



# To Set Our Hope on Christ

A Response to the Invitation  
of *Windsor Report* ¶135



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# FOREWORD

## From the Presiding Bishop

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” (1 Peter 1:3).

It is truly by the grace of Christ’s resurrection that the church lives, and in that “living hope” we find our common calling as members of Christ’s body throughout the world.

The Episcopal Church in the United States welcomes the request made in paragraph 135 of the Windsor Report: “We particularly request a contribution from the Episcopal Church (USA) which explains, from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, how a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ.”

The Episcopal Church has been seeking to answer this question for nearly 40 years and at the same time has been addressing a more fundamental question, namely: how can the holiness and faithfulness to which God calls us all be made manifest in human intimacy?

Though we have not reached a common mind we have come to a place in our discussion such that the clergy and people of a diocese have been able, after prayer and much discernment, to call a man living in a same sex relationship to be their bishop. As well, a majority of the representatives of the wider church—bishops, clergy and lay persons—have felt guided by the Holy Spirit, again in light of prayer and discernment, to consent to the election and consecration.

I have asked a group of theologians to reflect upon the question posed to the Episcopal Church in the Windsor Report. I am grateful

to the following persons who prepared this report. The Rev. Dr. Michael Battle of the Virginia Theological Seminary; the Rev. Dr. Katherine Grieb of the Virginia Theological Seminary; the Rev. Dr. Jay Johnson of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley; the Rev. Dr. Mark McIntosh of Loyola University Chicago; the Rt. Rev. Catherine Roskam, Bishop Suffragan of New York; Dr. Timothy Sedgwick of the Virginia Theological Seminary; Dr. Kathryn Tanner of the University of Chicago Divinity School. I am grateful as well to Dr. Pamela W. Darling for the preparation of the Appendix which delineates the formal contents of the debate over these last four decades.

The fruit of their efforts is set forth on these pages. As this paper is an explanation of how this action could have been taken by faithful people it makes the positive case. It does not attempt to give all sides of an argument or to model a debate. It is important to note that the paper does not attempt to replicate or summarize the conversations that have taken place in the church over nearly 40 years. The Appendix does describe these efforts.

The Windsor Report notes that this submission “will have an important contribution to make to the ongoing discussion.” We are grateful for the opportunity to make that contribution and offer this paper in a spirit of humility and in the interest of strengthening our bonds of mutual affection.

In the Gospel of John Jesus tells his disciples: “I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:12-14). It is my hope that the life we share in the gospel will be guided by the Spirit of truth, who works among us new understandings drawn from the immeasurable riches of Christ who is our Truth.

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church, USA

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## “To Set Our Hope on Christ”:

### A Response to the Invitation of *Windsor Report* ¶135

#### Part I: Introduction

- [1.0] Greetings from your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, members of his Body in the Episcopal Church. We give thanks to God, and rejoice with you all, for the immeasurable love of God poured out for us in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. Therefore we entirely desire, in unity with you, “to set our hope on Christ,” so that with you we “might live for the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:12) and so serve the Gospel throughout the world. Setting our hope on Christ, and praising his glorious power to proclaim peace to those who are far off and peace to those who are near, we entrust our words to God’s mercy, praying that under the sovereignty of Christ they may be fruitful in building up the Church in love.
- [1.1] We set our hope on Christ because we know how weak and fallible we are as your fellow servants. We set our hope on Christ because his Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, as into yours, “helps us in our weakness,” and persuades us that, together with you, nothing will be able “to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:26, 39). It is in this hope that we offer you this explanation “from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, [of] how a person living in a same-gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ” (*Windsor Report* ¶135). We welcome and are grateful for this invitation, sharing in this particular way in our Communion’s listening process, commended by the Lambeth Conference of 1998.
- [1.2] Our response to this invitation can, of course, only be a small part in the larger process of listening throughout the Anglican Communion; and even what we can report in this



essay barely begins to convey the conversation on same-sex relationships within the Episcopal Church over nearly forty years. We pray that, at the least, this explanation may foster a continuing desire for the whole people of God to walk together in the Anglican Communion, listening to all, especially to those who have often been unheard. Above all, we desire with you to place our whole trust in God the Holy Spirit to take what is truly of Christ and declare it to us (John 16:14).

- [1.3] In this process of listening together, we are aware that humility is particularly required of us who speak from Western contexts. For centuries we have been more ready to speak than to hear, and to speak in ways that are defined primarily by white, European and North American peoples. By contrast, the universal lordship of Christ calls us beyond our borders and cultures to a mutuality of knowledge between the northern and southern hemispheres. We desire to hear and learn the theological wisdom of Anglicans from around the globe, even as we wish to participate with all our brothers and sisters in sharing what we have received. Perhaps mutual humility is an essential virtue for the entire Anglican Communion, both to create a way forward and to provide mutual understanding. We pray that God the Holy Spirit may grant us all a blessed share in the humility of our Lord who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).
- [1.4] Setting our hope on Christ and praying for his humility, we desire to converse with you about the difficult but wonderful blessing that the Lord has opened our eyes to see in our very midst: the gifts and fruit of the Spirit (Romans 12:6-6, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Galatians 5:22-23) in the lives and ministries of our members of same-sex affection. We know that what we say may seem surprising or unsettling to some of you who read this essay. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the Anglican Communion, we can scarcely begin to express our gratitude to God for permitting us to share fellowship with you over the many years of our life together, and we earnestly desire to walk

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in communion with you into God's future. We would never willingly grieve or hurt you in any way. We wish only to describe something of what—through much perplexity and faithful struggle to serve the Good News of God in Christ—we have come to believe that God has been doing among us.

- [1.5] We also derive hope and seek counsel from the teaching of the Apostle Paul to churches in conflict. In Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, addressing early Christian communities that were in serious disagreement about major issues, St. Paul spends his time and energy working for Church unity across the lines of division. He does this in several ways: He invites those who over-simplify the issues to focus instead on the needs of the neighbor whom God welcomes (Rom 14:3), whom Christ welcomes (15:7), and for whom Christ died (1 Cor 8:11). Thinking of those with whom we may disagree as those for whom Christ also died changes the climate in which the discussion is held. Paul argues in Romans 14-15 that the conflicted churches are to welcome one another—but not for quarreling. Instead, they are to see, each in the other, those whom God has welcomed and therefore whom they should welcome. Jesus was open to the outcast as well as the respectable, seeking always to restore unity among them (“go show yourself to the priest” (Matthew 8:4). For Peter and the rest of the disciples who would soon deny and abandon him, Jesus utters the profound “high priestly” prayer, “may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me.” (John 17:21). Given such acts of compassion, generosity and availability on the part of our Lord, how much more should we continue in *koinonia* and hospitality with those with whom we disagree.
- [1.6] We pray that this contribution to our Communion-wide listening process may be fruitful for God's mission. The world, beset by terrible anger, division, and famine, is in great need of our Savior's healing and reconciling power. Many of you know this in far more costly and personal ways than do we—and indeed suffer through it in a powerful witness to the Gospel. We pray that whatever

differences there are in our Anglican Communion may never be overtaken by the anger and divisiveness of this world. We are not a Communion in agreement on all matters, yet may God grant us to be a Communion that bears the wounds of Christ, a Communion of differences yet reconciled in the Cross, a Communion broken yet united in love for the crucified and risen Savior. Let the same mind be in us all “that was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). May the Lord make even of our differences a sign to the world of the reconciling power of God. We set our hope on Christ, that we may, together with you, live for the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:12).

[1.7] In the pages that follow, you will find a brief account of how, in good faith and in loving obedience to the saving Word of God, many Christians in the Episcopal Church have come to a new mind about same-sex affection, and of how this has led us to affirm the eligibility for ordination of those in covenanted same-sex unions.

- *After this Introduction [1.0-1.7], we turn in Part II to the question of holiness of life and same-sex affection: first, we note that members of our Church have begun to discern genuine holiness in the lives of persons of same-sex affection [2.0-2.1], and then we describe how we have sought light from Holy Scripture to understand our situation—especially from an important account, in the Acts of the Apostles, of the early followers of Jesus seeking to understand the Lord’s will [2.2-2.13]. We then describe how that has given us new eyes to read other passages of Scripture [2.14-2.21], how members of our Church have come to new views about same-sex relationships [2.22-2.24], and, finally, how we have sought to understand these relationships in the light of the Church’s traditions about the universal call to holiness in all relationships [2.25-2.32].*
- *In Part III we share something of our story as a Church, to clarify the context in which we have attempted to discern God’s will in all these matters.*

*After a brief introduction and summary [3.0-3.2] we turn first to the story of our origins as a Church that has grown from widely varying points of view [3.3-3.6], then to some painful examples in our history that portray the difficulty of hearing minority voices [3.7-3.15], and finally to the story of our study and reflection as a Church on matters of human sexuality [3.16-3.22].*

- *In Part IV we turn to questions regarding ordination and the Church's unity, in light of our Church's reflections described in the previous sections. First we consider how the Church's life, and the calling to ordained ministry in the Church, is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus [4.0-4.3]; this guides us as we reflect on particular eligibility criteria for the ordained, especially holiness of life [4.4-4.10]. We then turn to the question of how such criteria are to be discerned and what role the local community plays [4.8-4.10]. This leads us to consider how a locally discerned calling may serve the catholicity of the Church throughout the world [4.12-4.16]. Finally we consider how the Church's unity and apostolicity, as living from and for the Holy Trinity, may be understood in our present circumstances [4.17-4.24].*

*A brief concluding Part V allows us to re-affirm our deep desire to continue walking together within the Anglican Communion in all its wholeness, and to identify some common work we might undertake in service to God's mission.*

## Part II

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### Part II: Holiness, God's Blessing, and Same-Sex Affection

#### *Discerning Holiness in the Members of Christ's Body*

[2.0] For almost forty years, members of the Episcopal Church have discerned holiness in same-sex relationships and, have come to support the blessing of such unions and the ordination or consecration of persons in those unions.<sup>1</sup> Christian congregations have sought to celebrate and bless same-sex unions because these exclusive, life-long, unions of fidelity and care for each other have been experienced as holy. These unions have evidenced the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). More specifically, members of our congregations have seen the fruit of such unions as sanctifying human lives by deepening mutual love and by drawing persons together in fidelity and in service to the world.

[2.1] Some of our members have come to recognize such holiness in the lives of Christians of same-sex affection, and in their covenanted unions. Their holiness stands in stark contrast with many sinful patterns of sexuality in the world. As a report to the Lambeth Conference of 1998 stated very well: Clearly some expressions of sexuality are inherently contrary to the Christian way and are sinful. Such unacceptable expressions of sexuality include promiscuity, prostitution, incest, pornography, pedophilia, predatory sexual behavior, and sadomasochism (all of which may be heterosexual or homosexual), adultery, violence against women and in families, rape and female circumcision. From a Christian perspective these forms of sexual expression remain sinful in any context (*Called to Full Humanity*, Section 1 Report, p. 16).

Christians of same-sex affection in the Episcopal Church have shown themselves entirely at one with their fellow Christians in rejecting such sinful expressions of sexuality and in seeking to live, in common with all Christians, lives blessed by the transforming power of Christ. Some members of our Church have, over many years, experienced

these manifest gifts of holiness and authentic desire to live the Gospel life among our fellow members of same-sex affection. We believe that God has been opening our eyes to acts of God that we had not known how to see before.

*Searching the Scriptures:*

*The Church's Life and the Living Word*

- [2.2] In this, we find ourselves in the same position as Peter and his companions in Acts 10, who, initially hesitant to welcome righteous Gentiles like Cornelius into their church, discovered that God had already welcomed them (Romans 14:3) and poured out the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon them. So we have been holding our circumstances, especially these signs of holiness where we had not known to seek holiness, before the Lord. We have been asking God to help us find our way by showing us the way of God's people. Holy Scripture, specifically the account of the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 10-15), has allowed us to interpret our experience in the light of the early Church's experience.
- [2.3] Because we came out of Judaism, Christianity was "born with a Bible in its cradle." That is to say, from the beginning we understood ourselves as being part of the people of God whose story was narrated in Israel's sacred scriptures. These scriptures themselves had a history. Unlike certain non-biblical texts that were supposed to be the product of direct revelation (dictated without human participation) the Church received its Bible as the product of a long tradition (handing down from one generation to the next) back to the farthest reaches of memory. At some point early in their own worship traditions, the early churches began to supplement the torah, prophets, and writings of Israel with stories of Jesus and the apostles, letters and sermons from Church leaders, and visions of Christian prophets. Eventually these also became part of Christian scripture.
- [2.4] As part of Judaism, Christianity was accustomed to thinking of itself in biblical terms and describing itself in biblical language. It praised God in the language of the Psalms and by recounting the mighty acts of God in creation and

exodus. It worshipped God in the language of scriptural hymns, prayed to God with scriptural laments, appealed to God on the basis of God's past record, and argued with God on the basis of God's own promises for deliverance and justice. It also continued the long tradition of Israel of settling its disputes and controversies by appealing to Scripture. This was no easy or automatic process, as if one could just look up the answer in Scripture. From the beginning, Scripture was seen as complex and contested: two creation stories; two rival accounts of how Israel got its first king; the argument of the Deuteronomist that the good are always rewarded and the bad always punished countered by Job; the argument against taking foreign wives in Ezra and Nehemiah countered by Ruth; the argument for exclusivism countered by traditions of inclusion in Second Isaiah and Jonah. Scripture itself corrected and amended earlier versions of scripture in some cases; in other cases, rival arguments were allowed to stand side by side unresolved. The idea that there is only one correct way to read or interpret scripture is a rather modern idea. For most of its history, especially in the period of its great patristic interpreters, Scripture has been understood as a living, vibrant, forum where God and humanity engage one another, seeking truth in the process of resolving difficulties, seeking understanding in the process of believing: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

- [2.5] From the very beginning, Christianity entered the fray of contested and contesting biblical interpretations. It had no choice, because the early Church was immediately faced with a major scandal: the One it described as Messiah and worshipped as the Son of God had died on a Roman cross in Judea. There were many kinds of messiahs expected to redeem Israel, but no one expected a suffering and crucified messiah. Paul argued (Galatians 3:13) with those who quoted Deuteronomy 21:23 against Jesus of Nazareth—"anyone hung on a tree is under God's curse!"—by

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countering their arguments with other scriptures. A quick glance at early Christian writings which became the New Testament shows that the first Christians framed their arguments as they ordered their lives—within the larger context of Israel’s Holy Scriptures as read in terms of the “things concerning Jesus of Nazareth” (Luke 24:19).

- [2.6] There was never a time when all members of Israel or of the Christian Church agreed on all major matters. The more we study the New Testament as a whole, and Paul’s letters in particular, the more we see a group of churches fighting very much the way churches fight now. Some of these conflicts reduce to personality differences and clashes of egos (we see Paul and other church leaders urging their congregations to behave like mature Christians, not infants, e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Other conflicts were more difficult to resolve because they were good faith attempts to live out different visions and different values, all of which could be rooted in scripture and defended by biblical arguments. Some parts of the Church exalted their leaders more highly than other parts; there were competing visions of the role of women in church leadership; some churches continued to worship the Lord on the Sabbath (seventh) day, while others worshipped on the day of the Lord’s resurrection (the first day of the week); some parts of the Church continued to observe the dietary restrictions of Judaism, choosing to honor God by abstaining in this way (Leviticus 11), while others argued that God had created all foods as part of the good creation (Psalm 24:1 quoted in 1 Corinthians 10:26). Some Christians fasted on one day; while others fasted on a different day. Some thought that since God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4) and idols are to be detested, Christians had no business eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols and was later sold in the marketplace; others argued that indeed God is one and therefore idols had no real existence, so Christians could not be harmed by eating food that had supposedly been offered to them. These things were not considered unimportant, matters of indifference (*adiaphora*), but vital matters upon which the Church nevertheless found itself in disagreement. St. Paul, in particular, argues in 1



## Part II

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Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14-15 that the churches need to learn how to respect one another's honest differences of opinion about important matters.

- [2.7] One of these important matters about which the church differed at first was the terms upon which Gentiles would be included. Would they have to become Jewish, taking on circumcision, sabbath observance, and the dietary laws? Could they continue to live as before? Judging from Paul's letters, some of these Gentile converts in Corinth apparently saw no conflict between becoming Christian and continuing to visit prostitutes (1 Corinthians 6). There must have been some compromise position whereby Gentile converts would not be expected to take on the entirety of Jewish law and custom, but would agree not to engage in behavior (like prostitution) that the community considered immoral.
- [2.8] We should be careful at this point to note that not all Gentiles were engaged in immoral lifestyles. Gentiles like Cornelius and his companions in Acts 10 lived a very demanding ethical lifestyle to which they adhered by virtue of their religion. The New Testament reflects some of the language by which both Jews and Gentiles stereotyped each other. Jews and Gentiles at the time regularly asserted their own identity by castigating the lives of other groups. As the New Testament writers remember the history (itself contested), at first the Christian churches were not inclined to admit Gentile converts unless they became Jewish and abdicated their Gentile past completely. There are many accounts of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the New Testament, but it seems useful here to focus on one account (Acts 10-15) that has been important to Christians in the Episcopal Church and elsewhere who have sought guidance from the Holy Spirit about God's will for us in these matters relating to same-sex affection.
- [2.9] Together with the disciplines of prayer and the sacramental life, we have sought the voice of the living God by paying attention to God's Word to us in the Scriptures. We have been led to notice possible analogies between the experience

of the early Church and our own situation. We have assumed that God's word is living and active (Hebrews 4:10-12); that it is effective and prospers in that for which God sent it (Isaiah 55:10-12); and that it is like fire and like the hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (Jeremiah 23:29). We asked God to show us whether we were to welcome Christians of same-sex affection into our midst and to invite them to share leadership of the Church with us or not. We asked God's help in discerning through the power of the Holy Spirit whether we ought to understand our situation in analogy with the experience of the early Church regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles. We began to study Acts 10-15 with great care.

[2.10] In our thinking about how the early church came to the decision to admit Gentiles without requiring them to become Jewish and to appoint Gentile leaders to help pastor the people of God, we have been instructed by several features of the story as it is recounted in Acts 10-15:

- *On the one hand, Peter was rightly reluctant to cross traditional clean/unclean boundaries. In his vision of the sheet lowered from heaven in Acts 10, his refusal to eat of the unclean animals is in direct obedience to clear biblical prohibitions in Leviticus (11), the same part of the Bible that contains the most explicit prohibition of male same-sex relations. At the same time, there is an implied criticism of Peter's certainty that he knows what is clean and unclean in the face of a vision and a voice from heaven inviting him to eat (see Ezekiel 4:14-15 for an important predecessor text in which the prophet's allegiance to earlier biblical prohibitions is countermanded by God). It is this very certainty about biblical prohibitions in Leviticus that God leads Peter beyond, precisely to serve the unfolding of God's plan of salvation.*
- *On the other hand, the Gentile Cornelius is described as a righteous man, famous for his ethics and in no way inferior to Peter. He is, however, unfamiliar and clearly outside what the Church, following one part of the Bible*

*(Leviticus, not Ezekiel), thought it should include.*

- *God took the initiative and it took the Church a while to catch up with what God was doing. The Holy Spirit's meaning is not immediately self-evident; it took both Peter and Cornelius a while to figure out what this new thing was.*
- *They came to understand each other by listening to the other tell his story of how God had led him to this encounter. They convinced others within their own groups by telling that same story. This was especially the case with Peter, who was, rightly, criticised for his actions by those who had not shared his experience. Initially, Peter's word was strange and seemed contrary to Church teaching based on the Holy Scriptures. The rest of the Church rightly called Peter and his companions to give an account of their experiences with the Gentiles and to describe the work of the Spirit among them. It was only after Peter told the story of how he had been led by the Spirit, how he had perceived God's grace upon Cornelius and the others, how the Holy Spirit had clearly fallen upon them, and that this was why he went ahead with the Baptism, that the rest of the Church was ready to consider the matter in greater detail. They did not automatically say Peter could do whatever he wanted.*
- *No one suggested it was a matter of adiaphora; it clearly had the potential to be church-dividing. The Church worked hard to avoid that outcome. Peter and the others both trusted God and were willing to withstand criticism for their actions that were in clear opposition to the established customs of the Church at the time. The weight of the scriptural arguments was on the side of Peter before his transforming encounter with Cornelius, and afterwards with the Church members who criticized Peter.*
- *There was no discussion of rights, such as a right to be baptized or a right to proceed contrary to the stated mind of the Church. Instead, Peter and the others gave*

*testimony which was persuasive about the gifts of the Spirit manifest in Cornelius and the other Gentiles. The Gentiles were not put in the awkward position of having to list or defend their own virtues. Instead, Church people who were not Gentiles argued on their behalf and introduced them to the part of the Church that had not seen their gifts and discovered the presence of the Holy Spirit powerfully among them. The outcome was not certain. The Church community was willing to wait to hear Peter's testimony and debate the issue with him. They could have simply penalized him and cast him out of the church for his irregular action.*

- *Acts 15 states the Church's studied compromise on the issue. The Jewish church was not requiring Gentiles to become like themselves, or to live in some cramped way so as not to offend. They decided not to add any yoke that they themselves would not be willing to bear. It seems to us that arguments such as that persons of same-sex affection can be ordained only if they remain celibate are thus rejected by implication. In the Anglican tradition, celibacy has been understood as a gift given to some, not a requirement for ordination. Acts 10-15 never implies that the entire early Christian Church agreed about this. There must have been many patterns of living together and failing to live together, some of which worked better than others.*
- *But eventually the mind of the whole Church changed on this matter. Now it is difficult to remember that there was ever a time when Gentiles were not welcome or were considered a danger to the Church. If anything, the danger now is on the other side: the Church must repeatedly remind itself of its Jewish roots and the importance of its ongoing conversation with Israel.*

[2.11] The point of these accounts in Acts is that a particular part of the Church (Peter and friends) has an experience of the Spirit that prompts them to question and reinterpret what they would previously have seen as a clear commandment of Scripture, not to associate with a particular group of people

## Part II

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who were considered unclean. After careful deliberation and much discussion (Acts 10-15) the Church as a whole agrees. Not everyone agrees, however. The New Testament itself reflects a number of patterns of Christian life with varying degrees of openness to Gentiles—Paul and Mark reflect clear openness while Matthew and Revelation are more guarded. What seems to have convinced the rest of the Church is Peter’s credibility as a witness (on behalf of Cornelius and the rest) that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were indeed present among them, that they were living lives of holiness, understood differently, but holy lives nonetheless. The Church as a whole gradually shifted its position, but only after careful reflection. In the meantime, there was room for a diversity of lifestyles, which were all understood as committed to seeking holiness in the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

- [2.12] The story in Acts 10-15 reminds us of the hard work of sorting out a complicated issue, and the patience required to respect and honor someone whose position differs from our own. We confess that at times we have acted as though the Church has never argued about its doctrines and practices, has never changed its mind; as if “the Scriptures are perfectly clear and do not need interpretation” or that “all reasonable people will agree” with us. We confess that even though we know this is untrue, and even though the quickest glance at the history of biblical interpretation of ethical issues demonstrates its falsity, we persist in acting as if all Christians could agree on complex matters. We mention, for examples, such issues as the right use of creation, whether Christians can lend money at interest to other Christians (usury), whether slavery is justified or not, the use of force and violence, abortion, the death penalty, war, contraception, the nature of marriage, the property rights of women, child labor laws, prison systems, how many languages should be taught in schools, whether evolution should be taught in schools, and many other questions in which the Church’s appropriation of Scripture has been complex and in many cases even at odds with the most obvious sense of the biblical text.

[2.13] In summary, these reflections on the Scriptural witness to early Christian life highlight two crucial features of our tradition.<sup>3</sup> First, we have always believed that God opens hearts and minds to discover yet deeper dimensions of Christ's saving power at work, far beyond our limited power to conceive it. Second, tradition tells us that by God's grace we ought not to let discouragement at disagreements jeopardize our common work for God's mission in the world. If God the Holy Spirit can hold the early followers of Jesus Christ together, even when they disagreed over so central a question as who might come within the reach of the Savior's embrace, then surely we must not let Satan turn our differences into divisions. May we hold them all the more humbly before Christ, that he may bless our proclamation of the Gospel in all the many and differing places and conditions of the whole human family.

*New Reflections on Biblical Texts*

[2.14] So far, we have offered a reading of Acts 10-15, telling how early Christians came to believe that since God had already welcomed Gentiles and had poured out the Holy Spirit upon them, the followers of Jesus should welcome Gentiles into the Church without requiring them to become Jewish. The experience of one part of the Church (Peter and his companions) initially seemed to be in direct contradiction to God's word in Scripture and to the Church's present practices, so Peter and the others were rightly invited to explain themselves to the rest of the Church. As they told their stories to one another, and as they listened to one another with respect and patience, they reached an agreement that the Holy Spirit really was leading the Church—at first, part of the Church and, then, later, most of the Church—to include Gentiles as Gentiles and to welcome Gentiles as leaders of the Church.

[2.15] In addition to giving a constructive account of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15), built on biblical foundations, we know that honoring the biblical text, and honoring all our brothers and sisters in Christ who read Holy Scripture with us, requires us to honor all of the biblical texts. We

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take seriously the biblical passages that seem to oppose our position.

- [2.16] Following the work of many contemporary biblical scholars, we note that when it comes to ethics, the overwhelming concern of the Bible focuses upon justice for the poor. Issues of wealth and poverty, concern for widows, orphans, refugees, and those who are oppressed are the most central and important ethical issues in the Bible. Nevertheless, the biblical writers speak about many other issues, as well. Because they write at different times and in different circumstances, they do not always agree with one another. There is usually not just one biblical point of view. So when someone says, “The Bible says this!” our faithful response is to ask, “In what book? When was it written and in what circumstances?” What are the reasons given and do those same reasons apply in the same way in our own situation? For example, it is helpful to know that when Ezra (chapter 10) commands the men of Israel to divorce their wives, it is because they had married foreign wives, who are seen to be a danger to Israel in exile. But there is another belief about foreign wives in the Book of Ruth, probably written at about the same time. The author of Ruth believed that Boaz acted faithfully when he married the Moabite Ruth and King David was descended from this marriage of an Israelite to a foreign wife. Today, in some situations, it may be faithful to follow Ezra, while in most situations it is faithful to follow Ruth.
- [2.17] Because we live in different cultural situations, not all biblical commandments or proscriptions apply simply or in the same way to any one person or situation. The authority of Holy Scripture, as the *Windsor Report* reminds us (§54), is in fact an instrument for the “authority of the triune God,” who speaks to us in “Jesus, the living Word... the one to whom the written Word bears witness,” and whom we are given ears to hear by the power of God the Holy Spirit. In seeking light from the Scriptures in our present circumstances, we are being led by the Spirit into an encounter with the living Word, who calls us into ever

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deeper obedience and listening through our prayerful, liturgical, and studious engagement with the Bible. Part of our discernment process, as we engage with any text of Holy Scripture, involves a thoughtful consideration of the contexts of the biblical writers and of ourselves. Is our situation like the situation of the biblical writers? Does a given biblical commandment or prohibition speak clearly to our own context?

- [2.18] This question will be helpful as we look at the biblical passages that prohibit same-sex relations. It seems very likely that there was no phenomenon in the time of the biblical writers directly akin to the phenomenon of Christians of the same gender living together in faithful and committed lifelong unions as we experience this today. We most devoutly wish to stress the difference between this statement we are making—that our cultural context is different from that of a given biblical writer’s context—and another statement that we sometimes hear but would emphatically disavow, “we today know better than the biblical writers.” On the contrary, we affirm the wisdom and holiness of the Scriptures and assume, most gratefully, that we are to be instructed by them. Yet not every biblical norm is directly relevant to every situation in our own time. Discernment is required, through the direction of the Holy Spirit, in order to ascertain the Lord’s will for us in every time and to follow in faith where Christ has led the way.
- [2.19] There has been considerable debate and discussion within both Judaism and Christianity about how to interpret the biblical texts that forbid same-sex relations. There are faithful scholars in both traditions who say that what the texts forbid is clear and that it applies today as it always did. On the other hand, there are faithful scholars in both traditions who believe that what the biblical texts describe is not as clear as it first appears and does not clearly apply in a very different cultural context.<sup>4</sup> Because the contextual situation of Leviticus, for example, is so different from our own, it would be inaccurate to assume that some of its texts are more binding on us today than all the other of its



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proscriptions that we, in fact, do *not* any longer follow.

[2.20] Although faithful scholars disagree among themselves about the interpretation of the biblical texts on same-sex relations, there is now something of a consensus about which biblical texts are the most important to the debate. We are reminded, however, once more, that, as one recent summary of the discussion puts it: “The Bible hardly ever discusses homosexual behavior.”<sup>5</sup> There are only a few references to same-sex relations, especially in comparison with the vast number of biblical texts on wealth and poverty, greed, and the right use of possessions.

- *Two biblical texts that have sometimes been read as condemning same-sex relations are Genesis 19:1-29 and its companion story in Judges 19. Both stories are more about violent attempts to undermine ancient traditions of hospitality through guest rape than they are about same-sex relations. Except for the lone voice of Jude 7, the rest of the Bible comments on the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah as the sin of greed. Ezekiel 16:49 says, “This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.”<sup>6</sup>*
- *Several other biblical texts (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:10, and Acts 15:28-29) contain vice lists (strings of prohibited behaviors). Written in Greek, the meaning of these words is sometimes contested. Among these words are two that have been interpreted to describe same-sex relations. At least one of the words (malakoi) is so uncertain in its meaning that no solid argument can be based on it one way or the other. The other word (arsenokoitai) is probably a shorthand expression for the prohibition of a man lying with a man as with a woman in Leviticus 18:22.<sup>7</sup> These vice lists do not contribute substantially to the debate, but they do point us to a text which does, Leviticus; and they serve at least to underline the importance of Leviticus for several New Testament writers.*

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[2.21] Bearing these points in mind, we turn now to what, in our judgment, are the two most significant biblical sites for the present discussion.

- a. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Leviticus, which is a book about what constitutes holiness, is distinctly relevant to our holiness argument.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, we have an obligation to take seriously the texts which seem to oppose our position. In Leviticus, holiness is not a private thing; the text makes clear that we can only be holy in a community that intends hospitality to God. The challenge in reading Leviticus (or any biblical book) is in its application to our own lives in a different context. For the writers of Leviticus, the issue was about boundary-crossing. The sexual prohibitions, like those against cross-breeding cattle, sowing hybrids or sowing different crops in the same field, eating amphibians or wearing clothes made out of wool blended with other materials, are meant to observe the distinctions that God (presumably) established at creation. Holiness is then defined as staying in one's class, and not mixing or confusing classes of things. One of the major difficulties of applying a text like Leviticus is that although our goals are the same—holiness, offering hospitality to God, living in such a way that God would feel comfortable in our midst—our categories are not the same as those of the biblical authors. For example, we do not see mildew as a problem for a priest to treat with a ritual of purification. Leviticus does.<sup>9</sup>

The holiness code (Leviticus 18-26) is generally dated to the early exilic period, a century or two later than much of Leviticus. It seems to have been a new synthesis of Torah for the community that survived the destruction of Jerusalem and was now living in exile among the nations. Maintaining Israel's distinctiveness would be a matter of survival. It is an axiom of sociological studies that pollution/purity beliefs receive emphasis where social boundaries are precariously maintained.<sup>10</sup> The holiness code makes no distinction between ritual and moral regulations, as is especially clear in chapter 19—which follows the chapter

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on sexual regulations and forms the rhetorical center of the holiness code. The rights of the poor and the duty to the neighbor are listed side by side with the prohibitions about not breeding two different kinds of cattle or wearing clothes made of different kinds of cloth. But even if the text itself makes no distinction, no interpretive community—including orthodox Jews—treat all the commandments with the same weight. The interpretive tradition is a living and growing conversation with the text about where “the density of holiness” lies. Interestingly, Judaism and Christianity have agreed about this: the commandments that help us sift out and interpret the others are those to love God above all else (Deuteronomy 6:4ff) and to love the neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18). As the scribe says to Jesus in Mark 12, these are far more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

- b. Romans 1:26-27. When we read in Leviticus or Romans that a specific behavior is proscribed, it is helpful to acknowledge from the first that the biblical writer’s words are neither unclear nor irrelevant.<sup>11</sup> St. Paul, as a first century Jewish male steeped in the tradition that includes Leviticus, was strongly opposed to same-sex relations even though he had reversed his position with respect to the issue of Gentile holiness. If we had Paul here, we might legitimately press him about the logic that crosses one boundary but not another. Since Paul wrote his letters expecting to have to defend his arguments, that approach is neither far-fetched nor unfaithful. Paul himself invites his readers to “discern for yourselves” (1 Corinthians 11) what is natural or unnatural, the very issue which is at stake in Romans 1. Paul also seems to have thought that long hair for men is “unnatural” while it is “natural” for women. While Paul’s letters had the status of advice from a trusted apostle, the members of his churches who received them probably felt free to argue with him about what was natural and what was unnatural. But now, as a result of the canonization of his letters, they have become Scripture for us and we honor them appropriately. Does this mean we can no longer engage Paul as if he were a living conversation

partner? We do not believe so. As Jesus himself argued against the Sadducees in Mark 12, God is the God of the living. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Paul is alive in the Lord and very present in the current debates of the Church. It is useful to speculate about where Paul might be on these issues today, given his unusual and brave commitments to Gentiles, women, and slaves in his own day. The logic of Paul's letters as a whole stands in some tension with the specific words he wrote in Romans 1.

Paul's subject in Romans 1:18ff is the way idolatry leads to many other kinds of sinful acts. That is the most important point of Romans 1, and we might well ask ourselves what forms of idolatry endanger us today: militarism? consumerism? wealth, status, or power? Perhaps whatever we most obsess about may become idolatrous. Thus the Wisdom of Solomon 14:12 and other texts suggest that the first sin, idolatry, leads to all the others and sexual immorality is an easy example. But it is not the only example: Paul's vice list at the end of the chapter includes a wide range of other equally serious sins, some much more serious than sexual activity between those of the same gender. In fact the point of the list seems to be that all of humanity, having engaged in one or more of these sins, is radically dependent on the grace of God. He also warns us that passing judgment on the sins of others is itself a participation in the sin of idolatry, since it usurps God's role as judge. St. Paul picks up this theme in Romans 14-15 when some members of the community are judging and despising others who disagree with them, encouraging us to read Romans 1 and Romans 14-15 together.

### *Developing Understandings of Same-Sex Relationships*

[2.22] In addition to prayerful hearing of the living Word in Holy Scripture, as it speaks to sexual matters over the past forty years in the Episcopal Church, some members also began to be informed by a growing preponderance of opinion in the fields of scientific research. For centuries it had been assumed that same-sex affection was inevitably a distortion or dysfunction of human nature. Increasingly,

scholars in the field have found that the phenomenon of same-sex affection is not accurately understood as a biological, psychological, or cultural dysfunction but more adequately studied as simply another way in which human nature exists. The word “homosexuality” itself, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is first used in English in 1897 and denotes a person with a propensity for desire towards persons of the same sex.<sup>12</sup> This reflects the quite recent change from the Western, specifically Christian, understanding that same-sex relations were a matter of choice over the equally free choice of engaging in heterosexual relations. Historical-cultural studies, social scientific studies, and studies from the natural sciences have identified multiple factors that correlate with same-sex attraction. Altogether, contemporary studies indicate that same-sex affection has a genetic-biological basis which is shaped in interaction with psycho-social and cultural-historical factors. Sexual orientation remains relatively fixed and generally not subject to change. Continuing studies have confirmed the 1973 decision of the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from their diagnostic manual of mental illness.<sup>13</sup>

- [2.23] In the Episcopal Church we have been faced with growing testimony, and the experience of some of our own members, that the distinction between same-sex and heterosexual orientation is not a divide between dysfunction and normality, nor between sinful activity and holy activity. Rather, the distinction has come to seem to us much more like the kind of cultural and biological distinctions that St. Paul came to see as overcome in Christ. In the unfathomable mystery of our redemption, hidden for ages in God, the most apparently basic and even, sometimes, hostile differences among the human family are overcome through our common membership in Jesus: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-8; cf. 1Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11). It is in this light that we have begun

to re-conceive our understanding of same-sex affection. In other words, we have begun to notice, as we had not before, the ways in which persons of same-sex affection might be leading lives of holiness. Why might we notice these facts as we had not before? Because before we had assumed that physical acts of same-sex affection must *necessarily* be sinful, *simply by virtue of being same-sex in orientation rather than heterosexual in orientation*. For some time now, some members of our Church have been perceiving that same-sex relations as well as heterosexual relations can be manifestations of holiness, honesty, goodness, and enduring fidelity—just as same-sex relations as well as heterosexual relations can be manifestations of abuse, promiscuity, and many other kinds of sin.<sup>14</sup>

- [2.24] As a result of this shift in our awareness, we have begun to reflect on signs of manifest holiness in the lives of our members of same-sex affection, not simply as an anomaly but in light of the great Gospel of Christ's victory overcoming the most basic differences within the human family. This growing awareness of holiness in same-sex relationships has caused the Episcopal Church to face some difficult questions we did not always want to face. Might Christ the Lord, unfolding the mystery of his redeeming work, be opening our eyes to behold a dimension of his work that we had not understood? In other words, might what we had thought to be a crucial and defining division within the human family—between those of same-sex desire and those of heterosexual desire—be in fact a biological or cultural difference (as between male and female, slave or free) that has been overtaken by our common Baptism into his crucified and risen Body? Many have begun to answer “yes” to these questions. Therefore we have tried to see ways in which persons oriented towards same-sex relationships are called to the Gospel life, without assuming that they must repent of their affection any more than male and female Christians are called to repent of being male or female, or persons of different ethnicities are called to repent of their ethnic identity.

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### *The Universal Call to Holiness of Life in Human Relationships*

[2.25] So we have begun to consider that Christians of same-sex and other-sex affections are equally called, within the terms of their respective modes of being, to the holiness of God. This has led us to the conviction that covenanted same-sex unions can be open to God's blessing and holy purposes in an analogous way to that of marriages between a man and a woman. The Episcopal Church has called all in relationships of sexual intimacy to the standard of life-long commitment "characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication" and the "holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" (Resolution D039, 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church). The experience of holiness in some same-sex unions has called for and deepened our sense of how these life-long unions of fidelity can be seen to manifest God's love.

[2.26] Christians have understood that sexual relations between man and woman in marriage are for the purpose of procreation (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) and for the purpose of persons sharing themselves with each other (Genesis 2:18-25). These have been called the procreative and unitive ends of human sexuality.<sup>15</sup> In Holy Scripture, procreation is understood as fulfilling the natural order and God's call to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). But procreation is not the exclusive end of human sexuality. In the second creation account in Genesis (2:4b-25), God says, "It is not good that the Adam should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Genesis 2:18). Jesus, referring back to the conclusion of this account (Genesis 2:24), calls on his followers to act as if it was meant from the beginning of creation: let no one separate those who have been married (Mark.10:2-9). In other words, even though Jewish law allowed for divorce for reasons of infertility, Jesus seems to have held that yet another purpose (life-long fidelity and self-giving love) would call for the continuance of the marriage even in the absence of children. In this unitive vision of human love as expressed in the Song of Songs, sexual union fulfills a passionate desire that delights and

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cares for the beloved. While this can become inordinate and misdirected, there is great pleasure and joy in mutual love.<sup>16</sup>

- [2.27] In the developing understanding of Christian marriage, the liturgical tradition confirms this judgment that what has been called the unitive end of human sexuality may be realized apart from the procreative end. As detailed in the 1997 Report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, “the Church’s theology of marriage according to its purpose and nature has been open and evolving historically.” Catholic liturgies expressed the primacy of children as the end of marriage. The Protestant reformer Martin Bucer, commenting on Cranmer’s 1549 rite, argued that “three causes for matrimony are enumerated, that is children, a remedy, and mutual help, and I should prefer what is placed third among the causes for marriage might be in the first place, because it is first.”<sup>17</sup> In 1949 the Episcopal Church listed, in the Declaration of Intent, companionship as the first purpose of marriage. In 1975 the draft of the English prayer book and then in 1979 the *Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* listed companionship as the first purpose of marriage. In the latter book “mutual joy” and “the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity” was followed by “and, when it is God’s will, the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup>
- [2.28] Holy Scripture, historical and contemporary understandings of human sexuality, and liturgical developments have been integral to discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit. The consequent testing and discerning of the Holy Spirit has led to fuller understandings of God’s action and grace towards us, including hearing anew older voices from the tradition. For example, the voices of many fathers of the early Church (notably emphasized in the Eastern Orthodox tradition) have taught that God’s love, which has made us members one of another in Christ Jesus, is a unitive energy in which we are drawn into communion. This love of God enkindles within us a desire for communion, a desire that begins



in self-giving of one to another and invites an offering of the self in return. This is the love that, poured out for our salvation in the self-giving of Jesus, reveals the eternal self-sharing of God the Holy Trinity, the blessed communion of the divine Persons.<sup>19</sup> From this perspective—as expressed variously in teaching documents in the Episcopal Church—sexuality is a divine gift.<sup>20</sup> God works through our bodies and desires. Through our mutual desires for one another we can, by God’s grace, be drawn into the love which is of God. The 2003 Report of the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, while expressing some caution, does affirm that “God’s gift of human sexuality...[makes] present in creaturely life a self-sharing and mutual fidelity that images the divine life.”<sup>21</sup> Such love has, moreover, been described as having its own generativity apart from procreation. As the Report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops said in 1997, “unless—as even the present Prayer Book rite does not maintain—there must be biological offspring from the marriage union, the generativity displayed by many same-sex couples in extending their nurturing and creative care to persons beyond their own exclusive union may well be seen as fulfilling [the] third, procreative, purpose of marriage.”<sup>22</sup>

- [2.29] The importance of the celebration and blessing of same-sex unions is more than a marking of the possibilities of holiness in the mutual love of a couple. The public celebration and blessing of these vows—like monastic vows and marriage vows—are not simply ceremonial. The celebration and blessing of same-sex unions constitutes a new reality, a sacred union. What is signified is effected in the taking of vows. The public vows taken between persons of same-sex affection commit two persons to form a life together marked by sexual fidelity and unconditional life-commitment to care for each other. The vows interpret as they constitute same-sex relationships within a larger reality, that of a covenant to form a household together as part of the Christian community of faith in its life of mutual love in service of the world.<sup>23</sup> The blessing of same-sex unions does not itself constitute the union anymore than the blessing of priest

or bishop constitutes a Christian marriage of man and woman. A blessing by a priest or bishop after the exchange of vows as part of the public celebration of same-sex union is rather “to give praise and thanks to God... Secondly it is thereby to invoke God’s favor upon those for whom the thanks are offered...”<sup>24</sup> The new reality of a union, though, is constituted in the mutual vows to form a life together.

- [2.30] Beyond the primary purpose of the blessing of same-sex unions to celebrate a new household of faith, the public blessing of those unions is an evangelical message to persons of same-sex orientation and to the culture-at-large. As sexually exclusive, life-long covenants to form a life together of mutual love and care, same-sex unions call persons from promiscuity to fidelity, from sexual fulfillment to a way of life marked by mutual love that extends to care for others and the world-at-large. As the Commission on Human Affairs wrote in its report to the 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 1991, “To all disciples in these covenant relationships the challenge of the gospel calls them to live in pureness of heart and to grow together in ways that will show forth to the world aspects of the faithful and sacrificial love of God and to find in their mutual care greater strength to serve the community.”<sup>25</sup>
- [2.31] The celebration and blessing of same-sex unions also stands as a witness of support against any violence to persons of same-sex affection. Historically such persons, and particularly gay men, have been stereotyped as perverted, promiscuous, sinful, untouchable persons who would sexually prey on others, especially children. Out of fear and judgment, persons of same-sex affection have been personally rejected, socially ostracized, and subject to intense discrimination, violence, and even death. Persons of same-sex affection report that they experience the rejection of same-sex unions as a rejection of themselves as human beings, or as refusing to recognize them as the actual persons they are, although they have grown in the image and love of God precisely because of the same-sex union that they are told to reject. Denigrated, these persons

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often struggle with self-hatred and self-denial. To reject the experienced holiness of unions between persons of same-sex affection, and the experience of those unions within the communities of which they are members, has come to seem to many members of our Church as reinforcing social discrimination, oppression, and violence.

- [2.32] In the face of this witness, members of our Church have prayed and struggled over how best to share the compassionate love of Jesus. Many have found themselves awed anew by the power of God in Christ to overcome the differences among us, differences that sin so easily corrupts into discrimination and hostile division, but which Christ gave his life to overcome: “For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14). For this reason, the blessing of same-sex unions is for many Christians in the Episcopal Church also a call to justice. Justice in this regard is not an abstract notion of human rights but a mandate of God the holy and just Judge, who hears the cry of the oppressed and vindicates the vulnerable of the earth against those who accuse them falsely and persecute them. This righteous Judge, the Church’s Lord, calls us to faithful obedience to his rule, and this, we believe, means the protection of those in need as children of God.

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### Part III: Contested Traditions, Common Life: The Episcopal Church's Historical Witness to Unity-in-Difference

- [3.0] In Part II of this essay, we sought to describe the theological developments, over nearly four decades, by which some members of the Episcopal Church came to perceive (a) holiness in the lives its members of same-sex affection, and (b) the potential for their covenanted unions to be open for God's blessing. In no way do we wish to minimize the sea-change in our understanding that this has represented. Indeed, we have only been able to conceive of what God might be doing in our midst by allowing the light of Holy Scripture to shine upon our experience and guide us to the living Word of truth. Thus have we prayed, and caught sight (in the Book of Acts) of Jesus' early followers struggling to understand the scarcely imaginable wideness of God's mercy, and of Paul being led to apprehend the power of Christ's death and resurrection to overcome the most basic differences among members of the human family for the sake of a new and redeemed creation. In order to clarify further how we have come to the decisions we have made, it is now time to cast our eyes to the horizon of our own Episcopal Church's history.
- [3.1] Placing our confidence in you, brothers and sisters who share in the compassionate love of Jesus, we are emboldened to name before you some of our many shortcomings. We know that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9). So as we reflect upon the account in Acts 10-15 from within our United States context, we cannot help noticing certain parallels within our own history that affect the way we interpret the Bible on this particular issue:
- *As we reflect on the history of colonization and genocide of First Nation/Native American peoples and repent of the harm we have done, we wonder how that story might have been different if the situation had been*

*framed in the light of Acts 10-15 (welcoming the gifts of the stranger) instead of Joshua (the conquest of the land and the expulsion and killing of its former inhabitants).*

- *As we reflect on the history of racism within our Church, and the loss of talented African American leaders like James Holly, who, frustrated by sinful exclusion here, finally left the United States to found the Anglican Church in Haiti, we wonder how many others like “Cornelius” have gone unrecognized because we could not perceive the gifts of the Holy Spirit among them.*
- *As we reflect on the history of the leadership of women in the Church, and how slow our own denomination was to recognize their God-given talents, we recognize that our Church lifted up a few biblical texts that seemed to prohibit women in roles of leadership and overlooked many others that blessed or endorsed it.*

[3.2] Looking at such difficult struggles in our Church’s story, we note two important facts. The first is a negative judgment about our history, one we can only pray that God will use for good within the plan of salvation: we have often been a Church in which the important or the dominant groups, as the world sees things, have not been eager to accept—far less to serve—the lowly or the oppressed. As the Lord calls us ever to conversion, so we pray always to be more mindful of the need to welcome in our midst those whom the world would incline us to reject. The second fact is, we hope, a more directly beneficial thing, though it is a sometimes difficult legacy: we have also been a Church in which many persons of many views, often very strongly held, have struggled within God’s embrace to serve the Gospel together. This experience makes us very trusting in the power of Christ, who won the Church’s unity at the cost of his life, and holds us together in abiding obedience to himself, even when our differences might seem puzzling or problematic to others. In short, we are something of a contentious lot, but we find that when, in fidelity to Jesus, we put his mission first, our differences can by the Spirit’s power often

translate into a fruitful evangelical appeal to many sorts and conditions of people. This aids in recognizing how our recent decisions make sense, in terms of being taught by the Lord to welcome those whom we would rather exclude and to trust all the more in God's reconciling power to grant us unity-in-difference.

*Placing Our History in Service to the Gospel*

- [3.3] Our Episcopal Church in the United States emerged from the arduous ministry of reconciliation following the American war of independence from England. Prior to the war, Church of England colonists were already divided between established Church sensibilities in the southern colonies and the independently minded congregations in the north. This division intensified following the war as many of our clergy either fled to Canada or back to England, and the congregations they left behind struggled merely to survive in the midst of post-war cultural instability and economic chaos. The task of reorganizing these colonial outposts of the Church of England involved the process of healing the wounds of war and relied on discerning a common mission across various religious sensibilities as well as political affiliations. As the architects of this reorganization quickly discovered, articulating a common mission necessarily entails the ministry of reconciliation.
- [3.4] It was by no means clear whether any ecclesial link would remain between these former colonial congregations and the Church in England, a link which many in the northern congregations understood to rely in large measure on episcopacy and securing an American bishop. The more strongly congregational sensibilities in the southern states, especially in Virginia, may well have prevailed if their parish vestry system had not been economically decimated in the aftermath of the war. Even the quest for an American bishop was temporarily thwarted by the refusal of English bishops to ordain Samuel Seabury to the episcopate. As church historian David Holmes describes the outcome, "The constitution, canons and Book of Common Prayer of 1789 laid the basis on which the Episcopal Church operates

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today,” which retains the historic three-fold order of ministry yet “displays the republican political ideals of the United States.”<sup>26</sup>

- [3.5] The result of this eighteenth-century process was an American Church in which we address differences through an unusual mix of episcopal authority and democratic deliberation. This particular construction of church polity has marked an American approach to reconciliation and institutional unity in profound ways, especially in the conviction—never easily achieved—that unity in mission need not require uniformity of belief in all matters. We have prayed as a Church to stay faithful to our Lord’s mission in the midst of many shifts in national identity—and sought never to allow debate over our different views to prevent us from sharing the Good News of God in Christ. In short, responding to the peculiarities of our cultural and political life for more than two hundred years, we have had to learn how to be a Church together in a crucible of contested traditions. Our life together has been punctuated by moments of severe theological and institutional crisis. The resolutions of these times of trial have appeared, not in spite of our disagreements, but from the hope of discerning—within those very differences—a renewed vision of common mission. Some of the more vexing of those moments of crisis include: the religious and cultural divisions over the institution of slavery; disagreement concerning theological perspectives on human labor and economics in the industrial revolution; differing positions toward nationalism and pacifism during two world wars; the threat of schism over the role of women in the Church; and, more recently, the ordination of openly lesbian and gay people and the blessing of their relationships.
- [3.6] Each of these moments prompted a re-evaluation of ecclesial relations, careful scrutiny of theological traditions and biblical scholarship, and the willingness to live with occasionally profound differences of belief, none of which transpired smoothly or without the real possibility of fragmenting the bonds of unity. These historical moments

of disagreement in our American church lend important background to the Episcopal Church's decision regarding the ordination of the Bishop of New Hampshire. Like other similar moments of disagreement in our history, our General Convention in 2003 was marked by diverse theological and biblical convictions, which the Convention had to address with respect to the complex relationship between institutional unity and Gospel mission within the cultural and political context of American society. Among previous times of trial, the abolition of slavery and the ordination of women are particularly illustrative of the challenge we faced in 2003.

*Facing the Truth of Our Past in the Light of Christ*

- [3.7] While most Protestant churches split decidedly over the question of slavery, often well before the American civil war, the Episcopal Church's House of Bishops refused to take a stand on this issue, even during the war itself. After the southern states seceded from the union, southern Episcopalians created what amounted to a shadow church by meeting separately in their own General Convention, adopting their own Prayer Book and drafting their own constitution and canons—all of which simply mirrored the ecclesial structures in the north. Historians actually differ as to whether the Episcopal Church split decisively at this time, even though the southern churches consecrated a bishop for Alabama without the consent of northern churches, which represented a potentially serious violation of canon law.
- [3.8] The reunification of northern and southern Episcopalians occurred rapidly after the war as we were forced to see more clearly that the divisive lines regarding slavery did not cut neatly according to geography, between north and south, but were drawn mostly with Scripture. The Bishop of Vermont, for example, had published a book articulating the biblical support for the institution of slavery while more than a few southern clergy and lay people belonged to the abolitionist movement. For the sake of post-war institutional unity, our House of Bishops decided not to address the question of race relations at all in their pastoral



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letters throughout the nineteenth century. It grieves us to note that this very likely prompted a mass exodus of African Americans from Episcopal congregations in the decades following the war.

- [3.9] As historian Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. has rather pointedly observed, despite the severity of this exodus, the General Convention of 1865 appeared more concerned with addressing the divisions among white Episcopalians. “Abhorring ecclesiastical schism more than the suffering of people held in bondage,” Shattuck notes, “white Episcopalians had argued that slavery was a purely political question and, as such, beyond the church’s concern.”<sup>27</sup> The legacy of this failure to confront blatant racial injustice marked our Church’s posture toward race relations for many decades. Only in the midst of the civil rights movement of the 1960s did we begin to address that failure, which necessarily put institutional unity at risk.
- [3.10] The struggle for women’s full inclusion in the Church and in society paralleled to some degree the struggle for abolition of slavery and the full inclusion of African Americans in the structure of the Church. Blacks fared only somewhat better than women with regard to ordination because segregation made it possible to separate out the black churches and disempower them as a group. Most black churches formed in the nineteenth century were not admitted to diocesan conventions until the twentieth century. Black suffragan bishops were consecrated beginning in 1874, with James Theodore Holly, but as late as 1954 African Americans were still not admitted to some diocesan conventions by some dioceses and so did not have access to election to General Convention. African American bishops did not receive full voice and vote until John Neville Burgess became the first black bishop diocesan, was granted full participation in the General Convention of 1970.
- [3.11] Because women could not be segregated out and disempowered as a group in quite the same manner, resistance to their full inclusion by our hierarchy took

different forms. A type of segregation did emerge structurally in the parallel development of the Women's Auxiliary, later the Episcopal Church Women. Highly organized and very effective within their own sphere, women did much to influence the direction of the Church's to ministry to the poor. Quite aside from the question of ordination, in the early phases of the women's movement, most Episcopal women simply hoped for a gentle revolution from within that would give them voice and vote in the councils of our Church. Their hopes rose in the early twentieth century as the cultural context moved to embrace women's suffrage. Those hopes were dashed as the House of Deputies, beginning in 1916, repeatedly voted against women's participation while nonetheless accepting millions of dollars raised by women each year for the work of our Church.

- [3.12] Meanwhile, the “setting aside” of women as deaconesses as early as 1858 prompted some of the first studies of women's ordination. Several of these studies considered whether such “setting aside” constituted ordination to the diaconate traditionally understood. The 1920 Lambeth Conference concluded that these women were in fact in Holy Orders, while the 1930 Lambeth Conference reversed this decision. This question received renewed attention in the 1960s, as further studies and commissions began to urge a more decisive position on women's ministries. One report presented to the 1966 House of Bishops meeting argued that there are no dogmatic or biblical reasons against ordaining women and plenty of psychological and sociological factors in favor of it. Deliberations and often heated debate continued at both the national and international levels until the House of Bishops voted “in principle” for the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate. A full 50 years after women achieved suffrage in the United States they were granted a vote in the councils of the church. In 1970 women were officially seated as deputies on the floor of our General Convention for the first time. Six years later General Convention voted to authorize the ordination of women to the priesthood.

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[3.13] It is also important to note here that the Episcopal Church in the USA was not the first province of the Anglican Communion to ordain women. The very first was Li Tim Oi, ordained to the priesthood by the Bishop of Hong Kong in the midst of war to minister to Chinese Anglicans during the Japanese occupation. Yet the process toward reception of women's ordination was in no way irenic or steady as the Lambeth Conference consistently rejected women's ordination to the priesthood from 1920 to 1958. As historian Mary Donovan recently commented, "Though the Conference changed its position slightly in 1968 by resolving that 'the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive,' this was scarcely a ringing endorsement."<sup>28</sup> Two more women were ordained in 1971 in Hong Kong and Macao after the bishop there received a scant majority of support at the first meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council. Donovan continues:

The Instruments of Unity generally came to the table after the arguments had been presented and, particularly in the case of the Lambeth Conference, after the decisions had been made. The unity that was achieved regarding the ordination of women was a unity based on the general agreement that member churches could live in harmony with other member churches that reached different conclusions even about an issue as fundamental as whether or not half of the world's population should be declared ineligible to exercise the ministry of priest or bishop. The fact that churches that allowed the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate were willing to continue in bonds of unity and affection with churches that retained a gender qualification for admission to Holy Orders demonstrates the power of those bonds.<sup>29</sup>

[3.14] These "bonds of unity" were further stretched as the cultural revolution of the 1960s not only prompted significant societal shifts regarding race relations and the role of women but also gave birth to a gay liberation movement. A number of Christian denominations began

addressing homosexuality explicitly in new ways as early as the 1950s, mostly with reference to social discrimination and cultural oppression.<sup>30</sup> In 1964, the widely influential and inter-denominational Council on Religion and the Homosexual was established in San Francisco to facilitate dialogue in churches on matters concerning sexuality. The Council's work spread quickly to other major U.S. cities and involved both clergy and lay leaders from several mainline denominations, including the United Church of Christ, the Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church. While the cultural and social justice work continued on several fronts, biblical and theological scholarship took some decisive turns as well, beginning fifty years ago in Great Britain with the publication of Derrick Sherwin Bailey's *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (1955), which challenged the standard interpretations of key biblical passages regarding human sexuality. Similar scholarly publications soon followed, among them Anglican theologian Norman Pittenger's argument for the full inclusion of lesbian and gay people in the Church in his 1967 publication, *Time for Consent: A Christian Approach to Homosexuality*.<sup>31</sup>

- [3.15] In our Church, both social justice advocacy and biblical/theological scholarship contributed to a series of task forces and commissions on human sexuality at the national and diocesan levels, including the publication of curricular materials for congregational study programs. Over the course of more than thirty years, and in ways similar to the disputes over racism and women's ministries, our General Convention wrestled with divergent yet deeply held convictions on sexuality and struggled to discern how to be faithful to common mission and preserve institutional unity. Resolutions from General Convention in the 1970s urged restraint on the question of ordaining homosexual persons while still affirming the full inclusion of such persons in the life of the church. This created a de facto "local option" practice regarding ordination. While some diocesan bishops refused to ordain persons of openly same-sex affection, others did. Many of our members have for decades benefited pastorally from their dedicated lives and faithful witness

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to the Gospel. The grace these servants of Christ have each received “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” has, in the view of many members of our Church who have experienced their ministry, helped greatly to equip the saints “for building up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:7, 12).

### *A Long Season of Listening and Consultation*

[3.16] In 1964, a resolution from the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs, was adopted by the 61<sup>st</sup> General Convention, calling for study and resources on the topic of human sexuality, in part because “changing patterns in human action have raised inquiries about the Church’s position on sexual behavior.” This led to a multi-page report to the 1967 General Convention on the “Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality,” and resolutions to continue study on the whole range of sexual topics, including homosexuality.<sup>32</sup> In 1976 the Church’s 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention asked the newly combined Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health to study the subject of same-sex affection and to “report its findings, along with recommendations, to the Church-at-large for study (and especially to the Bishops, Standing Committees, and Commissions of the National Church).”<sup>32</sup> Members of the Commission and delegates to the 66<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 1979 were divided on whether persons in same-sex unions should be prohibited from Holy Orders. At that Convention, a resolution passed that “there should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behavior the Church considers wholesome.” At the same time, General Convention also stated: “We believe it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.” Thus developed in our Episcopal Church a long process of education, discussion, deliberation, and decision-making. This included the development and dissemination of study materials to dioceses and congregations, the training of facilitators for study and discussions in congregations, publication of differing points of view, clergy conferences, and consultations among bishops.

- [3.17] In 1982, the 67<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church asked the national Church offices to “develop educational ways by which the Church can assist its people in their formative years (children to adults) to develop moral and spiritual perspectives in matters relating to sexuality and family life.”<sup>33</sup> In cooperation with the National Association of Episcopal Schools, a Task Force on Human Sexuality prepared an educational book—*Sexuality: A Divine Gift, A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life*<sup>34</sup>—that was published in 1987 and was used variously in different dioceses. This was followed the next year by another book, *Continuing the Dialogue [on] Sexuality: A Divine Gift* which offered different perspectives and responses.<sup>35</sup>
- [3.18] After the 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 1988, the Episcopal Church sought to insure that all dioceses and congregations would participate in the study, education, and discussion necessary for informed decisions by the Church regarding blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of persons in such unions. As called for by the 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 1991, a National Steering Committee for Human Sexuality Dialogues was formed. Representing the eight continental provinces of the Episcopal Church, it published and disseminated teaching materials and an educational design for use in dioceses throughout the church.<sup>36</sup> At this time a House Bishops Committee prepared *Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Study Document*. This 1994 study document summarized the work of the church through 1991, offered an account of the teaching of the Church beginning in Scripture, described understandings of same-sex affection, detailed the continuing violence against homosexual persons, and concluded with pastoral guidelines. It was the basis for small-group discussions at the 71<sup>st</sup> General Convention in Indianapolis in 1974.<sup>37</sup>
- [3.19] As a result, the 1994 General Convention formed a Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality, to continue to enable and coordinate study, education and discussion within the Episcopal Church. *Continuing the Dialogue* was

published and shared throughout the Episcopal Church, and was also shared with all the primates and provinces of the Anglican Communion. At the same 1994 Convention, our canons were modified to state: “No one shall be denied a place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church, except as otherwise specified by canon” (Journal of the 71st General Convention, p. 327). In 1996, the trial of Bishop Walter Righter, who had ordained an openly gay man, intensified the discussion.

- [3.20] In 1997, the Episcopal Church’s Standing Liturgical Commission reported back to General Convention on the specific question of the blessing of faithful life-partnerships between two persons of same-sex affection. The Commission clearly posed the question of what should be done when education and discussion have run their course and the Church remains divided over whether to bless same-sex unions.<sup>38</sup> In 2000, the Standing Commission—under the new name of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (having combined what were before two separate standing commissions)—proposed “that each Diocese, under the spiritual and pastoral direction of its bishop, shall determine the resolution of issues related to same-sex relationships, including the blessing of such relationships, and the ordination of homosexual Christians.”<sup>39</sup> In 2003, the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention passed a resolution that acknowledged the deep differences among members of the Church. It also “recognize[d] that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions”<sup>40</sup> even while it ruled out any official authorization of such liturgies by our Church at this time. At the same General Convention, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies consented to the election of the Rev. Canon Gene Robinson by the Diocese of New Hampshire as their next bishop.
- [3.21] Throughout this long season of listening and discernment, the Episcopal Church has remained committed to our common call to serve God’s mission as the basis for ecclesial

unity. We have prayed always for the divine gift of a common life that embraces even profound differences. We believe that, in our willingness to remain faithful to such “unity-in-difference,” we have not undertaken the work set before us lightly or without considerable study, deliberation, and constant prayer. We know that the power of the bonds of unity derives primarily not from institutional structures *per se*, but above all from the faithfulness of the Church’s Lord, who calls us together to share in his reconciling work in the world.

- [3.22] Indeed the Gospel calls us into a great mystery, the reconciliation that Christ has won for us upon the Cross, and which can be wrought among us only by the grace of Christ. Learning to trust the faithfulness of those with whom we disagree can fuel the lifelong process of conversion for all. This mutual trust bears witness not only to the power of the bonds of unity, but it also points quite beyond us to that mysterious power of divine grace at work in the Church’s unity. And this, we believe, may continually inspire hope for an even deeper unity of the sort none of us can yet imagine. In this sense, and as we have historically struggled to learn, the Gospel calls the Church to the kind of reconciling ministry the world can scarcely understand. A unity-in-difference that reconciles divisions and holds out compassion to all can bear real witness to the power of Jesus’ prayer that we “may all be one,” which John’s Gospel tells us was his fervent desire: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (17:21). We pray that the struggles of our Episcopal Church may always be used by the Lord to exhibit the power of God’s reconciling grace, “so that the world may believe that” God has sent the world’s Redeemer.



### Part IV: Eligibility for Ordination

“*Proclaiming Christ’s Resurrection*”:

*Eligibility and the Capacity to Bear Witness*

[4.0] Setting our hope in this reconciling power of Christ, we turn now to questions related directly to ordination. “If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” The Apostle Paul reminds us here in Romans 6:8 that the life of the whole Christian Church can only be the life of the crucified and risen Lord, who by the power of the Holy Spirit works within the members of his Body the mystery of his death and resurrection. Our aim in this section, then, is to expound the full meaning of previous sections of this essay, considering them now in relation to the ordering of Christ’s crucified and risen Body the Church. In light of the understandings of covenanted same-sex relationships articulated above, how has our Church discerned the suitability of those in committed same-sex relationships to lead the flock of Christ? We begin by reminding ourselves that the Church’s life springs from the death and resurrection of Jesus; we do so because we know that those who share in episcopacy are “called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ’s resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ’s sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings” (Examination of a bishop-elect, *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 517). This capacity to bear authentic witness to Christ’s resurrection and sovereignty definitively marks the identity of the apostles (see Acts 1:8, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:41, 13:31) and lays the irreplaceable foundation and context for all the other qualities needed in one called to exercise *episkope*.

[4.1] It would be hard to find a clearer biblical witness to this foundational quality in ordained ministry than the testimony of St. Paul himself. In the face of a challenge from would-be apostles with letters from Jerusalem, Paul directs the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11-12) to the qualities of vulnerability and endurance in suffering that have been given to him, and which make him a living reminder of the

humility and willing obedience of Christ, “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be visible in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:10). The Apostle’s share in the paschal mystery extends deeply into his very understanding of his own ministry. This is an understanding marked by the upending and conversion of his own life for the sake of the Gospel. St. Paul was forced to reflect on leadership because of God’s disruptive grace, shattering his life and destroying his “eligibility” for leadership in any normal sense of the word. As we read in the Book of Acts, Paul had measured his zeal for the Lord and for the traditions of the elders in terms of his willingness to persecute violently those of whom he was emphatically certain that God disapproved.

- [4.2] But then God “crucified” his world, and, in so doing, called him to be an apostle to the very group he had once tried to destroy. St. Paul later describes this as God’s great act of grace and mercy towards him when he himself was an enemy of God without knowing it. He had been absolutely certain that he was doing God’s will, only to find out that he was blocking God’s will instead (1 Corinthians 15:3-11). That experience caused the Apostle Paul to understand apostolic credentials in terms of service to others, not power over others—a service that could only spring from his own life-changing share in Jesus’ death and resurrection. For, as he says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). So when St. Paul speaks of his imprisonment at Philippi, he is more worried about the spread of the Gospel than about his own upcoming trial, even though his life may be in grave danger. He praises his co-workers, Timothy and Epaphroditus, for their service to the Church, for their willingness to spend their lives for the sake of the Christian community. He compares such ministry to the pattern of Jesus, who “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (Philippians 2:6ff). Over against Cynic philosophers who bullied their followers and ruled as tyrants over them,

Paul insists on a model of leadership that imitates the gentleness and kindness of Christ. Real eligibility, indeed real authority, in leadership, he insists, is seen in human willingness to be used by God for the empowerment of others.

- [4.3] Bearing these features of St. Paul's life and teaching in mind, we can see that what makes leaders fit to serve the *whole* Church of God is the *universality* of Christ's mission—and a minister's fidelity to Christ's way of serving that mission. This is the foundational quality that reaches across every human boundary. This is the fundamental ground upon which locally chosen ministers may be servants for the Church throughout the world. Thus the Christian family must, in discerning God's call to this apostolic ministry, be able to recognize such an authentic witness to the cross and resurrection in a candidate for episcopal service. Within our own Anglican tradition, Archbishop Michael Ramsey affirms that the wellspring of the Church's life is nothing less than the dying and rising of Christ, and clarifies how this must shape the Church's new Gospel understanding of reality. Men and women, he writes

are now found to be identified with Christ's death in such a way that they think of themselves no longer as separate and self-sufficient units, but as centred in Christ who died and rose again. They used to think of Christ as an isolated historical figure ("after the flesh"[2 Cor. 5]); now they think of Him as the inclusive head and centre of a new humanity, wherein a new creation of God is at work. The implication of this passage is far-reaching. Christ is here defined not as the isolated figure of Galilee and Judea but as one whose people, dead and risen with Him, are His own humanity.<sup>41</sup>

The transforming power of Jesus' death and resurrection, overcoming every division, unites his faithful people as the living members one Body. Thus the people of God, in the

power of the Holy Spirit, discern God's call to episcopal ministry in those in whom they recognize the charism of true, faithful, and, if need be, costly witness to the power of the Lord's death and resurrection. Such witnesses are notably marked by a deep and continuing conversion to God's purposes, as St. Paul understood, and by a gentleness, kindness, and humility that corresponds to the way of Christ. Across the centuries and in every region of the globe, the organic life of Christ, in the limbs and members of his Body, has expressed itself in this Spirit-guided authority to discern rightly such calls of God; the bishops of neighboring dioceses, in giving their consent to these elections and participating in the ordination liturgy, have affirmed the faithfulness of these communities in so discerning the call of God. Such, we devoutly believe, was the case in the recent calling to the episcopate of the Bishop of New Hampshire.

*Further Qualities to Be Discerned in the Ordained*

- [4.4] In addition to this foundational emphasis upon witnessing to the resurrection of Christ, the present ordination rites of the Episcopal Church (following earlier Anglican custom) identify other particular qualities and capacities for service which must be remarkable in one called to episcopal ministry. Among other features, one must be discernibly called "to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church... and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ" (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 517). These elements in the Examination of the bishop-elect reflect long-standing traditions in the Church's ritual life, tracing back to the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (c. 215) and behind that to the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). It must be noted here that if the Church had not adopted a canon of interpretation such as the foundational nature of Christ's death and resurrection, *all* the personal characteristics called for in the Pastorals would have to be given equal weight: this would most certainly prohibit the episcopal election of anyone married more than once (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), or of any who have unruly or unbelieving children (1

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Timothy 3:4; Titus 1:6), or of any who have a propensity to be quarrelsome, arrogant, or quick-tempered (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).

- [4.5] The history of episcopal ordinations throughout the Church's history suggests, rather, that the people of God have indeed interpreted all such prescriptions of personal qualities in the light of Christ's redemptive work. The Prayer Book calls for the ordination of a bishop to take place on the Lord's Day (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 511); and this reminds us again that all the qualities of the bishop-elect are understood as signifying and testifying to the power of Christ's resurrection. This is emphasized by the resonance of high priestly language in the ordination rites over time: in the *Apostolic Tradition* the candidate is called, using sacrificial language, to be blameless, gentle, pure, and humble. In the Book of Common Prayer, the prayer for the consecration of the bishop beseeches God to fill so abundantly the heart of the bishop-elect with divine love, that the new bishop may "exercise without reproach the high priesthood to which you have called *him* . . . in all things may *he* present before you the acceptable offering of a pure, and gentle, and holy life," thus directly echoing the personal qualities identified in the Hippolytan prayer. We may note here also echoes of Ephesians 5:2, where we are reminded that Christ, out of his love for us, "gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."
- [4.6] In this way, the prayer for the ordained to be filled with the love of God points us again to the new bishop's identity as a witness to the death and resurrection of Christ: the whole of the episcopal ministry is to exemplify the sacrifice of Christ, and the qualities of purity, gentleness, and holiness are not the new bishop's *own* possessions but can only be the continual outpouring of Christ who "loved us, and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." This means that the electing community must be able to discern in a candidate for episcopal ministry an authentic obedience to the love of Christ and a capacity to point, as St. Paul teaches us, not to the candidate's own self but to

Christ at work in the full power of his sacrificial holiness. And this is the testimony of the people of God in New Hampshire—laity, priests, and deacons—and of the bishops and deputies from every diocese consenting.

- [4.7] So while there may be differing forms in which the sacrificial holiness of Christ embodies itself in differing circumstances, there can be no doubt that the electing local community must be able, by power of the Holy Spirit, and confirmed by the consents of neighboring bishops along with clergy and laity from every diocese, to discern in candidates for episcopal office genuine charisms of obedience to Christ and so of authentic disposal of self to the service of Christ's sacrificial love. In the Examination of bishops-elect, after they confirm that they believe themselves to be called by God to episcopal ministry, the very first question asked is, "Will you accept this call and fulfill this trust in obedience to Christ?" (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 518). It is by means of this fundamental orientation of their entire being "in obedience to Christ" that bishops may bear witness in all their words and deeds *not* to their own particular qualities but to the power of the crucified and risen Lord whom they serve. While a bishop is, necessarily, recognized locally as called of God, it is precisely this obedience to the universal mission of Christ that fits the bishop to serve the universal Church. Again, it is their testimony that this is what the people of God in New Hampshire and the bishops and deputies consenting have discerned in electing their bishop.

*The Holy Spirit, the Local Community, and the Life of Christ*

- [4.8] Are we suggesting, then, that the potential openness to God's blessing of same-sex relationships is *adiaphora* and not a matter for Anglicans to consider across the Communion? Not at all, for that would imply that the Episcopal Church views the eligibility criteria for episcopal ministry as falling on the polarity between Church essentials and *adiaphora*. We believe that eligibility criteria for episcopal ministry do *not* fall on the differential between Church essentials and *adiaphora*. Rather, we believe that

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the particular form in which the holiness of Christ may be recognized in candidates for ministry is an element significantly determined by the painstaking discernment of the local community.

- [4.9] It has been the nearly universal practice of the Church in its early centuries and of the Episcopal Church since its inception, that local communities, in discerning God's call and electing their bishop, act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to identify candidates who can guide the flock of Christ into the holiness and catholicity that Christ would make manifest in his Body. Likewise it has been the equally widespread practice of the neighboring bishops of the Church to attest by their consent and participation in the ordination of the bishop-elect that the local community has, by its discernment and election, acted within the unity and apostolicity of the Church (thereby also serving the holiness and catholicity of the Church). In our Church, the consent of the bishops must always be coupled by the consent of the clergy and laity, as represented either by diocesan Standing Committees or by the House of Deputies during a General Convention. Discerning a candidate's capacity to lead the flock of Christ into Christ's own holiness is, because of the particular needs and conditions of every local community, the necessary task of the local community under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. Once more, it is the testimony of the people of God in New Hampshire and of the bishops and deputies consenting from the wider Church that this has been authentically accomplished in their recent election of a bishop.
- [4.10] So the Episcopal Church is far from wishing to consign *either* the eligibility criteria for ordination *or* the potential openness to God's blessing of same-sex relationships to the category of *adiaphora*. Rather, the Church keenly desires, as called for by more than one Lambeth Conference and by the *Windsor Report*, that these matters may be a subject of more widespread and considered discussion throughout the Communion. Nor does the Episcopal Church in the least disagree that the holiness and wholesomeness of

candidates for episcopal service is a universal essential for the Church; rather we have argued (1) that it is precisely a notable obedience to the *Lord's* own holiness and mission that foundationally disposes a bishop for universal service and (2) that the capacity of a candidate to lead a local community into the fullness of Christ's sacrificial holiness has historically been the burden of the local community to discern. We have emphasized that it is Christ's holiness, and the sacrifice accomplished and accepted once for all in Christ's death and resurrection, that must be the interpretive framework in the local community's discernment of requisite personal qualities in an episcopal candidate. Why is this important? This ensures that the personal qualities of the ordained may empower the people of God to a genuine following of *Christ*; and holds every local community's conception of holiness open to the full measure of God's holiness manifest in Christ.

- [4.11] The particular form in which Christ's holiness embodies itself in every concrete situation must necessarily be diverse if it is to be real for each local community. So, by analogy, were one person to push another to the ground, this would be an act of violent rudeness in a peaceful context, but the identical physical action upon a battlefield might well be an act of life-saving courage. Similarly, the needs and conditions of a local community, and their discerning familiarity with their candidates for ministry, guide them to recognize in one person the personal qualities that could lead their community into the fullness of Christ's saving holiness; whereas even quite similar personal qualities might not serve the growth in holiness of another community in a different context. What must be universal, however, is each community's absolute fidelity to the lordship of Christ and his holiness, and unflinching obedience to God the Holy Spirit who guides the community in recognizing how the Lord's holiness must come to full actualization in their life together for the sake of the world. Once again, it is the testimony of those servants of Christ involved in the episcopal election in New Hampshire that this is in fact what has guided them.



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### *Ordination for the Whole Church*

- [4.12] While the election of a bishop in the Diocese of New Hampshire was a local decision, meeting needs of mission and service to God's will as those were understood locally, it was offered up not just to the Episcopal Church but to the whole Communion in recognition of the fact that bishops are to represent and manifest the unity of the Communion. Bishops are a visible sign of this unity with a responsibility to maintain and strengthen the communion of churches within Anglicanism (see *Windsor Report* Appendix 2, Article 13). How can this be so in the case of the Bishop of New Hampshire, when his election has been a matter of such grave concern for other members of the family of Christ that it threatens to divide Anglicanism?
- [4.13] Bishops are consecrated into an order of ministry in the worldwide Church of God, and they do represent the universal to the local and the local to the universal ( *Windsor Report* 124), but this has never meant that a bishop duly elected in one locale must be acceptable everywhere or that his or her election is properly subject to confirmation by the whole Church. New Testament passages show some of the variety that emerges as Christian traditions attempt to find and apply biblical precedents for episcopal consecrations. New Testament texts suggest a variety of processes for selecting Church leaders, including the role that congregations and other church leaders are to take in the ratification or consecration of a new *episkopos* or bishop. The Pastoral Epistles suggest that Paul and other traveling leaders appointed the bishops of local churches; and no mention is made of their ratification by local congregations or other churches (Titus 1:5). In Acts 6:5-6, the local congregation elects seven Church leaders without any explicit ratification from the apostles. And according to Acts 13:2, Paul and Barnabas are chosen by direct command of the Holy Spirit without further review.
- [4.14] Despite the fact that this diversity of biblical precedents is narrowed down and harmonized with the ongoing development of legal codes or canons for church

governance, local variety in the manner of selecting bishops remains in evidence for centuries; and the need for prudence, flexibility, and procedural safeguards against abuse are always recognized when applying such rules. Even as they express a concern to regulate them, the important ecumenical councils always reiterate a principle of the integrity of local and regional churches in the selection of bishops. The first Council of Nicea aligned Christian jurisdictions with imperial ones, and established that a bishop should, if possible, be consecrated by all other bishops in that imperial province. But cooperative consecration is always balanced by an insistence on local specificity. Nicea 1 canon 15, for example, prohibits bishops from moving from church to church, while canon 6 (among other early ecumenical canons) discourages specious objections against the election of a bishop by instituting procedures for assessing them. Even with increased institutional concentration, east and west, at no time was it held that all bishops had to give consent to a particular episcopal election.

- [4.15] There exists at present no Communion-wide agreement on the acceptability of women bishops (see *Windsor Report* 126), or on whether divorce and remarriage prohibit eligibility (see *Windsor Report* 125). The unity of the Anglican Communion on these matters is therefore expressed as an agreement to disagree. Indeed, when considering the case of the Bishop of New Hampshire, everything depends on how unity and communion within Anglicanism are understood. Unity can mean, as the example of women bishops demonstrates, not consensus but the willingness to abide in love with ongoing differences of belief even about the criteria for eligibility to ordination. Unity within Anglicanism is a unity primarily of mutual love and care for one another (*Windsor Report* 9), ordered around our primary allegiance to Christ and mirroring the affection of Trinitarian persons for one another. In other words, we believe that the Church's unity depends not upon human uniformity of belief on all matters but upon our vital, common fidelity to the Lord, and our common

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sharing in his death and resurrection. For in Christ and the Holy Spirit the blessed unity and communion of the Trinity extends into our midst, becoming for us the very means of our salvation, the eternal life of God poured out for us.

- [4.16] Characteristic of Anglicanism is “the way it holds together diversities of many kinds. From the Reformation, Anglicans endeavored to hold together people of different temperaments, convictions and insights: the puritans who wanted more radical reform and the conservatives who emphasized their continuity with the pre-reformation Church. Today, for example, evangelicals, catholics, liberals and charismatics bring a diversity of insights and perspectives as Anglicans struggle to respond to the contemporary challenges to faith, order and moral teaching. Bound up with these groupings are the differences which arise from a variety of reactions to critical study of the Bible, particular cultural contexts, different schools of philosophical thought and scientific theory” (*Virginia Report* 3.3). The latter differences are surely ones informing the present controversy over blessing same-sex unions and ordaining those who live in them.

### *Unity-in-Difference:*

#### *The Church Lives from and for the Holy Trinity*

- [4.17] The unity maintained by Anglicanism, in contrast to other churches, has always been a unity in difference (*Windsor Report* 66), a rich and diverse unity (*Windsor Report* 62). A unity with this degree of internal diversity requires a communion that is exhibited and maintained, not by simple agreement among all parties, but by respectful listening to those with whom one disagrees (*Windsor Report* 65), by a willingness to render account to one another in love, and a readiness to learn from one another (*Windsor Report* 67). “At best the Anglican way is characterized by generosity and tolerance to those of different views. It also entails a willingness to contain difference and live with tension, even conflict, as the Church seeks a common mind on controversial issues” (*Virginia Report* 3.4). “The churches of the Anglican Communion, if that Communion

is to mean anything at all, are obliged to move together, to walk together in synodality. It is by listening to, and interacting with, voices from as many different parts of the family as possible that the Church discovers what its unity and communion really mean” (*Windsor Report* 67). Accountability to others in communion with them is “expressed by openness to dialogue, by attentiveness to the particularity of people, times and places, by acceptance of interdependence . . . and by honoring plurality and diversity as gifts of God” (*Virginia Report* 5.18). The episcopal election in New Hampshire is offered up to the whole church for its consideration in this very spirit of communion by which the Anglican churches have always been bound together in diversity. We recognize our disagreements here but walk together in love, in hope that the processes of discernment might be furthered thereby, for the sake of our common mission to bring God’s love to the world.

- [4.18] Rather than think of unity and communion as matters already achieved, we are consequently always on the way to greater communion and greater unity. The Anglican Communion, as the Archbishop of Canterbury reminds us, is both God’s gift and God’s command to us. With the help of our bishops we are therefore to strive to become the Anglican Communion, not assuming that we already are, or were but are no longer that communion. We believe, moreover, that communion as achieved agreement, or unity in the form of an already established consensus, should never be presumed a final stopping point, a stopping point that might keep us from heeding a God who ever calls us beyond our narrowness of vision for human life, a stopping point that might inhibit us from following in faithfulness the lead of the Spirit who moves ahead of us in surprising ways. As we noted in Section II above, the Book of Acts tells us of how Peter and his friends have an experience of the Spirit that makes them, and through them the whole Church, reconsider a previously well established opinion about the barriers to holiness presented by a Gentile lifestyle. They baptize Gentiles prior to any general Church approval for such actions as they feel they must, given these powerful

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new works of the Spirit, in the hope that the Church as a whole will eventually be moved by the transformed lives and Christ-like character of the new converts. And the Church as a whole gradually does shift its position after extended, careful, and at times quite heated consideration of what the Spirit of God seemed to be doing anew in its midst.

- [4.19] At the present time part of the Church believes that it recognizes members of same-sex affection who are living Christ-like lives of generous self-donation, costly witness, and courageous acts of discipleship in conformity with the pattern Christ establishes for us. And this part of the Church is calling the rest to “come and see” if this isn’t in fact the work of the Holy Spirit. It is according to this understanding of possible change in taken-for-granted views and of movement thereby towards greater unity and communion that the ministry of gay and lesbian persons is offered for the whole Church. The election of the Bishop of New Hampshire, therefore, is certainly not meant in any way to signal an interruption of communion with the wider Church or lack of concern for the Church’s greater good. We believe that God takes our differences, which the world would wickedly harden into divisions, and embraces them by the power of Christ and the Spirit within those blessed differences-in-relation of the Divine Persons; in this way the Church’s life of conversion and difference may become ever more fully a sharing in that blessed communion which is the life of God the Holy Trinity.
- [4.20] Bishops are the symbol of unity and communion not by reflecting some easy prior existence of those things, but by symbolizing in their persons the way a life of mutual responsibility and love in Christ can be created and sustained in these between-times of brokenness and disagreement, before Christ comes again to bring us all final reconciliation and peace. We might reflect here on the place where Jesus builds his new community—at the foot of the Cross. At the hour of his death, Jesus’ concern is for his mother, a vulnerable widow whose oldest son is now leaving her, and for his Beloved Disciple, who will be deeply

grieved at his death (John 19). He gives them to one another formally, in words that enact what he speaks, thus creating a new family, a new community among those who had not previously walked together. Might we not also lift this up as a model for our life together in Christ, especially in these trying times? In the midst of death and disunity, grief, loss, and betrayal, Jesus' concern is to build community. We could do worse than to imagine meeting those from whom we feel most estranged at the foot of the Cross.

- [4.21] The communion we all seek to share more deeply with one another can only be that which Jesus won for us at the cost of his passion and death. Putting our whole trust in him, we find strength, for the sake of a broken world, to reach beyond a unity of mere like-mindedness towards that blessed Divine Communion which alone can heal the world's divisions. Such communion is manifest and brought to light out of the diversity of voices through which surprising movements of the Spirit are discerned. Like women bishops, African American bishops, and all those bishops raised up from formerly colonized peoples before them, bishops of same-sex affection have the capacity, in virtue of Spirit-filled lives of holiness, to embody this salutary diversity for the greater good of the whole Communion. They are signs not only of the Church's unity but especially of its diverse and comprehensive catholicity. It is by way of this very diversity-in-unity, by way of all these diverse voices, including those previously unheard, brought together in a communion of mutual listening and learning, that we are brought more fully into the fullness of God's truth.
- [4.22] The whole community benefits from the raising up of previously marginalized persons into leadership positions in the Church. In and through their leadership, the Spirit leads us beyond the little loves of ours that are idolatrous, into the greater, more comprehensive love that God has shown us in Christ. In and through their leadership, the Spirit works beyond our blindness and short-sightedness to bring us into a greater understanding of God in his ultimately

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unfathomable difference from us. Unlike every other community we know, within the Body of Christ, the head must not say to the feet, “I have no need of you.” “On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect... God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that . . . the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12. 21-25).

- [4.23] Anglicanism at its best has been attentive to human fallibility, and has therefore especially prized humility and mutual forbearance as primary Christian virtues. The need for correction by others in a diverse Body of Christ and the need for openness to others in love, even and especially a respectful attentiveness to those with whom one most fervently disagrees, have always had a basis in this characteristically Anglican realism about the likelihood of moral and intellectual failure among the people of God. It is only in and through a diverse Communion that allegiance to any one particular viewpoint is prevented from *replacing* the allegiance that all of us owe to Christ, the one Head who alone can hold all of us, its diverse members, together in love. “In the process of discernment and reception relationships need to be maintained, for only in fellowship is there opportunity for correcting one-sidedness or ignorance” (*Virginia Report* 5.24).
- [4.24] “The experience of the Church as it is lived in different places has something to contribute to the discernment of the mind of Christ for the Church. No one culture, no one period of history has a monopoly of insight into the truth of the Gospel. It is essential for the fullest apprehension of truth that context is in dialogue with context. Sometimes the lived experience of a particular community enables Christian truth to be perceived afresh for the whole community” (*Virginia Report* 3.11). We wish most deeply to express our loving concern for the good of the whole Church, especially for those Anglicans worldwide who are

living in faithful, committed same-sex partnerships, and also for those Anglicans worldwide who do not see how such relationships can be open to God's blessing. We pray that the lived experience of the Episcopal Church—over such a long period of testing and controversy—has the potential to make a fruitful contribution. We pray that, in the words of the *Virginia Report* just quoted, the “lived experience” of this “particular community enables Christian truth to be perceived afresh for the whole community.”



## Part V

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### Part V: Walking Together by Grace

- [5.0] As we draw these reflections to a close, we observe again how fragmentary and incomplete is our offering. We know that much work remains for our Church and for our Communion. We hope that this document may be of assistance in the labors of many others in building up Christ's Body in love. We have sought to lay before you how the light of God's Word in Holy Scripture has led many among us to understand in a new way the possible significance of same-sex affection. And after sharing something of our Church's life story with you, we have tried to articulate how we have come to the present moment—seeking always the guidance of the Holy Spirit, desiring faithfully to serve the Gospel, and ever hoping to walk together with you by God's grace.
- [5.1] With you, we are moved by the compassion and love of Jesus. With you, we seek to nurture deeper listening and communication around our Communion. With you, we seek for more reflection on the matters of the Church's unity and of same-sex affection. We encourage a listening process by which the Communion could share reflections from dioceses and congregations about the impact and contributions of clergy of same-sex affection. Conversations on these matters might be usefully nurtured through a Communion web page for the purpose, through diocese-to-diocese links, and at the Lambeth Conference. We believe that much growth in mutual understanding could be achieved through Communion-wide biblical and theological studies on humankind's situation and calling as God's creatures—not only with respect to questions of human identity and sexuality but also in relationship to God's call to humanity regarding poverty, wealth, and the good of the whole creation. We encourage face-to-face encounters with the many faithful laity and clergy of same-sex affection whose stories have allowed members of our Church to catch sight of the holiness of God. We believe there are many such stories throughout our Communion.

[5.2] As we have been moved by the compassion of Jesus, and desire to serve him with you, our hearts are also opened to the many needs of the world he came to save. The listening process in our Communion surely must also listen with special tenderness and active care for the voices of those who are perishing from famine, HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, and war. Hearing their cry surely urges us all to work in common for the improvement of education, the alleviation of poverty, the countering of violence by peace (starting in all our homes), and the provision of adequate healthcare. We echo the recent call of our Communion's primates in their support for the Millennium Development Goals for 2015. To reduce absolute poverty by half and hunger by half—these achievements would bear powerful witness to the world of the power of God to rescue and redeem.

May we as Christians outdo all in love, that we may the more effectively bear witness to the God of love.

[5.3] And may God the Holy Spirit teach us to walk together by God's grace, "to set our hope on Christ," to live with you "for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:12).

# APPENDIX

## The Historical Development of Beliefs and Policies Regarding Sexuality in the Episcopal Church, USA

*This appendix sets forth, from official documents, the evolution of the Episcopal Church's deliberations on sexuality, from the earliest debates regarding marriage to the dialogues on human sexuality leading to the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention in 2003.*

*A narrative framework stitches together quotations from the actual legislative reports and resolutions. These documents form the common basis on which the leadership of the Episcopal Church deliberated and made decisions. Though not of one mind on many points, bishops and deputies worked from the same expanding knowledge base, drawing on the work of their predecessors while developing insights for the future. The change in content and language over the years was gradual but always in the same direction.*

*Complete references are found in the list of studies at the end, where there are also notes explaining some of the oddities of Convention Journals.*

*–Prepared by Pamela W. Darling, Th.D*

## Appendix

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### Introduction

From its earliest beginnings, the Episcopal Church has struggled to define what kinds of intimate relationships are permissible. Today, the chief topic in this struggle is the place of homosexual persons—gay men and lesbians—in the life of the church. This has been an explicit aspect of study, dialogue and legislation in the General Convention of the Episcopal Church since 1967. Long before that, however, concern about sexual behavior, contraception and the nature of marriage occupied many commissions and study groups, and contributed many pages to the Journals of the triennial General Convention.

At the 1808 General Convention, a question was raised about adopting from English canon law the “table of degrees” setting forth who cannot marry whom. The topic was judged too complex to be decided without further study. Instead, a resolution was adopted that “it is inconsistent with the law of God” to permit anyone with a divorced husband or wife still living to re-marry, unless the other party had committed adultery. Not until 1868 did the Church actually adopt a Canon on Holy Matrimony.

The divorce and re-marriage question was central from then on, with essentially three positions brought forward at various times: (1) marriage is an indissoluble bond, not affected by a civil divorce, so re-marriage is not possible under any circumstances; (2) adultery has the effect of nullifying the marriage, so re-marriage of the “innocent” party is permitted; (3) in addition to adultery there may be other circumstances which justify divorce, and it is the responsibility of the bishop to determine whether re-marriage can be permitted. The church struggled to reconcile the experience of the faithful with the words of the Scriptures:

Obviously the position that Christ’s teaching in regard to marriage is absolutely plain is open to doubt. ... We should not be discussing this matter at all if Christ had made his mind perfectly clear.

*Joint Commission on Marriage and Divorce, General Convention Journals, 1931 Appendix XI and 1937 Appendix XX*

A secondary theme of the debates and various revisions of the canons over the years was whether to withhold the sacraments from

persons who remarried “otherwise than as the Word of God and discipline of this Church allow,” and whether priest or bishop ought to make that decision. The role and authority of the bishop was a frequent subject of debate.

Major revisions to the marriage canon were approved in 1877, and later in 1904, 1931, 1946, and 1973. In parallel with these developments in the United States, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops also wrestled with marriage-related issues: re-marriage, birth control, polygamy. After the 1888 Lambeth Conference statement that people in polygamous relationships should not be baptized, Episcopal Church studies and reports thenceforth were scrupulous in defining marriage as “between one man and one woman.”

Decades of studies and debate, during which proposed changes were rejected as often as they were accepted, also raised the question of “the force of joint resolutions” as compared with amendments to the Constitution or Canons. The general conclusion was that since clergy cannot be disciplined for violating resolutions, only the constitution and canons are binding, regarding marriage as well as other matters. An amusing instance of this puzzle appears in an 1880 report “These very resolutions [to clarify the force of joint resolutions], if passed, would themselves be joint resolutions, neither more nor less...and it is difficult to see how any real relief could come to embarrassed minds from our passing them” (*1880 Convention Journal*, pp. 114-115).

Thus we see that prolonged disagreement about marriage issues resulted in challenges to the authority of Convention actions. Later disputes—including the ordination of women and the place of homosexual persons in the church—raised the same issues. Were resolutions of the General Convention as binding as changes to the constitution or canons? What about statements from the House of Bishops alone? Changing views of marriage, a fundamental building block of society, seemed to de-stabilize many aspects of life, in the church as well as the world.

And what about Lambeth? In 1877, a proposal in the House of

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Bishops that the Lambeth Conference be asked to prepare “accurate and authentic” versions of the Creeds and General Councils, the “standards of orthodox belief,” was rejected with the following comment:

Inasmuch as the Conference of Bishops at Lambeth is a purely voluntary association, with no organic character recognized by either the Church of England or our own Church... an address to them by this House representing ... the organic authority of the whole Church in this land, would be a matter of questionable propriety.

*1877 General Convention Journal, p. 116*

This attitude about the authority of Lambeth actions was common throughout many decades, and accounts in part for resistance in the Episcopal Church to being bound by resolutions taken elsewhere.

For many decades, the regulation of marriage was the primary way in which the Church established norms and enforced limits regarding the intimate relationships of baptized Christians. In the late twentieth century, growing directly out of decades of struggle about marriage, debate about homosexuality gradually took center stage. In 1961, the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs introduced a resolution on Christian Marriage & Population Control, quoting Lambeth 1958: “it is not to be held that the procreation of children is the sole purpose of Christian Marriage.” “Sex” could now be spoken aloud.

### 61<sup>st</sup> General Convention—1964

At the 1964 convention, a follow-up resolution on Family Life from the Human Affairs Commission expressed continuing concern about marriage, divorce and family life, and the need for studies to clarify cultural stresses and the Church’s response:

1964-HD9.4 *Whereas*, professional study and community experience have shown that family life in America today is under unusual cultural stresses; and

*Whereas*, The resultant family breakdowns, divorces, and marriages after divorce, concern the Church, and

*Whereas*, Changing patterns in human action have raised inquiries concerning the Church’s position on sexual behavior; and

*Whereas*, The Church is mindful of its trust to give responsible leadership in all areas of human conduct; be it

*Resolved*, That the General Convention instruct the appropriate units of the Executive Council to gather data, formulate studies, and make specific recommendations, to the 1967 General Convention, through the Joint Commission on Human Affairs, on the Christian understanding of sexual behavior; ...

*1964 General Convention Journal, p. 365*

And so the sexuality studies began.

### **62<sup>nd</sup> General Convention—1967**

Following the 1964 Convention, the Standing Commission on the Church in Human Affairs pursued its assignment vigorously and in 1967 reported candidly:

The Commission takes note of the significant turbulence in society about the meaning of human sexuality.... The complex, sometimes referred to as the “New Morality,” reflects changes in practice and attitudes in sexual behavior ... the development of anti-biotics, the pill, and the automobile, have freed people to make responsible decisions for themselves. The traditional and often stereotyped attitudes of the Churches may no longer provide adequate guidance. ...

Basically, sexuality is of the very nature of life and is good. Man is created a sexual being. ... The whole person can only be experienced as a sexual being.

Society has tended to focus attitudes about sexuality upon its limited aspects in genital expression. This narrow focus has often led the Church to concentrate mainly on the rightness or wrongness of a sexual act. In so doing, the Church has tended to emphasize the importance of moral and civil law as the sole guide to personal relationships. ...

Attitudes which give rise to rigid prescriptive statements and which fail to deal with the immediate experiences and attitudes of human beings will not meet the personal and corporate needs of people as they seek to relate to one another with responsibility and integrity. The Church needs to make available the means for direct and honest talk at every possible level. ...

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[I]t is especially necessary to make a distinction between those [civil] laws which are necessary for the protection of society and those which attempt to regulate private moral choice. ... [C]ivil law *alone* is not an appropriate repository for *all* the Church's teaching on sex.

*1967 General Convention, Journal Appendix 22.4-7*

The Commission identified a need for “direct and honest talk” as a means for moving beyond rigid prescriptive statements. Building on the resolution from the last General Convention, the Commission then proposed a more extensive study of many topics related to sexuality. It seems likely that this is the first use of the term “homosexuality” in the *Convention Journal*. The resolution was adopted in the following form:

1967-HD12/13 *Whereas*, Man having been created a sexual being, sexuality is of the very nature of life and is good; and

*Whereas*, Attitudes about sexuality should be focused less on specific sexual acts and more upon the development of human personality and relationships in the context of social responsibility; and

*Whereas*, With respect to civil laws which govern social conduct, a distinction should be made between those laws which are necessary for the protection of society and those which attempt to regulate private moral choice; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the General Convention instruct the Executive Council to

1. Initiate studies to express Christian attitudes with respect to birth-control; contraception; abortion; sterilization; illegitimacy; divorce and remarriage; marital, pre-marital, post-marital, and extra-marital sexual behavior; sexual behavior of single adults; and homosexuality;
2. Develop an educational program designed to communicate such attitudes to the Church at large.

*1967 General Convention Journal, p. 492-494.*

Also in 1967, a related attitude change, long in coming, was manifest in the decision to permit dioceses to include women as members of their deputation to General Convention, to go into effect in 1970.



### 63<sup>rd</sup> General Convention—1970

Following the 1967 Convention, the Human Affairs Commission experienced almost total turnover, with only one bishop and one priest continuing on the 16-member group, and its attention turned to other matters. The 1967 resolutions had probably been referred to staff, since there is no mention of a follow-up study in the Commission report; and there is only one paragraph even mentioning the topic of homosexuality, in this case prejudice against homosexuals:

[E]ven so “old fashioned” a social investigator as the late Professor Kinsey pointed out very clearly the difficulty of achieving a perfect casuistry when the officer on the beat is culturally disposed to find a homosexual act much more offensive than fornication. The two, being equally forbidden in the law, were unequally dealt with, because the casuist at the scene of both was disposed to be esthetically offended by the one while tolerant of the other.

*1970 General Convention Journal, p. 473*

This was the first Convention to seat women as deputies.

### House of Bishops Meeting—1972

A cryptic entry in the minutes of a Special Meeting of the House of Bishops, in New Orleans in October of 1972, reports on actions taken during an executive session, which included:

Discharged the Pastoral Committee from consideration at this session of a Resolution submitted by Bishop Charles on Holy Orders and the homosexual.

*1973 General Convention Journal, p. 1138*

This appears to be the first recorded instance of any reference by the bishops to homosexuality as an ordination issue, though it seems likely to have been discussed informally before.

### 64<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1973

In 1973, the Human Affairs Commission reported that it had decided to defer all topics which had been discussed previously, in

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order to focus on concerns related to the individual in society, and the individual in the family. Much of its attention was given to yet another attempt to revise the marriage canons. The new sections were meant to place decisions about remarriage after divorce in a pastoral rather than legalistic context. After prolonged debate, some amendments, and a Committee of Conference to reconcile differences, the General Convention adopted new Canons I.17-18, the first major revision of the marriage canons since 1949. This Convention, the second to seat women deputies, came very close to approving the ordination of women.

*1973 General Convention Journal, pp. 319-325, 582-602*

After the 1973 General Convention, the pace of developments in the gender and sexuality area picked up again. In 1974, eleven women were ordained to the priesthood by three bishops in Philadelphia, generating consternation and great anger within the House of Bishops. Four more women were ordained to the priesthood in Washington, D.C., in 1975. The ordinations were eventually determined to be “valid but irregular;” but the controversy fueled tempers and raised serious questions about collegiality and authority in the House of Bishops. Also in 1974, an organization called Integrity was founded as a support group in the Episcopal Church for homosexuals, their family and friends. It was to become a visible and effective lobbying group.

### House of Bishops Meetings—1974 & 1975

During the October 1974 Special Meeting of the House of Bishops, called to respond to the Philadelphia ordinations, reference was made to a “Sub-committee on Homophiles” of the bishops’ committee on Pastoral Development, but the minutes contain no further information about this until the following year (*1976 General Convention Journal, p. B-249*).

The September 1975 meeting of bishops was pre-occupied with continuing reactions to the 1974 Philadelphia ordinations, considering their validity and censuring the ordaining bishops. In the midst of this, the “Sub-Committee on Homophiles” offered a resolution on “Dialogue with Homophile Community” (probably

referring to Integrity), which was adopted by the bishops:

*Whereas*, the homophile community in the United States is seeking understanding from our society, and

*Whereas*, strong prejudices and discrimination do in fact operate to deny homophiles certain civil rights thus working a hardship on persons with this sexual orientation, and

*Whereas*, the Episcopal Church seeks to be sensitive to the needs of the persons [sic]; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That the Presiding Bishop ask the Joint Commission on Human Affairs, or such other appropriate commission as may already exist, to take up this matter to assure the continuation of the dialogue between the Church and the leaders of the organizing forum for homophiles who are active members of the Episcopal Church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Task Force be asked to work with the Joint Commission sharing with it its findings and insight and that the Task Force continue its involvement as a resource to the House of Bishops in this regard.

*1976 General Convention Journal, p. B-338*

There do not seem to be later references to the “sub-committee on homophiles,” but the conversation continued.

### 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1976

Since 1967, General Conventions have repeatedly authorized dialogues and studies of the theology and psychosocial aspects of homosexuality, and adopted a variety of resolutions regarding sexuality, homosexuality, civil rights, ordination, same-sex relationships, and so forth. In 1976, the Commission on Human Affairs noted receipt of the resolution from the 1975 House of Bishops meeting (above), and reported that the Presiding Bishop had asked the group to continue “dialogue with the homophile community within the church.” The Commission report began with a general statement summarizing attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality at that time:

1. Homosexual persons are children of God, who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love,

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acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

2. We make grateful recognition of the substantial contributions which homosexual persons have made and are making to the life of our Church and society.
3. The question of the causes of sexual orientation, the personal meaning of that orientation, and the ethical implications of homosexual acts are shrouded in great obscurity. This is clearly but one aspect of a confusion and tension which exists in the consciousness of the Church and many individual Christians concerning the relationship between the traditional Christian ethic and current developments and concepts of pastoral ministry, understanding of human psychosexual development, and the sexual practices of contemporary society. ... We are conscious of the personal suffering experienced by many homosexual persons and the various unnecessary ways in which society contributes to that suffering.

*1976 General Convention Journal, p. AA-153*

Three resolutions offered by the Commission were adopted, urging dialogue on the diocesan level, equal protection under civil law, and the assurance that homosexuals are children of God with equal claim to a place in the Church:

1976-A068a *Resolved*, That this General Convention recommends that the dioceses and the Church in general engage in serious study and dialogue in the area of human sexuality, (including homosexuality) as it pertains to various aspects of life, particularly living styles, employment, housing, and education.

*1976 General Convention Journal, p. C-112*

1976-A069 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the *Church*.

*1976 General Convention Journal, pp. C-108*

1976-A071 *Resolved*, That this General Convention expresses its conviction that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the laws with all other citizens, and calls upon our society to see that such protection is provided in actuality.

*1976 General Convention Journal, p. C-109*

Additional resolutions, from a bishop and several deputies, were related to the ordination of homosexuals, and the following was adopted as a substitute for all of them:

1976-B101 *Resolved*, That this 65th General Convention direct the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs to study in depth the matter of the ordination of homosexual persons and report its findings, along with recommendations, to the Church at large for study (and especially to the Bishops, Standing Committees, Commissions of the National Church), to the next General Convention, and be it further

*Resolved*, That all diocesan studies of this subject be forwarded to the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs for study, and distribution where pertinent.

*1976 General Convention Journal, pp. C-109-110*

The studies were starting to pile up, and the topic of the ordination of homosexuals, discharged at the 1972 House of Bishops meeting, had become a major focus. Also at the 1976 General Convention, amidst great controversy, the ordination of women was approved, and the revision of the Book of Common Prayer received first approval.

In January 1977, the Bishop of New York, with the consent of the Standing Committee, ordained a woman who openly acknowledged her homosexual orientation. When the Executive Council met in April it adopted the following resolution of distress:

*Resolved*, That the Executive Council express the hope that no bishop will ordain or license any professing and practicing homosexual until the issue be resolved by the General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Council deplore and condemn all actions which offend the moral law of the Church; and further that it witness to the necessity for the Church to give moral leadership

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in the affairs and activities of the Church and the world; and be it further

*Resolved*, That these matters be referred to the House of Bishops, meeting in September, with a request that they be placed on its agenda

*Executive Council Minutes, Apr. 27-29, 1977, pp. 26-30, 33*

### House of Bishops Meeting—1977

In October 1977, the House of Bishops met in Port St. Lucie, Florida, the first meeting after the approval of women's ordination. It became a tumultuous meeting when the Presiding Bishop offered to resign since he could not accept the ordination of women. "Port St. Lucie" became short-hand for the attempt to maintain unity in the midst of profound disagreement. The meeting focused primarily on matters relating to conscience and the ordination of women, but homosexuality also came up following the January ordination in New York and the Executive Council resolution. The Bishop of New York made a statement expressing his regret at having upset his brothers, followed by an explanation and defense of the action, which rested largely on the distinction between orientation and behavior.

The next day, the Committee on Theology offered a report, entitled "The Marriage and Ordination of Homosexuals," a lengthy statement expressing, for the most part, the "traditional" understanding about sexuality:

It is not clear from Scripture just what morality attaches to homosexual orientation ... The Church is right to confine its nuptial blessing exclusively to heterosexual marriage. ... With respect to the question of ordaining homosexuals it is crucial to distinguish between (a) an advocating and/or practicing (willful and habitual) homosexual and, (b) one with a dominant homosexual orientation.

The document was discussed at length, amended, and accompanied by a minority report, all found in the minutes of that meeting. At the end of the debate, a "mind of the House" resolution was adopted:

In light of the principles concerning homosexuality adopted by this House as contained in the report of its Committee on Theology, it

is the mind of this House that, pending further inquiry and study by the Church, no Bishop of this Church shall confer Holy Orders in violation of these principles.

*1979 General Convention Journal*, p. B-183-192

## 66<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1979

Responding to instructions from the 1976 Convention to consider the matter of the ordination of homosexuals (raised in the House of Bishops in 1972), the Executive Council report, and the House of Bishops debate, the newly-combined Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health presented to the 1979 General Convention a 30-page report, “Background Statement on Human Sexuality.

*1979 General Convention Journal*, pp. AA 119-149

The introductory section described their process.

The Commission consulted with many other persons who seek to make their own responsible decisions.... The nature of this subject and the environment for decision-making seem to require that all of us go through a pilgrimage of discovery together if we are to reach agreement with our sisters and brothers in Christ.... That the Commission was able to present a unanimous recommendation is testimony to the value it placed on the diversity of opinion which was discovered among its membership in the course of the honest, forthright discussion by which convictions and conclusions were reached.

The table of contents reveals the ambitious scope of the Commission’s work (Report, p. AA-124):

- I. Background Statement of Human Sexuality
- II. Basic Assumptions of the Commission
  - A. Interpretation of the Bible — Proof-texting – Imitation of Jesus — Principles vs. Rules — God in Christ the Only Absolute — New Testament Gospel Love Defined
  - B. The Biblical Views of Human Sexuality — Variety of Views — Sex Basically Good — Some Changing Rules and Customs — More Established Positions — Wider Social Effects

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- C. The Church's Sources of Authority — The Authority of the Bible — Scripture — Tradition — Reason
- D. Interpretations of Church Tradition and Natural Law — Natural Law — Church tradition — Church Historical Views of Sexuality — The Infection of Dualism — Chastity, Virginity and Marriage

### Summary

#### III. Toward a Position on Sexuality

##### A. Empirical and Modern Views of Sexuality

- 1. Area of Agreement
- 2. Homosexuality
  - a. Professional Agreements
  - b. Scientific Professional Disagreements
  - c. Additional Unresolved Issues

Subjective Attitudes Fantasy Deep Friendships

Related Factors Variation of Sex Drives Adolescence

Homosexual Person's Decision: "Open" vs. "Secret"

- d. Other Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

##### B. The Commissions Own Views

- 1. Evaluation of Scientific and Secular Views
- 2. Our Views of Human Sexuality
- 3. Selecting and Using Biblical Norms

Majority vs. Minority "Life-Boat" Exceptions Norms and Flexibility

Recommendation to the General Convention

Bibliography on Human Sexuality

Consultations with Diocesan Representatives

The Report begins with three general conclusions:

- 1. The purposes of human sexuality are to contribute to human welfare, pleasure, family procreation, social



order and a more abundant quality of life for all. More specifically, sex should be used as a means of achieving such purposes and should be under the guidance and expression of the kind of love taught by Jesus and revealed by God through Christ.

2. If sexual (homosexual or heterosexual) attitudes and concerns become obsessional and dominant, they are wrong (idolatrous) because they tend to hinder the growth in Christian love.
3. In establishing ethical norms and making moral judgments on specific sexual acts, the same criteria as are used for heterosexuals should be used for homosexuals. Does an act either hinder or enhance the family, Church, society's quality of life, or human love?

*1979 General Convention Journal*, pp. AA 125-126

The Commission, by its own account, was unable to find many areas of agreement:

About the only agreement found in contemporary views on sexuality is the affirmation that sex is one of the basic drives of human nature. After that, points of view diverge...

The next nearest agreement is the conviction that sex is more good than bad, and that it is a volatile and pervasive power that therefore needs control and direction.

*1979 General Convention Journal*, pp. AA 136

The report goes on to list areas of agreement among the various professionals who met with the Commission, in effect sharing their informational sessions with the wider church.

In spite of many differences of opinion among professionals, there are certain facts about which there is agreement. Many of these conflict with wide-spread popular beliefs.

- Homosexuality is not a single entity...
- [H]omosexual persons are at present less likely than heterosexual persons to molest or seduce children and young adolescents.
- There are homosexual persons in all walks of life and in all types of vocations and professions, and many of them are

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extremely able and have made valuable contributions.

- It is common to suppose that men or women who depart significantly from the model of “masculine” “feminine” behavior accepted in their community may have homosexual tendencies. Such indicators are almost entirely unreliable. ...
- Adolescents all go through a period of sexual identity confusion. This is usually transient and manageable. But it is extremely common, particularly in boys, for there to be homosexual concerns. ...
- No one theory of cause can explain all cases of homosexuality.
- The incidence of homosexuality is difficult to assess accurately.
- The issue of change to a heterosexual adaptation is difficult for members of opposing schools of thought even to discuss.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. AA-137*

The final section on “the commission’s own views” highlights the continuing confusion surrounding the topic:

We wish to conclude by emphasizing that many of the cultural responses for or against homosexuality were based on ignorance and emotional attitudes unsupported by either facts or the Gospel. Similarly, we wish to emphasize with equal fervor that present modern and scientific knowledge has not resolved many of the obscurities of sex. It seems obvious to us that we need the continued full and mutual support of religion and science to help us deal with human sexuality in all its forms in far better ways than has been true so far.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. AA-142*

An appendix reported on “consultations with diocesan representatives, reporting on a survey sent to 93 dioceses with responses from 80, of which 65 reported that a study would be done, was being done, or had been done. Only 13 reported there was no active discussion of the topic. Significant findings include:

There is not one position that has emerged. Rather there is a diversity of opinion, particularly on the ordination of homosexual persons. There is no consensus of position in one part of the country as opposed to another. There is no consensus in urban dioceses as opposed to rural dioceses. The one recognizable trend is that in dioceses where study has taken place on a broad base and in depth some consensus has been reached within the individual diocese.

The Church at large has and is taking a serious and thoughtful approach to the subject. General Convention delegates on the whole will have had the benefit of studies and discussions within their dioceses.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. AA-148*

The Resolution recommended by the Commission included the following effort to resolve the ordination question:

The General Convention should enact no legislation which singles out a particular human condition and makes of it an absolute barrier to ordination, thus depriving Bishops and Commissions on Ministry of the proper exercise of their discretion in the particular cases for which they are responsible.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. AA-122*

The Legislative Committee on Ministry of the House of Bishops, to which it was referred, recommended substituting another Resolution, which was approved by the House of Bishops on a roll call vote of 99 to 34:

(1979-A53s) *Whereas*, we are conscious of the mystery of human sexuality and how deeply personal matters related to human sexuality are, making it most difficult to arrive at comprehensive and agreed-upon statements in these matters; and

*Whereas*, we are aware that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church must continue to study these matters in relationship to Holy Scripture, Christian faith and tradition, and growing insights; and

*Whereas*, the 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention recognized "...that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church..."; and

*Whereas*, all the clergy and laity of the Church are expected to render compassionate and understanding pastoral care to one another and to all persons; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That this General Convention recommend to Bishops, Pastors, Vestries, Commissions on Ministry and Standing Committees, the following considerations as they continue to exercise their proper canonical functions in the selection and approval of persons for ordination:

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1. There are many human conditions, some of them in the area of sexuality, which bear upon a person's suitability for ordination;
2. Every ordinand is expected to lead a life which is "a wholesome example to all people" (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 517,532,544). There should be no barrier to the ordination of qualified persons of either heterosexual or homosexual orientation whose behavior the Church considers wholesome;
3. We re-affirm the traditional teaching of the Church on marriage, marital fidelity and sexual chastity as the standard for Christian sexual morality. Candidates for ordination are expected to conform to this standard. Therefore we believe it is not appropriate for this Church to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. C 88-89*

The Legislative Committee of the House of Deputies brought it to that House with a recommendation to delete the final sentence recommending against ordaining "practicing" homosexuals. After lengthy debate, the sentence was restored, and the deputies concurred with the bishops on a vote by orders: in the lay order, Yes-77, No-18, Divided-13; clergy, Yes-70, No-29, Divided-13.

The vote tallies suggest that at that time, in 1979, a large majority of bishops and deputies were not convinced that traditional teachings should be modified. However, there were some among the minority who felt very strongly otherwise. Shortly after the measure was adopted by the House of Bishops, a statement of disassociation by 21 bishops was presented to be "spread upon the minutes of this House." In forceful terms it repudiated the third section, and announced their intention not to be bound by it:

Taking note, therefore, that this action of the House is recommendatory and not prescriptive, we give notice as we are answerable before Almighty God that we cannot accept these recommendations or implement them in our Dioceses insofar as they relate or give unqualified expression to Recommendation 3. To do so would be to abrogate our responsibilities of apostolic leadership and

prophetic witness to the flock of Christ, committed to our charge...

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. B110-112*

In the House of Deputies, eight clergy and lay members presented a statement to “associate ourselves with the statement of conscience made by 21 of our Fathers in God in the House of Bishops.” Additional bishops, clergy and laity signed the statement after it was presented in each House.

Two other resolutions on sexuality were adopted in 1979, a statement of support for those ministering with homosexual persons, and a call for diocesan studies to build on the work of the Commission on Human Affairs and Health:

1979-D107sa *Whereas*, the 65th General Convention of the Episcopal Church of 1976 resolved that the Diocese and the Church in general engage in serious study and dialogue in the area of sexuality as it pertains to various aspects of life, particularly living styles, employment, housing, and education; and

*Whereas*, we need to grow into a mature understanding of sexuality as a gift of God; and as responsible stewards, we continue in our need to be open to God’s on-going revelation to us in this area, as this is made known to us through Scripture, tradition, and reason....

*Resolved*, That every Diocese use the Report and accompanying bibliography of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health to the 66th General Convention in developing programs to enhance a mature understanding of sexuality and our Christian responsibility as faithful stewards in this regard. Care should be taken that persons of differing attitudes, professional experience, and sexual orientation are appointed to insure a full spectrum of conviction and be it further

*Resolved*, That the coordinator of Christian Education be charged with the responsibility for the distribution of materials and for assisting Dioceses with the establishment of diocesan study programs

*1979 General Convention Journal, p. C-131*

The results of this recommendation that dioceses take on study projects are difficult to track or analyze, so the fate of this initiative is unclear. The resolution does indicate continued faith that somehow talking about it would eventually bring a resolution.

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### 67<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1982

The 1982 Report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health gives most of its attention to medical issues, but does include a seven-page essay on marriage, that theme which seems to alternate with considerations of sexuality. The opening passage invokes the history of marriage debates:

For the last fifty years there has been a quiet, yet persistent, struggle on the part of the church to maintain a clear view of Christian marriage against the background of increasing divorce rates, alternatives to monogamous marriage, and the growing sexual permissiveness. Frequently the struggle, it would appear, has taken the form of either a truculent refusal by the church to entertain, on the one hand, the possibility that its traditional teaching on marriage has been historically conditioned or, on the other hand, a virtual concession to the moral solipsisms of the times and the view that marriage exists solely to give us pleasure or for convenience.

*1982 Blue Book, p. 134-140*

The Commission brought no resolutions dealing with sexuality to this convention, but a re-affirmation of the 1976 and 1979 resolutions on civil rights for homosexuals was adopted (1982-B061a). One other resolution, probably influenced by the 1979 call for diocesan studies, aimed to carry the educational process forward.

1982-D076 *Resolved*, That the Executive Council through its Committee on Education for Mission and Ministry develop educational ways by which the Church can assist its people in their formative years (children through adults) to develop moral and spiritual perspectives in matters relating to sexuality and family life.

*1982 General Convention Journal, p. C-152*

This would have repercussions several years later.

### 68<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1985

As in 1982, the Commission on Human Affairs focused attention on other issues in its 1985 Report—racism, hunger, refugees, alcohol, abortion, aging—with no mention of homosexuality, and only a brief passage on marriage counseling. The only action in

1985 was a resolution seeking to keep the pressure on dioceses in terms of understanding homosexual persons and providing pastoral support.

1985-D082s *Resolved*, That the 68th General Convention urge each diocese of this Church to find an effective way to foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, to provide pastoral support, and to give life to the claim of homosexual persons “upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral care and concern of the Church” as recognized by the General Convention in 1976.

*1985 General Convention Journal, p. 207*

### 1988—The “Divine Gift” Controversy

As charged by the 1982 Resolution (1982-D076a) calling for educational programs to assist all ages to develop moral and spiritual perspectives in matters relating to sexuality and family life,” Church Center staff had created a Task Force on Human Sexuality and family Life Education. The Task Force drafted materials and tested them in a variety of settings over several years. The result was a 112-page book, plus leader’s guide, entitled *Sexuality: a Divine Gift—A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life*, released in 1987, which described itself as:

...an opportunity to share unique lessons learned from our collective experiences. ... Underlying the materials presented is a point of view intended to be thought-provoking, not intimidating, sensitive but not bland. ... We intend to be disciplined by, but not blindly submissive to, the viewpoints of our Christian forebears.

The program...is *theological* in asking participants to bring to their involvement in this program all they know and have experienced of God.... The involvement is *experiential* and *dialogue centered* in asking participants to share the wisdom they all possess. It is *intergenerational* and *holistic*.... It is *comprehensive* in asking everyone to consider a variety of role models and living patterns....

*Sexuality: A Divine Gift, p. vii*

In addition to selecting this experiential methodology, the Task Force based its work on assumptions that were well ahead of the

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majority view in the Church at that time.

It is possible to ignore all the sociological data and simply maintain that “good Christians” should follow the so-called traditional Christian standards of sexual abstinence or strict heterosexual monogamy. If one takes that view, noncommunication and enmity result. ...

This apparent jettisoning of traditional standards would not be well received.

In the course of planning the work, the Task Force developed several premises, including:

*History* A historical review of the church’s teachings ... reveals that significant change, conflict, and confusion still remain. ... *Tradition.* Traditional theological systems are so often couched in terms of sinfulness and morality ... [We need] a new and more Anglican sacramental focus on God’s loving gifts rather than dwelling on human failings. *Dialogue.* If we are confident of God’s unfailing truth, we need to be wary of setting up any barriers to free and open inquiry. ...

*Sexuality: A Divine Gift, p. 1*

Most of the book consisted of methodological guidance about surveying congregations, working with small groups, and asking questions. However, both the opening section and the resources suggested for group and individual included material plainly supportive of homosexuality. This quotation from James Nelson, placed in the section entitled “Reading for Reflection,” is representative:

A church which believes that God’s grace yearns for its fullest possible human embodiment will strive to help all persons to affirm and celebrate their sexuality. It is, after all, God’s gift which makes communion and intimacy possible. And, if these things are true, then those churches and Christians who would pressure homosexual persons to deny or hide or suppress or refrain from expressing their homosexuality are depriving them of something very fundamental to their wholeness. Churches, rather, should help lesbians and gay men to affirm and to celebrate their homosexuality. It is just as natural to them as is heterosexuality to other persons. And it is just as significant to their wholeness as is heterosexuality to those oriented in that direction. For the churches to believe and act in this way



would truly be a prophetic witness to a homophobic society.

*James Nelson, Between Two Gardens (NY: Pilgrim Press, 1983), p. 122  
as quoted in Sexuality: a Divine Gift p. 68*

The book was issued in late 1987, in time for the Standing Commission on Human Affairs to review as they completed their report to the next General Convention. The Commission was pleased to have a resource to promote dialogue, but not everyone took such a benign view. The Presiding Bishop and Church Center staff were besieged by angry complaints from many quarters, some dispassionate but many highly emotional. So great was the controversy that a supplement, *Continuing the Dialogue—Sexuality: a Divine Gift*, was quickly assembled. It included essays by people and resources generally considered on the “traditional” side. The controversy was so intense that the Executive Council, at its May 1988 meeting, adopted the following resolution.

EXCO51988.23 *Resolved*, That *Sexuality: A Divine Gift* is a study document published with the intent of inviting members of the Church to join the Task Force on Human Sexuality and Family Life Education “in exploring this vital area of human existence, where, we believe, no one has all the answers” (from the foreword to *Sexuality: A Divine Gift*).

We the members of the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church do hereby acknowledge and regret the confusion and distress surrounding the publication and distribution of this study document. We further wish to assure the Church that no change has been made in the official policies of the Episcopal Church regarding sexuality. The hope of the Task Force on Human Sexuality and Family Life and the National Association of Episcopal Schools, the two bodies responsible for publishing the resource in question, was to produce a document which would “develop moral and spiritual perspective in matters relating to sexuality and family life” (Resolution 1985-D076a). It now has supplemental material in the recently published resource *Continuing the Dialogue*.

*Executive Council Minutes, May 18-20, 1988, pp. 36-38*

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By the time the Human Affairs Commission presented its resolutions to the General Convention, in July 1988, a major crisis seemed imminent. Their original resolution on Education on Human Sexuality became the focus. The Commission had recommended:

1988-A089 *Resolved*, That this 69th General Convention call to the attention of the Church the study guide, *Sexuality, a Divine Gift*, prepared by the Executive Council staff; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we commend the Executive Council staff for the work done in preparing this study guide; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we call on the Presiding Bishop and the Executive Council to continue this effort and to provide and promote the use of additional materials on human sexuality, birth control and family planning for all age groups as part of this Church's ongoing Christian Education curriculum; and be it further

*Resolved*, That abortion education be included in the Church's education curriculum and that these materials be explicit, with a full understanding of the physical realities and risks involved in abortion; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we encourage the members of this Church to give strong support to responsible local public and private school programs of education in human sexuality.

*1988 Blue Book, p. 153*

During Legislative Committee testimony and vigorous debate on the floor of the House of Deputies, the first two clauses were cut, striking all reference to *Sexuality, a Divine Gift*, and leaving only the call for "materials on human sexuality.

*1988 General Convention Journal, p. 687*

Crisis was averted, and the implied rebuke to the staff who had prepared the book was plain. Thereafter the document itself was no longer distributed from the Church Center.

## 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1988

In 1988, eight pages of the Report to the 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health dealt with the topic of sexuality. The Outline of the entire report suggests the range of the Commission's work:

- I. Theological Introduction
- II. Human Sexuality (Introduction) —  
Background — Human Sexual Experience — Marital relationships — Pre-, Post-, Extra-Marital – Homosexuality — AIDS Epidemic — Abortion – Sacredness of Human Life
- III. Marriage
- IV Institutional Racism
- V. Bio-Ethical Issues

*1988 Blue Book, p. 138-147*

Excerpts indicate a continued emphasis on dialogue, and a gradual shift in attitudes throughout the Church.

The primary focus...has been on various issues of human sexuality... The Commission initiated a church-wide dialogue on these issues through the pages of *The Episcopalian*. Seven articles were published, written by various members of our Church, espousing differing points of view. It is important to note that each author is a dedicated Christian. The debate was vigorous,, with responses ranging from reasoned arguments on all sides to emotional presentations defending or attacking a particular viewpoint...

The commission believes that the debate is perhaps even more important than the conclusions. The moral standards of our society are in flux. ... One thing of which we are certain is that yesterday's standards are being challenged profoundly in this generation. Some argue that this is so because this generation is immoral and must therefore be recalled to the moral patterns affirmed in the past. Others contend that new knowledge and new realities that people in the past did not have to confront are forcing new behavior patterns. ...

The commission affirms marriage as the standard, the norm, the primary relationship in which the gift of human sexuality is to be

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shared. There was no debate among us on this issue. ... At this point the majority in our Church is committed to an attempt to call the society to the traditional sexual standards. A significant minority, however, of this Church is convinced that the time has come to begin a process that will enable Christians to think through new moral and sexual options in the light of new realities. ...

This commission believes that truth is served by allowing the debate to continue with no attempt to mute it by premature pronouncements at the national level. We believe that local and diocesan pronouncements serve local and emotional needs and will continue no matter what the church does nationally.. It is our recommendation that on the national level we, with bold maturity, foster a significant dialogue and thereby enable a new consensus to emerge over time if appropriate. ...

The homosexual issue must be approached, first of all, as a family issue by the Church. If it is approached as sickness, or an issue of evil, or as a perversion, the conversation never emerges to the fully human level.

The Commission proposed several resolutions related to sexuality – one speaking against violence:

1988-A085 Resolved, That this 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention decries the increase of violence against homosexual persons and calls upon law enforcement officials across the land to be sensitive to this peril and to prosecute guilty persons to the fullest extent of the law.

*1988 General Convention Journal, p. 483*

Another recommended a Lutheran study guide on homosexuality:

1988-A090 *Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That this 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention commend for use throughout this Church the Lutheran study guide, *A Study of Issues Concerning Homosexuality: Report of the Advisory Committee of Issues Relating to Homosexuality* (Copyright 1986, Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America).

*1988 General Convention Journal, p. 707*

In some respects the Lutheran guide moved beyond the traditional view, but it expressed the same lack of certainty and desire to move carefully that appear in many Episcopal studies:

Sexuality derived from this primary relationship to God expressed

in baptism cannot be defined solely in terms of sexual practice... [It] emphasizes the place of passion, affection, emotion in our relationship with God and with others. ... [I]t suggests that genital contact ought to be contained within the context of a covenant, a relationship that reflects the trust, fidelity and commitment we experience in our relationship with God. ...

All that has been reported in this study explains why we ... find it impossible to speak authoritatively about a subject with which the church is still struggling. There is among us little confidence that the traditional responses of the church to homosexuality are justified—theologically, biblically, or scientific ... Far from being able to instruct the world about the meaning of homosexuality, the church finds itself, with the world, struggling to understand and know where to praise and where to judge.

*A Study of Issues Concerning Homosexuality, pp. 36,38*

Another resolution from the Commission expressed a need, after years of studying the topic, to step back and codify the status of “the Church’s Understanding of Human Sexuality.”

1988-A091 *Resolved*, That this 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention direct the Executive Council to begin to compile a booklet setting forth what the Church has said and taught through General Convention during the past two decades regarding all the issues relating to human sexuality, and to include in such a booklet a bibliography of recommended resources for the further study of those issues; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this booklet be published following the 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention, thus allowing the studies currently underway to be completed and appropriate action in response to them to be taken by Convention.

*1988 General Convention Journal, p. 707*

The Commission’s summary of the issues expressed great hope:

In our conversations about human sexuality we have disagreed and fought and compromised and prayed and listened and searched Scripture, and in the end we feel alive and diligently intent upon an important mission. ... We are called to draw lines and to discern and make judgments, but these are understood, not as life-denying

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decisions, but as giving emphatic clues defining the grace areas of life as well as the danger areas of human fallenness. Only Jesus Christ brings life eternal as he shares his full divinity. Our frail, delicate sexuality rests in his mercy.

*1988 Blue Book, pp. 154*

One member of the Commission found himself unable to endorse the report, and filed “A Minority Report” which read in part:

My problem with Section II of the report is that, although it says that it supports the traditional standards regarding human sexuality, it seems to me to spend the vast majority of its time questioning that position. Also, it gives virtually no weight to Scripture, which for me must be the most important single factor in considering any of the issues involved.

Furthermore, discussion at commission meetings always seemed to revolve around whether we should uphold traditional Christian standards or alter those standards in light of new information and understandings concerning human sexuality. ...

I agree with other members of the commission that we need to be open to a further and fuller understanding of homosexuality. This can be accomplished by sensitive listening to those who are homosexual persons—ones who engage in genital sex, ones who maintain chastity, and ones who are seeking or have successfully found reorientation—and to the families and counselors of homosexual persons. Conclusions reached can then be measured more faithfully against Scriptural authority.

*1988 Blue Book, pp. 162-163*

A lot happened at the 1988 General Convention. A resolution was introduced in the House of Bishops for the Convention to “adopt as its own” a concise statement of the “traditional” position on human sexuality from the November 1987 General Synod of the Church of England. After various attempts to amend or substitute, the matter was postponed indefinitely. That afternoon, a group of bishops moved to place the English statement in the Journal over the signatures of 53 active and retired bishops, and this motion carried. Later, the 1979 statement of dis-association from the recommendation against ordaining “practicing homosexuals” was also placed on the record, along with the 20 signatures of those who had signed in 1979, and another 29 who signed in 1988.

*1988 General Convention Journal, pp. 183-184, 195-199*

The 1988 Convention was also notable for its controversy over “episcopal visitors,” a plan for dealing with congregations which did not accept their own bishop due to disagreement over the ordination of women. There was tremendous opposition from supporters of women’s ordination, noting that creating an exception for those who opposed the ordination of women had the effect of creating a second-class priesthood of women. On the other side there was pressure for a solution to take to the Lambeth Conference (beginning the week after the Convention) to show that the American church had found a way to accommodate dissenters. No one was particularly happy with the final resolution, and its provisions were never invoked during its six-year life (though the Church of England adapted the idea when it began ordaining women, with mixed results).

*1988-B022sa, 1988 General Convention Journal, p. 232*

### **House of Bishops Meeting—1990**

At the regular meeting of the House of Bishops in September 1990, the third afternoon was devoted to the topic of homosexuality, beginning with an address by the Presiding Bishop, a panel discussion, and small groups to continue discussion of the topic. The next day, the House considered their response to the December 1989 ordination in the Diocese of Newark of a gay man living with another man. In February the Presiding Bishop’s Council of Advice issued a statement in which they “decry the action” and “disassociate ourselves from the action of the Standing Committee and Bishop of Newark in carrying out this ordination.” An excerpt from this statement reveals that the reason had as much to do with church order as with homosexuality:

This statement grows out of extensive consultation, initiated by the Presiding Bishop, throughout the Episcopal Church, particularly with respect to the issues of the accountability of bishops and others in authority to the theological tradition of the church and orderly process in church life.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 501-503*

After re-affirming the 1979 resolution recommending against

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the ordination of “practicing homosexuals” (1979-A053sa), the Council of Advice statement went on:

Not all members of the church agree with this position, as they did not when the resolution was adopted in 1979. Nevertheless, short of action by the General Convention, it is the stated and authoritative position of the church at this time.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 502*

The House of Bishops debated the Council’s statement and eventually, with a roll call vote, adopted the following, supporting the Council of Advice statement:

(1990-B-1a) That the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church affirm and support the Statement of February 20, 1990, made by the Presiding Bishop and his Council of Advice in regard to the ordination of a practicing homosexual by the Bishop of Newark on December 16, 1989. The Statement ... is appended and made a part of this resolution.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 501*

The Presiding Bishop himself and several members of the Council of Advice voted against it, arguing that the statement had been an appropriate response at the time, but served no purpose so many months later.

The Bishop of Newark then addressed the bishops, presenting his rationale for the ordination. Immediately following his address, demonstrating the importance of the church order question, another resolution seeking clarity about “authority” was adopted:

*Resolved*, That the statement of the Presiding Bishop and his Council of Advice be referred to the Commission on Constitution and Canons (inasmuch as the statement raises questions about the authority of General Convention resolutions), and to the Commission on Human Affairs (inasmuch as the appropriateness of ordaining to the priesthood openly gay persons continues to be a vexing issue within the church).

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 503*

The Constitution and Canons Commission “continues to refrain from judicial interpretation” (1991 *Blue Book*) as required by the Canons, so there is no record of a response from that body. The Human Affairs Commission did respond (see below).



On the last day of the Bishops meeting, “A Statement of the House of Bishops” calling for widespread dialogue on the subject of homosexuality was adopted. Excerpts give a sense of where the bishops were in 1990:

[M]any voices from across the church ask—often insistently—for a definitive word on issues of human sexuality. ... We are not of a single mind in our understanding of the demands of Holy Scripture, of faithful obedience to tradition, or informed awareness of the actual lives and choices faced by homosexual men and women. ...

The 1988 General Convention called the Church to a disciplined dialogue, the creation of occasions to discuss human sexuality, in the context of which there would inescapably be a focus on homosexuality. Those discussions began, and they must continue. As your bishops, we reaffirm our commitment to stimulate prolonged opportunities for such dialogue. ... To call for dialogue in a puzzling and complex area is not to abdicate our leadership—it is precisely to give it in a way consistent with our Anglican heritage: to call God’s people to stand faithfully in the midst of life, seeking the mind and heart of God.

Obviously, we do not expect easy answers. Dialogue is not going to produce consensus. It may not even provide grounds for a compromise presently beyond our ken. ... As thorny as questions raised in dialogue about human sexuality may be, as bewildering as it may be to encounter believing Christians in often sharp disagreement, faith does offer answers. ... It offers an understanding of moral discourse and the need for theological reflection in our lives. It calls us to repentance, prayer, and discernment. ...

We urge you to pray for patience. This may be especially difficult for those who expect early resolution, an up-or-down vote at the forthcoming General Convention. ... We acknowledge the extent to which the whole Church groans in travail, waiting for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. ... The dialogue to which we again call you offers, we believe, the most faithful process for our community of believers to discern God’s will.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p.517-518*

There is no agreement, but still a commitment to dialogue.

### 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention—1991

The 1991 report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs presented results from the sexuality dialogues conducted in the 28 dioceses which responded to the Commission's query. One immediate finding was that most people in the Church are reluctant to talk about the topic. Many reported serious disagreement within their dioceses about the nature of homosexuality, the Church's authority in sexual matters, and the authority of Scripture. The Commission concluded:

This Commission, like the Church at large at this time, is not of a single mind in its assumptions and prescriptions about what the Church should do and say concerning human sexuality. ... We do not agree, in particular, concerning two issues fundamental to the Church's position on ethical questions before us: (1) whether homosexual orientation is an equally valid, God-given alternative to heterosexual orientation, and (2) whether committed, monogamous heterosexual marriage is the only morally acceptable context for full sexual intimacy. ... We agreed that sexuality is rightly used and blessed by God in the life-long marriage covenant of a woman and a man. We believe that Christian communities should strive to be much more supportive of these marriages and families. ... We are agreed that homosexual orientation is not morally culpable or inconsistent with being a committed Christian. ...

This commission believes that our Church is engaged in a long and ongoing process on these issues, one in which there will continue to be different perspectives, often strongly held and argued. We know that there are disciples of profound morality on several sides of the issues.

Truth in complex issues is rarely comprehended fully from one perspective, and we believe we need each other's insights. ... In the Anglican—Episcopal Church tradition we also believe that it is not only possible but of God that we do not insist that there be only one agreed-upon position on these matters and that we can live and serve together with that tension.

*1991 Blue Book, p. 196-204*

This section of the Human Affairs Commission's Report concluded with a proposed resolution to affirm the church's teaching on sexual expression, commission congregational dialogue, and direct

bishops to prepare a pastoral teaching. The resolution also affirmed that each diocese was “fully competent to determine whom best to ordain,” and which clergy to receive or license. Reaching the Convention, however, a substitute was debated and finally adopted, focusing on the dialogue process and eliminating the section on diocesan decision-making about ordination:

1991-A104sa *Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirms that the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous “union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind” “intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord” as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Church continues to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this General Convention confesses our failure to lead and to resolve this discontinuity through legislative efforts based upon resolutions directed at singular and various aspects of these issues...

The second and third resolves introduce two new elements to the conversation: recognition of the “discontinuity between [traditional] teaching and the experience of many members of this body,” and of the failure thus far to bridge that gulf through legislation. It goes on to encourage yet more dialogue, this time at the congregational level.

*Resolved*, That this General Convention commissions the Bishops and members of each Diocesan Deputation to initiate a means for all congregations in their jurisdiction to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues; and further this General Convention directs the President of each Province to appoint one Bishop, one lay deputy and one clerical deputy in that province to facilitate the process, to receive reports from the dioceses at each meeting of their provincial synod and report to the 71st General Convention; and be it further

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*Resolved*, That this General Convention directs the House of Bishops to prepare a Pastoral Teaching prior to the 71st General Convention using the learnings from the diocesan and provincial processes and calling upon such insight as is necessary from theologians, theological ethicists, social scientists and gay and lesbian persons; and that three lay persons and three members of the clergy from the House of Deputies, appointed by the President of the House of Deputies be included in the preparation of this Pastoral Teaching.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 746*

The final resolve removed the topic from the purview of the Human Affairs Commission, placing responsibility for the dialogues and the development of a “pastoral teaching” squarely on the bishops.

The Convention adopted without amendment the Commission’s resolutions acknowledging lack of consensus and calling for a pan-Anglican and ecumenical dialogue.

1991-B020 *Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That this Church receive the report of the Standing Committee on Human Affairs as clear evidence of no strong consensus in this Church on the human sexuality issues considered or the resolutions proposed; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Office of the Presiding Bishop now be directed to propose to all provinces of the Anglican Communion and all churches with whom we are in ecumenical dialogue that a broad process of consultation be initiated on an official pan-Anglican and ecumenical level as a bold step forward in the consideration of these potentially divisive issues which should not be resolved by the Episcopal Church on its own.

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 807*

This does not seem to have been acted upon for several years.

### 71<sup>st</sup> General Convention—1994

The final resolve of the much-amended resolution, 1991-A104sa, had directed the House of Bishops to prepare a “pastoral teaching,” and a committee of eight bishops, and six deputies—three priests, a lay man and two lay women—was appointed to summarize

previous developments, review the issues, and point a way forward. Throughout the triennium, drafts of their work were circulated to members of the House of Bishops for comment.

By early 1994, the content of the “pastoral teaching” was sufficiently developed to suggest an open attitude toward sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular—which was very distressing to some. A month before General Convention, a statement from bishops in Province VII (the Southwest) entitled “An Affirmation” was circulated to members of the House of Bishops, saying in part:

Having read the Fifth Draft of the House of Bishops’ document called “*Continuing the Dialogue*,” which is intended to be a pastoral teaching on human sexuality, and believing that, if adopted, this Fifth Draft would signal a substantive change in the teaching of the Church, eighteen bishops of Province VII ... have issued the following statement.

Their accompanying statement offered an alternative, “to affirm afresh the unchanged teaching of the Church in a day of moral confusion.”

1. The fundamental element in Christian sexual morality is the discipline of self-control called Chastity which means absolute faithfulness in marriage and sexual abstinence apart from marriage. ...
2. Premarital sexual relations, however prevalent in society, cannot be condoned by a Church that proclaims the sanctity of marriage. Equally, sexual relationships outside of marriage constitute a denial of God’s plan for humanity.... Sexual relationships between members of the same sex are also a denial of God’s plan, and cannot be condoned by the Church.
3. We recognize fully the difficulties which Christian moral imperatives impose on all of us as members of our fallen race, and we therefore counsel tolerance and loving pastoral care.... But neither the Church nor its bishops have the authority to compromise in principle, or give approval in practice, to standards less or other than our God has given us.

*1994 General Convention Journal, pp. 151-153*

At the beginning of the 1994 General Convention, Bishops and

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Deputies met together for presentation and discussion of the Pastoral Study. The title had been changed from a “Teaching” to a “Study,” so as not to appear to be pronouncing the last word on the subject. The House of Bishops had debated at some length and initially agreed to circulate the Province VII bishops’ statement along with the official Pastoral Study. In response, the Bishop of Newark drafted an alternative statement, “An Affirmation in Koinonia,” initially signed by 51 additional bishops, “lest anyone think consensus has in fact been reached on these issues, or that there is no change occurring in this vital area of our life.”

It began with thanks to the committee because

that document in its various drafts forced the whole church to wrestle with issues that affect vitally the lives and hopes of a sizable group of the members of this church....

and compared the present debate with earlier conflicts in the life of the church:

... this convention by various resolutions has taken stands before on very emotional subjects such as capital punishment and abortion and has called this church to various boycotts of products to achieve what the majority believed was a moral agenda. On the role and place of women in the total life of this church this body has spoken by amending the constitution and canons to give the decision of General Convention the force of law. ... even with these official actions no one has suggested that those who hold contrary opinions are somehow violating the collegiality of this house or that they were not welcome to continue to bear witness and indeed to act on their consciences in these matters. Collegiality has meant that we have agreed to respect each other and to live with our differences.

It described the discouragement felt by gay and lesbian Church members and clergy at the decision to circulate “An Affirmation” with the Pastoral Study, which:

has had the effect of tilting the carefully crafted work of the committee back to a place where some members of our church no longer feel included.

*1994 General Convention Journal, pp. 154-157*

The document provoking these competing “affirmations” was *Continuing the Dialogue: a Pastoral Study Document of the House*

*of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality.* This 76-page study began by reviewing developments from 1976-1991, discussed the 1991 General Convention actions, and then considered a series of topics: Dialogue in Community, The Bible and Human Sexuality, A Traditional Christian Understanding of Marriage, The Discontinuities (including Concerning Homosexuality), and Sexualized Violence, and concluded with Pastoral Guidelines, a listing and summary drawn from earlier statements of the General Convention. This excerpt from its Pastoral Guidelines illustrates the tenor of the study:

- We believe sexual relationships reach their fullest potential for good and minimize their capacity for ill when in the context of the chaste, faithful, committed lifelong unions between husband and wife. There are those who believe this is as true for homosexual as for heterosexual relationships and that such relationships need and should receive the pastoral care of the church.
- We view as contrary to the baptismal covenant, and therefore morally unacceptable, sexual behavior which is adulterous, promiscuous, abusive, or exploitative in nature, or which involves children or others incapable of informed mutual consent....
- We acknowledge that certain discontinuities exist, in human sexuality as well as in other areas, between the standards and norms set forth by the Church's teachings and the experience of a number of the Church's members. Those discontinuities, of necessity, do not interrupt the communion we share. Where we disagree, we need to continue the dialogue. Therefore we commit ourselves to:
  - Respond pastorally...
  - Continue in trust and *Koinonia* ordaining only persons we believe to be a wholesome example to their people, according to the standards and norms set forth by the Church's teaching.
  - Hold paramount the belief that we are all loved equally by God and are called to love one another.
  - Commit to ongoing consultation concerning these matters with the wider Anglican Communion and with our ecumenical partners.

*Continuing the Dialogue, p.66*

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Appended to *Continuing the Dialogue* was “A Report on the Human Sexuality Dialogues” held pursuant to the fourth Resolved of 1991-A104sa. The Pastoral Study committee had worked in tandem with the Dialogue committee, which coordinated a training and survey project eventually involving some 30,000 persons from 1,128 parishes in three-fourths of the dioceses. The Dialogue Committee’s report had previously appeared in the *1994 Blue Book* (pp. 332-346), but the Pastoral Study itself was not released until it had been adopted by the House of Bishops at the beginning of the 1994 Convention. After floor debate and many attempts to amend, the bishops adopted the following compromise:

1994-B1001 *Resolved*, That the House of Bishops, affirming the teaching of the Church that the normative context for sexual intimacy is lifelong, heterosexual, monogamous marriage, and pursuing our Anglican tradition of historic truth encountering contemporary life, offers *Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Study Document of the House of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality* to the Church as a way for the Church to continue the dialogue on human sexuality

A second clause was the compromise, not to circulate either of the two “affirmations” but making them part of the minutes:

*Resolved*, That the two statements, “An Affirmation” and “An Affirmation in Koinonia,” *not* be an official part of the House of Bishops’ Pastoral Study Document on human sexuality; the statements are to be made a part of the minutes with names of signatories attached, but not distributed with the study document.

*1994 General Convention Journal, pp. 141-142, 151-157*

Note that the House of Bishops did not approve the content of the document itself, but “offered” it to the Church for continued dialogue. Since it was a product of the House of Bishops, it was not formally considered by the House of Deputies, and thus is not an official Act of Convention (which requires the concurrence of both Houses).

At 70 pages, the 1994 Pastoral Study was the longest “official” document on sexuality since the 30-page report of 1979. The reaction by groups of conservative and progressive bishops in the two 1994 “Affirmation” statements, and the eventual vote in the House of Bishops (108 for, 23 against) suggests that it may



represent a “tipping point” in the gradual shift of the majority of bishops away from traditional prohibitions toward a more open attitude about sexuality and orientation.

Recognizing an on-going process, the 1994 General Convention authorized a Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality to provide resources and training for continued church-wide conversations about the Pastoral Study, *Continuing the Dialogue* (1994-B012a). The 1994 Convention also added sexual orientation to the anti-discrimination categories for church membership (1994-C020sa,) and reaffirmed the 1976 support of civil rights for homosexual persons (1994-C019, endorsing 1976-A071).

Further demonstrating that the majority was shifting, in perhaps its most far-reaching action, the 1994 Convention called for a report on the theological and pastoral considerations of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex.

### 1995—The Trial

Not surprisingly, there were those who felt the traditional foundations were eroding despite their best efforts through protests, statements and legislative action. On January 27, 1995, ten bishops filed a presentment against Walter Righter, a retired bishop who had ordained to the diaconate a partnered homosexual in 1990, while serving as assistant bishop in the Diocese of Newark.

The presentment cited three documents: the 1977 House of Bishop’s resolution at Port St. Lucie,

In light of the principles concerning homosexuality adopted by this House as contained in the report of its committee on Theology, it is the mind of this House that, pending further inquiry and study by the Church, no Bishop of this Church shall confer Holy Orders in violation of these principles.

*1979 General Convention Journal, pp. B-183-192*

the Statement of the Presiding Bishop’s Council of Advice, following the 1989 ordination of a partnered homosexual, to

disassociate ourselves from the action of the Standing Committee

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and Bishop of Newark in carrying out this ordination

*1991 General Convention Journal, p. 501-503*

and the “Affirmation of Koinonia” giving notice that the signers did not intend to regard homosexuality or living in a partnered relationship as a bar to ordination which Bishop Righter had signed in 1994.

*1994 General Convention Journal, pp. 151-154.*

There were two charges:

1. a violation of Canon IV.1.1(2) in that he is teaching publicly and advisedly that a practicing homosexual may properly be ordained...and is therefore teaching a doctrine contrary to that held by this Church;
2. violation of Canon IV.1.1(6) in that he ordained a practicing homosexual ... in violation of his ordination vows to “conform to the Doctrine ... of the ... Church

*“Presentment, In the Court for the Trial of a Bishop,” 1995, pp .6-7*

In March 1995, the Presiding Bishop described the presentment process to the House of Bishops, reviewed the recent history of relationships with the House, and shared his views about the presentment:

Our present situation, with regard to the presentment, is not a complete surprise. Differences of opinion, discord, divisions are inevitable in a church such as ours—where diversity is not only tolerated but honored. ... this presentment is not the way to go deeper into the truths of one another. ... Regardless of its merits, its worth, and what might or might not be found by invoking the legal process, this presentment will not solve anything. It will resolve nothing. Yes, we hunger for resolution, for clarity, but I think we have to stay hungry, as we are always hungry for the Word of God. This presentment can only disrupt us and divert us from the path we are on. ...

This is not a debating society or a court of law. This is a community of God’s people. We have another way. To that way, I commend you.  
...

When it is my turn to vote, I cannot, and will not consent to this presentment. And I pray that this House will realize that this is

not the way. ... Let us put ourselves in God's hands and ask for transformation. We can do no more. We must do no less.

*Appendix G, "Brief of Respondent," May 10, 1995*

The canonical requirement—that one quarter of the bishops qualified to vote in the House of Bishops consent in writing to the presentment going forward—was met within the time allowed. A public trial was held (after two changes of venue), and the proceedings were highly publicized. In May 1996, the court issued its opinion and decision, finding in favor of Bishop Righter on both counts. This hinged on the central question: what constitutes “doctrine”?

The Presenters, the Respondent and the Court have agreed that the basic issue in this case is the doctrine of the Episcopal Church. ... We are not a confessional church which has carefully articulated and identified the entire scope of its teaching... Within Anglicanism there is a long tradition of appeal to fundamental doctrine as supplying a basis for reckoning a Church to be a true Church. This “Core Doctrine” arises out of the Gospel itself, and is rooted and grounded in Scripture. ... [it] is understood as of the essence of Christianity and necessary for salvation, and is therefore binding on all who are baptized. Core Doctrine, therefore, is unchangeable. Anglicans have important grounds for viewing the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (which names “the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith”) as a reflection of this understanding of Core Doctrine ... It is this Core Doctrine, and not the broad definition urged by the dissent, which is protected by the canons of the church.

Theology is different from Doctrine. ... Doctrine is not to be confused with “theology” which is prayerful reflection on scripture and Core Doctrine in the light of the Christian experience....[and may] offer diverse understandings of Holy Scripture and doctrine. ... The Anglican tradition has encouraged theological diversity and supports faithful exploration in developing theology rather than a confessional definition. ...

The Court finds that there is no Core Doctrine prohibiting the ordination of a non-celibate homosexual person living in a faithful and committed sexual relationship with a person of the same sex, and therefore the Court dismisses Count 1. ...

Count 2 dismissed: We hold that for a violation of a doctrinal or traditional teaching to be an “act which involves a violation of

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ordination vows,” the proscribed act must have been so specified by the full and unequivocal authority of General Convention.

*“Summary of Court’s Opinion,” May 15, 1996*

Of eight members of the court, one filed a dissenting opinion, holding to the traditional view. The “heresy trial” had ended. Despite the court’s statement that “we are not giving an opinion on the morality of same-gender relationships,” the decision, and the concept of “core doctrine,” did not reassure those hoping for a return to a traditional understanding of sexual morality.

### 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention—1997

Perhaps the most far-reaching action of the preceding General Convention had been the instruction to the Standing Liturgical Commission dealing with the blessing of same-sex relationships. They were directed not to prepare actual rites, but address theological and pastoral aspects:

*1994-C042s Resolved*, That the 71<sup>st</sup> General Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to prepare and present to the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention, as part of the Church’s ongoing dialogue on human sexuality, a report addressing the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring the love and commitment between persons of the same sex; and be it further

*Resolved*, That no rites for honoring the love and commitment between persons of the same sex be developed unless and until the preparation of such rites has been authorized by the General Convention.

*1994 General Convention Journal, p. 819*

This moved the discussion from the Standing Commission on Human Affairs to the Standing Liturgical Commission, in cooperation with the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops. The resulting 15-page “Report to the [1997] General Convention on the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships” presented and rejected four options:

A. Continue to emphasize that the right and proper context for

genital relations is within heterosexual marriage. ...

- B. Have the Standing Liturgical Commission devise a rite or rites of marriage to be authorized for use equally with heterosexual or homosexual couples. ...
- C. Have the Standing Liturgical Commission develop a rite or rites that would officially bestow the church's blessing on same-sex unions but would clearly not be the same as sacramental marriage. ...
- D. Accept the ambiguity of the present situation and affirm the duty of local pastors to respond pastorally to the needs of their parishioners.

In the context of the church's liturgical life, the concern about homosexuality articulated in this Report had come full circle, from its origins in the debates about marriage which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

Those who aver, either fearfully or hopefully, that full-blown sacramental marriage for same-sex persons would mean a rethinking of the nature of marriage are clearly correct. The present canonical provisions for remarriage after divorce were arrived at in piecemeal fashion, without due consideration of what they implied for marriage itself. Furthermore, in allowing remarriage after divorce without providing any liturgy for ritualizing the passage from married to single state the church has failed at another level to think through its theology of marriage. More than that, the different imaging that homosexual and heterosexual marriages would hold up for the church require that marriage itself needs rethinking. ...

Noting the importance of the issue to the life of the church, the report cautioned:

An alternative that would provide official, church-wide blessing of same-sex unions could not be adopted without creating division—possibly schism.... This, as the earlier question of the ordination of women, pushes the church to think more deeply about its own nature. The question of blessing same-sex unions raises more than issues of sexuality. It raises the question of the church itself. ...

Its observations about Anglican practice and diocesan initiative are more than pertinent to the questions of 2005:

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England underwent centuries of experience learning the essential value of compromise and “loyal opposition.” Anglicanism has refused to adopt an authoritative *magisterium* or confessional stance. It has never insisted on deciding for one side of a truly ambiguous question at the expense of the values represented in its opposite. Anglicanism’s authority has consistently grown from pastoral decisions rather than ideological ones. We have decided what most faithfully cares for the life and unity of the church and its people by prayerfully responding to the concrete problems and concerns of the people as they arise. In the Episcopal Church in the United States, the diocese has historically been the basic unit of the church. Thus, typically, such responses occur at the level of parish and diocese.

*1997 Blue Book, pp. 286-296*

The Liturgical Commissions Report included a four-page minority report submitted by three bishops who were members of the Committee, which underscores some points and takes issue with others:

A community of faith becomes a community of faith when it agrees to a set of formative or foundational beliefs. ... It would be wrong, of course, to place the traditional Christian teaching about marriage and sexual behavior alongside the major foundational beliefs of the Christian community, such as the Resurrection and the Incarnation. But since that teaching traces some of its roots to the Seventh Commandment, and to Jesus’ teaching about marriage, it is equally irresponsible to place it among the *adiaphora*, in such a way as to make it simply optional.

The minority report criticizes the dialectical approach of the majority:

This approach...is wrong in that it hides the historic priority of the traditional teaching in a thicket of “options,” treating it as one of the “extremes.” The result is to make a departure from that teaching appear as the classic Anglican *via media*. In fact, just the opposite is true.

The true Anglican *via media* is to seek unity in doctrinal essentials and to respect the historic traditions of the church, requiring the burden of proof to come from those who would make radical alterations.

Despite all of the controversy of the past twenty years, official Episcopal Church statements including those from the 1994

General Convention, have followed such a caution when faced with challenges to the church's traditional teaching. The priority of this teaching has, of course, been disputed by many bishops supporting the [Affirmation in] Koinonia Statement, but their views have not been endorsed by the General Convention. The Righter verdict did not alter the traditional teaching, but only denied that dissenters could be presented for trial.

Again, the challenge to our understanding of marriage is noted by the Minority Report:

There can be little doubt that marriage is the issue. The entire report is couched in terms of marriage, and the language commending those living in committed, monogamous, homosexual relationships is marital language.

The Majority Report points out that ... Resolution C042s involves revising the church's doctrine of marriage. Traditionalists argue that the nature of the man/woman relationship, and the terms of the marriage covenant, are God-given, and that the Church lacks authority to make such a change. Liberationists argue that marriage is culturally relative, and that therefore the church does have such authority.

The need to be clear about the meaning of marriage, or of any rite that looks like marriage, is crucial to the self-understanding of the Christian Church. As the Prayer Book says, marriage "signifies to us the mystery of the union of Christ and his Church."

*1997 Blue Book, pp. 296-300*

The Committee had been instructed to report on theological issues, but not to prepare any rites or make any recommendations, so no resolutions were offered, but the topic was discussed widely during Convention. One resolution (1997-C002) proposed by the Diocese of Pennsylvania would have directed the Liturgical Commission "to develop, after critical study of pertinent rites already in use by faith communities, a rite or rites for the blessing of committed relationships between persons of the same sex." After various attempts to amend, it was defeated on a vote by orders in the House of Deputies, being one vote shy of approval in both orders. Consequently, it never reached the House of Bishops.

A similar resolution to "Affirm Traditional Marriage and Request Study of Same-Sex Relationships" fared better, sending the subject

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back to the Standing Liturgical Commission:

1997-C002s *Resolved*, That this 72nd General Convention affirm the sacredness of Christian marriage between one man and one woman with intent of life-long relationship; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission to continue its study of theological aspects of committed relationships of same-sex couples, and to issue a full report including recommendations of future steps for the resolution of issues related to such committed relationships no later than November 1999 for consideration at the 73rd General Convention.

*1997 General Convention Journal, p. 781*

Other developments at the 1997 Convention, at which a new Presiding Bishop was elected, were mixed. In its 1997 Report, the Executive Council had proposed a resolution entitled “On the Topic of the Norms of Sexual Conduct”:

1997-A032 *Resolved*, that we recognize recent discussions in the Church regarding human sexuality have revealed increased ambiguity and tension. ... and be it further

*Resolved*, That in honoring the divine gift of free will to all children of God, we cannot and will not attempt to control the behavior of others. However, we accept the Church’s responsibility to offer the values and guidance ... and be it further

*Resolved*, That we foster a greater awareness that, even when using protection, sexual activity can result in unwanted pregnancy leading to difficult decisions regarding marriage, adoption or abortion; and be it further ....

*Resolved*, That we affirm the teaching of the House of Bishops Pastoral Study Document “Continuing the Dialogue,” (Guideline #7, page 94): “We view as contrary to the baptismal covenant, and therefore morally unacceptable, sexual behavior which is adulterous, promiscuous, abusive, or exploitative in nature, or which involves children or others incapable of informed, mutual consent and understanding the consequences of such a relationship”; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we recognize that all people are children of God and those who fall short in their attempt to live by these teachings have a full and equal claim upon the love, pastoral care and concern of the Church.



Although approved (with a minor amendment) in the House of Deputies, it was never brought to the floor of the House of Bishops, and so died with the adjournment of the Convention.

The Committee for Dialogue on Human Sexuality, successor to the group that reported in 1994, used the 1994 Pastoral Study Document, *Continuing the Dialogue* as a basic tool in surveying and promoting discussions at home and throughout the Anglican Communion. Several of the findings in their 1997 Report suggest that faith in dialogue to resolve disagreements was wavering:

- Mandated dialogue on human sexuality has run its course.
- Dialogue is often seen as a way of furthering “their” agenda, whoever “they” are.
- People are confused about what they are “dialoguing” about.
- In a few dioceses where local initiative and leadership were recruited and the process was personalized, true dialogue did take place and was perceived as beneficial.
- “Dialogue” has become, for many people, a code word for “deadlock” or a synonym for “debate.”
- True dialogue cannot be mandated...
- Concerns about sexual misconduct and boundary violations (which are problems) having contributed to the idea that sexuality itself is a “problem.”

*Continuing the Dialogue* was sent to every province of the Anglican Communion, reporting on the Episcopal Church’s efforts and inviting feedback. Six provinces and three ecumenical partners responded, and the Primates meeting in March 1995 sent a reply from which the Committee quoted at some length:

Around the world serious questions relating to human sexuality are being faced by the Church. The traditional response to these questions is to affirm the moral precepts which have come down to us through the tradition of the Church. Nevertheless, we are conscious that within the Church itself there are those whose pattern of sexual expression is at variance with the received Christian moral tradition, but whose lives in other respects demonstrate the marks of genuine Christian character..... We have to recognize that there

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are different understandings at present among Christians of equal commitment and faith. We invite every part of the Church to face the questions about sexuality with honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and polarization, in a spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our lives as Christians.

*1997 Blue Book, pp. 243-250*

Notwithstanding the reservations noted above, Dialogue Committee's resolution to encourage continued dialogue in a less formal manner was adopted:

*1997-A071 Resolved*, That the 72nd General Convention commend the process of voluntary dialogue as an effective and appropriate process for Episcopalians to use in facing questions about sexuality "with honesty and integrity, avoiding unnecessary confrontation and polarization, in a spirit of faithful seeking to understand more clearly the will of God for our lives as Christians"; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Human Affairs ... promote the continuing use of dialogue as a process for facing questions about human sexuality...

*1997 General Convention Journal, p. 278*

The fate of another resolution at the 1997 General Convention indicates the unwillingness of the majority to force a confrontation. Resolution 1997-B032 called for endorsing the Kuala Lumpur Statement from the Second Anglican Encounter of the South. The House of Deputies voted to refer it to an interim body for recommendation. The House of Bishops eventually concurred with the referral, but only after defeating a substitute which would have endorsed the Kuala Lumpur Statement, on a roll call vote of 42-94 with two abstentions.

### **73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention—2000**

The previous Convention had referred the Kuala Lumpur Statement to the Standing Commission on Anglican and International Peace with Justice Concerns. Reporting to the 2000 General Convention, the Commission's comments also reflected the stresses within the Anglican Communion which had flared during the 1998 Lambeth

### Conference:

For us, what stands out regarding Kuala Lumpur, Lambeth, and subsequent statements and happenings, is the paucity of intra-provincial understanding and communication within the Anglican Communion on matters of cultural differences and differing theological/scriptural approaches. As the “Virginia Report” [a pre-Lambeth document] points out, “an important function of life in communion is always to remain attentive to one another... attentiveness to the particularity of peoples, times and places.” To this end, moves the leadership of the Communion to improve understanding and communication are of utmost importance.

We commend especially the efforts of our Presiding Bishop, the Archbishop of Canterbury the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Anglican Peace and Justice Network to find opportunities to follow through on the commitment “to listen to the experience of homosexual people. Members of this Commission honored that commitment themselves by listening ... to the experiences of gay and lesbian persons in Africa. It is clear to us that the commitment can only be truly honored here and abroad if we create “safe spaces” for lesbian and gay stories to be told.

The Commission avoided specific comment on the substance of the Kuala Lumpur statement, focusing instead on the need to stay in conversation. To facilitate this, the Commission offered a way to encourage dialogue:

Resolution 2000-A009. *Resolved* That the Executive Council establish a formal process for parishes to identify themselves as “safe spaces” for lesbians and gays to tell their stories and be heard with love and care, and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Presiding Bishop’s staff work with counterparts within the Anglican Communion to encourage similar “safe spaces” within the Communion.

*2000 Blue Book, pp. 7-8.*

In amended form, this was adopted at the 2000 Convention, along with a parallel resolution from the Executive Council to “provide a safe, hospitable environment for frank conversations with youth and young adults (2000 A046a).

*2000 Blue Book, pp. 245, 202*

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The newly merged Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music devoted 28 pages of its 2000 Report to the requirement of Resolution 1997-C003s to continue its study of “theological aspects of committed relationships of same-sex couples.” This included essays on:

- a historical review, with reference to the 1998 Lambeth Conference Report on Human Sexuality and to the “Virginia Report” of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission;
- the use of Scripture in considering same-sex relationships;
- “Tradition” in the life of the Church, its definition, forms and function “as a living system of communication in and through which people are brought into and live out a certain relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit ... a continuing process of interpretation;” its relationship to Scripture and Reason;
- “Experience” and the many different forms marriage has taken throughout the history of the church;
- Understandings of Homosexuality” surveying recent physiological, psychological and historical-cultural research on the origin of homosexuality;
- “Ecclesiology: the Nature of Anglican Decision-Making,” noting that “when history generates newness and the church must respond, not all Christians will respond the same way, and not all who take the same direction will move at the same pace.;
- a linguistic and historical analysis of “Baruk Attah, Adonai Blessing;”
- an introduction to “Catechesis and Same-Sex Blessings” which presents the Church’s catechetical understanding and structures as a framework for understanding sexuality;
- “A Reflection on the Foregoing Articles: the Virtues of Ignorance, Humility, and Reverence for Mystery.”

The latter concludes with the following sadly prescient paragraph:

When we simply cannot agree that one view compels the allegiance of all faithful people, as is the case today, the reverently ignorant thing to do is either to abstain altogether from making a decision, or else to allow dioceses to find their own way in the matter, and only

much later, if ever, come to some general agreement. The fact that people's lives, not merely their ideas, are to some extent at issue here suggests providing for local resolution rather than doing nothing. In the diocese, it is the task of the bishop, as chief teacher and pastor, to know the state of understanding of matters of sexuality among local clergy and people, and to teach and to foster discussion accordingly. Such an approach also allows broader participation in discussion by those whom any decision would affect. All of this is primary instance of the Anglican principle of "subsidiarity," our preference for doing on the provincial or international level only what cannot be done at the fundamental level of the diocese. On this basis the charitable recommendation of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music commends itself to the Church. The principal alternative seems to be schism, which many an ancient Christian believed to be a state far worse than heresy or ignorance.

*2000 Blue Book, pp. 205-232*

Following extensive debate, a substitute form of the Commission's resolution was adopted, to "Acknowledge Relationships Other Than Marriage and Existence of Disagreement on the Church's Teaching." In the House of Deputies, a clause which would have authorized preparation of rites was removed on a vote by orders, and the remaining seven clauses were adopted by the deputies and, after more debate, by the House of Bishops, on a roll call vote of 119 yes, 19 no, 4 abstain.

*2000-D039sa Resolved*, That the members of the 73rd General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts ...and be it further

*Resolved*, That we acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members; and be it further

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*Resolved*, That this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values ... and be it further

*Resolved*, That we acknowledge that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position; and be it further

*Resolved*, That in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to the call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we reaffirm the imperative to promote conversation between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

*2000 General Convention Journal, pp. 287-88*

Without the last clause, which would have authorized preparation of rites for blessing same-sex unions, the action called for was simply to continue the dialogue. Its significance lies in its articulation of evolving beliefs, acknowledging the presence of same-sex couples in the Church, and that some “acting in good conscience” will not conform to the Church's traditional teaching. In addition, the resolution adds a description of positive qualities to be expected in committed relationships—“fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God” and reiterated the negative attributes previously identified in the 1994 Pastoral Study as morally unacceptable—“behavior which is adulterous, promiscuous, abusive, or exploitative in nature.”

*Continuing the Dialogue, a Pastoral Study. p. 66*

Immediately following adoption in the House of Bishops, a motion was introduced pledging the bishops to continue in dialogue and calling for a report from its Theology Committee:

2000 B300 *Resolved*, That it is the mind of the House of Bishops that we continue study and be in conversation regarding issues of human sexuality by making use of the Theology Committee (under process of appointment by the Presiding Bishop) in consultation with the House of Bishops Committee on Pastoral Development. This

committee, consisting of lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons, will make a report in the hopes that a Mind of the House resolution will result from their study.

*2000 General Convention Journal, p.288-89*

The rest of the Convention also agreed to “Continue Dialogue on Human Sexuality”

2000-C008 *Resolved*, That we, the members of the 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church, commit ourselves to continue the process of mutual sharing, study, and discernment concerning human sexuality, so that we remain open and connected to one another despite our differences, and so we can permit the Holy Spirit to act in our midst.

*2000 General Convention Journal, pp. 244*

### **International Anglican Conversations, 1999-2002**

Following the 1998 Lambeth Conference, with its major controversy over sexuality, the Archbishop of Canterbury convened a working party of twelve bishops and primates, chaired by the Primate of the Episcopal Church in the United States, to consider the topic of homosexuality. Picking up on the idea contained in the 1991 resolution calling for pan-Anglican and ecumenical dialogue, reiterated in the Pastoral Study of 1994, the working party tested the effectiveness of dialogue. The group met annually for four days, over three years, with an outside facilitator,

to deepen our understanding of each others’ views, as well as the theological perspectives and personal/cultural experiences in which these views are grounded. ...

Honoring one another by refusing to impute ill motives and by valuing the opinions of those with whom we disagreed, we became a kind of laboratory in which to grapple with our topic.

*A Final Report, pp. 1-2*

It was a test of cross-provincial dialogue as a path through the thicket of disagreements, and the final report, prepared at the last meeting, urged the model on others:

We believe that respect for our Communion is fostered when we as bishops engage in face-to-face conversations across provincial lines.

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We encourage the development of similar conversations between other lay and ordained provincial leadership. ... This discipline of seeking the truth and speaking the truth in love is especially important when information flows freely around the world due to contemporary technology. Our experience has reaffirmed our conviction regarding the importance of face-to-face communication. No amount of e-mail can take its place.

*A Final Report, pp. 10-11*

Like all the groups before it, the Conversations were able to agree on some points, and to identify points of disagreement.

- We were not able to reach a common mind regarding a single pattern of holy living for homosexual people.
- We have different perceptions of the relationship of the authority of Scripture to that of Reason and Tradition, and contemporary experience.
- We approach and interpret particular Scriptural passages in different ways.

*A Final Report, p. 13*

Questions remaining are those which have been at the base of all deliberations from the beginning:

1. Does the Holiness, that we all understand ourselves bound through Christ to grow into, to encourage, and to teach, exclude or include homosexual behavior within committed relationships?
2. What constitutes loving and responsible pastoral care of homosexual people? What may be the workings of God's grace in this context?

Among recommendations for more opportunities for dialogue, especially among bishops, is one relating to the change process:

Those proposing changes to the Church's traditional teaching on human sexuality or other significant issues should take account of both ecumenical and inter-faith implications, and the impact upon other Provinces of our Communion.

*A Final Report, p. 17*

The truth of this caution would be demonstrated in the months ahead.



## Approaching Minneapolis, 2003

Through Resolution 2000-B300, the House of Bishops handed formal responsibility for continued study and consultation on human sexuality to its Theology Committee, which prepared a document, received by the bishops in March 2003, with the following proviso:

Though it does not reflect in all points the views of all members of the House, we offer it to the Church for study and reflection...

The Theology Committee was asked to continue its work, and its statement was provided to all Deputies to the 2003 Convention. A few excerpts from “The Gift of Sexuality” follow:

- It has been our special concern to encourage the Church to think about how disagreement over issues of human sexuality may become open to God’s grace. [1.1]
- Sexuality is one of God's wonderful, complex, confusing, and, sometimes, dangerous gifts. At the same time, we have been made freshly aware of how sexuality can be cheapened and exploited in human society and made an occasion of sin, hurt, and disorder, rather than the blessing God intends it to be. [2.0]
- ... disunity over issues of human sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, needs to be taken seriously by all members of the Church. And diverse opinion needs to be respected. But we do not believe these should be Church-dividing issues. [5.3]
- The question before the Church is whether some homosexual relationships are, like some heterosexual relationships, open to the blessing of God through the Church, or are they always inherently sinful? And for those who believe that at least certain homosexual practices are sinful, the question must be raised, “how sinful”? [6.0]
- We have insisted there are no doctrinal grounds for inhospitality to homosexual persons as members of the Church. What then are the grounds for refusing to bless the relationships of homosexual couples who are prepared to commit themselves to the same standards and vows as do heterosexual couples? [6.1]

Despite the evolution in understanding, the Theology Committee’s

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recommendations remain on the side of tradition, seeking to avoid confrontation at home and abroad.

- Liturgy provides cohesion for the Anglican Communion, and it is through our liturgies that we define what we most deeply believe as Christians. Because at this time we are nowhere near consensus in the Church regarding the blessing of homosexual relationships, we cannot recommend authorizing the development of new rites for such blessings. [6.5]
- [We] urge the greatest caution as the Church continues to seek the mind of Christ in these matters. This will require a diligent and perhaps painful willingness on the part of the Church to engage in focused conversation among all of us, and openness to the guidance and movement of the Holy Spirit. [6.6]
- There is a subset of questions that needs further exploration. Chief among them is whether unmarried, non-celibate persons, heterosexual or homosexual, should be ordained. In our polity, ordination is at the discretion of the bishop as overseer in the community of faith with the advice and consent of the Standing Committee. Sexual discipline and holiness of life must be a very serious consideration for bishops, Standing Committees, and Commissions on Ministry as they discern what constitutes a “wholesome example to all people” (*Book of Common Prayer* 544). [7.0]
- We affirm the responsibility of Dioceses to discern and raise up fit persons for the ministry of word and sacrament to build up the body of Christ in that place. We call on bishops and Standing Committees to be respectful of the ways in which decisions made in one Diocese have ramifications on others. We remind all that ordination is for the whole Church. [7.1]
- For these reasons, we believe it is imperative that the Episcopal Church refrain from any attempt to “settle” the matter legislatively. For a season at least, we must acknowledge and live with the great pain and discomfort of our disagreements. The act of trusting those with whom we disagree intensely bears witness to the reconciling power of God, which is always beyond our imagining. Sensitive restraint and mutual forbearance is needed rather than a vote that might “win” the argument for some and leave others seemingly rejected. “Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness” (James 1:19-20). [8.1]

Finally, quoting the Lambeth Conference report on Sexuality, the report concludes:

We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions that are raised. There is much that we do not understand (*Called to Full Humanity*, Section 1 Report, page 17).

*2003 General Convention Journal, pp. 780-788*

The Theology Committee's report was distributed to all bishops and deputies in July 2003, immediately before the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention. Many went to Minneapolis hoping the Church would continue on the side of caution.

There, theory was replaced by real life, in the person of an experienced priest who had served among the people of New Hampshire for seventeen years, and was elected by them to be their bishop. To many it seemed the winds of the Spirit were carrying us up and over the line of caution into a place where God was making all things new. To many others, it seemed the Episcopal Church had put itself beyond the pale, outside the line drawn between Anglicans and "others," between believers and unbelievers.

If there are themes running through all the studies and reports chronicled here, chief among them is the inability to reach a common mind. Time and again, committees, commissions and task forces confess that "we are not of one mind." There can be no dispute about the depth of the disagreements occasioned by continued attention to sexuality, even extending, for some, to the question of whether this disagreement should be church-dividing. For some, authority and church order hang in the balance. For others, new, less hierarchical structures of authority and church order are emerging. For some, the plain truth of the Scriptures must be upheld. For others, interpreting Scripture from a contemporary perspective has been the task of the Church since the beginning. For all of us, the future is in God's hands.

### Official Studies and Reports on Human Sexuality Episcopal Church, USA—1967-2003

1967 “Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality,” in the Report of the Standing Commission on the Church in Human Affairs to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Convention (*1967 Journal of the General Convention*, Appendix 22.4-7).

1979 “Background Statement on Human Sexuality” in the Report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health to the 66<sup>th</sup> General Convention (*1979 General Convention Journal*, pp. AA 119-149).

1987 *Sexuality: a Divine Gift—A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life*, (NY Education for Mission and Ministry Unit, The Episcopal Church, 1987)

1988 “Human Sexuality,” in Report to the 69<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health (*1988 Blue Book*, pp.140-147).

1991 “Sexuality,” in Report of the Standing Commission on Human Affairs to the 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention (*1991 Blue Book*, pp. 196-204).

1994 “Human Sexuality: Reports from the Provinces” in the Report of the National Steering Committee for Human Sexuality Dialogues to the 71<sup>st</sup> General Convention (*1994 Blue Book*, pp. 332-346)

1994 *Continuing the Dialogue: a Pastoral Study Document of the House of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality* (The House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, 1994).

1997 “The Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships,” in Report of the Standing Liturgical Commission with the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention (*1997 Blue Book*, p. 285-300).

2000 “Theological Aspects of Committed Relationships of Same-Sex Couples,” in the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention (*2000 Blue Book*, pp. 205-232).

2003 “The Gift of Sexuality: A Theological Perspective,” a Report of the Theology Committee to the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church, March 2003 (*2003 General Convention Journal*, p. 780-788).

Two reports from Lutheran and Anglican partners:

1986, *A Study of Issues Concerning Sexuality: Report of the Advisory Committee of Issues Relating to Homosexuality*, Lutheran Church in America (*Division for Mission in North America, Lutheran Church in America, 1986*) 102 pages.

2002, *A Final Report from the International Anglican Conversations on Human Sexuality* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 2002) 19 pages.

## Appendix

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### The Vagaries of Journal Organization and Convention Practices

“Whereas” clauses are not part of a resolution, but are included in this document when available because they illustrate prevailing assumptions and convictions.

Commissions with interim responsibilities file reports which are distributed piecemeal to convention members. Until 1982, these were gathered and bound along with the convention journal. In 1982, these reports were sent in a separate volume beforehand. That year the paperback covers of convention publications were blue, and the pre-convention report volume has been called “The Blue Book” ever since.

Numbering of resolutions seems to have begun in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the system was different from convention to convention. By 1973, the present system was in place: A designates resolutions from Standing Commissions; B is for bishops; C is for diocesan conventions; D is for deputies. To avoid confusion, the year of the convention is prefixed to the resolution number. Thus 1991-D112 signifies the 112<sup>th</sup> resolution submitted by a deputy to the 1991 Convention.

Journal paging has been idiosyncratic, sometimes with separate B paging for the House of Bishops and D for the House of Deputies; for some years a C-section for “concurring actions” was included, and variations on A/AA were used for reports published as appendices until the Blue Book.

The House of Bishops meets several times between Conventions. Minutes of those meetings are initially distributed in a booklet, which is later included in the Journal of the next Convention. The Bishops often issue “Mind of the House” statements from its separate meetings, or on matters not of interest to the House of Deputies, and in some cases on a statement with which the House of Deputies has declined to concur.

Adoption of a resolution only becomes an “act of Convention”

if it receives the concurrence of both Houses. A change in the Constitution or Canons is binding on all clergy, and laity to the extent that the church can discipline laity. Constitutional changes must be approved by two consecutive Conventions.

In the House of Bishops, serious issues are often decided by a “roll call” vote, in which each bishop casts his vote verbally when her/his name is called. A roll call would be impractical in the 800-member House of Deputies, but a “vote by orders” is used for major issues. All four clergy cast one vote for their diocese, as do all four lay deputies. Should the members of either group split 2 to 2, the vote is counted as “Divided,” which has the effect of a No. There must be a majority of diocesan Yes votes in each order for something to be adopted.

## Endnotes

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- 1 In 1964, the 61st General Convention called for study “on the Christian understanding of sexual behavior,” and the resulting report to the 1967 Convention recommended further investigation, specifically including the topic of homosexuality. (*General Convention Journals*: 1964, p. 365; 1967, pp. App.22.3-7; 492-495) The 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1976 requested the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health to “study in depth the matter of the ordination of homosexual persons and report its findings, along with recommendations, to the Church-at-large for study (and especially to the Bishops, Standing Committees, Commissions of the National Church).” *The Journal of the 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention*, 1979, p. 76. A description and summary of all official studies and reports that document the ongoing conversation on homosexuality in the Episcopal Church is being provided separately from this essay, to assist the reader in assessing the full scope of the Church’s discussion of the questions.
- 2 In concluding the report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to the Episcopal Church’s 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention in 2000, the Rt. Rev. Paul Marshall (Bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem, Episcopal Church, USA) said, “Whatever are the historical facts about a Council of Jerusalem, we see in Acts 15 some in the early Church being asked to accept those with whom they could not agree about holiness of life, while those for whom the way was being paved were charged not to outrage the sensibilities of other communities in the Church. Local fellowships worked out their ways of life accordingly.... When we simply cannot agree that one view compels the allegiance all faithful people, as is the case today, the reverently ignorant thing to do is either to abstain altogether from making a decision, or else to allow dioceses to find their own way in the matter, and only much later, if ever, come to some general agreement. The fact that people’s lives, not merely their ideas, are to some extent at issue here suggests providing for local resolution rather than doing nothing. In the diocese, it is the task of the bishop, as chief teacher and pastor, to know the state of understanding of matters of sexuality among local clergy and people, and to teach and to foster discussion accordingly. Such an approach also allows broader participation in discussion by those whom any decision would affect. All of this is a primary instance of the Anglican principle of “subsidiarity,” our preference for doing on the provincial or international level only what cannot be done at the fundamental level of the diocese. On this basis the charitable recommendation of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music commends itself to the Church. The principal alternative seems to be schism, which many an ancient Christian believed to be a state far worse than heresy or ignorance.” *The [Blue Book] Reports the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention*, p. 231.
- 3 See Richard A. Norris on “Tradition” in the Report from the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (2000) to the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention



of the Episcopal Church. “Scripture is indeed a “source,” a set of books that can be consulted and interpreted. Reason, however, does not lie about in the manner of a “source.” It acts rather in the capacity of a lens through which Scripture is understood—the lens of what counts as “common sense,” of “what everyone knows,” of “what ‘makes sense’” (which of course differs, to varying extents, from one society or culture to another). In somewhat the same way, tradition is not a “thing” alongside and independent of Scripture Tradition is the cumulative “common sense” of the community whose life and common mind represent an interpretation as well as a vehicle of the scriptural message. To consult tradition is to render this “common sense,” in its varying forms, a conscious object of inquiry: (a) to review, for one purpose of another, regarding one issue or another, the ways in which the meaning and implications of the new life in Christ have been understood, explained, and transmitted in previous generations; (b) to see how these fit with the Scriptures and above all with the Gospel that is the Scripture’s central message; and thus (c) to elicit the ‘sense’ of this tradition in the light of the circumstances or events or conditions that have made people wonder whether the church’s common sense makes as much sense as it ought to.” *The [Blue Book] Reports to the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention (2000)*, p. 214. This is what the Windsor Report called for in asking that the Episcopal Church explain its actions in terms of the sources of authority of “scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection” (para. 135, also para. 141).

- 4 For one official statement from our own Church, see *Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Study Document of the House of Bishops to the Church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement Publications, 1995), pp. 22-37. For a more recent summary of the extensive biblical scholarship on biblical proscriptions see Arland J. Hultgren and Walter F. Taylor Jr., Background Essay on Biblical Texts for *Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2003) Available at >[www.elca.org/faithfuljourney](http://www.elca.org/faithfuljourney)<.
- 5 Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. HarperCollins, 1996, p. 381. This citation, and those that follow, is not meant to suggest his endorsement of their use.
- 6 Further see Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, p. 381.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
- 8 Ellen Davis, “Reading Leviticus in the Church,” *Virginia Seminary Journal*, Winter 1996/97: 30-4. What follows is indebted to her article but may reach conclusions different from her own.

## Endnotes

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- 9 See Leviticus 14:34-54 which has an elaborate ritual for purifying “leprosy” from the walls of a house. This raises the question of whether the authors could possibly have meant the same thing by “leprosy” as we do today. Most people today would use the term “mildew” instead. Leviticus seems to categorize many different kinds of things, not just skin diseases, as “leprosy” and to have thought about it quite differently than we do. In the same way, they categorized a number of things as “abominations” (including a man lying with a man as if with a woman, but also many other things) which some of us might see as members of a different category today.
- 10 See, for example, Mary Douglas on the abominations of Leviticus in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London/New York: Ark, 1966).
- 11 What follows is based in part on the fuller argument of A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God’s Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 25-31.
- 12 The first use of the word outside of the English language is thought to be in 1869 in the writings of Karoly Benkert of Vienna. See Marti Nissinen, *Homosexualism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective*, tr. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 143, note 23.
- 13 For a summary of these factors and bibliographical references see Timothy F. Sedgwick, “Understandings of Homosexuality” in the Report from the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in *The [Blue Book] Reports to the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention (2000)* pp. 221-222.
- 14 An analogy may clarify our meaning here. While this analogy is prompted by actual circumstances in particular cultures (e.g., in North Africa), we propose it in abstract terms simply as a way of clarifying how a given behavior may be physically identical and yet mean entirely different things in different circumstances. Suppose there were a community that held all left-handed acts to be morally repugnant and evil—precisely because of being left-handed. But then suppose that over time it appeared that in every age there were people predisposed to left-handedness. Members of the community noticed that not all acts performed by these left-handed people, even when using their left hands, were necessarily pernicious but were in fact sometimes good and a source of goodness for others. Furthermore, there was no impairment of the left-handers’ ability to choose good or avoid evil in general. And, as might be expected, there were certainly many examples of people who performed evil deeds using their right hands. So in time members of the community began to consider whether left-handed acts were necessarily, by definition, evil, or whether it were possible that both left-handed and right-handed acts might be vicious acts or might be virtuous acts—depending not on handedness but on the

particular act in question. It might then be the case that the distinction between left-handed acts and right-handed acts, while clear enough as a physical difference between people, was no longer seen to be, in and of itself, a marker of vicious and opposed to virtuous acts.

- 15 In the study presented to the General Convention in 1979, the Standing Commission on Human Affairs and Health speaks of the ends of human sexuality as procreation and “an expression of love apart from having children,” p. 81. See also *Continuing the Dialogue*, pp. 52-54. Most recently the House of Bishops’ Committee on Theology wrote, “Holy Scripture teaches that God gave sex as one of the means for married persons to share themselves with each other (1Cor. 7:3-5); for procreation (Gen. 1:28); and to be an icon, on the human level, of the relationships between God and the people of Israel, and Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:25-33).” “The Gift of Sexuality,” *The Journal of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention (2003)*, p. 782, para. 4.4, available at ><http://arc.episcopalchurch.org/presiding-bishop/pdf/theologycomreport.pdf><.
- 16 See *Continuing the Dialogue*, p. 27. Also see the Report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, *The Journal of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention (1997)*, p. 289.
- 17 Report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, *The Journal of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention (1997)*, pp. 288-9: “In terms of the purpose of marriage, from the time of Augustine until the Reformation, the church taught that marriage had three purposes: fides (fidelity), proles (offspring), and sacramentum (mystery or solemn obligation). . . . In the introduction to the marriage rite for the first Book of Common Prayer (1549) Cranmer” presented three purposes: for procreation, as a remedy for sexual frustration, and for companionship. On the developing understandings of marriage see John Witte, *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition* (Westminster John Knox, 1997). As reflected in the judgment of the legitimacy of contraception, expressed in the 1958 Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Church has confirmed that mutual love is not tied to procreation or the possibility of procreation between man and woman. See *Lambeth Conference 1958*, “The Family Today”.
- 18 *The Journal of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention (1997)*, pp. 289. The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, p. 423.
- 19 See “The Gift of Sexuality,” *The Journal of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention (2003)*, p.782, para. 4.3; *Report of the Second Consultation of Episcopalians on Same-Sex Unions (1996)* available at ><http://www.oasiscalifornia.org/intro.html><, section 1, paragraphs 29-32; and the 1997 report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology

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- Committee of the House of Bishops to the 73rd General Convention, *The Journal of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention* (2000), p. 291. On the orthodox tradition see Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, tr. from the 1980 French *Sacrement de L'Amour* by Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).
- 20 For example, "The Gift of Sexuality," *The Journal of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (2003), p. 780-88; and the Task Force of the Episcopal Church, *Sexuality: A Divine Gift: A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life* (New York: The Episcopal Church Center, 1987).
- 21 "The Gift of Sexuality," *The Journal of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (2003), p. 782, paragraph 4.3. Sexuality draws persons together in a movement from encounter to mutual self-disclosure in which arise recognition, discovery, acceptance, and embrace. We must welcome and accept another if they are to be known for who they are, and we in turn must be ourselves if we are to be loved for who we are. Mutual desiring thus becomes mutual self-giving with all the vulnerability that entails. In such giving of ourselves to each other we fall in love and come to care for each other beyond ourselves. As Archbishop Rowan Williams has written, "The discovery of joy means something rather more than the bare facts of sexual intimacy. I can only fully discover the body's grace in taking time, the time needed for a mutual recognition that my partner and I are not simply passive instruments to each other.... [O]f course the more time taken the longer a kind of risk endures. There is more to expose, and a sustaining of the will to let oneself be formed by the perceptions of another." Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace," *Ourselves, Our Souls and Bodies*, ed. Charles Hefling (Cambridge, MA: Cowley, 1996), p. 63.
- 22 Report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, *The [Blue Book] Report to the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention* (1997), p. 289.
- 23 *Ibid.* See the report of the Standing Liturgical Commission in collaboration with the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to the 72nd General Convention in 1997:
- The social purpose [of marriage], "the help and comfort given one another," flows out of the "erotic," which is a physical expression of this greater spiritual reality. While marriage may be preceded by erotic courtship and fulfilled in sexual delight, the union of man and woman brings about a new reality, a society. As Christian circles developed their thinking about marriage and the metaphor of the marriage between Christ and his Church took the fore, the new society created by marriage was seen as a "little church" within the larger Church. Marriage, then, is an

ecclesial matter and not one simply between the two persons.

The report goes on to say,

Can same-sex marriages fill this social/ecclesial purpose? Not if, as some maintain, the relationship between the two partners is a merely erotic one. Engaging in physical acts of love is not the same as marital communion because the union would not be of two sexes into one flesh. Homosexual partners, however, regard such an argument as a circular one—the necessity of two sexes is built into the definition, not derived by any kind of logic—and it is a view that shows no awareness of the depth of love, tenderness, and caring that such partnerships contain. To suggest that the kind of intimacy shared by homosexual persons is always to be equated with the “ethics of intimacy” thus defined is insulting. Such generalizations are as unfair to homosexual persons as they would be if similarly applied to heterosexual persons. *The [Blue Book] Report to the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention* (1997), p. 290.

See also the Rev. Michael Hopkins, “Claiming the Blessing: A Message to the Church” from the partnership “Claiming the Message”, including several ministries in the Episcopal Church: Integrity, Beyond Inclusion, and diocesan Oasis ministries. On-line at >[www.claimingthebless.org](http://www.claimingthebless.org)<.

- 24 Leonel L. Mitchell, “Barkuk Attah, Adonai Blessing,” Report from the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, *The [Blue Book] Report to the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention* (2000), p. 226. The blessing, in fact, need not always mean that the Church favors the activity (such as fighting a war), but that it asks God’s care and protection for those engaging in it, and assures them of God’s love and the Church’s continuing prayers.”
- 25 The Commission on Human Affairs, *The [Blue Book] Report to the 70<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (1991), p. 202.
- 26 David Holmes, *A Brief History of The Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1993), 55.
- 27 Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 9.
- 28 Mary Sudman Donovan, “Recent Mutual Discernment within the Communion,” unpublished paper.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 For an historical overview of the social conditions of self-identified homosexual persons at this time and the variety of religious responses and church actions, see Gary David Comstock, *Unrepentant, Self-Affirming, Practicing: Lesbian/Bisexual/Gay People within Organized Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1996), especially Chapter One.

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- 31 Equally galvanizing in other traditions was the 1963 report, *Toward a Quaker View of Sex*, which called for a sweeping reevaluation of Christian teaching on sexuality, and in 1972, Ralph Blair's publication of *An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality*, which argued for the compatibility of same-sex sexual relations and the practice of Evangelical Christian faith.
- 32 *General Convention Journals*: 1964, p.365; 1967, pp. App.22.3-7; 492-495. See also the accompanying compilation of official actions and studies.
- 32 *The Journal of the 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (1976), p. C-110.
- 33 *The Journal of the 67<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (1982), D-76A.
- 34 *Sexuality: A Divine Gift: A Sacramental Approach to Human Sexuality and Family Life* (New York: The Episcopal Church Center, 1987).
- 35 *Continuing the Dialogue [on] Sexuality: A Divine Gift* (New York, The Episcopal Church Center, 1988).
- 36 The published materials adapted the study prepared for use in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, *Human Sexuality and the Christian Faith: A Study for the Church's Reflection and Deliberation* (Minneapolis, MN: ELCA Distribution Service, 1991), except for Province VII which developed its own resources for study.
- 37 *Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Study Document of the House of Bishops* (Cincinnati, OH: Forward Movement, 1995). An appendix to the study included a summary of responses from the congregations that participated in the dialogues from 1991 to 1994, which also appeared in the "Blue Book" of *Reports to the 1974 General Convention*, pp. 332-346.
- 38 *The Journal of the 72<sup>nd</sup> General Convention* (1997), pp. 285-300.
- 39 *The Journal of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention* (2000), pp. 232.
- 40 *The Journal of the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention* (2003), pp. 615-616.
- 41 Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1956), chapter 3.1, pp. 33-4.

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