



# Unity In Mission

A Paper on Common Mission  
and the Challenge Posed by Division

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*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 be 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

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Matthew 5.9

*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.*

Charles Swindoll

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# Foreword

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*Transcript of Comments by Former [Secretary of State James Baker III](#),  
at first Task Force on Unity in Mission Meeting, September 2011.*

I became involved in this issue about three years ago, as we were witnessing the schism in [The Episcopal Church](#) over this issue play out in the form of one congregation after another leaving to go its own way. We were witnessing at that time as well—and before, frankly—the proliferation of lawsuits over church property that accompanied those departures. I personally grew quite concerned.

I really felt that we were desperately in need of a way to resolve our differences, rather than to allow those differences to continue to separate us. I tried to look at it from several different perspectives—first, as an Episcopalian, and one who dearly loves our Church, albeit one who really claims no expertise whatsoever in the polity of the Church. I will confess to you that I’ve learned a little about it, since I first became so concerned, but I really don’t know a lot about the polity of the Church.

Secondly, I looked at it as someone who has had extensive experience in both national and international politics and negotiations. From both perspectives, it was clear to me that this issue is one that is so very divisive and with respect to which positions of both sides are so deeply held, that we’re not going to resolve it, if we insist that we have to go one way or the other. That is, if we insist, that on this issue, there is going to be one winner and one loser. I must confess to you that I ran into a few of those types of issues during my time in public service that are so divisive that they’re just not capable of being solved on a one-win, one-lose basis.

Instead I felt—and I still feel—very deeply that our goal ought to be to come up with a win-win solution, if we can, that gives those with views on either side of this issue, the

opportunity still—notwithstanding their views—to dedicate their lives to Jesus Christ through The Episcopal Church. Now, saying that, I recognize and I appreciate that there will be some on the fringes of this issue that feel so committed and so dedicated that they will always look at this issue as an either-or matter. I just happen to think that continuing on that path is a recipe for disaster. My experience, frankly, told me that the best way to find that win-win solution would be to see if we couldn't create a system that allows both sides of the controversy to simply agree to disagree, and in so doing, to still maintain respect for one another in the process.

The more I thought about it, the more I felt that we should try to establish what might be called an all-are-welcome approach—an all-are-welcome approach that allows our parishes to make important decisions on this issue. That seemed to me to be a fair and reasonable approach. It still seems to me to be a fair and reasonable approach. On this one issue, some will choose a more traditional stance, while others will choose to do blessings. Doing this—I think—allows the local parishes to make the critical decisions on the issues, and that is, after all—at least, in my view—consistent with the Church's long history of allowing for decision making at the local levels.

As many—as all of you probably know—many of the same people who developed our country after the American Revolution—that is, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington and James Madison—were members of our Church after it separated from the [Church of England](#). The system that those American Anglicans put into place was really not dissimilar to the democratic approach our founding fathers put into place. Yes—I guess—we'd have to acknowledge that the system has created some conflict, just as there are tensions in our country today between states' rights and federal rights, there is tension inside our Church between dioceses, the national church, and the General Convention.

Overall, it is my view that the system has served our Church well for almost two and a half centuries, just as it has served our country well. Eventually, I discussed this idea with local and state and national Episcopal leaders. I was then asked to write an [op-ed](#) for the [Virginia Theological Seminary](#) that outlined my thinking, and I did that. For a variety of reasons, our

national church leaders said that they did not think this all-are-welcome or agree-to-disagree approach could be implemented at [General Convention](#). I understand that, and, frankly, I agree with it, but I did get positive feedback from Episcopal leaders from several states, and particularly from Bishop Doyle.

Now, [Bishop Doyle](#) has taken that article and thought prayerfully about it and refined it in many, many ways and made it much, much, much better. He will go through that in some detail shortly. I'm sure he has probably already discussed it with those of you who were there in Austin. First of all, what I want to say—and I'll say this in conclusion, if I might—is that I think we Episcopalians in Texas have an opportunity here to lead by example on this issue. That is, lead by example within The Episcopal Church of the United States. Frankly, if we were able to do that satisfactorily and effectively, it would be a lesson that, quite frankly, our national political leaders could learn a little bit from.

Hopefully, the approach that the Bishop is going to outline will serve as a textbook example that could demonstrate to dioceses elsewhere that, with mutual respect and understanding, we can adopt a process or a procedure or a policy, with respect to this very divisive issue, that will permit our Church to stay together during this understandably trying time. I happen to personally believe that our savior Jesus Christ would prefer us to come together with a solution to this issue that, irrespective of which side we may be on, will permit us to continue to be in communion with each other. Once again, let me simply say thanks to all of you for being willing to offer to try and find a way forward that can help our Church stay together and help it to concentrate on our common commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the mission of his Church.

# Preface

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For 40 years The Episcopal Church has wrestled, not only with the issues of ethnicity and gender regarding ordination, but with sexuality and how it relates to the sacrament of marriage. In fact, all of the major denominations—and even non-denominational churches—have been in the same discussion.

In a traditional dioceses like Texas, anxiety rises once again, as we approach [The Episcopal Church's 2012 General Convention](#). Reports and liturgies are being prepared, which will usher in a new age of sacramental understanding about sexuality and marriage for The Episcopal Church. The [Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music](#) (SCLM) is preparing a [teaching document and liturgy](#) for approval as a trial rite, which will probably be approved by a majority of the [House of Deputies](#) and the [House of Bishops](#) this summer. Some people in The Episcopal Church will welcome the action while others will not. This legislation will challenge the wider church and much of the [Anglican Communion](#), and it will challenge the people of the [Diocese of Texas](#) on several fronts if not prayerfully weighed and responded to in advance.

The Diocese of Texas has suffered because of the belief that we should all agree on the matter of same-gender blessings; and that those who disagree should leave. This conflict of conscience has made it difficult for us to remain one church in a common mission. Our western culture of indictment teaches us to use power and force against those who do not agree with us. In a culture that is tied to outcomes with a winner and loser, we create communities of isolation in which we say good-bye to dear friends we disagree with and hide behind a sense of moral high ground. When the General Convention meeting in 2012 takes action this summer on rites for blessing same-gender relationships, issues of sexuality will reignite at the diocesan and parish level—conflict that will result in winners and losers. This reigniting of anxiety, fear, and

cultural war is not a healthy response to difficult times. It is most assuredly not helpful for the purpose of mission and the proclamation of God in Christ Jesus.

Hope means having a realistic understanding of the past and present without nostalgia. As we look over our history as a diocese, and as we reflect on the history of our Church and the ancient scriptures that reach back to the very day that Abram set out from the land of Ur, we know that God's people have bickered with one another for ages. Scripture reminds us that such "quarreling over opinions" (Romans 14:1) is poor stewardship of our time and energy and does not serve our Lord well.

My gifts have typically been best used when mediating between differing parties. When we did the "walkabouts" in the diocese prior to my election as bishop, I explained that I would help us faithfully get through this theological, liturgical and cultural change, or crisis. I knew that I had gifts to help us find a kind of unity that brings opposing groups to the table.

After General Convention 2009, I knew I couldn't allow our Diocese of Texas to slip into division and conflict without action on my part. I approached former Secretary of State James Baker to help me think through the leadership that was required at this moment in history. I also began to read and think critically about my own position and what I thought was best for the diocese. I have asked and prayed for clarity about how best to lead the Diocese of Texas.

I am grateful to former Secretary Baker for his expertise and his guidance in what has expanded into a multiyear process of discernment and strategic thinking. I am especially grateful to him for his kind and stern words to me during a particularly rough patch of thinking and conversation. In November 2010, Secretary Baker took time for my phone call while in Washington D.C. helping President Obama get the START Treaty through Congress (which I think illustrates how important Secretary Baker feels this work is to the life of the Church). While I worried out loud that not everyone was going to like the strategy we were working on, he said, "Bishop, you are the Bishop of Texas. We need you to be our bishop. No, not everyone will like what you are proposing, but this is what it means to be a leader." I am eternally grateful for his kind words on that day. I am also appreciative for the years of focused work and



the support Secretary Baker has given to me and to the people of the Diocese of Texas. He has been an inspirational partner in this endeavor, and I am thankful for his service not only to the United States but also to his beloved Episcopal Church.

I have crafted a strategy that I believe will lead us through the divisions that threaten our growth numerically and spiritually. My hope and my prayer is that this strategy will help us continue our focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission that is before us.

It became clear by February of 2011 that the strategy itself would need a supporting document. Our diocese needed a monograph—a paper—that would explain my stance, my leadership, and my theological and liturgical thinking on the issue of unity first and foremost. It would also include a teaching on how I see the current debate on marriage and the blessing of same-gender relationships.

Our diocese is diverse—as diverse as the whole Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion. The Diocese of Texas is not of one mind on the issue of human sexuality. I do not see a consensus between clergy and laity being reached in the foreseeable future. But our unity must depend upon the Christian Gospel. **We are a people united by one Lord, one faith, and one baptism** (Ephesians 5:4). We are united by God in Christ Jesus and not by one perspective on the issue of human sexuality.

In order to lead through General Convention 2012, I need to create a solution that respects our diversity and allows all people to act in accordance with their faith regarding issues of human sexuality; “for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). This is the work of this paper: to lay before you, the people of the Diocese of Texas, a means by which people of differing views (while holding a different view on sexuality out of their own faith and reading of scripture) may choose unity for the mission of God in Jesus Christ first and foremost. I am seeking in this short text to answer the questions: How do people with differing views on sexuality and blessing of same-gender relationships stay together for the sake of the Gospel? How is it that we are able to remain one church?

What follows is a theological reflection on our unity in mission and a strategy that will enable the Diocese of Texas to remain united in mission while navigating the division that can so easily threaten to divert our attention from the unique proclamation of Jesus Christ and his message of mercy and forgiveness.

I am grateful for the many people who have spent time with me and shared their hopes and desires as well as their concerns and prayers. A number of these have been bishops who have shared in their thoughts and have supported me in discerning my leadership on this issue. I give thanks for the direction and clarity with which the following have offered guidance: the Most Rev. Rowan Williams, the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, the Most Rev. George Carey, the Rt. Rev. James Tengatenga, the Rt. Rev. Philip Poole, the Rt. Rev. Ed Little, the Rt. Rev. Neil Alexander, and the Rt. Rev. Duncan Gray, III. I give thanks also for the Rev. Canon Kenneth Kearon (Secretary General of the [Anglican Communion](#)) and the Rev. John Peterson (former Secretary General of the Anglican Communion). I give thanks for the Very Rev. Joe D. Reynolds (dean of [Christ Church Cathedral](#), Houston), the Rev. Dr. Russell Levenson (rector of [St. Martin's Episcopal Church](#), Houston), the Rev. Dr. Ian Markham (Dean of [Virginia Theological Seminary](#)), the Rev. Dr. Bill Stafford (Dean of the [Sewanee School of Theology](#)), and the Rev. Dr. Paul Zahl (former Dean of [Trinity School for Ministry](#), Ambridge) and the Rev. Larry Hall (rector of [St. John's the Divine Episcopal Church](#), Houston). I am thankful for the challenge and support that I have also received from Ms. Laurie Eiserloh (parishioner at [St. David's Episcopal Church](#), Austin). In no way do I mean to imply their endorsement of this paper, but I appreciate the time and conversations they have had with me over the last several years and their encouragement in seeking a way for the Diocese of Texas to seek unity with the wider Church (Episcopal and Anglican) while also sustaining unity for mission at home.

In addition, these faithful bishops—the Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne (seventh Bishop of Texas), the Rt. Rev. Don Wimberly (eighth Bishop of Texas), the Rt. Rev. Dena A. Harrison (bishop suffragan in the Diocese of Texas), and the Rt. Rev. Rayford B. High (bishop suffragan in the Diocese of Texas, retired)—all have been a part of this conversation and have offered

nothing but their support of me for the sake of unity and the health of mission for the Diocese of Texas.

I knew that I could not undertake this work alone. I announced to the diocese at Diocesan Council 2010 that I would gather a task force together. Slowly one by one I invited a great group of leaders to participate in this work. While the plan is of my own design, the sharp edges, thoughtful process, and unity of thought is in large part do to this listening community that has journeyed with me for over a year as we prepared for General Convention 2012. This wonderful group of leaders has gathered with me to work on the strategy, and I am grateful for their work and participation in the process. They are: the Rev. Dean Calcote, Clint B. Capers, John C. Dawson, Jr., Ms. Linnet Deily, Ms. Laurie Eiserloh, Mr. David Harvin, Mr. Frank E. Hood, Jr., the Rev. Susan Kennard, Dr. James E. Key, Mr. David G. Long, Dr. George McGonigle, the Rev. Uriel Osnaya, Ms. Carole Pinkett, the Rev. Victor Thomas, the Rev. David Luckenbach, the Rev. Michael Wyckoff, and H. A. "Trey" Yarbrough III. They have written a letter of affirmation of my leadership on this work and have accepted the plan for the diocese that I propose in this paper.

Most especially, I am thankful to the Rev. David Puckett and the Rev. Chris Bowhay, who agreed to help with editing the text, and Dr. Scott Bader-Saye, who agreed to serve on the Task Force for Unity and also agreed to be a reader for this paper. His thoughts have been most helpful in insuring a solid theological footing.

I am also grateful for the Diocese of Texas Staff who has helped me to make time devoted to this project. I am especially indebted to the Rev. Canons John Logan and John Newton, and Carol E. Barnwell, each of whom has helped with my thinking and my writing. Stephanie Taylor and Rebecca Sweitzer have been essential in helping me with the meetings for the Task Force on Unity and Mission and in the production of these materials.

Let me now thank JoAnne, my wife. She is my partner in the adventure that is bishop. She has read more than a few pieces of my work, and in all she has given me her support

despite the numbers of comma and semicolon corrections. I love her and am blessed to have her in my life.

Lastly, I am grateful to God and the people of the Diocese of Texas who have inspired my ministry and have invited me, as the ninth bishop diocesan, to share their lives. Their courage, their fierce tenacity for mission, and their belief in the kingdom of God—all of this makes me want to be a better bishop. Moreover, their audacity for the Gospel of Jesus Christ urges me to leadership on this issue.

# Introduction

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## *The Future We Create*

Over the last four decades [The Episcopal Church](#) has been in conflict with itself (on the Prayer Book, ordination of women and homosexuals, and on blessing same-gender relationships), while at the same time losing unparalleled numbers of members.

Recent statistics published in [The Episcopal Church Annual of 2011](#) (p. 15) paint a bleak picture of changes between 2008 and 2009: 69 fewer parishes; 50,949 fewer baptized members; 42,177 fewer communicants in good standing; 22,294 fewer people in average Sunday attendance; 1,887 fewer baptisms; 597 fewer confirmations. In 2010, the Diocese of Texas began to increase the number of baptisms and confirmations for the first time in more than a decade by focusing on mission and strategic growth. Nevertheless, we have a long way to go. Even our progress on baptisms and confirmations does not make up for shrinking membership and average Sunday attendance.

The much work to be done includes planting new churches and new kinds of congregations. It includes the improvement of our newcomer ministry that welcomes people into our church and shares with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the unique formation of Christians who are unabashedly Episcopalian. We also need to learn how to share the Gospel with those outside of our churches.

The Rev. Dr. Russell Levenson wrote a [recent article](#) in *The Living Church* that captured the reality of our decline with these words:

*... the essential elements of decline began in the mid-1970s. In 1970, TEC had an all-time high of 3,475,164 members. Within five years, it had lost nearly half a million, down to*

3,039,136 (*Episcopal Church Annual*, p. 21). In the four decades since then, we bled out more than one-third of our members. Some will blame this drastic period of anemia on divisions over women's ordination, prayer book revision and even fallout from the civil rights movements of the 1960s, but it is probably not that simple either. A massive loss between 1970 and 1975 occurred before the height of divisions over women's ordination and prayer book revision.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the issues that have created conflict in the Episcopal Church, he writes:

*Some will cite the 2003 General Convention, which approved the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop, as the turning point, and The Episcopal Church Annual again shows an important decline (see p. 21): we have lost more than 250,000 baptized members (from 2,284,233 to 2,006,343) and 325 parishes and missions (from 7,220 to 6,895). "Episcopal Congregations Overview" records that 89 percent of Episcopal congregations reported conflicts or disagreements in the last five years, and adds: "The ordination of gay priests or bishops was the most frequently mentioned source of conflict."*<sup>2</sup>

Both Dr. Levenson and the Very Rev. Joe Reynolds point out that the conflicts that stem from our differing views on sexuality are taking its toll on the church at large.

Over these four decades, The Episcopal Church has walked neither a merciful and loving way, nor a middle way. I believe we have approached the conversation, with a perspective of division on issues and not on unity in mission. There has been very little willingness by either side of the cultural/sexual issues for tolerance with one another.

In Zahl's podcast Episode 53, entitled [How to Tell the Future](#), he invites the listener to think about the science fiction author Philip Wylie's work and the reality that his predictions have been 90 percent accurate.<sup>3</sup> Zahl believes that Wylie's accuracy is due to the fact that

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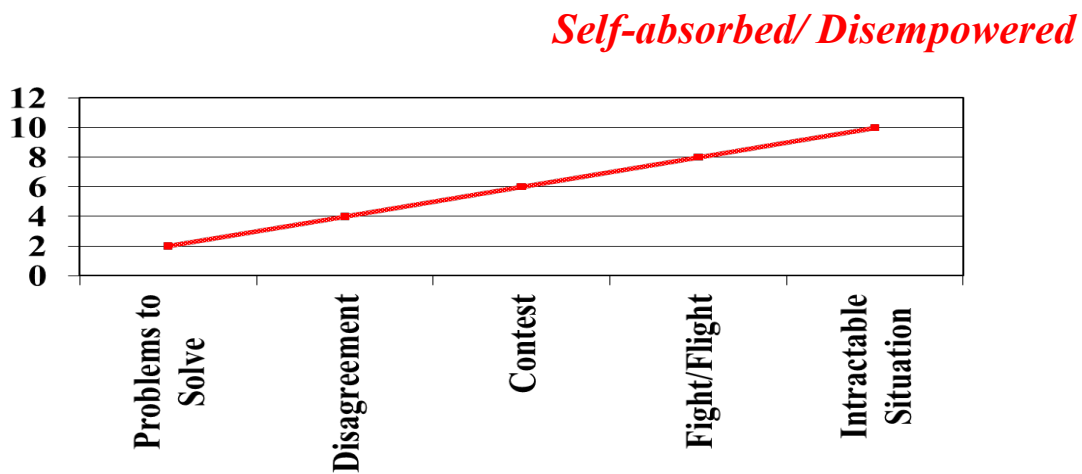
<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. Russell Levenson, "Reclothing the Emperor," *The Living Church*, July 15, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> The Rev. Dr. Zahl does tell us that Philip Wylie was an awful writer by today's standards, and that his attitude is often holier than thou. Nevertheless, from smoking to the Internet, Zahl challenges the listener to see that the

Wylie holds two basic truths: 1) human nature does not change 2) fashion and trends change. Zahl says these truths when employed will not create “friends in the present,” but they will bring “awe in the future because of the accuracy” of our predictions.

When I was taking mediation courses at George Mason University and UT Law School, there was a perennial truth that was drilled into our psyches: when humans are in conflict, they move to a place of incapacity. In our natural and healthy reflective state we approach conflict feeling empowered to make decisions. We have the ability to consider other people’s ideas. At this stage the conflict is simply a problem to be solved. As the conflict continues over time, we move gradually up the conflict scale. As we live in unresolved conflict, we begin to feel less power to make decisions and cannot tolerate another person’s conflicting ideas. Conflicts at this stage are at a “fight or flight” stage. Our normal functioning becomes inactive when we feel the conflict consumes our lives. Here is a graph that shows what happens in conflict. The graph illustrates the reality that anxiety grows when people move from being able to listen to others and feeling empowered to solve problems to an intractable situation and a place of feeling powerless.



*Other/Empowered*

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predictions in Wylie’s work are mostly true; incorporating a list of works that stretch from 1928 to 1971; including the book *When Worlds Collide*.

When we combine this information with Zahl's thesis that human nature does not change but, rather, only fashion changes, we are able to predict a future with accuracy.

At [General Convention 2012](#), our Church will vote to approve the blessing of same-gender relationships. Predictably, parts of the Church that have not been able to decrease the level of anxiety over the sexuality debate will succumb to a "fight or flight" condition. While many dioceses have already moved past this point, there are still many dioceses in which the decisions from this Convention will cause an exodus. Churches still embroiled in this conflict will have their mission incapacitated by the conflict. Progressives in predominately traditional dioceses will continue to press for change and create conflict. Traditionalists will continue to fight over and against the leadership of TEC and against the liberals in their own dioceses. Such uses of time, energy, power and money drain resources that should be focused on, and used for, the proclamation of God in Christ Jesus.

While we have worked hard to respect our differences in the Diocese of Texas, I predict that human nature will overtake us and we will forget that our unity is in Christ and not in our forced agreement on sexuality issues and will drive us into conflict once again.

In another podcast entitled [Should I Stay or Should I Go?](#) Zahl challenges us to realize that we live in a culture of indictment.<sup>4</sup> We continue to live in a dualistic and conflicted culture in which "you are either with us or against us." We must stop being "against" one another and begin to be "for" Jesus.

Our challenge is to move beyond the abysmal wreckage of these past four decades and say to those of us in the Diocese of Texas and beyond, "Enough is enough."

We must surmount the culture wars and return to the very real work of proclaiming a Gospel of mercy and love—in our hearts, in word and in deed. We must agree that we

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<sup>4</sup> The Rev. Dr. Paul Zahl, PZ Podcast, Episode #59. <http://www.mbird.com/2011/08/pzs-podcast-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go/>



disagree—that this is a challenge to be faced and we must take action that will allow us to move forward into the mission field together.

We have faced challenges of division and conflict before and our bishops have led us through them intact. At the time of revolution when the earliest white Texians (as they were called) wrestled power from Mexico, our first bishop, the Rt. Rev. George Washington Freeman, who was appointed and paid for by the Episcopal Church Missionary Society, focused our attention on building up the Diocese of Texas. The seeds planted by his ministry and the support he gave our first clergy built a united company of faithful men and women who would petition and become the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. In the midst of settlement in the new state he argued for dollars to raise up missionaries.

During the Civil War, at a time when Texas was deeply divided, Bishop Alexander Gregg (our first bishop) focused on mission and the growth of congregations and schools throughout Texas. He was one of the first southern bishops to make his pledge to the Union after the war. The silver dollar he paid for his reinstatement was considered a collector's piece. While he could not attend the first General Convention of the Episcopal Church following the Civil War, he was one of the first bishops to lead his southern diocese back into union with the Episcopal Church. His commitment to keep us together in the midst of a divided Texas helped us to grow despite the culture war on slavery.

Bishop Gregg's witness and commitment to unity helped the people of the diocese envision hope for the future. We next elected a bridge builder, the Rt. Rev. George Herbert Kinsolving. He served on the Confederate side of the Civil War as a young man, yet was eager for reunification at its end. He was known as a low-church evangelical who was committed to unity even as his high church brothers and sisters threatened to depart The Episcopal Church over the liturgical conflict that was dividing our Church at the time. Six-foot six, he was known as *Texas George* and was an advocate for the freed men then seeking to build churches across the country and in Texas. His advocacy for black bishops to help oversee freed-men congregations was well known nationally. Upon his death he was mourned by the black leadership of the Episcopal Church across the country for his activism.

Bishop Clinton S. Quin, our third bishop, held an unmovable vision of a Gospel unleashed through evangelism, and he guided the expansion of Episcopal churches in Texas despite divisions brought about by two stock market crashes and two world wars. A friend of the laity, he was able to hold the diocese together and witness its growth during a time when the country struggled with two economic depressions and the First World War.

His successor, the Rt. Rev. John Hines, helped us live through the civil rights era and later served as our Presiding Bishop. He endured the vitriol and hatred of that time that infected our Councils. Yet his prophetic witness—that the kingdom of God was a realm encompassing all people in an undivided society—held the diocese together. Despite the anger that threatened division and even disintegration of the Diocese of Texas under Hines' leadership, we continued unprecedented growth in our churches and membership. Many parishioners recall this time to me and remind me that though we disagreed on the floor of our Diocesan Council we could be found together late into the evening in the company of brothers and sisters of the same Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Rt. Rev. Milton Richardson succeeded Bishop Hines and was known for his wisdom and strength of leadership. Not only did he help guide us through the rest of the civil rights era, but he also led us through the *Book of Common Prayer* revision and women's ordination. Bishop Richardson was the only bishop in the House of Bishops who voted against the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. Yet, after its approval by General Convention, he ushered in full use of the book, allowing for some congregations to maintain their use of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*. We wrestled with women's ordination, but when he discerned it was time, he was present for the first ordination of a woman in the Diocese of Texas, the Rev. Helen Havens. And, when Texas itself raised up its first woman priest, he ordained the Rev. Elizabeth Masquelette. Bishop Richardson was thoroughly committed to The Episcopal Church. When parishioners were likely to complain about The Episcopal Church and challenge him not to send money, he would say, "You can't get all of the New York Times for a quarter." Even though he disagreed with the wider Church at times, being a full member of The Episcopal Church family was never in question.

The Rt. Rev. Maurice Benitez then helped us to more fully embrace women's ordination and brought greater liturgical innovation into the Diocese of Texas through the then-popular renewal movement. Things in the Diocese of Texas did change in this era, and we were bitterly divided on the issue of sexuality. Yet, we entered a period of time when institutions that were begun during previous bishops' tenures grew and took on new life. We began to plant new churches again. Bishop Benitez was certainly unhappy at times with the leadership of the wider Church, especially on the issue of sexuality, but he loves the Church and, to this day, will speak passionately about the Church he loves and in which he has stayed.

The election of the Rt. Rev. Claude E. Payne moved the diocese to a more moderate but still traditional position. Bishop Payne, not unlike Bishop Richardson early in his tenure, did not feel it was time to deal with the issues that divided us. He urged and cheered the diocese on to grow—to expect miraculous things of one another. He held a traditionalist stance, but he did not let the culture wars distract us from mission and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 2003, the Rt. Rev. Don A. Wimberly brought his sound leadership to the diocese. Following the election of the Rt. Rev. Gene Robinson in 2003 as The Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop, the Diocese of Texas' unity was truly threatened. Leaders who are still friends and supporters today urged the Bishop to take the Diocese of Texas out of The Episcopal Church. To have done so would have embroiled us in the legal disasters that have befallen many of our brothers and sisters across the Church. Still others considered the issue of gay marriage and sexuality over and assumed that the bishop would move us to the blessing of same-gender relationships. This would have created a ripple effect of conflict and destruction throughout the diocese. I remember that on the same day Bishop Wimberly received letters and calls urging him to lead us out of The Episcopal Church; he then had a meeting with gay and lesbian leaders and their friends who urged him to embrace the change. I was there while the hope of leading a diocese to continue the missionary growth of previous bishops was on the verge of being dashed against the rocks of a diocese at war with itself. I saw Bishop Wimberly look into the eyes of those who would tear us apart —on either side—and declare that we would remain Anglican and Episcopalians. Neither would we bless unions, nor leave The

Episcopal Church. His gift to the Diocese of Texas was not unlike that of our former bishops: he challenged us to be Episcopalians and to be part of the wider Anglican Communion. He never accepted that there was only one side to the Church and attempted to keep a diocese with diverse opinions together.

Our bishops have not been perfect, but each one faced challenges much like those we face today. Beginning in 1838 and in the successive 173 years, the bishops' leadership shared common elements of vision as they have faced very different cultural and church conflicts that threatened the very unity they had promised to protect.

They all held common elements of leadership: They never abandoned their relationship with either the Anglican Communion or The Episcopal Church. They did not flee from the challenge but rose to meet it head on. Starting from a traditionalist approach, they then made room for change bravely leading the diocese into the new era.

Unity is a gift created by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ. Unity is paramount for the sake of mission and for the sake of the kingdom of God. I believe each bishop before me has had an enduring sense that human nature does not change and that trends in conflict come and go. I believe they understood the frailty of community when it is founded upon our own human ability that is always marred by sin and forever dependent upon grace. They ministered out of an understanding that those on every side of the conflict they faced in their time were in the end as much in the need of that blessed grace, generous mercy and abundant love that comes from God alone.

Today, we can look into the future and we can see that General Convention 2012 will vote to make it normative in our Church to bless same-gender relationships. We know that human nature has not changed. We know that this decision will bring with it the possibility for renewed conflict within the Diocese of Texas between the theologically diverse populations that make up our 79,000 members.

But we know this is not the first time in the life of the people of God that we have been at odds with one another. Indeed, we know that it is not the first time that the people of our

diocese have been at conflict with the wider Church or with one another. We know though that we have a tradition in our diocese of leading through conflict and change. We have a tradition in our episcopate—and a tradition within the clergy and laity—that endures and ensures that we have always lived out our God-given mission as brothers and sisters in Christ. We have a tradition in this diocese of disagreeing on the most essential matters that have faced our culture and church: slavery, war, economic depression, civil rights, remarriage, liturgical differences and ordination of women; and at the end of the day we have always sat down as friends of Jesus, received the broken bread and shared the common cup making us one.

We are challenged at this moment to stand up and to lead. We are challenged to remain one family even in the midst of profound disagreement. We are challenged to be one in Christ for the sake of Christ's mission. We are challenged not to react and walk away but rather to lead and face the future together.

# Chapter 1

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## *The Responsibility of the Bishop as Leader*

As the ninth [Bishop of the Diocese of Texas](#), I intend to lead through the current crisis that faces us in the Diocese of Texas, our Episcopal Church, and the wider Anglican Communion. I stand on the shoulders of all my predecessors and intend to lead through the decision of General Convention 2012 wherein The Episcopal Church will approve [rites for the blessing of same-gender relationships](#). Because I believe I am leading out of a tradition of bold Texas bishops, I also have clarity in my vocation as bishop. I am a bishop of the Diocese of Texas, a bishop of the Episcopal Church and a bishop within the Anglican Communion. In our common life we may think that we reverse this hierarchy, but in reality I am rooted in my place of ministry. Beyond that rootedness and commitment to ministry is my firm belief that above all else I am a Bishop of the Church of God. In my ordination I testified that I would uphold the doctrine and discipline of the Church as I have received them, and that I am so persuaded of my call to be bishop that I am willing, regardless of cost, to carry out the vocation I have inherited faithfully and diligently. Moreover, I understand I am to bring about (with the clergy and laity of the diocese) a healthy growing church—a missionary church—and, at day's end, am to leave a church alive and well for those who follow.

Jesus Christ is our great high priest. The outward flowing of the inner life of God, which we know as Trinity, is revealed and manifested in Baptism and Eucharist. In our Anglican and Episcopal tradition I am chief president and primary sacramentalist for the Episcopal community in which I am called to serve—the Diocese of Texas. I am the chief liturgist—I am responsible for ordering our common life of ministry to enable order and communion between all of our many and diverse parts. A document produced by and published by the [Inter-Anglican](#)

[Theological and Doctrinal Commission](#), in October of 2007, entitled [The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church](#) [TSEO] says that as bishop I am the “focal person who links parishes within a diocese not only to one another but also the diocese to the wider Church within the Communion and ecumenically.”<sup>5</sup> We might also remember that this echoes our own Episcopal ordination service, which says that I am ordained as bishop to “wisely oversee the life and work of the church.”<sup>6</sup> At once my vocation and my office are both contextually and universally catholic.

The unique proclamation of the Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ is my particular evangelical office. Bishop Payne used to say, “The Bishop is the chief evangelist.” It is my work to give voice to the mission of God’s people and their community, the Church. It is my work to share the practice and proclamation of the Good News as it is exemplified in the many and diverse communities throughout the diocese, the wider Episcopal Church, and communion. I believe it is my work to make Jesus known in each community that I visit, to help them to see Christ in their midst. Moreover, my work is to take there with me the particular representation of the incarnate Christ discovered and to represent that to the next congregation I visit. The role of narrating the miraculous reconciling work of Jesus Christ locally is a role that invites me to speak prophetically to the Church and its people. It is my daily work of devotion, study and reflection that prepares me to “know Christ, to know the power of his resurrection; and to enter into the fellowship of sharing his sufferings.”<sup>7</sup> It is my evangelical work to make Christ known in the Church and beyond.

Within one week in August 2011, I visited a small congregation in the lower Shire valley in Southern Malawi and then a small congregation in Freeport, Texas. Both congregations gave voice to the notion that I, as Bishop, had incarnated the global communion to them. Both congregations were aware of the work of Christ in their midst and far away in a distant country.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Anglican Way: The Significance of the Episcopal Office for the Communion of the Church*, [TSEO] Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, October 2007, 12ff. See also the *Book of Common Prayer* [BCP] (Church Publishing: New York, 1979) 517ff.

<sup>6</sup> BCP, 521.

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3.10

In this one week, people living on opposite sides of the globe were truly and effectively one and bore witness to both the prophetic voice of unity and mission that I carried. Both were bound together through the apostolic witness of a universal church and fellowship.

I want to spend my life encouraging believers into this one body of faith, deeply rooted in our apostolic heritage. It is my vocation to guard the faith and to help Christ build up the faith. It is a faith heritage of “patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs and those of every generation.”<sup>8</sup> It is my responsibility to hold fast to the teachings of the apostolic Church through time and space, symbolized by my own apostolic succession. It is my work to witness to the faith once delivered to the saints and to preserve a living orthodoxy: worship, believing and practice.

We cannot use dogma, which we believe is essential, to bludgeon our fellow Christians or those who seek a living Christ. We must be faithful to the Gospel, but we cannot condemn the mission field we wish to convert or condemn one another. We might do well to remember that Jesus himself did not come to condemn the world. We can easily bring to mind the words of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” We often forget Jesus’ next words wherein he says, “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Another passage that challenges us is John 7:53-8:11 in which Jesus deals with the adulterous woman. Jesus in this passage turns his living word into action, enacting John 3:17 in his conversation with this woman. Lifting up the woman from the ground, Jesus says to her, “Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.” It is my vocation, like the ministry of Jesus, to be “merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper.”<sup>9</sup> I am to come to the aid of the condemned and the condemner alike.

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<sup>8</sup> BCP, 517.

<sup>9</sup> BCP, 518.



In order to live life in the Church with one another, we must be careful to discern the essentials and the nonessentials. While we have not done this very well over the last four decades, it is our vocation to do so now. I pray for courage and wisdom in the undertaking of this vocation for I am responsible for praying the Holy Spirit into the ancient teachings once received in order that the true faith of the Gospel of Jesus Christ might flourish.<sup>10</sup> As Brian McLaren recently wrote, beneath our stated belief is every person's deeply "cherished experience of God and nearness to God."<sup>11</sup> I endeavor therefore to raise faithful followers of Jesus Christ who rest upon our theological legacy of scripture and tradition and reason and who are animated because of their heart experience of God. It is my work to build a scripture-formed people for God.

There is no diocese without a bishop and the reverse is true. The bishop is always in a particular context but also in the midst of a particular people. It is my vocation to work with the people and specifically with the baptized. It is the work of the bishop to order and coordinate the gifts of the Church for the mission of the Christ. We understand that the gifts of the baptized are not the property of any one person but are given to each to edify the body of Christ, his Church, for the purpose of serving God and his mission. "We are all members one of another," writes Paul in his letter to the Romans (12:5). The idea that we are all genuinely family, and that together we are a strong missionary community, is deeply rooted in our Diocese of Texas history. We have been a diocese with a history of strong bishops who brought many gifts, but we also know the names of the clergy and lay people who stood next to them and helped to build the mission of the Church with their immense generosity and stewardship.

One of the special ministries that I have as bishop is my relationship with my clergy. Our clergy share with me in carrying out the mission of the Church. I have a vocation to pastorally and spiritually provide an environment in which they may grow and flourish in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. Together we must engage in the work that is before us, deeply grounded in an exchange of prayer and scripture. This result is a shared sense of ministry where we all

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<sup>10</sup> BCP, 517ff.

<sup>11</sup> Ken Howard, *Paradoxy*, (Paraclete Press: Brewster, Massachusetts, 2010) x

undertake the work of liturgy, proclamation and formation together. Therefore, I feel responsible to come to the aid of clergy under my care, offer resources to help each respond to their local context, and to lead through the conflict that may arise following General Convention 2012.

Today the people of the Diocese of Texas are faced with a great conflict of conscience. It is an anthropological conflict and it is a conflict on the theology and liturgy of marriage. It is a conflict on the nature of human sexuality. It is a conflict that we have been debating at Diocesan Council since the late eighties, but it is deeply rooted in unsettled conflict around divorce and so we may see that the nativity of our current debate on the nature of marriage predates most of our own births.

It is my vocation as bishop to lead through the conflict within the Diocese of Texas and to “recall the broken and conflicted body of Christ to its reconciled life in him.”<sup>12</sup> My vocation of mediating disputes within the family of God is normally a work undertaken on a congregational level and within a much more confined context. The conflict that is before us is multilayered and multigenerational, and is connected throughout the churches of this diocese, the wider Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion.

We believe, and we proclaim in our mission and vision statement of the Diocese of Texas, that we are “reconciled by Christ” and that we value our unity. In our conflict on marriage and sexuality we are currently not reconciled one to another, yet we prize unity as a goal. Even though we are bone-weary from the fight, we have soldiered on in conflict and have so sought our own will, that we have been willing to divide the body of Christ itself. We have been willing to indict one another based upon our assurance of right, forgetting we are to imitate Jesus’ ministry and mission of mercy and love, and forgetting Peter and Paul’s commitment to unity over division.

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<sup>12</sup> TSEO.

While this is our current reality, I am challenged by the text from TSEO where we find these words, “Most obviously the Church is made up of frail and foolish people. The upward call of Christ presumes we are sinners in need of God’s grace, forgiveness and mercy. In this context, *koinonia* (the intimate communion of God) is necessarily a partial and vulnerable reality. A bishop’s vocation involves tending this *koinonia* through the wise handling of conflict. The challenge for bishops is how to harness conflicts so that through this process a deeper *koinonia* in the Gospel emerges.”<sup>13</sup> This is a call to ministry that I am willing to answer as bishop diocesan.

It is my vocation to help us, as a diocese, deal with the issues that feed our division and keep us from the work of the Gospel, and to help us do so in a manner that helps each of us engage God and Jesus Christ in a deeper manner—drinking deeply from the spiritual waters that heal and restore the creatures of God.

Another vocational aspect of my Episcopal life regarding this conflict is my role to connect the baptized people of God across every boundary—to make catholic what is experienced as diversity. Diversity is not a core value of our faith—catholicity is. We have a confidence in a tradition of apostolic faith that is expressed and proclaimed in a variety of missionary contexts. The unique story of the gift of Jesus Christ, our Trinitarian faith, our doctrine and our worship are shared in every context. I understand that my office and ministry personify this catholic, universal temperament of the Gospel. Being in communion with other bishops is an essential part of this ministry because it incarnates the unifying reality of Christ throughout the world. Being in communion with completely dissimilar parishes is another example of this unifying catholicity in the midst of a varied diocese and larger Church.

I turn here again to the text from TSEO. I believe it so clearly articulates the vocation of catholicity:

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<sup>13</sup> TSEO.

*The catholicity of the [episcopal] office means the bishop is an agent of the fullness of the one faith expressed through myriad local forms.<sup>14</sup>*

Our Anglican and Episcopal faith has historically understood and practiced a polity in which our catholicity is always connected to our context and our local culture through the bishop. This can be a challenge. Therefore, in our model of church this connection to culture and the context places the bishop in a special ministry of translating locally what is received from abroad and translating abroad what is received locally. The bishop then becomes an icon of both the local and global expressions of church. The commission continues:

*Enculturation that is authentic plumbs the heart of the Christian faith. This requires active engagement with the local cultures so that any stumbling blocks to the hearing, receiving and enacting of the gospel be removed. When this occurs the gifts of the people are harnessed for authentic mission in that time and place. A bishop must truly know the local cultures and values of the people that the bishop has been called to serve and lead. This can be a real challenge, for the bishop is chief pastor within and across particular ethnic, racial, and cultural contexts. Yet in this role the bishop has to ensure that the one catholic faith finds expression through these particular identities without becoming subsumed by them. The catholicity of the office requires a way of life that is constantly in dialogue with others (especially including other bishops) across many boundaries.<sup>15</sup>*

As a bishop of the Diocese of Texas, I am always aware that I serve a wider faith body. I am always at once bishop of Texas, bishop in The Episcopal Church, and bishop in the Anglican Communion. In the same way I am a witness to our catholicity of our local expression of church to the wider province and communion.

*Catholicity also means that the decisions that come from any local place are not simply “local” decisions, but affect all. Bishops have a particular responsibility to bring the Church catholic into local processes of discerning the apostolic faith. They*

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<sup>14</sup> TSEO, 12ff. See also BCP, 518.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* See also BCP, 518.

*also have a responsibility to represent their diocese to the rest of the Church, to interpret to the Communion the realities of their local place. This means explaining not simply the end results of decisions reached, but being able to give theological explanation of the discernment of the gospel in the culture, and of the catholicity of such decisions. Bishops need the courage and wisdom to be able to hear the voice of others, whether within or outside their contexts.*<sup>16</sup>

It is my particular vocation to bring the broadest global view into our dialog and discernment on all matters of church, and to represent the diversity of voices; and to represent our dialog globally to make catholic a church family, a diocesan family, which consists of people from different cultures, class, gender, race and different views of marriage and sexuality. I am also responsible for communicating our particular context in Texas to the rest of the Church so that bonds of affection may grow despite the stumbling blocks diversity brings. I am at once a bishop in God's Holy Church and at the same time shepherd of "[my] people."<sup>17</sup>

We hide from our catholicity with words like *conservatives* or *traditionalists* and *liberals* or *progressives*. However, to break up the discourse into two camps is to have failed already. We are one family, which is nothing less than the family of God; and within that family are various and divergent individual voices. We are intimately connected with individuals throughout our community and world. In our family we have sons and daughters, parents and grandparents, clergy and laity, who seek to help decipher the church's teachings, and more importantly who need help to reconcile their firm feelings about the closeness of God and the sense that the Church cares for them.

Finally and perhaps ultimately, it is my vocation to be and participate in the wider community of bishops. I intentionally seek to have a healthy bond with my fellow bishops. My work and actions are never acted out in a vacuum. I "share with my fellow bishops" a life of

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<sup>16</sup> TSEO

<sup>17</sup> BCP, 517 and 518.

ministry.<sup>18</sup> How I lead us as a diocese impacts other bishops and this is always in the forefront of my mind.

This is my vocation as bishop—to be: chief liturgist, an evangelist, an apostolic teacher and binder of our faith, a partner with clergy and laity alike, a mediator of God’s grace, an encourager of reconciliation, catholic, and a colleague with my brother and sister bishops. My episcopal life, prayer and discernment have taught me that if I endeavor to lead or do anything without these vocations in the forefront of my mind I am being unfaithful to God’s calling.

I am supported by nearly 200 years of the historical witness of our bishops in the Diocese of Texas who have, against great odds and tumultuous division, maintained the unity of Christ’s mission and have forged a great diocese from the fires of disunion.

It is then in the great tradition of Diocese of Texas Bishops and out of my own understanding of the vocation and office of bishop that I come to bring my attention to the matter of our unity in mission above the cultural wars, and division on marriage and sexuality. I make my stand defending the catholic and reformed faith that is in me with sound reasoning and great charity in order that the mission of the good news of salvation and our proclamation of the uniqueness of God in Christ Jesus might be sustained. I am therefore committed to unity not for the sake of compromise and peace but as a means of comprehension and truth.<sup>19</sup> I make my stand for the mission of the Gospel “that the world may believe.” (John 20:20)

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<sup>18</sup> BCP, 518.

<sup>19</sup> Collect for Richard Hooker: O God of truth and peace, you raised up your servant Richard Hooker in a day of bitter controversy to defend with sound reasoning and great charity the catholic and reformed religion. Grant that we may maintain the middle way, not as a compromise for the sake of peace, but as a comprehension for the sake of truth. *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints* (Church Publishing: New York, 2010) 667.

# Chapter 2

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## *Unity: Effective Instrument of Mission*

As a bishop I often have the pleasure of hearing the blessed Samuel John Stone's hymn "The Church's One Foundation," which was written in 1868. While it was written following the Civil War and the reuniting of our Episcopal Church, it was, in fact, written for a very different reason. In 1866, an influential and liberal Anglican bishop wrote a book that attacked the historic accuracy of the Pentateuch. This caused a widespread controversy throughout the Anglican Church. Samuel John Stone, a pastor ministering to the poor of London at the time, was deeply upset by the schism that surrounded him. He wrote a collection of twelve creedal hymns. He understood, above all things, that the foundation of the church must be the Lordship of Christ and not the views of any one group of people. His hymn "The Church's One Foundation" was based on the Ninth Article of the Apostles' Creed. In his time it read: "The Holy Catholic (or Universal) Church; the Communion of Saints; He is the head of this Body." These are words today that always move me and remind me of the awesome work we in the Church choose to undertake, and upon whom we depend most of all.

*The Church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
she is his new creation,  
by water and the word:  
from heaven he came and sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her,  
and for her life he died.*

*Elect from every nation,*

*yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation,  
one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
one holy Name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with every grace endued.*

*Though with a scornful wonder  
men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed;  
yet saints their watch are keeping,  
their cry goes up, "How long?"  
and soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song.*

*Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war  
she waits the consummation  
of peace for evermore;  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blessed,  
and the great Church victorious  
shall be the Church at rest.*

*Yet she on earth hath union  
with God, the Three in one,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Hymnal (Church Publishing: New York, 1982) 525.



We seek to live these words despite our common disagreements, our desire to have our own way, our hope for schism, and our sinful want to fight rather than to engage in mission.

Our own efforts for unity depend partially on each of us; but only in a limited way. Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2, offers us these words on unity for the sake of mission.

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ 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, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

We are called by God to be “in full accord and one mind” for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot begin to offer a strategy on how best to proceed through the conflict that is upon us if we do not proceed in common mission under the headship of Jesus Christ. Effective mission hinges on the unity of the Church. This unity is so essential that before his death, Jesus prays for us asking God to make us one. He prays for his disciples and for us saying, “May they become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me.”<sup>21</sup>

Throughout his ministry, St. Paul pleaded with the Church to “be in agreement.” Let there be “no divisions among you. Be united in the same mind and same purpose,” he wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians (1:10). Yet, the first Christians were deeply divided over many different things. They were divided because the mission to the Jews and the mission to the

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<sup>21</sup> John 17:23

Gentiles were in conflict. The early Christian community inherited religious practices from the Jewish tradition that were icons and sacramental ways of life and were in direct conflict with the Gentile way of life. Much of the Book of Acts and Paul's letters are filled with descriptions of how the early church dealt with what was essentially a conflict created by two colliding cultures. Specifically, we might recall Paul's thoughts on the morality of eating meat offered to idols. In fact, two of Paul's letters addressed this particular pastoral issue because it was so divisive to this growing Christian community. Rather than appealing to the law, Paul reminded believers of the freedom they have in Christ. Christians, Paul insisted, are free to follow their conscience and are free from the burden of judging or changing others. Christians are not only free from but prohibited from indicting and sentencing those who are different because of the freedom we have in Christ Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

"Who are you," Paul asked, "to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. The faith you have, have as your own conviction before God."<sup>23</sup> How can a Church so deeply divided over the morality of this issue still "be in agreement?" The first Christians embraced the Gospel truth that Christ is our unity. What glues the Church together is "the message of the cross," Paul wrote.<sup>24</sup> Our diverse yet faithfully held positions shall in the end be laid at the altar of God. Until that time our faith in Jesus Christ unites us and draws us into the mission field.

In this we find a manner of living with one another in a covenant community. If we imitate Christ and his manner, we too will find unity in our faith and in our work. Paul's words challenge us to be unified for mission some two thousand years later.

Paul challenges us: "do not look to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited." Though we are members of the

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<sup>22</sup> I do not imply here a neo-latitudinarianism, for I believe this freedom is only manifest within a community that proclaims a monotheistic faith in God as creator and Jesus as the incarnate Son who fulfills salvation history.

<sup>23</sup> Romans 14: 4-5, 22

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:18

Abrahamic faith, the family of God, we are not to exploit or use it to our own benefit. We are not to use our partnership with God as a means to judge and condemn others. We are to act with mercy, forgiveness, love and kindness. This work of mercy is so difficult that, like Jesus, we must empty ourselves in order to be filled with grace. Today the world tells us to fill up ourselves, to consume, to be served, to attach ourselves to others, to over identify ourselves with others. Detachment is an ancient Christian practice, though in our current culture we attach and over identify with others. We are a culture that consumes and we consume one another and consume ourselves. Listen to St. Paul's words, "[Be like Jesus who] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." This is a radical way of being with one another.

In our conflicts we spend so much time attempting the destruction of one another that there is nothing left in the person or in the relationship to be served. From the beginning of Genesis, chapter 1, we are reminded of our long history of blaming others. Adam blames Eve and Eve blames the snake. This prehistoric tale reminds us of our fallen nature and how easy it is to scapegoat others rather than owning our own responsibility. We, by our fallen nature, find it enticing to have an enemy we can consume rather than a brother or sister God invites us to make family. Our Gospel challenges us, through the blessings of grace received, to empty ourselves and our natural desires to judge and condemn, that we can come along side our fellow Christian with the love, mercy and forgiveness of Jesus.

This is the unifying mind of Christ. It is a unity that understands hospitality and love and is obedient no matter how abusive someone else might get. You and I are challenged by the reconciling love of Jesus Christ to be different than the world around us.

After meeting all day, a few bishops gathered late one evening to talk and solve the problems of the world. One bishop got really angry and said the "other side" deserves what they get because they were so hostile to the minority long ago. I challenged him (and myself). I said that the task of the Christian is not to require an eye for an eye, but to be a witness of grace and mercy no matter what is given. In return the Christian empties the natural desire to harm in order to have the mind of Christ, which is to love.

When ideological opponents in the church can cease judgment of one another and serve one another, only then is the mission of Christ successful. When we have the mind of Christ and act with mercy, grace, love and kindness, then the kingdom of God is revealed before us.

I have lunch with a mentor and friend on a regular basis. He has been caught up in the culture wars that have infected the church, yet he is a man of incredible love, mercy and kindness. He challenged me to explain how do we know what unifies us if we are not unified on our understanding of sexuality and on the issue of marriage or same-gender relationships. He, of course, knew well what the answer was. I believe he also knew that the culture wars have created a great lie within the Church. That lie is that if we are not in agreement on the issues of sexuality, then we must not be unified.

The reality is what the scripture tells us, and what Paul and Peter specifically tried to convey to the earliest Church. When one leaves, moves away or chooses to live outside of the community of God as we have received it in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic fashion, they move away from God. The rector for whom I first worked once looked me in the eye and said to me, “Andy, God will not bless division and conflict. It is not God’s way.” I think he is marvelously correct. When we turn inward and fight among ourselves, God does not bless our efforts, and the fruits of our labor rot upon the tree. In fact, there is much that unifies us as members of our Anglican and Episcopal Church.

### ***Common Marks of Anglican Tradition***

There are, in fact, very real marks of our Anglican tradition that are ubiquitous throughout our life as Church. These marks are common to us here in the Diocese of Texas just as they are common to the church across the world. These marks of being an Anglican are the particular icons of how we live out our lives as Christians. They are marks of our unique expression of the

Anglican way of being the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> [The Anglican Primates' Commission on Education](#) [TEAC] noted the following marks are found in churches throughout the Anglican Communion: "churches are formed by and rooted in scripture, shaped by its worship of the living God, ordered for communion, and directed in faithfulness to God's mission in the world."<sup>26</sup> They continue with this statement, "In diverse global situations Anglican life and ministry witnesses to the incarnate, crucified and risen Lord, and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Together with all Christians, Anglicans hope, pray and work for the coming of the reign of God."<sup>27</sup> We see that this echoes our own Episcopal understanding of the Christian hope, which is a life lived bearing witness to Christ, using our gifts to continue his work, and carrying out the work of reconciliation.<sup>28</sup>

Episcopalians, like Anglicans, are formed by the reading and studying of scripture.<sup>29</sup> TEAC produced this statement:

*As Anglicans we discern the voice of the living God in the Holy Scriptures, mediated by tradition and reason. We read the Bible together, corporately and individually, with a grateful and critical sense of the past, a vigorous engagement with the present, and with patient hope for God's future.*

*We cherish the whole of Scripture for every aspect of our lives, and we value the many ways in which it teaches us to follow Christ faithfully in a variety of contexts. We pray and sing the Scriptures through liturgy and hymnody. Lectionaries connect us with the breadth of the Bible, and through preaching we interpret and apply the fullness of Scripture to our shared life in the world.<sup>30</sup>*

[The Windsor Report](#) recognizes that our attachment to scripture grew out of the "early Anglican reformers on the importance of the Bible and the Fathers over and against what they

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<sup>25</sup> The Anglican Way: Signposts on a Common Journey, (The Working Party on Theological Education[TEAC], May 2007) 2.

<sup>26</sup> TEAC, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Primates* are the heads of each Provincial Church in the Communion, *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> BCP, 855; see also 861ff.

<sup>29</sup> BCP, 853.

<sup>30</sup> TEAC, 4.

saw as illegitimate medieval developments. It was part of their appeal to ancient undivided Christian faith and life.”<sup>31</sup> The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theologians (called divines) hammered out their foundations of scripture, tradition and reason. Scriptures was always the most important element. Nineteenth-century theologians produced [The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral](#). It, too, echoes the Anglican Communion's notion that scripture is the foundation of theological discourse.<sup>31</sup> [The baptismal covenant](#), [ordination rites](#) and the [catechism](#) are all documents that reflect that The Episcopal Church still considers scripture as a common binding element of our Anglican faith.<sup>32</sup>

The people and the churches of the Diocese of Texas reflect this key and essential mark of Anglicanism. Regardless of the congregation I visit, I am assured to find people there engaged in reading the scriptures. Our calendars are filled with Bible studies for almost every age. Some are led by clergy, but many more are led by laity. Still more present are the Bible studies that come before meetings in order to ensure that decision making is born out of an engagement with scripture.

Scriptural texts fill our prayer books and hymnals. The authors of the Windsor Report write:

*This means that for scripture to “work” as the vehicle of God’s authority it is vital that it be read at the heart of worship in a way which (through appropriate lectionaries, and the use of scripture in canticles, etc.) allows it to be heard, understood and reflected upon, not as a pleasing and religious background noise, but as God’s living and active word. The message of scripture, as a whole and in its several parts, must be preached and taught in all possible and appropriate ways.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Windsor Report, ¶134 & 35. The Windsor Report, while not accepted by the Communion officially, is a major masterpiece on the unifying aspects of our common life together as Anglicans.

<sup>32</sup> BCP, Baptism 304; Ordination: Bishop 517, 518, 521 (similar passages may be found throughout ordinal; and Catechism 853.)

<sup>33</sup> TWR, ¶157.

Scripture is the basis of the rich tradition of inherited historical documents, many of which are provided in the back of our [Book of Common Prayer](#).<sup>34</sup> The importance of scripture has long been a foundation for our churches' decision making. TEAC wrote this about how scripture has permeated our decision making: "They have shaped our rich inheritance: for example, the ecumenical creeds of the early Church, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and Anglican formularies such as the Articles of Religion, catechisms, and the Lambeth Quadrilateral."<sup>35</sup>

Anglicans, unlike many other Christians, have not only enjoyed a long and enduring love affair with scripture, but they have continuously engaged in studying it. We have a collect that reminds us of the importance of the scripture to us. It calls us to read, mark and inwardly digest the scriptures. As Anglicans, we are not afraid to engage scripture as a "true learning community."<sup>36</sup>

The fact that we read our texts with a scholarly eye, and have always done so, highlights one of the important aspects of who we are as Anglicans and Episcopalians. We understand that we read the biblical texts within a given community. We are reading the scripture in the midst of a living community, which is in turn engaging the Bible and the world around it. This means that we look to the scholar, the disciple, and the members of our community to help us interpret and engage the scripture. We are not afraid of the challenge of listening to others and their interpretation. The TEAC reports said it this way: "We desire to be a true learning community as we live out our faith, looking to one another for wisdom, strength and hope on our journey. We constantly discover that new situations call for fresh expressions of a scripturally informed faith and spiritual life."<sup>37</sup>

Alan Bartlett in [A Passionate Balance: The Anglican Tradition](#) wrote this story showing the complexity and length to which Anglicans will go to engage deeply the scripture that is before them:

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<sup>34</sup> BCP, 864.

<sup>35</sup> TWR, ¶13.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶15.

*A gifted Nigerian priest was studying at a college in the north of England. He was writing a thesis on the household codes at the end of the Pauline Epistles. He was especially looking at the teaching about the roles of men and women in the marriage and family. He finished his study by telling us that, in his context, if this teaching was adopted it would radically improve the treatment of women. But then he asked a wider question about how we were to understand the purpose of these texts? Were they intended to provide a law for all time....or were they, especially in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus, to be seen as contextual and instrumental pieces of teaching by Paul? Their purpose was precisely to improve the treatment of women by men in these Christian communities at that time, but....this teaching sat on top of a much bigger biblical trajectory, which was about the flourishing of women (and men) in God and that trajectory had a much more radical and open-ended agenda.<sup>38</sup>*

Another wonderful quote comes from the writer Eugene Peterson:

*Reading scripture constitutes an act of crisis. Day after day, week after week, it brings us into a world that is totally at odds with the type of world that newspaper and television serve up to us on a platter as our daily ration of data for conversation and concern. It is a world where God is active everywhere and always, where God is fiery first cause and not occasional after-thought, where God cannot be procrastinated, where everything is relative to God and God is not relative to anything. Reading scripture involves a dizzying reorientation of our culture-condition and job-oriented assumptions.<sup>39</sup>*

Scripture is so central to our identity as Anglicans that it is considered the first bond of communion. The Windsor Report places scripture and its study at the center of our unity.<sup>40</sup> It is the Church's supreme authority.

At the same time as we claim this as an essential bond and common mark of our communion the common phrase "the authority of scripture" can be misleading; the confusions that result may relate to some of the divisions just noted."<sup>41</sup> This is a very complicated notion and so I want to quote directly from the Windsor Report here:

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<sup>38</sup> TEAC, 6, 7.

<sup>39</sup> TEAC, 6.

<sup>40</sup> TWR, ¶153

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶153



*Scripture itself, after all, regularly speaks of God as the supreme authority. When Jesus speaks of “all authority in heaven and earth” (Matthew 28.18), he declares that this authority is given, not to the books that his followers will write, but to himself. Jesus, the living Word, is the one to whom the written Word bears witness as God’s ultimate and personal self-expression. The New Testament is full of similar ascriptions of authority to the Father, to Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. Thus the phrase “the authority of scripture”, if it is to be based on what scripture itself says, must be regarded as a shorthand, and a potentially misleading one at that, for the longer and more complex notion of “the authority of the triune God, exercised through scripture.”<sup>42</sup>*

It is this understanding that keeps Anglicans and Episcopalians from becoming narrow in their reading of the text. Take, for instance, the reading of the text by the Nigerian priest understanding the contextual reading of new freedoms for women in Nigeria. The same reading would appear to be oppressive in a more Western context. Therefore, as many scholars point out, taking a text and applying it universally as to meaning and practice can prove problematic in context.

The scripture is always pointing to the revelation of who God is. The early Christian Church was challenged to interpret God’s revelation through the ancient Hebrew texts to a changed context, just as we read the text within an ever changing community and are challenged by our context of mission today.

The authors of the Windsor Report help us understand how this Anglican form of reading scripture has created (between text and context) a dynamic, revelatory practice. As Anglicans, we see and understand that whether at a vestry meeting, women’s meeting, youth event, or Bible study the revelation of God and Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is a continuous breaking into our world and reality.

Again our authors of the Windsor Report help us to understand how Anglicans comprehend that the Holy Spirit breathes into our lives and vocations through the reading of scripture.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, ¶154

*For Jesus and the early Christians, “authority” was not conceived as a static source of information or the giving of orders (as the word “authority” has sometimes implied), but in terms of the dynamic in breaking of God’s kingdom, that is, God’s sovereign, saving, redeeming and reconciling rule over all creation. This saving rule of God, long promised and awaited in Israel, broke in upon the world in and through Jesus and his death and resurrection, to be then implemented through the work of the Spirit until the final act of grace which will create the promised new heavens and new earth. If the notion of scriptural authority is itself to be rooted in scripture, and to be consonant with the central truths confessed by Christians from the earliest days, it must be seen that the purpose of scripture is not simply to supply true information, nor just to prescribe in matters of belief and conduct, nor merely to act as a court of appeal, but to be part of the dynamic life of the Spirit through which God the Father is making the victory which was won by Jesus’ death and resurrection operative within the world and in and through human beings.”<sup>43</sup>*

As a congregation or as a diocese our responsibility is to engage scripture. We are to work together so that “each individual Christian, to the fullest extent of which they are capable, must study it and learn from it, thoughtfully and prayerfully.”<sup>44</sup> As clergy and lay leaders, we have an obligation to lay a fertile ground in which our Church can grow into a developed faith through the study of scripture.<sup>45</sup>

In the Episcopal Church, through our *Book of Common Prayer*, and specifically in the Baptismal Covenant, we proclaim that we will continue in the “apostles’ teaching.”<sup>46</sup> Our Episcopal tradition tells us that the scriptures are the Word of God, the Holy Spirit still speaks to us, and we read them that we may understand the life and teachings of Jesus.<sup>47</sup> We believe the Holy Spirit guides us in a “true interpretation.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *TWR*, ¶154

<sup>44</sup> *TWR*, ¶157.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> BCP, 304.

<sup>47</sup> BCP, 853.

<sup>48</sup> BCP, 854.

As a unique part of the Episcopal tradition, we publicly make our vow to God and before one another that we will seek God through the scriptures. We understand, and speak out loud, that an important part of the role of living life as church is the scripture. Scripture reinforces our unity in Christ. It is in scripture that the church is described as the body, with Christ as its head. Saint Paul wrote, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Ephesians 1:22ff)

In the Episcopal Church we stand and make our witness that scripture is an essential guidepost for being Anglicans/Episcopalians who choose to follow Jesus and Lord and Savior. Our particular and unique way of using scripture throughout our worship, our critical study as prerequisites to our theology, and our understanding that the Holy Spirit is always moving us to see Christ in our mission context are unique marks of our Christian life. It is from scripture that the people of the Diocese of Texas find the revelation of our potential life in Christ, our unity, and our mission.

### ***Shaped through Worship***

The second mark of our unity as Anglicans is our worship. When I visit with new members, they often tell me it is our worship that draws them into community. Our worship, regardless of its contextual face, is life-giving.

Our tradition of Anglican worship has always bound us together. Authors of the English reformation speak of a unified church despite differences.

*It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been diverse...*<sup>49</sup>

It has been true for the Anglican Church ever since, and the breadth and commonality of our worship and common prayer bind us still, despite our differences on many issues.

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<sup>49</sup> BCP, 874.

Over the centuries the importance of our worship as a mission tool engaging with the culture has played a central role in the health and vitality of our Communion's mission. Moreover, our experience of shared worship (especially through Baptism and the Eucharist) is unifying in and of itself.

When I have traveled to Mexico, England, Southern Malawi, Central Ecuador, and when I travel to the many congregations of our own diocese, I can promise you that it is the continuum of our prayer and the traditional flow of scripture, hymnody, proclamation, forgiveness, table fellowship, and dismissal into the missionary field that fills my heart with the notion that I am a bishop of a unified diocese unified in Christ despite the diverse opinions on sexuality. Moreover, as Texas bishops before me, I enjoy the health and vitality of relationships globally.

We might remember well the words of St. Augustine in his confessions (fourth century), which remind us of our ever seeking and imperfect vision of God's glory. For Augustine lived in a time when there were many Christian liturgies within a Catholic church. He writes:

*Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? How magnificent is his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! We are one of your creatures, Lord, and our instinct is to praise you. We bear about us the mark of death, the sign of our own sin, to remind us that you thwart the proud. But still, since we are part of your creation, we wish to praise you. The thought of you stirs us so deeply that we cannot be content unless we praise you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.<sup>50</sup>*

Our common worship in the Anglican and Episcopal tradition is a shared road map upon which we make our pilgrim journey to God in a common manner. We seek in all things, and especially in worship, to glorify God. The TEAC document that I have referred to earlier makes this statement about how we share common Anglican traits regarding our liturgy:

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<sup>50</sup> TEAC, p 8.

*In the Anglican tradition particular importance is given to worship together in common as the gathered people of God. A life-long Anglican comments, "You give thanks all day long, but giving thanks together must be part of that thanksgiving." As we gather for worship we bring with us the joys and sorrows of our varied everyday lives. When we open ourselves to God in worship, our eyes are opened to God's ways with the world and we are empowered for service and mission.*

*...This means that our shared worship is vital for our life together as Christian disciples.<sup>51</sup>*

Our formation and transformation is tied more directly to God in worship. Our common life in context (from coast to coast, from country to country) is intertwined in worship. The Holy Spirit is at work in our worship and specifically is working to pull and bind us together. Our individual and corporate connection with God is cultivated. We "unite ourselves with others to acknowledge the holiness of God, to hear God's word, to offer prayer, and to celebrate the sacraments."<sup>52</sup> In part, we experience in worship the very real presence of God the creator, God who is incarnate and works salvation in the world, God who is the spirit of love challenging us towards greater unity, and a God who invites to join him as partners in building up of the kingdom through word and deed.<sup>53</sup>

Our worship tells us who we are, it tells us whose we are, and it forms us as community. We become the very body of Christ as a people who worship together. Across the globe the Anglican Church makes its praise to God in a common form binding us in community. Because

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p 9.

<sup>52</sup> BCP, 857.

<sup>53</sup> TEAC, 9. The TEAC document gives a sense of the Anglican notion of our relationship with God nurtured in worship. They write: "5) Our relationship with God is nurtured through our encounter with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in word and sacrament. This experience enriches and shapes our understanding of God and our communion with one another. 6) As Anglicans we offer praise to the Triune Holy God, expressed through corporate worship, combining order with freedom. In penitence and thanksgiving we offer ourselves in service to God in the world. Through our liturgies and forms of worship we seek to integrate the rich traditions of the past with the varied cultures of our diverse communities. As broken and sinful persons and communities, aware of our need of God's mercy, we live by grace through faith and continually strive to offer holy lives to God. Forgiven through Christ and strengthened by word and sacrament, we are sent out into the world in the power of the Spirit."

of our manner of worship, the marks that make us Anglican and Episcopalian within our tradition, we find that we make a proclamation that is ancient or apostolic (reaching back to the earliest forms of Christian worship), a proclamation that is catholic or universal (stretching globally across every time zone) and present (contextually uniting people in their community with others).

### ***Ordered for Communion***

Across the communion, as in our own Episcopal Church, we are ordered into a common life. This life is particularly and uniquely our own expression of Christianity. We have bishops who are leaders and symbols of our unity—who have a particular and unique vocation. The same can be said of priests and deacons. All of the ordered lives are in a ministry partnership with the whole body of faithful people—the baptized. In fact, those with ordered lives who work in our midst are people who are called to support the baptized in their own ministries. Together the Church (ordered and non-ordered alike) supports and— through common discernment in synods, councils, or conventions— governs the work of the church. The ordinals of our church globally affirm this shared and mutual ministry (TAW, 11.9).

These common orders bridge our geographical divides. We serve together in many ministerial, missionary, and governing bodies that link us together for the purpose of our common mission of Gospel proclamation. Certainly beyond our own councils, provincial structures and General Convention, we look to the [Archbishop of Canterbury](#), the [Lambeth Conference](#), the [Anglican Consultative Council](#), and the [Primates Meeting](#) as means for us to share our global communion ministry. The TEAC report says clearly that these are not places of "centralized authority," but rather places where we can see the bonds of affection and mutual ministry taking shape.<sup>54</sup>

Together we see our unity and our potential life as a global church and family of God. This is not to say that we do not struggle with one another.

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<sup>54</sup> TAW, 11.10

In our common ministries we see parallels among localized organizations that network globally for both financial and spiritual support. Mission agencies are linked together more and more. In our own diocese we have more than 50 different partnerships with national and international organizations. We are strengthened when we share our life of ministry beyond our local Church, and we are strengthened as relationships with diverse peoples in differing mission contexts help us renew the vision of our own ministry at home.

In the years since the colonial age of mission and the first Lambeth Conference, we have seen greater local ministry supported by the ordered life of the Church. It is easy to look over our history and see the fabric of our global life woven tightly through an ever expanding series of new relationships. Yes, it is true that in recent years the ordered life of communion has been challenged and tested, especially with this discussion on sexuality. The West has had trouble dealing with cultures where one man has multiple wives, just as others have had difficulty with the emerging Western discourse on sexuality.

What has been truly amazing in this last decade and a half is that, despite the differences here in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, our relationships have grown stronger. Today we are healthier than ever before. Our relationships and common work stretch not only across The Episcopal Church, but we enjoy more mission relationships with provinces and dioceses across the globe. We in Texas are a part of ministry on the ground on every continent of the globe.

We share our desire to be in communion with one another, and to support, and to share in ministry in every manner possible. I firmly believe as Anglicans and Episcopalians we are uniquely ordered as a communion—a catholic church.

### ***A Church in Mission***

The fourth way we share a common journey with Episcopalians and Anglicans is through a common mission (TAW, 12). We recognize together that our chief work is the proclamation of the Good News of Salvation through the unique witness of God in Christ Jesus. It is our Anglican and Episcopal nature to engage this work respectfully with those who are believers, seekers

and even with those of other faiths or no faith. One of the unique hallmarks of our work as a church in mission is that we believe we do our mission in context. Across the Episcopal Church we do mission in different geographical, economic and cultural contexts. This mission diversity is exponential when one stops to consider the global diversity of contexts wherein the Anglican Communion is active.

At the center of our faith—as individuals and as a community—we share the Good News of Salvation and the unique proclamation of God in Christ Jesus with those around us. We do this in word and by example, and we understand that our lives bear witness to an incarnate God who suffered, died, and rose again. We undertake a partnership in shaping the world (not to our own devices and will) for the one who will come again.

We have certainly made a mess of this work from time to time. We have allowed national concerns and our own colonial desires to govern this mission at times. We recognize and claim our own history of abuse, self-interest and domination that has led to supporting oppression of the weak and poor.<sup>55</sup> This is an important part of our missionary history; nevertheless, we challenge ourselves to do better. We make a public covenant with God that we will proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. We will see Christ in all persons. We promise to work for justice, peace, and the dignity of every human being.<sup>56</sup> It is important to recognize because the divisions we are working through today as a global communion are rooted in past experiences. The divisions that threaten our common work today stem from the former lack of respect for the local context in which people do their work. I believe unity will be our humble engagement in foreign partnerships that honors leaders unlike ourselves, and supports them in their mission endeavors. We will discover, I think, in this new era of global mission that we are not so much missionaries abroad but that we are pilgrims on the way to renewing our own evangelistic efforts.

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<sup>55</sup> TEAC, 13.

<sup>56</sup> BCP, 305.



So it is that we together join with all of God's people, and the diverse leadership of our Anglican Communion, to do God's work of peacemaking and justice making. Today we are, as an Anglican body, seeking missionary strategies that flow out of God's reconciling love and not our own desires for power. In the past three decades our churches have been icons for reconciliation and change. Certainly, leaders come to mind who have stood against abuse of power and domination in this new missionary age. Before us remain the challenges upon which our generation will be judged: "secularization, poverty, unbridled greed, violence, religious persecution, environmental degradation, and HIV/AIDS."<sup>57</sup> I believe we stand together with the potential of proclaiming a unity in Christ that is willing to help change the course of our global trajectory. I believe we are united on these issues.

### ***Our Episcopal Witness to Unity***

In our own Episcopal Tradition we reflect the above common Anglican traits. We have a unique voice in the witness that the Anglican Communion presents to God and to the world. One of the primary places you see our uniqueness modeled is in our [\*Book of Common Prayer\*](#) and specifically in the Baptismal Covenant. The first part of the Covenant reflects our Anglican heritage of making a faith statement prior to baptism and confirmation. This bears witness to our common and historic faith that stretches back to the first councils of the Church. While not originally meant as a document to be used in worship, the creedal statements now inhabit our lives as a weekly promise of a shared faith. This is supported in part by the first baptismal promise. It follows the creedal statements, a promise that we will continue in the apostles teaching, their fellowship, and the breaking of the bread. We bear witness to a common life molded and shaped by engagement with the scripture, the ancient and apostolic witness to faith, the Church as the primary form of this fellowship, and a communal life that is Eucharist-centered.

Our baptismal covenant in The Episcopal Church then continues with several important and unique promises. Only Anglican provinces that have adapted their services to reflect the

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<sup>57</sup> TEAC, 17

*Book of Common Prayer* and Provinces that were once part of the Episcopal Church as mission dioceses use the same formula from 1979. Today still some [16 countries make up what we call The Episcopal Church](#).

When we make our faith statements in worship we are saying that, as a community and as individuals, we are different from the world around us. While we may make worship changes that offer a vision into our context, we are clear that we are different from the world as well.

In almost every service the [Creed](#) is recited; it is the foundation of every Anglican service, and it is common to all rites of initiation. We make our creedal proclamation affirming the apostolic and catholic faith our church. We also do this to reaffirm our own faith. We say it to remind us that while we are people in a missionary context, we have a particular word of faith and truth to speak out in the world. We have a particular message of hope and transformation. We remind ourselves, our community, our Church, and our communion that our faith is a faith of mercy, forgiveness and unity.

We proclaim that we believe in a God who created and ordered the world for a particular purpose: beauty and relationship. We believe in a God who watches over human life and who interacts, especially within the human community. We believe in a God who desires that people be good and fair to each other and a God who says we have a responsibility to take care of those who are poor, hungry, alone or in need. We believe that Jesus Christ is the living, resurrected example of how humanity is to treat one another, and that we are to set as our goal the living of life that is most like Jesus' own. We believe it is a good thing to be happy and to feel good about one's self, but we do not believe this is the central goal in life. Moreover, as good as we are, human nature remains the same—always struggling to live as God has intended us to live. We believe that living as mere consumers can create disordered lives out of proportion with the wider needs of the world around us. We believe in a God who is a “friend” (John 15:15) and a God who is a companion along the way (Luke 24).

We believe in the kingdom of heaven, but we also believe that we are to be about bringing into reality the kingdom of God today. As Episcopalians our challenge is to hear Jesus'

words of good news that the “kingdom is near.” (Mark 1:9) We can see it within ourselves and our brothers and sisters. We can enact it in the world, which is our work. We remind ourselves that Jesus’ work was teaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and curing every disease and every sickness among the people, and that he invites us with urgency, “Follow me.” (Luke 4:12-23)

When we as Episcopalians step forward and choose to make our confession of faith, we choose to walk the pilgrim way with God and to live out a particular revelation found uniquely in The Episcopal Church.

The words have meaning and they have substance. As Christians who are unabashedly Episcopalian, our worship language is more than a social construct. Our words in worship combined with our faith-filled actions are sacramental and add both meaning and substance to the world around us. When we stand up and make our promises before God with the congregation and community as our witness, we create a verbal vessel of grace that makes its way through creation and draws us ever closer to the divine being and to one another.

In our faith statements, you and I are making promises about how we believe as well as statements about the kind of people we wish to become, and the kind of world in which we wish to live. When we step forward, we are proclaiming that we have a particular and unique vision of the world around us. This world view is not formed by capitalism or some political theory. Our Episcopal world view is formed in the sacraments.

In The Episcopal Church there are two Gospel sacraments: one is the Eucharist and one is Baptism. These are considered to be Gospel sacraments because Jesus gives them to humanity and the church as specific signs of the grace of God. We say we have seven sacraments (like the Roman Church) and we do; but for Anglicans and Episcopalians we recognize that the five additional sacraments were not given by Jesus Christ to the church, but rather that the church created them through the guiding of the Holy Spirit recognizing their power to dispense grace to the individual Christian. These sacraments are Confirmation (the second half of baptism), Marriage, Anointing the Sick, Reconciliation and Ordination. They are

fondly referred to as the sacraments with the little “s.” The Church believes they have been revealed, not by Christ but, by the living out of the kingdom of God. Each sacrament has a special sign and is itself set aside as a vessel of God’s grace. The *Book of Common Prayer* describes these other sacraments as sacraments that “evolved over time.” They are not necessary but can aid in a life lived with God. We believe each of the sacraments is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.<sup>58</sup>

When we step forward and make our promises as baptized Episcopalians, we say we believe in a particular kind of church. We answer the questions asked in the covenant out of our nature as Episcopalians. No other church globally (except those who began as missionary churches of the Episcopal Church) has a baptismal covenant like ours. The Episcopal Church’s baptismal covenant is unique in the family of Christians worldwide.

When we step forward to answer these questions, we enter a community that is grounded and founded upon the ministry of Jesus Christ as a continuation of the Torah life of our Jewish faith ancestors. We claim a life lived in a particular community. So it is a continuation, if you will, of the Hebrew life revealed in what we call the Old Testament.

We are also proclaiming our faith as part of living our life. When we step forward, we are physically putting on the Church we claim as our own. We are becoming Episcopalians. We are choosing, as I think you will discover, a particular rule of life. Not unlike the communities in which the authors wrote the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, we make our communal life particular in our place and time as Episcopalians. We are unique and yet connected to our faith ancestors.

The baptismal promises that we proclaim begin with an affirmation of the Creed. In the Creed, the church is described as one holy, catholic and Apostolic and participates in a oneness. As a church we proclaim our unity, and we are challenged by our proclamation of unity. Some

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<sup>58</sup> BCP, 857.

people like to talk about how the Church is not unified. Well, if we were to exist only on our own abilities and in our own manner, the Church would not be unified. The Church's unity is not dependent upon human actions. The Church is constantly enacting, in great and small measures, the unified body—the incarnational body—of Jesus Christ in the world. That is an action of God, not of human undertaking. Now, humans can break it all apart and destroy it, but that does not make the Church as an expression of God's life in the world any less real. So it is that when we step forward and make our promises we make them individually and corporately. No individual ever steps forward for baptism or confirmation without the congregation promising to support them in their life in Christ as a member of The Episcopal Church, and no person ever makes their covenantal promises to God alone. So there is a unity of the Church.

The question constantly posed to the disciple making their pilgrim way is, "Am I living in that unity or not? Am I consciously seeking to be a part of that one church?"

Episcopalians believe, as did the ancient Christians, that when one is baptized one is being baptized into the body of Christ. When we present somebody to be baptized—child or adult—the vision that we see in The Episcopal Church is not of individual transformation but of the growth of the corporate body of Christ and the increase of the community itself. Now, the questions come up. "Do you want to be baptized?" And so the person says yes or family members say yes on the child's behalf, later to be confirmed by the individual. Baptism and confirmation are a part of the same service. They are not two separate services, but when the Church began to baptize babies, the service was divided in half so that individuals could make an adult confession of faith later. Either way, there is some clarity that you desire this sacramental life or people are offering it to you, and these questions: Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? Do you renounce the evil powers of this world that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God? Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your lord?

You cannot get to the baptismal covenant without first answering these questions. We don't get to our definition of God or our promises to read scripture and participate in worship, and to strive for justice, peace and the dignity of every human being without going through these questions.

You can see that we believe in a particular God, and it is a particular world in a particular Kingdom that we are promising to be involved in. We are promising to do some very specific things. We are taking on a discipline as a Christian, and as an Episcopalian, because not everybody makes these promises in baptism.

This is part of a unique framework that is part of our Episcopal witness. When I talk about being "unabashedly" Anglican and uniquely proclaim our Episcopal nature, this is part of it. We are united by our promises. We promise to act and speak out against spiritual forces that rebel against God and the story of God and our understanding of who God is and the world that God created. We say we will act and speak out against powers that corrupt God's creation, that move creation from sustainability to commodities for consumption, and that corrupt and destroy the creatures of God. We have clarity that we will resist desires that draw us from the love of God. We are going to aim towards Jesus Christ as the highest form of a life lived in God's community, and we are going to trust that God's love and grace will enable us to do this work.

### ***A Hierarchy of Elements***

One might ask if there is a hierarchy to the elements that makes up our common life. It is my opinion that there is a hierarchy of elements and that it is important. I believe as Episcopalians and Anglicans some elements of our common life are more important than others. For instance, the Anglican Communion became an idea long before it became a reality. It was birthed out of the conflict between the breakaway colonies in our fledgling nation and a colonial empire. Today it is valued more than any other time over the last two centuries. I would add that is in large part due to our own work to help bind the global ministry of the Anglican Church

together.<sup>59</sup> Worship style (meaning high church or low church) has ceased to be the primary unifying principle of our communion while our common worship itself remains unifying. I have already spoken of the primary unifying elements of communion.

Theologically I rank the hierarchy of elements of conformity in this way. I would place the creeds, historic councils, the three-fold order of ministry, and prayer book worship as primary and of the utmost concern to all in the communion. Entwined and linked to every one of these elements are the two Sacraments of the Anglican Church: Baptism and the Eucharist. They impart "grace unearned and undeserved."<sup>60</sup> They are the two Sacraments of the Gospel given by Christ to his Church. All other "sacramental rites evolved in the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."<sup>61</sup> The Prayer Book Catechism goes on to say that while they are a means of grace in our tradition, marriage and the other sacramental rites "are not necessary for all persons in the same way that Baptism and Eucharist are."<sup>62</sup>

I bring this to your attention to place marriage in its appropriate sacramental space within the life of the church locally and the communion globally. Is it important? Yes. Does the conflict on marriage merit the divergence of resources being expended through lawsuits, time, energy, the loss of membership, and the depletion of energy for the proclamation of the Gospel? I think not.

### ***Unity and Interdependence***

Archbishop Robert Runcie, not unlike our own primates today, faced a similarly trying time for the Anglican Communion. In my view the issues that faced Runcie locally were the disaffection between the Conservative Party of British politics and the Church of England, social change and the lack of response by governments including his own, ecumenical challenges and

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<sup>59</sup> The Rev. Dr. Robert Prichard has an excellent paper on the nature of our communion relationship entitled: The Anglican Communion: A Brief History Lesson. You may read it here: <http://www.livingchurch.org/anglican-communion-brief-history-lesson>

<sup>60</sup> BCP, 858.

<sup>61</sup> BCP, 360.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

relationships with Rome, the ordination of women in England, and global church struggles with theological colonialism. Into this sea of change and challenge he spoke these words at the 1988 Lambeth Conference.

*...are we being called through events and their theological interpretation to move from independence to interdependence? If we answer yes, then we cannot dodge the question of how this is to be given 'flesh': how is our interdependence articulated and made effective; how is it to be structured? ... We need to have confidence that authority is not dispersed to the point of dissolution and ineffectiveness ... Let me put it in starkly simple terms: do we really want unity within the Anglican Communion? Is our worldwide family of Christians worth bonding together? Or is our paramount concern the preservation of promotion of that particular expression of Anglicanism which has developed within the culture of our own province? ... I believe we still need the Anglican Communion. But we have reached the stage in the growth of the Communion when we must begin to make radical choices, or growth will imperceptibly turn to decay. I believe the choice between independence and interdependence, already set before us as a Communion in embryo twenty-five years ago, is quite simply the choice between unity or gradual fragmentation.<sup>63</sup>*

What I believe Archbishop Runcie was saying is that if we are to live together in communion, as an Anglican Communion (I would even be so bold as to say an Episcopal Church), we must be willing to not only do ministry together but we must listen to one another and make our pilgrim way with one another through issues that threaten to divide us. We cannot run away from the other—for there is no communion in that at all. It is precisely when disaffected people present themselves to God in Jesus Christ that transformation occurs. Therefore, we must in some manner, some way, say “No” to the ever dividing nature of humanity that seeks to boost ego over community.

This is more eloquently stated in the [Windsor Report](#) as the authors reflect themselves on Runcie's statement. They write, "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

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<sup>63</sup> R Runcie, *Opening Address* reproduced in *The Truth Shall Make You Free* (The Lambeth Conference, Church House Publishing: London, 1988)16.



communion really mean."<sup>64</sup> In my opinion, finding some way to be unified in mission means not walking away from one another at the exact moment in which we may actually come to know one another in an ever deeper way. While we differ in many different ways theologically and across many different cultural contexts, it is precisely at this moment that we should embrace one another. Unity and interdependence mean that we are self-differentiated, claiming our context and view while at the same time embracing and working together with those who differ. Unity and interdependence are called "both/and" in the business world; we more commonly call it the Anglican way or the *via media*.

Are there fundamental limits to this autonomy? As I have received the teaching of the Church, the limits I seek to preserve encompass the above statements. Our unity is in the creeds of the Church, the priority and formational work of scripture, apostolic worship, the threefold ordered ministry in mutual ministry with the laity, and the proclamation of the Gospel of Salvation and unique presentation of God in Christ Jesus, especially through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. I will work to preserve and hand on this faith as I have received it. In all else I am willing to listen and be in relationship with the Church, though we may differ on the presenting issues of the day.

I also believe that, as the Windsor Report advises, we do, in fact, have a particular ministry for continued communion health. We, as individual churches, as a diocese within The Episcopal Church and as your bishop, must consider, promote and respect the common good of the Anglican Communion and its constituent churches. We must maintain our communion with fellow churches locally within The Episcopal Church and more broadly in the global Church through dialogue and in consultation with the communion leadership.

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<sup>64</sup> TWR, 37.

# Chapter 3

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## *Common Themes and Essential Foundations in Traditional Marriage*

It is not surprising that the heirs of a denomination whose founding was forged in a context of a famous divorce would eventually find marriage and same-gender blessings complicated. When, in 1538, Henry VIII separated from what was perceived to be the Universal Church and also from Catherine of Aragon, he invented an ambivalent space in which Christians claimed to be separated from one another temporally while remaining united mystically and eschatologically through Christ. Since that time, the Anglican and The Episcopal Church has lived in that ambivalent space, not only doctrinally but also in its discipline. On the one hand the entirety of apostolic Christian witness insists that marriage is the lifelong union between one man and one woman. On the other hand, the history of the relationship between secular and religious authority and their joint definition of what constitutes a marriage reveals a tolerance in Christian discipline for adapting and adjusting our Biblical, apostolic, and sacramental ideal to the circumstances of the time. Kings have not always agreed with bishops about what constitutes a marriage, but ever since at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century, bishops have won the argument. I, like the bishops before me, believe that marriage is an icon of the eternal, ideal, and real relationship between Christ and His Church. While every marriage is intended to express that icon, especially and pedagogically through the examples of Christ's ordained people, the Church has the authority to either relax or expand its understanding of how that expression is lived out through its expression of fallen humanity with certain expressions of pastoral response. As you will see in this chapter, such expansion includes divorce and

remarriage of its people.<sup>65</sup> I turn my attention now to the topic of traditional marriage and its most recent developments.<sup>66</sup>

As one reads the past and current theological thoughts on marriage, there appear some common threads that are what I believe are essential foundations and common themes. Roman Catholic theologian [Cardinal Walter Kasper](#) begins his theology of marriage by asking an important question, “What is essential in marriage before we begin to speak about the connecting of families, rearing of children, and sharing of property?”<sup>67</sup> In many texts on marriage we find the first common thread is intimacy, which is important. It is stated in several texts that the theological significance of marriage develops from *intimate* sexual relationships of partnership, fidelity and fellowship.<sup>68</sup>

Yet there is more to marriage than intimacy. Kasper wrote, “The point of departure for Christian thinking about marriage today should be the aspect of mutual love and faithfulness.”<sup>69</sup> [Martin Bucer](#), the sixteenth-century theologian suggested that one of the essential goals of marriage to be “the fellowship of mutual fidelity.”<sup>70</sup> Today our Prayer Book defines the goals of marriage to be mutual joy, mutual help and comfort, and for the Godly procreation and rearing of children. These are not ideals alone or without foundation in our tradition. Each statement attempts to reject the cultural ideal of romantic love as the center of marriage and redirects it, placing the emphasis on mutuality that signifies and mirrors God’s love for creation. Intimacy then is always situated within a larger picture of the mission of marriage as a particular calling tied to the living out of our baptismal covenant with a particular individual. In other words, in

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<sup>65</sup> As you will see, both remarriage and the blessing of same-gender relationships are recent innovations in our tradition.

<sup>66</sup> I am very appreciative to The Rev. Christopher Bowhay for help on the introduction to this section and his particular support in parsing the theology of the Nuptial Mystery.

<sup>67</sup> Writings on Marriage, [WOM] Greg Jones, et al Diocese of North Carolina, 2009, 13. I want to acknowledge that here I am dealing with the ideal and theology of marriage. It is important to recognize transparently that there has been over the years a strong patriarchic message embedded in the Christian and Hebrew Scriptures regarding marriage. The treatment of women in Christian marriage has not been positive throughout the history of this secular institution and religious sacrament.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Theology of Christian Marriage*, Crossroad Publishing, 1983, 14.

<sup>70</sup> WOM, 14

The Episcopal Church we present marriage as a particular way of living out our witness of Christ and his church—it is an act of specific discipleship. Stated well by Dr. Scott Bader-Saye, “discipleship is primary and intimacy secondary.”

What Bucer, Kasper and almost every theologian who has ever addressed this topic seem to reflect is the idea that marriage “has to do with God and God’s will for human beings: that we are created to be partners one for another and with God in a community of mutual joy and affection for the glory of God and for the stewardship of God’s creation.”<sup>71</sup> What is essential in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony as our Episcopal Church has received it is this very notion that what we are doing is tied to the wider theme of creation and salvation history. Through the act of marriage within the Church by a heterosexual couple making a covenant with one another, tied to their baptismal promises, the whole church is able to see the revelation of the covenant relationship between God and God’s people. First and foremost, the work of the couple is nothing less than living a life together that reflects God’s love for His Church: this is the nuptial mystery. Our liturgy says this: “It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church.”<sup>72</sup> This sentence reminds us that what we do when we are wed is to intentionally live a life that is reflective of the particular union between God and humanity.

Our theological tradition holds that the commitment of man and woman in marriage reflects God’s mysterious desire for creation and humankind. When the incarnation takes place and God becomes man made manifest, heaven and earth are united. The incarnation is an “unveiling” of God’s intention. The marriage of man and woman is not only a reminiscence of the first couple, but it too points towards God’s intended unity of creator with creation. The “enfleshment” of the living Word proclaimed in John’s Gospel (and particularly as laid out in the ancient Christian hymn that the author includes in the first chapter) is a parallel revelation to

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> BCP, 423. This was included in the 1662, 1775, 1892, and 1928 BCPs; while omitted from the 1786 and 1789-1871 editions.

Genesis 1.<sup>73</sup> In the Gospels, then it is no surprise that Jesus Christ has come as the Bridegroom, the one for whom the Bride has been waiting.<sup>74</sup> N. T. Wright says that the nuptial mystery reflected in marriage is “the redemption of God's good world, his wonderful Creation, so that it can be the glorious thing it was made to be.”<sup>75</sup> This is the very first common thread within the marriage tradition—it is an icon of God’s love and incarnation.

There are still other threads that deserve our attention. Greg Jones captures these other essential building blocks of marriage in the text entitled [Writings on Marriage](#), which was produced for the Diocese of North Carolina. These are the essential foundations of Christian marriage as I have received them, understand them, and try to articulate them to the people of the Diocese of Texas.

1. Theologically understood, the essence of Christian marriage is not a conversation about one’s individual nature but a conversation about relationships. Christian marriage is a relationship defined by the mutual embrace of the whole person; it is an embrace of someone other than one’s self. As such, the starting point for our thinking about Christian marriage is mutual love and faithfulness, and it flows out of the commandments to love God and love one another.
2. Christian marriage involves people who are created by God. As creatures of God, each person has dignity because he or she reflects who God made them to be, specifically the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ “through [whom] all things were made.”<sup>76</sup> Each individual is fully human; we are not lacking anything and certainly not something that is found in marriage.

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<sup>73</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Is This Word?* The incomprehensible, intimate Christmas story. The sermon was republished in Christianity Today and it may be read in its entirety here:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/decemberweb-only/151-42.0.html?start=1>

<sup>74</sup> Mark 2:13-22; or Luke 5:33-39

<sup>75</sup> Wright, *What Is This Word?*

<sup>76</sup> BCP, 358.

Human beings do seek community though. This community of persons reflects God as Trinity. The sharing of life between two individuals bound in love reflects the perfect love that binds Father and Son. Christian marriage is a reflection of God's divine economy of love, making real in this world a reflection of who God is through mutual and shared affection.

3. Christian marriage involves human beings who are created from the earth. We are of earth and our bodies are flesh. Our earth-made and fleshly bodies are sexual. And as sexual creatures our sexual identity and sexual expression are very much connected both with who we are spiritually and mindfully. In Christianity, this sexual identity is fulfilled within the context of personal bonds. We understand that without these very real bonds this relationship, sexual expression and experimentation disintegrate the beauty and dignity of the human person as an individual creature of God.
4. Christian marriage is not a private or personal engagement. As physical beings with a bodily and sexual nature, marriage means that our relationships are public—they are communal. We make public vows as individuals and as a couple that transparently commit us not only to honor one another through love but to act in ways that dignify and provide for the other economically, socially and spiritually. Our commitment is to God first, then to one another in the context of the Christian community.
5. Christian marriage is a discipline and a bond that brings individual and mutual freedom. The mutual yoking of one to another in Christ offers the ability for the individual to be free to discover and become the person whom God has created. Christian marriage is not simply about loving one another, but in a deep and meaningful way it is also to love the incarnation of Christ revealed in one's spouse.
6. Christian marriage wherein two individuals entrust themselves to a total partnership is a form of Christian obedience. Christian marriage mirrors God's own unconditional

love. In both the promises of God and the promises made in Christian marriage, the journey of life and the end of life are unknown. Faith, therefore, is essential in the success of Christian marriage. At the same time, faith in God also grows out of Christian marriage as it navigates a life of relationship, trials, tribulations, celebrations, and transformational moments. Christian marriage is therefore a sacrament in life, through which we are changed, and in which divine Grace may be experienced.

7. There is lastly a common thread around the significant theme of procreation in marriage. While the prayer book liturgy offers an optional prayer regarding “the gift and heritage of children,” it is nevertheless an important theme.<sup>77</sup> From the time of Augustine forward, marriage has been seen to involve “unitive, procreative, and sacramental goods.”<sup>78</sup> Our tradition has tended to hold that the marriage relationship as a whole needs to be open to the bearing of children, while at the same time holding that not every sexual act needs to be open to procreation. The tradition has also held that when it has not been possible to have children, then the couple has been invited to adopt or to embrace a special role of caring for the children of the church community.<sup>79</sup> This is a central element in our tradition because, writes Bader-Saye, “it shows the way that the love of the two, which could easily become a self-enclosed narcissism, opens up, by nature, to welcome new life—precisely through sex, the place where we are most tempted to turn our love inward rather than outward. In this way the love of the couple in marriage again mirrors the overflowing love of God that extends beyond the internal life of the Trinity to pour forth creation.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> BCP, 429.

<sup>78</sup> Dr. Scott Bader-Saye, private correspondence regarding this paper.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

So while, on the one hand, for more than 30 years The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion have been engaged in a challenging conversation about sexual ethics, especially regarding same-gender relationships in the life of the church, the essential ingredients of how we understand marriage has not changed. From before Bucer to today, we have held very basic principles of marriage that are fundamental to any conversation on the topic.

### ***In Conversation with Charles Price and Louis Weil***

The book [\*Liturgy for Living\*](#) written by the Rev. Drs. Charles Price and Louis Weil, from *The Episcopal Church's Teaching Series*, offers clarity around the liturgy and nature of Christian marriage within The Episcopal Church.<sup>81</sup> Not only do these two contributors to the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* offer us insight into our current liturgy of Marriage, they also offer us clarity around the theological nature of Christian marriage as our Church now practices the sacrament. By engaging with their text and their thoughts about Christian marriage, I hope to offer you a sound and clear theology for the Diocese of Texas during my episcopate.

Their article begins with these words, "Marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman for the creation and nurture of new life, and for mutual support and enjoyment."<sup>82</sup> We have already probed the essential theological precepts construed in this powerful and inaugural statement. Christian marriage in The Episcopal Church has and continues in my episcopate to be a relationship, a commitment between a man and a woman, for their mutual benefit and for God's benefit creating and nurturing life—for community, the support of one another, and to be for their enjoyment as well as God's. In its fidelity it reflects God's faithful covenant and the union of Christ and the Church. That is a lot to comprehend, but one can easily see that it taps into what we have already been saying. And, yet it also says a great deal more.

Price and Weil recognize that we do not arrive at this moment in our communal discourse on marriage without receiving customs and traditions from our own natural and spiritual parents. You and I come from families. Some of us are wounded from divorce; some

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<sup>81</sup>Charles Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living*, Volume 5 (Seabury Press: New York, 1979)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.



have received and experienced healthy expressions of Christian marriage. Still others have lived within dysfunctional expressions of Christian marriage. We arrive today to read and reflect on marriage having been blessed by or having been victims of marriages that worked and did not work. We have our own cultural traditions that flow from the society in which we live and move. We are people formed within a particularly American and twenty-first-century culture. The traditions that surround marriage have so grown and diversified that a whole section of our economy is based on managing weddings. We have seen movies from *Father of the Bride* to *Bachelor Party* where the institution and pressures surrounding marriage have influenced us through a public critique and conversation outside of the Church. So we must understand that Christian marriage, like the missionary church itself, exists within a context. This context is unique and particular and is constantly being shaped and formed by the community around us. A discussion on Christian marriage therefore includes not only the events currently shaping the world in which we live, it also must include for the Christian who is an Episcopalian the theology, liturgy and culture inherited from past church experience and the Hebrew society from which it was born.

Price and Weil capture the complexity of what we mean when we speak about marriage: "It is established by an act of intention in accordance with some custom and tradition. It constitutes families as the basic unit of society, the context for expressing the deepest of human relationships, and the normal structure within which children are born and raised. It is a completely human institution, which can be distinguished from the mating of animals....The marriage of a man and a woman, though rooted in the natural urges of sex, is transformed by will and culture."

Here marriage is transformed from simply the natural coming together of two sexes by their "will and culture." Christian marriage is hallmarked forever by the fact that one man and one woman come together and make a promise to God and one another in the midst of a community, making a covenant that is to last for all time. That community is a particular culture. It is the culture of the family of God as revealed through the Church. I believe this is an important and clarifying statement within our discussion on the topic of Christian marriage. There is the natural urge to be in community, there is an economic relationship, and there is

most often property involved; and so marriage as a social construct purely does exist in culture with or without the Church. Marriage is a contract and so local laws govern such contracts. In The Episcopal Church our theology on the matter of Christian marriage is not governed by law or by citizenship rights. Rather, it is based on our inherited scriptures, and our ancient and western traditions. It is based on our conversations over many centuries. It is the compilation of the Church's witness. So we begin with the Old Testament.

In the first stories of the Old Testament, in the very earliest of our ancient spiritual ancestral life, we see clearly that our forefathers practiced polygamy. The first instance of polygamy/bigamy in the Bible was that of Lamech in Genesis 4:19: "Lamech married two women." Several prominent men in the Old Testament were polygamists: Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and others all had multiple wives. In 2 Samuel 12:8, God, speaking through the prophet Nathan, said that if David's wives and concubines were not enough, he would have given David even more. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (essentially wives of a lower status), according to 1 Kings 11:3.

Polygamy was not unusual for the Near Eastern cultures of the time in part because of the inheritance traditions of the age and the need for male heirs. Israel, in other words, was not unique. We need look no further than Jacob who took Leah and Rachel as wives and had two concubines named Billah and Zilpah (Gen. 30:1-13). Solomon was a figure who had more than a few wives. Price and Weil wrote: "Solomon's seven hundred wives are legendary (1 Kings 11:3). One may even suspect some Oriental hyperbole!"<sup>83</sup> This means that the nature, complexity and makeup of what it means to be family have not always been what it is today. One man and one woman were not the norm for many centuries, and such a concept seems at odds with our current thinking around the constitution of family. Perhaps one might say that it would have been about as difficult for Solomon or Jacob to grapple with the reality of our family systems in the twenty-first century as it is for us to ponder the intricacies of family systems some 5,000+ years ago.

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<sup>83</sup> WOM, 18.

Polygamy was certainly the given assumption in these most ancient texts; and yet while that is foreign to our experience today in the West, the texts bring forth a special gift of theological understanding about relationships. There remain very deep and abiding scriptural truths that flow out of these early texts. The first is that creation itself “is good, human beings are good. The second is that God’s covenant with God’s people sets the standard for all relationships.”<sup>84</sup> This means that relationships between husbands and wives in the Hebrew tradition and within the Israelite customs were based on these two Deuteronomic truths. Men and women are created good and the manner in which they bring forth children is good—it is all part of God’s good work. The relationship between the man and the woman, the husband and wife, is governed by the grace that governs the covenant between God and God’s people. Moreover, their relationship is an example of the goodness and love of God. Price and Weil wrote: “In the second place, husbands and wives are to be related to each other with loyal love (*hesed*) of the same quality as God’s loyal love to Israel.”<sup>85</sup>

Many scholars believe that the story of creation itself, as offered in the Genesis account, places a deep understanding that our creaturely nature and our natural bonding with one another points to who God is. In the Genesis accounts, our flesh, the difference between man and woman, and their unity as partners (both in relationship one to another and sexually) reveal to the broader community who God is. Price and Weil write,

*The story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis puts an extraordinarily high value on human sexuality. We read: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Sexual union is created to be one means by which human beings realize and participate in the image of god. (It is not the only one, to be sure. Marriage is not necessary to salvation.) Sexuality is therefore a matter of greatest concern for the Christian faith.*

*On the other hand, what is designed to be a great good is often, in sin-ridden human life, a source of evil and distortion. The corruption of the best is the worst, as a familiar proverb puts it. Our sexuality is no exception. It brings soaring joy. It can also bring frustration and bitterness. In the biblical understanding of the conditions of*

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<sup>84</sup> WOM, 18.

<sup>85</sup> WOM, 18.

*human existence after the Fall, the relationship between man and woman comes under the curse which affects all things. What was designed as a blessing and as expression of deepest human mutuality becomes time and time again, a frustration and an opportunity for one partner to dominate the other. "...Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you," the Genesis account reads (3:16).*

*Under these circumstances, the understanding of marriage in Israel grew with the developing knowledge of God's ways with his people. It came to be recognized that the sexual bond between husband and wife was most secure, satisfying, and fulfilling when it was maintained in the context of a relationship marked by the kind of loyalty and faithfulness which God showed to Israel.<sup>86</sup>*

Price and Weil offer us an important understanding about Christian marriage in this particular part of their essay. On the one hand Christian marriage finds meaning in the goodness of God's creation. God's covenantal love is manifest in Christian marriage. The notion of marriage inherited from our Hebrew tradition reflects the fidelity between God's people (Israel) and God. The sexual bond of marriage is part of both the goodness and the love that is part of God's creation. However, Christian marriage, as we experience it, is a sacrament well-grounded in a world after the Fall. So our experiences of domination, abuse, misuse and dysfunction do not belong to the intentions of God but rather to the sinful, broken and fallen world in which we live. Just as the sacrament holds within it profound meaning about who God is and how God loves, we also know from experience that it is a sacrament engaged in by human beings who are often broken and hurting people. In our current time and context the reality of experience is the rule of truth. It is easy for us to believe that because we have not had a good experience with Christian marriage or because the culture doesn't choose Christian marriage that it is an institution and theology of the church that belongs in the past. I think not.

Christian marriage continues today as an icon of God's *hesed*, loyal love to his people. It is the pledge to this powerful experience of goodness and covenant love that is the strength of

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<sup>86</sup> WOM, 18-19.

Christian marriage and remains so today. Christian marriage rooted in the Old Testament is about created man and created woman's goodness and faithfulness to one another (in a sexual and emotional/spiritual bond) and to God, which reflects and illustrates God's own loyalty and faithful love to all people.

The first followers of Jesus were practicing Jews, who had been formed in the teachings and instruction of the first covenant, the Old Testament. They interpreted who Jesus was based on the writings of the law and the prophets. So as they wrote the story of Jesus and managed the matters that grew out of the emerging communities of Jesus' followers, they brought to bear the ancient texts on creation and marriage. They further developed them within the context of the first century but also within the context of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself was clear about marriage as a lifelong faithful response to God's love and the goodness of one another. Jesus taught that marriage was difficult but that it was about monogamy and the expectation of God that it was lifelong. We look to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10 beginning at the fifth verse, to see Jesus' teaching on marriage.

*Jesus said, "For you hardness of heart he [Moses] wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God had joined together, let not man put asunder."*

Jesus was clear that divorce was not an option in God's eyes because divorce breaks a covenant. (Matthew 19:9).<sup>87</sup>

Divorce neither upholds the goodness of one another, nor does it reveal the loyal and covenantal love of a faithful God. In this teaching Jesus "establishes the permanence of the

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<sup>87</sup> Moses allowed it because of our sinfulness – our hardness of heart. At the time Jesus spoke, some people believed that the law permitted divorce at any time. The reasons for divorce were not important; as long as there was a legal notice, there could be a divorce. For example, Herod the King divorced his first wife so that he could marry his brother's wife. Herod thought that he had the right to do this. One of the reasons he allegedly arrested John the Baptist was that he opposed him. There were still others in Jesus' day who thought that there could be divorce only because of adultery. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to declare which opinion was right.

marriage bond in Christian understanding.”<sup>88</sup> For centuries the form of Christian marriage has been between a man and a woman. It is a relationship and commitment that takes precedence over all other human relationships. It is a relationship that is higher than any previous commitments to father and mother or the family of origin.<sup>89</sup> What makes the sacred bond between a man and a woman a sacrament is its faithful, unmoving commitment to one another above all else, just as God is faithful to his people.

While Price and Weil talk about the different cultural forms that arise from this understanding of family, I think it is important to consider the deeper theological challenge that Jesus presents to us in this passage. The sacrament of Christian marriage in our culture today is not threatened by the divorce rate or even the conversation around same-gender covenants (all of which we will come to in due course). The sacrament of Christian marriage is most threatened by the Church’s failure to be the Church, including its failure to speak clearly and persuasively of God’s loyal love to his people. As our culture becomes ever more secular, it finds little use for an accommodated church.

It is clear from [Barna Group](#) studies and the recent [Pew Research Center](#) studies that it is not God who has a problem but rather the Church.<sup>90</sup> Many Americans today believe that our institutions of faith are seen as ineffectual in dealing with the matters of daily life. It is a prevalent notion that the institutional church is not committed to being pastoral and relevant outside of its membership, and in moments of family crisis it is less able to help than the local therapist or counselor.<sup>91</sup> The Church has not passed on or articulated well the powerful

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<sup>88</sup> WOM, 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> 2011 Barna study reported one-fifth of young adults with a Christian background said “church is like a country club, only for insiders” (22%). Six Reason Young Christians Leave the Church, read more here: <http://www.barna.org/new-topics/you-lost-me>

<sup>91</sup> A 2008 Barna study “showed that the percentage of adults who have been married and divorced varies from segment to segment. For instance, the groups with the most prolific experience of marriage ending in divorce are downscale adults (39%), Baby Boomers (38%), those aligned with a non-Christian faith (38%), African-Americans (36%), and people who consider themselves to be liberal on social and political matters (37%). Among the population segments with the lowest likelihood of having been divorced subsequent to marriage are Catholics (28%), evangelicals (26%), upscale adults (22%), Asians (20%) and those who deem themselves to be conservative on social and political matters (28%). Born-again Christians who are not evangelical were indistinguishable from the national average on the matter of divorce: 33% have been married and divorced. The survey did not determine

theology of God's providence and love for his people. We have not been about the work of spreading the Good News of Salvation as expressed in God's covenant relationship to his people. For me these two issues dominate the erosion of Christian marriage within our Church. We have not cared enough to teach the theology and practice of marriage as Christian discipline. We have not spoken to our people about the sacred and iconographic nature of marriage. And, so as our people experience a Church that is less concerned for their real-life struggles, they connect it with a God who seems distant, unconcerned and detached.

It is difficult to uphold a marriage of mutual love and loyalty wholly representative of God's love and faithfulness if the Church does not help the individual and couple to experience God in this manner. How can we hope to bear witness to a covenantal love when we threaten to "divorce" each other when we disagree? The Church itself has a responsibility to show God's unfailing love for creation and to be a part of people's lives in profound ways. When the Church ceases to do this most basic of pastoral ministries, we have begun to live in the hardness of our hearts and not embraced our own connection as one flesh with the community of people whom God claims as his own. The renewal of Christian marriage does not rest upon the victory of a cultural war waged against divorce or same-gender covenants; it rests on the Church's ability to offer itself totally for the sake of those who are seeking God and God's never-failing love. How can Christian marriage withstand the trial of life in this century if the Church that institutes it does not reflect the same faithful loving care proclaimed in the Gospel?

Christian marriage is (according to the ancient scriptures and in Jesus' own words) profoundly about a man and a woman giving themselves wholly to one another. The first followers of Jesus have rooted deep within the scriptures of the Old and the New Testament theology the understanding of this self-giving as reflecting not only the creator's providence and care but Jesus' own sacrificial commitment to humanity. So it is that the liturgy of Christian

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if the divorce occurred before or after the person had become born again. However, previous research by Barna has shown that less than two out of every ten people who accept Christ as their savior do so after their first marriage. In fact, when evangelicals and non-evangelical born-again Christians are combined into an aggregate class of born-again adults, their divorce figure is statistically identical to that of non-born-again adults: 32% versus 33%, respectively." Read article here: <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released>

marriage includes this offering of oneself completely, regardless of consequence. The relationship sought and committed to is forever and always a relationship that illustrates the love of God. The passages used in the service itself illustrate to those who witness on behalf of the whole community the meaning of the act of total self-giving and how it is tied to the New Testament's proclamation of Christ's love for the world and the Church.

In the 1 Corinthians passage we see that love is an essential ingredient to the marital relationship. This is not a romantic notion of love. On the contrary, Paul is speaking of one of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit. The gift that binds community together is love and it does not originate within the relationship or community but comes from without and from God alone as gift. So too for marriage it echoes the broader unifying spirit of the Christian community that is always and forever held together not by its own force of will but rather by the Holy Spirit's gift of Love. A beautiful and all too romantic passage alone, within the context of teaching about community as Paul was doing in chapter 13, it is even more powerful. It speaks as much to the unity of the Christian Church with its diverse opinions as it does for the marital couple who are assuming a vow of unity in the worst of times, in poverty, and in sickness. They, like our own diocesan community, are/ will be held together by God's faithful love alone. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13:

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup>Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

*<sup>8</sup>Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.*



*<sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

The passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians which may be chosen has similar themes. In it Paul is describing his own experience of God's faithfulness and his desire to share it with the Ephesians. He is praying that those in Ephesus may be granted the very same spirit of God's love. He prays that they as community may be bound together in God's faithful love that the world will know Christ and his mission to gather all people to himself. Again the gift of love and power to be bound one to another does not generate within the couple but is a gift; and it is not for the sake of the couple, but for the sake of the Gospel mission. Not unlike couples we marry, our church community receives the same blessing of love from a faithful God that we might be one for the sake of our witness to the world around us. Paul writes in Ephesians 3:14-21:

*<sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup>and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup>I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

In the second passage for Ephesians that may be chosen, Paul invites the community of Ephesus to be at work forgiving one another for when they do this as beloved people of God they reveal the God who forgives. It recognizes the sinfulness that is in us and offers a vision of a virtuous life lived for God. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:1-7, 5:15-20:

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,<sup>2</sup> and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*<sup>15</sup>Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup>So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. <sup>18</sup>Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,<sup>19</sup> as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,<sup>20</sup> giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the passage from Colossians which is an option for the marriage ceremony Paul is speaking to the community and inviting them to remember who has chosen them – God. It is God that has brought them together and claimed them. God has raised them to a new life of faith and they are to seek a heavenly reflection in life. They are to seek to be God’s chosen and beloved. Therefore, they are to clothe themselves with Christ’s nature in their relationships. The church, like the married couple hearing this lesson, is to allow Christ’s nature to rule our relationships and actions. Paul writes in Colossians 3:12-21:

*<sup>12</sup>As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

In the First letter from John to his community, he invites them to reject the spirit that is not the spirit of love. The spirit of love is the spirit of the followers of Jesus. The loving person is a person from God and reveals God’s nature. Again in this passage we catch glimpses of the Gospel of John and the nuptial mystery whereby we are to love as God loved and gave himself for us. The couple is inspired to mirror a loving Christian

community, which is itself a reflection of God's desire for unity with humankind. In 1 John 4:7ff, we find these words:

*<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.*

The passage from Ephesians gives a sense of the profound image of Christ's love that is expected in both the sacramental covenant of marriage and in the relationship of man and woman one to another.

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup>Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. ... <sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup>in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, <sup>27</sup>so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. <sup>28</sup>In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

Ephesians 5:21-33

Like Price and Weil and a host of Episcopalians, theologians and laity alike, we “regret the lack of mutuality between man and woman expressed in this passage.”<sup>92</sup> “Many of us today would say that husbands and wives should be subject to each other and should give themselves to each other, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it. We believe that this mutuality is an implication of Christian love, which has gradually become clear as Christian people have lived into the meaning of the Christian mystery.”<sup>93</sup>

We understand, therefore, that the image for Christian marriage, beyond the witness of the Old Testament, is the exemplifying character of Christ’s complete self-giving.

There can be no question that the model for Christian community, of which marriage is a microcosm, is the complete bountiful and generous nature of God in Christ Jesus and his “agape” love.<sup>94</sup> As people ponder the implications of God and Christ’s generous love for them within the Christian community, they are given an image of God whose love is complete for his Church. They also see God’s fidelity to his creation, his desire to be united with humankind, and his invitation to live in this sacred and holy community that is bound together through the Holy Spirit’s gift of love.<sup>95</sup> For Christians who choose to marry, meaning is found in fidelity to another, fidelity that is an icon of God’s “unswerving faithfulness, revealed by Christ, which God has for his people.”<sup>96</sup>

What I find interesting is that Price and Weil wrote in 1979 that when a Christian community’s conviction of God’s faithfulness waivers, the nature of the wedding vow and the security of its promises will, too. They write:

*The love of God in Christ, agape, which is faithful to death, redeems sexual love, eros, and makes it capable of bearing the meaning it was designed in creation to have; capable of making the union of male and female to be the image of God. This capacity of*

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<sup>92</sup> WOM, 21.

<sup>93</sup> WOM, 21.

<sup>94</sup> WOM, 21.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

*Christian marriage to be a communicating symbol of god's own life is so potent that marriage is commonly called a sacramental act.*<sup>97</sup>

Christian marriage has, as we have received the teaching of the Church, forever been and will continue to be an icon of God's love for the world.

Christian marriage itself, the sacramental act of blessing individuals in a rite, is not an invention of Jesus. There is not a rite of marriage—Israelite or Christian—recorded in the Bible. The wedding of Cana—the story of Jesus' first miracle—in John's Gospel simply speaks of the context of the miracle but records no rite of marriage. This means that we are left without biblical texts in which to guide the construction of the ritual of Christian marriage. And we are given little if no real help in understanding the first rites of Christian blessings of marriages if they occurred prior to the third century. There may have been some movement of marriage in the ritual world of early Christianity, but it is clear that there was none in the Christian texts and traditions that survive today. Price and Weil point out that "Ignatius required a couple seeking marriage to get the bishop's permission, and Tertullian in the third century indicated that a couple's marriage would be blessed at a celebration of the Eucharist. In each case the implication is that the actual marriage ceremony took place in accordance with existing local customs."<sup>98</sup> We also know that the ancient tradition of blessing the civil ceremony, when practiced, was done during the Eucharist, a tradition that continues today.

It has been the custom in Europe, and in many places is more common today, that the church blesses only what the civil servants have already pronounced legally. It was for a long time the work of the local government to deal with the binding of men and women in contracts of marriage. The church simply blessed two people wishing to make a public commitment because of their own faithful response to God's providence and faithful love.

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<sup>97</sup> WOM, 21.

<sup>98</sup> WOM, 21.

We also know that it was not until the Middle Ages that we had a description of a marriage liturgy. This is not to say that faithful men and women were not living in relationships or even that they didn't consider their family's life to be an extension of God's love or even the reflection of the church. We do know though that there was not an expectation that marriage took place in the church. As we review the development of Christian marriage, it is clear that it grew out of the church taking on the civil ceremony, not the other way around. What we are describing is the fact that Christian men and women have always come to the church seeking its blessing for life, children, crops, the safe return of men at war, and for healing an ailing relative. It was a natural progression as the church took a greater role in governing and Christians got married that the two events, civil and religious, were comingled.

Price and Weil wrote: "When the church at last did take over the marriage ceremony, it really functioned as the civil authority, church and state being coterminous at this period of history [ninth century]. The priest was understood to function as a *witness* of the couple's vows as well as the church's representative to bless the couple. The marriage rite itself embodied local customs. Some of the features of the Prayer Book service most familiar to Episcopalians originate in northern England. The father's giving away of the bride, for example, belongs in this category. The giving of a ring as a symbol of the vow is a widespread European custom, but it is by no means universal."<sup>99</sup>

In our country the ordained are permitted to function as a civil officer witnessing the exchange of vows according to the license of the state. In many European countries, if you wish to get married, you are married in a civil ceremony and only after is there a blessing of the civil union.

According to Title 1.18.1 of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, every member of the clergy is required to "conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also to the laws of the Church governing the solemnization of

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<sup>99</sup> WOM, 22.

Holy Matrimony.” Article 1, Section 32 of the Texas Constitution provides that “marriage in this state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman” and that the State “may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage.” Likewise, Section 2.001(b) of the Texas Family Code provides that a marriage license may not be issued “for the marriage of persons of the same sex.” Similarly, Section 6.204 of the Family Code provides that “a marriage between persons of the same sex or a civil union is contrary to the public policy of this State and is void in this State.”

The 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, not surprisingly, reflects the culmination of our theology regarding marriage, the liturgical history of the rite dating to the ninth century, and the civil contract of its day. It is a ceremony bathed in sacramental theology that is essentially the exchange of vows and a blessing all within the pro anaphora (or beginning) of the Eucharist. Like baptism and regular Sunday worship, the vows and the blessing take place within the liturgy of the word.

The beginning of the service is clear and the opening words by the celebrant affirm everything that I have already laid out. The vows and the blessing are certainly present but so are the words about union, bond and covenant, God’s reflection, creation, the mystery of sacrament, the whole commitment of self for the other, mutual benefit, reflecting the family of the church and God’s family and the sharing of the love of God.

*The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church...*

*The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is 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. (BCP, 423)*

It is my opinion that we do not undo the meaning of marriage between two heterosexual individuals as we have received it over these many years by proposing the blessing of same-gender relationships. For those who are married, this liturgy brings meaning and covenant to their common life and their life with God. We cannot and we do not undo something that is of great importance in the lives of many people, which is theologically of value, just because we are seeking to reach out to do something new for others. Marriage as a rite and sacrament of the Church continues today as a sign of God's covenant to his people.

Marriage between one man and one woman has meaning for me as a bishop, theologian and husband. These are the promises that my wife and I made to one another and to God. Our promises and the promises of hundreds of thousands more cannot be undone by the vision of something new. It is for this reason that I will continue to hold what is now considered the traditional understanding of marriage as central to the life and ministry of the Church.

### ***Remarriage - Making Room for the Pastoral in the Midst of Reality***

Remarriage itself recognizes by its very nature the painful loss of a spouse through death or by virtue of a life together that no longer reflects our understanding of traditional marriage's sacramental iconography as a vehicle for God's love and grace. Divorce is a "defeat" of the Christian vision of marriage. However, remarriage offers hope for a renewed commitment and covenant between two people who have let go of a previous life commitment.

Sometime after Charles Price and Louis Weil's essay was published, Weil took a moment and offered a reflection on the changing nature of marriage over time and the shifts he had witnessed in his own lifetime.

*Two thousand years of Christian experience have taught us that despite the best of intentions, some marriages are not healthy. Some way has to be provided to dissolve them in these cases the breakup of a marriage may be the least of evils, but it is a defeat for the Christian vision of what marriage can be to a couple who undertake it. Christian marriage must intend it to be permanent when they exchange their vows.<sup>100</sup>*

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<sup>100</sup> WOM, 25



This paper is primarily concerned with the discourse and current divide over the blessing of same-gender relationships and our search for a common vision of unity for the sake of mission. I do not think that we can fully ponder these things if we do not take a moment here to say that this is not the first time that the "sacrament of marriage" has been tested by prevailing cultural norms.

Our Church also faced similar questions and challenges as growing numbers of people were divorced in this country. The first time that the General Convention addressed this matter was at the 1808 meeting.<sup>101</sup> That joint resolution provided:

*“Resolved, That it is the sense of this Church, that it is inconsistent with the law of God, and the Ministers of this Church, therefore, shall not unite in matrimony any person who is divorced, unless it be on account of the other party being guilty of adultery.”<sup>102</sup>*

Sixty years later the Convention of 1868 passed further canonical legislation regarding divorce and remarriage. That canon provided:

*“No minister of this Church shall solemnize Matrimony in any case where there is a divorced wife or husband of either party still living; but this Canon shall not be held to apply to the innocent party in a divorce for the cause of adultery, or to parties once divorced but seeking to be united again.”<sup>103</sup>*

This was repealed by the Convention of 1877 and exchanged. The new canon was stricter not only binding the priests but also the people involved. The 1877 text was virtually the same except it gave provision for annulment.<sup>104</sup>

The Convention of 1904 allowed the innocent party to a divorce (caused by adultery) to be remarried within the Church. This, however, while accepted here in The Episcopal Church

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<sup>101</sup> Kenneth E. North

“Holy Matrimony, Divorce, and Remarriage According to the Canons of The Episcopal Church”  
An online article published on the Canon Law Institute website. You can read the article here:  
[http://www.canonlaw.org/article\\_matrimony.htm](http://www.canonlaw.org/article_matrimony.htm)

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

did not follow other canon law in the communion and was out of sync with the canon law of the Church of England. It also added in this version a one-year waiting period. And the parties were to bring satisfactory evidence regarding the facts to the ecclesiastical authorities for a ruling. This insured that the individuals and clergy were operating within the canon of the church.<sup>105</sup> It also permitted remarriage in those instances of annulment, “i.e., the cause of the divorce arose prior to the marriage, by a civil court.”<sup>106</sup> In 1922 more definitions were added to insure equity between clergy and laity regarding remarriage.

Almost ten years later at the Convention of 1931, while keeping the basic form and intent of the 1904 canon with its successive modifications, the convention added a provision for grounds upon which a former marriage annulled or dissolved by a civil court could be declared null and void by a bishop. The impediments to marriage were stated clearly as:

1. Consanguinity
2. Lack of free consent
3. Mistake as to the identity of either party
4. Mental deficiency sufficient to prevent intelligent choice
5. Insanity of either party
6. Failure of either party to have reached the age of puberty
7. Undisclosed impotence
8. Venereal disease in either party and
9. Facts which would make the marriage bigamous.<sup>107</sup>

The canon also said:

*"Any person whose former marriage has been annulled or dissolved by a civil court and pronounced null by the Bishop, may be married by a Minister of this Church as if he had never previously been married."*

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

The Conventions of 1937-1943 continued to refine the language and form of the canon. In 1946 more impediments were added:

*The Convention of 1946 expanded the list of Impediments, which now constituted a bar to first marriage, as well as a basis for permission to remarry. The additional Impediments were: "Concurrent contract inconsistent with the contract constituting canonical marriage," and "Attendant conditions: error as to the identity of either party, fraud, coercion or duress, or such defects of personality as to make competent or free consent impossible." The Matthean exception was not mentioned. This Convention also amended the canon pertaining to remarriage by imposing a one-year waiting period after any civil court annulment or dissolution. In the case of a prior marriage, the bishop was tasked to determine whether the parties to the proposed remarriage "intend a true Christian marriage," and whether any of the canonical Impediments are shown to exist or to have existed which manifestly establish that no marriage bond as the same is recognized by this Church exists ...<sup>108</sup>*

In 1973 the Convention removed the canonical prohibition against the remarriage of members of the Church whose former spouse was still living, and whose prior marriage was valid from its inception. The provision that most of us take for granted today was a long, painful development. It took over 177 years for the Church to make up its mind about the nature of remarriage and how it would deal with an emerging growth in divorces among its members. These were not only discussion and division on canon law.

We as a Church came to an understanding that when individuals in a marriage no longer embrace the whole other person through a mutual love, or recognize their partners as God's creation, or treat one another with dignity, or as fully human, or through the appreciation of each other's beauty, or by living out symbolically the nature of the Trinity, such marriages are dissolved.

Moreover, while the Church recognizes marriage as one woman and one man joined together in perpetuity, when that marriage ends in divorce, it is a possibility that either or both

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

parties may, in fact, seek out this life-giving relationship with another human being. The Church changed its understanding about relationships in order to make pastoral room for those who found new bonds of love that led to a desire to be married.

We cannot underestimate the ferocity of the battles that ensued. There are people today who are very injured from that era. Still others who are members in other churches with a different understanding than our own often find hope in our Church because of the pastoral room we have made in our tradition for such situations.

Today marriage and remarriage is a regular part of our life as a church. The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Texas did 101 remarriages in 2011 alone. That is a lot in my opinion. In point of fact, a number of those were third marriages.

Because it is a part of our common life today, we may forget that in the scriptures Jesus speaks particularly against this, as do the Epistles. In fact, there is more New Testament scripture against remarriage than there is on other sexual exploits. I say this because we all have our own canon of scripture. I mean by this that we typically, in an ever human way, seek to make our argument out of the scripture we know. We should be aware that the Church has changed its mind on divorce and remarriage considerably since the time of Jesus. Yet, I would offer we did so out of our pastoral concern and desire to offer redeeming grace to those who sought relief from marriages they believed failed and an ever new opportunity for transformation through the gift of marriage. We as a church have come to believe that remarriage (though clearly against scripture) mirrors God's own unconditional love.

# Chapter 4

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## *Opposing Views*

As many of you know, I was brought up in an Episcopalian household. I went to church weekly. I went to Sunday school as a child and as an adult. I read scripture as I grew older. I participated fully in the life of the Episcopal Church. I bring this up because of the awakening that I had when I went to seminary. I went to seminary believing that somehow there had been one monolithic church, undivided, until the reformation, when the Church of England was born along with other reformed churches. I believed that we in the Anglican and specifically the Episcopal Church reflected a unified faith that was only one step from Rome and its unified faith that stretched back to Jesus. I awakened to the reality that Christians have been fighting with one another for ages and over things that I just assumed we had always believed.

It did not take long after Jesus' death for the Church to begin to debate the different books of the Bible—which should be in and which should be left out. Then we fought over God's oneness, or his Trinitarian nature. Then we fought over the Holy Spirit. We fought over the nature of the incarnation. We argued about the nature of the Church and its authority, who were the saints. We argued over the nature of salvation. We did all of that long before the Middle Ages, sometimes hashing and rehashing the arguments. We argued and continue to argue over baptism and the Eucharist. We have argued over the end times, and we have argued about the meaning of the kingdom of God. We have argued about the orders of ministry, the pope, power and the number of sacraments. We have argued over how many angels may fit on the end of pin, and whether we should have candles on the altar. We have waged bloody civil wars over these beliefs and many a Christian has killed another for the sake of their conscience. My view before seminary was naive on my part. I will tell you that as a priest and now bishop I

find such naiveté prevalent throughout our Church. People believe as I did and so they were sure that the local church custom, their experience, and local story are universalized. And, because this notion is prevalent, we have a false sense of our past and our present. We have a nostalgic sense that somehow we have never really fought over things before, or that somehow we were unified up until just recently. When we have this view, we are more often than not disappointed and we are frustrated as the slow moving church navigates conflict in our modern world. This is heightened by the pace of our culture, the global nature of communication, and the rampant miscommunication of any one person's view as the all-encompassing truth. The reality is that today just as in the past we face a particular turning point. After all, that is the subject of this paper, isn't it? How do we live together and do our ministry within a Church that is divided on the nature of sexuality and marriage?

### ***Adiaphora***

I think it is appropriate here to consider a wider communion view of the situation regarding differing viewpoints. The wider communion has sought to manage its diverse nature in recent times by using a term called adiaphora. Strictly speaking, adiaphora means “things that do not make a difference, matters regarded as non-essential, issues about which one can disagree without dividing the Church.” This notion lies at the heart of many current disputes. The classic biblical statements of this principle can be found in Paul’s letter to the Romans (14:1-15:13) and again when he writes his first letter to the Corinthians in chapters 8-10. Both these extensive passages reveal Paul’s wrestling with inherited traditions that are threatening to divide the communities. Paul offers a vision of a community that is bound in the God who is love and embraces us. Each argument might be characterized by the very first line in his letter to the Romans in chapter 14. Paul writes: “Welcome those are weak in the faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions.” Later he continues that our life and the life of our community are lived for God and God alone (Romans 14:7). He is struggling, even in the earliest years of Christianity, with the nature of what is essentially important and what is not. The Windsor Report describes this notion of what is essential carefully as it seeks to navigate the current division in the Church. Here I want to give some space to this and quote directly from

the report as I believe it is essential for understanding the position I will later lay before you as our strategy.

*There, [Romans 14 and I Corinthians 8ff] in different though related contexts, Paul insists that such matters as food and drink (eating meat and drinking wine, or abstaining from doing so; eating meat that had been offered to idols, or refusing to do so), are matters of private conviction over which Christians who take different positions ought not to judge one another. They must strive for that united worship and witness which celebrate and display the fact that they are worshipping the same God and are servants of the same Lord.*

*This principle of “adiaphora” was invoked and developed by the early English Reformers, particularly in their claim that, in matters of Eucharistic theology, specific interpretations (transubstantiation was particularly in mind) were not to be insisted upon as “necessary to be believed,” and that a wider range of interpretations was to be allowed. Ever since then, the notion of “adiaphora” has been a major feature of Anglican theology, over against those schools of thought, both Roman and Protestant, in which even the smallest details of belief and practice are sometimes regarded as essential parts of an indivisible whole.*

*This does not mean, however, that either for Paul or in Anglican theology all things over which Christians in fact disagree are automatically to be placed into the category of “adiaphora.” It has never been enough to say that we must celebrate or at least respect “difference” without further ado. Not all “differences” can be tolerated. (We know this well enough in the cases of, say, racism or child abuse; we would not say “some of us are racists, some of us are not, so let’s celebrate our diversity”). This question is frequently begged in current discussions, as for instance when people suggest without further argument, in relation to a particular controversial issue, that it should not be allowed to impair the Church’s unity, in other words that the matter in question is not as serious as some suppose. In the letters already quoted, Paul is quite clear that there are several matters – obvious examples being incest (1 Corinthians 5) and lawsuits between Christians before non-Christian courts (1 Corinthians 6) – in which there is no question of saying “some Christians think this, other Christians think that, and you must learn to live with the difference.” On the contrary: Paul insists that some types of behavior are incompatible with inheriting God’s coming kingdom, and must not therefore be tolerated within the Church. “Difference” has become a concept within current postmodern discourse which can easily mislead the contemporary western church*

*into forgetting the principles, enshrined in scripture and often rearticulated within Anglicanism, for distinguishing one type of difference from another.*

*The question then naturally arises as to how one can tell, and indeed as to who can decide, which types of behavior count as “adiaphora” and which do not. For Paul, the categories are not arbitrary, but clearly distinct. For instance: that which would otherwise separate Jew and Gentile within the Church is “adiaphora.” That which embodies and expresses renewed humanity in Christ is always mandatory for Christians; that which embodies the dehumanizing turning-away-from-God which Paul characterizes with such terms as “sin,” “flesh,” and so on, is always forbidden. This, of course, leaves several questions unanswered, but at least sketches a map on which further discussions may be located.*

*To this end, we note that, though Paul’s notion of “adiaphora” does indeed envisage situations where particular aspects of lifestyle are associated with particular cultures, he never supposes that human culture in the abstract is simply “neutral,” so that all habits of thought and life within a particular culture are to be regarded either as “inessential” or for that matter “to be supported and enhanced.” When we put the notion of “adiaphora” together with that of inculturation (see above in paragraphs 32, 67, 85), this is what we find: in Paul’s world, many cultures prided themselves on such things as anger and violence on the one hand and sexual profligacy on the other. Paul insists that both of these are ruled out for those in Christ. Others prided themselves on such things as justice and peace; Paul demonstrated that the gospel of Jesus enhanced and fulfilled such aspirations. The Church in each culture, and each generation, must hammer out the equivalent complex and demanding judgments.*

*Even when the notion of ‘adiaphora’ applies, it does not mean that Christians are left free to pursue their own personal choices without restriction. Paul insists that those who take what he calls the ‘strong’ position, claiming the right to eat and drink what others regard as off limits, must take care of the ‘weak,’ those who still have scruples of conscience about the matters in question – since those who are lured into acting against conscience are thereby drawn into sin. Paul does not envisage this as a static situation. He clearly hopes that his own teaching, and mutual acceptance within the Christian family, will bring people to one mind. But he knows from pastoral experience that people do not change their minds overnight on matters deep within their culture and experience.*

*Whenever, therefore, a claim is made that a particular theological or ethical stance is something “indifferent,” and that people should be free to follow it without the*



*Church being thereby split, there are two questions to be asked. First, is this in fact the kind of matter which can count as “inessential,” or does it touch on something vital? Second, if it is indeed “adiaphora,” is it something that, nevertheless, a sufficient number of other Christians will find scandalous and offensive, either in the sense that they will be led into acting against their own consciences or that they will be forced, for conscience’s sake, to break fellowship with those who go ahead? If the answer to the latter question is “yes,” the biblical guidelines insist that those who have no scruples about the proposed action should nevertheless refrain from going ahead. Thus the notion of “adiaphora” is brought back into its close relationship with that of “subsidiarity,” the principle that matters in the Church should be decided as close to the local level as possible. A distinction is drawn between trivial issues about which nobody would dream of consulting the great councils of the Communion, and more serious matters which no local church has the right to tamper with on its own. The two notions of “adiaphora” and “subsidiarity” work together like this: the clearer it is that something is “indifferent” in terms of the Church’s central doctrine and ethics, the closer to the local level it can be decided; whereas the clearer it is that something is central, the wider must be the circle of consultation. Once again, this poses the question: how does one know, and who decides, where on this sliding scale a particular issue belongs? In many cases an obvious prima facie case exists of sufficient controversy, both locally and across the Communion, to justify, if only for the reasons in the previous paragraph, reference to the wider diocese or province, or even to the whole Communion.*

*Not least because of the recurring questions about “who decides” in these matters, the twin notions of “adiaphora” and “subsidiarity” need to be triangulated with the questions of authority, and particularly the authority of scripture on the one hand and of decision-makers in the Church on the other. This brings us back from consideration of the nature of diversity within communion to the bonds of unity which hold that communion together, and so to complete the circle of this account of what our communion actually is and how it functions and flourishes as it seeks to serve the mission of God in the world.<sup>109</sup>*

I think what the report and Paul make clear is that even in our differences we are to be primarily committed to the community, so the questions about eating or drinking are NOT

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<sup>109</sup> Windsor Report, Paragraphs 36-37, p 21.

private matters. Neither are they the most important and unifying element of the community. In the end there are some things that are more important than others in the sustaining of the community in mission. I believe he was saying that our personal convictions on certain matters need to take a backseat to the common good and the mission of the gospel. I make the case that both the traditional and the progressive side of the conflict on sexuality would argue that marriage is not *adiaphora* but rather one of the essential ingredients to community life. They would, however, disagree on who gets to decide such matters. The traditional side would lean toward the Windsor Report as the guiding authority and press for waiting until there is broad communion support for blessings; this they have done. From the progressive perspective the choice is located not within the Instruments of Communion but within the province itself (referring to The Episcopal Church), which is why there is a press forward to approve a rite for the blessing of same-gender relationships.

Within our Church there are a growing number of individuals who would indeed say that our uniformity on the sacrament of marriage is indeed *adiaphora*. There are a number of leaders who do not see our common and uniform theology on this (non-Gospel) sacrament as essential for the unity and mission of the Church. These leaders see this issue as similar to the dietary issues raised in Paul's epistles, or as described in Acts. There is a higher good at stake.

We are fallen creatures and one of the things that we do is delegitimize the other. We certainly have been doing this quite well as we have approached the issues of sexuality. People on both sides of the sexuality issue have sought to alienate the other and say, "You are not in." "You are not just." "You should leave." "You are not a true believer." "You are caving to the culture." And so the two sides have drawn their lines in the sand and demarcated TRUE community. What we deny in acting this way is that God has brought us (despite our differences) together for the sake of his Gospel and for the mission of the Church. We cannot unmake ourselves. "Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder."<sup>110</sup> Over the centuries what we have learned is that the Church is one and apostolic not by its uniformity of

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<sup>110</sup> BCP, 430.

belief but by the bond of love between Christ and Christians as they live out the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ. Augustine of Hippo said that it remains *one* by continuing to receive grace from God. It is catholic because universally it is the “root of charity in the bond of peace and in the fellowship of unity.”<sup>111</sup>

I am not arguing that Augustine would be in favor of blessing same-gender relationships; in fact, I think he would have a difficult time understanding our view of anthropology and sexuality. I am saying that the basics of Augustine’s argument remind us that our unity is not based upon what a person does or even believes. His argument reminds us that our unity as church is constantly dependent upon grace and upon Jesus Christ. It reminds us that the argument before us really may be *adiaphora* or nonessential when it comes to the unifying principles of mission by the Church. In a way we are repeating our donatist heresy by believing if we don’t all agree on sexuality we are somehow not the “true” church.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, our thinking today about purity of belief is predominant, especially in the midst of our division. Our younger leadership, in the tradition of Augustine, does not see the discourse on sexuality as necessary for the saving of their own souls, the transformation of their own lives, or the unity of their community for the sake of common mission as Anglicans. While some would disagree, my guess is that there are, in fact, many more of every age who agree.

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<sup>111</sup> Augustine, Letters, 61. Also McKim, 59.

<sup>112</sup> We might remember well that the Donatist controversy, as it emerged and has re-emerged over the years, reveals that the church has often decided that what a person says, and does, will not affect their ministry or the efficacy of their sacramental offerings. During the time of persecution, some Christians handed over sacred texts and worshiped the Roman gods; meanwhile, still others died for their beliefs. The community was divided over the efficacy of the ministry of the traditor, or traitor. The question was about the purity of the ministers and of the church itself. Augustine would eventually enter the fight and argue that the Bible refers to the pure church as the Church that still exists in the kingdom of God. The locus of the point is not the cleric here but that the church has long lived out its ministry and mission in the company of those who were not likeminded. (This is quite the countercultural idea today.) On this earth the church exists as “mixed company” filled with believers of all kinds. So Augustine taught the visible and invisible church, the church today and the church yet to come. For Augustine the church remained Holy not by the personal virtues of its membership but by the grace of God communicated through the sacrament of baptism and Eucharist. “Baptism belongs to Christ, regardless of who may give it.” He continues, “The genuineness and holiness of the sacrament [does not depend upon] what the recipient of the sacrament believes and with what faith he is imbued.” We have long lived in a church of diverse opinions both within the clergy and lay order. Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points*, John Knox Press, 1988, 55ff. *Augustine, On Baptism*, Chapter 3. Also, McKim, 58ff.

That being said, it is here in the emerging discourse over our polity and the context of *adiaphora* that we have a conflict between two very distinct sides on sexuality, both of which exist within our Church. It is my perspective that both ends of the theological spectrum believe that a common and uniform theology on marriage is *necessary* and *required* for unity. It is an issue that is present within the wider conflict on sexuality, marriage and ordination of gay and lesbian people. I will say that this issue of *adiaphora*, while clearly articulated in the Windsor Report, is one that has existed for a long time on many other and diverse issues, and dates back to the earliest beginnings of the global communion. Culture, mission strategy, theology, and liturgy have all woven themselves into this complex conversation on what is necessary for communion and what is not necessary. A shared unanimity by all individual members of the Church is neither possible nor necessary for unity in mission.

### ***The Traditional View on Marriage***

The Lambeth Conferences of 1988, 1998, and 2008 have urged the churches of the Anglican Communion to engage in an intentional process of listening to the experiences of gay and lesbian persons and exploring our pastoral ministry to them. There have been sharp disagreements between the opposing sides of this conflict. Our life within our communion has been strained because of the fight, and we have been repeatedly encouraged to listen to one another and to the "other's" viewpoint. It is important to listen to the view of our neighbor if we are to understand where we are as a church and to understand where others stand. This can be difficult work but it is important work. I find reflecting on another's opinion is important in understanding my location on the map, and it helps me to understand the place I currently inhabit.

The House of Bishops Theology Committee invited both sides of the divide on sexuality to make a case for their view with the expectation that we as individual bishops would have a

greater sense and understanding about where we stood in the midst of community.<sup>113</sup> I think it was a helpful exercise and one worth thinking about here. To that end what follows is a synopsis of the traditional view on marriage as given in the paper.

The traditionalist argument for marriage begins by stating concern about the future of the faith. Traditionalists write in their paper, "Conservatives also share the skepticism voiced by non-western church leaders about the agenda of modern liberals, because so often the attitudes toward a revision of traditional views of sex and marriage are linked with liberal views of biblical authority, theological heterodoxy, and a general tendency to water down the basis and nature of Christian attitudes and way of life. This would generate a Christianity that, by not being countercultural enough, becomes unfaithful to the Gospel."

The traditionalist is in favor of the current practice of marriage and remarriage. They argue that if there is genuine error in their thinking then by all means the Church should reform itself and make room for the blessing of same-gender relationships. And, so their paper argues out that, in fact, from their perspective, the church is not in error.

Furthermore, they make the case that there is no requirement to abolish practices and institutions that develop in accordance with reason and tradition when they are not in contradiction with Holy Scripture. They base this upon Richard Hooker's text *Ecclesiastical Polity*. They also rest upon Hooker's natural law.

This then leads to their argument that the scripture is uniquely authoritative for basic Christian belief and practice and that it offers clarity on the nature of marriage as union between one man and one woman, which is at the heart of the traditional perspective. They say that the traditional and liberal students of scripture simply read the texts differently. They note also that conservatives themselves sometimes read texts differently—for instance, in the case of the Genesis 19 story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Robert Gagnon in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* defends the traditional interpretation, while Richard Hays in his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* writes: "there is nothing in the

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<sup>113</sup> The paper was entitled: "Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church" offered by The Theology Committee of the House of Bishops. It may be read in its entirety here: <http://www.collegeforbishops.org/resources>

passage pertinent to a judgment about the morality of consensual homosexual intercourse.”<sup>114</sup> Further, traditionalists argue that reading the whole text and searching for the author's intent is an important part of the work of interpretation. The interpreter has a moral obligation to seek out the meaning of the text.

They suggest that Jesus interprets scripture by evaluating the perspectives of a text from the Torah according to the way it reflects God's vision in creation, along with the possible provision for human hardness of heart. They then have a very important couple of paragraphs, which I think are essential in unpacking the case against the blessing of same-gender relationships. They write:

*Might same-sex relationships go back to God's creation intent and have the same theological and ethical status as heterosexual relationships? This would fit with the fact that such relationships seem as "natural" to some people as heterosexual relationships seem to other people, yet it can hardly be reckoned to fit with the Torah's own vision of creation and of what is "natural" in the way that is the case with a forswearing of anger, lust, swearing oaths, and forgoing revenge. Jesus points out that the opening chapters of the Torah describe God making humanity male and female and describe a man leaving his parents to be joined to a woman. It is hard to see how this could fit with the idea that a same-sex marriage is just as valid a creation reality as a heterosexual marriage.*

*The argument is often made that the scriptural treatment of chattel slavery, the subordination of women, and the prohibition of usury are moral issues where subsequent reflection and experience led to genuine change in the Church's teaching, and that the question of same-sex relationships poses the same kind of challenge to accept the wisdom of a new perspective. However, this comparison really does not work. With regard to the subordination of women, it is explicit in Genesis 3 that men's ruling over women came about as result of human disobedience rather than as an original intention of creation. Texts that require the subordination of women can therefore plausibly be seen as concessions to human sinfulness, and reflect the disorder of humanity after the fall.*

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<sup>114</sup> Robert Gagnon in *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 71-91. And, Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 381.

*The same description in Genesis 1:27 of humanity made in God's image in turn leads to a description of humanity's vocation to cultivate and tend the garden; there is no hint of slavery or servitude in human relationships. Texts in the Torah that later regularize servitude are concerned to constrain an institution that exists because of the fallenness of humankind. The New Testament has been seen as more acquiescent to slavery, but there are texts (e.g. 1 Tim 1:10) that put human trafficking in a negative light. We should regard the apparent acquiescence (not at all the same as approval, by the way!) as largely a reflection of the immense power and apparent resistance to change of the political and legal institutions of the Roman Empire within which the Church had to manage.*

*There are no indications in Scripture parallel to the principles used against slavery, racism and the subordination of women to which we could appeal to demonstrate that God's creation ideal should also embrace same-sex relationships. Rather, the portrayal of human origins in Genesis points in the opposite direction. There, the centerpiece in the vision of human marriage is not intimacy or relationship or romance but family. The man and the woman will be the means and the context in which the family will grow in such a way as to serve God and serve the land. This point in itself does not exclude same-sex marriages, but it does suggest they are not an equally valid option.*

*If the Church—or at least a large portion of it in western countries—does actually move ahead on the question of accepting same-sex relationships, it may appear to be following a pattern of moral change demonstrated in the past. In our judgment, however, the reasoning behind this change in viewing marriage and sexual relations will have come more from assimilation to modern culture than from following Jesus in learning how better to understand and live by the Scriptures.”<sup>115</sup>*

The text presented continues with a section on scriptural portions important to the argument of upholding traditional marriage, then a discussion on natural law, followed by theological trends and concerns about abuses within the Church towards gay and lesbian people. They also finish with a reflection on the nature of mission from a traditionalist perspective and how to engage in a thoughtful and disciplined way of creating space for gay and lesbian people within a Christian community.

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<sup>115</sup> House of Bishops' Paper on Sexuality, 15ff.

I did find their closing remarks important and worth inserting as they echo some of my own thoughts on the subject.

*We need to put into proper perspective the inflated importance we naturally attach to sexual fulfillment and even marriage. We have the teaching of Jesus about the disappearance of marriage and family relationships in the kingdom of heaven, and we have the examples and teaching of both Jesus and Paul, who made clear that physical sexual needs, expressions, and relationships are temporary and secondary compared to our destiny as co-heirs with Christ. "The goal for homosexual and heterosexual alike is fulfillment and wholeness in Christ." Recovery and proclamation of that conviction is the challenge for our Church.<sup>116</sup>*

I am not intending to cut this short as I think the full argument makes a much better case for itself and I would encourage you read it regardless of your position. I do think in this section I have included for you how the traditionalist or conservative argument makes its case against same-gender relationships based on scripture—how they argue for a theological bulwark to culture. Yet at the same time I believe I have shown that they, too, are committed to trying to figure out how individuals reflect the Christ-like wholeness Christians manifest in their life.

### ***The Liberal View on Same Gender Blessings***

While the conservative argument takes Richard Hooker, natural law, scripture, science and mission as their outline, the liberals take a completely different approach. They begin with mission, scripture, the vows, and the patristic witness for marital themes on relationships and then return to mission.

The liberals make the case that, rather than being revisionist or doing something purely that is new, they are expanding something that is old. They take for themselves then the name of "expansionists." I take this to mean they are expanding the notion that people in same-gender relationships can have their commitment to one another blessed by the church.

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<sup>116</sup> HOB paper, 40.



They argue that marriage itself is a discipline and a way in which sinners receive grace. The vows, they argue, are ways in which two people come together as sinners, recognizing their dependence upon one another and upon God.<sup>117</sup> They argue that in doing this the blessing of a same-gender couple's covenant relationship can be seen as an icon of Christ's love for the world and church.

They believe that the Church should marry same-gender couples because it requires a testimony of love and recognizes their own need for sanctification as individuals. The grace and marital virtues that the Church offers to heterosexual couples would improve the Christian lives of the gay and lesbian couples as well. Furthermore, they argue that this is, in fact, the mission of the Church: to offer grace to sinful people and inspire virtue through a covenant with one another and with God. The marriage rite itself, the blessing, places couples into a discipline of life lived one to another and Christ. In doing so they believe this rite can be an image of how God is reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19). They write:

*This is not so much a new theology of marriage... We base our argument, then, not on autonomy, individualism, or personal experience, but on the embodied discipline—that of marriage—by which God may transform longing into charity and dispositions to love into works of virtue. Can we credit what we pray in the marriage rite, that God may “make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair” (BCP, 429)<sup>118</sup>*

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<sup>117</sup> Andrew Lang has an interesting insight worth mentioning here. Lang is a UCC minister. He writes, “Like heterosexual marriage and celibate community, these relationships are ‘schools for sinners,’ in which two partners learn how to live in the paradox of freedom that is unlimited precisely because it is limited by the other... Neither same-sex relationships nor celibate community are objectively “equal” to heterosexual marriage. The marriage between a man and a woman has its own distinctive and privileged character. But neither are they ‘second-class’ marriages. They are moral relationships and they have a specific claim on the ministry of the church... Same-sex couples therefore have a claim on the pastoral care of the church. The church must not abandon us to the moral disorder of a fallen world that is in rebellion against God. But the church's pastoral concern for these couples necessarily requires the public, liturgical expression of the vows that bind them together.” You may read the whole text of his argument here: <http://www.ucc.org/beliefs/theology/does-god-have-a-plan-for.html>

<sup>118</sup> These texts are also, unless otherwise noted, taken from the House of Bishops' Theological Paper on Marriage.

Not unlike the conservative view they also go to Augustine, which I find interesting.

They continue with this statement,

*Because Scripture demands to be interpreted in accord with the mission of God, we should not so confine it to any one sense, as to expose the faith to ridicule (Augustine, Confessions V.5, De Genesi ad litteram 1; Aquinas, De potentia 4, 1, r). For different mission partners will inevitably ridicule the faith in some way, causing the church to see different aspects of the truth that God desires holiness. This view of Scripture is the view of Augustine: that God gives us the difficult work of interpreting Scripture in order to make finite, sin-darkened readers capable of growing into the truth. Scripture gives itself to many readings that its readers may slowly learn to orient their desire to God's desire for them.*

I want to take another excerpt where the use of scripture in the liberal, or expansionist view, helps us to clearly see the difference by which the two groups come to read the scripture.

*Alongside the marriage practices described in Scripture, even in their variety, our proposal that the Church extend marriage to same-sex couples appears transgressive. Yet, within the testimony of the early church's way of reading Scripture, it appears to fit the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15, 23) that exceeds Paul's expectation by grafting wild branches onto the domestic olive (Rom 11:24). Acts portrays the apostles and the earliest church as following the presence of the Spirit even when the Spirit's activity seemed to exceed the plain sense of Scripture. In Romans and Galatians, Paul must defend the astonishing inclusion of Gentiles, which exceeded theological assumptions, and elaborate the coherence of a way of life that ran against moral assumptions. We argue here, that analogously, marrying same-sex couples comports with the mission of God celebrated by the Spirit in the body of Christ, even though it seems to exceed the marriage practices assumed by Scripture and honored by tradition.*

*...We do not claim that biblical writers imagined or anticipated marriages of two women or two men. The New Testament does, however, give evidence that the followers of Jesus and the churches begun by Paul and other missionaries took a skeptical perspective on both male-female marriage and the patriarchal family. In Mark, Jesus makes the true mark of a sibling and kindred relationship doing the will of God (Mk. 3:31-35). Paul's letters show that both he and some members of the*

*churches understood baptism into Christ to commend celibacy (1 Cor 7). Many texts in the gospels and letters attest to the ascetic character of these early communities. Later Christian writers then reasserted the primacy of marriage and the household as the model for the shape of the church. Marriage practices supported by the early church therefore hold in tension both those who radically relativize the traditional family in preference for celibacy or "spiritual" family and those that make the traditional family, what we would call today the "biological family" the sole Christian model. Our approach combines the two New Testament values of asceticism and household: marriage is a school for virtue, a household asceticism: "for better for worse," "forsaking all others" (Book of Common Prayer 427, 424).*

*The history of interpreting these diverse texts has yielded various kinds of support for gender relations, sexual understanding, and marital practice. In different periods and with distinctive priorities they have celebrated the superiority of celibacy and the vocation of Christian marriage, promoted a celibate male priesthood and a married clergy, restricted ordination to males and lately extended it to women. Guided by the reading of Scripture in the prayers and blessing of marriage in the Book of Common Prayer, we argue that faithful marriage partnership can also be the aspiration of same-sex couples just as it is for opposite-sex couples. Adapted to include partners of the same sex, Christian marriage still retains procreation as one of its purposes (BCP, 423). Marriage creates a family and a home for the nurture of children. Beyond the good of procreation, marriage makes the conditions for companionship and friendship that God intends both for mutual joy and for the sanctification and maturation of the individuals within it. We testify that in this, God shows no partiality. Opposite-sex as well as same-sex couples who engage in this covenant undertake extraordinary promises in the face of great odds and with God's help make a vivid witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the church established in his name.*

*It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" that they should marry (Acts 15:28). Reading Scripture for the way marriage bears witness to God seems to depend at least in part on how a reading community understands the mission of God in its context. We read in the community that the Spirit makes. Because the Spirit spans the centuries, our argument reads Scripture in the company of patristic interpreters as well as in the company of readers long silenced by the tradition.*

Key to this argument is that Paul himself loosened the requirements of scripture as the emerging early Christian movement was growing. The liberals or expansionists argue that, in

fact, there were many instances where Paul did this despite the clarity with which the scripture implicitly restricted believers. We might remember our earlier discourse about dietary laws and we would want to add to it circumcision. This is an important and essential piece of the expansionist argument. It is key for what they are saying —as the mission of Christ is pursued, there are times when, despite the words of scripture, a faithful church may choose to loosen binding prohibitions for the sake of those being added to the number of faithful Christians.

The liberal or expansionist argument holds that the Church learns how to interpret Scripture by being the Body of Christ. *"It learns the truth of Scripture by living from marriage to its Bridegroom, and therefore not from self-sufficiency but from self-donation to another. That means that the church reads Scripture not in purity but from mission, a mission that must leave it changed. The church takes part in the mission of the Trinity when she goes out from the Father in the person of the Son and in the community of the Spirit. She evangelizes others and herself by going out of herself and receiving into herself those who are different, as the Son and Spirit do in their missions."*

The liberal argument then goes through the marriage service itself and takes each vow and illustrates how it is a vow to all sinners wishing to live in lives of covenant with one another and with God. They then continue to make their case that the expansion of the marriage rite for the Church will reveal more who Christ is in relationship to humanity and specifically his Church.

As I did with the conservative/traditional argument, I want to include their concluding statement in this synopsis and overview with a quote from the liberal/expansionist paper.

*We do not call for an end to disagreement, for that is part of the labor of our common baptism into God's mission. The Father sent the Son and the Spirit into a finite and fallen world where only diversity could image infinity and only history could reconcile them. Baptism prepares human beings for this arduous process by binding them together, and promises them that contrary to human expectations, their disagreement will have been for blessing: "thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies" (Ps 23:5). Under conditions of both diversity and division, disagreement can become a Spirit-given way of discerning the form of the Son. Baptism binds us together for the long process of making the body of Christ whole and complete in all its members. We are baptized into the Father, the Son, and the*

*Spirit so that we can better disagree. The bonds of baptism tell us that there is no salvation without the others and require therefore the greatest freedom for disagreement rather than the narrowest slice of purity.*

### ***Some Thoughts***

I strongly encourage those of you interested in these divergent views to read both articles with care. I find that they are very different and run almost on different rails of the Anglican tradition. As I have shown in the brief synopsis (which does not do justice to either paper), the two cases use two completely different methods for different purposes. I did this because, after being in this discussion for the whole life of my ministry, I see that we have reached a point in which the two divergent sides will not meet in the middle. Truly there will be people who resonate with bits of each argument; we don't all think in monolithic terms. Our experience of life itself and our own story will find in each argument the parts that speak to us. Within the church politic, though, there is a divide.

On the one hand, "the conservative paper argues that accepting same-sex marriage contradicts moral teachings of Scripture and the guidance of reason by natural law. It therefore defends readings of Scripture that support traditional heterosexual marriage... It supports those readings with natural law principles of sexual complementarity and procreative purpose in marriage." On the other hand, the liberal paper "does not reason from specific social [I would say moral] teachings but from the moral patterns of Scripture." Their argument does not "defeat biblical suspicions of various sexual relations." The liberal argument does attempt to illustrate "how God uses marital faithfulness to heal and perfect sinners."

I believe the lay reader of these two texts, along with the skilled academician, sees that, regardless of how one takes up the argument and seeks to make their case, there are profound effects on our current theological thinking both within The Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion. They demonstrate the burden that an expansion of marriage must bear within the Anglican Communion. I believe both papers do well in their acknowledgement of our U.S. and Western culture and how our struggle challenges good Christian people here and abroad. I also fear that the two papers do not particularly bring the two differing sides together.

There is no great dialectic here. I rather find there are two separate conversations. It is very much up to the reader to examine the texts and try and find a convergence within one's own heart, or even simply to find a place upon which to stand.

I think the great benefit of reading both papers is the well-done Anglican thought that illuminates for the churchgoer the complexities and yet true gift our Anglican theology has to offer when making a case for or against the blessing of same-gender couples. I also think it is a clarion bell ringing out the reality that we are simply stuck with two good and competing cases for the truth.

I imagine that most conflicts of such a divided nature always run a set of complicated tracks, crossing and re-crossing one another as they make their way through time and prayer. A close reading of texts from the first centuries of our Church illustrates the great divisions on theology, ecclesiology and missiology. In the midst of any given time period, these competing thoughts also seem to stand in complete opposition to one another. A reading of the Donald K. McKim's seminal book [\*Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought\*](#) shows the depth by which competing views in our history have always seemed to run on parallel tracks until the Church reconciles itself to Christ. This can take centuries, and in some cases the great theological controversies and their themes continue to be wrestled out through prayerful discernment and discussion even to this day. McKim writes:

*Christian theology has come a long way, zigging and zagging from its earliest days through many expressions of faith. The path has not always been smooth or straight. Through theological debate and dialogue new forms of expression arise and new answers are given to old questions. Yet new answers inevitably raise new questions, and so it goes.*

*The Christian church and Christian theology can only turn new corners, however, when critical and sustained attention is given to all the issues raised by adherents. While the main figures in the history of theology are often considered "superstars," theology at its best is done through the open participation of people in all arenas and cultures, so that what results can resonate with truth and touch the lives of people in many contexts. As theology today becomes open to more and more people with varying accents and experiences, the tapestry of Christianity can be increasingly enriched. New contexts, methods, issues, and conclusions will come. New turning*

*points will arise, and from these new resources the continuing history of Christian doctrine will emerge.*<sup>119</sup>

I believe we are in the midst of just such a struggle. It is perhaps a struggle that will continue long after our part in its conversation is long since played out and we will have entered into the nearer company with God, Christ Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the saints in light. Nevertheless, you and I must find a Christian unity beyond this difference and continue our missionary work of proclaiming the Gospel in spite of our difference and the gulf that appears before our beloved Church.

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<sup>119</sup> McKim, 175ff.

# Chapter 5

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## *Our Response*

I want to begin with an idea of how we are to respond to one another in the midst of this divide. It comes from a document that has become an essential ingredient to life at our very own [Seminary of the Southwest](#). This document is called the "Conversation Covenant." I believe that it offers the people of the diocese a way in which we may choose to be in community together.<sup>120</sup>

The Very Rev. Doug Travis says this about the covenant, "One way we express our Christian friendship is through our 'Conversation Covenant,' which is rooted in the baptismal covenant. We seek to listen as well as speak, to show kindness and humility, and to acknowledge that we might be wrong. We yearn to be a people who without exception see in the face of the 'other,' a friend, someone for whom Jesus has died and whom Jesus has invited to join him at his table, the heavenly banquet."

We, the people of the Diocese of Texas, have an opportunity to continue the great tradition of this diocese in forging a way through division and becoming Christian friends. It is a characteristic that has shaped and formed us from our very beginning. It is the recognition in one another of a fellow pilgrim, sinner and neighbor who, through the grace of God and his crucifixion and resurrection, is our brother and sister.

It is my belief that the Church is busy at work interpreting the Gospel of Good News to the world and seeking to inquire how we might better live out our Christian faith. We do this in word and we do this in deed. Such reflection is not a private affair but is lived out, and our lives

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<sup>120</sup> You may read the text in its entirety here: <http://www.ssw.edu/conversation-covenant?phpMyAdmin=d82de654bdb95466ba2ba5d15ad452a5>



become icons of this engagement with scripture, with God, and with the Christian community. People look at us and they see the kind of Christian we are—based upon our expressions of love to one another and to our neighbor.

In such a community, made up of individuals willing to journey together, "frank, confident, and trustful conversation" is the hallmark of Christ's love in our midst.<sup>121</sup> Such conversation is an essential ingredient for our common and communal transformation. We cannot shy away from the other and their perspective. True Christian conversation is shaped by reading the whole text, even the parts with which we disagree. It is engaging in conversation with individuals, even those who have a different perspective.

At times in Christian history such as this, we face hard topics and we know that such conversations are difficult, most especially when we dare to speak with someone who disagrees with us. These conversations can be "difficult, even disturbing," because often times our assumptions are challenged.<sup>122</sup> Our hopes that we will never see the passage of rites for blessing a same-gender couple, or our hope that they will be available soon, come into direct conflict with other people's ideas about how things are to be. Our "opinions and certainties" are challenged by those who see the world differently or interpret a text differently. Yet these moments are often powerful moments of formation in the Christian faith. These conversations are landmarks along our pilgrim journey.

It is true that walking apart can seem easier. It is true that at times cultural war seems the only way forward. Fight or flight is symptomatic of a life that does not embrace our Anglican identity and leaves the mission of the Church subservient to forces of division and darkness. It is destructive and we are good people who wish to do nothing more than find our way into the bosom of the God who loves us. We are a good people who wish to do good works and minister well. We want to be faithful and we want to follow Jesus.

In order for us to move forward and into a life lived in the midst of this conflict, we must begin by acknowledging that we are all made in the image of God and must, therefore, treat

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

one another with respect and dignity.<sup>123</sup> We must do this for those with whom we agree and we must do this for those with whom we disagree. We must not repay evil for evil and we must seek to be at peace with our brothers and sisters.

In order for us to live in the midst of these conflicting ideas, we must give ourselves—and our neighbor—freedom to explore different ideas and beliefs as well as to grow and to change theologically.<sup>124</sup> None of us has been birthed into this world fully formed. Many of us do not fully understand the depth to which this division runs in our Church. Many of us do not even understand the full scriptural meaning of the texts upon which our ideas may be grounded. We must seek out resources, learn, and try to understand the complexity of this issue. Despite what our culture teaches us, researching on Wikipedia does not make us an expert.

Not only do we need space but we need to remember our sinfulness. "We share a common sinfulness and, therefore, will understand only partially and be mistaken frequently," the Conversation Covenant says. Even Saint Paul said in 1 Cor 13:12, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

In order to live together in the midst of this conflict, we must reject the prevailing cultural notion that we should be with only those who are like-minded. Christianity and our Anglican tradition tell us clearly that "we do not have to agree in order to love one another."<sup>125</sup> I grew up in this diocese and I have seen the power of redeeming love that is present in this Church. I know many of you by name and I know many who now stand on the opposite side of the theological fence from one another. I believe that it wounds God when we allow our disagreements to keep us from loving one another as Christ has loved us.

We have to be clear that "our conversations, even our most passionate disagreements, take place in the Spirit whom we seek not to grieve."<sup>126</sup> In doing so, we must realize that our

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

enterprise of community and communion is a sacramental and grace-filled gift of the Holy Spirit. We are Christ's own gift to one another, and that gift was purchased for us on the cross that we might all be drawn ever closer together and ever closer to God.

When we begin from this perspective, we may approach the conversation with a willingness to listen and learn, acknowledging the value of opposing views. We can treat one another as honest inquirers, attempting to discern God's truth in a complex world, and we give ourselves permission to engage ideas without attacking or dismissing those who hold them. We are able to consider the possibility that we might be mistaken, secure in the knowledge of the love and forgiveness we have all received in Christ. We are able, no matter how difficult the subject, to challenge one another while seeking not to give offense. We seek, therefore, to acknowledge stereotypes, ask for clarification in order to avoid misunderstandings, and make room for complexity.

The nuptial mystery, in which two who are profoundly different become one, makes our unity in the face of conflict especially profound. In the creation narrative of Genesis, we see the dissolution of two who were intended to support each other. But towards the conclusion of the Revelation of St. John, as the Holy Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth adorned as a bride prepared for her bridegroom, we see the reconciliation and reunion of heaven and earth, which implies the reconciliation and reunion of those who had been separated to become one. Because the Church is an icon of the way God has made one all things that are in heaven and in earth, and because the Church expresses this iconographic union, we are encouraged to find our way forward together.

It is my belief that God has called us together. We are given as family to one another and we are offered a sacred moment, this moment of deep conflict and divide, in which to show our commitment to God by committing ourselves to one another. I believe that we, the people of the Diocese of Texas, have it within ourselves to choose to walk humbly with God and with one another, to remain united in mission despite our disagreements, and to treat one another with respect and dignity. In so doing, you and I together, will light a fire of reconciliation and mission for all the world to see. We shall together make our witness of the hope that is in us—the good news of salvation. We shall sit and eat at the table together. We

will, as the people of the Diocese of Texas, become ourselves an icon of the nuptial mystery of God's reconciling action of uniting heaven to earth and earth to heaven.

# Chapter 6

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## *A Strategy for Unity in Mission*

The Diocese of Texas has an opportunity to respond to the challenge of liturgical change within the life of our Church in a manner that safeguards our unity and remains faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. My goal has been to create a strategy and resources that will help each rector and parish to faithfully respond to the events at General Convention in 2012 when The Episcopal Church will approve rites for same-gender blessings. From the very beginning it was clear that a process should exist for each rector and their parish to faithfully identify and decide whether or not to offer blessings of same-gender relationships. On the one hand, traditional parishes and their priests need to have resources at their disposal that will help them feel secure in their relationship with the bishop, the diocese and the wider church. They have asked for and desire a way in which they can take action that will enable them to feel that changes in liturgy and theology that conflict with their conscience won't create for them an impasse to what is now a healthy relationship with the rest of the diocese.

On the other hand, progressive priests and their congregations feel a similar need to respond to a context in which gay and lesbian people are asking for the pastoral blessing of the Church in order to live faithful lives. These clergy should be allowed to officiate at the blessing of same-gender relationships if their conscience requires it. A congregation that wishes to create a safe space in which these blessings can take place need a process by which they can prepare and discern their communal response to these requests.

Meanwhile, as bishop I wish to shepherd my flock and help every Christian who is seeking a way in which to make their faithful pilgrim journey. I am a bishop, and I love the people whom God has given me. I love those who are straight, gay or lesbian, conservative, traditional, moderate, liberal progressive, black, brown or white. I feel the call to care for each

and help each become the Christian that God desires and embraces. My hope is that progressives and conservatives alike will cherish the dignity of each other and see with the eyes of Christ their opponent and call them brother and sister. I hope we may, as Christ unites the heaven with the earth, ourselves be united in mission as One Church under the headship of Jesus Christ for the glory of God. Our polity currently provides that each clergy be given the discretion to decline or to solemnize a marriage. The same ability must be protected for those who do and those who do not wish to officiate at a blessing of a same-gender relationship.<sup>127</sup>

Allowing rectors and individual parishes to decide for themselves how to respond to General Convention 2012 and using resources found in this text and online is not a move towards congregationalism. The final decision belongs in the parish and in conversation between rector and people. We do this while maintaining our unity for mission and thereby walk the middle way together with our diverse opinions on sexuality set aside. I encourage the people of the diocese to prayerfully seek to walk the *via media* and to honor our Anglican heritage of making new decisions in new contexts for the sake of common mission. As Hooker wrote, “When the best things are not possible, the best may be made of those that are.” Mordecai urged Esther: “You have been chosen for such a time as this.”<sup>128</sup> This is our time, our moment to come together for the sake of the one who loved us and died for us that we might be coworkers in the heavenly vineyards of God.

The solution to this impasse shall be my reliance on our polity, canons and structure, which already make room for clergy to have local liturgical freedom and parishes to self-differentiate given their local mission contexts.

I have worked with the Task Force for more than a year. Our work was to see if it was possible for us to commit to staying in one church even though we would be making the option of same-gender blessings available for those congregations and priests who felt they needed to do this ministry while at the same time protecting the conscience of those traditionalists who did not agree with this action. We were proactively preparing our diocese for General

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<sup>127</sup> 2009 Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, Title 1.18.4.

<sup>128</sup> Esther, 4.

Convention 2012 in a way that fosters the renewal of evangelism and mission in the Diocese of Texas and affords us the opportunity to remain both Episcopal and Anglican. I believe that we have reached that goal within the Task Force, and I am counting on them and upon the people of the diocese to rise to the occasion of this particular challenge.

Such a renewal is impossible without mutual respect for the convictions of all and thoughtful processes for individual congregations to self-identify. Under my direction the Task Force prayerfully discussed the best way to set up processes, which will allow individual parishes to act in accordance with their conscience around the issue of sexuality. Any process adopted had to be consistent with our polity, catholicity and Anglican heritage.

They have helped me to hear the concerns of our diverse diocese and to offer leadership and a way forward for us all. Through this process, my own reflection in this paper, and years of prayer I have come to understand that unity for the sake of mission will require a humble spirit as we place our opinions on human sexuality where they belong—behind our common commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ and to the mission of his Church.

### ***Bishop Diocesan***

As Bishop Diocesan I will continue in communion relationship with the wider Anglican Communion maintaining a stance that remains in concert with the Anglican Communion Covenant. I will remain in The Episcopal Church. I will continue to follow and to uphold its doctrine and its discipline. I will work to engage in healthy and transparent relationships with all leaders of our Church, local and abroad. I will accomplish this broad church relationship by continuing to work with people across the communion with whom I have healthy relationships. Personally, I will not bless a same-gender couple's union. I will abstain from voting for the approval of any bishop living in a same-gender partnership. And, because I believe that the diocese remains predominately one that holds a traditional understanding of marriage to be the primary teaching of the Church, I will vote against the proposed liturgy for the blessing of a same-gender covenant which will be presented at General Convention.

This, however, does not limit my relationship building and common ministry with my fellow bishops in the House of Bishops. I will continue to support our mutual ministry of episcopate regardless of their place along the theological spectrum, their gender or sexuality.

Part of the plan was to put forward my thinking on the subject of our division, which I have done in this paper. I hoped to offer you, the people of the diocese, a picture of the theology of marriage that we currently espouse. I wanted you to see how we had come to develop our understanding of marriage over time. And, I want you to see that we have made room in our understanding of traditional marriage to include remarriage and that we made this change in the midst of debate in our culture. My intent was also to give you some theological and scriptural background. I want you to be able to see the division within the theological community on the issue of marriage and the differing views that people hold across the Anglican Communion regarding the place of blessing same-gender relationships. I also want to provide to you primary documents that are important keys to understanding where the various members of the Church stand on the issues before the Church. These are linked throughout this document. I have endeavored to offer you a view of where I am and how I will lead. Most importantly, I want to provide you with an understanding of the things within our Church that unite us and to place marriage within its proper perspective, not as a unifying or necessary element for unity within our Church but as one of the sacraments. I wanted you to see how we have added remarriage to our understanding and how today The Episcopal Church is on the verge of including as another separate liturgy—the blessing of same-gender relationships. In the end I wanted you, the reader, to deepen your understanding of the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ as portrayed in the unified mission of the Anglican and Episcopal Church. I wanted you to see the place of marriage in that discourse. Most of all, I wanted you to come to an understanding of where you might find yourself in the midst of a very diverse community in Texas, The Episcopal Church and the global Anglican Communion.

This plan rests purely on the authority vested in me as your bishop. Therefore, this strategy does not ask for further debate or require our diocesan council to approve my leadership on this issue. I have not asked for people to change their positions or even to like the plan that I am setting before us. I am asking that the people of the Diocese of Texas to choose



unity over division for the sake of the Gospel of Salvation and the proclamation of God in Christ Jesus.

By the power vested in the office of Episcopal Bishop, in this Church, and in this diocese, I will allow clergy and congregations in the Diocese of Texas the following actions following the approval of same-gender blessings in The Episcopal Church.

### ***A Traditional Option***

Congregations and rectors need to be able to respond to concerns by their parishioners following General Convention 2012's action on same-gender relationships. Out of my pastoral concern for priest and people, I will allow traditional congregations to state their preference and position through resolutions or congregational bylaw changes. The rector is required to request permission from the Bishop Diocesan prior to proceeding so that we may be in conversation on a common strategy and process. The vestry will be asked to study and undertake the work after being fully informed. I will suggest that they read this paper and review the attached documents so that they can understand fully the decision that they are making.

A resolution or bylaws may be changed to read:

*This Episcopal congregation declares itself to be forever committed to the primacy and authority of Holy Scripture, as written in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible. In keeping therewith, neither the Vestry nor the Clergy of this congregation shall:*

- A) Conduct or participate in rites, services or ceremonies for the Holy matrimony or blessing of the union of persons of the same gender;*
- B) Sponsor for ordination or employ any priest or other clergy who is engaged in a non-celibate relationship outside of Holy matrimony between a man and a woman, or be required to participate in any liturgy where such a non-celibate person is in leadership; or*
- C) Offer any liturgies or promote any teachings inconsistent with those contained in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.*

The vestry may also at this time choose to affirm the articles of the [Windsor Report](#) and the [Anglican Communion Covenant](#) if they have not done so already. At any time in the future the priests and congregations may choose to change their position. I will not treat congregations that choose this option any differently.

I recognize that not all congregations in the diocese will be pleased with this proposal at this time, and I wish to pastorally respond to what they may consider feelings of being sacramentally out of communion with my office. I recognize that it is possible that such pain may exist that a congregation will wish to have alternative pastoral oversight. I have already visited with bishop beyond this diocese should this be the case and we can respond easily. Furthermore, I am offering this in advance—that should the rector request and the vestry approve, I will allow for alternative pastoral oversight through the TEC plan called Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight.

### ***A Liberal Option***

If General Convention approves rites for same-gender blessings (either as trial rites or for general use), I will permit clergy desiring to do so to use this new liturgy and materials.<sup>129</sup>

First, to protect the pastoral relationship between the rector, the congregation's leadership, and the congregation, I will require evidence that the congregation supports the rector's desire to offer such a liturgy. To that end, I will require clergy who believe this is an important part of their ministry to read the documents produced by General Convention to prepare themselves for the work of providing this liturgy to people who request it. Likewise, I want congregations interested in this ministry to have gone through the materials provided in the Liturgical Resources 1 text on same-gender covenants. Therefore, prior to officiating a rite for blessing a same-gender covenant in an Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Texas, a rector will be required to have the congregation complete the congregational education portion of the

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<sup>129</sup> The SCLM has proposed a text entitled: *Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You, and You will Be A Blessing, Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships*. The Bishop's permission is an essential ingredient in the proposed rite.

process. The rector shall affirm to me in writing that the congregation has completed a time of discernment (having used the Liturgical Resources material) and is prepared to participate in the blessing of same-gender covenants. I am also requesting that the Senior Warden write to confirm that this discernment work has been carefully undertaken. This work needs to be done well in advance of conducting any service and not a rushed process. I am requiring this preparation also out of my pastoral concern for individuals seeking the Church's blessing and who deserve when blessed within the Church to have the community stand and support their commitment to God and to one another. The promise of the congregation in the liturgy to support the new couple is an important one and a promise that the community cannot make without having discerned its meaning. After having fulfilled this process, the rector will notify me, and I will approve at a time of my choosing when the congregation may be given permission to do these rites.<sup>130</sup>

I want us to be attentive and to learn from our experience. We will not be approving a large number of congregations all at once. On the contrary, my pastoral care for the general life of our diocese will dictate a slow-moving process for approval of congregations. Therefore, following General Convention 2012, and the publishing of the *Liturgical Resource 1* rites, I will allow one rector from Houston and one rector from Austin to request in Advent of 2012 permission to conduct such blessings within their respective sanctuaries.

Not every priest is in a congregation that will be able to support such blessings. Therefore, I am making provision for clergy in congregations that have not affirmatively opted to refrain from blessing same-gender covenants to be able to use the Liturgical Resource 1 text outside of the Church. This should allow access to the rite in places that are not prepared to do this service in their sanctuary or who are adverse to such action. It will allow for a generous pastoral care of members throughout our diocese.

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<sup>130</sup> We are beginning our usage of these rites and I will be moving cautiously forward and slow to approve congregations until we are fully aware of the best process and practice of preparation for these rites. I do this out of my concern for liturgy well done and care for congregations and people involved.

Second, the clergy will be required to request permission each time they propose to use the liturgy of same-gender blessings. As we take this new step in our liturgical life, I am pastorally concerned for the couple and want to ensure the highest and most generous care is being taken. A 30-day requirement will be in effect for this request. As Anglicans and Episcopalians we will do these services well and follow the rubrics. One of the partners must be an Episcopalian who attends our Church. Moreover, we will not do multiple or group services. This is not our tradition.<sup>131</sup>

Furthermore, if this is not the couple's first blessed union, or they were previously married, there is the expectation that the remarriage guidelines be fulfilled before permission is given. I truly believe that serial monogamy and the increase in divorces has been most damaging for people and families. I will govern same-gender covenants in the same manner.<sup>132</sup>

Third, because Texas law currently does not recognize same-gender marriage or civil unions and because all clergy are canonically required to conform to state law regarding marriage, it is imperative that no clergy permit any representation or characterization of the Church's blessing of same-gender covenants as creating or solemnizing any marriage, civil union or other legal relationship. It does not.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Process steps and forms will be published online in Fall of 2012. Clergy who do not follow my guidance, in accordance with the canons, will be immediately placed on administrative leave and given a pastoral directive.

<sup>132</sup> This remarriage form is being adapted to the new rite.

<sup>133</sup> According to Title 1.18.1 of the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church, every member of the clergy is required to "conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also to the laws of the Church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony." Article 1, Section 32 of the Texas Constitution provides that "marriage in this state shall consist only of the union of one man and one woman" and that the state "may not create or recognize any legal status identical or similar to marriage." Likewise, Section 2.001(b) of the Texas Family Code provides that a marriage license may not be issued "for the marriage of persons of the same sex." Similarly, Section 6.204 of the Family Code provides that "a marriage between persons of the same sex or a civil union is contrary to the public policy of this state and is void in this state." Interestingly, until the mid-1970's, the Family Code did not specifically prohibit marriage between persons of the same sex. Also, the provision in the Texas Constitution prohibiting marriage between persons of the same sex is called the Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA. It was approved overwhelmingly by Texas voters in 2005. However, in some of the urban areas within our diocese DOMA had strong opposition; 60%-90% of the vote was against passage. A number of our churches minister in these areas.

The lawyers with whom I have worked believe this will be challenged in the near future; nevertheless, we cannot have our clergy vulnerable to the law and I wish for them to be protected so guidance will be given for the use of the rite here in Texas. We cannot do anything that intends the same rights as civil marriage.

At any time in the future clergy and congregations may choose to change their position. I want to give rectors and congregations the opportunity to test the waters and to change their minds. Therefore, just as the traditional congregation may choose to change its mind, so too may a liberal one. It will be up to the vestries and rectors in conversation with me that will help guide this process.

I also understand that, just as are traditional congregation may not be happy with my permission giving; it is also possible that a liberal congregation may be unhappy. Should that be the case, I am willing to offer alternative pastoral oversight through the TEC plan entitled: Delegated Episcopal Pastoral Oversight.

In order to facilitate this process, guidelines and forms will be produced in the fall of 2012 to help priests and congregations across every spectrum deal with these provisions and guide these processes as needed; making adjustments as needed.

### ***Reflections about Process***

Not every congregation will want to deal with this or even discuss it. I believe that many congregations in the Diocese of Texas will be happy with my provision and also pleased with my transparent position on how to move forward. Therefore, it is possible that many congregations will choose to do nothing; they will choose neither to make a traditional stance nor to do same-gender blessings.

It is natural that other questions will arise about the discernment process for ordination and the calling of men and women in same-gender relationships to serve as rectors. Currently, we have a diocesan canon that prohibits deployment of gay and lesbian clergy, living in a same gender relationship, into congregations as rectors or associates. If that canon were to be removed or revised to make room for such deployment, I would invite the Standing Committee to advise me on the developing issues that would arise.

Gay and lesbian people not in relationships have been allowed to go through the process of discernment for ordination for several decades now. Gay and lesbian clergy, not in

committed same gender relationships, are currently serving in our diocese and have been faithfully carrying out their ministry for years. Gay and lesbian church members in partnered relationships have been going through local discernment at the parish level within the diocese for the last eight years. They then have sought a sponsoring parish outside of the diocese.

Bishops globally and within The Episcopal Church have asked me to find a way to protect and make room for traditional congregations within the Episcopal Church. I believe this plan does, in fact, do that. I have also been asked by the people of our diocese to find a way in which, as a traditional diocese, we may give an option to more liberal congregations. I believe this plan does that. The plan that I have outlined is, in fact, one that is informally present through the communion in different forms, including the Church of England.

I am hopeful that as we move through this process we will learn from one another and that actually our deep respect and love for one another will deepen.

# Appendix A

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## *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.

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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

# Appendix B

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## *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*

- 1. If a same-gender couple has already had their relationship blessed in another diocese, will the Diocese of Texas recognize their relationship?** Yes. Currently same-gender couples and their children attend and are members of churches in the diocese. The congregations of the diocese welcome all people and recognize each as a beloved child of God.
- 2. What is the biblical warrant for the Church’s decision to bless same-gender relationships?** The Standing Commission for Liturgy and Music has prepared a report that may be found in the *Liturgical Resources 1* text. It includes further resources. You may also read their opinion in the paper liberal theologians delivered to the House of Bishops in 2010.
- 2. Why are we doing this now?** We feel that faithfulness to the Good News of Salvation and the unique Gospel proclamation of God in Jesus Christ demands unity and peace for the sake of mission. We believe that a proactive response to emerging issues that may divide us against one another safeguards the mission and life of the Church.
- 4. What is the specific role of the vestry in implementing the Bishop’s plan?** Depending on your rector, and your congregation, the vestry may have a role in guiding one of two different processes. An explanation of this role may be found beginning on page 113.
- 5. Why does the Bishop’s plan support the blessing of same-gender covenants and not same-gender marriages?** The Texas law prohibits a clergy person from performing the “marriage” for a same-gender couple. The law is footnoted on page 116. The Episcopal Church is not expected to approve a rite for same-gender marriage.
- 6. Does this plan diminish the Church’s theological understanding of marriage?** No. *The Book of Common Prayer’s* definition of marriage as the union between a man and a woman is not affected by this development within The Episcopal Church.
- 7. Why are some Episcopal dioceses allowing clergy to perform same-gender “marriages”?** Some dioceses within The Episcopal Church are allowed to “marry” same-gender people because their mission context is one that exists within a state where same-gender marriages are legal and recognized by the state.

8. **Will any priest or congregation be forced to bless a same-gender relationship?** No. The Constitution of The Episcopal Church protects the right of every individual clergy person to choose which rites they will perform, and for whom they will perform them.
9. **Are we going to be required to hold such services?** No, a parish may not be required to do any service authorized by The Episcopal Church. Each Episcopal priest alone chooses (in relationship to the people of their congregation) what services are offered: Eucharist, Morning Prayer, marriage, etc.
10. **What authority does the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church have to prevent, alter or enforce this plan within the Diocese of Texas?** None whatsoever.
11. **Will there be blessings of same-gender couples at my church?** Your rector will have the opportunity to decide in accordance with the pastoral guidance of the bishop diocesan and in conversation with the congregation.
12. **What is the difference between a blessing ceremony and a wedding?** The liturgy will be different. Marriage has legal standing in the State of Texas. To date, a blessing of a same-gender partnership does not.
13. **What are options for same-gender couples in a parish that does not allow such blessings?** The rector may refer them to clergy licensed to serve in the Diocese of Texas who are willing to do such blessings.
14. **What preparation does a same-gender couple have to receive?** It is the bishop's expectation that like premarital guidance offered by our clergy the same expectation of guidance will be offered to those same-gender couples seeking a blessing.
15. **What guidance will be provided to parishes about how to opt out or opt in?** The Bishop's plan provides specific direction for each clergy person and parish.
16. **Will gay and lesbian clergy in the Diocese of Texas be permitted to have their same-gender relationships blessed?** No, in the Diocese of Texas we have Canon 43, which keeps the diocese from allowing clergy in same-gender partnerships to be deployed as priests-in-charge in the diocese.
17. **What happens if the clergy and vestry in a parish are not on the same page?** Nothing happens within the parish and sanctuary. The Bishop's plan is one that seeks consensus and pastoral harmony between the priest, vestry leadership, and the congregation.
18. **Can the bylaws be changed so that the deed of a church's property is transferred from the diocese to the parish?** No

19. **What is the legal status of a same-gender couple whose relationship has been blessed in this new rite?** It depends on state law. In Texas, this couple's relationship would currently have no legal status.
20. **Will the Bishop have to approve each blessing?** Yes, as he currently approves all remarriages.
21. **Does each parish have to declare itself?** No, parishes may decide to do nothing at this time, or ever.
22. **Can a rector conduct such services off-site of his/her parish?** Yes, but only with permission of the Bishop in accordance with his plan.