberation theology, so manifest today in several contexts, hinges on the courageous and creative assertion of human value wherever embodied: in peasants, blacks, women or sexual minorities. And it is encouraging that the oppressors themselves, in the course of the liberation of the oppressed, find their own bonds of hatred and fear are loosening. In the matter of homophobia, we look for a freeing from the hatred and fear that are so deeply rooted in many heterosexual men.

In terms of the various aspects of contemporary thought just discussed, it is clear that areas of public contention about homosexuality focus around public health, social responsibility and (foremost for us) theology. All too many people subscribe to erroneous beliefs about gay men:

- that they have deliberately "chosen" their orientation
- that they are all promiscuous
- they they are given to child abuse
- that AIDS is God's punishment on them.

Popular beliefs about lesbians are less lurid but equally condemnatory. In the face of such myths this committee takes its stand in seeking to promote just dealings on the part of the Church, in theological concern and deep commitment to the healing of a society in which any of its people have been grievously abused and neglected. Let no one misunderstand what we mean by "healing": we emphatically do not seek to manipulate sexual orientation, which may be as much a given as eye color. Our work is to lay out the situation and call it to

the Church's attention, while stressing the magnitude of the undertaking of setting this wrong right. If we are persuasive, both society and the Church must face the enormity of the task ahead. If the Church is to behave biblically: to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with its God, it must now start reformulating its present shabby and ambiguous relationship with its own lesbian and gay members and address itself with full vigor to that larger homosexual community that understandably disregards the Church and is disregarded by it. The present is always the acceptable time to do justice. Now especially we are in a period of the threat of pandemic disease and reactionary oppression. If in these present circumstances a stable gay life is both expedient and life-preserving, should not the Church have a positive role to play in enhancing it? Let us bear in mind that gay and lesbian people in the Church repeatedly ask clergy for a blessing on their unions. Is it too late for us to be seen as responsive? Unfortunately we who are Church have a dismal history of ineffectuality, indifference and ignorance in our dealings with this sexual minority. Many congregations who would see themselves as tolerant have come only so far as to say, "It is OK for you to BE but not to DO; you may even join us if you don't tell us too explicitly who you are; please sit in the back and don't run for office. NEVER EMBARRASS US. Just present us with a fair imitation of straight behavior."

By such a stance the Church both outrages and wrongs over ten per cent of its own lay and ordained members. The deleterious effect is almost beyond imagination. There is for one thing the awful Annihilation by Invisibility (i.e., if I do not let myself see you, you do not exist). There is the gradual attrition of self-esteem that scornful laughter and anti-gay jokes can bring about. More subtly, there is the homophobia that lurks in the dark recesses of the minds of both heterosexual and homosexual people. One finds it impossible to listen

without tears to any account of the adolescence of a gay sufferer from society's contempt. In the name of Christ, it is time for the Church to address the wrongs it has ignored or colluded in.

Indeed, the present crisis of growing societal rigidity and increasing threat of disease may afford us churchpeople our best opportunity ever to act with love and justice in matters of sexuality. To reiterate, contemporary theology stimulates us to think about the goodness of creation and the self affirmation of women and men. Contemporary health issues demand redefinition of responsible social behavior. If we now, as Church, have the courage to extend understanding and acceptance, we will become part of the solution rather than part of the problem, discharging an obligation we have too long failed to face. Let us admit it with shame: we have blasphemed in pretending to offer love in terms of loving-the-sinner-and-hating-the-sin. We have not taken seriously our duty to these sisters and brothers in Christ, and even less so our duty to those among them who have given up on the Church.

How then can we get a handle on our responsibilities? Are we open-minded enough to see that we have driven a wedge between the sexual and the spiritual? Are we humble enough to submit to reeducation, that we may speak with discerning love to those we have hitherto rejected or manipulated? There is a spectrum of responses available to us, and they all cost something. Any action at all, even the least generous, will be expensive in terms of negative response, for we have waited until late in the day to make any positive moves, and some may see us as opportunistic even as we strive to be timely. Here is a range of possible responses. (All of these attitudes may be seen in action in any diocesan office on a weekday or any parish church on Sunday.)

Rejection. Though not a desire to stone or gas homosexuals (such a desire actually exists in some Christian circles), our rejection may consist in grim-faced refusal to acknowledge the presence of homosexual people within the church, and a resolute blindness to their gifts, graces and needs. Of course, part of the price of this hardness of heart is that we in turn are rejected by those we injure. The damage to us all is incalculable.

Toleration. This is scarcely any better from the point of view of the gay or lesbian person in the pew. For you to be accepted by me as long as I don't have to know who you really are is to wither up the potential for love in us both. It forecloses any steady look at our obligation to one another. As hypocrisy, it is among the worst of sins. Let us recall that Christ says nothing about homosexuality but much about hypocrisy.

Reluctant Acceptance. The script for this attitude runs as follows: Of course we welcome you, for we are all sinners, are we not! Though really now, your sin consists in being who you are. Unlike us, you are automatically and generically sinful, but we "love" and "accept" you. Only please don't embarrass us by bringing your lover to church, or even worse, a church supper. Above all, don't dance where we can see you. Inadequate as this response may be, the Church at large cannot yet affirm even this.

Celebration. In accordance with Paul's description of the Church as the Body of Christ, an organic diversity in which the members

contribute to the wholeness and harmony of the entirety, we in the Church celebrate one another. Wholeness, harmony and radiance, says Thomas Aquinas, make up the attributes of a work of art. At its best the Church, we surmise, could fall within the definition. But most of the time it lacks the inclusivity that makes for wholeness, the generosity that enables harmony and the radiance that love engenders. We all, as the Church, are divided and divisive, and too muscle-bound for rejoicing in the marvelous complexity that makes up the Body of Christ. To understand human love in its various manifestations is to begin to appreciate the multiplicity of the divine love that encompasses all. Until we realize this, we will be the poorer for the exclusionary lines we draw, and will spiritually impoverish those whom we fence out.

Celebration is the worshipping community in action. We celebrate baptisms and weddings. Eucharist is sheer celebration, a joyful banquet at which we insult our Host if we do not turn up in wedding garments. In conspicuous ways (as conspicuous as wearing inappropriate clothing) we fall short if we refuse to honor the inclusivity of the invitation. Who are we to claim the right to check over the guest list of the Giver of the Feast? Who are we to refuse to be present on the festal day, or to attend grudgingly, not wearing festal garments? The perplexing parable about the wedding guest who refused to deck himself with gladness and was thrown into outer darkness has to do, the Committee holds, with the same unjoyful acceptance with which some of the godly respond to God's amazing grace and generosity to people they despise. But the despised and rejected have always had a right to be there: they are invited guests. Let us not assume that when lesbians and gay men come to the feast of love, they

they have come to steal the spoons; they have come as honored guests, as have all the others. To be very specific: we as Church blaspheme the name of love in refusing to welcome the affectionate bonding of same-sex couples who wish to affirm before the world that they pledge faithfulness to one another. This Committee feels that in so doing we blind ourselves to one manifestation of God's incarnational love.

It is ineffective and dishonest to present ourselves as fully accepting fellow Christians while refusing to take some people's affections and intentions as seriously as we do those of others, for whose unions we offer the blessing of the Church. We had better be prepared, in all generous seriousness, to wholly welcome gays and lesbians by offering to witness and bless their loving commitments, or we had better give up any pretense of acceptance altogether. A handshake with reservations is not a handshake, and a partial hug is worse than none.

Let us emphasize that the Committee is not asking the Church for a sort of passive validation of same-sex relationships. That would be as improper as routine performance of uncounselled marriages, a misfeasance of which our clergy are surely not guilty. Presumably, if the clergy are doing their job in premarital counselling, all possible discernment is being brought to bear on the pertinent circumstances of every couple. At least as much care should be given to exploring the situation of same-sex couples seeking the blessing of the Church. This seems to us essential, since in the case of marriage all social structures are arrayed in the support of the union, while same-sex couples are only too likely to find themselves swimming upstream in most aspects of their relationship to society. Hence they need all the help they can get. The Church is being challenged to offer that help. We fully realize that the Church is unprepared

and ignorant when it comes to the nurturance of gay and lesbian people. This is scandalous and must be addressed in great depth and at great length. All the Church's resources in pastoral counselling will have to be involved. Moreover, all of us, clergy and lay, have to learn to behave as family, as loving family, for the giver of our Eucharistic feast defines us as family, and sets the table for all of us. And if our brother Tom and his lover are barely tolerated when they sit down with us, and if Judy has to come to the banquet alone because we have rejected her lover Jill, it is not a feast for anybody, and the Giver of the Feast is dishonored. We look forward to that day when the celebrative event excludes no part of the Body of Christ, and all the seats at the Lord's table are occupied.

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REGARDING THE USE OF THIS PAPER: Since this is a work in progress, we invite readers to share their appraisal with the author and Committee of Concern, listed below. Do not hesitate to tell us what you see to be the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and to mention any considerations which you believe we have neglected. Please be assured that we will take your assessment seriously.

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APPENDIX I**Theological presuppositions regarding****Lesbians and Gay Men****in the Life of the Church**

1. God is Creator, Redeemer, and Empowerer of all that is, seen and unseen.
 - a. Homosexual persons exist, as do heterosexual people, on a continuum of orientation which ranges from those exclusively oriented to opposite gender to those exclusively oriented to the same. Sexual orientation is part of the natural creation of persons, not a moral choice in the course of their development.
 - b. Sexuality, along with other aspects of a person—one's mind, feelings, body—is part of wholeness of being, for which one is responsible in behavior before God and other people.
 - c. A primary purpose of sexuality is the expression of love between partners, not alone the procreation of children. The Church has also identified the safeguarding and benefit of society in its covenant and prayers for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.
 - d. Specific sexual behavior, both heterosexual and homosexual, is condemned by various authors of the Holy Scriptures. Included are rape, incest, adultery, violence, child abuse, and the use of another person for one's own gratification.

2. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ affirms the existence and worth of human flesh.
 - a. Jesus Christ proves God's love for human beings by sharing our human flesh, with all our senses, responses and passions.
 - b. Human "being" includes the physical and sexual as well as the intellectual and emotional, all of which are included in the Incarnation. The Church condemns dualism, a teaching that denies the fullness of the Incarnation.
 - c. Jesus Christ loves all people, and the Scriptures record his intimate relationships with people of both genders, though there is no mention of his sexuality at all.

- d. The invariable component of God's love, faithfulness to the covenantal relationship, stands as an expectation of reciprocal human faithfulness in relationships both with God and with other human beings.
3. The authority of God is interpreted, mediated, and taught by the Church.
 - a. The Church provides the discipline of faithful, covenantal relationships for heterosexual persons in the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.
 - b. The Episcopal Church has, in four successive General conventions, determined that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral care of the Church."
 - c. The Church does not now provide a discipline of faithful, covenantal relationships for lesbians and gay men, in spite of its frequent condemnation of the infidelity and promiscuity it finds among them. Stability and faithfulness cannot be attained or supported without the type of societal support the Church best affords for both heterosexual and homosexual people.
 4. God cannot love what does not exist.
 - a. Many people attempting to be seen by others to conform to social roles and moral expectations of the majority, deny their homosexual orientation and "live a lie" of pretended heterosexuality. This choice denies their relationships with their Creator and with their spouses and loved ones, and undermines their own self esteem.
 - b. The Church seeks to counsel, sensitively and honestly, all people engaging in relationships in order to offer the support of a loving community in which those relationships can flourish honestly and openly.

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APPENDIX II**Biblical Considerations**

1. The Anglican Church understands the Bible to be the product of historically and culturally rooted human communities, and recognizes the need for, and the appropriateness of serious biblical study which seeks to discern the essential message through the culturally conditioned understandings in which it is embodied. That means that individual verses and passages must be weighed within the total context and evaluated in relation to the total logic and thrust of the biblical message. This approach is not a concession to modernity, but a profound affirmation of the doctrine of the Incarnation.
2. This approach has resulted in the Church's recognition that, in spite of what isolated verses and passages may say to the contrary, the total logic of the biblical message
 - * required the abolition of the institution of slavery and the denial that it was divinely ordained;
 - * led to the recognition that precisely reverence for the institution of marriage, as well as pastoral concern reflecting divine love, make it necessary to acknowledge the fact of civil divorce so that the vow of lifelong faithfulness can remain a sacramental sign of God's love and of our need for one another, and not become a legalistic prison.
 - * resulted in the recognition that women are as fully and completely human as men and therefore capable of exercising all orders of ministry in the Church.
3. Such an approach requires the Church to continue to search for the total logic of the biblical message for issues which will continue to arise from the life of the human community in history.
4. In accord with understandings of the cultures from which it comes, the Bible takes the natural human tendency toward heterosexual union to be divinely ordained, and recognizes the necessity for legal provisions for marriage which protect individuals and safeguard society. Jesus does not deny the need for such legal provisions, but takes the discussion to a deeper level, pointing to the deeper meaning of marriage as an expression of God's will for the unity of humankind. It is the logic of Jesus' affirmation which leads to the Church's post-biblical understanding of marriage as a sacrament. When, as is now the case, authoritative interpretation of the evidence that the predominant natural tendency of a significant number of human beings is toward homosexual union, the total logic of the Bible seems to demand our recognition of and provisions for such union which protect individuals and safeguard society, as well as to indicate that the deeper meaning of such union is a sacramental expression of God's will for the unity of humankind.

5. Far from denying the authority of God, therefore, continuing serious biblical criticism reveals the dynamic and creative activity of God at work in the world about us, with the affirmation of the total message of the Bible guiding our consciences and our pilgrimages in the present and into the future.

Harvey H. Guthrie

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APPENDIX III**Agenda for Covenants of Fidelity**

1. Seminaries must institute and develop training programs in the counseling of lesbians and gay men, and of lesbian or gay male couples who seek to make covenants of fidelity. Lesbians and gay men, both clergy and lay, must have a voice in the process.
2. Under their bishops' direction, clergy associations and clerici must develop on-the-job training in counseling of lesbian and gay male relationships. Lesbians and gay men, both clergy and lay, must have a voice in the process.
3. Those who are opposed to homosexual relationships of any kind, for whatever reason, should not offer service as counselors for lesbians or gay men, and should be candid about their thoughts and feelings at the outset.
4. The Board for Theological Education, in addition to ensuring compliance with point 1 above, should periodically include issues involved in the counseling of lesbians and gay men in the General Ordination Examinations, not to establish a uniform ethic but to discover inappropriate responses to a most common pastoral situation and to recommend remedial study and counsel.
5. The Executive Council should order the assembling and distribution of materials on sexuality in general and on homosexuality in particular, together with its concomitant homophobia, using the best of theology, biblical scholarship, history, sexology, psychology, linguistics, and sociology. Lesbians and gay men, both clergy and lay, must have a voice in the process.
6. The distinction between the celebration and blessing of marriages and the celebration and blessing of covenants of fidelity must be maintained in order to ensure the integrity of each.
 - a. The purposes of marriage include the procreation of children, if it is God's will, in addition to the mutual expression of love and the general benefit of society. Lesbian and gay male relationships in covenants of fidelity are expressions of love and commitments to witness for stability and faithfulness within society at large. There is a particular opportunity and responsibility for Christian witness within the lesbian and gay male milieu.

- b. The liturgy should not be symbolically or literally a revision of the marriage service, but rather a celebration of the commitment of each partner to the other, and both to Jesus Christ. It would, of course, be inappropriate to witness and bless the unions of unbaptized, atheistic, or agnostic couples.
 - c. The Church should not publish a final, 'authorized' text for the celebration and blessing of covenants of fidelity for many years, until the collected pastoral and liturgical resources of widespread practice are available. Meanwhile, the chief authorship of such liturgy grows out of the pastoral relationship between the pastor and the couple. Under no circumstances should the provision for a liturgy for covenants of fidelity exculpate the Church from sensitive, informed, and conscientious pastoral counseling.
 - d. Every possible care must be taken in the celebration and blessing of covenants of fidelity to avoid any connection with sanctions or licenses of the State, now or ever.
 - e. The Bishop of the diocese is the executive judge and arbiter of the Church's blessing of covenants of fidelity.
7. Lastly, it must be explicit that covenants of fidelity are not intended to include relationships in which either or both parties do not intend commitments of faithfulness. Clearly, this agenda also expects the Church to acknowledge and to minister to the dissolution of temporal relationships of whatever kind. And likewise the Church must refrain from its denunciation of promiscuity and infidelity in relationships until it provides a celebratory rite to help endorse and stabilize committed covenants of love and hope.

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APPENDIX IV**Pastoral Counseling with Lesbian Couples and Gay Male Couples****1. Concerns of Persons Establishing Relationships.**

Persons of any sexual orientation are likely to be concerned about individual identity, self-esteem, autonomy vs. dependence on the partner, intimacy vs. separation, power and control in decision-making, gender-role expectations, the communication of feelings and thoughts, the physical expression of sexual attraction, rational and irrational expectations of the partner and of the relationship. These concerns are colored by the life experiences of the partners: biological, social, psychological, and spiritual factors inform the values, needs, and hopes the partners bring to their partnership.

2. Concerns of Same-Sex Couples.

- a. Homosexual feelings, homosexual experience, and persons known or presumed to be lesbians or gay men are disvalued and denigrated by many members of society, especially persons who hold power in religious and secular institutions (on homophobia and its manifestations, see DECKER, NELSON, ROCHLIN). Accordingly, many lesbians and gay men seeking to enter committed relationships suffer self-hatred, alienation, fear, shame, guilt, anger and depression.
- b. Unlike their heterosexual sisters and brothers, most lesbians and gay men are denied the opportunity to publicly date persons to whom they are attracted; even when dating experiences become known they are unlikely to be celebrated by family members, heterosexual friends, community groups, religious institutions, or the community-at-large (DECKER). In consequence, lesbians and gay men may flee from their isolation and alienation into intimate relationships for which they are almost totally unprepared.
- c. Since lesbian and gay male relationships receive little societal sanction, support, or celebration, same-sex partners are likely to turn to each other for the fulfillment of all their needs; an unhealthy enmeshment may result (DECKER, McCANDLISH).
- d. While our culture maintains an ambivalent attitude toward sexuality and heterosexual manifestations of it, the overwhelming condemnation of homosexual attraction and behavior may inhibit the sexual expression of intimacy between same-sex partners (ANTHONY, DECKER).
- e. Same-sex partners who disagree about how closeted they must be may find themselves engaged in ongoing conflict generated by anxiety and frustration (DECKER).

- f. Societal prejudice against lesbians and gay men is embodied in our legal system. Lesbian and gay male couples undergo particular discrimination in matters such as property rights, parenting, child custody, the adoption of children, insurance, employment benefits, hospital visitation, and challenges to wills (CURRY & CLIFFORD).
 - g. To the degree possible, it is advisable for pastoral counselors to meet with the families of lesbians and gay men contemplating an ongoing committed relationship to help family members understand, accept, and support the partnership.
 - h. "Support groups" for lesbian and gay male couples are to be encouraged (UHRIG). Pastoral counselors accepting of lesbian and gay male relationships and skilled in groupwork may well serve as group facilitators.
3. Concerns of Lesbian Couples.
- a. Women are socialized to believe that their self-esteem comes from relationships with other people, and to merge their identities with others' by taking others' interests and needs as their own. With the additional pressure of being homosexual, lesbians may tend toward over-bonding or fusion, closing themselves off from the outside world. This can lead to loss of one's own identity or ego boundaries (DECKER).
 - b. Women may tend to equate sex with love; they may "fall in love," and seek a committed relationship with their first sexual partner to legitimize their sexual activity (DECKER).
 - c. Lesbian couples not only have to deal with homophobia but also cope with discrimination against women. These pressures range from subtle forms of anti-women stereotypes to more blatant acts of rape, economic discrimination, and sexual objectification of women. Thus, women are kept in a second-class position in society. A heterosexual couple's social status is too frequently defined by the man's social position. Yet, lesbian couples have no defined social status at all.
 - d. Motherhood - Lesbians who have a child from a previous heterosexual relationship may need to choose between their child or a relationship with another woman and risk losing custody of the child, with consequent feelings of anger, frustration, jealousy, and deep-seated guilt. Lesbian couples who do not have children must examine their attitudes toward mothering, decide whether or not they want children, and how to proceed. This long, involved process can put a tremendous strain on the relationship.
4. Concerns of Gay Male Couples.
- Gay male couples may find themselves especially concerned about gender-role expectations such as the blocking of the awareness of feelings, the blocking of the communication of feelings, self-reliance, competition, control, and acting on sexual attraction to persons outside their relationship: behaviors frequently found among men whether heterosexual or homosexual.

5. Conclusion.

It should go without saying that all counselors need to exhibit a positive regard for their counselees, honesty and sincerity, a warm and loving sense of humor, and spiritual maturity (FORTUNATO).

Persons who offer to counsel with lesbians and gay men must, in particular, be aware of their own homophobia, a fear of homosexuality that we all share to some degree, whatever our sexual orientation. Counselors must address and work through their homophobia to the degree possible (McWHIRTER & MATTISON; NELSON; ROCHLIN).

Counselors must be aware of the varieties and complexities of lesbian and gay male experience and sensitive to that experience (ROCHLIN). Counselors must regard lesbian and gay male relationships as desirable and viable and must seek to inform themselves about such relationships. Counselors need to be especially knowledgeable in matters such as the "stages" in lesbian and gay male relationships, communication in intimate relationships, coping with interpersonal conflict in close relationships, fusion and enmeshment, closeted vs. publicly-visible same-sex relationships, discrimination against lesbians and gay men, legal concerns of same-sex couples (see 2 f above). Counselors need to make themselves aware of lesbian and gay male resources available to them and to their counselees (DECKER, ROCHLIN). Counselors who lack knowledge of the lesbian-gay male world must be open and honest about their ignorance (McWHIRTER & MATTISON).

Counselors who understand the stigma and consequent emotional distress suffered by lesbians and gay men are likely to provide the most empathic and knowledgeable counseling. This understanding of lesbian and gay male experience can be gained only by living it. Accordingly, many lesbian and gay male couples may choose to seek lesbian or gay male counselors who are willing and able to make their sexual orientation known, just as many women counselees seek out women counselors and many people of color search for counselors who are not white (ROCHLIN).

We acknowledge, of course, that most counselors are heterosexual, and that most lesbian and gay male counselors are unable at this time (1987) to openly state their sexual orientation. These counselors, whether they be homosexual or heterosexual, can provide helpful service to their counselees if they have met the needs outlined in the paragraphs above.

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APPENDIX V**A. Recommended Action for the Church**

1. The promulgation of a new Canon enabling gay men and lesbian women to have their bonded relationships witnessed and liturgically celebrated by the Episcopal Church.
2. The creation of an appropriate support system to ensure the requisite counselling and education both for couples seeking such recognition and for clergy and staff persons who will help them prepare for such union.

B. Actions Needed in the Public Realm

The lesbian and gay movement will be occupied for some time to come with the right to love and live with the person of one's choice.

Discrimination against lesbians and gay men living in modern society will not be eradicated through education and good will alone; it will require the reforming of some of the basic institutions and established laws of society. The following considerations must be codified if the civil rights of lesbians and gays are to be achieved.

1. Passage of amendments to state and federal civil rights legislations that would add the words "sexual orientation" to the list of categories protected against discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations.
2. Repeal of existing state legislation which make a criminal offense of private homosexual acts among consenting adults.
3. Assurance of the right of lesbians and gays to be foster and adoptive parents, and to retain custody of their natural children.
4. Defeat of proposals for mandatory testing for AIDS virus exposure, and assurance of the availability of voluntary and anonymous testing.
5. Increased funding for AIDS prevention education and research.

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