

INTRODUCTION

Background:

The R-5 Commission appointed by Bishop Lee in 2007 reported to Council in 2008 in the document Report of the R-5 Commission to the 213th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia. In the conclusion to the report it stated:

Recommendation as to Finding a Way Forward:

We, the members of the R-5 Commission, being mindful of our membership in the Anglican Communion, recommend that the 213th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia, building on the process of continued listening and discernment of a possible “emerging consensus” with regard to the permitting of “local option” for the blessing of same-gender unions, appoint a new commission to identify the practical steps necessary to provide for the pastoral care and spiritual support of same-gender couples in committed monogamous relationships.

We specifically recommend that:

1. An appointed Commission compile and make available theological, catechetical, and liturgical resources within the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion for the pastoral care and spiritual support of same-gender couples in committed relationships; and
2. The Commission design and execute four town hall meetings, in order to share resources for education and to establish a better sense of an “emerging consensus” pertaining to “local option” for the blessing of same-gender unions; and
3. The Commission be tasked to make a report of its findings and work to the 214th Annual Council, in time for further action to be taken in anticipation of the 76th General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2009.

This recommendation seeks to provide an ongoing commitment to discern ways of being generous and faithful in our common pastoral call, even as we acknowledge that we are not of one mind in this Diocese on the permissibility of “local option” in the blessing of same gender unions.

In response the Bishop of Virginia appointed The Windsor Dialogue Commission in February 2008 with the following charge:

- To encourage and continue a process of listening pastorally and prayerfully to all persons in the church concerned about the place of gay and lesbian members of the church, involving gay and lesbian persons themselves in that listening process;

- To seek to discern signs of an emerging consensus in the Diocese of Virginia regarding the issues identified in that listening process;
- To encourage and continue the commitment of the Diocese of Virginia to the processes recommended in the Windsor Report and to recommend ways the Diocese of Virginia may strengthen its support of and engagement with the wider Anglican Communion;
- To engage members of the Diocese of Virginia in educational and discernment events that will contribute to broader understanding and strengthened unity.

Membership of the Commission

Ms. Auguste Bannard

Mr. Frank Baxter

Ms. Mary Causey

The Rev. Susan N. Eaves *

The Rev. Sarah Kinney Gaventa

The Rev. Richard Lord *

The Very Rev. Ian Markham

The Rev. Robert Prichard

Ms. Jamie Roberson

The Rev. John Thomas Sheehan

Mr. Alexander Slaughter

* Co-chairs of the Commission

The Commission has met regularly throughout 2008 preparing work in sub-committees and bringing that preparation to the Commission as a whole for consideration, discussion, and resolution. The result has been this report provided to Council in January 2009. This report includes:

- A report on emerging consensus in the Diocese of Virginia
- The Windsor Dialogue Listening Process and recommendations for implementation
- Educational materials as resource for study
- A report on our compliance with Windsor
- Two possible liturgical responses

We move forward with two assumptions:

1. All baptized people are part of the Body of Christ and endowed with gifts valuable to the Church community; and
2. Part of the pastoral response to the gay and lesbian community is finding a way to recognize and honor monogamous commitments between two persons of the same gender and to call those couples to responsibility to each other, their communities of faith, and to God.

EMERGING CONSENSUS

The Windsor Dialogue Commission is engaged in the process of determining whether a consensus is emerging in the Diocese of Virginia to permit parishes to bless unions consisting of two persons of the same gender who have committed to a stable and permanent relationship.

In exploring the idea of consensus, we have found that the word has two definitions. The first denotes a general agreement on the question presented within a given group or community whose members have the independence to express views on the matter. The second is the adoption by the group or community of an agreed course of action even where there remain substantive differences with respect to the underlying question itself.

Furthermore, there is some confusion over the precise meaning of blessing. The entire Commission supports the obligation to prayer for all people; in addition there was agreement that it is appropriate for the Christian Community to pray for committed same-gendered couples.

The disagreement arises over the role of the priest in the act of blessing. The majority of the group believes that the time is right for same-gender unions to be blessed, albeit the liturgies should not be authorized. There are some in the group who would like to see authorized rites, although naturally this is beyond the scope of this group.

LISTENING PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION

1. The Commission will recommend twelve churches, representative of churches in the diocese, to participate in the listening process. These twelve churches will be paired (taking geography into account) with each other into six groups. The Commission's recommended groups can be found in Appendix Four: Suggested Churches for Listening Process.
2. The rectors will choose four people whose diversity is representative of their congregations, contact their partner church and help the group make arrangements to meet and use the process.
3. The groups report back to their respective churches and provide a written report to a body appointed by the Bishop. The report should include reflection on how the group experienced the process, any insights that were gained, especially those reflecting the development of new understandings. The report is to be filed **before Easter 2009**.
4. The body appointed by the Bishop will evaluate the reports and determine next steps.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about gay/lesbian Episcopalians, same-gender relationships, and the role of the Episcopal Church therewith, please consult the following resources:

A Church at War: Anglicans and Homosexuality, Updated Edition, Stephen Bates (editor), I. B. Tauris, 2006 (survey by liberal British religious writer of the church's struggle with social change —the ordination of women, the acknowledgment of high divorce rates—and exploration of how different Anglicans interpret the Bible and come to divergent conclusions about homosexuality)

The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible, and Authority Are Dividing the Faithful, Frank G. Kirkpatrick, Praeger Publishers, 2008 (discussion of church history and beliefs as a background for the complex issues affecting unity or division within today's Episcopal Church)

Equal Rites: Lesbian and Gay Worship, Ceremonies, and Celebrations, Kittredge Cherry (author) and Zalmon Sherwood (editor), Westminster John Knox Press, 1995 (collection of worship services, ceremonies, and celebrations attuned to sexual minorities)

Faith and Politics: How the "Moral Values" Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together, John Danforth, Viking Adult, 2006 (criticism of "Christian conservatives" by ordained Episcopal priest - who also is former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and former Republican U.S. Senator from Missouri - who urges political rivals to pull together to strengthen the United States, so the nation can in turn promote world peace)

For the Bible Tells Me So, First Run Features, 2007 (film and accompanying study guide that depicts experiences of five Christian, American families with gay children, including those of former House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt and Episcopal Bishop Gene Robinson)

Gays and the Future of Anglicanism: Responses to the Windsor Report, Andrew Linzey (editor), Richard Kirker (editor), O Books, 2005 (contributors offer different views as to what the Windsor Report means to the role of gay/lesbian people within the Anglican Communion)

The Homosexuality Debate: Faith Seeking Understanding, Catherine Sider Hamilton, ABC Publishing, 2003 (collection of essays from lay and clergy - including Archbishop Rowan Williams - exploring how we understand homosexuality, our faith, scripture, and the relationship between the church, our culture, and the world)

In the Eye of the Storm: Swept to the Center by God, Bishop V. Gene Robinson, Seabury Books, 2008 (autobiography of Bishop Robinson)

Issues Facing Christians Today, John R.W. Stott, John Wyatt, Zondervan, 2006 (appraisal of important current issues under the lens of biblically informed thinking)

Justice for Gays and Lesbians: Reclaiming Christian Fundamentals Crisis and Challenge in the Episcopal Church, Robert McCan, BookSurge Publishing, 2006 (clear and comprehensive coverage of the issues involved when individuals and congregations wrestle over inclusion of gays and lesbians in church and society)

Men and Women: Sexual Ethics in Turbulent Times, Ann Belford Ulanov, Barry Ulanov, Philip Tuner, Elizabeth Zarelli Turner, Victor Preller, Helen Oppenheimer, Cowley, 1989 (conservative Christian perspective on sexual ethics)

The Moral Vision of the New Testament, Richard B. Hays, Harper, 1996 (New Testament ethicist demonstrates how the New Testament provides moral guidance on ethical issues such as violence, divorce, homosexuality and abortion)

This Far by Grace: A Bishop's Journey Through Questions of Homosexuality, Bishop J. Neil Alexander, Cowley Publications, 2003 (examination of Scriptural passages that have been used to justify exclusion of gays, and reflections on Scripture, worship, prayer and service from an Episcopalian perspective)

Those 7 References: A Study of 7 References to Homosexuality in the Bible, John F. Dwyer, BookSurge Publishing, 2007 (summary exegesis of Biblical references commonly used to claim that God condemns homosexuality or homosexuals, or both, demonstrating author's opinion that such claims are misguided)

To Set Our Hope On Christ, <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHopeOnChrist.pdf> (Episcopal Church's response, solicited by the Windsor Commission, to clarify actions of the Church with regard to the selection of Bishop Robinson)

True Union in the Body?, paper commissioned by Archbishop Drexel Gomez, published privately and circulated at the Primates' Meeting in May 2003 (discussion of, among other things, the necessity to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care)

Two Sexes, One Flesh: Why the Church Cannot Bless Same-Sex Marriage, Stephen F. Noll, Latimer Press, 1997 (argument that the Episcopal Church does not have authority to revise marriage rite or devise quasi-marital sacramental rite for same-sex couples)

A Wholesome Example: Sexual Morality and the Episcopal Church, Robert W. Prichard, (editor), Bristol Books, 1993 (substantive guidance and examination of what constitutes proper sexual conduct in the context of traditional Christian standards)

LITURGICAL OPTIONS

In discussion with Bishop Peter James Lee, the Windsor Dialogue Commission was invited to develop liturgical resources in making a pastoral response to the gay and lesbian community. Gay and lesbian Christians seek full inclusion in church life. While we are limited by the moratorium from offering a Blessing of Same Sex Unions, we did want to offer liturgical resources that would recognize couples in committed relationships. Three liturgies were developed and are attached to the end of this report.

The first and second liturgical resources, “A Eucharist in Thanksgiving for a Committed Relationship I and II” are both Eucharist services with readings and Prayers of the People specially chosen to celebrate the committed relationship of same gendered couples. The *Book of Common Prayer* allows for the use of concrete signs and physical actions in specialized forms of the Prayers of the People. The laying of hands accompanies, for example, the prayers for the Ministry to the Sick, and gifts are given to clergy in the prayers for the Celebration of a New Ministry. We believe that at the point in which a statement of commitment is made, there is flexibility for an exchange of gifts, such as rings, or for physical actions, such as the laying on of hands.

These liturgies give opportunities for these committed relationships to be acknowledged and celebrated within the couple’s church community, giving gay and lesbian couples the opportunity to have their loving relationships affirmed and legitimized.

While preparing these liturgies, the committee came to realize that pastoral liturgies in the Book of Common Prayer were very marriage-centered. While not directly related to same gendered committed relationships, the commission thought it would be helpful to expand the conversation around liturgies to include friendships. “A Celebration of Friendship” is a liturgy intended for use to celebrate all of the many friendships that life offers and to acknowledge that friendships can be deeply meaningful gifts from God.

All three liturgies can be found as appendices to this report.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE WINDSOR REPORT

1. The Bishop of Virginia's charge to the Windsor Dialogue Commission in February 2008 included two foci: (a) process of listening and education; and (b) an effort "to encourage and continue the commitment of the Diocese of Virginia to the processes recommended in the Windsor Report and to recommend ways the Diocese of Virginia may strengthen its support of and engagement with the wider Anglican Communion." It was hoped that these two efforts might together lead to "broader understanding and strengthened unity" and assist in the discernment of "an emerging consensus in the Diocese regarding issues identified in [the] listening process."
2. We understand the "processes recommended in the Windsor Report" to include the following four elements:
 - The continuation of the three moratoria—i.e. "The complete cessation of (a) the celebration of blessings for same-sex unions, (b) consecration of those living in open gay relationships, and (c) all cross border interventions and inter-provincial claims of jurisdiction."¹
 - The Continuation of the listening process called for in 1998 Lambeth 1.10.
 - The development of an Anglican Covenant, the most recent (but not final) draft of which is the "St. Andrew's Draft," created at a meeting in St. Andrew's House, London in late January and early February 2008.²
 - "The duty of pastoral care that is laid upon all Christians to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations. As recognized in the booklet *True Union*, it is necessary to maintain a breath of private response to situations of individual pastoral care."³
3. We understand that the bishops at the recent Lambeth Conference considered a variety of issues related to the Windsor Report but did not take any legislative actions related to it. Nevertheless, we note that a number of interesting ideas were shared at the conference. Among them were the following:

¹ Anglican Communion News Service, "Windsor Continuation Group-Preliminary Observations to the Lambeth Conference (Parts 1, 2, 3), 28 July 2008. <http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/28/ACNS4480>. In keeping with the general attempt to avoid legislative actions, the members of the Windsor Continuation Group offered "Preliminary Observations" at Lambeth rather than an official report. The statement was, nevertheless, an extremely helpful statement of the thinking of members of the group. We have cited their restatement of the meaning of the three moratoria.

² "An Anglican Covenant—St. Andrew's Communiqué," http://www.aco.org/commission/covenant/st_andrews/communique.cfm.

³ Anglican Communion Primates' Pastoral Letter of May 2003 quoted in the Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004), ¶143. See also Peter Walker and Andrew Goddard, *True Union in the Body?* (Bramcore, Notts, Grove Books, 2003).

- The preliminary observation of the Windsor Continuation Group that “there are real fears of a wider agenda—over creedal issues (the authority of scripture, the application of doctrine in life and ethics and even Christology and soteriology) and polity (comprehensiveness, autonomy and synodical government).”⁴
- The call of the same body for “the swift formation of a ‘Pastoral Forum’ at Communion level to engage theologically and practically with situations of controversy as they arise or divisive actions that may be taken around the Communion.” The Windsor Continuation Group understands such a body to draw “upon proposals for a Council of Advice (Windsor), a Panel of Reference (Dromantine), a Pastoral council (Dar es Salaam) and the Episcopal Church’s House of Bishops’ Statement (Sept 2007) acknowledging a ‘useful role for communion wide consultation with respect to the pastoral needs of those seeking alternative oversight.’”⁵ The Archbishop of Canterbury endorsed the idea of a Pastoral Forum in his closing address to the Lambeth Conference and indicated that he will “look within the next two months for a clear and detailed specification for the task and composition of a Pastoral Forum.”⁶
- The recommendation of the Windsor Continuation Group that this “Pastoral forum develop a scheme in which existing ad hoc jurisdictions could be held ‘in trust in preparation for their reconciliation within their proper Provinces.’” The continuation group went on to explain that “such a scheme might draw on models derived from religious life (the relationship of religious orders to the wider Church), family life (the way in which the extended family can care for children in dysfunctional nuclear families) or from law (where escrow accounts can be created to hold monies in trust for their rightful owner on completion of certain undertakings). Ways of halting litigation must be explored, and perhaps the escrow concept could even be extended to have some applicability here.”
- The *Lambeth Indaba Reflections*’ observation that “there were many positive responses to the idea of a Covenant” and “an overall willingness to enter a Covenant, particularly to help us in the present crisis,” that “the covenant could provide historical continuity with the past, creativity in the present and lead us into the future” and “may help heal present wounds and prevent new ones.” The *Reflections* noted further that “there was a general satisfaction with the first half of the main text of the St. Andrew’s Draft, but there were real concerns with section 3 and even greater concern about the appendix.”⁷

⁴ Anglican Communion News Service, “Windsor Continuation Group-Preliminary Observations to the Lambeth Conference (Parts 1, 2, 3), 28 July 2008. <http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/28/ACNS4480>

⁵ “Windsor Continuation Group-Preliminary Observations to the Lambeth Conference (Parts 1, 2, 3), *Lambeth Daily* (28 July 2008), <http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/7/28/ACNS4480>

⁶ Rowan Williams, “Concluding Presidential Address to the Lambeth Conference 2008,” *Lambeth Daily* (3 August 2008) <<http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/8/3/ACNS4511>>

⁷ “Lambeth Indaba Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008 Equipping Bishops for Mission and Strengthening Anglican Identity,” *Lambeth Daily* (3 August 2008), 18 <<http://www.lambethconference.org/daily/news.cfm/2008/8/3/ACNS4510>>. The 2008 Lambeth Conference was organized around a South African pattern of meeting in *indaba* (discussion) groups, rather than in legislative sessions. Reports on the insights of the individual groups were collected and collated.

- The Archbishop of Canterbury’s declaration in his closing address that “a Covenant is needed.” He referred to three meetings in the coming year as playing a role in the development of that covenant: “a Primates’ Meeting as early as possible in 2009”; a meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in May; and “special meeting in November of the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the ACC.”⁸
- He has also indicated his belief that “it will be important to invite those absent from Lambeth to be involved in these next stages. Much in the GAFCON [The Global Anglican Future Conference] documents is consonant with much of what we have sought to say and do, and we need to look for the best ways of building bridges here.”⁹

4. Implications for the Diocese of Virginia:

- Since the issuing of the Windsor Report (2004), the Diocese of Virginia has observed the three moratoria. We recognize that to continue to do so will be painful and difficult for some members of the Diocese. Yet we urge that we continue to do so, understanding that action to be in conformity with the charge from the Bishop, the statements of the 2006 General Convention, and the urging of the four instruments of communion of the Anglican Communion.¹⁰
- We urge individuals and parishes within the Diocese to study the St. Andrew’s draft of the Anglican Covenant and to study and comment upon the further revised draft of the covenant anticipated in March 2009.
- We commend further exploration of the “in trust” concept that has been suggested by the Covenant Design Group as a means of retaining some contact with ad hoc jurisdictions that have separated themselves from the Episcopal Church.
- We believe that it would be appropriate for the Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia to reaffirm our continuing intention to remain an active part of both the (Protestant) Episcopal Church (in the United States of America) and of the Anglican Communion.
- We believe it would be appropriate for the Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia to reaffirm our belief that, to quote the Windsor Report, “the duty of pastoral care . . . is laid upon all Christians to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations.”¹¹

⁸ Williams, [“Concluding Presidential Address.”](#)

⁹ The GAFCON conference was held in Jerusalem in June 2008 and attended by 291 Anglican bishops many of whom did not attend the Lambeth Conference.

¹⁰ Contemporary Anglicans recognize four instruments of communion (or union): the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council.

¹¹ Anglican Communion Primates’ Pastoral Letter of May 2003 quoted in the Lambeth Commission on Communion, *The Windsor Report* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2004), ¶143.

APPENDIX ONE: WINDSOR DIALOG LISTENING PROCESS

Windsor Dialog Listening Process Structure

Proposal A six week Program of once weekly two hour sessions for no more than 8 individuals representing the spectrum of the congregation

Goal To offer a listening process that enables mutual understanding

Method Each session is led by a trained facilitator who will:

- Facilitate conversation as a spiritual exercise
- Set boundaries for the group, including confidentiality
- Explain the objective
- Create safe space
- Encourage “I statements”

Each session will share a similar structure:

- Prayer
- Icebreaker
- Sharing time
- Bible Study (based on a reflective model)
- Prayer

Windsor Dialog Listening Process

Session I. My own faith story

Introduction: (10 minutes)

Facilitator script:

I want to thank you for taking the time to participate in these conversations. It can be quite difficult to sit in a group and take the risk of sharing thoughts and ideas that are very special to you and which may be different from the thoughts and ideas of the others in the group. Never the less, it is through sincere sharing that we discover not only how to love and care about each other but how we ourselves are also loved.

For this reason these conversations will be a process that will evolve over the six weeks of our time together. Through this process we will share the story of our own faith, our experience of the church, how we arrived at our own understanding of issues of human sexuality, our personal encounters with inclusion and exclusion, and our hopes for the future as a person of faith. It is my hope that this will be an enriching and deepening experience for everyone who participates.

Our objective is not to change each others' minds or prove we are right but to attempt to truly understand the person to whom we are listening. In order for us to be able to speak with honesty it will be important that this time and place be experienced as safe for all who are here.

It will help us to follow some simple guidelines: (post at every session)

1. Everything said in this room stays in this room;
2. We will own what we say by using "I" statements (give examples);
3. We will be careful and kind in the way we use our words; we are here to dialog not debate;
4. We will commit to be present for every session or reschedule to make that possible;
5. We will start on time and end of time; come at the beginning and stay to the end.

Above all, this is holy work. Any time we ask a person to share their spiritual life we are walking on sacred ground. We are asking the Holy Spirit to be present in our conversation and in our actions. We are not debating. We are listening for the voice of God expressed in the lives and stories of the people in this room. We will pray at the beginning and at the end of our time together and pray for each other in weeks to come.

Please feel free to ask any questions or clarify anything you have not understood so far.

Then let us begin.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Human Family BCP p. 815

Icebreaker: (20 minutes)

Take a moment to introduce yourself by name, tell of your earliest memory of church and how it has affected your journey of faith.

Ask: What are your hopes and fears for being a part of this process?

Sharing time: (45 minutes)

The facilitator draws a horizontal line on a flip chart or something similar and marks off the appropriate number of decades in his/her life.

Paper and pens are distributed to the group. Each member draws similar diagrams.

The facilitator instructs the group to respond to the question: "In what way has your faith developed and influenced your life?"

Explain that the participants should reflect on each of the decades of their life and consider what memories, events, or experiences formed their faith during those years and make notes on the chart. These notes do not have to be shared. Identify several memories, events, or experiences which influenced choices or decisions. You can remain in your seats or find a comfortable quiet place on your own. (20 minutes)

The group is reconvened and members are invited to share their story.

The facilitator thanks the members of the group for sharing.

Bible Study: Luke 19:1-7 Zacchaeus. (30 minutes)

See Attachment 1 (based on a reflective model of Bible study – see Attachment 7)

As part of the Bible study connections can be made with the movements that occur in the life of faith.

A final question to consider: As we think about our own journey of faith and those in scripture what do I take away with me?

Closing:

Facilitator thanks the group for their participation, invites the group to pray for each other during the coming week and to join in the final prayer.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is

in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

A Prayer attributed to St. Francis BCP p. 833

Session 2: How I experience my church

The facilitator welcomes the group and reviews the previous session to provide connection between past and present sessions.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

God our Creator,
when you speak there is light and life,
when you act there is justice and love;
grant that your love may be present in our meeting,
so that what we say and what we do may be filled with your
Holy Spirit.

A New Zealand Prayer Book p. 141

Ice Breaker:

Invite everyone to name the church to which they belong, how long they have been there and why they chose it.

Sharing Time:

The facilitator invites group to share their personal experience of church through the following questions:

Why do you stay in the church?

What feeds your faith in this church?

What was your first responsibility in this church?

How has your role in the church changed?

How has your perception of yourself in the church changed?

Would you consider changing or leaving the church and why?

In times of joy or sorrow, where do you seek communion?

Bible Study: Psalm 84 (30 minutes)

“How lovely is thy dwelling place.” See Attachment 2 (based on a reflective model of Bible study – see Attachment 7)

Closing:

The facilitator thanks the group for their participation and invites the group to pray for each other during the coming week and to join in the final prayer.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

BCP p. 256-257

Session 3: My experiences of inclusion and exclusion

The facilitator welcomes the group and reviews previous sessions to provide connection between past and present sessions.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

O God, fountain of love, pour thy love into our souls, that we may love those whom thou lovest with the love thou givest us, and think and speak with the love thou givest us, and think and speak of them tenderly, meekly, lovingly; and so loving our brethren and sisters for thy sake, may grow in thy love, and dwelling in thy love may dwell in thee, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Edward Bouverie Pusey, 1800-82

Icebreaker:

Facilitator: Two truths and a lie. Each member of the group is to tell three things about themselves. The group has to sort out which of the three items is not true.

Sharing time:

Facilitator: Everyone is invited to think about various stages of their lives: family life, elementary school, junior high, high school, college, dating, working, marriage, parenthood and list times when you felt very included in those worlds and other times when you felt excluded. We will be sharing our reflections on these experiences.

Silence (3 minutes)

Members of the group share.

Facilitator: Let us reflect on your experience of church. How have your feelings of inclusion and exclusion effected your church participation and share an example? What part of church life do you feel included in? Excluded? Has that changed depending on where you are in your life? Are there times you chose not to attend church regularly? Why or why not?

Silence (3 minutes)

Again, the group shares their experiences.

Bible Study: Acts 10:1-20 Peter and Cornelius

See Attachment 3 (based on a reflective model of Bible study –see Attachment 7)

Note: The facilitator should encourage connections between Cornelius's experiences and the members of the group. What would have inclusion felt like for you?

Closing:

Facilitator: Let us take the opportunity to offer prayers that have emerged from our conversation. Let us pray.

Silence

Group offers prayers together closing with the Lord's Prayer.

Session 4: How I arrived at the place I am around issues of sexuality

The facilitator welcomes group and reviews previous sessions to provide connection between past and present sessions.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

God, you are working still,
breaking down and building up;
open our eyes to discern your hands
so that we may take our place
as laborers together with you.

A New Zealand Prayer Book p.617

Ice Breaker:

Facilitator: Our conversation may be a little more sensitive today as we begin to share our thinking on what is, for many, a difficult subject as we talk about sexuality. It is important we care for each other in this process so we can trust that confidentiality and the dignity of the members of the group will be respected.

Is there anything from our previous session that you carried with you during the week?

But let's break the ice first! How did you first get your sex education? Given what you learned then, how does it impact what you know now?

Sharing Time:

Facilitator: Spend some time defining your place around the issue of human sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular. Your thoughts do not have to be shared but I will allow some time for individuals in the group to do so if they choose.

silence

Discussion questions:

What previous conversations or dialogues have you been involved in around issues of sexuality?
Where do you experience joy in your experience of human sexual relationships? Where do you experience confusion concerning human sexual relationships?

When/how did you become aware of homosexuality?

Has your understanding changed since then? If so, how?

If so, what precipitated those changes?

If not, what solidified those changes?

What are the connections for you between your view of homosexuality and other aspects of your life?

Bible Study Genesis 1:26-31

See Attachment 4 (based on a reflective model of Bible study –see Attachment 7)

Closing:

The facilitator thanks the group for their participation and invites the group to pray for each other during the coming week and to join in the final prayer.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

Creator God

You have made us

not in one mould, but in many:

so deepen our unity in Christ

that we may rejoice in our diversity. Amen.

A New Zealand Prayer Book p. 615

Session 5: My hope for the future as a person of faith

The facilitator welcomes the group and reviews previous sessions to provide connection between past and present sessions.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

BCP p.816

Icebreaker:

The facilitator invites each member of the group to share something you learned from the last session that you have carried with you during the past week. How has this effected your view of what is happening in the church now?

Sharing Time:

Facilitator: Sometimes we are so concerned about details and issues that we can lose sight of our own faith and even our hopes and dreams for the church. We have spent rich time sharing the stories of our faith and of our own congregations. Today we are going to spend some time dreaming on behalf of the church. We are going to look up from what concerns us and reflect on what we hope for. As Paul writes in the letter to the Ephesians, “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations.”

Discuss:

What would your church look like if it was “right”? Name three things needed to make it happen.

What would have to be included?

What would you want to protect? What would need to be let go?

How does your vision for your congregation relate to the diocese? the wider church?

How can you contribute to that vision?

Bible Study: Matthew 15: 29-37, The Feeding of the Four Thousand

See Attachment 5 (based on a reflective model of Bible study –see Attachment 7)

Closing:

The facilitator thanks the group for their participation and invites the group to pray for each other during the coming week and to join in the final prayer.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son. Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Session 6: Reflection on my experience as a member of this group

The facilitator welcomes the group and reviews previous sessions to provide connections between past and present sessions.

Facilitator: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Facilitator: Let us pray.

silence

Grant us to recognize in others, Lord God, the radiance of your own face. Amen.
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, 1881-1955

Icebreaker:

Each shares one learning they have experienced as a member of this group.

Sharing Time:

Facilitator leads discussion using the following questions:

How did your experience in this group match with the hopes and fears you named in the first session?

Did your experience match with that hope and fear?

In what ways did you feel heard or not heard in this group?

Share a particular story or experience that was shared?

What would you like to learn more about? Has anything you've learned here influenced your beliefs?

Have any of our Bible studies stayed with you over the last few weeks?

What do you hope for yourself and for other members of the group?

Bible Study: Acts 2:1-13, Disciples gathered in the upper room

See Attachment 6 (based on a reflective model of Bible study –see attachment 7)

Closing:

Facilitator: Let us take the opportunity to offer prayers of thanksgiving that have emerged from our conversation. Let us pray.

Group offers prayers together closing with the Lord's Prayer.

Attachment 1

Luke 19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2 A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. 3 He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5 When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' 6 So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7 All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.'

Attachment 2

Psalm 84: 1 How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! 2 My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. 3 Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. 4 Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise. 5 Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion. 6 As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools. 7 They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion. 8 O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob! 9 Behold our shield, O God; look on the face of your anointed. 10 For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live in the tents of wickedness. 11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly. 12 O Lord of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.

Attachment 3

Acts 10: 1 In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. 2 He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. 3 One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, 'Cornelius.' 4 He stared at him in terror and said, 'What is it, Lord?' He answered, 'Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; 6 he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.' 7 When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, 8 and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa. 9 About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' 14 But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' 16 This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. 17 Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. 18 They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. 19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, 'Look, three men are searching for you. 20 Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.'

Attachment 4

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' 29 God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Attachment 5

Matthew 15: 29 After Jesus had left that place, he passed along the Sea of Galilee, and he went up the mountain, where he sat down. 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the mute, and many others. They put them at his feet, and he cured them, 31 so that the crowd was amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel. Feeding the Four Thousand 32 Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way.' 33 The disciples said to him, 'Where are we to get enough bread in the desert to feed so great a crowd?' 34 Jesus asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven, and a few small fish.' 35 Then ordering the crowd to sit down on the ground, 36 he took the seven loaves and the fish; and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. 37 And all of them ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.

Attachment 6

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' 13 But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Attachment 7

A Model for Reflection Adapted from the African Model for Reflection

1. The facilitator invites a group member to read the scripture slowly out loud and has the group listen to identify a word or phrase that catches their attention.

one minute of silence

2. The facilitator invites everyone to share the word or phrase that touched them.
3. Another member of the group is invited to read the scripture again and the facilitator tells the group there will be three to five minutes of silence to sit with the text reflecting on what it is the scripture is offering to us on this day. Individuals may choose to stay with their original word or phrase or select a fresh one.

three minutes of silence

4. The facilitator invites everyone to share their reflections beginning with “I am/feel/think ...” Do not try to teach it to others. Do not discuss. Do not try to solve problems. Share your own experience.
5. A third person is invited to read the scripture again and the facilitator invites the group to reflect on how this scripture speaks to the subject of today’s session and asks them to be prepared to share what each will take away with them from this study.

three minutes of silence

6. The facilitator invites everyone to share their reflections and to be as concrete and specific as possible.

APPENDIX TWO: LITURGY – IN THANKSGIVING FOR A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

The Holy Eucharist Rite Two In Thanksgiving for a Committed Relationship I

“Of the six forms provided (BCP pp. 383-393), none are required. Any of them may be used or adapted to the occasion. They may also be replaced by other forms. All that is required is that the topics listed at the top of page 383 be included in the prayers” (Enriching Our Worship, 54).

This collect, suggested readings, and prayers of the people are intended to be used with the Book of Common Prayer's Rite II Eucharist.

The Collect of the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, especially *N.* and *N.*, that in their lives and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Suggested readings are:

Ruth 1:16-17

1 Samuel 18 1, 3; 19:1b; 20:16-17, 41-42

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Colossians 3:12-17

Suggested readings from the Gospel are:

John 15:9-12

Matthew 5:13-16

Prayers of the People

The couple desiring to make a statement of commitment comes forward at the invitation of the celebrant. Standing before the congregation, the two persons read a prayer or prayers asking for God's grace and committing themselves to support and care for one another.

It is essential that the persons seeking to make the statement of commitment prepare their petitions in advance, in consultation with the celebrant. Their prayers may be read jointly or alternatively, and be in the form either of a single petition or a series of versicles and responses. The prayers should include a request for God's grace and assistance.

Let us pray for *N.* and *N.* who come before this community today to give thanks for the grace of companionship and to make a covenant to live together in faithfulness and love.

Grant, O Lord, that *N.* and *N.* be sheltered under your wing, welcomed as your own flock, and serve the Church together to your glory.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Bestow on *N.* and *N.* the grace to be faithful to each other for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health that they might love and cherish each other until they are parted by death.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Grant them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Make their home a place of refuge for those in fear, a place of hospitality for those in need, and a place of renewal for those who are weary.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

May their lives together be lives of service and prayer for their neighbors, their nation, and the world that their ministry may be a sign of God's mercy in this troubled world.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for those who have died in hope of the resurrection, [including _____ who were loved by *N.* and *N.*] May we share with all your saints in the eternal kingdom.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be

done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and forever.

Amen.

Before the exchange of the Peace, members of the congregation may come forward and lay hands upon the couple. The service continues with the exchanging of the Peace.

At the Offertory, it is appropriate that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by the couple that has made the statement of commitment.

The Holy Eucharist Rite Two

In Thanksgiving for a Committed Relationship II

“Of the six forms provided (BCP pp. 383-393), none are required. Any of them may be used or adapted to the occasion. They may also be replaced by other forms. All that is required is that the topics listed at the top of page 383 be included in the prayers” (Enriching Our Worship, 54).

The following form is provided for congregations that wish to include prayers for a same-sex couple among the Prayers of the People at the Eucharist. It is based on Form VI of the Prayer of the people, Prayers and Thanksgivings (BCP pp. 810-41), and the Form of Commitment to Christian Service (BCP pp. 420-21). It may be further adapted.

The Leader and People pray responsively.

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence

For all people in their daily life and work;
For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.

For this community, the nation, and the world;
For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.

For the just and proper use of your creation;
For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.

For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;
For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God;
For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.

For all bishops and other ministers;
For all who serve God in his Church.

For those who have died;
For the grace to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of your heavenly kingdom.

For the special needs and concerns of this congregation;
For this couple that comes before us this day.

For all the blessings of this life;
For family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side.

The couple desiring to make a statement of commitment comes forward at the invitation of the celebrant. Standing before the congregation, the two persons read a prayer or prayers asking for God's grace and committing themselves to support and care for one another.

It is essential that the persons seeking to make the statement of commitment prepare their petitions in advance, in consultation with the celebrant. Their prayers may be read jointly or alternatively, and be in the form either of a single petition or a series of versicles and responses. The prayers should include a request for God's grace and assistance.

At the conclusion of the prayers the celebrant says the following prayer:

For those we Love

Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The following prayer may also be added:

For the Human Family

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Peace

The celebrant may then say to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

At the Offertory, it is appropriate that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by the couple that has made the statement of commitment.

APPENDIX THREE: LITURGY – FRIENDSHIP

Rationale

It is widely recognized that the concept of the individual is not found in Scripture. Instead, the witness of Scripture locates us as a people in community, within a nation, and as part of the family of God. A central Biblical theme is the rich web of relationships that mould our life. This web consists not only of a spouse, parents or children, but also of friends.

In the church, we have come to honor parts of this web of relationships. More and more Mother's Day and Father's Day are becoming liturgical events as well as cultural ones. However, there is no place in the church to honor non-familial relationships. We need to recognize the importance of friends in our lives in a liturgical manner, as well. For certain groups, this liturgical recognition would be much appreciated: the teenager who is aware of how important his or her friends are, the widower who is heavily dependent on certain special friends, the single person (who would love to be married, but hasn't yet found anyone) who lives for friends, and yes, this might be appreciated by the gay couple as well.

The purpose of the liturgy that follows is to invite all those who wish to celebrate friendship to participate. This can include the teenage group of girls, the married couple who are proud to see each other as 'best friends', as well as those who are single and want to celebrate their circle of friends. Friends celebrating this liturgy can do it in pairs or in larger groups.

In much the same way that a healing service does not require everyone to participate, so not everyone in the congregation is required to participate fully in this liturgy. However, those who would like to are invited to stand at the appropriate point in the liturgy and participate in this celebration and recognition of friendship.

The goal is to celebrate friendship and locate the gift of friendship as a gift from God. In so doing it supports community; it serves certain liturgically neglected groups (the single, the teenager, and the very old); and it recovers a major Biblical theme.

Friendship Liturgy

Opening Sentences

John 15: 12-17

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Opening Hymn:

H1982 576 or 577

Collect

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Loving God, living in relationship with others is the gift of being. From the day we are born to the day we die, you desire that we live in community and be shaped by others. As we learn to receive love from others, so we learn to give love. On this day, we celebrate the reality of love found in friendship. We do so recognizing that all love is a recognition of the intimacy enjoyed at the heart of the divine life; therefore we come into your presence through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings:

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." 17 "Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

1 Samuel 18 1, 3; 19:1b; 20:16-17, 41-42

Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David. 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies." 17 Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life. 41 When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David wept the more. 42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.

Affirmation of Friendships

Those affirming friendships are invited to stand.

The celebrant says:

Living in community is a gift from God. We learn understanding, how to give and receive love, and the power of forgiveness and grace. Our Scriptures celebrate friendship within community. Throughout scripture, we see friendship as an integral part of God's action in community. We experience the friendships of Elijah and Elisha, Ruth and Naomi, Jonathan and David and even our Lord Jesus Christ extended himself in friendship to Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Today we celebrate and commit ourselves to the challenge of being true friends.

Do you recognize in your friendship the gift of the love made possible through the Triune God?

People: We do.

Celebrant: Do you recognize the obligations of friendship – the willingness to be present for each other, to weep when things are difficult, to celebrate in moments of joy?

People: We do.

Celebrant: Do you repent of those moments when we failed to be a true friend – those moments when a candid word was needed, when the needs of the friend went unrecognized, and when a moment of joy was not fully appreciated?

People: We do.

Celebrant: Do you recommit to the friendship – to enjoy each other, to build on a shared past, and to ground your friendship in the love of Christ?

People: We do.

Celebrant: May the God of love and friendship, bless your friendship in the light of this moment of celebration and recommitment. And the blessing of God Almighty, be upon you and remain with you, always. Amen.

APPENDIX FOUR: SUGGESTED CHURCHES FOR LISTENING PROCESS

Per Bishop Lee's request, the committee has made suggested pairings of churches in the Diocese that might be good candidates for the listening process. Churches were chosen to be diverse in size, location, theology, and ethnic make-up.

Preferred:

San Marcos, Alexandria — Christ Church, Alexandria
St. Anne's Reston — Good Shepherd, Burke
All Saints, Richmond — St. Mark's, Richmond
Calvary Church, Front Royal — St. Leeds, Markham
St. Peter's, Purcellville — Christ Church, Winchester
St. Paul's Memorial, Charlottesville — St. John the Baptist, Ivy

Further suggestions:

St. Mary's, Arlington — St. Timothy's, Herndon
St. Paul's, Richmond — St. James the Less, Ashland
Christ Church, Glen Allen — Grace Church, Goochland
COOS, Charlottesville — St. Thomas, Orange