



REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON CHANGING PATTERNS  
OF SEXUALITY AND FAMILY LIFE

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Diocese of Newark

By: The Task Force on Changing Patterns  
of Sexuality and Family Life

The Rev. Dr. Nelson S. T. Thayer, Chair  
The Rev. Cynthia Black  
Ms. Ella Dubose  
The Rev. Abigail Hamilton  
The Rev. Dr. David Hamilton  
Ms. Diane Holland  
Mr. Thomas Kebba  
Mr. Townsend Lucas  
Dr. Teresa Marciano  
The Rev. Gerard Pisani  
The Rev. Gerald Riley  
Ms. Sara Sobol  
The Rev. Walter Sobal

## TASK FORCE ON CHANGING PATTERNS OF SEXUALITY AND FAMILY LIFE

### Introduction

Following the mandate of the Diocesan Convention on January, 1985, the Task Force on changing Patterns of Sexuality and Family Life has been meeting for study and discussion, focusing its attention on three groups of persons representative of some of the changing patterns of sexuality and family life: 1) young people who choose to live together without being married; 2) older persons who choose not to marry or who may be divorced or widowed; 3) homosexual couples. All three kinds of relationships are widely represented in the Diocese Newark, and it has been recognized that the Church's understanding of and ministry among the people involved has not been adequate.

The aim of the Task Force has not been original social scientific research. Members of the Task Force have engaged in Biblical, theological, historical, sociological and psychological study, and in extensive discussion of the issues raised. The intent of the Task Force has been two-fold: to prepare a document that would help the clergy and laity of the diocese to think about the issues, and to suggest broad guidelines for the Church's pastoral response to persons in the three groups and to those not in those groups but who are concerned about the issues raised.

The process of study and discussion engaged the members at the deepest levels of their self-understanding as human beings and as Christians. We sometimes found ourselves confused, angry, hurt, uncertain. The subject brought up basic fears and prejudices which members had to struggle with corporately and privately. We became more deeply aware of our own fallibility and of our need for each other's response, correction and support. Each member is a distinct person with her or his own distinct experience and viewpoint; complete uniformity was neither sought nor attained.

But the Task Force became and remains convinced that such a process of search and person-to-person engagement is essential for the Church to respond to the social, cultural and personal realities involved in the changing patterns of sexuality and family life. Appropriate response to these issues requires the willingness to confront within ourselves some of our most deeply formed impulses and assumptions, and some of our tradition's most firmly embedded attitudes. This can only occur in a context of conversation with others whose experience and viewpoints enable our own to be transformed.

We understand the Church to be a community in search, not a community in perfection. As a community in search, the Church must recognize the needs among its members, among all Christians, indeed among all persons, for loving support, for mutual trust, and for growth

through learning from each other. As one contemporary writer has put it "...as such a community the Church is of prime significance in making love a reality in human life--incarnating the Incarnate Love... These images affirm not only intimacy and mutuality but also inclusiveness; there are implications for a diversity of sexual patterns within a congregation. Different sexual lifestyles being lived out with integrity and in Christianly humanizing ways need not simply be tolerated--they can be positively supported. The 'family of God' can ill afford to make the nuclear family its sole model." (James Nelson, Embodiment. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978, p. 260.)

This report crystallizes the Task Force's perspective on these issues. It does not summarize each discussion, nor does it present all the research and data that informed these discussions. The report is offered to the Diocese of Newark to stimulate our corporate thinking and discussion. The Task Force's major recommendation is that discussion continue on an intentional, Diocese-wide basis. This and other recommendations are offered in the final section.

## I. The Cultural Situation

The social and cultural changes that have occurred in American society over the past half-century are increasingly being reflected in the changing attitudes of members of the Anglican communion regarding some of the basic moral values and assumptions which have long been taken for granted. Profound changes have occurred in our understanding and practices in areas involving sexuality and family life. Traditionally, the Church has provided, virtually unchallenged, direction and guidance on these matters that deeply affect the individual, the family unit and the community at large. Today, the Church is no longer the single arbiter in these matters, which were once thought to be within its sacred province. Some of the factors that have led to the diminution of this status are:

1. Secularization of American society as it moved from a predominately rural background at the turn of the century to today's predominately urban setting. This has produced new and competing centers of values and morality.

2. Social, economic and geographical mobility that has individually and collectively loosened structures traditionally provided by the community, church and family. These structures tended to channel and constrict values, choices, and behavior in the areas involving sexuality, marriage and family life.

3. Advances of technology, which have provided means of disease control and birth control, which have effectively separated the act of sexual intercourse from procreation.

4. Reduction of the age at which puberty begins. This confronts children with issues of sexuality earlier than in the past.

5. Adolescent dating without chaperonage. This removes a powerful external structure of control of sexual behavior.

6. Many in contemporary culture begin and establish a career at a later age than formerly. Marriage also tends to occur later. These two developments combined with convenient methods of birth control, the earlier onset of puberty and the absence of chaperonage, significantly lengthens the period when sexuality will be expressed outside of marriage.

7. The gradual, but perceptible changes in attitude regarding what constitutes a "complete" human being: the human body and sex are no longer considered something to be ashamed of, and these physical realities as well as intellect and spirituality constitute essential elements in the development of a complete human being.

8. The decline of exclusive male economic hegemony, which has resulted in a realignment of the male/female relationships in society.

9. The existence of a better educated society, which does not depend upon authorities to determine "what is right" on issues such as nuclear war or power plants, abortion, birth control, poverty, environment, etc.

10. The intensifying clash between the claims of traditional authority as demanded by the family, church and society and the aims of twentieth century men and women to seek their own fulfillment in ways that were not necessarily acceptable in the past. This is, of course, an ancient tension; it gains its particular contemporary character in American society from the dissolution of the degree of ethical consensus as the society has become increasingly pluralistic.

The Church needs to think clearly about these social, cultural, and ethical realities. It must order its teachings and corporate life so as to guide and sustain all persons whose lives are touched by these realities. The challenges that these realities pose to our beliefs and practices must be examined and responded to.

As indicated in the introduction, this report is intended to contribute to the Church's understanding of these issues, and to offer perspective on and suggestions for the Church's response.

## II. Biblical and Theological Considerations

### A. Tradition and Interpretation

The Judeo-Christian tradition is a tradition precisely because, in every historical and social circumstance, the thinking faithful have brought to bear their best interpretation of the current realities in correlation with their interpretation of the tradition as they have inherited it. Thus, truth in the Judeo-Christian tradition is a dynamic process to be discerned and formulated rather than a static structure to be received.

The Bible is misunderstood and misused when approached as a book of moral prescriptions directly applicable to all moral dilemmas. Rather, the Bible is the record of the response to the word of God addressed to Israel and to the Church throughout centuries of changing social, historical, and cultural conditions. The Faithful responded within the realities of their particular situation, guided by the direction of previous revelation, but not captive to it.

The text must always be understood in context: first in the historical context of the particular Biblical situation and then in our own particular social and historical context. The word of God addresses us through scripture. It is not freeze-dried in prepackaged moral prescriptions, but is actively calling for faithful response within the realities of our particular time. Any particular prescription in scripture, any teaching of the law, must be evaluated according to the overarching direction of the Bible's witness to God, culminating in the grace of Christ.

#### B. The Centrality of Christ and the Realm of God

The central point of reference for the thinking Christian is the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The history of interpretations of the meaning of that event begins in scripture itself and continues into our immediate present. The central fact about Jesus's life and teaching is that he manifested in his relationships, acts, and words, the imminent and future Kingdom of God, which will be referred to as the Realm of God.

The Realm of God as presented by Jesus in his relationships and in his parables is characterized by loving action on behalf of all men and women including especially the poor, the sick, the weak, the oppressed and the despised, the outcast, and those on the margins of life. The Realm of God presents us with both the fulfillment and the transcendence of the inherited law. The Realm of God presents us with an overturning - even a reversal - of the structures by which humans attempt to establish their own righteousness, which inevitably oppresses or exploits, or marginalizes others.

The challenge to the Church to respond creatively to changing patterns of sexuality and family life in America must be seen as an instance of the Holy Spirit leading us to respond to the blessing and claim of the Realm of God foreshadowed and made continually present by the life of Christ Jesus. In his death Jesus exemplifies sacrificial love that is faithful to his vision of the Realm of God. In the resurrection we know God's ultimate faithfulness and sovereignty.

It is in response to this central example and teaching of Jesus regarding the Realm of God that we attempt to discern what should be the Church's response to changing patterns of sexuality and family life. We discover in the actions and parables of Jesus that the Realm of God manifests grace unfettered by legalistic obligation to tradition and "the law". When the choice is between observance of the law or active, inclusive love, Jesus embodies and teaches love. It is in the light of this fundamental principle of God's active reconciling love

that any religious law or dogma, social or economic arrangement is to be assessed.

### C. The Realm of God and Human Social Structures

The specific instances of changing patterns of sexuality and family life that this Task Force addresses do not occur in a cultural vacuum but in the cultural turmoil marked by the ten developments noted in the opening section of this document. Not one of these developments is morally unambiguous. All of them are marked--as has been every development of social history--by the human propensity for self-deception and self-aggrandizement at the expense of others, which Christians call "sin".

Jesus's radical claim is that in his person the Realm of God confronts us, in every age, with our bondage to sin. Included in sin's manifestations are the social norms and arrangements by which we conventionally order our lives. In parable after parable Jesus presents us with the need to see historical relativity, the need to examine the arbitrariness and the maintenance of power by traditional structures. The Church itself and the authority of its traditional teachings is subject to judgement by the ongoing activity of the Realm of God.

Judged by the grace of God starkly presented by the parables, Jesus's preaching and his actions show us that response to the Realm of God requires us to be ready to perceive and modify those structures in our society that hurt and alienate others rather than heal and extend love to those in circumstances different from our own.

With this consciousness we hear the challenges to our conventional attitudes and practices regarding sexuality and the family and try to discern how these challenges should influence our understanding of our traditional values and our response to new realities. We engage in this process knowing (and discovering anew) that all our thoughts are laced with our desire for self-justification, our need for self-aggrandizement, and the willingness to hurt those whom we see as opposing us. Sin is our human condition; it permeates all our institutions, all our traditions, and all our relationships, so it has always been for humankind; so it has always been in the Church.

### D. Historical Relativity

Recalling our sinful condition causes us to look critically both at the Church's conventions and at the demands for change put forward by various groups in our culture. The relativizing impact of the Realm of God enables us to see more clearly what Biblical and historical research discloses: that beliefs and practices surrounding marriage and sexuality have varied according to time, culture and necessity. We tend to sacralize the familiar and project into the past our current practices and beliefs and the rationales supporting them.

Such is the case with our assumptions about marriage. We tend to project into early Biblical times a twentieth century model of monogamous self-chosen marriage when clearly, at various periods in the Old Testament records, polygamy was assumed (at least for the wealthy). Even into the Middle Ages a marriage was an economic event, perhaps an alliance, between two families or clans.

Marriage was not given the status of a sacrament by the Church until 1439. And not until 1563 did the Church require the presence of a priest at the event. And even then marriage functioned to solemnize an agreement which had been entered into more for reasons of procreation, the channeling of sexuality, and economic benefit to the families than as a means for preexisting love between the two persons to develop and flourish, as we expect of present-day marriage.

In the Bible and in our own Western heritage, sexuality outside of marriage has been proscribed for women--not men. When women were found adulterous, the violation was of property rights rather than of sexual morality as we tend to conceive it, because women were viewed as property of fathers, and then of their husbands.

Homosexual behavior was condemned because it was part of pagan religious practices from which Israel sought always to differentiate itself. Biblical scholarship maintains that in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's concern was not with the homosexual nature of the implied rape of his guests, but with such behavior as a violation of rules of hospitality. Homosexuality as a fundamental human orientation is not addressed in scripture; and Jesus himself was entirely silent on the subject.

#### E. Revised Understanding of the Person

A major change in perspective is occurring in religious thinking regarding sexuality and the body. Greek philosophical and agnostic thought had great influence on the early development of Christianity. Since that time the Church has tended to teach that the body is a dangerous vessel, subject to temptation and sin which temporarily houses the superior soul or spirit. Whereas the Greeks regarded the mind or spirit as able to reach its triumph only by freeing itself from the corrupting captivity of the physical body, the Hebrews knew no such separation. In Hebraic thought one does not have a body, one is a body. What we today refer to as body, mind, and spirit were--in Hebraic thought--dimensions of an indivisible unity.

The contemporary more Hebraic understanding of the person runs counter to the traditional dualistic teaching of the Church, which has tended either to try to ignore the fact that humans are embodied selves, or has looked at the physical, sexual body as the root of sin. The contemporary attitude views sexuality as more than genital sex having as its purpose procreation, physical pleasure and release of tension. Sexuality includes sex, but it is a more comprehensive concept.

Sexuality is not simply a matter of behavior. Our sexuality goes to the heart of our identity as persons. Our self-understanding, our experience of ourselves as male or female, our ways of experiencing and relating to others, are all reflective of our being as sexual persons.

We do not have bodies, we are bodies, and the doctrine of the Incarnation reminds us that God comes to us and we know God in the flesh. We come to know God through our experience of other embodied selves. Thus our sexual identity and behavior are means for our experience and knowledge of God. This theological perspective means that issues of homosexuality, divorce, and sexual relations between unmarried persons involve not only matters of ethics but have to do with how persons know and experience God.

It is our conclusion that by suppressing our sexuality and by condemning all sex which occurs outside of traditional marriage, the Church has thereby obstructed a vitally important means for persons to know and celebrate their relatedness to God. The teachings of the Church have tended to make us embarrassed about rather than grateful for our bodies. As means of communion with other persons our bodies sacramentally become means of communion with God.

### III. Ethical Essentials

From the perspective of Jesus's teaching regarding the Realm of God, all heterosexual and homosexual relationships are subject to the same criteria of ethical assessment--the degree to which the persons and relationships reflect mutuality, love and justice. The Task Force does not in any way advocate or condone promiscuous behavior which by its very definition exploits the other for one's own aggrandizement. The commitment to mutuality, love and justice which marks our ideal picture of heterosexual unions is also the ideal for homosexuals unions. Those who would say homosexuality by its very nature precludes such commitment must face the fact that such unions do in fact occur, have occurred and will continue to occur. The Church must decide how to respond to such unions.

It is becoming clear that many persons--single, divorced, or widowed--may not seek long-term unions, while some commit themselves to such unions without being formally married. The overriding issue is not the formality of the social/legal arrangement, or even a scriptural formula, but the quality of the relationship in terms of our understanding of the ethical and moral direction pointed to by Jesus in the symbol of the Realm of God.

The challenge to the Church is to discern and support the marks of the Realm of God in all these relationships. The Church should be that community above all which is marked by its inclusion of persons who are seeking to grow in their capacity for love and justice in their relationships and in their relation to their world-neighbors. The Church should actively work against those social and economic arrangements which militate against the establishment of such relationships.



#### IV. Marriage and Alternate Forms of Relationship

Our nation has been described as a "highly nuptial" civilization. This means that for whatever reasons many Americans see marriage as a vehicle for happiness and satisfaction. Life-long marriage offers the possibility of profound intimacy, mutuality, personal development, and self-fulfillment throughout the years of the life cycle. On the other hand, of course, a marriage can be marked with the sin of self-centeredness and exploitation of the other, and by the estrangements of male from female, weaker from stronger.

Ideally, marriage can be a context in which children can develop their identities by drawing on both male and female ways of being a person. It can therefore provide a uniquely rich context for the formation of children into adults who cherish and intend the qualities of the Realm of God--love and justice--in the context of ongoing relationships marked by sacrifice, forgiveness, joy, and reconciliation. It can also give to parents the opportunity to mature and develop their own capacities for caring generativity.

The Church must continue to sustain persons in the fulfillment of traditional marriage relationships both for the well-being of the marriage partners and because such marriage provides the most stable institution that we have known for the nurturing and protection of children. But the Church must also recognize that fully intended marriage vows are fraught with risks. Belief that deeper knowledge each of each in marriage will enable the original intentions of love and devotion is not always fulfilled. Persons living through the dissolution of marriage need especially at that time the support of an understanding and inclusive community. Such is true obviously also for divorced persons, whether living singly or in new relationships.

One of the Church's present deficiencies is its exclusionary posture toward those who have "failed" in the conventional arrangement of marriage and family and the conventional understanding (and avoidance) of sexuality has blinded us to present reality. The Church needs actively to include separating and divorced individuals and single parents.

The Church must take seriously that Jesus's teaching and manifesting of the Realm of God were concerned not with the formal arrangements of our lives but with our responsiveness to the vision of the Realm of God. Admittedly, this confronts all of us with a relativization of all personal, social and economic arrangements by which we live. We cannot live without structure in our relationships; but these structures are subject to continual correction by the image of the Realm of God. If the Church is to err it must err on the side of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.

Marriage has served as a stabilizing force in American society, channeling sexuality in socially acceptable directions, providing a structure for the procreation and nurturing of children, and enabling enduring companionship between a man and a woman by defining the legal and spiritual responsibilities of the married couple. Although

marriage has taken many forms in human society, it has been a central, constant building block of human society in all cultures. The power of sexuality both to attract persons, and satisfy persons, and to disrupt the social order has been recognized in the practices, mythologies, and laws of all cultures.

Marriage has bound the family, clan, and tribe to customs and traditions which insure survival and identification of a people as a people. The church must consider the consequences of calling into question institutional relationships which have permitted the Church to flourish and survive. However, our contemporary consciousness of racial, sexual, and economic domination and exploitation has raised our culture's consciousness about some of the oppressive, repressive and exploitative dimensions of marriage and family arrangements. This heightened sensitivity, combined with a cultural ethos that favors self-fulfillment over the dutiful but self-abnegating adherence to conventional marriage and family arrangements has caused many to deny that life-long monogamous, heterosexual marriage is the sole legitimate structure for the satisfaction of our human need for sexuality and intimacy.

There are those who think that even though the forms have been enormously diverse, the pervasive human tendency to union with an individual of the opposite sex in a committed relationship and the universal presence of family structure in some form evidences something fundamental about the nature of the created human order itself. Biologically, this has been the only option for the perpetuation of the human race as we know it. While other arrangements may be appropriate to the given nature of particular individuals, monogamous, life-long marriage and family organization ought not to be thereby relativized as simply one option among others.

Given the Church's traditional view of the exclusive primacy of marriage and the nuclear family and the (relative) opprobrium with which the Church has viewed other options, the Church must learn how to continue to affirm the conventional without denigrating alternative sexual and family arrangements. Again, the criteria are the quality of the relationships and their potential for developing persons responsive to the Realm of God. The Church must find ways genuinely to affirm persons as they faithfully and responsibly choose and live out other modes of relationship.

We live after the Fall. The metaphor of the Realm Of God reinforces the realization of brokenness and finitude in all our human arrangements and relationships. We sin daily in our self-deception, self-centeredness, self-justification, and readiness to exploit and oppress others for our own material and emotional self-aggrandizement. And this is clearly seen in our readiness to interpret scripture and tradition to reinforce what we perceive as our own best interests so that we appear righteous and those who differ from us appear unrighteous.

The dynamic process of God's incarnational truth has brought us to a time in history when the critical consciousness made possible by

modern forms of knowledge - including Biblical scholarship - enables us to see the Realm of God as a present reality relativizing all human knowledge and social arrangements. We are therefore suspicious of the invocation of tradition even while we believe that in God's ongoing creation not all relational arrangements are equally aligned with a caring God's purposes for humankind

Those who believe that the heterosexual family unit headed by monogamous heterosexual partners offers the best possibility for the development of children who will become confident, loving, compassionate and creative adults must acknowledge the historical fallibility of the family in accomplishing such results. All sexual and family arrangements must be judged by the same criteria suggested by the metaphor of the Realm of God.

Ultimately, do couples (of whatever orientation) and families of (whatever constitution) exist for the sake of their own self-fulfillment? The Gospel does not support such an individualistic possibility. Nor does it support promiscuous behavior, which by its very nature uses the other person simply for one's self-aggrandizement, whether mere sexual release, as compensation for feelings of inadequacy or to express hostility. Theologically, patterns of sexual and family arrangements are to be judged according to the degree to which they reflect and contribute to the realization of the Realm of God. Since this is a dynamic not a static reality, continual diversity, exploration, experimentation, and discernment will mark the life of the faithful Church.

In the absence of set rules, great demands are thus placed on clergy and others who counsel persons regarding these issues. We believe that at the level of congregational life, the Church ought not focus its concern on this or that particular pattern. The Church's focus ought to be on persons as they seek to understand and order their lives and relationships. All relationships and arrangements are to be assessed in terms of their capacity to manifest marks of the Realm of God: healing, reconciliation, compassion, mutuality, concern for others both within and beyond one's immediate circle of intimacy.

#### V. Considerations Regarding The Three Alternative Patterns

As indicated in the Introduction, the Task Force decided to address specifically the Church's response to young adults who choose to live together unmarried, adults who never married or who are "post-marriage", due to divorce or the death of their spouse, and homosexual couples. We do not address the subject of adolescent sexuality, although we agree on the need for more thorough-going education of adolescents within the Church regarding sexuality and relationships.

We believe that certain questions of context are appropriate whenever persons consider beginning a sexual relationship: a) Will the relationship strengthen the pair for greater discipleship in the wider context? Will they be better enabled to love others? Will their relationship be a beneficial influence on those around them? b) Will

the needs and values of others in the larger context be recognized and respected, especially the needs of their own children (if any), their parents, and their parish community? Since an ongoing sexual relationship between two persons occurs within a network of relationships to parents, children (perhaps adult children), colleagues, and fellow parishioners, such a relationship needs to be conducted with sensitivity to the possible emotional and relational effects on these other persons. c) What is the couple's intention regarding the procreation and/or raising of children?

Regarding the relationship itself, the following considerations are appropriate: a) The relationship should be life-enhancing for both partners and exploitative of neither. b) The relationship should be grounded in sexual fidelity and not involve promiscuity. c) The relationship should be founded on love and valued for the strengthening, joy, support and benefit of the couple and those to whom they are related.

#### A. Young Adults

One of the issues facing the Church in our time comes under the broad category of what used to be called "pre-marital sex". The issue for the Church to which attention is given in the following discussion is specifically defined as that of young adults of the opposite sex living together and in a sexual relationship without ecclesiastical or civil ceremony. (Of course, many young adults, for economic and social reasons share housing without having a sexual relationship. We do not address these relationships in what follows.)

From an historical perspective, such relationships are not unfamiliar to our culture. For many years common-law marriage had legal validity for purposes of property and inheritance settlements. Attitudes concerning careers, emotional and sexual commitments and intimacy, marital economics, and experiences (either through observation or background) all contribute to decisions concerning the form of relationship a man and a woman choose. In the contemporary world, young adults may live together to deepen their relationships, as a trial period prior to a commitment to marriage, or as a temporary or a permanent alternative to marriage.

In order to maintain the sacredness of the marital relationship in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, The Church has generally been opposed to the actions of couples choosing to live together without ecclesiastical or civil ceremony. Opposition has been and is expressed both in direct statement and by silent tolerance. The effect of the opposition has been to separate those couples from the ministry of the Church, to the detriment of the quality of their relationship, of the spiritual growth of the individuals, of their involvement in the mutual ministry of the Church, of their contribution to the building up of the Christian community. Current research documents that persons living under these circumstances are less likely to profess an affiliation with an established religion or to attend church. And yet these persons might well benefit from a church affiliation.

To minister to or engage in ministry with those who choose to live together without marriage does not denigrate the institution of marriage and life-long commitments. Rather it is an effort to recognize and support those who choose, by virtue of the circumstances of their lives, not to marry but to live in alternative relationships enabling growth and love.

In a community in search, all benefit from mutual support and concern. Although living among persons of differing lifestyles can be threatening, it can provide those who have committed themselves to a lifelong relationship in marriage the opportunity to renew, to reform, to recreate their loyalties and vows in an atmosphere of alternative possibilities.

We emphasize that the Church's focus should be on persons as they seek to understand and order their lives and relationships. All relationships are to be assessed in terms of their capacity to manifest marks of the Realm of God: healing, reconciliation, compassion, mutuality, concern for others both within and beyond one's immediate circle of intimacy. Extending the image of the Church as a community of persons in search raises pastoral implications. A community in search seeks wisdom, understanding and truth in the experience and hopes of each of its members and from those (too often ignored) who choose not to participate in that community

Both at the diocesan and congregational levels, the Church can actively engage in education and discussion on all issues of sexuality. Members of the congregation, persons from specific disciplines in the secular world, and persons who have in their own lives wrestled with pertinent issues can all be asked to participate in such efforts. Congregations should encourage open, caring conversation, leading to trust and mutual, supportive acceptance. This makes more credible the Church's claim to faithfulness to the Realm of God.

Persons who have been ignored or rejected by the Church's ministry, or who have assumed such rejection, can only be reached and loved by a community that witnesses in deed to its faith that God calls all people to new hopes, to new possibilities, by a community that knows it does not have all the answers and in which each member contributes to its growth and future wholeness in the Realm of God.

#### B. "Post-Married" Adults

Some mature persons, by life-long choice or because of divorce or the death of a spouse find themselves unmarried but desiring an intimate relationship. We affirm that there can be life-enhancing meaning and value for some adult single persons in sexual relationships other than marriage. Economic realities may militate against traditional marriage arrangements. For example Social Security payments are reduced for two individuals who marry; channeling inheritances for children can become legally expensive and complicated where re-marriage occurs; maintaining a one-person household is for many persons prohibitively costly.

The choice of celibacy or estrangement from the Church for such persons who choose not to marry is not consonant with the Church's hope of wholeness for all persons in the Realm of God. Our understanding of the Church is one of inclusiveness. As we struggle to understand what the Church is called to in our time, one of our goals is inclusion in the Christian body of persons who have thoughtfully chosen lifestyles different from that of the mainstream.

Because we are whole human beings, and not, in the last analysis, separate compartments of body and soul, therefore the spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and sexual aspects of our personalities are all to be nurtured and expressed in responsible ways if we are to continue to grow towards wholeness in our mature years. We are created sexual beings, and our spiritual health, no less than any other aspect of health, is therefore linked to sexuality. When therefore, mature single adults choose to celebrate their love and live their lives together outside of marriage, provided that they have considered and responded sensitively to the public and personal issues involved, we believe that their decision will indeed be blessed by God and can be affirmed as morally acceptable and responsible by the Church.

### C. Homosexual Couples

Changing patterns of sexuality and family life confront pastors and congregations with new challenges and opportunities for understanding and for ministry. Rather than arguing about these issues we need first to listen to the experience of those who are most directly involved. Where homosexuality is concerned, fear, rejection, and avoidance by the heterosexual community is common and entrenched; we believe that pastors and congregations must meet members of the homosexual community person to person. The first step toward understanding and ministry is listening.

We need as much as is possible to bracket our judgements and listen to persons as they are. The Church needs to acknowledge that its historic tendency to view homosexual persons as homosexual rather than as persons has intensified the suffering of this 5%-10% of our population. A congregation's willingness to listen is a first step toward redeeming our homophobic past.

Listening is also a first step toward acknowledging that our own understanding needs ministry. Those of us fearful and angry regarding homosexuality need liberation, and this can only come through person to person communication. So the Church's response includes permitting itself to be ministered to by the homosexual community.

This process will help the Church recognize that whatever our historical experience, we encounter each other as we are with all our many limitations and potentialities. What we may become is a function of our open meeting of each other and of the reconciling, empowering spirit of God active in such open meeting.

Such person to person meeting, by means of open forums, small group discussions, and one to one conversations needs to be accompanied

by the study of Biblical, historical, theological, and social scientific perspectives. Accurate information and informed opinion are important counterbalances to the fear and distortion, which have so often inhibited the Church's ability to respond appropriately.

Listening opens the door of hospitality, which has so long been firmly shut. Such words as ministry and hospitality, however, still suggest a relationship of inequality, we and they. As such they perpetuate the image of the Church as separate from the homosexual community. In fact, however, we believe that the Church should be as inclusive of homosexual persons as it is of heterosexual persons. In this light, all the normal avenues of inclusion should be available to homosexual persons.

Criteria for membership, for participation in church committees, choirs, education, vestries, etc. and for ordination should be no different for any given group. Some persons express fear that including homosexual persons in the full round of church life will influence others - especially children - to become homosexual. In fact, we know of no evidence or experience to confirm that such association can bring about a homosexual orientation.

Ideally, homosexual couples would find within the community of the congregation the same recognition and affirmation which nurtures and sustains heterosexual couples in their relationship, including, where appropriate, liturgies which recognize and bless such relationships.

#### V. Recommendations

Sexuality is an integral part of our God-given humanity. The Church must devote more attention to sexuality in its child, adolescent, and adult educational programming. As we understand more about the nature and meaning of our sexuality we will learn how to respond more appropriately to persons of many different circumstances.

Change in the Church's life is an ongoing process. We therefore urge education and discussion at all levels of diocesan life.

Specifically we recommend the following:

1. That all collegial groups such as the Commission on Ministry, the Newark Clergy Association, and all other regular commissions and committees of the diocese address these issues as they impact their areas of responsibility and concern.

2. That the March/April Clergy day, 1987, and the June, 1987 Religious Education Conference include sexuality among the issues to be considered.

3. That Congregations develop programs appropriate to their setting and circumstances which enable education and discussion regarding issues of sexuality and the Church's response to changing patterns of sexuality and family life. In addition to providing

structured educational programs, the Church should be a community where persons can discuss their experience and clarify their self-understanding relationships and courses of action. We would urge congregations to provide space and time, for example, for parent groups whose children are gay or lesbian and who want to discuss the implication of this for their own lives. Likewise, gay and lesbian couples may want to meet with each other or non-gays for support and friendship.

4. That Convocations support and perhaps sponsor such programs as suggested above.

5. That a group similar to this Task Force be established to facilitate discussion at the congregational level, to monitor the process, and to report to the Diocesan Convention of 1988, perhaps with recommendations or resolutions.

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