

Christ Church, Detroit service draws vocal opposition

by Herb Gunn

Although other services in support of a same sex relationship occurred in the Diocese prior to the one held at Christ Church, Detroit, it was in the weeks leading up to the October 17 service there that the Detroit media was stirred to cover the story. Many at Christ Church hoped the service would remain a parish event. But the attention of the media was drawn to the church when, prompted by the spread of rumors beyond the parish, rector Erv Brown made the issue his sermon topic on September 27 [see page eight].

When the story broke in the press, opposition galvanized. Sponsored by the Michigan Convocation of the Episcopal Synod of America, special Saturday services were held at St. Bartholomew's, Swartz Creek, and St. Michael's, Redford, on October 17 to celebrate "the traditional recognition of marriage," where, it was reported, 90 and 45 people attended, respectively.

In the weeks since the news broke, priests on both sides of the issue took to their pulpits to inform and challenge their parishioners. Some opponents called for calm; others called for revolt. Some were careful to avoid gay-bashing; others acted recklessly.

A letter leaked

As a part of the process in advance of the service of affirmation, Erv Brown, rector of Christ Church, invited the vestry, their spouses and 20 parishioners with a range of opinion to an evening meeting on August 24. Brown did not intend to draw publicity to the event. The purpose of the meeting was for those present to meet the two people requesting the service and to fulfill Bishop Wood's request that any affirmation service arise from the parish's corporate life. Brown hoped the selected group was both representative of the parish and small enough to have a constructive conversation.

Brown's letter of invitation to that meeting mentioned the two women's names several times and the date of the planned service.

Publicizing the names of homosexual people is an easy tactic for pressuring - people who wish to protect themselves from harassment. Brown explained he is aware of this but did not expect his letter to circulate beyond the invited parish members.

"I regret it," he declared. The letter "was intended to be for the information within this parish family. I was naive to think that's where it would remain."

The Record office received a copy from someone who acquired a copy at the Trinity College choral concert at St. John's, Detroit, on September 13. An identical copy came in the next day attached to a letter from Craig Everett, member of the choir at Christ Church, Detroit, and one of the parishioners who attended the church's meeting on August 24. Everett's letter [published on page fifteen] appealed to the Bishop to prohibit the service.

COPY: Material located in the Archives of the Episcopal Church



"It doesn't bother me," explained Everett, when asked if he was aware his copy of the letter was being circulated by others in the Diocese. "It's in the Diocese and I think it's a Diocesan-wide problem. We've got people walking around here interjecting their own personal view of what the laws of the Church are, completely ignoring what is said in the Bible. To me, that's a sin."

"I don't think the actions of one priest in the middle of Detroit should be something used to change the rules forever in the Church, especially when it's wrong. More power to them," he said of the people circulating the letter. "The bigger the stink the better as far as I'm concerned."

"It's going to ruin the Church. It's torn our parish apart right now. We have families that aren't speaking to each other right now. I don't believe these two people who came here came to our parish to join our family. If they did, they would have stopped this," continued Everett. "If they really were interested in joining the family, they would have backed away because they would have seen the harm they were doing. They don't care about that. All they care about is making their political statement."

Outspoken Opposition

"The General Convention Resolution A-104 (sa) was pretty clear," explained Bertram Herlong, dean of the Cathedral, who opposes liturgical affirmations for same sex couples and preached to the issue in an October 4 sermon titled *Stay at the Table*. "The real question here is authority. Does the General Convention speak for the Church? Are we bound by its authority? If we're not bound by General Convention, it gives credence to those who oppose the ordination of women and the use of the '79 prayer book."

"We do believe that in this particular instance, the Bishop is wrong," outlined Herlong in his sermon. "To suggest that each congregational can do

what they think is pastoral is to suggest that we are a congregational church instead of an Episcopal church."

"Though I believe the proposed action is erroneous," Herlong explained later, "I and The Cathedral staff and congregation are loyal to the Bishop. I believe others who disagree should be loyal. While it is highly emotional, it is not the essence of our faith."

Gene Geromel, vicar at St. Bartholomew's, Swartz Creek, and convener of the Michigan chapter of the Episcopal Synod, responded quickly to the question of affirming homosexual relationships.

"I think the one thing it points out to me is how poor a job we in the Episcopal Church have done in teaching the glory of the sacrament of marriage and Biblical injunctions about marriage," explained Geromel. "We have failed to teach, and that means traditionalists as well as others, the importance of marriage to society and to the Church as a Christian sacrament. We have let the Church down and, therefore, God down. None of this would be happening if we just paid attention to scripture."

"A couple of things which are very, very sad," Geromel continued. "The Episcopal Church has been asked to think about this issue and learn about it. And once again, that process has been cut short by those who are intent on doing it no matter what the scripture says, no matter what the Church says."

"That says to us who are traditionalists that our input is really not valued, our perspective is not valued. And when we are asked to dialogue, it means 'you sit there and do nothing and we will go ahead and do what we planned to do.'"

"To suggest that this is merely an affirmation is doing everyone a disservice. When people plan a honeymoon, exchange rings, go through premarital counseling, please do not tell Episcopalians that the goal of this is not marriage."

Geromel explained that he was initially given the Brown parish letter by a priest in the Diocese although he didn't say who. He said he was shown the letter by at least four sources and

assumed it was public.

"I was given Father Brown's letter and shared it with my vestry. They were appalled," said Geromel. "They said 'I don't think we need to attack this; I think we need to make some positive statement of what we stand for as a [Episcopal] Synod congregation.'"

"And then someone said in the vestry 'Is this known in the Diocese?' And I said 'No, I don't think it is,'" Geromel recalled from his vestry meeting. "And they said 'this is the type of thing that parishioners have a right to know.'"

The vestry decided to send Brown's letter to all the senior and junior wardens in the Diocese.

When asked whether reprinting the names of two homosexual people who wish their identity to remain unknown might be seen as gay-bashing, Geromel responded that he assumed Brown's letter was a public document. Furthermore, he explained that there was no intention of staging a protest at Christ Church in Detroit.

"But quite frankly, if you put things in writing which are that controversial, you have to expect that they are going to get out," he said in explaining the action.

"The information needed to go out. They needed to know that that was going on with the Bishop's approval. That was the purpose of the [vestry's] letter. To suggest for anyone that it was an outing or insensitive - you won't find any of my people acting in that manner," Geromel insisted. "The intent was solely information. We had no idea who they were."

Geromel later clarified that he was not cognizant that the women's names were used in Brown's parish letter and was remiss in not blotting out their names.

"I focused on the things which really upset me and I never really thought about that and no one pointed it out," explained Geromel, accepting responsibility for letting the letter go from his church with their names included. He wrote the two women a letter of apology.

continued on page eleven

Clergy sign letter in support of Wood and Brown

In early October, John Laycock, rector of St. Columba's, Detroit, wrote a letter in support of the decisions of Bishop Stewart Wood, the Rev. Erv Brown and the people of Christ Church.

"They are making a courageous and commendable contribution to our understanding of this Church's ministry with homosexual persons," the letter stated. "The Church's present unwillingness to those same persons is simply one more indication of our need to discern God's will in the area of human sexuality."

"The pastoral ministry of a bishop does not define doctrine, nor are the opinions or actions of one congregation binding on others."

"If the rector down the road took a pro-life position," Laycock said to The Record, "that does not bind me and my congregation to a similar position any more than my pro-choice position binds them."

"The Episcopal Church, historically, has had a lot of controversy for the good reason because we believe that out of the depths, God's work will emerge."

Laycock's letter was signed by 27 clergy in the Diocese.

Partners in Life Covenant ask to be understood

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continued from page three

on it—that he was well aware of the moratorium and that he would work within the limits.”

Howell and Glaser had begun to attend St. Andrew's, which was closer to their Ann Arbor home. The other couple had been “looking for another parish home,” according to Glaser, and the Bishop suggested Christ Church, Detroit as a possibility, since they were in the Detroit area.

“The service symbolizes the start of a new family” Howell said, with the hope that his family's acknowledgement will deepen. Howell recalled a painful family reunion where pictures were taken of “all the kids and their spouses,” and how his relationship was not recognized.

“I made up my mind that day that was never going to happen again,” Howell said. “I'm not going to do that any more. It was interesting though, because I looked at my Mom, and I just felt like there was a little bit of understanding finally of what I have to go through. It's like she could start to understand what it was like to always be excluded from certain things, from certain rituals, from taking a family pic-

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Opposition

continued from page five

Michael Bedford, rector at St. Elizabeth's, Redford, was dismayed by the service planned at Christ Church, Detroit, “because it seems to be running counter to what the Bishop asked the Diocese not to do.

“I am dismayed by the fact that by clever wording, looking for legal loopholes,” Bedford continued, “they are going to contravene the instructions of their Bishop. I am distressed by that.

“I did not speak out publicly to embarrass the Bishop, but to let the people know that not everyone in the Episcopal Church agrees with what's going on,” explained Bedford. “In fact, this action seems to me to be a direct contravention of the Bishop's own instructions. So I don't see how speaking out against it could have embarrassed him.

“For the Church now to be holding secret services I think tells you something about how the people themselves regard what it is that they are doing,” explained Bedford. “This is a novel thing in the Church. I didn't know that the Church ever conducted secret services since the days of the Catacombs.”

Bedford said he received several copies of the Brown parish letter, and since the letter was printed on Christ Church letter head, with the salutation whitened out, he even assumed one was from Brown himself. In an invitation to the October 17 service at his church, mailed to clergy in the Westside Convocation, Bedford specifically urged an avoidance of gay bashing.

Richard Kim, rector of St. John's, Detroit, reacted strongly when the news

ture—you can't understand what trivial things like that mean until you can't participate.”

The two couples worked on a liturgy, helped by Guthrie through several revisions, and sent the final draft to Wood for review in August. The Bishop was on vacation, but following his return, he met with the two couples and with Erv Brown from Christ Church, Detroit. The couples were directed to revise the liturgy because it was too much like the marriage service. Although they understood from the beginning that the blessing could not be included, they had used the marriage service in the prayer book as their original pattern. The final celebration of their life covenant became their own document.

“I feel it's a first step, and I'm happy

with it for that reason,” responded Howell when asked how it felt to not receive a blessing. “It won't make what this service means to us any less.”

“Nor will it make our relationship any less,” added Glaser. “In that sense, yes, it is distressing in the sense that we are still second class citizens as far as the Church is concerned. We can commune there, we can worship, we can preach.”

“But we're being denied one of the sacraments,” interjects Howell. “And one whole subject we haven't even touched on that is a very important one, especially when you're talking about fundamentalist reaction to all this—what's the alternative? If they don't have a compassionate alternative, then I think their whole basis is suspect.”

“I'd like to be able to go to a new members' meeting and be able to say,

like half the people did in our recent new members' meeting, ‘we were married in this Church,’” said Howell, “but I go through this mental gymnastics about all the stuff that's going on.”

“I'd like to be able to say we're married,” said Glaser. “I hope for a different time, when that doesn't matter. And we'll just be on the same level with everyone else.”

The celebration of the life covenant of David Glaser and Douglas Howell took place on Saturday, October 3, at St. Andrew's, Ann Arbor. Howell wrote the processional titled, “*Behold, I Do a New Thing*.” A soloist also sang his song “*House On The Ocean*.” Over 100 family members and friends gathered to witness and celebrate the covenant and to pledge support to the two men in their life together.

House on the Ocean

(Music & Lyrics by Doug Howell)

I've always wanted a house on the ocean
all made of glass, perched high on a hill
first every morning I'd wake with the sunrise
and every night rock to sleep on the waves
all down the midway that leads to the water
flowers are dancing in time with the breeze

but I'd be content with a room in the city
if you'll just live with me
we could grow flowers in pots by the window
you can whisper the breeze in my ear

I've always wanted to be a composer
I'd write strains in my house by the sea
to fill all the country with music and dancing
leap for and thurpops would walk hard in hand
and no one would think what they see unimportant
it would be one and would not be the same

but I'd be content with a tune to be humming
if you'll just live with me
I'll hear a symphony each time you touch me
and your love is the song I will sing

since I remember, I've always wanted
to live in a future but like my dreams
everything I'd want that's what would come true
then about lying and trying to be
riding on clouds eye moonshadowed mountains
siding on rainbows and chasing the stars

but I'd be content with only this moment
if you'll just live with me
I'll find my future in vows left unspoken
I can find all the stars in your eyes

of the service planned at Christ Church was brought to his attention. He made a copy of Brown's parish letter for himself but explained he had nothing to do with its further circulation.

“I was aghast, I was appalled—particularly when I heard these people, these lesbians, were sent to Brown by Bishop Wood,” explained Kim.

He called Brown to urge him not to perform the service and subsequently wrote to Wood expressing his “dismay and distress.”

In explaining his strong opposition to the actions of Wood and Brown, Kim recalled the 1990 Port Huron Diocesan Convention when Wood called for two things: a Committee to develop a curriculum for Diocesan study of human sexuality; and a ban on the blessings of same sex unions.

“I trusted Bishop Wood to engage in dialogue,” explained Kim. “This Committee was going to put together some kind of report that we could use as resource material to engage in dialogue at the parish level. That Committee is still in session, has not released its

report—but so what? The Bishop unilaterally proceeds to engage in this kind of thing by giving his blessing to a couple of priests.

“Bishop Wood in my view has betrayed the Church. And if he is unwilling to uphold the faith of the Church and unwilling or incapable, for God's sake, to recant what I believe to be an error, he ought to step down and allow that office to be filled by someone else.”

Kim went on to say that those priests who step forward to support the bishop ought to resign as well.

“I think the laity themselves better speak in whatever fashion they are able to reconstitute the Church which is made up, after all, of the laity of whose ranks come clergy. The laity, yes, the laity needs to revolt because clearly those of another view among the laity are attempting to revolt to press their message.”

Kim called a meeting at St. John's, Detroit, on October 24 for clergy and likely delegates to the 1993 Diocesan Convention to explore ways to “stop the fast moving train whose engineer

seems incapable and unable to control it.”

In a conversation with *The Record*, Kim compared the Church and its bishops with alcoholics who are “out of touch with reality.”

“He is out of touch with reality,” declared Kim of Bishop Wood. “He is out of touch with the laity. He is out of touch with the Church. He is in touch with a handful of people but he is out of touch with the majority, the vast majority of the Church in this Diocese.”

Kim explained that he believes the Episcopal Church “has signs all over that are cries for help. Because the Episcopal Church is committing corporate suicide in the hands of some sick people.

“When it happens in a sister church of mine,” said Kim about the service at Christ Church, “it happens to me. And that's how everyone else should see it. If a bishop in the hierarchy of the Church acts like a fool, it affects all of us.

“If it is allowed to happen there, it's going to be pervasive everywhere.”