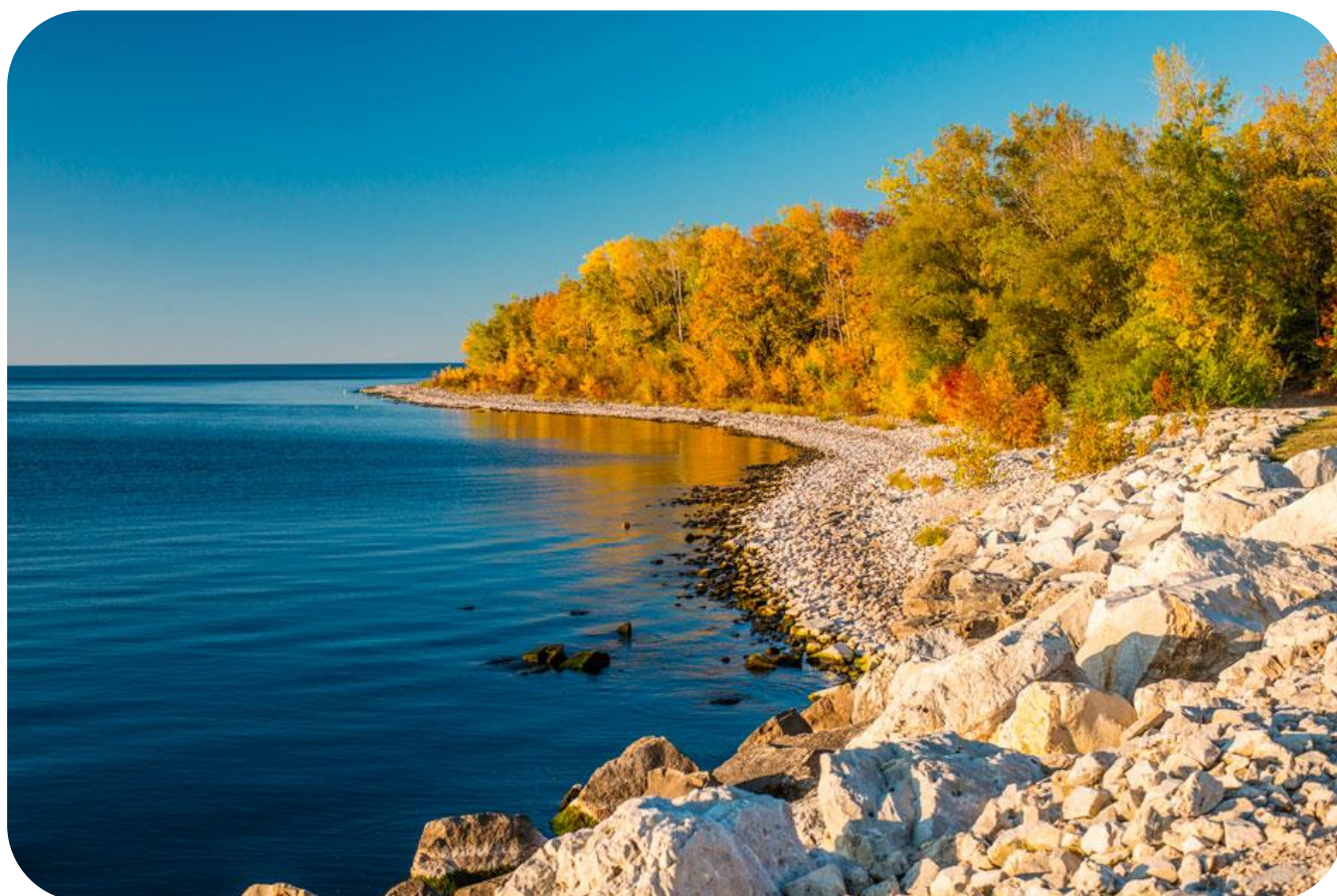


IN DIALOGUE WITH EACH OTHER: A STUDY GUIDE



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the Episcopal Church in northeast Wisconsin

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A. INTRODUCTION

For some time the Episcopal Church has been wrestling with how to understand the reality of its gay and lesbian members. We have been debating the options for gay and lesbian Christians who desire to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Traditionally the Church has held that sexual relations between members of the same sex are always sinful. Thus, the only faithful options are celibacy or heterosexual marriage. In the last few decades some have argued for rethinking this position. They have argued that same-sex relations are not necessarily sinful and thus committed same-sex unions are blessable.

Parallel to the debate in the church, a similar debate has gone on in the larger society as gays and lesbians have advocated for acceptance and legal recognition of their relationships. Given all of this, I am convinced that it would be good for us in the Diocese of Fond du Lac to engage in conversations about the shape of faithfulness for gay and lesbian members of the church and the disagreements about that among us. We as a diocese are not of one mind on this and I suspect that in every congregation there is a range of views. Strong feelings and firm convictions are involved. One might hope for patience and charity as well.

As I said before my election as your bishop, I believe there is room for faithful, orthodox Christians to disagree on this matter. I know that even that is controversial. But, I am committed to insuring that that disagreement is recognized and space is made for folk of differing convictions.

I find it helpful to remember that there have always been disagreements about a variety of things in the Church. Some examples are:

- Is it permissible for those who are divorced to remarry? The second Bishop of Fond du Lac (1888-1912), Charles Chapman Grafton was emphatic in defense of the Episcopal Church's teaching of his day that even the "innocent" party in a divorce is not free to remarry.
- Can women be ordained priests?
- Is it permissible for Christians to lend money at interest?
- Should Christians ever go to war and, if so, under what conditions?
- What if anything happens to the bread and wine at Holy Communion? Anglicanism has allowed a very wide range of views on this most basic practice.
- Should infants be baptized or only adult believers? During the Reformation Christians killed each other over this disagreement.
- Is it permissible for Christians to use birth control? Until the Lambeth Conference of 1930, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion agreed with the Roman Catholic insistence that contraception is opposed to scripture and tradition.
- Notoriously in this country there was once much debate about whether or not scripture and tradition allowed for owning slaves. In 1861, the Rt. Rev. John Henry Hopkins, Bishop of Vermont and later Presiding Bishop, argued that they did. Around the same time Charles Grafton, then a young law student, argued that they did not.
- What is the relationship of divine sovereignty and human freedom? What is the best way to understand what God accomplished for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to claim the Bible is inspired and how is it best interpreted?

We could list more. On the one hand, the fact that Christians have disagreed in the past does not mean that all disagreements are equal. Some disagreements are more significant than others. In particular, some theological views have been declared heretical.

On the other hand, in each of the examples above, serious and faithful Christians did disagree and considered the disagreements to be essential. We only see some of them as less than essential because they are not the issues that animate our times. How do we decide which theological and scriptural disagreements are more important than other? What is the range of faithful disagreement? And, who decides?

The issue we are struggling with cuts close to the bone. This is partly due to the fact that our own sexuality is such an integral part of who each of us is as a person. It also raises questions about how we interpret scripture. Potentially, it raises questions about how we understand the sacrament of marriage. There are other theological implications as well.

As I mentioned above, within our diocese we have brothers and sisters who disagree about the potential faithfulness of same-sex unions. Part of the genius of the Anglican Tradition has been bearing with one another in spite of differences as we wrestle together with the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments which we believe to be “the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation.” Our own Bishop Charles Grafton wrote the following in anticipation of the General Convention in 1904,

The differences existing relate to matters of policy, statements of doctrine, forms of worship. It is a token of our Church’s strength that she does not seek to crush individual thought and action. True spiritual strength is found in union with diversity, not in an enforced lifeless uniformity.

In an instruction to the Sisters of the Holy Nativity, he claimed,

Outside the Creed we need have no settled opinion. When we have said Amen to that, we have said Amen to all that we really know and upon any point we can yield to others.

That the Anglican Tradition has allowed for considerable latitude does not mean that therefore anything goes. Some questions have been settled and the conclusions are summarized in the Nicene Creed. There will be no debating that basic creedal Christian faith in the Diocese of Fond du Lac even as we explore together – and sometimes debate – what it means to believe in and live as faithful followers of Jesus

This guide for reflection and discussion is adapted from one created for the Diocese of Upper South Carolina and is used with the permission of the bishop of that diocese, the Rt. Rev. Andrew Waldo. It seems unnecessary to create our own study guide if the work has already been done. What I like about this guide is that the lessons, excerpts and questions were created by a task force of clergy and lay members and laity representing diverse views. They are designed to help conversation in the face of such differences and strongly held convictions. The sessions delve into Scripture and Christian tradition. They explore ethical perspectives along with issues related to cultural currents, Christian unity, and the wider Anglican Communion. The sessions try fairly to present important but different

understandings. For example, the content and suggested discussion questions pay particular attention to language seeking to avoid labels and phrases that have represented stumbling blocks to dialogue.

The study guide is intended to further fruitful and faithful conversation. A commitment to conversation does not minimize the seriousness of our disagreement.

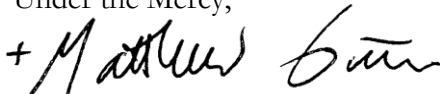
Sometimes bearing with one another in spite of disagreement requires a commitment even in the face of what are seemingly unresolvable differences. The curriculum that follows affirms that Scripture is our ultimate authority and asks how we are to understand and apply it in dialogue with tradition and with one another.

The conversations we will have will not always be easy. But we want to engage them prayerfully, sensitively, and with concern for faithfulness.

I invite you to read my reflections in this area on my blog, “An Odd Work of Grace” at <http://anoddworkofgrace.blogspot.com/>

Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.
(1 Peter 3:15-16)

Under the Mercy,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Gunter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Gunter
VIII Bishop of Fond du Lac

B. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

The purpose of this study guide is to promote informed, thoughtful discussion in our congregations regardless of any particular person's point of view.

I hope that all congregations will engage this study, not only to strengthen our unity on substantive matters on which we can agree, but also to develop a common language for those things about which we do not agree. This will deepen relationships within the diocese and give us a more nuanced and robust language for conversations with persons from other traditions as well.

The study guide could be used in a number of different settings, for example, small groups, church leadership retreats, or a series of adult forum sessions. It is our desire and prayer that individuals will commit to attending and participating fully and respectfully in all sessions that are offered.

Suggestions for use of this study guide

This study guide is intended for use in congregations in the Diocese of Fond du Lac to promote thoughtful and respectful study, conversation and dialogue on the subject of same-sex blessings.

The discussion leader may use the background materials and readings to prepare in advance of the sessions. The one-page handouts may be modified as the facilitator wishes and may be distributed at the beginning of the session. The background materials and Additional Readings following this study guide could also be distributed prior to or during the sessions. It is intended that this material be used to spark discussion and dialogue, not for lectures by the facilitator.

Depending on the time available, number of attendees and sessions, readings, discussion questions and sessions may be selected from those presented in the study guide. Don't expect that you can cover all of this material. For example, of the questions presented in each section, the facilitator might choose three for each session. We recommend that at least one session be held on each of the following three topics: tradition, scripture, ethics, and the Episcopal Church's relationship to the Anglican Communion.

Suggested norms for discussion

At the beginning of the first session, it may be helpful to establish discussion norms. The norms listed below may be posted at the beginning of each session as a reminder and for reference during the discussion.

Prayer

Begin each session with prayer and perhaps a moment of silence.

Confidentiality

Establish a safe environment by asking participants to agree to keep confidential the specifics of the conversation and identities of speakers.

Respect dignity

Affirm the Baptismal Covenant, to respect the dignity of every human being; listen with respect to points of view and experiences that are not your own.

Balanced participation

Give everyone a chance to speak and to finish what they have to say. Do not let one or a few people dominate the conversation. This may be avoided by going around to give everyone an opportunity to speak and by limiting the time allotted to each person. Encourage all to participate, but if someone wishes to pass their turn, their preference should be respected.

Use active listening statements

Use “I” statements, instead of “you” or “we” or “they” statements; avoid any statements that accuse or condemn another; avoid labels, such as “conservative,” “liberal,” etc. It can be helpful to ask participants to express and explain a position that is different from their own, clarifying what strengths there are in the other’s point of view.

Listen deeply

Refrain from applause and other affirming or condemning reactions to what speakers say. Remember that we are listening deeply to tradition and scripture, even as we listen respectfully and prayerfully to one another.

If the conversation should become heated, the facilitator may choose to direct the conversation back to the main points. Highlight where the group has been expressing common threads and affirm the feelings of individuals. A time-out for quiet reflection may also be helpful.

C. TRADITION IN THE CHURCH

Background:

One of the arguments against performing same-sex blessings is that *such a service is a departure from the tradition of the Episcopal Church (TEC) and of the universal catholic Church*. Some argue that precedent for performing a same-sex blessing cannot be found in Christian tradition, and therefore the rite should not be performed. Others argue that, within the Church's long tradition, there are instances of significant change in a tradition or teaching, and that this is an instance in which a change is warranted.

The Church has made changes in Tradition: One example of a change in tradition would be the decision made by TEC General Convention in 1976 in favor of the ordination of women. Although there is textual and archaeological evidence for sacramental function by women in the very early church, women were excluded from ordained ministry when ordination became formalized. The first woman to be ordained in the Anglican Communion was the Rev. Li Tim-Oi, who was ordained to the priesthood in China in 1944.

In other situations, the Church has upheld Tradition: Tradition was reaffirmed, and change was not embraced, in the founding of the Anglican tradition and later in the founding of the Episcopal Church. The English Puritans felt that Luther and Calvin and Thomas Cranmer had not gone far enough in making reforms and changes in Roman Catholic traditions. However, an early Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, spoke instead in favor of "received practices", such as the threefold orders of ministry: deacon, priest, and bishop. He also upheld the received tradition in the prominence given to the sacraments. He defended such patterns as they grew out of tradition so long as they were not directly repugnant to Scripture. He argued that some traditions need to be affirmed and affirmed again.

When is a departure from tradition warranted? This is not a new concern in our time. In the 3rd Century CE, Stephen, Bishop of Rome, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, disputed with each other concerning re-baptism of those who had been baptized by heretics. Stephen declared, "Let nothing be innovated, unless it has been handed down." Cyprian retorted, "Custom without truth is but the longevity of error."

Readings and summaries

Reading C1: Dan. O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Kindle Locations 507-517), Kindle Edition.

From Dan O. Via:

"There are two basic views of biblical authority. (1) The a priori view says that the Bible is authoritative in all of its parts and is so prior to interpretation. Since this affirmation of total authority is made before one interprets the Bible – it is assumed before one interprets particular texts – the person who makes such an avowal must do so on the basis of someone else's opinion – a parent, pastor, or teacher's. The

affirmation is not made on the ground of one's own experience. (2) The experiential or existential view says that the Bible is authoritative only in those parts that are existentially engaging and compelling

– that give grounding and meaning to existence. This avowal can be made only after and in the light of one's own interpretation. At the same time it should be recognized that the Christian tradition and community are a part of the individual's location (Barr 1973, 27). I take the latter view. ... There is... no a priori reason why a univocal position [in Scripture] cannot be overridden if the countervailing biblical, theological, and cultural considerations have sufficient strength, as I believe they do."

From Robert A. J. Gagnon:

"When I come to Scripture, I use historical-critical methodology [i.e. contemporary scholarship], see development and significant tensions in the canon, take account of metaphors and tradition history, and recognize the necessity of interpreting texts anew. However, in keeping with the historic stance of the church, I also believe that Scripture is the primary authority for faith and practice. If that primacy counts for anything, it must count for core values. Core values are values that are held 1. Pervasively throughout Scripture (at least implicitly), 2. Absolutely (without exceptions), and ... 3. Strongly (as a matter of significance). This applies all the more to instances in which: 4. Such values emerged in opposition to contrary cultural trends, 5. Have prevailed in the church for two millennia. Such a value is the biblical limitation of sex to intercourse between male and female, with its attendant opposition to all same-sex intercourse. If the authority of Scripture means anything, those who seek to overturn its core values must meet an extraordinary burden of proof. The evidence must be so strong and unambiguous that it not only makes the witness of Scripture pale by comparison but also directly refutes the reasons for the Bible's position. For example, it would not be enough to prove that (1) the only models for homosexual behavior in antiquity were exploitative, or (2) modern science has demonstrated that homosexuality is congenital and fixed. One would also have to prove that the Bible condemned homosexual practice (3) primarily on the grounds that it was exploitative (e.g., because it abused boys), or (4) on the grounds that all participants in homosexual behavior experienced desires for the opposite sex. As we shall see, none of these points can be substantiated."

Summary C1: In this book, Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon present two views on how to understand homosexual practice and by extension same-sex blessings. While much of their conversation (and these excerpts) focus specifically on Scripture, their exploration has much to do with tradition. Gagnon, a traditionalist, argues that Scripture, and the tradition that follows, uniformly argue against same-sex blessing. Via admits that Scripture has a strong tradition of opposition, carried forward through much of church history, but that findings of science and newer understandings of theology and ethics can override that.

Reading C2: Griffiss, James E. (1997-01-25). *Anglican Vision* (Kindle Locations 372-384). Rowman & Littlefield. Kindle Edition.

“It was not until the seventeenth century that theologians of the Church of England began to develop a theological rationale for the changes [sought by King Henry the VIII and the Continental and English Reformers]; as is so often the case, theological reflection followed upon historical events. In the wake of so much upheaval and change, the Church of England felt it had much to justify. On the one hand it had to satisfy itself that it had not abandoned the Catholic faith and tradition, as Roman Catholics charged; on the other hand, that it also had gone as far as it could in terms of theological and ecclesiastical reform in order to satisfy its more extreme Calvinist wing. As the Puritans began to emerge as a powerful group in the Church of England ... Anglicans also had to justify holding onto their older traditions of belief and practice. The theologian who responded most successfully to all the opponents of the Church of England was Richard Hooker, writing his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* at the end of the sixteenth century. His method of dealing with theological questions has remained characteristic of much Anglican theology ever since – maintaining continuity with the tradition the church has received from the past while seeking to accommodate the changes new situations require.”

Summary C2: Griffiss argues that Anglicanism historically has listened to Scripture with special reference to tradition. Indeed, when English Anglicans debated with the more radically Protestant Puritans, they made the point that God could speak through the church’s long history and practice, and that reason (the use of our intelligence and wisdom) also helped us understand how best to apply what we read in Scripture.

Reading C3: The Articles of Religion, *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Episcopal Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), page 871.

XIX. Of the Church.

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred; so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith.

XX. Of the Authority of the Church.

The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith: and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherefore, although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same ought not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of Salvation.

Summary C3: In the Articles of Religion (1801), sometimes referred to as the Thirty-nine Articles, we see a concern about both the primacy of Scripture and the need for decisions to be made about specific issues, whether they concern liturgy (“Ceremonies”) or “matters of faith” and practice (BCP, page 871).

Reading C4 and Summary C4: Fredrica Harris Thompsett, *Living with History* (The New Church’s Teaching Series, vol. 5; Cowley Publications, 1999), especially pp. 1-24; also chapter on “Living with Controversy.”

The first chapter of this book addresses the challenges of tradition and change, giving the example of changes in the Episcopal Church liturgy and in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Thompsett emphasizes that tradition is a “handing over” from one generation to the next, and therefore a dynamic and active process. She notes that tradition may change, because of “our limited, partial comprehension of divine intentions. As receivers and bearers of the tradition, Christians carry responsibility both for preserving historic hallmarks of the faith and also for responding to God’s actions in our midst” (p. 19).

Thompsett gives the following examples of changes in tradition: slavery; language in worship; devotional practices during worship. She also discusses three examples of times of controversy in the Anglican/Episcopal tradition: the Elizabethan settlement in the 16th century; the official position of the Episcopal Church during the Civil War; and the Anglican response in the second half of the 19th century to evolution and the Bible.

Reading C5 and Summary C5: Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology, an Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 183-189.

The question of fidelity to the apostolic faith and innovation began as early as the second century C.E. By the early 5th century, Vincent of Lérins proposed that “that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all people” would determine the true tradition of the Church. Later theologians challenged the concept of an immutable tradition that could not reflect the movement of the Spirit in a living faith, and yet an interpretation of scripture and tradition that would be safe from error. In the 19th century, one theologian proposed that tradition has both an objective aspect, which is the set and unchangeable tradition, and also a subjective aspect which is “living and dynamic.” McGrath comments that tradition is “not merely something that is handed down, but an active process of reflection by which theological or spiritual insights are valued, assessed, and transmitted from one generation to another” (p. 186).

In the early Church, “tradition” usually concerned the traditional interpretation of scripture. In the 14th and 15th centuries, “tradition” came to signify not only scripture, but also the teachings handed down within the Church. Some radical theologians of the Reformation and the Enlightenment rejected the Church’s teaching on tradition altogether and proposed that each individual could interpret scripture as the Holy Spirit led them.

Discussion Questions: TRADITION IN THE CHURCH

1. When has the Episcopal Church made changes in tradition in your lifetime?
2. In what ways were these changes in tradition supported theologically, biblically, pastorally?
3. What do you think does justify making a change in Church tradition?
4. In what ways might the sacramental rite of marriage form a precedent for same-sex blessing? In what ways does marriage not provide an analogy or precedent? Why or why not?
5. How might heterosexual marriage be affected by the legitimizing of same-sex blessings?
6. How might same-sex blessings or same-sex marriage affect traditional, heterosexual marriage?
7. How is offering same-sex blessings an issue of human or equal rights? Is this primarily a pastoral issue? Do you think that this pastoral issue is a legitimate reason for a change in the tradition?
8. Do other rights issues apply or not?
9. What questions have gone unanswered for you?

Handout: TRADITION IN THE CHURCH

“We’ve always done it this way”

One of the arguments against performing same-sex blessings is that it is a departure from the tradition of the Episcopal Church (TEC) and of the universal catholic Church. Others assert that this is one of the situations in which a change in tradition is warranted.

In the history of the Anglican and Episcopal Church, there are instances of significant change in a tradition or teaching. For example, TEC General Convention in 1976 approved the ordination of women to the priesthood. Other examples of changes in Church tradition include: slavery, divorce, role of women and new editions of The Book of Common Prayer.

In other situations, decisions against change have been made. In the founding of the Episcopal Church, decisions were made to uphold “received practices” such as the ordination of deacons, priests, and bishops and the prominence given to the sacraments.

In our discussion of same-sex blessings, a core question is whether this change in the tradition of the Episcopal Church is indeed warranted.

Discussion Questions

1. When has the Episcopal Church made changes in tradition in your lifetime?
2. In what ways were these changes in tradition supported theologically, biblically, pastorally?
3. What do you think does justify making a change in Church tradition?
4. In what ways might the sacramental rite of marriage form a precedent for same-sex blessing? In what ways does marriage not provide an analogy or precedent? Why or why not?
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7. How is offering same-sex blessings an issue of human or equal rights? Is this primarily a pastoral issue? Do you think that this pastoral issue is a legitimate reason for a change in the tradition?
8. Do other rights issues apply or not?
9. What questions have gone unanswered for you?

D. SCRIPTURE:

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY, AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US TODAY?

(This material may be used for one or for two sessions)

Background:

What Scripture says about same-sex relationships is central to our conversation. We will consider both the passages of Scripture that address sexual morality directly as well as the overall message of divine revelation.

The catechism in *The Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 853-854, gives the following summary of our understanding of Scripture:

Q. Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?

A. We call them the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible.

Q. How do we understand the meaning of the Bible?

A. We understand the meaning of the Bible by the help of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church in the true interpretation of the Scriptures.

For some traditions, scripture is the only authority. For Anglicans, the Lambeth Conference in 1888 articulated it this way: “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, [contain] all things necessary to salvation, and [are] the rule and ultimate standard of faith.” Further, Anglicans believe that, though our primary authority, scripture can only be fully understood in the light of tradition and reason.

Given that Scripture is central to our faith, we need to consider how we read and interpret divine revelation in the Bible. In his book *Those Episcopals*, Episcopal priest Dennis Maynard offers several ways in which Episcopalians read the Bible:

"Episcopalians don't surface-read the scriptures. We don't begin with an opinion or with a particular point of view and then try to find a scripture text to substantiate it. . . . [W]e believe in divine inspiration. We do not believe in divine dictation. . . . Before we can understand what the Bible means we have to first understand who wrote it, to whom it was written, the culture of the people, and the situation to which the writer was addressing himself" (pp. 52, 54).

We do not read Scripture in a vacuum, in isolation or without regard to our current surroundings and experiences, but we read it in conversation with what we know, and in the light of tradition and reason.

In the document “Let the Reader Understand” (Diocese of New York, 2002), these additional points are raised:

- Individual texts must not... be isolated and made to mean something at odds with the tenor or trajectory of the divine plan underlying the whole of Scripture.
- The Church’s interpretation of Scripture is itself part of the human response to the economy of salvation.
- ...Because the Church’s members are human, their reading of Scripture is contingent and fallible, even in matters of faith and morals.
- Interpretative security rests... in the tested deposit of the baptismal faith and... in the covenant of God who is faithful.

Questions:

1. In what ways do you agree or disagree with Maynard’s observations on how Episcopalians read the Bible?
2. In what ways do you agree or disagree with the points raised in “Let the Reader Understand”?

Readings and Summaries

Reading D1: Roger Ferlo, *Opening the Bible* (The New Church’s Teaching Series, vol. 2; Cowley Publications, 1997), p. 114.

“To read Scripture faithfully, one must accept the full discipline of reading – with heart and mind and soul and mouth and ear, listening both for the voice of the Spirit who speaks through Scripture, and also for the voices of one’s companions in faith, voices past and present, probing and respectful, agreeing and disagreeing...”

Questions D1:

1. In your congregation, what do you hear from your “companions in faith” that enlarges and/or challenges your reading of Scripture?
2. In your congregation, how do you engage in the “full discipline of reading” of Scripture as individual disciples and as a community?

Reading D2: Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003), p. 2.

“The interpretation of a text is always strongly governed by its context, and this context is two-fold or bi-focal: (1) the literary and historical/cultural context of the text; (2) the religious, intellectual, and cultural context constituted by the interpreter’s pre-understanding, presuppositions, or social location.”

Reading D3: Robert A.J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003), pp. 41-42.

“When I come to Scripture, I use historical-critical methodology, see development and significant tensions in the canon, take account of metaphors and tradition history, and recognize the necessity of interpreting texts anew. However, in keeping with the historic stance of the church, I also believe that Scripture is the primary authority for faith and practice.”

Questions D3:

1. How do Via and Gagnon differ in their approach to reading Scripture?
2. How important for you is the historical/cultural context of the text?
3. How important is the balance of scripture/tradition/reason for you?

Selected Bible passages for discussion:

Genesis 19:1-14: Sodom and Gomorrah.

Leviticus 18:22: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination”.

Matthew 22:34-40: When Jesus is asked what law is the most important, he responds, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Mark 10:2-9: in this passage, Jesus quotes Genesis about the union of male and female as a sexual partnership as part of a discussion of divorce.

Luke 6:43-44: “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush (NRSV).” Just as good fruit is known to come from a good tree, good relational fruits would therefore come from a good relationship.

John 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing (NRSV).” If the “fruit” we bear is indicative of our foundation in Christ, then that shows that we abide in Christ.

Acts 8:26-40: The Ethiopian eunuch is in violation of Jewish law by being castrated (see Leviticus 21:20, which excludes eunuchs from entering the Temple, and Deuteronomy 23:1, which excludes eunuchs from being admitted to the assembly of the Lord). Nevertheless, the eunuch is acceptable to God and, at the direction of the Holy Spirit, may be baptized.

Romans 1:26-27: Paul lists “degrading passions” in which women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and men were consumed with passion for one another.

1 Corinthians 6:7-11: Paul encourages unity among the Corinthians (while discouraging lawsuits among the community) and lists individuals who will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13: The nature of Christian love.

Galatians 3:28: “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 (NRSV).”

Galatians 5:22-26: Paul lists the fruits of the spirit.

Questions:

1. Of what significance are the historical context and cultural circumstances that surround the above Scripture passages?
2. How can we apply these passages to our ongoing discussion regarding same-sex blessings?
3. How do we remain faithful to Scripture and also be responsive to cultural shifts and pastoral needs? How does Scripture shape and inform these decisions?
4. Scripture is our primary authority, but Scripture can only be fully understood in the light of tradition and reason. What role do tradition and reason play in interpreting or applying these passages of Scripture to our conversation?

Handout: SCRIPTURE:

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY, AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR US TODAY?

Holy Scripture is the inspired “Word of God and [contains] all things necessary for salvation” (BCP, p. 538). (See also the catechism in the BCP, pp. 853-854.)

We all read the same texts, but how faithful Christians read and interpret them may differ. In his book *Those Episkopols*, Episcopal priest Dennis Maynard offers several ways that Episcopalians read the Bible. He says:

"Episcopalians don't surface-read the scriptures. We don't begin with an opinion or with a particular point of view and then try to find a scripture text to substantiate it.... [W]e believe in divine inspiration. We do not believe in divine dictation. ... Before we can understand what the Bible means we have to first understand who wrote it, to whom it was written, the culture of the people, and the situation to which the writer was addressing himself" (p. 52, 54).

Selected Scripture passages for discussion:

Genesis 19:1-14

John 15:5

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Leviticus 18:22

Acts 8:26-40

Galatians 3:28

Matthew 22:34-40

Acts 15:19-21

Galatians 5:22-26

Mark 10:2-9

Romans 1:26-27

Luke 6:43-45

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Questions:

1. Of what significance are the historical context and cultural circumstances that surround the above Scripture passages?
2. How can we apply these passages to our ongoing discussion regarding same-sex blessings?
3. How do we remain faithful to Scripture and also be responsive to cultural shifts and pastoral needs? How does Scripture shape and inform these decisions?
4. Scripture is our primary authority, but Scripture can only be fully understood in the light of tradition and reason. What role do tradition and reason play in interpreting or applying these passages of Scripture to our conversation?

E. ETHICS: ARE SAME-SEX BLESSINGS THE RIGHT OR WRONG THING TO DO? DOES GOD BLESS SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS?

(This material may be used for one or two sessions.)

Background:

The 1998 Lambeth Conference of bishops reiterated the traditional doctrine of Christian marriage in its Resolution 1.10: “In view of the teaching of Scripture, [this Conference] upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage.” While the resolution went on to advise against the “blessing of same sex unions,” nevertheless it committed to “listen to the experience of homosexual persons” and assured such persons that they were “loved by God” and “full members of the Body of Christ.”

Are same-sex blessings equivalent to marriage, such that the two should share the same rite? Are they similar in form but fundamentally different, requiring distinct kinds of rites? Are they mutually exclusive, with marriage between one man and one woman the only faithful option?

Narrowed down, the central question seems to be: can the Church bless lifelong, committed sexual relationships – characterized by fidelity, monogamy, affection, and holy love – between two Christians of the same sex?

The following readings are designed to give us tools drawn from Holy Scripture, and from theological reflection upon Scripture, to help us as the Church respond faithfully to these pressing and difficult questions.

Readings and summaries

Reading E1: “The Radical Hope in the Annunciation: Why Both Single and Married Christians Welcome Children,” *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, (Duke University Press, 2001).

Summary E1: In this essay, Stanley Hauerwas, a prominent theological ethicist at Duke who serves as Canon Theologian at Christ Church Cathedral (Episcopal) in Nashville, reminds us that Christians don’t “get to make up what sex is for.” Instead, we start with the church’s historic practice of marriage, as it has been shaped by Holy Scripture. We do this, rather than start from a “general account of human sexuality,” because we as the church are called to live together as Christ’s disciples. The church is called to be a witness to the world of what it looks like to live together as disciples of Jesus, full of fruits of the Spirit such as love, hope, peace, patience, gentleness, forgiveness and faithfulness. That means that when we think about sex, we have to think about where sex “fits” into the church’s overall character and mission.

As the church, we live as a people of faith and hope. Even when it seems like suffering and sin may have the upper hand, we have faith in the victory that Jesus won over sin and death, and so we can live patiently in hope until the day when Jesus returns to establish his Kingdom of love, peace and justice forever.

Marriage fits inside that larger vision. God will be faithful to his promises to save and renew his church, even when we are unfaithful to him. As we learn to respond with our own faithfulness to God's deep and abiding faithfulness, we discover what it means to love this God who so loves us. As we learn how to respond in love and faith to this faithful and loving God, we also learn how to live with our spouses in love and faithfulness. The church's practice of marriage requires us to be faithful to our spouses "till death do us part," even though we can't possibly know what we're getting ourselves into! But the promise of faithfulness gives us the time to discover what this love really means. And by God's grace, knowing that God in Christ is forever faithful to us, we are able to live up to this promise. In this way, the love of our marriages reflect the love and faithfulness of Jesus.

Children fit within this vision, too. We have been given a very great hope in Jesus, so great that we believe the church is called to bear witness to it over many generations. Even our own individual deaths cannot swallow up this hope; Jesus destroyed death on Easter morning. We bear, raise and baptize children as a sign that even though we shall die and someday our children shall die, too, the hope we are given in Jesus is stronger than death itself. We raise children to pass on this hope and faith to those who will come after us.

The practice of marriage, then, as "unitive and procreative," is one facet of the church's larger witness in the power of the Spirit to the love and faithfulness of God in Christ. When we think about sexual ethics, we have to start here.

Reading E2: John Milbank, "Gay marriage and the future of human sexuality," Australian Broadcasting Corporation Religion and Ethics, 13 March 2012):
(<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/03/13/3452229.htm>)

Summary E2: The prominent Anglican theologian John Milbank argues that male–female differentiation and procreation are an essential part of what Christian marriage means. He appeals to our created nature. As the popular book from several years back had it, Milbank thinks that men are from Mars and women are from Venus—they have significantly different ways of viewing and acting in the world. He rejects the common, older view that women thus should stay in their place, or are somehow lesser than men—men and women are of equal value and worth, partners that need each other precisely in their difference. And marriage, he thinks, is the ancient social institution that grew up in large part to bring men and women in all of their differences together, in a common project on equal footing.

A key element of that common project, for Milbank, is bringing up the next generation. As an ethicist, Milbank is concerned that severing the natural link between sex and childbirth will lead to deep and unwelcome cultural changes. Most of us have a sense of, and deeply value, the family ties that go back generations—some part of me, for instance, is carried forward from the old homeplaces and traditions of my ancestors. And most of us can know that we were created in love by two persons and received as a gift, rather than made in a lab to precise specifications for a price. Milbank thinks that these basic, natural realities are at risk.

In the complete essay, he argues (unlike Radner) that the church ought to accept same-sex blessings! But he holds it is important to view them for what they are, as something valuable but distinct from marriage, so as not to efface the distinct value of traditional marriage itself.

Reading E3: Ephraim Radner, [“Same-Sex Marriage is Still Wrong,” The Anglican Communion Institute, 17 July 2013](http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2013/07/same-sex-marriage-is-still-wrong-and-its-getting-wronger-every-day/): <http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2013/07/same-sex-marriage-is-still-wrong-and-its-getting-wronger-every-day/>.

Summary E3: This excerpt places marriage in the context of where Christ calls us to follow him as disciples. The prominent Episcopal theologian Ephraim Radner sees “suffering procreative love” as deeply joined to what it means for humankind to follow our Lord in the way of the Cross. We are born to die, but marriage is a little red flag of love and hope we wave in the face of death: through the pain of childbirth and the great sacrifice of childrearing, we will pass along the deep goodness of life itself to the next generation. We will do this out of a love so strong that it’s willing to suffer great pains and losses; out of a sacrificial, agape love that’s faithful for the long haul, come what may. Out of this love comes the next generation; only out of this love will the next generation flourish. This Radner sees as deeply connected to walking in Christ’s footsteps as his disciples, as it images the suffering love of God in Christ that created and redeemed the whole world.

Marriage, then, Radner understands as essentially bound up with this “suffering procreative love,” with the project of men and women to bring forth and raise up the next generation. That is the deep logic to why Christian tradition has historically viewed procreation as essential to marriage; it “fits” with the whole story of how God in Christ has created and redeemed the world. To make procreation an extra add-on rather than a fundament of marriage would, then, change marriage’s meaning altogether. As a Christian ethicist, Radner reflects upon Scripture: what does it mean to say that marriage is a sacramental reality that somehow images “Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32)? This is his explanation of the Christian tradition’s answer to the question, and he does not think revisionist views are capable of “fitting” nearly so well with the story of Scripture.

Reading E4: Deirdre Good, Willis Jenkins, Cynthia Kittredge, and Eugene Rogers: “Marriage begins in eros, and ends in caritas,” from “A Theology of Marriage Including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals,” *Anglican Theological Review*, Winter 2011.

Summary E4: For these four Episcopal theologians, the love that is essential to marriage has nothing to do with male–female differentiation, nor does it necessarily involve the procreation of children. Rather, marriage most basically is a “school for virtue” that teaches its pupils to grow in love: from eros, the erotic, romantic sexual desire of one for another that’s often the spark that first lights the marital flame; to caritas or agape, the love that loves the other as one’s own self. In other words: the path to marriage might begin with seeing a very attractive young woman across a crowded room, and end with tightly holding that same woman’s hand 60 years later as she’s dying. From eros, to caritas—not leaving eros behind, but eros growing into something deeper.

That, these theologians propose, is what marriage is all about at its basis. It shapes our loves well, in the pathway of Christ. We might begin as amorous teenagers who “love” every cute movie star and pop idol we set our eyes on. We are led by marriage to love our spouse for his or her own sake,

rather than for the sake of our own sexual pleasure alone. Marriage is thus a school for our sanctification, for growing in holiness as our loves grow more Christ-like. Gender differentiation just doesn't come into play, and procreation isn't essential to the process. Same-sex couples do this just as well. They need marriage to sanctify their loves, just as opposite-sex couples do, and the church needs their own particular witness to Christ-like love.

Questions for discussion:

1. How might same-sex marriage change the meaning of traditional marriage? What is the risk?
2. How might it be argued that same-sex blessings won't change the basic meaning of marriage? Are there ways in which one might argue that marriage and community would actually be strengthened?
3. Are there elements of "lifelong, committed sexual relationships characterized by fidelity [and] monogamy... between two committed Christians of the same sex" that are aspects of God's creative purposes? If so, what should be the response of the Church to preserve and encourage the growth of these elements?
4. Within your congregation, what is at stake in your response to question 3?
5. What further questions have been raised for you by this discussion?

Handout: ETHICS

ARE SAME-SEX BLESSINGS THE RIGHT OR WRONG THING TO DO? DOES GOD BLESS SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS?

Does God bless lifelong, committed sexual relationships – characterized by fidelity, monogamy, and love – between two committed Christians of the same sex? What is the appropriate ethical response for us as Christians and as the Church?

A recent General Convention of TEC has proposed a blessing of two people of the same sex who:
–are committed to companionship, fidelity, and lifelong commitment
–hope to bear the fruits of the Holy Spirit...” (p. 24)

Ethical considerations include:

- the Church’s historic practice of marriage, as shaped by Scripture: unitive and procreative
- the love of our marriages ideally reflect the love and faithfulness of Jesus; marriage is a sacramental reality imaging Christ and the Church as his bride
- traditionally, marriage brings together the male-female differentiation
- traditionally, and historically, a primary purpose of marriage was procreation
- marriage may be seen as “suffering procreative love”
- marriage may also be seen as a “school for virtue...[and for] sanctification”, regardless of the gender

Questions:

1. How might same-sex marriage change the meaning of traditional marriage? What is the risk?
2. How might it be argued that same-sex blessings won’t change the basic meaning of marriage? Are there ways in which one might argue that marriage and community would actually be strengthened?
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5. What further questions have been raised for you by this discussion?

F. UNITY AND COMMON LIFE IN THE WORLDWIDE ANGLICAN COMMUNION: HOW ARE WE TOGETHER AND HOW ARE WE APART?

Background:

The Anglican tradition has long held that while there are essentials in our shared Christian faith, unity will not always mean uniformity. But what are the bounds of unity and common life in the wider Anglican Communion and other traditions in the worldwide Christian faith? How do we relate to them? What responsibility do we have?

Discussions about church unity within the Anglican Communion and in our relations with other denominations accelerated more than ten years ago. The decisions of the 2003 General Convention of the Episcopal Church sparked intense debate. A majority of deputies to this convention consented to the consecration as bishop of Eugene Robinson, who was openly gay and partnered. The Convention also suggested that, where local Episcopal leadership permits, such relationships might, given certain circumstances, be liturgically blessed. This was even more controversial in the international context.

Effects could be seen on the level of the Anglican Communion worldwide and in our national church structures. There was much polarizing. Such fracturing has also occurred more locally, of course: within individual congregations and within our diocese, and even within families. The sometimes heated conversations ensuing from those actions have strained the common life of a number of congregations.

In the aftermath of General Convention 2003, and at the urging of Anglican primates worldwide, the then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, the prime bishop through whom Anglicans are united, appointed a panel of international theologians and church leaders in October 2003 to help address such questions. The Lambeth Commission, as it was called, was charged to comment on the “legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal church ... and specifically on the canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion.” The Commission’s work was published in 2004 as *The Windsor Report*.

Further work on the topic came to fruit with the idea for an Anglican Communion Covenant, a document designed to further commitment and common cause while addressing polarizing actions. The Covenant was first broached in the Windsor Report ([paragraphs 113- 120](#)). Two international Anglican groups began work on it. The Joint Standing Committee of the Primates (that is, senior bishops, sometimes called archbishops) and the Anglican Consultative Council (a committee of lay, clerical and episcopal representatives from around the world), commissioned a study paper.

The then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, called together a Covenant Design Group to further the study and the drafting of a Covenant. Several revisions led to the form finalized in late 2009. While the Episcopal Church in this country opted in 2012 to “decline to take a position” on the Covenant, the work found in the document is helpful for understanding issues of unity. (See excerpts below.)

Also, at the 2012 General Convention, Resolution A049, which authorized provisional use of the rite The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, created further controversy. The liturgy “is a service of blessing for same-sex couples who are in lifelong, faithful monogamous, committed relationships,” as one church leader described it. Some welcomed its passage as a way forward. Others saw it as a violation of the intent of Scripture and tradition with potential for damage in our relations with other Anglican bodies worldwide.

Readings and Summaries

Reading F1: Excerpt from The Windsor Report, Section A: The Practical Consequences of a Healthy Communion. (http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_a/p2.cfm)

“Life in the Anglican Communion, as a communion of churches, is indeed nourished by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, building up the body in love. Throughout its history, the Anglican Communion has been sustained by a common pattern of liturgical life rooted in the tradition of the Books of Common Prayer; shaped by the continual reading, both corporate and private, of the Holy Scriptures; rooted in its history through the See of Canterbury; and connected through a web of relationships – of bishops, consultative bodies, companion dioceses, projects of common mission, engagement with ecumenical partners – that are the means and the signs of common life. This continues to flourish in a myriad of ways at the local as well as national and international level.”

Questions for discussion F1: How might conversation on the issues presented by The Windsor Report, particularly the issue of the American Episcopal Church and its relationship to the wider Anglican Communion, be discussed with both conviction and respect?

Reading F2: Excerpt from The Windsor Report, Section B, Autonomy. http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_a/p2.cfm

“A [denominational] body is ... 'autonomous' only in relation to others: autonomy exists in a relation with a wider community or system of which the autonomous entity forms part. The word 'autonomous' in this sense actually implies not an isolated individualism, but the idea of being free to determine one's own life within a wider obligation to others. The key idea is autonomy- in-communion, that is, freedom held within interdependence. The autonomy of each Anglican province therefore implies that the church lives in relation to, and exercises its autonomy most fully in the context of, the global Communion. This idea of autonomy-in-relation is clearly implicit in the laws of some churches: for instance, South East Asia describes itself as ‘a fully autonomous part of the Anglican Communion.’”

Questions for discussion F2: How should the Episcopal Church in the United States consider the views and experiences of a wider faith community? How are we both independent and interdependent?

Reading F3: Excerpt from The Anglican Communion Covenant, Section 4 of the Introduction to the Covenant has this to say about our role as Anglicans in the wider church, and our common communion:

In the providence of God, which holds sway even over our divisions caused by sin, various families of churches have grown up within the universal Church in the course of history. Among these families is the Anglican Communion, which provides a particular charism and identity among the many followers and servants of Jesus. We recognise the wonder, beauty and challenge of maintaining communion in this family of churches, and the need for mutual commitment and discipline as a witness to God's promise in a world and time of instability, conflict, and fragmentation. Therefore, we covenant together as churches of this Anglican Communion to be faithful to God's promises through the historic faith we confess, our common worship, our participation in God's mission, and the way we live together.
(<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm#sthash.CsAUCUnc.dpuf>)

Questions for discussion F3: This document is addressed to the church on the broad scale of the worldwide communion of Anglican churches, but what responsibility does it suggest in our local churches when it comes to living and serving together?

Reading F4: Excerpt from The Windsor Report: Section B: Adiaphora
(www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_b/p10.cfm#sthash.43sMtyXT.dpuf)

“As the Church has explored the question of limits to diversity, it has frequently made use of the notion of adiaphora: things which do not make a difference, matters regarded as non-essential, issues about which one can disagree without dividing the Church. This notion lies at the heart of many current disputes. The classic biblical statements of the principle are in Romans 14:1-15:13 and 1 Corinthians 8-10. There, in different though related contexts, Paul insists that such matters as food and drink (eating meat and drinking wine, or abstaining from doing so; eating meat that had been offered to idols, or refusing to do so), are matters of private conviction over which Christians who take different positions ought not to judge one another. They must strive for that united worship and witness which celebrate and display the fact that they are worshipping the same God and are servants of the same Lord.”

Questions for discussion F4:

1. How might the category of Adiaphora help us determine the proper relations between a national church body and other Anglican or ecumenical partners?
2. Two responses to this difficult (and to similarly controversial topics) might be: Constantly agitating and talking about the issues, or just wishing to sweep it all under the rug and move on. What might the perils be of either extreme? When we consider what is essential to our faith, how does that impinge on our awareness of how others see our actions?
3. How is your congregation doing in steering a middle course between the two tendencies or temptations?

4. Consider the familiar church dictum: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” How might that apply to the issues we face in our congregation, in the diocese, in the denomination, and in the Anglican Communion? In what ways are the issues brought to the fore now “essentials” or nonessentials?

Reading F5: Excerpt from The Anglican Communion Covenant, Sections 2 and 3

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm#sthash.CsAUCUnc.dpuf%29>

(2.1.4) the imperative of God’s mission into which the Communion is called, a vocation and blessing in which each Church is joined with others in Christ in the work of establishing God’s reign. As the Communion continues to develop into a worldwide family of interdependent churches, we embrace challenges and opportunities for mission at local, regional and international levels. In this, we cherish our mission heritage as offering Anglicans distinctive opportunities for mission collaboration.

(3.1.4) [Each church is to affirm:] the importance of instruments in the Anglican Communion to assist in the discernment, articulation and exercise of our shared faith and common life and mission. The life of communion includes an ongoing engagement with the diverse expressions of apostolic authority, from synods and episcopal councils to local witness, in a way which continually interprets and articulates the common faith of the Church’s members. ... In addition to the many and varied links which sustain our life together, we acknowledge four particular Instruments at the level of the Anglican Communion which express this co-operative service in the life of communion.

I. We accord the Archbishop of Canterbury, as the bishop of the See of Canterbury with which Anglicans have historically been in communion, a primacy of honour and respect among the college of bishops in the Anglican Communion as first among equals. ... As a focus and means of unity, the Archbishop gathers and works with the Lambeth Conference and Primates’ Meeting, and presides in the Anglican Consultative Council.

II. The Lambeth Conference expresses episcopal collegiality worldwide, and brings together the bishops for common worship, counsel, consultation and encouragement in their ministry of guarding the faith and unity of the Communion and equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4.12) and mission.

III. The Anglican Consultative Council is comprised of lay, clerical and episcopal representatives from our Churches. It facilitates the co-operative work of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, co-ordinates aspects of international Anglican ecumenical and mission work, calls the Churches into mutual responsibility and interdependence, and advises on developing provincial structures.

IV. The Primates’ Meeting is convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury for mutual support, prayer and counsel. The authority that primates bring to the meeting arises

from their own positions as the senior bishops of their Provinces, and the fact that they are in conversation with their own Houses of Bishops and located within their own synodical structures. In the Primates' Meeting, the Primates and Moderators are called to work as representatives of their Provinces in collaboration with one another in mission and in doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters that have Communion-wide implications.

This section of the Covenant concludes: "It is the responsibility of each Instrument to consult with, respond to, and support each other Instrument and the Churches of the Communion. Each Instrument may initiate and commend a process of discernment and a direction for the Communion and its Churches."

Questions for discussion F5:

1. How has the Episcopal Church in the United States taken seriously these "instruments of unity?" To what extent should we as an autonomous denomination not be hindered by such structures? To what extent should we submit to the potentially helpful input of a larger group of church bodies?
2. How might these larger bodies guide the Episcopal Church? What obligation do we have to them? Could that awareness keep the church from prophetic action? Or perhaps help it avoid the eccentricities of contemporary faith?

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm#sthash.CsAUCUnc.dpuf>

Handout: UNITY AND COMMON LIFE

IN THE WORLDWIDE ANGLICAN COMMUNION: HOW WE ARE TOGETHER AND HOW ARE WE APART?

The Anglican tradition has long held that while there are essentials in our shared Christian faith, unity will not always mean uniformity. At the Episcopal Church General Convention of 2003, a majority of deputies consented to the consecration as bishop of Eugene Robinson, who was openly gay and partnered. The Convention also suggested that, where local Episcopal leadership permits, such relationships might, given certain circumstances, be liturgically blessed. This was even more controversial in the international context.

The then-Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, appointed a panel of international theologians and church leaders to help address the subsequent divisions across the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Commission, as it was called, was charged to comment on the “legal and theological implications flowing from the decisions of the Episcopal ... and specifically on the canonical understandings of communion, impaired and broken communion.” The Commission’s work was published in 2004 as *The Windsor Report*.

Subsequently, Rowan Williams called together a Covenant Design Group to further the study and a draft another document which was finalized in late 2009 and entitled the [Anglican Communion Covenant](#). While the Episcopal Church in this country opted in 2012 to “decline to take a position” on the Covenant, the work found in the document is helpful for understanding issues of unity.

Questions for discussion:

1. What do you recall about the controversial actions of the denomination’s General Conventions of 2003 and 2012? What do you understand to be the most important issues brought to the fore by those actions?
2. How might the Episcopal Church in the United States respond to the views and experiences of a wider faith community in the Anglican Communion? How are we both interrelated and independent?
3. Consider the familiar church dictum: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” How might that apply to the issues we face in our congregation, in the diocese, in the denomination, and in the Anglican Communion? In what ways are the issues brought to the fore now essentials or nonessentials?
4. What are the bonds of unity and common life in the wider Anglican Communion and other traditions in the worldwide Christian faith? What responsibility do we have?
5. What responsibility do our local churches have when it comes to living and serving together?

G. ADDITIONAL READING

Episcopal Church/Anglican Communion documents

[Claiming the Blessing](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org) (<http://www.claimingtheblessing.org>, 2003).

[The Windsor Report](#) (Lambeth Commission on Communion, 2004).

[To Set Our Hope on Christ: a response to the invitation of Windsor Report para. 135](#) (New York: Office of Communication, the Episcopal Church Center, 2005).

[Anglican Communion Covenant](#) (Covenant Design Group, 2009).

[I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing](#): resources for the witnessing and blessing of a lifelong covenant in same-sex relationship (Commission on Liturgy and Music, The Episcopal Church, 2012). NB: this document includes the rite approved for trial use in the Episcopal Church.

Unity in Mission: a paper on common mission and the challenge posed by division, The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas (April 16, 2012).

Other writings and commentaries

Barclay, William, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2001), "Marriage and Divorce," pp. 227-254.

Gagnon, Robert, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: texts and hermeneutics* (2002).
Gagnon, Robert and Dan O. Via, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

Haller, Tobias, *Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009).

Wright, N.T., "[Where People Get Scripture Wrong](#)," (Relevant Magazine, April 10, 2012).

Tracy, David and Robert McQueen Grant, *Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (Fortress Press, 2005).

Johnson, Luke Timothy, *Scripture and Discernment: Decision Making in the Church* (Abingdon, 1983), pp. 63, 64, 144-148.

"Let the Reader Understand," (Diocese of New York, 2002),
<http://www.diocesenyny.org/pages/372-let-the-reader-understand>.

H. RESOURCES ON MARRIAGE AND SAME-SEX UNIONS

These resources are coded “Gold and “Green”.

- “Gold” represents the more traditional understanding.
- “Green” represents a rethinking of the tradition.

Referring to the respective positions in this way is one way to de-escalate the rhetoric when we have conversations with one another. If you are inclined to agree with the Gold side, please read or watch some of the material representing the Green side. If you are inclined to agree with the Green side, please read or watch some of the material representing the Gold side.

GENERAL RESOURCES

- Camosy, Charles C., Guidelines for Cultivating Civil Discourse, <http://www.anderson.edu/sites/default/files/migrate/diversity/civil-discourse.pdf>
- Coakley, Sarah, Love in time of infidelity: Rethinking sex and celibacy, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/10/29/3621015.htm>
- Gunter, Matthew, The King or a Fox: Configuring the Mosaic of Scripture, <http://www.diofdl.org/guides/studyguidekingorfox.pdf>
- Gunter, Matthew, Bearing with One Another When We Disagree, <http://anoddworkofgrace.blogspot.com/2015/02/bearing-with-one-another-1-broken-love.html>
- Paris, Jenell Williams , What Is “Sexual Holiness” Anyway?, <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/relationship/features/28995-what-is-sexual-holiness-anyway>

Green & Gold

- Same-Sex Relationships in the Life of the Church, Offered by The Theology Committee of the House of Bishops, http://www.collegeforbishops.org/assets/1145/ss_document_final.pdf

Gold

- Gagnon, Robert, The Bible and the 'Gay Marriage' Question (Part 1 of 3), <http://www.christianpost.com/news/the-bible-and-the-gay-marriage-question-52020/>
- Hays, Richard B., Awaiting the Redemption of Our Bodies, <http://www.presbytery-middletennessee.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/hays-article.pdf>

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- Allison, James, “But the Bible says...”? A Catholic reading of Romans 1, <http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/texts/eng15.html>
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