

# Intimate human Relationships

## Resources for Conversation

in the Congregations and Deaneries  
of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont

offered by the

**MOUNTAIN ECHO**

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Editor

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## *Please Note*

The material in this booklet is offered to individuals, congregations, and deaneries of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont as a resource for conversations about intimate human relationships and human sexuality.

With the exception of the Introduction, the Suggested Readings, and Appendices, all material was published originally in the Mountain Echo, the monthly newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont.

The articles in Parts One, Two, Three and Four represent the opinions of their respective authors and are not intended as statements of official policy of the Diocese of Vermont or the Mountain Echo.

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# Introduction

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The lives of nearly all human creatures are characterized by the need for some form of intimate relationship with other humans. The degree to which sexual expression is part of those relationships has always been of concern to social and religious institutions, and anthropologists will verify that societies and religions have responded in a variety of ways throughout human history.

The Episcopal Church has been engaged in conversation, and often debate, about one aspect of human sexuality since the early 1970s—homosexuality. While affirming that persons who are homosexual are children of God, the focus has been on whether “practicing homosexuals” should be eligible for ordination, and on whether the Church should approve a rite for blessing same-gender unions. No consensus has been reached, but successive General Conventions have urged continued dialogue.

Such dialogue has occurred periodically in the Diocese of Vermont at the parish, deanery and diocesan levels. Responding to a resolution of the 1998 Diocesan Convention calling for further discussion, the Mountain Echo in March, 1999, began what became a six-part series of columns on human sexuality.

Passage of the Civil Union Law by the Vermont Legislature in April, 2000, generated intense debate throughout the state and has prompted the Church to respond. Should we find a way to bless these now legal relationships? Is it time for the Church and society to acknowledge that same-gender relationships are—like opposite-gender relationships—about much more than sex? Do we need to look at all intimate relationships in the context of our faith and worship?

This booklet gathers together the original Echo series, recent statements by the Bishop of Vermont printed in the Echo, columns published in the first half of 2000, and some additional resources. It is intended to be one among many resources for conversations about marriage, civil unions, and human sexuality. Another resource is the document prepared following the 1994 General Convention by the Committee for Dialogue on Human

Sexuality, *Continuing the Dialogue: A Pastoral Study Document of the House of Bishops to the church as the Church Considers Issues of Human Sexuality*. It includes a discussion guide and is available for \$2.95 from Forward Movement Publications, 800-543-1813; <[www.forwardmovement.org](http://www.forwardmovement.org)>.

## Guidelines for Conversation

Conversations will be most fruitful if they take the form of dialogue rather than debate. According to Daniel Yankelovich (*The Magic of Dialogue*), the core requirements of dialogue are equality, empathy, and openness.

The goal of dialogue is not to win the day for one’s own point of view but for all participants to grow in understanding of both themselves and others. Such growth can occur if participants:

- speak only for themselves (use “I” statements);
- take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings;
- remember their baptismal vow to respect the dignity of every human being;
- seek and acknowledge common ground;
- honor confidentiality unless permission to share is explicitly given;
- practice “sacred listening” by:
  - listening for God in the experience of others;
  - accepting those experiences as valid for the speakers;
  - searching for strengths in the other’s position
  - avoiding interruptions and argument;
  - avoiding applause or other reactions to speakers.

In small groups, each person who wishes to speak should have an opportunity before anyone speaks again.

Finally, if a particular group of individuals, such as gay and lesbian persons, is to be discussed, be sure there is at least one person of that group (preferably more) present who is willing to share his or her experience.



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## Part One

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## 1999 Series on Human Sexuality

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A resolution of the 1998 Diocesan Convention called for Deanery discussions to study and reflect on a pastoral letter signed by over 180 bishops of the Anglican Communion following the Lambeth Conference. The letter asks “the entire Communion to continue prayerful, respectful conversation on the issue of homosexuality.” The Mountain Echo ran a six-part series intended as a resource for such discussions.

The series received a Polly Bond Award of Excellence in the category of “In Depth Coverage” at the annual meeting of the Episcopal Communicators in March, 2000. The judge said of the series, “You weren’t afraid to explore a controversial issue. It was presented admirably. It explored both sides of this controversial topic. In addition, it was well-written. Excellent job.”

The series follows. The Lambeth resolution on Human Sexuality, the pastoral letter, and two resolutions approved by the 1998 Diocesan Convention are included as appendices at the end of this booklet.

### **Sexuality in the Body of Christ: It’s Time We Talked**

Mountain Echo March 1999

By David A. Lewis

Christ came healing; so should Christ’s Church come healing. Given the strife within the Church over human sexuality, however, it is clear that for Christ’s sake we in the Church must pray and work to heal ourselves.

A majority of the Anglican bishops at the 1998 Lambeth Conference voted in favor a resolution (1) affirming that all baptized, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ, (2) calling all people to minister pastorally and sensitively to everyone irrespective of sexual orientation, and (3)—claiming Scripture in

general as grounds—advising against legitimizing or blessing same sex unions and also advising against ordaining those involved in same gender unions.

Following Lambeth, a dissenting Pastoral Letter from over 180 Anglican bishops, including Vermont’s own Bishop McLeod, expressed the signatories’ pledge to gay and lesbian Anglicans “to reflect, pray, and work for your full inclusion in the life of the Church,” and called all Anglicans “to continue prayerful, respectful conversation on the issue of homosexuality.”

What both groups of Anglican bishops have addressed ought to provoke fundamental questions for the agendas of the prayerful and respectful conversations Bishop McLeod will soon ask us to engage in here in Vermont. After nearly 2000 years of Christianity, how is it that a person’s nature as a sexual being—whether of homosexual or heterosexual orientation—has become a divisive topic in the global Church, and particularly the Anglican Communion? How is our nature as sexual beings related to our having been created “in the image of God”? How can we be sure? What ought we cease doing that we have been accustomed to doing? What ought we begin doing that we have not done before?

### **Allow the Holy Spirit to Lead**

If these questions are distressing, let me suggest that the Holy Spirit often makes us uncomfortable when pointing at what we must work on in order to grow in the sight of God and in the love of Christ. Let me suggest, as well, that it may take many years for a new consensus to emerge, given our skill at resisting the Spirit’s leadership.

New consensus will take work, patience, and always prayer for the community of faith as a whole. Whenever other people’s opinions or criticisms provoke in us emotional reactions, the roots of the conflict usually reach into fundamental unspoken assumptions on both sides. To settle such arguments, or to reach consensus, each party to an argument has to recognize

and acknowledge his or her previously unexamined assumptions and then evaluate their merits. Division only deepens, however, without willingness to rid ourselves of worthless assumptions. To thus “deep clean” our spiritual houses, we will need the blessing and strength of the Holy Spirit. We will have to allow the Spirit to lead.

Just what does each of us assume to be true about human sexuality, and why? While one’s assumptions may be cherished beliefs by which one defines and values one’s self, those same assumptions can and should be evaluated for the effect of the conduct they imply towards others in creation.

What does each of us honestly consider our authority for any knowledge of God? The truth is probably that our assumptions reflect the wide variety of our experiences. Some of us rely on historic teachings of the Church. Some of us rely on literal readings of translated Holy Scripture as universally timeless truth, while others of us rely on Holy Scripture as an inspirational collection of various forms of religious literature produced over many centuries by people whose experiences of God and expressive responses reflect ancient cultures distinctly different from our own. Some of us rely on personal experiences of the Holy Spirit. Some of us rely on philosophical reasoning followed by a decided leap of inexpressible faith. Some of us read Prayer Book collects. Some of us actually listen to sermons.

What does each of us assume is the point of human life? The truth is probably that we have many different assumptions. Some of us assume that God has an orderly, rational plan for everything and that our primary obligation is to live according to the plan. Some of us assume that our primary task is to discern God’s will, to which we should surrender ourselves in devoted obedience. Some of us assume that our primary task is to develop an appreciation of God’s character as the Creator who loves each of us enough to give each of us freedom to choose how, and even whether, each of us shall love God in return.

Talking out these and other assumptions about God, the world, being human, and being a member of Christ’s Living Body is where we must all begin. As Lambeth 1998 showed painfully, the Anglican Communion is not likely to hold together much longer without our willful efforts and the Holy Spirit’s support for the emergence of new theological consensus among

Anglicans everywhere.

In the Diocese of Vermont, our discussions of sexuality may well be strained at first. The discussions will surely become increasingly interesting, though, as they become theology by the people, the “just folks” of faith.

Theology for Anglicans has never been a deposit of systematic religious doctrine, but a creative process of discourse about God. Therefore let us all begin to pray now, even before we officially sit down and talk, that the Spirit-led creativity of Vermont’s Anglican community will begin to heal the divisions within the Church over human sexuality, and indeed among all our brother and sister creatures of God.

*David Lewis is a member of Zion Church, Manchester. He holds a master’s degree from the School of Theology at Claremont and a diploma from the Episcopal Theological School at Claremont.*

## **Arizona Bishop Calls for a More Inclusive Church**

Mountain Echo April 1999

By Robert Reed Shahan

*On Epiphany, 1999, the Rt. Rev. Robert Reed Shahan, Bishop of Arizona, issued an “Epistle” to the people of his diocese on “the topic of being the church called to a more inclusive posture in relation to all of its members.” Bishop Shahan had not expressed during the six years of his episcopate a position on the various issues confronting the Episcopal Church related to human sexuality, but he was led to write “The Epistle” by his experience at the Lambeth Conference. He describes it “as a Gospel teaching from the Bishop and not simply a statement of my position. The Epistle does not represent a change of policy but rather a change of perspective. I have made a commitment to work and speak for a more inclusive church along the lines of the teaching and it is my prayer that the church will become more accepting and supportive of all of its members.”*

*A portion of Bishop Shahan’s Epistle follows on the next page. It was printed in the Mountain Echo with his permission*

### **The variety of perspectives**

I have never quite understood why the issue of homosexuality and related matters is of such concern to certain people. It sometimes seems as if one's own salvation is only possible by keeping the church safe from people who differ from us in this way. It cannot be a reverence for Scripture because that reverence is very selective indeed.

If that were not the case, we would all be tithing and the church would be so involved in missionary activity that we would not have the time to argue about matters of sexual preference. If that were not the case, we would be living in observance of the code of Leviticus which is filled with all kinds of things such as the prohibition against lending money at interest not to mention all manner of harsh penalties, including death by stoning, for any number of offenses.

The list of scriptural problem areas goes on to include a teaching on divorce that most find nonsensical today and various prohibitions against women such as speaking in church, braiding their hair and wearing gold, pearls or expensive clothes.

The scene at the Lambeth Conference on August 5, 1998, where a bishop from Sudan likened any homosexual expression to bestiality and pedophilia and received great applause, was also the scene where an American bishop made a somewhat sympathetic reference to homosexuals in his diocese and was hissed and booed.

This is not about Scripture. It is not about holiness. It is not about order. It is not about obedience. It is about politics. The politics have come from both sides of the question and both have made reasonable conversation difficult. I have had about enough of it.

The church in many parts of Central Africa and other regions is as dogmatic as the Moslem culture with which they collide in the "two-thirds world." It is not an attractive sight. It is a scene where they want to condemn homosexuality quite soundly while turning a blind eye to the instances of polygamy, tribalism, genocide and even female mutilation in their own culture.

I tire of the righteousness that is not of God. I tire of a proclamation that is harsh, judgmental and calls forth that same kind

of judgmental posture from those who disagree. It creates its own environment in which there is not love, mercy, acceptance, hope, grace, or holiness.

I call the Episcopal Church in Arizona to a higher road. While I still remain in support of order and obedience within the church, I will, when given the opportunity, speak and vote in favor of a more inclusive community that more closely reflects what this servant of God believes to be the Gospel teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ.

### **The ordination of persons**

I will seek to move the church to ordain and to call forth those among us whom we deem to be healthy without regard to sexual orientation or identity. This decision is not mine alone, but it is shared with members of congregations, vestries, clergy, the Commission on Ministry, the Standing Committee, representatives of the mental health and physical health community, as well as the rest of the church speaking through the General Convention.

I will not act alone or precipitously, but I also will not allow the wholesale condemnation of homosexuality to go unchallenged in Arizona. Jesus did not call groups of people. He did not say we need fishermen. He did not say we need tax collectors. He did not say we need farmers. On the contrary he said: "Peter, James, John, Matthew. Come. Follow me." He called people by name and not by any other category of identity.

### **The Blessing of same-sex relationships**

Regarding the marriage of same sex persons I still stand by what I said in the interview before being elected Bishop of this diocese. I do not believe that is possible. This is not to say that same sex persons cannot live in committed relationships which are a blessing to both persons. I know and have known many such persons who are in long term relationships. I just believe that "marriage" is not the right symbol of blessing for them. I, along with others, will be thinking and praying about what might be an appropriate symbol. We should not refuse to bless a relationship of monogamous love and lifelong commitment in a church that blesses animals, boats, cars, buildings, candles, pieces of cloth and basically "anything whatsoever" as it says in the Manual for Priests. While we are not yet in a position to

make the pronouncement in a unified way, I tell you that the blessing already resides with those who would seek it. I am not authorizing or changing anything here. That will be done by the church in its wisdom acting in convention. One of the ironies of life is that the church is the community of blessing. We are in the world to provide and proclaim blessing. We are not here to withhold blessing. It is, after all, God who blesses everything. We are the people who pronounce the words of blessing, but it is God's blessing. We are one of the ways that God's blessing is made manifest and it is our vocation to seek opportunities to bless.

It is clear to me that while marriage is a sacramental expression for males and females, there can be a way to bless those who wish to have a relationship set apart in holiness. Some kind of covenant is appropriate and I can see this applying to many relationships. You must remember that we are talking about responding only to those persons who come to the church asking for God's blessing to be pronounced upon a relationship.

The irony here is that we do weddings regularly where the couple involved want to be married, but the thought of seeking God's blessing on the relationship has never occurred to them or their wedding consultant. For many, the church is merely the site where the wedding takes place. We are called to be a more serious place of blessing. In fact, I often think that the church would be better off if we were out of the wedding business entirely and only did blessings for those who particularly desired them after they were married in a civil ceremony. It would give more integrity to our blessings.

## **Differing Definitions Underlie Sexuality Debate**

*Mountain Echo* May 1999

By Anne Clarke Brown

The issue of homosexuality has become a divisive one for the church, because it brings to the surface deep divisions on other fundamental questions such as how Scripture is interpreted and understood to have authority in our lives, understand-

ings of "human nature," and the place of sexuality in human relationships.

Prior to the Lambeth Conference two bishops on opposite sides of the issue (John Shelby Spong of Newark and Peter John Lee of Christ the King, South Africa) engaged in conversation to discover those areas in which agreement could be found and those in which agreement seemed impossible. The resulting paper, "A Catechesis on Homosexuality," asks the Anglican Communion to "treat those with whom we disagree with dignity, to recognize as legitimate the competing and seemingly irreconcilable points of view that divide us, to hold them in a dynamic tension, and to commit ourselves to live prayerfully into the solutions, confident that the God we serve will in time lead us all into God's truth."

Spong and Lee write, "Underneath the debate, which is posed in biblical, moral and theological terms, we believe is a disagreement in the definition of homosexuality." The most basic aspect of this disagreement is the belief by one group that homosexuality is defined by what people do, by a choice of lifestyle, and the belief by an opposing group that homosexuality is a part of who one is.

For the first group, "homosexuality is an evil activity chosen by morally depraved or mentally ill people and condemned by God, scripture and tradition as sinful.... Given this definition, adherents would regard any attempt at accommodation of gay and lesbian people on the part of anyone in the Church as a violation of the will of God and as representative of the abandonment of Christian principles."

The second group "are those Christians who have become convinced by insights from the field of modern science that a homosexual orientation is a natural and normal, albeit minority, aspect of the human sexual experience, that it is not something one chooses, or is conditioned into, but something one is. These members of our church hold that sexuality is morally neutral and that both homosexuality and heterosexuality can be lived out either destructively or in life-affirming ways. The position of the Church, they argue, should be to oppose all destructive uses of the gift of human sexuality and to support those sexual expressions that issue in life and wholeness for the people involved. That would be their attitude whether they were talking

about heterosexual persons or homosexual persons.”

Because of their different basic assumptions, these groups often seem to be talking past or at each other rather than engaging in dialogue. Our challenge is to find avenues of faithful communication.

*Anne Clarke Brown is editor of the Mountain Echo, a Deputy to General Convention, and senior warden at Church of Our Saviour, Killington. She has completed all work but the dissertation toward a Th.D. in Anglican Studies from the General Theological Seminary. She teaches the Theology portion of the Diocesan Study Program.*

### **“Where we begin will often determine where we end up”**

Mountain Echo June 1999

By Anne Clarke Brown

The last column in this series outlined two definitions of homosexuality described by Bishops John Spong of Newark and Peter John Lee of South Africa in their “Catechesis on Homosexuality” prepared for the Lambeth Conference. These are definitions used by those on the polar opposites of the discussion of human sexuality. Because of their different basic assumptions, these groups often seem to be talking past or at each other rather than engaging in dialogue.

Spong and Lee maintain that compromise between those whose attitudes are set on one side or the other is neither possible nor a proper way to proceed in reaching moral conclusions. They therefore offer a two-step proposal whereby “members of this Church might walk together into the future without requiring those who hold diametrically opposed convictions to feel that they are being asked or driven to sacrifice either their convictions or their understanding of the Gospel.”

The first step is to discover “those areas in which both sides can find substantial agreement,” and the second is to describe accurately the issues of division. Spong and Lee, themselves representatives of opposing views, were able to agree in three areas:

(1) “We believe that homosexual people are God’s children who with entire human family share in God’s love and they must therefore be treated with fairness, justice and equality before the law.... We also deplore those times when the rhetoric of Christians has suggested that destructive and degenerate behavior, which all of us would condemn, is the standard behavior of all homosexual people.”

(2) “We stand together in upholding the sacredness of marriage and the importance of the family unit in every society. We recognize that sexuality is an aspect of our humanity that can give both life and death to individual persons.”

(3) “We believe that...any sexual activity that is predatory and unwelcome, any pattern of sexual behavior that seeks to impose upon a weaker person the will of a stronger person is wrong... We share that conviction whether that sexual activity is the behavior of heterosexual or homosexual persons.”

In the following three areas, the bishops could not agree:

(1) The blessing of same sex couples.

(2) Ordaining to the priesthood gay/lesbian people who live in faithful, monogamous relationships.

(3) Views on the use and authority of Holy Scripture.

Bishops Spong and Lee proposed that Lambeth pass resolutions only on the areas of agreement and “commend the areas of disagreement to an international panel to be set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury, consisting of articulate leaders of the two sides and the spectrum in between.”

As we now know, the Lambeth Conference did not follow the recommendation of Bishops Spong and Lee. By a substantial majority, the bishops chose to declare “homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture,” and to state that the Conference “cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same-sex unions, nor the ordination of those involved in such unions.”

Is that the last word from the bishops of the Anglican Communion? Even Archbishop Carey, who holds a clearly conservative view, says that is unlikely. A great many people have not come to firm conclusions but are seeking to discern a faithful response. Those who have made up their minds need to find avenues of faithful communication. Where to begin?

I believe Spong and Lee’s articulation of the divergent definitions of issues and of the areas of both agreement and

disagreement provides a useful focus. They concluded, “Both sides need to seek to enter the other’s world, to understand the other’s fear and to share in their suffering as redemptive agents of the Incarnate One, who came to us long before we deserved that gracious gift.”

As a way of entering the world of another, there is no substitute for a careful examination by each of us of our own assumptions. Where we begin will often determine where we end up. We can first of all consider our assumptions about our own sexuality. Is it an integral part of who we are as embodied persons? Is it a gift? Is it something to be kept under control? Is it frightening? Do we hold those assumptions because they are part of the cultural atmosphere in which we grew up, or because we have spent time in reflecting with care on our own experiences?

Most gay and lesbian persons have had to engage in very serious personal reflection on these questions in order to navigate their way through a largely unreflective culture that views them as alien. To focus our discussions entirely on the so-called issue—or “problem”—of homosexuality as if it is only about “others” is to continue that alienating process. We all have work to do, and I believe much to gain from a deeper understanding of sexuality in human relationships.

## Marriage, the Church, and Same-Sex Relationships

Mountain Echo July/August 1999

By Anne Clarke Brown

In April of this year, every postal customer in the State of Vermont received a mailing titled, “An Open Letter from Hawai’i’s Citizens to Vermont’s Citizens.” The letter, actually mailed by a group in Ohio, and referring readers to a Vermont group called “Take It to the People,” expressed concern that Vermont might legalize marriage between persons of the same sex and upheld the belief that, “traditional marriage, between one man and one woman, richly benefits our society.”

The issue of a liturgical rite for the blessing of same-sex couples has been before the Episcopal Church for several years.

It entered into the debates at the Lambeth Conference and is likely to come before the General Convention in 2000. What are the real issues, and what is at stake? How is it related to the legal issue of civil marriage?

In the United States, clergy are authorized to act as agents of the state when they perform a marriage rite, so the legal and religious elements of marriage are brought together in a single event. In the Episcopal Church, as in the Roman Catholic Church, marriage is considered a sacrament—“an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (BCP, 857)—but prior to the year 1215, marriage was primarily a civil affair, a means of regulating inheritance and the transfer of property.

### Civil Marriage

Today, couples can marry without involving the church, and laws governing civil marriage still focus on questions of property and inheritance. In addition, a great many regulations in other areas—insurance, child custody, taxes, hospital visitation rights, etc.—are tied to the marital status of a couple. These are the practical concerns leading many gay and lesbian couples to want the right to marry.

Some, including the writers of the letter from Hawai’i, see this desire as a threat to traditional marriage and “family values.” But *New Republic* editor and author, Andrew Sullivan, in testimony before a Congressional committee considering the “Defense of Marriage Act” in 1996, said, “Like anybody else, we do not seek to destroy marriage; we seek to strengthen it. We do not seek equality in marriage because we despise the institution of marriage, but because we believe in it and cherish it and want to support it.

“People ask us why we want marriage, but the answer is obvious. It is the same reason that anyone would want marriage. After the crushes and passions of adolescence, some of us are lucky enough to meet the person we truly love. And we want to commit to that person in front of our family and country for the rest of our lives. It’s the most natural, the most simple, the most human instinct in the world....

“As many conservative thinkers have noted, and I have argued in many places, this is an essentially conservative measure. It seeks to promote stability, responsibility, and the disciplines of family life among people who have been historically

cast aside to the margins of our society. What could be a more conservative project than that? Why indeed would any conservative seek to oppose those very family values for gay people that he or she supports for everybody else?"

### **Marriage in the Church**

Many countries maintain a distinction between civil marriage and the rites of the church by requiring a separate civil ceremony. The couple may begin their wedding at the town hall and then process to the church. Some in the church are questioning whether this might not be a more appropriate pattern for us, because the sacrament of holy matrimony is about something quite different than the regulation of property rights.

As the liturgical tradition of marriage has evolved, its focus is no longer on procreation and inheritance, but on fidelity, or faithfulness. The role of the church is that of witness, celebrating, affirming, and blessing a couple's covenant of love and fidelity. That couple has traditionally been a man and a woman.

### **Same-Sex Blessings**

Gay and lesbian couples now are asking why they should not be able to come to their faith communities for similar celebration, affirmation, and blessing of their promises of faithfulness. Why, they ask, should their relationships, their desire to live up to the same norms of love and fidelity as heterosexual couples, be excluded from the church's blessing?

Congregations and clergy in many dioceses of the Episcopal Church have responded by making some form of liturgical rite available to offer public support and witness to the relationships of gay and lesbian members.

There are no easy answers, but some questions to consider as we discuss these issues include: Should the state continue to restrict civil marriage to heterosexual couples? Should the church, in the words of Bishop Bennett Sims, "get out of the marriage business," and focus on blessing? Do we need to re-think marriage? Is what is blessed in marriage something that is exclusive to heterosexual couples? Should the church develop a separate liturgical rite for gay and lesbian couples? Should a single rite be created that can be used by all couples?

## **Is the Bible Clear About Homosexuality?**

Mountain Echo October 1999

By John C. Morris

In our local newspaper here in southern Vermont, we have had a recent flurry of letters to the editor which have tried to use the Bible to condemn homosexuality. These letter-writers trumpet their opinion that "the Bible is clear about homosexuality." For several reasons, I am saddened when this happens.

First, I would ask these writers if any of the Biblical authors would have understood the idea that two people of the same gender could be called by God to live together in a committed, faithful, loving relationship. Would the author of Leviticus have had any notion that two men could have as their God-given nature to be "homosexual" (a word that did not even come into our language until the 19th century)? Would St. Paul have understood that two women could indeed make a lifetime commitment to each other and live with fidelity and mutuality in a healthy and holy relationship? In each case, I think the answer is "No." To ask these authors questions based on our modern understanding of human sexuality would be like asking them what they think about the Interstate Highway system, air conditioning, or in vitro fertilization. They just wouldn't understand the question.

Second, the few verses in Scripture which do condemn same-gender sexual intercourse are not applicable to the kind of lives to which gays and lesbians find themselves called today. Consider the three main places in Scripture that are consulted when the topic of homosexuality is discussed:

(1) The old story of Sodom and Gomorrah is certainly about sinful behavior, but we must ask: What is the sin that is being condemned? Is it pride (which is how the authors of Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom analyze it)? Is it neglect of the poor and needy (which is how Ezekiel analyzed it)? Is it lack of hospitality (which is how Jesus analyzed it—see Matthew 10:14-15 and Luke 10:10-12)? If one does want to focus on the specific sexual acts committed by the people of Sodom, then it seems clear that the sin is that of gang rape, which we all can agree is abominable. In no way can we see the "sin of Sodom" as having anything to do with the experience of two people of the same

gender living as longtime companions in a loving relationship.

(2) The oft-quoted passages from Leviticus 18 and 20 reflect that author's obsession with ritual purity and moral behavior for Jewish people after the Exile. In attempting to help create and maintain a strong community, the author wants to be sure everything and everyone are in their "proper place." With our modern understanding that human sexuality includes people whose nature is to be in loving relationships with a person of the same gender, isn't it appropriate to use the Levitical concern and say that for gays and lesbians, their "proper place" is to be in committed relationships with people of the same gender? I am also very intrigued by the scholarly suggestion that Leviticus 18 and 20 are "attempts to enforce incest taboos for households consisting of an extended range of members beyond the unit of a married couple and their children" (p. 265 in *Long Ago God Spoke*, by William L. Holladay). If these Levitical verses are about incest, then we can all agree that incest is abominable, but that does not have anything to do with honorable gay and lesbian relationships.

(3) A few passages from Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians are usually used by people who suggest that "the Bible is clear about homosexuality," but again we have to ask if it is appropriate to think that Paul is condemning behavior that we call homosexuality. Is it not more likely that Paul is condemning the Graeco-Roman practice of older men and women seeking sexual pleasure from younger boys and girls. (Today we would call this "pederasty" and indeed it is abominable.) Paul is critical of this behavior because it goes against these men's and women's nature. If Paul had understood the notion that some people are born with a "homosexual nature," then would he not criticize them if they try to go against their nature and behave as heterosexuals (which is what many of the aforementioned letter-writers recommend)?

When writers cite these particular passages of Scripture to bolster their opinions about homosexuality, isn't it striking that they do not cite any passages from the Gospels? Jesus is very critical of Sodom-like inhospitality (see references mentioned above) and he does quote from the Book of Leviticus, but he does not quote from Leviticus 18 or 20. Instead, he cites Leviticus 19:8 ("Love your neighbor as yourself.") and then

broadens the definition of "neighbor" to include people who were rejected by the religious leaders of the time. How should we interpret Jesus' silence about the topics being discussed in this essay? If he urges acceptance and respect for those different from us, why do we insist on condemning them?

Finally, in the sadness I feel about the way that gays and lesbians are treated in church and society today, I find it interesting that most of the letter-writers who have been published recently in our local newspaper buttress their opinions by quoting verses from the King James Bible. Do any of these letter writers see any irony in the fact that King James himself, according to some scholars, was indeed "homosexual" (even though that word was not available in the 17th century to describe his "nature")?

According to my analysis, the Bible is not at all "clear about homosexuality." And neither is it clear about traveling on Interstate highways, cooling our rooms with air conditioning, or a woman giving birth to a child conceived in a dish. When it comes to these and many other human situations, we must rely on God's continuing revelation, mediated through Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, in order to understand what we are called by God to do. What the Bible is clear about is that we are called to honor God's creation, which is diverse and mysterious and often not as neat and tidy as we would like it to be, and we are called to live in loving relationships with our neighbors, defined by Jesus as including those who are different from us. Therefore, I must ask those who condemn committed and faithful gay and lesbian relationships, what is the basis for your condemnation? Why is this love not recognized as being part of God's wonderful creation and worthy of everyone's respect and support?

[Part of this column was printed as a Letter to the Editor in *The Living Church*, August 29, 1999, page 18.]

*The Rev. John C. Morris recently retired as Vicar of St. Mary's-in-the-Mountains, Wilmington, and is currently Interim Rector at St. Luke's, Chester. He teaches the Scripture portion of the Diocesan Study Program.*

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## Part Two      Statements by Bishops Mary Adelia McLeod and Thomas C. Ely

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The Rt. Rev. Mary Adelia McLeod, who retired as Bishop of Vermont at the end of 2000, was active in the statewide discussion leading up to the passage of the civil union law. Printed below are: her bishop's column from the February 2000 Mountain Echo, and, from the March 2000 Mountain Echo, a letter to the Diocese responding to those who commented on her column, and her testimony before the House Judiciary Committee on behalf of efforts to extend marriage benefits to gay and lesbian couples.

The Rt. Rev. Thomas Clarke Ely was consecrated Tenth Bishop of Vermont in April 2001. Printed here are his Mountain Echo column (July/August 2003), "Looking Toward General Convention," in which he announced his intention to appoint a Task Force on the Blessing of Persons Living in Same-Gender Relationships; excerpts from his Echo column (September 2003, "Reflections on General Convention," and his response to the October 2003 statement of the primates of the Anglican Communion [See Appendix F], printed in the November 2003 Mountain Echo.

### **"Let the Church be the first to issue an Emancipation Proclamation"**

Mountain Echo February 2000

By the Right Reverend Mary Adelia McLeod  
Bishop of Vermont

### **The true purpose of the union of two people**

The union of two human beings in mind, body and heart is one of God's greatest gifts. Heterosexual and homosexual people are equally capable of entering into life-long unions of love, mutual support and fidelity. In the marriage vows in The Book of Common Prayer, two people promise to "...love, honor, and

be faithful to each other for as long as they both shall live." The Prayer Book defines marriage as intended for: "...mutual joy, help and comfort given to one another in prosperity and adversity; and *when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture...*" Contrary to what is often thought, the purpose of the union of two people is not procreation. The true purpose of the union is for love and mutual support. Children blessing a union may or may not be "*God's will*" for the couple.

It is no secret among Vermont Episcopalians that I believe homosexual persons choosing to live together in a life-long union are not committing a sin. I believe some persons are born homosexual and are not made/chosen as a result of trauma, rebellion, psychological difficulties or for any other reason. God creates diversity in human beings. God creates many skin colors, left and right handed people, tall and short, blue and brown eyed, brilliant and average, disabled and able bodied, sighted and non-sighted, hearing and non-hearing, extroverts and introverts, homosexual and heterosexual. God also creates within us the urge to seek mates with whom to walk through-out our lives. God's great gift of love and expressing that love cannot and should not be denied for those among us who happen to be homosexual.

### **Expanding the definition: the Emancipation Proclamation**

The Anglican tradition understands marriage as the life-long union between a man and a woman. I have no quarrel with that understanding, but suggest the Church might consider expanding what we mean or may want to mean by the union of two human beings committed to each other in a life-long relationship. The Supreme Court of Vermont directed the State legislature to study the same question. Should not the Church do the same?

If we appreciate history and precedent, we need not look very far. Not so long ago in our country, slaves could not obtain licenses to marry, as their white owners certainly were required to do. Nor would the Anglican Church permit slaves to marry.

In essence, slaves were not allowed to marry. However, slaves committed to one another liturgically celebrated their relationship by “jumping the broom” at a ceremony in the slave quarters. It is repugnant to note that the expression of love within the union was considered beneficial rather than sinful because the birth of children was lucrative for the slave owner. The unions were tacitly recognized by the slave owners, though not by the State or Church. It was not until after the Emancipation Proclamation that African Americans were permitted to form unions just as any other American citizens.

It is time for Christians to issue our Emancipation Proclamation for our homosexual sisters and brothers. We must emancipate them from the “Catch 22” that traps Christians who are homosexual. The “catch” is that even though they love the Lord and each other, at this time they cannot receive God’s blessing from their Church.

### **Separating the State from the Church in marriage**

What exactly is the role of the Church in the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage? In Sacramental Theology there are four signs of a Sacrament. By that is meant, four elements must be present in order for a Sacrament to be valid. The four signs are: Proper Intent, Proper Person, Proper Minister and Proper Matter.

For instance, in the Sacrament of Baptism, the Proper Person is the Candidate for baptism; the Proper Matter is water; the Proper Minister is any baptized person; and the Proper Intent is to incorporate the person into the Body of Christ.

In marriage, the Proper Person(s), the couple; Proper Minister, again the couple; Proper Intent is to unite two people who are committing their lives to each other for as long as they both shall live; the Proper Matter is the symbolic ring(s) representing the commitment of mind, body and heart. The role the priest plays in the union of two people is conveying God’s blessing on the union. People come to the church to have their union blessed, the priest does not “marry” the couple. One might say the priest prompts the marriage vows as they are spoken by the couple, but a priest is not necessary for the vows. The priest is necessary to convey God’s blessing on the union.

In our country, as an ordained person, I act as an agent of the State at the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage. In European countries, priests are not agents of the State. When my

niece married in France, she and her fiancé went to a municipal building to be married by an officer of the State. The following day, she had a lovely wedding at the American Cathedral in Paris for the Celebration and Blessing of a civil marriage. There is such a service in the Book of Common Prayer.

### **Clergy should be agents of God and not the State**

If we speak of a priest’s role as an agent of the State in joining two people together then we must also consider the divorce of two people. The State is the sole legal agent for the dissolution of the union. The Church does not act as a State agent in that action. If the Church is to be an agent of the State in the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, then for me, the Church should also act as an agent of the State in the dissolution of the union and have requirements for that action just as the Church has requirements for uniting two people. Perhaps divorce would not be as rampant if the Church were involved in both actions.

I would like to see some consistency in the action of the Church concerning unions. The Church should decide if it wishes to be an agent of the State in the joining and dissolution of the union of two people. If the State will not relinquish its sole right to be involved in divorce, then the Church should consider relinquishing its role as an agent of the State in joining two people together. However, I strongly believe Christians should still come to the Church for the Celebration and Blessing of the union. The clergy of our Church should be agents of God’s blessing and not agents of the State.

### **Do not deny God’s blessing to homosexuals**

Please, read carefully and understand that I am not saying people entering a union do not need the Church to participate in that union. Every Christian couple who love each other and are committed to living together for as long as they both shall live need God’s blessing and also need their commitment to be publicly affirmed and supported by the Christian community. Episcopalians need a priest to convey God’s blessing and need their commitment affirmed within a liturgical context as outlined in the Book of Common Prayer.

I realize I repeat myself, but I cannot say it often enough: God’s great gift of love and the expression of that love cannot and should not be denied to those among us who happen to be

homosexual. Let the Church be the first to issue an Emancipation Proclamation.

When two people promise to "...love, honor, and be faithful to each other for as long as they both shall live," let us also love, honor and be faithful to them.

### **A Letter to the Diocese of Vermont**

Mountain Echo March 2000

The Rt. Rev. Mary Adelia McLeod

My brothers and sisters in Christ:

Thank you for your many thoughtful responses by regular mail, email and phone messages concerning my article in last month's Mountain Echo and press release concerning human sexuality. While I appreciate all comments, I particularly treasure those who disagree with me and have the courage to say so. You gracefully allow me the privilege of responding to your concerns.

Of all the questions and comments I received, the most overriding issue was: Was I speaking personally or for the Church? Please realize that in the article, press releases, and testimony at the state house, I always spoke in the first person and made it clear that the Church has not yet granted permission for the blessing of same-gender relationships.

What I hope happens, perhaps in your deaneries and/or in your parishes, is an open, honest conversation about the issues facing us. All voices need to be heard. The Vermont Legislature is struggling with the Supreme Court decision that same-gender relationships are entitled to all the benefits which flow from marriage. The Legislature's particular task is to name and define the legal means of accomplishing that goal. I believe the Church needs to struggle with the same issue along with the Legislature. For me, the Church needs to be involved in the conversation, both pro and con.

I do not have a lock on the truth concerning our gracious God, nor do I expect or want you to accept what I say, think and believe as your truth about any given issue. I invite you to

struggle, pray, learn, and listen and see what fits best for you as you journey with Christ in your life.

Faithfully,  
Mary Adelia McLeod  
Bishop of Vermont

### **Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee**

Mountain Echo March 2000

The Right Reverend Mary Adelia McLeod

*On February 2, 2000, Bishop McLeod and five other Vermont religious leaders testified before the legislative committee considering how to implement the Supreme Court ruling in Baker V. Vermont. Her statement to the committee follows.*

I applaud and am encouraged by the Vermont Supreme Court's ruling that the State of Vermont must "extend to same-sex couples the common benefits and protections that flow from marriage under Vermont law."

Since its 1976 General Convention, the Episcopal Church has consistently expressed "its conviction that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection of the laws with all other citizens," and it has called upon our society "to see that such protection is provided in actuality." The Vermont Legislature has the opportunity to meet this call by permitting same-sex couples to exercise the responsibilities, and enjoy the benefits and protections, of civil marriage. Such action will serve to strengthen the social fabric and is not a threat to the integrity of traditional marriage.

It is said by some that homosexual marriage will somehow threaten traditional marriage. It must be said that heterosexual couples thus far are not the best examples of life-long unions of love, mutual support, and fidelity. The divorce rate in our country, which undermines family values and traditional marriage, is a heterosexual problem. Many of the issues facing our youth, such as drugs and violence, are products of broken heterosexual homes. The alarming rate of teenage pregnancy is

a heterosexual problem. I believe it is counter productive to hold up heterosexual marriage as the only standard, since we heterosexuals have not lived up to the vows we took to live in life-long unions of love, mutual support and fidelity.

The interests of the state in licensing civil marriage and those of the church in the blessing of a marriage are quite different. The civil rights flowing from marriage primarily concern property, inheritance, and the responsibilities and privileges of couples in matters of privacy, insurance, custody of children, and decision-making about one another's welfare. These are issues faced by both heterosexual and homosexual couples.

The rites of the church offer God's blessing on, and the support of the faith community for, relationships of faithful, loving commitment. The union of two human beings in mind, body and heart is one of God's greatest gifts. Heterosexual and homosexual people are equally capable of entering into life-long unions of love, mutual support and fidelity.

A diversity of opinion may be found among—and within—faith traditions and Christian denominations about homosexuality and whether same-sex couples should be permitted to marry. While many Episcopal clergy feel called to participate in the blessing of same-sex relationships, the Episcopal Church is not of one mind about extending the rites of the church to same-sex couples. It is, however, committed to justice, inclusivity and continued dialogue.

I believe sexual orientation is not a matter of what a person does in a particular sphere of his or her life but a matter of who a person is. Homosexual persons choosing to live together in a life-long union are not committing a sin. God creates diversity in human beings. God also creates within us the urge to seek mates with whom to share our lives. God's great gift of love and the expression of that love cannot, and must not, be denied for those among us who happen to be homosexual.

The struggle for equal rights and benefits under the law has a long and honorable history. This latest chapter holds promise that we are moving toward full inclusion and acceptance of all our brothers and sisters. I pray for us in Vermont and elsewhere to find the peace and understanding I believe God intends for all of us.

## Looking towards the General Convention

Mountain Echo July/August 2003

The Right Reverend Thomas Clark Ely

On July 28<sup>th</sup> Ann and I will leave for Minneapolis to join our diocesan deputation and the other bishops and deputations of the Episcopal Church for the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention. This will be my first General Convention as a bishop. In 2000, I was a deputy from the Diocese of Connecticut. As we head to General Convention, I am mindful of the many important matters that will be before us as we meet around the theme of **Engage God's Mission**. Two matters that directly affect our church's mission and ministry to, with and by gay and lesbian persons have already gained broad attention. I thought it would be helpful to be clear with you about my thinking regarding these matters.

The first is the election of the Reverend Canon Gene Robinson as Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire. By our Episcopal Church Canons, the General Convention must vote its consent to this election before his ordination and consecration can proceed. There are nine other recently elected bishops whose elections must also be confirmed by General Convention. The New Hampshire election has drawn the most attention of these ten, because Gene is living in a committed relationship with his partner, Mark Andrew.

Many of us in Vermont know Gene through his ministry as Executive Secretary for Province One. I have known Gene for over twenty years, since our early days of youth ministry together. More to the point, the people of New Hampshire know Gene and his ministry. After following the same canonical procedures that Vermont did when you elected me to serve as your bishop, the Diocese of New Hampshire elected Gene Robinson to serve as their bishop. I believe Gene will be a fine bishop, and I intend to give my consent to this election. Our Diocesan Council and Standing Committee have both voted and communicated their support of this election and have sent their congratulations and best wishes to our neighbor diocese to the east. I am mindful that not everyone in the Diocese of Vermont will agree with me on this matter, and I welcome conversation with those who hold a different point of view.

The second matter of importance in our engagement of

God's mission among gay and lesbian persons is the church's blessing for those living in faithful, committed same gender relationships. Proposed legislation would authorize the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to draft a liturgy (or liturgies) for the blessing of same gender relationships for inclusion in the Book of Occasional Services. The next General Convention in 2006 would then vote whether to approve the proposed liturgy.

Since all proposed legislation is first referred to committees, it is impossible to say at this point exactly what legislation (if any) will be debated and acted on at General Convention with respect to this matter. None the less there is, and will continue to be, considerable discussion around this topic.

Let me be clear about what I desire in this regard. My deepest longing is that we will find a way through this conversation that is affirming of the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church and of their ministries that are already so much a part of who we are as the Episcopal Church here in the Diocese of Vermont and beyond. That means, among other things, finding a way to offer the Church's blessing upon persons living in committed same gender relationships. From my perspective, there is simply too much at stake for the church not to move forward in this direction. The tension between continuity and innovation will always be part of who we are as God's people on a journey, and now is one of those times when we need to heed and embrace God's word from the prophet Isaiah, "*Behold I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it.*"

My other desire is that the Episcopal Church not experience deeper separation and division as a result of offering pastoral ministry to our gay and lesbian members. The way for that to happen is not to force people to go to a place they are not yet ready to go, but rather to make provision for those who are prepared to move forward to do so with integrity and without fear of reprisal. Perhaps if those who in good faith do not believe the church should move forward in this area of pastoral ministry could "suspend judgement for a season" it would allow the space we need in order to let the Holy Spirit "*lead us into all truth,*" as Jesus promised.

The ministry of gay and lesbian persons, lay and clergy

alike, is significant in our diocese and for that I give thanks. Likewise, it is pastorally important for us to move forward with clarity about the church's blessing of those who wish to be joined in civil unions in our congregations. Therefore, in consultation with the Standing Committee and members of our General Convention Deputation, I am establishing a **Task Force on the Blessing of Persons Living in Same Gender Relationships**. The charge to this Task Force is to advise the Bishop and the Diocese regarding next steps in response to the actions of General Convention regarding the blessing of persons living in same gender relationships. I have asked the Very Reverend Kenneth Poppe, Dean of the Cathedral Church of Saint Paul and President of the Standing Committee, and Anne Clarke Brown, one of our Vermont Lay Deputies to General Convention, to co-chair this Task Force.

I want this Task Force in place prior to General Convention so that they are ready to meet following the convention. If the Minneapolis General Convention decides to move the Church forward in this matter, the Task Force will advise us on how we might do so most appropriately in Vermont. If the convention does not move the Church forward in this matter, then the Task Force will advise us on what direction we might take as a diocese with regard to the pastoral needs of our diocese and its people. Because of the good and effective track record of ministry with and by gay and lesbian persons, I believe the Diocese of Vermont is uniquely poised to offer leadership to the larger church in this matter. I will take an active role in this work of this Task Force.

As we head to General Convention, I ask your continued prayers for our diocesan deputation and me. We are hard at work reading through and digesting the volumes of reports, recommendations and resolutions that will come before us in Minneapolis. Knowing that you are holding us in your prayers means so very much to us.

Faithfully,  
+Thomas

**Reflections on General Convention 2003**

Mountain Echo September 2003

The Right Reverend Thomas Clark Ely

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ

Thank you for all your prayers and expressions of support and concern for me and the entire Vermont contingent at General Convention. It is good to be home! It was a full and lively couple of weeks, and through it all the Holy Spirit was powerfully present in word and in action. Prayer, worship, Bible study and Eucharist were at the center of our community life in Minneapolis and provided the firm foundation and the context for our life and work together.

The news media focused the world's attention on the Episcopal Church, and my assessment is that the world saw us at our best—at least most of the time. I think we may have confused or frustrated the media at times, especially in our willingness to spend significant time in prayer and reflective conversation before acting, but I take that to be a very good thing! Many members of the media did comment on the care and respect with which we treated one another when dealing with difficult matters, as well as on the joy and life that was so present among those gathered in Minneapolis. That was certainly my experience, and I am pleased that it was reported. In his homily on the final day of Convention, the Presiding Bishop dared to name this reality for what it truly is—Love! I agree.

The theme of the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church was Engage God's Mission, and I think we were faithful to that focus. For me, engaging God's mission is our baptismal commission. It is at the heart of what we do and how we live our lives day after day. Our engagement of that mission during General Convention was a significant expression of the way in which members of our church participate in the reconciling mission of God in daily life. This edition of the Mountain Echo provides you with a look into some of the ways in which we approached the ongoing mission of the church. My comments in this column will focus on a few aspects of that mission engagement that are of particular concern and interest to me.

**Questions of full inclusion**

Clearly, most of the media attention at General Convention

was focused on our attempt to define better how our engagement of God's mission would, or would not, embrace the full inclusion of gay men and lesbians in the life and ministry of our church. In the end, we voted consent to the election of the Reverend Canon Gene Robinson as Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire, and we passed a resolution recognizing the reality and legitimacy of the ongoing pastoral support being offered in many parts of our church—including here in Vermont—for gay and lesbian couples who seek God's blessing in their relationships.

While we did not authorize the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop rites for the blessing of same sex relationships, we did commit ourselves to continued prayer, study and discernment on the pastoral care for gay and lesbian persons. I hope you will be part of that ongoing conversation. Some believe these decisions went "too far." Some believe these decisions "did not go far enough," and so we continue to live into the question of what we really mean by The Episcopal Church Welcomes You....

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While most of the conversation during the discussion about the consent process for Bishop-elect Robinson and the various resolutions on blessing the committed relationships of gay and lesbian couples was respectful, it was also my impression that there were some who were less sensitive to the reality of gay and lesbian persons in our midst than others. I was particularly troubled in our deliberations by those who treated gay and lesbian persons more as objects than as persons. An e-mail I received during Convention from a Vermonter reminded me that often in listening to the calls for "unity" in the church, there is a sense that some people are not fully aware of how that call might be heard by gay and lesbian persons as the church's willingness to sacrifice their lives, their ministries and their safety for the sake of "unity," or perhaps more accurately, the appearance of unity.

I was also troubled by those who framed their arguments from the perspective of a biblical literalism or selectivity that I do not think is representative of our Anglican tradition. I fully appreciate the broad range of biblical and theological understanding that is present in the Episcopal Church; however, any

narrow reading of scripture that pits one particular section over against the testimony of the fuller biblical witness is in my mind deficient. Deep, thoughtful, reflective study and conversation about scripture and theology is healthy for our church and is crucial for our common life and our engagement of God's mission.

### Concerns about schism

In light of the decisions reached at General Convention regarding Bishop-elect Robinson and the church's pastoral ministry to and with gay and lesbian couples living in faithful, committed, life-long, monogamous relationships, some have claimed that the Episcopal Church is on the road to schism. Sadly, some appear intent on making this a self-fulfilling prophecy. Clearly, not everyone is in agreement about the decisions we reached in these matters, but we did reach them in the same open, fair and deliberate way that we have reached every other decision of General Convention, including those with which I am not in agreement.

Our polity is such that the Constitution and Canons of our church call us to a high degree of prayerful, participatory decision-making, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the concerns of the larger Anglican Communion, as well as our ecumenical and inter-faith partners, matter, and I know of no one who was not cognizant of those concerns as we deliberated our decisions. In the end, the Episcopal Church, through the authority of General Convention, made important decisions about the mission and ministry of our church. It seems to me essential that we first live into those decisions before any choice is made to live apart from one another as a result of those decisions.

I believe that in the long run those decisions will strengthen the Episcopal Church, in terms of both our mission and our growth. Some disagree. Of course only time will tell, but in the mean time, the church has important evangelism, mission, outreach and justice work to do. It is my firm belief that this baptismal ministry will not be advanced by any of us saying to another, "I have no need of you."

Many of you have heard and read that the Archbishop of Canterbury has asked the 38 Primates of the Anglican Communion to gather for conversation in October, presumably to discuss the concerns some have raised about particular actions of

our General Convention. While this is understandable, I would hope that such an extraordinary (and expensive) meeting of the Primates would concern itself with issues beyond our seeming preoccupation with sex and sexuality. Surely, a worldwide communion can use its resources more effectively to find common ground around a worldwide mission of global reconciliation and offer the hope, promise and substance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to a hurting world. I'll be watching for that!...

\* \* \*

My overall impression of General Convention is that it was a holy time, although not an easy time, for the Episcopal Church. There is much room and need for continued conversation and mutual respect, especially around those issues about which we disagree. On the other hand, thanks to the extensive media coverage, many people were given an opportunity to get to know us better. I suspect many of them may pay us a visit as they travel their spiritual journeys. I trust we will continue to be that welcoming community of faith where God's love is made real in our worship, education, pastoral care and ministries of outreach and social justice. As we engage God's mission with renewed vigor and intention my hope is that the powerful, life-giving and life-saving gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed in all we do and that the joy of our life in the Spirit will draw many others into its tether.

Faithfully,  
+Thomas

## Response to Statement by Anglican Communion Primates of October 16, 2003

[See Appendix Eight for text]

Mountain Echo November 2003

The Right Reverend Thomas Clark Ely

The statement issued by the primates of the Anglican Communion following their October meeting at Lambeth Palace is clearly a product of an honest, prayerful and yet painful dis-

cussion among colleagues of widely divergent points of view who are struggling to remain in faithful communion with one another. I am deeply grateful for their willingness to remain in the struggle.

I find much in their statement that offers hope for our continued fellowship as a communion. The primates affirmed that, “what we hold in common is much greater than that which divides us in proclaiming Good News to the world.” Had this meeting been called to address any of a number of issues of concern to Anglicans other than that of human sexuality, the common ground would indeed be substantial.

Pointing to the bishops’ resolution at the Lambeth Conference of 1998, the primates affirmed not only that “gay and lesbian persons are full members of the body Christ,” but also that the voices and experience of gay and lesbian persons are crucial to the ongoing conversations on human sexuality needed throughout the Communion.

The statement affirms the autonomy of provinces to direct the mission and ministry of the church within the realities of their local contexts. It also acknowledges that the primates may now have a fuller understanding of the democratic nature of the constitutional process of the Episcopal Church. Our polity is quite different than that of most other provinces in the Communion, where bishops are not elected by members of both the lay and clerical orders but are appointed by other bishops.

I also, however, am concerned about some elements of the statement. Perhaps most troubling for me is the expression of fear that “the fabric of our Communion” will be torn apart because some are leading in new directions. The Anglican Com-

munion has historically been strong because it is woven together of a variety of theological, liturgical and cultural threads. It embodies a capacity to come together in a communion of difference, to respect one another’s dignity while acknowledging variations in context, in practice, in governance and even in belief. Each thread contributes to the overall strength of the fabric, perhaps most especially those threads that stand out because of their rarity or even their newness. I hope this characteristic will continue to enrich the Anglican Communion.

The fabric has been strained before, most recently over the decision by some provinces to include women in all orders of ministry. Other provinces—and even some dioceses in our own Episcopal Church—have not taken this step. Though there are now bishops who are women, bishops whose ministry some provinces do not recognize, these provinces and dioceses have not severed communion. I hope they will conclude that it is not necessary to sever communion because of the consecration of a bishop who is a gay man.

I pray that none among us will say to the other, “I have no need of you.” Schism will come to the Episcopal Church only if some among us choose to leave our heritage behind and deny the integrity of who we are as Anglicans and what we offer as our witness in the larger church and in the world. The primates affirm in their statement that the Anglican Communion is strong and capable of engaging in the “process of prayer, reflection and substantial work” needed in order to remain an effective worldwide voice for the reconciling mission of Jesus Christ. That mission is primary, and it needs all of our energy. Let’s get on with it.

## Part Three

## Marriage and Civil Unions

### Ask Sr. Bible Person

Mountain Echo April 2000

**Note:** In last month's *Mountain Echo*, a letter to the editor stated: "I am inclined to 'Ask Sr. Bible Person' where in the Bible God says it's O.K. for a man to marry a man or a woman to marry a woman."

**Response:** I read your letter and I do have a few thoughts about the issue you raised. Let me say first, though, that I think this whole topic is enormously complex and obviously very volatile. I wouldn't want to discourage people from expressing their opinions in letters to the editor, but it seems to me that the most helpful way to approach this topic is by committing ourselves to ongoing personal conversations with people with whom we disagree and for us to listen carefully to the personal stories that lie behind everyone's opinions.

My main response to your letter is to say that on this topic—or any other topic—we should all resist the temptation to look at the Bible as a recipe book. I wish it were possible to go to the Bible and ask, "How does one make a marriage?" in the same way that we ask a recipe book, "How does one make an angel food cake?" But if we look carefully at what the Bible says about marriage, we see that a clear answer to our question just isn't there. What we do find is a record of a wide range of customs, many of which evolved as people's historical and cultural circumstances changed.

For example, look at the first real "marriage" described in Genesis. No, it's not Adam and Eve—the story never describes them as being "married." The first real marriage described in the Bible is between Isaac and Rebekah. If we followed the marriage instructions given in this story in the same way we follow instructions for our angel food cake, then we would send a messenger to our ancestral homeland to find a wife for our son because we would not want our son to marry someone from the people "among whom we live" (Gen. 24:3). That doesn't sound like something most Christians do today.

Neither do most Christians imitate Jacob, who simultaneously had two wives (Leah and Rachel) and two "concubines" (Zilpah and Bilhah), even though God seems to have said that it was O.K. for Jacob to have this marital arrangement. God also seems to have said that the custom of "levirate marriage" was O.K. (Note: This is the custom in which a widow would seek out her husband's brother with whom to conceive more children after her husband died.) That's another recipe that few Christians follow today.

So, I think it is best for us to refrain from looking to the Bible for answers that aren't there, but rather, let's allow the Bible to guide us as we seek the best ways to love God and each other in the 21st century.

*Sr. Bible Person, whose identity is known to the editor, contributes a regular column to the Mountain Echo.*

### Editorial

Mountain Echo April 2000

By Anne Clarke Brown

The Vermont House of Representatives took a courageous step toward full civil rights for gay and lesbian couples when it voted, 76-69, on March 16, to approve H.847. The bill establishes a system of "civil unions," in which same-gender couples may receive the same benefits and protections—and exercise the same legal responsibilities—as legally married heterosexual couples. Rep. Tom Little, Chair of the House Judiciary Committee—and Chancellor of the Diocese—deserves great credit for the care and leadership he displayed in crafting H.847 and shepherding it through the process of public and legislative debate.

Why is this legislation necessary? Gay and lesbian couples are no different from married couples in the love they have for

one another, the kinds of hopes and dreams they share, and the commitment they have for one another's well-being. They are families, both with and without children, and they are our neighbors. But they do not have the assurance that if something happens to one member of a couple, the family will be protected, assurance married couples take for granted. In some ways, those opposed are right: If we acknowledge these families in the law, we will have to stop defining them as "other" and recognize their deep similarities to "normal" families.

What does the legislation mean for religious institutions in Vermont? The summary of H.847 [See Appendix Four] states, "Persons authorized to certify a civil union include judges, justices of the peace and clergy. A religious institution or organization may choose whether to certify a civil union according to their rules, customs or traditions."

Clearly, we must consider whether and how our Episcopal churches will respond. Do we wish to affirm the civil unions of our gay and lesbian members in a manner similar to that in which we affirm marriage? Our tradition has tended to discover our theology in our liturgy—"praying shapes believing." Do we need to develop a liturgy for blessing civil unions? What might it look like? What is the church doing when it "blesses"? Is there something in civil unions worthy of blessing?

There cannot be too much discussion of these questions, and I encourage all congregations and deaneries to join in the conversation.

### **Marriage—For What? For Whom? Three Rivers Deanery Forum Presentations**

The Three Rivers Deanery planned a forum to discuss the implications of the legislation pending before the State Legislature that would establish a legal status for same-gender couples. Scheduled for March 12, then April 9, 2000, the forum was cancelled both times because of inclement weather. The three panelists offered their presentations to the Mountain Echo in the hope that they might contribute to greater understanding—and provide some basis for parish or small group discus-

sions—of the issues of marriage, civil unions and same-gender relationships.

Judge Ernest Gibson addresses the legal dimensions of the Supreme Court's decision in *Baker v. State of Vermont* and the resulting legislation establishing a system of civil unions for same-gender couples.

The Rev. Gunnar Urang offers a "verbal collage" on sexuality and marriage.

Their presentations appeared in the *Mountain Echo*, which went to press while the bill was under consideration in the Senate. The bill was amended and passed by the Senate, and the House passed the amended bill on April 25, 2000. It was signed into law by Governor Howard Dean on April 26.

Anne Clarke Brown reflects on discerning the role of scripture in relation to marriage and civil unions.

### **I. Judge considers court decision and civil unions**

*Mountain Echo* May 2000

By Ernest W. Gibson III

The subject of civil rights for same-sex partnerships is a sensitive one for many people and has become the firestorm of a heated debate.

What I propose to do here is discuss the December decision of the Vermont Supreme Court on this subject; I think there is a misunderstanding in some quarters about what the Court did. I will then take a brief look at the draft bill on civil unions that came out of the House Judiciary Committee. Finally, I'll offer some personal observations of my own on the subject.

### **The Vermont Supreme Court Decision**

About three years ago, three same-sex couples sued their town clerks and the State of Vermont for refusing to issue them marriage licenses. These couples had lived together in committed relationships for periods ranging from four to twenty-five years; two of them had raised children. The trial court eventually dismissed the case on the ground that there was no violation of the statutes or the state Constitution. The couples appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court.

In its opinion the Supreme Court pointed out early on that the case did not turn on a religious or moral debate over same-sex relationships. Rather, the fundamental issue was whether the State of Vermont could legally exclude same-sex couples from the benefits and protections it provides to opposite-sex married couples.

Looking first at the marriage statutes, the Supreme Court found no provision authorizing marriage licenses for same-sex couples and concluded that there was no violation of the statutes by the town clerks in refusing to issue marriage licenses. In its discussion, the Court clearly stated that there is “no doubt that the plain and ordinary meaning of ‘marriage’ is the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife.”

The Court then turned to the Vermont Constitution. It contains the following significant language: “That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people...and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single person, family, or set of persons, who are a part only of that community” [Chap. 1, Art. 7]. This is commonly referred to as the Common Benefits Clause.

The plaintiffs (i.e., the same-sex couples) claim that, by not giving them the same benefits that married couples receive, the statutes treat them differently from such couples and thus violate their right to the “common benefits and protections” guaranteed by the Constitution. The principal argument of the State in opposition to this claim followed the reasoning of the trial court—namely, that the existing statutes serve the State’s interest in promoting the “link between procreation and child rearing.”

In analyzing this argument, the Supreme Court made three points:

(1) Many heterosexuals marry for reasons unrelated to procreation—that is, some never intend to have children, and some are incapable of having children.

(2) A significant number of children today are being raised by same-sex parents, and increasing numbers of children are being conceived by same-sex parents through a variety of assisted-reproductive techniques.

(3) Legislation already on the books authorizes same-sex parents to adopt and raise children, and protects the interests

of same-sex parents and their children whenever such couples end their relationship.

The Court concluded that, to the extent the State’s purpose in issuing marriage licenses is to legitimize children and provide for their security, same-sex couples are in no different situation than heterosexual couples; yet, the statutes treat the two groups differently. Further, the Court noted, the exclusion of same-sex couples from the legal protections afforded married couples exposes the children of same-sex couples to the very risks against which the State seeks to protect other children.

The Court also noted that child-development specialists disagree as to whether opposite-sex couples offer advantages to children that same-sex couples cannot offer, and that state policy is to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Court rejected other suggested problems as speculative.

After considering all the arguments, the Supreme Court concluded unanimously that the State had not shown a valid basis for excluding same-sex couples from the benefits offered married couples. The Court held that the Constitution requires the State to give to same-sex couples the same “benefits and protections” that flow from marriage.

The Court suspended the effect of its decision, however, in order that the Legislature might have an opportunity to consider the matter and adopt appropriate legislation. The Court reserved jurisdiction to act further itself if the Legislature did not act within a reasonable period of time. The Court was not being autocratic nor was it passing the buck. (It has been accused of both!) It did not order the Legislature to do anything. Rather, realizing the potential social impact of its decision and that there were several possible remedies, some of which were beyond its jurisdiction, the Court merely extended an invitation to the Legislature to come up with a viable solution. If the Legislature fails to do so, the Court will then itself decide on an appropriate remedy. But the Court is limited in what it can do. It may have no alternative but to require town clerks to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples—the very remedy many people fear the most. One Justice is already on record as being in favor of this result.

### The pending legislative bill on civil unions

I will touch now on the House Judiciary Committee bill (H. 847) presently under consideration in the Senate. In effect, the bill would give same-sex couples the same benefits and protections as heterosexual couples through a civil-union certification procedure, without calling it marriage. The bill includes a provision that defines “marriage” as the union of one man and one woman as husband and wife.

Another facet of the bill that has received little attention, but demonstrates the degree of thought given the matter by the Judiciary Committee, is a section entitled “Reciprocal Relationships.” The purpose of this section is to enable two blood relatives, who are unable by law to marry or enter into a civil union, to establish a legal relationship that would allow them to receive certain benefits and protections in the field of health. Hospital visitation and medical decision-making are two examples of such benefits.

Under this section, two siblings, or a parent and child, or a grandparent and grandchild, for example, could file a sworn application and obtain a certificate (of reciprocal beneficiaries relationship) from the Commissioner of Health. Either party would have the right to terminate the relationship at any time.

Not many people seem to be aware of this provision of the bill.

### Personal perspective

In conclusion, I’d like to comment briefly on my own personal perspective on the current debate.

As a lifelong Episcopalian and a devotee of the Bible since my youth, it has taken me a long time to accept the idea that homosexuality is not unnatural and is not a deliberate choice a person makes. But mounting evidence indicates that it is a built-in, genetic orientation and that a significant number of the population are born with this innate sexual tendency. If this is true, then perhaps the prohibitions in the Bible against homosexuality need to be reexamined in the same manner that other biblical pronouncements have been. It is certainly conceivable that the prohibitions in Leviticus and 1 Corinthians were based on a false premise—namely, that all people are born “straight.” As the rhetoric continues, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with civil rights here, despite some

protestations to the contrary. The issue is whether one group of people (same-sex couples) is being unlawfully deprived of benefits and protections given by the State to another, similarly situated group (married couples). The resolution of this issue does not depend on religious or moral teachings. To say otherwise is to close one’s eyes to the laws under which we live and are bound.

We have learned a lot in the last 2000 years or so, but we still have a way to go. I think it is important for all of us to become as educated as possible in this unfolding drama, and to proceed with faith and compassion, and not with fear and intolerance.

*The Hon. Ernest W. Gibson III, is a retired Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, former Chancellor of the Diocese of Vermont, and a former Deputy to General Convention. He is a member of Christ Church, Montpelier.*

## II. Sexuality and marriage: a verbal “collage”

Mountain Echo May 2000

By Gunnar Urang

One of the morning program activities often undertaken at our summer Rock Point conferences for kids is collage. We’ve all done collage: Working from a general theme you assemble ads, pictures, words and phrases, letters even, cut out from “dead” magazines and paste them onto posterboard in free-associating arrangements that bring out various issues related to the topic you started with.

Well, this will be something of a verbal version of such a collage—made up of stories, quotations from clippings, questions (from a questionnaire addressed to heterosexuals and passed on to me recently), my own thoughts, and suchlike.

### General Convention Phoenix, Arizona, 1991

The place is hot: 107 degrees some days outside the Convention Center. And the agenda is hot: institutional racism and (more than expected, I think) sexuality. There’s that marching, singing evangelical Church Army group giving out a pamphlet

whose title page includes—with big capitals—the words Fornicator, Adulterer, and Glutton. Do you visualize it? F-A-G: “FAG.” Bad news! Though not quite as bad as the Fred Phelps group picketing us with the message “God Hates Fags” on our way to Sunday worship in Indianapolis in 1994.

My table is “hot” that way too. Why “my table”? For daily Eucharist there at the Phoenix Convention, small groups of us, selected more or less at random, sit around tables to discuss the day’s Gospel at sermon time and to receive Communion together.

Ms. SV, she’s there at the table (“SV” is for Southern Virginia, which she represents as the soul of southern courtesy). Rev. D. is with us—he’s a priest (and adjunct instructor at an evangelical Episcopal seminary). And Mr. H., wearing the pink triangle (hot pink) of Integrity.

Integrity. Founded by Louie Crew in 1976, after he and his partner were asked to withdraw from a parish because of their suspected homosexual lifestyle.

Flash to Integrity Eucharist at the 1994 General Convention in Indianapolis. Tim Eberhardt and I standing together and belting out the A-flat at the end of “Lift every voice and sing!” Louie Crew in the pulpit greeting us straight people with, “Welcome to Samaria!” Retired bishop, Bennett Sims publicly repenting of his opposition to that move by Louie Crew twenty years before in Sims’s diocese of Atlanta.

### Vermont, 1992

Look, there’s resolution A104sa, a product of Phoenix ’91, and one of a series of Convention and House of Bishops’ resolutions on sexuality dating back to 1976. And, carrying through on A104sa, some people participating in a series of discussions in this diocese the next year, 1992. Here names and faces get linked up with the term “homosexuality,” since almost every discussion group includes someone (by design) who actually is lesbian or gay.

In my mind’s eye I catch sight of many straight people I have known who have changed their minds on issues of human sexuality as a result of really getting to know gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ. They had to ask, concerning their formulations of belief and their habitual practices: Do these actually conform to the love and justice required of us as “Jesus

people”? Too many alleged believers are like the economist targeted in a witty remark I read recently: “That’s all very well in practice, young man,” says the expert, “but it’ll never work in theory.”

*[And now, a couple of questions for some of you to consider (from the tongue-in-cheek “Heterosexuality Questionnaire” I threatened you with): When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual? What do you think caused your heterosexuality?]*

### Back to that table in Phoenix

Every day Rev. D. leaves at Offertory. So I confront him one morning, sitting beside him on the bus that ferries us to and fro between Convention Center and our fairly distant resort accommodations, and find out why: It’s because of Mr. H., his pink triangle, and his “lifestyle.” With him he can’t exchange the peace and share the bread and wine!

Well? Doesn’t “the Bible say” ...homosexuality is wrong? And isn’t it “contrary to natural law”? And isn’t the Bible, as Jerry Falwell declares, “infallible,” “dictated by God”? But—was the killer of a gay couple out West right, then, in insisting, “I had to obey God’s law, not man’s law?” And what about the fact that the Bible also OKs slavery, and forbids divorce and remarriage, and tells women to be silent in the church? Words from William Sloane Coffin: Some Christians “use the Bible much as a drunk does a lamppost—more for support than for illumination.”

But it’s different among us more enlightened members of the heterosexual majority—isn’t it? We accept lesbians and gays—right? Well, of course. (I need to acknowledge, by the way, that, after our confrontation, Rev. D. actually did stay through for Communion each day). Of course “we” accept “you.” As long as you stay in the closet. And don’t advocate for what some conservatives call, contemptuously, the “homosexual lobby.” Above all, as long as you don’t invoke the M-word: “marriage.” (Heard at Town Meeting in Athens, VT: We must not “change the word ‘marriage’ to mean something as ill and as foul as same-sex partners.”)

*[More from the questionnaire: The great majority of child molesters (90% plus) are heterosexuals. Do you really consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?]*

### Focus on the table in Phoenix again

It turns out that Mr. H., our 62-year-old Integrity person, is in a long-time committed relationship. Too bad! Lambeth says, a federal “defense of marriage” law says, California voters say, even the General Convention of the Episcopal Church says (officially)—with shameful echoes of pre-Civil Rights Jim Crow days in the South—for marriage, “no gays admitted, straights only.” The liturgical rites of “marriage” (R-I-T-E-S) can be enacted only by a man and a woman. The legal rights of marriage (R-I-G-H-T-S) are only for those who have contracted such a “traditional marriage.”

### And so our conflicts persist

A bishop gets brought up on a presentment for having knowingly ordained a gay man. Conservative elements in our church consecrate two irregular bishops, in protest against the “liberal” tendencies of the mainstream. Our own bishop takes flak for her clear and courageous Pastoral Letter on the issue of same-sex unions.

And our questions multiply concerning this mystery of our sexual being? Why do we gravitate toward vowed, committed relationship? What is a “family”? What is the interface between the Church’s Holy Matrimony and the secular state’s vested interests in protecting, and privileging, married persons? Does one choose to be homosexual? Why would one so choose, given what society does to its lesbians and gays? Or does one simply find, at some point, that this is an essential aspect of one’s identity, one’s very being?

### What should gay couples do?

In which case (in the words of the heading to a recent letter in the Valley News) “What Should Gay Couples Do?” Stay underground—option 1—and live the stereotypical “homosexual lifestyle”? Or—option 2—Try to “get over it”?

*[Question from our questionnaire: There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals, Techniques have been developed to help you change, if you really want to. Have you considered aversion therapy?]*

Or—option 3—Stay gay but remain celibate—whether you have been granted the gift of celibacy or not? Or—option 4—Seek to live out, woman with woman or man with man,

the promises made in the marriage ceremony “to love and to cherish until we are parted by death”? And at this point I recall hearing gay psychologist and Episcopal lay leader John Fortunato say, at a Provincial Convocation some years ago: “We are asking you, the church, to summon us to fidelity.”

### But the story is about Mr. H.

One morning in Phoenix, Mr. H. shows up sporting a beautiful white carnation. Ms. SV, voice all magnolias, says: “May ah ask whah y’all are wearin’ that beautiful flowah?”

Mr. H. replies, “It’s my anniversary.”

“Oh, how long have y’all been married?”

“I’m not able to say that I’m married. I’m homosexual. My partner and I have been together ten years today, but our relationship is not recognized as a marriage. I hope that some day we will be considered married, in the eyes of the church and of society.”

Long pause. How will the soul of southern courtesy handle this? But she’s up to the challenge. “Well,” says Ms. SV, “ahm sure you do.”

### Step back and consider the collage just presented

Do you discern symptoms and symbols of many of the issues of the last twenty-five years in our church, issues having to do with the mystery of our sexuality, the wonder—and pain and blessing—of what the Prayer Book speaks of as “the bond and covenant of marriage,” the mystery of the Holy Spirit’s Kingdom work for justice in human society, and the mystery of the Church’s “struggle and confusion” in seeking to “accomplish [God’s] purposes on earth”?

Do you catch the imperative of understanding and welcoming persons whose sexual orientation is not that of the majority of the populace, and who have therefore been unjustly, painfully, often damagingly marginalized, in society and also in the church?

Do you also sense the opportunity—and the obligation—to examine just as rigorously (from perspectives provided by Scripture and theology and our traditional practices and omissions) what sexuality and marriage and family mean for that heterosexual majority as well? Marriage—for what? for whom?

If we do discern that imperative and that opportunity, we will give heed to the solemn words on this whole matter from (once again) William Sloane Coffin:

“It occurs to me that all Vermonters should take some time out from the clamor of life to become as reflective as possible. Thoughtful conversations need to take place in every family, in every church, temple and mosque, in every field, factory and office.... To be avoided at all costs is the solace of opinion without the pain of thought.”

*The Rev. Gunnar Urang is a retired priest, former Dean of the Diocesan Study Program, and a former Vermont Deputy to General Convention. He is a member of St. Barnabas', Norwich.*

### III. Marriage and civil unions: Discerning the role of Scripture

Mountain Echo June 2000

By Anne Clarke Brown

Same-gender couples are asking both civil society and the churches to do a new thing—to acknowledge that their loving and committed relationships are deserving of the protections of the law and the blessing and support of the religious community. Considering this new thing—social acceptance of same gender couples—does, I believe, require that we revisit marriage. Just what is “traditional marriage” anyway?

Because marriage is so basic to our social system, anything that might appear to threaten its status brings out strong reactions. Some believe Vermont’s Civil Union Law is such a threat, and many reactions to it—both in favor and opposed—claim to have a religious basis.

My aim is not simply to offer my answers to the questions we face—though I will share some of my conclusions—but to offer some ways to approach the questions that are grounded in the Anglican tradition. Six years of seminary study in theology and New Testament gave me great respect for our tradition, one that cannot be pinned down as a set of propositions or system of doctrine. It is more a way of thinking and a way of praying. We can share a method, and we can pray together, while living

in the tension engendered by the fact that the method does not always lead everyone to the same place.

#### Authority of Scripture

One of the most significant questions raised by the issue of same-gender relationships is that of how scripture has authority in discerning God’s desire for our lives. To answer that, we first have to consider what scripture is. Is it the direct word of God transcribed by humans? Or is it revelation from God incorporated in a series of human stories about life in relationship to God? Is it intended to be like a map, providing a set of rules for living? Or is it more like a compass, pointing us in a direction? Are we to interpret it literally, or metaphorically, or both? Should we consider it apart from, or in the context of, its historical settings? Is everything in the Bible of equal weight? If not, how do we decide what takes precedence?

While some hold to a literalist approach, this is not the path taken by the significant theologians of our tradition, beginning in the sixteenth century with Richard Hooker. When Anglicans are confronted with a difficult social or ethical question, we begin with scripture, but unlike much of the reformed tradition for which scripture is the sole authority, we bring the witness of our tradition, as well as our experience and capacity to reason, into the conversation.

We recognize that the Bible is the product of people living in particular periods of history and embedded in particular cultures. Ours is a very different time and a very different culture, so discerning how the Bible might speak to us is a complex process.

Scripture as a whole has authority. Verses out of context do not. Even scripture itself is not consistent. Passages written later interpret—and sometimes contradict—those written earlier. A good example of this is divorce. Looking only at isolated verses, one can find both support and condemnation for divorce. Something other than the texts must guide our discernment.

#### Scripture and human identity

How we understand the scriptural portrayal of the human condition—Are we good? Are we fallen? What is sin?—will point us toward different conclusions about marriage and same-gender relationships. At all times, we should beware of

how we might be reading our own preconceptions into the biblical stories.

The Bible was written by, for, and about people who had a corporate, not an individual, sense of identity. It's hard for us to grasp. Behavior of a first century inhabitant of the near east would be viewed in terms of whether it brought honor or shame to one's family or community. It would not be understood as flowing from a sense of personal identity.

The notion of homosexuality—that is, being drawn to love another of the same gender—or a homosexual identity, would have been totally foreign to the biblical authors. Homosexuality is a late nineteenth century term. Today, it has to do with who one understands oneself to be rather than with what one does. Sexual identity—hetero, homo, or bi-sexual—is only part of an individual's identity, identity which I hope for all of us is something continually growing.

Even though the Bible does not speak directly to twenty-first century notions of individual identity, it can tell us much about being human, both in relation to one another and in relation to God. We are created, say the authors of the first of the two Genesis creation stories, in the image of God, both male and female, blessed by God and called very good. For both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, love of neighbor and love of God are fundamental.

### **Scripture and same-gender relationships**

I am using the term same-gender rather than same-sex or homosexual. I understand sex to refer to our biological being; we are male and female. Gender includes all the socially defined aspects of masculinity and femininity; we are men and women. Beyond biology, gender is not a given but is created by culture; our understanding varies from culture to culture and over time.

Intimate human relationships, including those of gay and lesbian couples, are about much more than sex. They are about whole persons—men and women—loving and caring for one another. So I am consciously avoiding the focus on biological sex as a primary identifier.

The Bible does have seven passages that are thought to be applicable to considerations of same-gender sexual activity (Genesis 2:24; Genesis 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; 1 Corin-

thians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; and Romans 1:18-32). In trying to determine how these passages might be authoritative for us, we might ask the following questions:

- What is the historical context?
- What is the context within the larger text?
- Can we determine the author's purpose?
- What has the tradition said?
- What is different about the present context?
- What do we know about humankind that the biblical authors did not know?

My own analysis leads me to the conclusion that these isolated passages are not adequate guides for our present reality. I invite you to draw your conclusions.

### **Scripture and traditional marriage**

Biblical marriage was about property, offspring, inheritance, and the maintenance of the tribe. Marriages—always between a man and a woman—were arranged between families, and many of the prominent men were married to more than one woman at a time, particularly if the first wife did not bear male children. Women and children were property of men. Love is rarely mentioned in the Bible in connection with marriage.

Weddings do seem to have been celebrated with a banquet, but none of the biblical references to weddings or marriage has any mention of a religious ceremony or even the invocation of a blessing.

Marriage as we understand it today is an institution that has evolved over time. It was not until the middle ages that the church performed marriage ceremonies. Only in recent times has it become common in the West for couples to marry because they “fell in love.” And only in very recent years has the church acknowledged reasons other than procreation for sexual expression and thus for marriage. Our marriage ceremonies still contain elements of the “property exchange” between a father and a husband.

At what point in this long evolution do we find “traditional marriage”? Because the Bible describes the creation of humans as beginning with a male/female pair, should we conclude that this is the only permissible intimate human relationship?

### Call for conversation

Bishop McLeod, the Presiding Bishop, and even the Lambeth conference, have urged us to engage in prayerful conversation about human sexuality. I hope we will do so in this diocese.

The civil union law, I believe, offers us as faithful Christians, a real opportunity to re-examine our intimate relationships: how and why we form them, how we remain faithful to them in changing circumstances, how we support the relationships of those around us, how and why we accord them legal status, and how and why we ask God's blessing on their participants. Where better to do such work than in our parishes and deaneries where our conversations can be grounded in communities committed to "respect the dignity of every human being" and to holy listening?

To focus our conversations only on "the problem of homosexuality," or on sexual behavior, or simply on the civil union law, will be a serious mistake. The question for us as Christians is the question of right relationship, right relationship with one another and with God. All of us seek intimacy. Most of us find it with persons of the opposite gender. Some of us find it with persons of our own gender. But the problems we face are similar; our sexuality is only part of how we live in right intimate relationship. I believe we will find that we all have much in common if we shift the focus from the "other" to all of us. Even so, the "other" should always be explicitly included in the conversation.

## An Open Letter to our General Convention Deputies

Mountain Echo April 2003  
Timothy C. Eberhardt

Dear Colleagues in Christ,

As you prepare to tackle all the issues of the world, the flesh, and the Church at General Convention this summer in Minne-

apolis, I want to urge you to bear special witness to our particular Vermont story with civil unions, and thus to encourage in turn our larger Church to move ahead with the development of liturgical rites for the blessing of same gender unions.

While this is not the place for me to present the many reasons that compel my urging, and while I know there are many who hold different and even opposing convictions to mine, I do however offer my own experience as a priest. Last summer I was graced with the privilege of preparing for and officiating at a civil union with a blessing in church with the Eucharist. I have thus come to know firsthand the blessings of such a state and God sanctioned celebration.

As a matter of fact, it would be a good thing if we introduced a resolution at Convention encouraging all dioceses to petition their governors and state legislators (not to mention their Supreme Courts) nationwide to undergo the same public process of hearings as we experienced here in Vermont prior to the civil union enactment. Talk about "listening for the sacred"! With the leadership of so many like Tom Little, that was a profound witness of political grace that does not get mentioned a lot.

But, above all, yes, we in Vermont have been able to experience these occasions of love for over two years now. And while we have only begun, I, and many others, have been enriched along the way. In my case, interestingly, the non-marriage liturgy used was adapted from one used in Arizona with the theme of "covenant" at its heart. Another liturgy I attended earlier underscored the theme of our common baptism and community. Other themes such as faithfulness or incarnational love could work too, or, indeed, how about creation! Why not put our best liturgical scholars and Biblical imagists to work as a Church?

All the more reason to profess "Hey, world, we Vermonters have something to say about grace at work!" May God bless you in your ministry of service to the Church.

Faithfully yours,  
Timothy C. Eberhardt

*The Rev. Timothy Eberhardt is Rector of St. John's, Randolph and a former Deputy to General Convention.*

## **Blessings: the evolution of a General Convention resolution**

Mountain Echo September 2003

Anne Clarke Brown

All resolutions considered by the General Convention are subject to a careful, public process of deliberation before being sent to the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies for further debate and, ultimately, votes. The evolution of the resolution approved by the 2003 General Convention in Minneapolis addressing the question of blessings for same-gender relationships (C051) offers an excellent glimpse into the legislative process of General Convention.

When bishops and deputies began their work on July 29, four such resolutions were in the hopper: two forwarded by diocesan conventions (California and Michigan); one submitted by a deputy; and one submitted by the Rt. Rev. Stacy Sauls of Lexington. The first three called for the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music to develop a rite for blessing same-gender unions that would be considered by the next General Convention for inclusion in "The Book of Occasional Services." The fourth said no consensus exists on the question, acknowledged a "diversity of pastoral support for homosexual persons," and stated a commitment to avoid a legislative solution.

All resolutions are initially assigned to one of 25 legislative committees, which must hold public hearings. Speakers usually have two minutes to make their case. The Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music set aside a two-hour period on the evening of August 1, to hear testimony. Witnesses signed up in advance to speak either pro or con, and the committee heard alternately from the two groups.

### **Vermonters testify**

Four members of the Vermont Deputation spoke in favor of a liturgical rite for blessing same-gender unions. Lay Deputy Tom Little told of his involvement in the creation of Vermont's civil union law and said, "The civil union law is mostly about families, the gay and lesbian families in Vermont who are faithful and committed enough to shoulder the legal burdens of the law, in order to gain the legal rights and responsibilities that

give them a legal, state-recognized foundation to their families." He concluded that, "these couples ought to have access to an appropriate liturgical response to the reality of their committed relationships."

Bishop Thomas Ely told the committee, "The need for a liturgical rite is both a matter of pastoral urgency and part of a 20/20 mission opportunity for the Diocese of Vermont. We don't all have to be in the same place at the same time around this issue in order to provide the tools that some of us need to move forward in mission. I long for this General Convention to make some provision for moving us forward on this matter, so that I and others in Vermont can minister faithfully, pastorally, justly and with open honesty."

Clergy Deputy Diane Root told about a couple whose civil union she had blessed. After one of them died in an accident, "We were able to minister to her partner in grief," she said, "because we had already shared their joy and honored their love." She concluded, "If we are going to minister to one another, we need to be able to share respect as well as repentance, celebration as well as sorrow, love as well as forgiveness, blessing as well as burial."

Clergy Deputy Thomas Brown, speaking of his recent civil union ceremony, said, "The blessing of our relationship was necessary because our faith communities had already discerned in Tom and me the gifts of commitment and fidelity. The church and all of us need this occasional rite."

### **Substitute resolution emerges**

On Monday, the committee sent a "substitute" for resolution C051 to the House of Bishops, which is the "house of initial action" on matters pertaining to liturgy. The compromise included language from Bishop Sauls' resolution, and it requested rites for inclusion in *Enriching Our Worship*. Unlike the BOS, use of EOW requires approval by a bishop. The resolution affirms Resolution D039 of the Denver Convention that outlined expectations of fidelity and monogamy in relationships, acknowledges a diversity of understanding and "pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us," and, it states, "we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions."

The House of Bishops debated the substitute resolution on August 6, the day after they had voted to consent to the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire. In the course of the debate, supporters of blessings agreed to an amendment removing the provision for the preparation of rites, and the bishops approved the amended resolution by a voice vote described as “overwhelming.”

Resolution C051 went before the House of Deputies the next day. Any changes in language would have meant a return to the House of Bishops, so those in favor supported it without amendment. A special rule of order, whereby deputies had one minute to speak, and those pro and con would speak alternately from microphones on opposite sides of the hall, governed the debate.

Those organizing the “pro” side assigned Lee Crawford, clergy deputy from Vermont, to speak first. She described the blessing of her own civil union with fellow deputy, Anne Brown, and told the House that, “straight couples said hearing our vows made them reconsider their own and strengthened their understanding of them.” She added, “Faith communities such as the one in which my partner and I were blessed are already experiencing the power of witnessing and supporting gay and lesbian couples. These communities are strengthened, not weakened by these services.”

The House of Deputies voted by orders, a process that gives each diocese one clergy and one lay vote. A “yes” vote in either order requires a positive vote by at least three of the four deputies, and a “no” vote at least three. A tie in either order is a “divided” vote and essentially counts as a negative. Of the 108 dioceses voting, 58 lay deputations voted yes, 38 no, and 12 were divided; 62 clergy deputations voted yes, 33 no, and 13 were divided.

### Implications for Vermont

The resolution recognizes that those congregations who are blessing civil unions in Vermont are doing so “within the bounds of our common life” as Episcopalians. Bishop Ely is appointing a task force, with the Very Rev. Ken Poppe and Anne Brown as co-chairs, that will address what direction the diocese might take in terms of continued conversation, policies and rites.

## Suggested Readings

- Alexander, Marilyn Bennett and James Preston. *We Were Baptized Too: Claiming God's Grace for Lesbians and Gays*. Forward by the Rt. Rev. Desmond Tutu. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996.
- Bawer, Bruce. *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- Breidenthal, Thomas. *Christian Households: The Sanctification of Nearness*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997.
- Countryman, L. William. *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988.
- Farley, Margaret A. *Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Gomes, Peter. *Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1996.
- Graff, E.J. *What is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999.
- Hefling, Charles, ed. *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies: Sexuality and the Household of God*. Cambridge: Cowley, 1996.
- Nelson, James B. and Sandra P. Longfellow, eds. *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994.
- Sedgwick, Timothy F. *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Siker, Jeffrey S., ed. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- Sullivan, Andrew. *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.
- Turner, Philip. *Sex, Money, and Power: An Essay in Christian Social Ethics*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1985.
- Wallace, Catherine M. *For Fidelity: How Intimacy and Commitment Enrich Our Lives*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998.
- Wink, Walter. *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

[This is the list of readings provided in the 2000 edition. Additional readings may be found at [www.dioceseofvermont.org/Orgs/TFonBlessings.html](http://www.dioceseofvermont.org/Orgs/TFonBlessings.html).]

## Part Four

## The Anglican Communion

### What is the Anglican Communion?

Mountain Echo January 2004

Thomas Little

In recent conversations around our diocese and at our annual convention, I often heard questions about the “Anglican Communion”—what is it, where did it come from, who is in charge, how does the Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA) fit into it, what can the Anglican Communion “do” in response to the Robinson consecration and other actions taken at the 2003 ECUSA General Convention, and what does it all mean to our diocese and our congregations? In the last twelve months, as Chancellor of the Diocese and a Deputy to General Convention, I have had an opportunity to read fairly extensively about these matters. Though I am not a historian or a scholar of Anglicanism, I would like to offer my thoughts and understandings.

#### Overview

In brief, the Anglican Communion developed during two periods. The first emerged out of 17th century Britain, through its colonization of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Southern Africa, and what became the United States. The second period started in the late 18th century, as missionaries developed Anglican churches throughout most of the rest of the world.

Anglican Churches—those that are in “communion” with the Archbishop of Canterbury—uphold and proclaim the catholic and apostolic faith, based on Holy Scriptures as “interpreted in the light of tradition and reason.” At the most fundamental level, churches in the Anglican Communion are dedicated to proclaiming the Gospel. The “faith and order” of the Communion are manifested in the Book of Common Prayer, the 16th and 17th century Ordinals (the form and manner of making, ordaining and consecrating of bishops, priests and deacons) and in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (adopted by the US House of Bishops in 1886 and then, with minor alterations, at

the 1888 Lambeth Conference). The Quadrilateral affirms four elements as essential to the Church’s faith and order in the quest for Christian unity:

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the revealed Word of God;
2. The Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith;
3. The Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, ministered with the words and elements used by Christ;
4. The Historic Episcopate (bishops making new bishops in succession through prayer and laying-on-of-hands), locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples [See the BCP, pp. 876-878].

#### Origins of the Communion in the U.S.

The American Revolution threw our church’s Anglican connections into confusion until 1789, when two groups of American Anglican/Episcopalians (a “high church” group led by Bishop Samuel Seabury of Connecticut, and a “low church” group led by Bishop William White of Pennsylvania) reconciled among themselves, and with the Church of England. This convention adopted a revised Prayer Book, incorporating elements of the English and Scottish versions, and also established a separate legislative “house” for bishops (who would be elected, not appointed), to join the existing House of Deputies. In 1792, the four bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States consecrated a fifth bishop, setting the practice that has endured ever since. This is the Anglican “context” in which the Vermont Episcopal Church developed.

#### Composition of the Communion

There currently are 38 “provinces” in the Anglican Communion, with a total membership of over 70 million. Each province is an autonomous church with its own internal governance structures, bishops and leading bishop (in some cases a presiding bishop, in others an archbishop, but each known as a primate).

Dioceses, each overseen by a bishop, are the primary organizational and governing units within the provinces.

ECUSA is one of the 38 provinces, and the Most Rev. Frank Griswold is our presiding bishop/primate. Unlike in the Roman Catholic hierarchy, there is no over-arching legal jurisdiction or governance structure among or involving the provinces. This distinguishes the Anglican Communion from its constituent provinces. While a province generally has governance rules for admitting new dioceses, electing bishops, enacting legislation, etc., this is not true of the Anglican Communion.

### **Traditions and Principles of the Communion**

Nonetheless, strong traditions and principles of communion and interdependence are intrinsic to Anglicanism's understanding of itself. These traditions and principles are manifested in canonical or other legal arrangements for mutual recognition of holy orders and participation in sacraments. This allows priests in one province, under certain established conditions (including the consent of a receiving bishop), to become active as priests in another province.

At an international level, these traditions and principles are manifested in what are known as the “instruments” of Anglican unity. As explained below, these instruments are critical to the cohesion of the Communion, but they are not formal, binding governance, legislative or judicial mechanisms. There is no central body that has legal jurisdiction or control over the provinces of the Communion. This lack of binding governance and decision-making structure, together with the diversity of cultures, local church traditions, forms of worship, etc., means that the Anglican Communion exists (and has persisted over the last two hundred-plus years) in the midst of diversity, disagreement, controversy and friction. To quote from the 1988 Lambeth Council report, “authority in the [Anglican] Church works *through* rather than in spite of disagreement.”

The ties that bind the Anglican Communion seem to defy easy classification. The Communion is not like a corporation, or even an unincorporated association. Some have likened it to this country's Articles of Confederation, as opposed to our Constitution, but neither is an accurate description. The Communion is not based on a contract or series of explicit, written agreements. None of these captures the spirit of the relation-

ship, which involves sacramental, spiritual and ecclesiastical elements.

Yet the Communion is not a casual or accidental collection of churches. Although the provinces are autonomous, to paraphrase the Chancellor to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the provinces are subject to reasonably uniform, self-imposed constraints, stemming from their recognition of Holy Scripture, the Creeds, the Councils and certain other common elements of faith and ecclesiastical order.

### **The Four “Instruments” of Unity**

Critical to the provinces' sense of communion is their recognition of, or participation in, four “instruments” of unity:

#### *The Archbishop of Canterbury*

Through a suitably arcane and idiosyncratic Anglo-Anglican process of ecclesiastical and political consultation, nomination by the Prime Minister and consent by the Crown, a cleric (usually a bishop) of the Anglican Communion is made Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop serves as a diocesan bishop, Primate of the Church of England, and leader of the Anglican Communion. The current archbishop, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams, is from the Church of Wales, but his predecessors have been bishops in the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury wields unmatched influence within the Communion, having sole capacity to convene the Lambeth Conferences and the primates' meetings. These are powerful and influential functions, but they do not constitute legal authority over the constituent members of the Communion.

#### *Lambeth Conferences*

Named after the Archbishop of Canterbury's palatial home and meeting rooms, these conferences began in 1887 and are traditionally called by the Archbishop every ten years. Normally, all bishops with jurisdiction in the 38 provinces are invited. The formal resolutions adopted at Lambeth command considerable respect in the provinces, although their authority and influence have no binding legal force on the attending bishops or their dioceses.

#### *Anglican Consultative Council*

This Council was created following a resolution of the Lambeth Conference in 1968. It has voting representatives—laity,

clergy and bishops—from each province. The constitution of the Council was accepted by the general synods or conventions of all the member churches of the Anglican Communion. Membership is symbolic and proof of a province's participation in the Communion. The Council provides the only official Communion-wide forum for the voice of laity and clergy. It has adopted guidelines to assist the Archbishop in determining whether and how to recognize the Communion status of churches seeking admission, but it has no authority to require any action of any province.

#### *Primates' Meeting*

These meetings, the first held in 1979, are convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury to respond to the needs and mission of the Communion. The meetings are not conducted pursuant to any constitution or other governance structure and typically conclude with pastoral letters or “statements” (as in the October 2003 Meeting), not formal resolutions. To the extent that a meeting concludes with a strong consensus on an issue, it can influence the actions of the provincial governing bodies.

#### **Meaning of the Communion for our diocese**

The Anglican Communion acts non-judicially and non-legislatively, in a peculiarly Anglican manner. As a constituent member of ECUSA, the Diocese of Vermont has a powerful spiritual, symbolic and sacramental connection to Anglican dioceses throughout the world through ECUSA's relationship of communion with the See of Canterbury.

A number of provinces and dioceses have expressed their displeasure with the consecration of Bishop Robinson and the General Convention resolution acknowledging the reality of same-gender blessings by declaring themselves to be “out of communion” or in a condition of “impaired communion” with ECUSA—or with dioceses and bishops who approved those actions. Such statements or resolutions of a diocese or province may be evidence of conflict within or around the Communion, but they are not binding on the Communion as a whole. They may actually impair the status of the originating church as much as the status of the church at which they are directed.

#### **Conclusion**

The Anglican Communion is an unwieldy but, over time, a remarkably successful institution for collectively seeking the

mind of Christ and walking throughout the world in His ways. I hope this very brief discussion has been useful in understanding some of what has been written and said in the aftermath of General Convention 2003. Please let the Echo know if you would like to read more about the Anglican Communion (or other “chancellor” topics), and please let me know of any errors or omissions. I want to thank my colleagues in the chancellors' community for their assistance in developing this article.

*Thomas Little is Chancellor of the Diocese of Vermont, a Deputy to General Convention and a member of Trinity Church, Shelburne.*

### **Is there an Anglican tradition?**

**Mountain Echo** February 2004

Anne Clarke Brown

Precipitated by disagreements over issues of human sexuality, the worldwide Anglican Communion, a “family” of 38 autonomous geographical provinces encompassing 161 countries, with over 70 million members, today faces the danger of schism. Tensions over the authority and interpretation of scripture, the authority of bishops and institutions, the ordination of women, and cultural diversity have been simmering for many years, but the combination of the approval by a Canadian diocese of a rite for the blessing of same-gender unions and the consent by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church of an openly gay man as Bishop of New Hampshire, has led to some provinces and dioceses declaring themselves to be out of communion—or in a state of impaired communion—with other provinces, dioceses, and bishops.

[Tom Little's article, “What is the Anglican Communion?” in the January Mountain Echo ably describes the formation of the Communion, its nature, and its importance as a force for Christian unity.]

Within the Episcopal Church, groups calling themselves “traditionalists” have either sought affiliation with other provinces (the Anglican Mission in America) or to organize “like-minded” dioceses and congregations to change the direction of

the church from within. The American Anglican Council, one of the latter, seems also to be exploring ways to take the place of the Episcopal Church as the recognized Anglican presence in the US.

While dissenting groups have varied concerns and agendas, a common theme is the claim to represent *the* Anglican tradition, which in turn is said to adhere to a traditional understanding of the “clear meaning of Scripture.” This claim does, in my opinion, a tremendous disservice to the historic genius of Anglicanism (though the term only came into usage in the 1830s).

So is there a single Anglican tradition to which we are always called back? Only, I believe, if we understand it as a method of doing theology and being Christian community and not as a set of specific doctrines to which we must confess belief. Our forebears of the English Reformation looked to Scripture and the ecumenical councils and theologians of the first five centuries of Christianity for the foundation from which they then moved forward. The Church of England—and now the Anglican Communion—has, since then, demonstrated a remarkable capacity to discern and unite around key elements considered essential to faith and order and to live with the messiness of creative tension around the rest.

Joined in Christian community by common prayer—not common belief on all questions—Anglicans have appealed to Scripture, the traditions of the early church, and reason as authorities for theological discernment. Putting it perhaps too simply, one strand—the evangelical tradition—has emphasized the authority of Scripture, and some, but not all, among them have insisted on a more literalist reading. Another strand—the Anglo-catholic tradition—has emphasized the authority of

the early church, and some, but not all, of them have not accepted subsequent development of doctrine and practice. Other strands have looked to reason, including to a greater or lesser extent, experience, to mediate Scripture and the tradition in the light of the learning of science and culture.

Thus, Anglicanism has embraced more than one strand or tradition of Christian living and believing, and those strands or traditions have remained in a lively tension, informing, enriching, and sometimes conflicting with one another. Each has had times or places in which it held greater influence than the others, but none has been able to claim that it was *the* tradition, exclusive of the others. We speak of “Anglican comprehensiveness,” or Anglicanism as the “*via media*,” not because we are wishy-washy or overly inclined to compromise basic principles, but because we value the ultimate goal of Christian unity and St. Paul’s understanding of the Body of Christ, in which no part may say to the other, “I have no need of you.”

We do need one another, no matter how difficult it is sometimes to tolerate our differences. The tragedy of today’s divisiveness is that some would exclude others as failing the test of a particular strand of Anglicanism and thus no longer belonging in the Communion. They would impose a litmus test of confessional belief. But do we really want to be in a church of “like-minded”—or even like-believing—people? Do we want to be in a church that does not accept the possibility that God, working through the Holy Spirit, can do new things? As Frederica Harris Thompsett says in *Living with History* (Cowley Publications, 1999, p. 14), “Who would expect a fixed or closed system from a God who promises to make all things new?”

## Appendix One

## Lambeth 1998 Resolution on Human Sexuality

The Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the worldwide Anglican Communion meets once every ten years. Each bishop attending the 1998 Lambeth Conference in Canterbury, England, was assigned to participate in study, reflection, and dialogue on one of the four main themes of the conference: Called to full humanity, Called to live and proclaim the Good News, Called to be faithful in a plural world, and Called to be One.

Section One, Called to Full Humanity, had subgroups on the issues of human rights and human dignity, environment, human sexuality, modern technology, euthanasia, and international debt and economic justice. Study papers on each theme and sub-topic, as well as reading lists, were sent to the bishops in advance.

Though each of the sections presented resolutions for consideration by the entire conference, dialogue and mutual understanding were intended to be the primary goals.

The Conference adopted, as amended, the following from the final report of Section One, by a vote of 526 in favor, 70 opposed, and 45 abstaining:

### **Resolution 1.10**

#### **Human Sexuality**

This Conference:

(a) commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality;

(b) in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;

(c) recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;

(d) while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex;

(e) cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions;

(f) requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us;

(g) notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.

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## Appendix Two

## Bishops' Pastoral Letter

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*In response to the Lambeth Conference resolution on human sexuality, the Rt. Rev. Ronald Haines, Bishop of Washington drafted the following pastoral letter and circulated it among the bishops who had attended the Conference.*

### **A Pastoral Statement to Lesbian and Gay Anglicans from Some Member Bishops of the Lambeth Conference**

August 5, 1998

Dear sisters and brothers,

The Lambeth Conference has spent nearly three weeks deliberating issues of human sexuality, among many other vital issues facing our worldwide Communion. We have met in a climate of enormous diversity and have attempted both to articulate our views and listen carefully to those of others. Within the limitations of this Conference, it has not been possible to hear adequately your voices, and we apologize for any sense of rejection that has occurred because of this reality. This letter is a sign of our commitment to listen to you and reflect with you theologically and spiritually on your lives and ministries. It is our deep concern that you not feel abandoned by your Church and that you know of our continued respect and support. We pledge that we will continue to reflect, pray, and work for your full inclusion in the life of the Church. It is obvious that Communion-wide we are in great disagreement over what full inclusion would mean. We ourselves have varied views and

admit, as the report of the Human Sexuality Sub-section of the Conference says, that there is much we do not yet understand. But we believe it is an imperative of the Gospel and our faith that we seek such understanding.

We call on the entire Communion to continue (and in many places, begin) prayerful, respectful conversation on the issue of homosexuality. We must not stop where this Conference has left off. You, our sisters and brothers in Christ, deserve a more thorough hearing than you received over the past three weeks. We will work to make that so.

Faithfully,

As of November 11, 1998, the letter had been signed by 182 bishops (including eight primates) from the following provinces of the Anglican Communion:

- Australia (12)
- Brazil (1)
- Canada (17)
- Central Africa (2)
- England (42)
- Ireland (3)
- Japan (1)
- Mexico (1)
- New Zealand (8)
- Scotland (6)
- South Africa (7)
- United States (76)
- Wales (5)

## Appendix Three

## 1998 Convention of the Diocese of Vermont

*The 165th Convention of the Diocese of Vermont, meeting at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Burlington, November 13-14, 1998, passed the following resolutions by voice vote (with one audible nay vote):*

### **A Resolution Concerning Deeper Understanding of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason in Relationship to Human Sexuality**

*Resolved*, That the 165th Convention of the Diocese of Vermont affirm Section (c) of Resolution 1.10, passed at the 13th Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops—inasmuch as it recognizes the presence among us of persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation and commits us to listen to the experience of homosexual persons, remembering that we are all loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ; and be it further

*Resolved*, That in the light of the traditional Anglican reliance on Scripture, tradition, and reason for the discernment of God's will in our lives, this Convention reject as too limited a reading of biblical texts that portion of (d) "rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture;" and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution be sent to our primate, the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, with the request that it be shared with the Anglican Consultative Council in accordance with clause (f) of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10 on sexuality.

Proposers: The Rev. John Van Sicken  
St. Paul's, White River Junction  
The Rev. Sarah Horton  
St. Barnabas', Norwich

### **Explanation**

The Anglican churches have, since the earliest years of the reformation in England, relied not only on Scripture as a source of authority in their discernment of God's will in their communal lives, but also on the resources of a rich tradition and the gift of reason. The Lambeth Conference resolution on human sexuality, however, cites only Scripture as the foundation for some of its conclusions.

Anglican theological tradition as we receive it today represents the current state of our conversation with Scripture through the centuries. Each generation interprets Scripture and the tradition out of its own place in time and understanding of the human condition. Similarly, individuals come to the conversation from a variety of contexts and perspectives, and their interpretations often differ. It has been the Anglican way to be in conversation about our differing interpretations and always to be open to the working of the Holy Spirit rather than settle on a single reading as definitive for all people in all contexts.

Although a few passages in the Bible address sexual behavior between persons of the same sex, they reflect the understandings of particular people living in particular contexts. Ours is a different world, with the benefit of centuries of history and growth in reflecting on the human condition. We have available to us a variety of interpretations of the Scriptural witness, many based on the entire body of Scripture rather than on a few verses taken out of context.

Scripture condemns some behaviors we now consider acceptable (divorce) and approves some we now reject (the owning of slaves). In the Anglican Communion we do not have consensus about homosexuality or homosexual practice. It seems at this time more appropriate to live with ambiguity and continue our conversation.

This resolution thus affirms the Anglican tradition of bringing all relevant resources to bear in the discernment of how we can live out most faithfully our call to love God and our neighbor, our call to full humanity as Christian men and women in a complex world.

### **Deanery Study on the Bishops' Pastoral Letter from Lambeth in Support of Gay And Lesbian Anglicans**

*Resolved*, That, the 165th Convention of the Diocese of Vermont concurring, in line with the Pastoral Statement issued at the Lambeth Conference by a number of member bishops calling on the church to “reflect, pray, and work” for the “full inclusion” of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the church, call on the Bishop of Vermont to schedule Deanery meetings, following her sabbatical and before the 2000 General Convention, for the purpose of such study and reflection, and that each Vestry receive a copy of the Pastoral Statement for discussion at a parish Vestry meeting before the Deanery meetings take place; and be it further

*Resolved*, That a copy of this resolution be sent to our primate, the Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold, with the request that it be shared with the Anglican Consultative Council in accordance with clause (f) of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10 on sexuality.

Proposers: The Rev. John Van Siclen  
                   St. Paul's, White River Junction  
                   The Rev. Sarah Horton  
                   St. Barnabas', Norwich

### **Explanation**

There have been several occasions over the years in which the Episcopal Church in Vermont has addressed homosexuality and broader issues of gay and lesbian persons in our corporate life. The time between a Pastoral Letter issued by bishops on this subject at Lambeth and the upcoming General Convention in Denver in 2000 can provide an opportunity for new reflection as a way to respond to the call of the Letter (“We call on the entire communion to continue...prayerful, respectful conversation on the issue of homosexuality.”) and the call of St. Paul of oneness in Christ Jesus. (“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”—Galatians 3.28.)

## Appendix Four

## Summary of the Civil Union Law (Act 91)

*On April 26, 2000, Governor Howard Dean signed into law Act 91, "An Act Pertaining to Civil Unions." The legislation was approved by the General Assembly on April 25. The following summary is available on the web page of the Vermont State Legislature <[www.leg.state.vt.us](http://www.leg.state.vt.us)>.*

### **Brief Summary of H.847 (Act 91) as Passed by the General Assembly**

The purpose of the act is "to respond to the constitutional violation found by the Vermont Supreme Court in *Baker v. State*, and to provide eligible same-sex couples the opportunity to 'obtain the same benefits and protections afforded by Vermont law to married opposite-sex couples' as required by Chapter I, Article 7th of the Vermont Constitution."

The act also provides eligible blood-relatives and relatives related by adoption the opportunity to establish a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship so they may receive certain benefits and protections and be subject to certain responsibilities that are granted to spouses.

Civil union status is available to two persons of the same sex who are not related to one another. Parties to the civil union must be at least 18 years old and competent to enter a contract. To enter a civil union, a person may not already be a party to another civil union or a marriage.

Parties to a civil union will have all of the same benefits, protections and responsibilities under law, whether they derive from statute, administrative or court rule, policy, common law or any other source of civil law, as are granted to spouses in a marriage.

The family court will have jurisdiction over all proceedings relating to the dissolution of civil unions. The dissolution of civil unions will follow the same procedures, and be subject to the same substantive rights and obligations that are involved in the dissolution of marriage, including any residency requirements.

To establish a civil union, a couple may apply for a civil union license at their town clerk's office. If the couple meets the requirements for establishing a civil union, the clerk will issue the couple a civil union license. Within 60 days of issuance of the license, a couple must have the civil union certified by an authorized person. Persons authorized to certify a civil union include judges, justices of the peace and clergy.

Nonresidents may obtain a civil union license from any town clerk in the state rather than having to obtain the license from a town clerk in the county in which the civil union is going to be certified.

Town clerks will provide persons who apply for a civil union license with information prepared by the secretary of state that advises such persons of the benefits, protections and responsibilities of a civil union, and that Vermont residency may be required for dissolution of a civil union in Vermont.

Insurers must make available dependent coverage to parties to a civil union that is equivalent to that provided to married persons. An individual or group health insurance policy which provides coverage for a spouse or family member of the insured shall also provide the equivalent coverage for a party to a civil union.

Employers are not required to provide coverage to parties to a civil union. Insurers will be required to offer equivalent coverage, but the employer then decides whether to purchase the group health insurance for its employees and which employees are eligible for the insurance.

For the purpose of state income taxes, parties to a civil union will be taxed in the same manner as married persons. However, Vermont estate taxes are treated differently because the state's estate taxes are not piggybacked on the federal estate taxes.

"Marriage" is defined as the legally recognized union of one man and one woman in both the marriage chapter and the civil union chapter in the domestic relations title.

Two persons who are blood-relatives or relatives related by adoption and prohibited from establishing a civil union or mar-

riage with one another may establish a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship. Persons must be at least 18 years old and competent to enter a contract. They may not be a party to another reciprocal beneficiaries relationship, a civil union or a marriage. Each person must consent to the relationship without force, fraud or duress.

Two persons who meet the criteria may establish a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship by presenting a signed, notarized declaration of a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship to the commissioner of health, and paying a filing fee of \$10.00.

Reciprocal beneficiaries may receive the benefits and protections, and be subject to the responsibilities that are granted to spouses in the following specific areas: (1) Hospital visitation and medical decision-making; (2) Decision-making relating to anatomical gifts; (3) Decision-making relating to disposition of remains; (4) Durable power of attorney for health care and terminal care documents; (5) Patient's bill of rights; (6) Nursing home patient's bill of rights; and (7) Abuse prevention.

Either party to a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship may terminate the relationship by filing a signed, notarized declaration with the commissioner. Within 60 days of the filing of the declaration and payment of the fee by a party to a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship, the commissioner shall file the declaration and issue a certificate of termination of a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship to each party of the former relationship.

If a party to a reciprocal beneficiaries relationship enters into a valid civil union or a marriage, the reciprocal beneficiary

relationship shall terminate, and the parties shall no longer be entitled to the benefits, protections and responsibilities of the reciprocal beneficiaries relationship.

A Civil Union Review Commission is established for two years. The commission will be comprised of 11 members, consisting of two members of the House designated by the Speaker of the House, who shall be of different political party affiliations; two members of the Senate designated by the Senate Committee on Committees, who shall be of different political party affiliations; four members appointed by the Governor representing the public, one of whom shall be an attorney familiar with Vermont family law; one member appointed by the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court; the chair of the Human Rights Commission or his or her designee; and the Attorney General or his or her designee.

The commission will prepare and implement a plan to inform members of the public, state agencies, and private and public sector businesses and organizations about the act, as well as collect information about the implementation, operation, and effect of the act, and report to the general assembly and the governor with its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The findings, purpose and the commission sections of the act take effect upon passage. The insurance sections of the act take effect January 1, 2001. The tax sections of the act take effect January 1, 2001. The rest of the act takes effect July 1, 2000.

## Appendix Five

## 2000 General Convention Resolution

### Resolution D039sa\*

#### The General Convention 2000, Denver

Approved by the House of Deputies (voice vote)

Concurred by the House of Bishops (119–19, 4 abstaining)

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, that the members of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts and creative energies for mission, and be it further

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

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

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

*Resolved*, That this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them, and be it further,

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

*Resolved*, That in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to the call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we reaffirm the imperative to promote conversa-

tion between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

#### Notes:

The resolution as presented to the House of Deputies by Committee 25, The Church and Human Sexuality, had an eighth "resolve." It was considered in a vote by orders in the House of Deputies, where it passed in the clergy order by one vote but failed in the lay order by three votes. It was reconsidered in the House of Bishops but did not pass. It follows:

*Resolved*, that desiring to support relationships of mutuality and fidelity other than marriage which mediate the grace of God, the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Convention directs the standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to prepare for study and consideration by the 74<sup>th</sup> General Convention rites by means of which the Church may express that support.

The bishops did pass a "mind of the House" resolution, which reads:

*Resolved*, That it is the mind of the House of Bishops that we continue to study and be in conversation regarding issues of human sexuality by making use of the Theology Committee (under process of appointment by the Presiding Bishop) in consultation with the House of Bishops Committee on Pastoral Development. This committee, consisting of lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons, will make a report in the hope that a Mind of the House resolution will result from their study.

\* The addition of the letters "sa" indicates that the resolution approved is a substitute (s) for the original D039, and that the substitute as presented to the two houses was amended (a) before final passage.

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## Appendix Six

## Civil Union Homily Preached by Martin L. Smith

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**A homily preached by Martin L. Smith  
at the Blessing of the Union of  
Thomas James Brown and Thomas Nordboe Mousin  
Saturday, 28 June 2003  
Church of our Savior, Killington, Vermont**

Part of the fun of weddings and holy unions is meeting the other guests and relatives, and finding a whole lot out about the couple from the reception and the arrangements and the service. A couple tell us a whole lot about themselves and we are all going to be delighted and intrigued over this weekend of celebration. We can find a whole lot out if we are all eyes and ears, and it has already started in the service with the gospel passage that Thomas and Tom have chosen to put as a hallmark on their relationship.

John the Baptist is trying to run his reform movement from jail and time is running out. He needs to know whether Jesus is the One who is to come, or should they keep on looking for someone else. Jesus doesn't give a straight answer. He just points to the evidence that people are being set free from what blights and stunts life and thwarts its fullness. "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matt. 11:5).

Lots of anxious people are asking these days what authority we have to celebrate in church the union of a man with a man, and if we know the gospel we don't have to give a straight answer, any more than Jesus did. We point to the evidence of grace abounding in the relationship and the blessings spreading all around from the relationship. And we just say "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at us." The blessing of a gay relationship isn't a special concession to homosexuals, but one facet of the liberation itself that comes to us all through the good news. We just happen to be people who have had our eyes opened, our ears unstopped, and we can see and tell that the

intimacy and commitment and the faithfulness and hospitality of two men in love in Christ are manifestations of the gospel liberation meant for all. Its wonderful but it isn't weird. It's just the good news taking hold—at long last.

There's bound to be a poignancy to this service precisely because blessing services are still new, and Thomas and Tom have the special vocation of pioneers. For millennia our gay and lesbian predecessors lived with the poverty of having their relationship invalidated and unrecognized, in the blindness of the closet, the lameness of secrecy, the leper's stigma of the rejected. Four thousand years is a long time to wait. But now the time has come for liberation to take hold, and it is doing so. And if anyone asks by what authority we perform this controversial blessing, we do have an answer even if it is not a very straight answer, an answer with a queer ring.

When a wedding of a man and woman takes place in church, it takes place under the authority of immemorial tradition and precedent. From the dawn of humanity, men and women have been coupled to make a family, have children, and nurture the next generation. When the union of a man and a man takes place in church, there is no authority from the past. Instead, the blessing is taking place under the authority of the future.

"Are you the one who is to come?" That title, the One who is to come, is the greatest title for Jesus as the Christ. Jesus is the one who does not tie us to the past, but recruits us to join him in making God's future present in the here and the now. As soon as we recognize Jesus for who he truly is, we realize that God's future is too real to be postponed any longer. We can't think of it as an ideal realm that always stays over the horizon, at the other end of a rainbow that we can never actually reach. Jesus had the chutzpah to proclaim that the time of waiting is over—enough already!—and the Reign of God has arrived. It is up to us to live as an outpost of the future in the present, insistent on acting as if God's blessed future is something we can enjoy today.

Well, I am sure that Tom and Thomas really did show their theology in the choice of the gospel. But the unconscious is a

strange thing in the way it guides us. This question, “Are you the One who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” is almost word for word the question any man asks about his partner when he falls in love. “Is he the One I have been waiting for, or should I go on looking for someone else? Has the search ended, or is the One for me someone else, someone I haven’t met yet?” Perhaps unconsciously our friends have shown us something of the vulnerability of commitment. There is so much risk in deciding not to go on looking, not to carry on waiting, but to choose. He is the one, this is the moment, I let go of searching and waiting, I choose the one who has found me and the one I have found, the one who is here and now.

Commitment is necessarily an act of faith. If I could guarantee that I would stay the same, if I could guarantee that my partner would stay the same, we could work out pretty well the odds of making it all work. But the very nature of love is the willingness to be changed by love, by the one we love, and by the experiment of union with the one we love. We don’t know who we are turning into when we risk intimacy.

Now a few of you know how much the mystery of the Trinity means to me— it has been central in my life of faith and in my writings and preaching—and so Trinity Sunday is almost my favorite Sunday in the year. This year I celebrated it in a very special way. I went to a Unitarian Church. Needless to say there had to be a strong love interest to get me to do that on Trinity Sunday. Someone very dear to me was giving a testimony in the service. The service was full of blessings. And one of the most striking was in a new hymn I had never sung before. In a superb call to give God many names, the hymn has a verse:

Young, growing God, eager still to know,  
 Willing to be changed by what you started.  
 Quick to be delighted, singing as you go:  
 Hail and hosanna! Young, growing God.

In just a few lines it brings to life the theology of the mystics—didn’t Meister Eckhart proclaim that God is the novissi-

mus, the newest of the new, the youngest of the young? And Brian Wren’s hymn allows us to celebrate the great religious breakthrough of the twentieth century, the discovery of a God who is wedded to the evolutionary process of Creation, that God is so vulnerably wedded to our unfolding through evolution and history that God is willing to be changed by what he started. A God who is not the immobile Ancient of Days defending immemorial custom and binding us to ancient law, but our intimate incarnate companion in a changing and emerging world embracing us, wedded to us, as we step together into what is unprecedented and new and risky and young.

For some people it is not only unbelievably scary, but outrageously blasphemous to claim that God didn’t know what he was getting into when the Big Bang went off. But the Christian gospel really does claim that God got into it all the same. Jesus is the sign of God’s sharing our embodiment. The Cross is the sign for all time that his willingness to be changed by what he started extends to sharing our suffering and death, the worst that can befall any and all of us, in order to make sure that we are held in life within his beating Heart, whatever happens.

So we turn to Thomas and Tom in blessing. They know what they are getting into, and yet they don’t know really. Thomas and Tom are willing as men of faith to be changed by what they’ve started. What they do know is that their companion in what they’ve started is a living God, who is open to the new life they are making together, willing to suffer with them in their struggles, and to share in the joy and fruitfulness which is certain to flow in all sorts of ways from their union, some sure, some quite unpredictable. The One who is to come is here, and we don’t have to wait for the wedding of God to us as we celebrate the wedding of heart to heart, body to body and soul to soul of these excellent men and dearest of friends.

*The Rev. Martin L. Smith is a former member of the Society of St. John the Evangelist (SSJE). He is on the staff of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.*

## Appendix Seven

## 2003 General Convention Resolution

### Resolution C051sa

#### General Convention 2003, Minneapolis

Approved by the House of Bishops (voice vote)

Concurred by the House of Deputies (vote by orders\*\*)

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 74th General Convention affirms the following:

1. That our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate.

2. That we reaffirm Resolution A069 of the 65th General Convention (1976) that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.”

3. That, in our understanding of homosexual persons, differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions, and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same.

4. That we reaffirm Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention (2000), that “We expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God,” and that such relationships exist throughout the church.

5. That, we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore

and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.

6. That we commit ourselves, and call our church, in the spirit of Resolution A104 of the 70th General Convention (1991), to continued prayer, study, and discernment on the pastoral care for gay and lesbian persons, to include the compilation and development by a special commission organized and appointed by the Presiding Bishop of resources to facilitate as wide a conversation of discernment as possible throughout the church.

7. That our baptism into Jesus Christ is inseparable from our communion with one another, and we commit ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion and, among dioceses, a diversity of pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us.

8. That it is a matter of faith that our Lord longs for our unity as his disciples, and for us this entails living within the boundaries of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. We believe this discipline expresses faithfulness to our polity and that it will facilitate the conversation we seek not only in The Episcopal Church, but also in the wider Anglican Communion and beyond.

\* The addition of the letters “sa” indicates that the resolution approved is a substitute (s) for the original D039, and that the substitute as presented to the two houses was amended (a) before final passage.

\*\* With 108 dioceses voting, the vote by orders was 58 lay deputations, yes, 38 no, and 12 divided; 62 clergy deputations, yes, 33 no, and 13 divided.

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## Appendix Eight      Statement of the Primates of the Anglican Communion

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### **A Statement by the Primates of the Anglican Communion meeting in Lambeth Palace**

16 October 2003

The Primates of the Anglican Communion and the Moderators of the United Churches, meeting together at Lambeth Palace on the 15th and 16th October, 2003, wish to express our gratitude to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, for calling us together in response to recent events in the Diocese of New Westminster, Canada, and the Episcopal Church (USA), and welcoming us into his home so that we might take counsel together, and to seek to discern, in an atmosphere of common prayer and worship, the will and guidance of the Holy Spirit for the common life of the thirty-eight provinces which constitute our Communion.

At a time of tension, we have struggled at great cost with the issues before us, but have also been renewed and strengthened in our Communion with one another through our worship and study of the Bible. This has led us into a deeper commitment to work together, and we affirm our pride in the Anglican inheritance of faith and order and our firm desire to remain part of a Communion, where what we hold in common is much greater than that which divides us in proclaiming Good News to the world.

At this time we feel the profound pain and uncertainty shared by others about our Christian discipleship in the light of controversial decisions by the Diocese of New Westminster to authorise a Public Rite of Blessing for those in committed same sex relationships, and by the 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA) to confirm the election of a priest in a committed same sex relationship to the office and work of a Bishop.

These actions threaten the unity of our own Communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ's Church, our mission and witness, and our relations with other faiths,

in a world already confused in areas of sexuality, morality and theology, and polarised Christian opinion.

As Primates of our Communion seeking to exercise the "enhanced responsibility" entrusted to us by successive Lambeth Conferences, we re-affirm our common understanding of the centrality and authority of Scripture in determining the basis of our faith. Whilst we acknowledge a legitimate diversity of interpretation that arises in the Church, this diversity does not mean that some of us take the authority of Scripture more lightly than others. Nevertheless, each province needs to be aware of the possible effects of its interpretation of Scripture on the life of other provinces in the Communion. We commit ourselves afresh to mutual respect whilst seeking from the Lord a correct discernment of how God's Word speaks to us in our contemporary world.

We also re-affirm the resolutions made by the bishops of the Anglican Communion gathered at the Lambeth Conference in 1998 on issues of human sexuality as having moral force and commanding the respect of the Communion as its present position on these issues. We commend the report of that Conference in its entirety to all members of the Anglican Communion, valuing especially its emphasis on the need "to listen to the experience of homosexual persons, and to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ"; and its acknowledgement of the need for ongoing study on questions of human sexuality.

Therefore, as a body we deeply regret the actions of the Diocese of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church (USA) which appear to a number of provinces to have short-circuited that process, and could be perceived to alter unilaterally the teaching of the Anglican Communion on this issue. They do not. Whilst we recognise the juridical autonomy of each province in our Communion, the mutual interdependence of the provinces means that none has authority unilaterally to substitute an alternative teaching as if it were the teaching of the

entire Anglican Communion.

To this extent, therefore, we must make clear that recent actions in New Westminster and in the Episcopal Church (USA) do not express the mind of our Communion as a whole, and these decisions jeopardise our sacramental fellowship with each other. We have a particular concern for those who in all conscience feel bound to dissent from the teaching and practice of their province in such matters. Whilst we reaffirm the teaching of successive Lambeth Conferences that bishops must respect the autonomy and territorial integrity of dioceses and provinces other than their own, we call on the provinces concerned to make adequate provision for episcopal oversight of dissenting minorities within their own area of pastoral care in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates.

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church (USA) has explained to us the constitutional framework within which the election and confirmation of a new bishop in the Episcopal Church (USA) takes place. As Primates, it is not for us to pass judgement on the constitutional processes of another province. We recognise the sensitive balance between provincial autonomy and the expression of critical opinion by others on the internal actions of a province. Nevertheless, many Primates have pointed to the grave difficulties that this election has raised and will continue to raise. In most of our provinces the election of Canon Gene Robinson would not have been possible since his chosen lifestyle would give rise to a canonical impediment to his consecration as a bishop.

If his consecration proceeds, we recognise that we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy. In this case, the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognised by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves to be out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This will tear the fabric of our Communion at its deep-

est level, and may lead to further division on this and further issues as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in communion with provinces that choose not to break communion with the Episcopal Church (USA).

Similar considerations apply to the situation pertaining in the Diocese of New Westminster.

We have noted that the Lambeth Conference 1998 requested the Archbishop of Canterbury to establish a commission to consider his own role in maintaining communion within and between provinces when grave difficulties arise. We ask him now to establish such a commission, but that its remit be extended to include urgent and deep theological and legal reflection on the way in which the dangers we have identified at this meeting will have to be addressed. We request that such a commission complete its work, at least in relation to the issues raised at this meeting, within twelve months.

We urge our provinces not to act precipitately on these wider questions, but take time to share in this process of reflection and to consider their own constitutional requirements as individual provinces face up to potential realignments.

Questions of the parity of our canon law, and the nature of the relationship between the laws of our provinces with one another have also been raised. We encourage the Network of Legal Advisers established by the Anglican Consultative Council, meeting in Hong Kong in 2002, to bring to completion the work which they have already begun on this question.

It is clear that recent controversies have opened debates within the life of our Communion which will not be resolved until there has been a lengthy process of prayer, reflection and substantial work in and alongside the Commission which we have recommended. We pray that God will equip our Communion to be equal to the task and challenges which lie before it.

“Now I appeal to the elders of your community, as a fellow elder and a witness to Christ’s sufferings, and as one who has shared in the glory to be revealed: look after the flock of God whose shepherd you are.” (1 Peter 5.1,2a)

## Appendix Nine

## “Where the Bible Leads Me”

### Where the Bible Leads Me

Christian Century 20 October 2003

Barbara Brown Taylor

During the fourth century, at the height of the Arian controversy in Constantinople, one Christian wrote that it was impossible to go into a bakery for a loaf of bread without debating the nature of Christ.

Was he the eternal Son of the eternal Father or was there a time when he was not?

With bishops physically assaulting other bishops over this question and emperors changing sides on a regular basis, the debate spilled out of the church into the streets, where the Athanasians favored passages from John’s Gospel and the Arians shot back with passages from Mark.

When I read this chapter of early church history, I thanked God for letting me live in a later one. Then I got back to planning classes and grading papers.

That was before the 2003 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, however, when a majority of delegates from across the United States confirmed the election of the Rev. Gene Robinson as the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Communion.

Since then, North Georgia has come to resemble Constantinople in at least one regard: no Episcopalian goes anywhere without being asked for his or her position on homosexuality.

While no physical assaults have yet been reported, the debate has split churches and threatened budgets. It has also involved heated references to scripture. Robinson fans tend to favor passages from the Gospels, while Robinson foes shoot back with passages from Paul.

In the crossfire, it is not hard to understand why Anthony the Great fled civilization for the desert in the middle of the fourth century. Depending on who your neighbors are, snakes and hyenas can look like pretty good company.

The problem I run into at the bakery is that I do not have a

position on homosexuality.

What I have, instead, is a life. I have a history, in which many people have played vital parts. When I am presented with the issue of homosexuality, I experience temporary blindness. Something like scales fall over my eyes, because I cannot visualize an issue.

Instead, I visualize the homeroom teacher who seemed actually to care whether I showed up at school or not.

I see the priest who taught me everything I know about priesthood, and the professor who roasted whole chickens for me when my food money ran out before the end of the month.

I see the faces of dozens of young men who died of AIDS, but not before they had shown me how brightly they could burn with nothing left but the love of God to live on.

I see the face of my 16-year-old friend, still waiting for his first true love, who says that if he found out he was gay, he would kill himself.

Other people have other stories, I know, but these are the stories that have given me my sight.

To reduce them to a position seems irreverent somehow, like operating on someone’s body without looking him in the face.

I used to believe that swapping stories was one way to get closer to people who see things differently than I do, so that both of our truths get stretched, but I have almost given up on that.

Where I live, at least, there is little sense that life stories can be “true.”

Only scripture is true, so that the debate about the place of homosexual Christians in the church today hangs on what various biblical writers did or did not mean by one of five passages that were written at least 1,950 years ago.

I love the Bible.

I have spent more than half of my life reading it, studying it, teaching and preaching it.

While I do not find every word of it as inspiring (or inspired) as some of my fellow Christians do, I encounter God in it reli-

ably enough to commit myself on a daily basis to practicing the core teachings of both testaments.

When I do this, however, a peculiar thing happens.

As I practice what I learn in the Bible, the Bible turns its back on me.

Like some parent intent on my getting my own place, the Bible won't let me set up house in its pages.

It gives me a kiss and boots me into the world, promising me that I have everything I need to find God not only on the page but also in the flesh.

Whether I am reading Torah or the Gospels, the written word keeps evicting me, to go embody the word by living in peace and justice with my neighbors on this earth, whatever amount of confrontation, struggle, recognition and surrender that may involve.

In this way, I have arrived at a different understanding of what it means to follow the Word of God.

The phrase has become a double entendre for me, meaning not only the Word on the page but also (and more crucially) the Word made flesh.

If Jesus' own example is to be trusted, then following the Word of God may not always mean doing what is in the book.

Instead, it may mean deviating from what is in the book in order to risk bringing the Word to life, and then facing the dreadful consequences of loving the wrong people even after you have been warned time and again to stop.

These days I guess everything sounds like a position, even a confession like this one.

I do not know what is right.

All I know is whom I love, and how far I have to go before there is no one left whom I do not love.

If I am wrong, then I figure that the Word of God will know what to do with me.

I am betting my life on that.

*Barbara Brown Taylor is an Episcopal priest who lives in Georgia and teaches at Piedmont College and Columbia Theological Seminary.*

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