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The heart of the issue: Same sex unions and the Episcopal Church

by Lucinda Keils

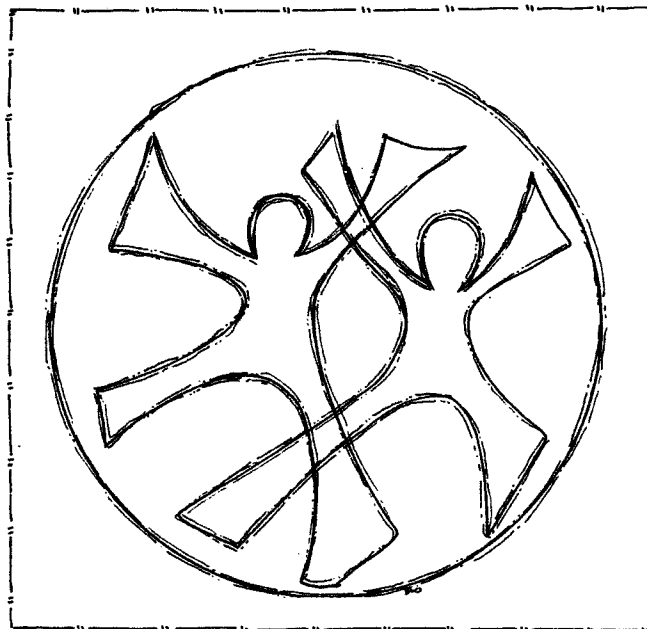
Three parishes in the Diocese recently celebrated liturgical affirmations of life covenants made by same-sex couples in their congregations. The parishes are All Saints', East Lansing; St. Andrew's, Ann Arbor; and Christ Church, Detroit.

"In each case," said Stewart Wood, bishop of the Diocese of Michigan, in an interview with *The Record* in early September, 1992, "the people came seeking some expression of affirmation from the Church for the commitment they had made to one another and in each case the clergy were struggling to find a way to do that and to honor the moratorium" on blessing same-sex unions which Wood asked clergy to observe in remarks made at the March 1990 Diocesan Convention in Port Huron.

As reported in the March 1990 issue of *The Record*, Wood noted in his speech to the Convention that Zalmon Sherwood, then assistant rector at St. Paul's, Jackson, had "helped homosexual couples design a worship service in which they could express their commitment to one another, and seek God's grace to live out those intentions." Wood then further stated "while such blessings are nowhere forbidden they are clearly outside the norm," and asked "all of our clergy who may be working with homosexual persons seeking such a blessing to wait while we craft a process that will enable this Diocesan family to come clear about what we can uphold in good faith.

"I hope you will trust me," said Wood, "as your chief pastor and liturgist to work with all of our clergy to fashion a ministry that honors the Church's historical understandings of Christian marriage, monogamy, fidelity and provides a pastoral and liturgical ministry to homosexual persons seeking grace by which they can be faithful to one another and to God." In the same speech, Wood called on the community to "tolerate disagreement...acknowledge the possibility of differing appreciations of the Scripture's intent," and refrain from "retaliation of any kind."

In the September 1992 interview, Wood described how he believes the



three parishes could hold services affirming same-sex unions and still honor the moratorium which he affirms remains in effect. "The way in which to do that was to acknowledge publicly that the Church makes no provision for the blessing of same sex unions...and making sure that what is understood is that the congregation is affirming these people in the commitments they've made to one another."

"The priest and members of the vestry would in each case meet with the couple," according to Wood, "so there was a process of discernment before any kind of promise was made to provide a service of any kind. So that it was a congregational response, not the response of a clergy person to a couple coming to him or her.

"The way in which congregations deal with that is up to the congregation itself," continued Wood. "I don't imagine them voting or having public meetings saying are we going to affirm this couple. But my confidence is that the

priest is working with the vestry who know the couple to be sure they can with integrity, stand with the couple."

Wood characterized his authorization as an "opportunity to be pastorally responsive and to search for an appropriate way to do it." He expressed concern that "this is perhaps going to give the appearance that we've found some way. We're not clear that we have." He outlined the criteria: it is not a blessing, it may not be "surreptitious," it should be "a very serious response on the part of the congregational leadership to their own pastoral sensitivities." He required the congregations "publicly acknowledge in the service...that this is not a marriage service.... This is not a blessing of same-sex unions."

"In these three circumstances this seemed to me to be an appropriate way for a congregation to be pastorally responsive to people within their own worshipping community," explained Wood, "while honoring what I have asked of the Diocese and what is true

for the Church at large.

"This is not some end run," he continued. "In each case my understanding is the priest and the members of the congregation are seeking to affirm a relationship within their congregation. To be able to stand with those people and what they've further done is to say we will seek to stand with you as the Church works through this process."

Acknowledging that such a process will be a long one, Wood reiterated his 1990 Convention hope that he could "be in a position with integrity of using the Church's resources to honor such relationships." He saw his response in these three instances as akin to parish ministry where individuals and families are affirmed, valued, and where "people have made commitments to one another and lived them out in a way we want to hold up." He perceived the instances as limited, "individual responses to pastoral needs within the congregation.

"This is not a new liturgical formula," Wood concluded. "They haven't created some new ceremony."

St. Andrew's, Ann Arbor

"I can't bless a union because I am a priest of the Church," explained the rector of St. Andrew's on how he responded to homosexual couples who asked for a blessing of their union while he was at the Episcopal Divinity School as dean and teacher. "When I give a blessing, it's not like me, Harvey Guthrie, blessing something, it's the Church doing it, and the Church doesn't do that. I think it should, but it doesn't do that." So Guthrie suggested celebrating the Eucharist with the couple and their guests, and that the couple "make a statement that you are committed to one another, and mean that, and that it is your intention, when and if that's possible, to have the Church's blessing."

"I don't want to get into titles like liturgical affirmation, or written services. I don't think that's the issue," Guthrie explained of the four occasions he has had for services since coming to Ann Arbor—two in people's homes, one in the chapel and one in the church. "I

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COPY: Material located in the Archives of the Episcopal Church

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feel uncomfortable, because I'm doing a liturgical thing in which I have to say the Church doesn't really accept it because of who you are. But it almost brings tears to my eyes, because they're saying, 'well, it means a great deal to us that at least the Church in some sense recognizes who we are completely.'

"I did tell our vestry what I had done and was about to do," explained Guthrie on the preparation for celebrating the Eucharist at a St. Andrew's service on October 4, 1992, for David Glaser and Douglas Howell. "The only questions of our vestry were questions about technically what are you doing here, since the Bishop said don't do unions?"

Guthrie has not blessed unions, and has told Wood what he was doing. Additionally, Glaser and Howell met with the Bishop, and rewrote their service, with Guthrie's help, to conform to Wood's requirements.

Guthrie views his pastoral ministry to homosexual persons as helping them "discern what God's call to them is, and who they are in the sight of God."

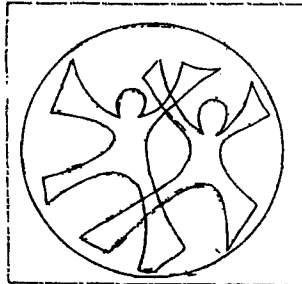
"That's really one side of it." Guthrie believes the other side is that "our sexuality, biblically speaking, is one of the agencies through which God and God's purposes are symbolized and witnessed to and expressed and actualized."

Possible *sacramentally expressive* ways of living out our sexuality for Guthrie include heterosexual marriage, a vocation of celibacy within a religious community, and homosexual union. Guthrie defines *sacramentally expressive* as "the kind of intimate relationship God wants for the human community," that we are fully human when we are in relationship to other humans, and that being "married, or in a homosexual union or in a religious community are *sacramentally expressive* of what we need to be human."

Asked to respond to those who are opposed to homosexual unions on biblical grounds, Guthrie recalled Church history regarding African-American slavery. Distinguished theologian Samuel Seabury, a descendant of the first American Episcopal bishop, castigated *secular abolitionists* in the 1850s who "were advocating the abolition of slavery, quite contrary to the Word of God in the Bible and to established tradition and to the natural law as understood by the Church." Seabury called for slaves to be treated "Christianly," but believed that "Jesus had not come to abolish divinely sanctioned institutions."

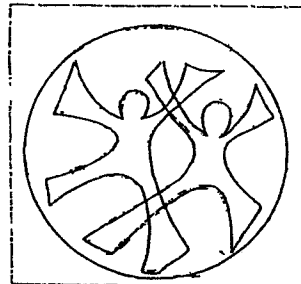
"Well you know that is really ridiculous in terms of where we ended up," stated Guthrie. "I don't know any in our country, however conservative their biblical hermeneutic is, who would argue that about slavery."

The history of the Bible is full of ideas "that have to be left behind because they don't fit with the logic, like slavery, or like saying that women are derivative types of humanity from the real thing which is male, and I think we're beginning to see that" with respect to homosexual people, Guthrie explained.



The changes in religious understanding of "the universality of God" frequently resulted from "external pressures," such as "the pressure of Gentiles in Asia Minor," which "made the Church begin to understand that you didn't have to be a Jew before you were a Christian."

"What is God trying to show us?" is the question for Guthrie. "The record of our God is clearly that always exter-



ways to meet with and respond to gay people in the Church and his efforts to be pastoral and reconciliatory with both sides, keeping the question open.

All Saints', East Lansing

Ted Rice, rector of All Saints', East Lansing, studied Old Testament at seminary under Harvey Guthrie, and calls him "my most honored and revered professor." Rice consulted with

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—Harvey Guthrie, rector, St. Andrew's, Ann Arbor

nal things are being used to say things that we need to hear."

Guthrie recognizes that changes in the way the Church responded to African-Americans in the 60s and the ordination of women in the 70s have resulted in alienation, trauma and division for many in the Church. "I'm somebody who deeply, deeply operates out of a conviction about God's inclusive purpose, and that the fullness of humanity isn't realized until all these parts are related to one another in such a way that we fulfill and complement one another in a wholeness, until a whole vision of what the Church is about is realized."

"Each of us has to be faithful as best we can from where we're understanding," explained Guthrie, aware that splits may result. "You can elevate the value of sticking together. Saul Alinsky once said to me about the Episcopal Church, 'there's something wrong with a Church that didn't split up over the Civil War,' and I see what he was saying. I think it's possible to split up and still respect what that's coming from, even though in the proximate terms that you're coming from, you have to say 'they're wrong; their hearts are hard.'"

"The affirmation of the humanity of every human being," said Guthrie, "is the heart of faith, not selected biblical texts. If that causes divisiveness because somebody is seeing something else as the bottom line, that's too bad."

"But," he continued, "you have to be affirmative of the humanity of the person who's taking something else to be the bottom line."

"There aren't many bishops around today who would be handling this the way he's handling it," said Guthrie, of Wood, whom he admires for seeking

Guthrie, with Bishop Wood, with many laypersons in his parish, and with other clergy as part of the process of discernment before deciding to do a service of commitment for a gay couple in his parish in August of this year.

One of the members of the couple for whom he performed the service had attended All Saints' off and on for three years. Raised Episcopalian, he was no longer "very active in the Church because of the Church's position on homosexuality when he was growing up," Rice explained.

When the man's former lover died of AIDS, Rice did the funeral service which "celebrated the life of the man that died, who was very open about being gay and having AIDS." Rice also facilitated grief work afterwards, and following the grieving process, the surviving member of the couple, who is not HIV positive, came to Rice and revealed that he and his former partner had broken up before the partner was diagnosed with AIDS. The man had begun a new relationship but when the diagnosis was made, he and his new partner put their relationship on hold to care for the sick man. After the grieving process, he returned to the new relationship and, according to Rice, "they came here saying that they'd like to get into counseling about the purpose and nature of their relationship, and not just have something happen without thinking it through and making some agreements and commitments."

"I shared with them immediately the Bishop's prohibition on blessing of same sex unions," Rice explained, "but said if they were willing to go through the difficult negotiation and discussion about where all this would land, which might be very uncomfortable, that I'd be willing to walk through it with them. But I

could make no promises.

"So they left, and called back, and came back and said they'd like to be part of that conversation. They said that they didn't want to do anything to hurt the parish, or hurt my relationship with the Bishop, or endanger the Bishop, but if something was possible, they would certainly appreciate that."

Rice began calling members of his vestry. He told them the couple's story and set aside time at a vestry meeting in April "not to take a vote, but to counsel together."

"That was one of our finest hours," explained Marie Kingdon, junior warden. "There was a lot of concern to make sure Ted touched base with the Bishop, so that we weren't doing anything that was going to be contrary to the Bishop's direction to us. I walked in there with my little statement which I made about [how] there's so much promiscuity out there and the results are a disease that kills anyone that has it."

"When you've got people, and I don't care whether they're heterosexual or homosexual," continued Kingdon, "who care for each other, who want to make a commitment, and they want to share that in God's home, well then, let's do it. And I think that sentiment has prevailed."

Rice says that the vestry's discussion lasted more than an hour, "at the end of which I was in tears because of the care and concern that the vestry had for the Bishop, for me, for the couple involved, for the parish." The kind of questions asked by the vestry included "Does this mean that every gay couple in town is going to come here? What happens if a parishioner gets upset? All the questions from my point of view that a vestry needs to ask, but none of them reasons not to do it." Rice said.

"The basic sense at the end of the meeting was, this is a couple interested in a lifelong, monogamous relationship of sexual fidelity; we ought to be doing everything we can to support that. But don't endanger our relationship with the Bishop."

"The vestry debated not telling the Bishop," explained Gus Breyman, also on the vestry. "We were wondering whether he really wanted to know." But the vestry decided telling him "was the only honest and forthright thing to do."

Additionally, Kingdon says the decision to seek to do the service was included "in our vestry minutes, and it was posted, and people in the parish knew about it, so it wasn't something that was hidden."

"I was not real surprised with the outcome of the meeting," explained Chris Thomas, senior warden. "It seemed to me the whole movement of the Church and this parish has been an inclusive movement, and I looked at it and thought, 'How would this body go the other way? On what basis do you exclude a celebration of that type of commitment?'"

"We know what we've done, we've done it thoughtfully," explained Rice.

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"We believe we've done it the correct way by involving a lot of people."

"The decision was not made based on how vestry members necessarily felt" about gay and lesbian people, explained Thomas. "It was not the fight we see in the newspapers now over that political issue. There are probably wide differences in the parish about understanding that, but that's not the issue."

"We are not going to exclude these people in that process until we all sometime come together with some great wisdom. You start dealing with *people*, as opposed to lifestyles, groups, and categories," Thomas continued. "I'm certain that does not erase the differences in outlooks and opinions, and it shouldn't. I mean that's going to evolve, and people individually and in this community are going to have to deal with it."

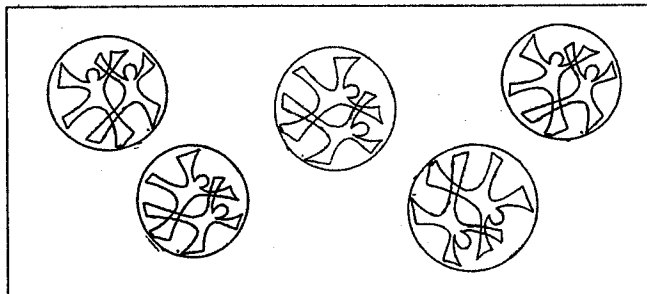
After the vestry weighed in, Rice contacted Wood, told him the couple's story, and the Bishop responded with a desire to support their intention. Knowing his own penchant for pushing limits, Rice discussed with Wood "what a service like this might look like. And very clearly we agreed that it would not include the vows of the Church service or either of the two prayers of blessing preceding [the vows in the marriage service]," Rice recalled. "But that we could give thanks that these two people had found each other, hope that they would have God's protection, and that their relationship would grow and be nourished."

"So we went through all the steps, and he said, 'go ahead.' And at that point I got really scared. It would have been real easy if the vestry or the Bishop had said, 'No.' But God sent this to us and we responded as faithfully as we could as a community, and obviously we're being called to go on."

After continuing to counsel the couple, who attended All Saints' regularly through the summer, and have continued to attend, Rice performed a "Celebration of the Covenant of Love and Holy Commitment," on August 8. The entire vestry was invited, and four members of the vestry attended. The couple publicly declared "their relationship to one another to be a sacred, binding covenant, so that they may offer their relationship to God, and may declare their intention to seek the blessing of God's Church on their union."

The people attending heard that "the Church does not now have a provision for celebrating and blessing same-sex unions." And the people stated their commitment "to work and pray so that the mind of the Church may come to affirm, support and bless such unions." The couple exchanged promises, rings, and the Eucharist was celebrated. The following Sunday, the parish gave thanks for the union of the two men.

Rice is aware that critics believe the difference between such a service and a blessing is one of semantics. "I'm sure that they believe that, and believe it sincerely," Rice responded. "It seems to me in the Church we make some



fairly clear and narrow distinctions. To the best of my knowledge, we've been faithful to those.

"When I sit down with my Jewish brothers and sisters, we break bread, we drink wine, we give thanks to God for that, but it's not the Eucharist," Rice explained. "The Eucharist looks like bread, tastes like bread, smells like bread, but we say it's the Body of Christ. I mean some fairly narrow distinctions. The

chance for evangelism.

"So we had a really good laugh about that, and the vestry said, 'Maybe we ought to talk about a consistent policy.' What I normally say to heterosexual couples is that you're not required to be a member here, but one of you needs to be baptized. You need to attend our church and be willing to consider being part of the parish family. And this couple happened to easily and much more than

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prayer book is real clear about the definition of a marriage. That it involves a man and a woman, and it's in accordance with the canons of the Church and the state laws," and Rice adds, the service he performed is not a marriage. "So the distinctions may be fine, but I think extremely important. And I for one, am deeply saddened that I can't proclaim a blessing."

"The drive for these commitments and affirmations comes from within the Church body, not from the outside," added vestry member Breyman, who doesn't accept the idea that there is no difference between a marriage and a service of commitment. "I think we need and we're all called upon in our daily lives to make very subtle distinctions. Subtle distinctions are very important. That's what intelligent people do. We're not charged with making black and white distinctions; we're charged with drawing subtle distinctions, in our secular lives and in our religious lives. It just seems to me that what we've done as a group is to make some very careful narrow distinctions and very comfortably arrived at a decision."

Rice doesn't see himself or All Saints' on a crusade, but rather as trying to be faithful. He has refused couples seeking similar services who were not members of All Saints' community. The issue arose as part of the vestry discussion and Rice said "Everybody wants to be real rigorous about parish membership [regarding homosexual couples] but every time I raise with the vestry that I said no to a [heterosexual] couple or I sent them elsewhere, they say what a wonderful

fulfill this."

Many heterosexual couples that come to him for pre-marital counseling want to talk about a pre-nuptial agreement, Rice recalls. "Part of me understands that," he explained. "But it is totally inconsistent with my understanding of Christian marriage. When I mentioned to this [homosexual] couple, 'you know this is not legal, and whatever we do doesn't make you married? What is your legal relationship and understanding?' They said, 'Oh, we've already gone to lawyers. Everything we own is jointly owned.'

"They knew as no other couple that's ever come to me the power of standing up before a community, before God, and asking for the affirmation and support of the community, and wanting God's blessing in any way they could get it. They knew that. How many couples to be married have any sense of that? Very few in my experience. So this is an experience I will never forget, no matter what the controversy is over it. This is a committed relationship that I honor deeply."

"I don't know how as a community," asked Senior Warden Thomas, "the Church can turn these people away and exclude them."

"I don't understand why people are gay. I don't understand [all the] debates and literature. But it'd be a terrible thing if some day it's definitively proven that that was a genetic makeup and that we, as a community, had excluded these people for years and years."

"We're struggling through something where many people have their feet placed firmly in mid-air," explained Rice, calling for toleration. "There is a priest in this Diocese who's blessed a polo field in the last couple of years. There are others who bless battleships. I imagine there's a parish in this Diocese [which has] had memorial services for the unborn, which I, on personal and theological grounds, might have a lot of difficulty with. But that is the ministry their parish has chosen. They and I could talk about that, but I'm not going to take a placard and march back and forth in front of their church [saying] they've got no right to do that ministry [to] which they and their members feel called."

"It doesn't violate the canons of the Church. I think we have assiduously tried to stay within the requirements of the Church as we understand them, and we just ask that people tolerate what we're doing, and get into discussion so we can learn from them and they can learn from us."

Asked about the view of homosexuality as sin, Rice refers to one of the texts from Romans 13: 8-10, chosen by the couple in the August service.

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

"There was nothing that we saw in what we experienced in this dialogue and celebration that was anything but the fulfillment of God's wish for love among God's creatures."

Christ Church, Detroit

In the winter, preceding the 1990 Port Huron Convention, Erv Brown, rector of Christ Church, Detroit, preached a sermon in favor of same-sex blessings. He set forth his biblical and theological bases in the sermon and presided at a congregational discussion following the sermon. The issues surrounding homosexuality and his church's role remained theoretical until the spring of 1992, when a woman called Christ Church, Detroit and made an appointment to talk to Brown.

"They were desirous of having their long-term relationship blessed or affirmed by the Church, and they hadn't found a receptive climate," explained Brown. "They had talked with the Bishop, and he had suggested they might talk to me, and that I might be receptive. I didn't know anything about it until they came in and talked with me."

"There'd been another couple who'd come to me, a male couple, and asked if I would do the same thing for them, and I had to say no, because they were not able to become members of the family," explained Brown, conscious of the Bishop's parameters. "In fact I called [the Bishop] back with regard to the

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male couple, and he said, 'no; I don't think that's within the guidelines, if they can't be part of the family.'"

After counseling the women, and after inviting them to worship and see how Christ Church felt to them, Brown said, "Did you feel comfortable with the place? I don't want you coming here just because you feel like, 'I've got to come here to get this.'"

They told Brown they felt comfortable and they mentioned the things people usually appreciate about Christ Church.

"I take that at face value. I long since gave up digging up motives for people coming to church. If we have a motives test, there are going to be a lot of folks in trouble," Brown explained. "I was satisfied they were sincere in their desire to have the Church be a part of their relationship and the affirmation of it."

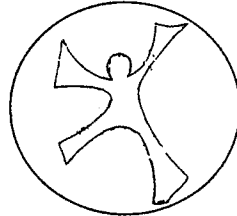
Brown chose to hold a meeting the evening of August 24, inviting by letter the vestry and "a group of other people whom I thought might be representative of the congregation as a whole," he said. "I intentionally invited some people whom I knew were or might be opposed, and they were. It was my feeling it was my decision to make as the rector, but I didn't want to make it in a vacuum. If this is going to be reflective of the family, then the family's got to know something about it."

Brown spoke, introduced the couple to those present, many of whom had not met them over the summer. Then the couple talked about themselves, their faith journey and the planned service. They stated that they had transferred their membership and that they wished and intended to be part of the Christ Church family.

People asked questions, expressed their feelings, concerns, support and opposition, and listened to Brown, the couple and each other.

"I start with the assumption that homosexuality is not a life choice," Brown said in an interview with *The Record* on September 21, "that it's something that's a given in somebody's life, in the same way as brown eyes or red skin, whatever."

"What God calls us to do is to be good stewards of what we're given, to make the best of what we are, whether we're heterosexual or homosexual. I believe God has given the gift of sex to Creation, not only to procreate the race, but as a sacramental expression of love and bonding between two people. I know there are some people who say the most responsible thing for homosexual people to do is to remain celibate, but I think that's denying part of God's creation. I think that the perversion of sexuality in our day has been largely because people haven't understood that, and have used sex in an exploitative kind of way, either in a violent oppressive kind of way, or a cheap kind of physical gratification without any kind of emotional commitment. I think that's wrong whether it's heterosexual or homosexual."



"I think our sexuality is best lived out in a monogamous lifelong relationship, not because that's some kind of capricious whim on God's part, but because that's what leads to fullness for people," Brown continued. "I don't know what more I would want for a homosexual couple than just that, that they are committed to each other, that they are faithful to each other, care about each other and make a commitment to each other. I cannot find, try as I will, the immorality in that. It's doing the most responsible thing with who they are."

Brown points out that Jesus made no statement about homosexuality,

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— Erv Brown, rector, Christ Church Detroit

although He twice referred to divorce. "In one place He prohibits it entirely," Brown recalled, "in the other, He makes an exception for adultery."

"There's great question about what the sin of Sodom was," explained Brown, referring to the disagreement of Biblical scholars about the Old Testament passages in Genesis and Leviticus. "The sin of Sodom is referred to in other places in Scripture, including by Jesus, but never is it sexual sin. It's inhospitality and violence, and not receiving strangers."

The references in the Leviticus Holiness Code may "have to do with cult prostitution," but Brown pointed out even if the reference is to homosexual orientation, "there are a whole lot of other things in the Holiness Code that we have decided not to hold onto, like [not] eating shellfish, [not] planting two kinds of seed in the same field, and [not] mixing fabrics in the same garment."

Brown noted that times have changed. The Church has accommodated divorce; it has abandoned its support for the institution of slavery; and it permits women to speak in church.

"We accommodate those things we want to accommodate, and we don't, those things that we don't. Which I think is all the more reason why you look for larger truths being expressed in Scripture rather than picking out particular things and beating people over the head with them."

Brown says he has seen things change radically in the 25 years since he was ordained. He guesses that three-fourths of the couples who come to him to be

married are openly and unashamedly living together.

"That is non-Biblical. And I could say, 'I'm sorry, I'm not going to perform the service, because you two are living together and that's licentiousness,'" expounded Brown. "The culture is different since the Bible was written. Now we have adolescence until age 30, and people aren't necessarily going to remain celibate because the Bible tells them to. So we've accommodated ourselves to that. But it's not cricket to pick out those passages on homosexuality and beat people over the head with them unless you're going to do it with everything else."

"I know what the blessing is and what it isn't, and every priest knows what that is, and I'm not doing a blessing," Brown said, responding to critics' charges that there is no distinction between a blessing and an affirmation. "I'm standing with these people and saying 'I'm with you in your struggle. I affirm your relationship with each other."

I pray for you. I pray with you. But I'm not pronouncing the blessing of the Church on it. I'm prohibited and I wouldn't do it."

"I've blessed the whole hunt-foxes, riders, horses and hounds. The whole crowd. The ones who needed it most were the riders," Brown explained. "I've blessed houses and all the rooms therein, pets, basset hounds, a yacht club regatta, an Indian Village tennis club."

"When I pronounce a blessing, I don't have the sense that it's Erv Brown doing it; I have the sense that it's a priest of the Church, speaking in the name of and on behalf of the Church. I would not do a blessing of this same-sex union, number one, because my Bishop has asked me not to, and number two, because the Church has not spoken on this issue, and I can't in good conscience or maybe even effectively pronounce the blessing of the Church when the Church has not provided for it."

"I'm going as far as I think I can go in good conscience and with integrity. If I felt it were allowed, I'd go the whole way. Personally, it grieves me that we can't," Brown said, with the hope that "some day we'll be able to bless those relationships just as we can bless marriages. And we can hold that up as a model for people, and say there is a model of responsible homosexual behavior. It's seeking a committed lifelong monogamous relationship with another person, just like we hold that model up for heterosexuals, although not everybody meets it."

"The process is rocky and stormy, because there is a lot of controversy, a lot of very strong feelings," Brown said. "What we're going through, trying to

develop a service with some integrity, is an indication that we don't have much in the way of models."

After the interview with *The Record*, plans continued to be made for the service which was held on October 17. But a month prior to the service, Brown became aware that someone present at the August 24 parish meeting contacted clergy in the Diocese who were opposed to the service. He began to receive telephone calls from some clergy asking him not to proceed with the service. Brown related that one priest who called, urging him not to proceed asked, "Would you not do it if the Bishop told you not to?" And I said, "Of course I wouldn't. Just like I would take the 1928 prayer books out of the church if I were told to. I'm a man under orders."

Believing that outside organized opposition was mounting and that the secular press might soon be reporting on the story, Brown decided to preach to his congregation on September 27 about what he was doing and why. Brown felt it wasn't fair for those who didn't know to learn about it from the secular press. During coffee hour approximately 60 people from the congregation gathered for discussion of the sermon. People spoke in favor of and against the affirmation service [see page nine].

The following Wednesday, the church was deluged with television reporters, and the story was broadcast. Brown continued to receive numerous phone calls of support from members of the congregation, as well as some in opposition. Brown was moved to tears when a gay couple, not in the Church, sent him a floral arrangement thanking him for his stand. The following Sunday, two picketers appeared outside the Church and one member of the congregation spoke during Announcements and began circulating a petition urging Brown not to perform the service at Christ Church.

Brown expressed concern that the issue "is so explosive that there's a possibility of some sort of schism and large numbers of people leaving either way, unless we have a lot more charity with each other than we've been exhibiting."

"The dilemma I feel is between on the one hand being called to be the steward of an institution, and on the other hand, standing for some truth that may be threatening to the welfare of the institution," explained Brown. "So much of this reminds me of growing up in the south in the 50s and 60s. Some of the same stuff said, 'These black people coming to church aren't really sincere; they're here to cause trouble. We can't do this because it will cause trouble. There's nothing wrong with this, but you can't push it; it's got to evolve gradually. Some of my best friends are black... gay...'"

"You try to foster a community where people can live together with their differences and be tolerant of one another."

[Lucinda Keils is a member of Christ Church, Detroit where she is the chairperson of the Spiritual Growth Committee.]