

## *Affirmation of the Bishop by the Task Force for Unity in Mission*

*"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

John 17:20-23

In the last hours before His Passion, Jesus turned to the unity and mission of His disciples. In fact, Jesus clearly connected the two – "...that they become completely one, so that the world may know..." Charles Swindoll offers some food for thought on our struggle for unity in the midst of differing opinions. "Union has an affiliation with others but no common bond that makes them one in heart. Uniformity has everyone looking and thinking alike. Unanimity is complete agreement across the board. Unity, however, refers to a oneness of heart, a similarity of purpose and an agreement on major points of doctrine."

For at least forty years The Episcopal Church (along with many others) has been embroiled in conflict around issues of human sexuality. That conflict has been all the more intense because it emerges from divergent views of Scripture, tradition and reason that are held sincerely and passionately by members of our Communion. From a posture of "win-lose" it has often seemed that the only possible solution is an all or nothing approach: "You either agree with my position on this issue or we need to part company." And that, indeed, has sometimes seemed to be the strategy of those on every side of this highly sensitive and often emotional issue.

The church has paid a high price for the conflict. The loss of membership in The Episcopal Church over the same period of time is both frightening and disheartening. It may be an oversimplification to attribute the loss of membership to a single issue; there are many factors involved. But there is no question that people

have been hurt, people have felt abandoned by their church, people have been left spiritually bereft, and many have “unplugged” out of exhaustion. The real casualty has been, and continues to be, the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The real casualty is represented by countless lives left without the hope of the Word of God.

It is likely that the 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church will offer, as an avenue of pastoral care, a pathway for what has become commonly known as a “Same-Sex Blessing.” That avenue will likely consist of liturgical rites to be included in *Liturgical Resources 1* for those gay and lesbian couples seeking a life-long commitment of fidelity, mutual affection and support.

Over a year ago, Bishop Doyle began to call on us individually and as a group to discuss positive solutions to the division between faithful Christians who embrace varying beliefs regarding human sexuality. In anticipation of the possible actions of General Convention, we have gathered on a regular basis to discuss and support our bishop’s efforts to move beyond this divide with the intent of focusing on our unity in a way that strengthens our mission to faithfully proclaim the gospel.

The Bishop’s plan is presented in full in the first section of this document. It is a pastoral response allowing for different responses while maintaining unity in mission. It is, by its very nature, a compromise. It is not, however, a departure from, or compromise of, our commitment to the central truths of our faith as stated in the Apostles’, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

We see this response to an issue that has caused such strife as neither a cause to celebrate or grieve, nor to claim “win” or “loss” for any “side” in this ongoing struggle. Instead we see it as an opportunity to celebrate our authentic Anglican heritage of finding solutions which transcend our inevitable differences over certain aspects of the Christian life, and to celebrate authentic diversity by moving beyond our divisions over these issues toward our mission which can, and must ultimately, unite us. We see this to be a great advantage for the local parish and clergy, with the oversight of the bishop, to exercise their ministry in a way that best accords with the particular needs of each parish.

Our support of Bishop Doyle and his vision for the future on this issue is an effort to press forward on those matters that bring unity, and more importantly, our focus on the One Who unites us, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We accept the bishop's plan as an earnest offering to live into our Lord's prayer that "we all may be one" as a bedrock foundation for evangelism "that the world may know ... " This and this alone, is our only cause for celebration.

We realize that in finding another way there will always be those who feel as though they have lost or have not been heard, and we grieve for those who may feel ignored or abandoned on either side of this struggle. We counsel them to join us in prayer and hope for a new day of mission in which the church moves beyond our divisions toward unity in Christ.

*Signatories:*

Dr. Scott Bader-Saye  
The Hon. James A. Baker, III  
The Rev. Patsy Barham  
The Rev. Chris Bowhay  
The Rev. A. Dean Calcote  
Mr. Clint B. Capers  
The Rev. Howard Castleberry  
Mr. Jim Chandler  
Mr. John C. Dawson, Jr.  
Ms. Linnet Deily  
Ms. Laurie Eiserloh  
The Rev. Laurens A. Hall  
Mr. David T. Harvin  
Mr. Frank E. Hood, Jr.  
The Rev. Lisa Hunt

The Rev. Susan Kennard  
Dr. James E. Key  
The Rev. Dr. Russell J. Levenson, Jr.  
Mr. David G. Long  
The Rev. David Luckenbach  
Dr. George McGonigle  
The Rev. Uriel Osnaya  
Ms. Carole A. Pinkett  
The Rev. Rob Price  
The Very Rev. Joe D. Reynolds  
The Rev. Victor Thomas  
The Rev. Paul Wehner  
The Rev. Michael Wyckoff  
Trey Yarbrough