Task Force Report
The Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida

Table of Content

I. Observations and Conclusions

II. Getting Started
   A. Purpose of Task Force
   B. Members
   C. Objectives and desired results
   D. Larry R. Holben’s chart
   E. Reading with charity
   F. Thomas Merton prayer
   G. Primary Topics for Discussions

III. Topics
   A. Agreement and Pastoral Implications
   B. Scripture: What does the Bible say, and what does that mean for us today?
   C. Tradition and the Church: “We’ve always done it this way”
   D. Theology and Ethics
   E. Unity and Common Life in the Worldwide Anglican Communion: how are we together
      and how are we apart?

IV. Readings

Appendix 1: “Can We Disagree On Homosexuality Yet Remain Together?” by The Rev. Dr. Chuck DeGroat

Appendix 2: A summary of Braving the Wilderness (written by Brené Brown)

Appendix 3: “The Third Way, Evangelism, and Pastoral Care of LGBTQI”

Appendix 4: “Summary of Studies on Genetic Differences”
I. Observations and Conclusions

Observation #1

The Task Force was commissioned at the Diocesan Convention (January 2018) to offer a reflection on the decisions of General Convention 2015 in providing liturgies for same-sex marriage, and to consider both the canonical and pastoral implications for congregations within the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. The Task Force discussed implications that are relevant to all churches in the Diocese.

After the conclusion of General Convention 2018 and the passage of Resolution B012, the Task Force recognized the landscape for the discussion of human sexuality had changed. With regard to polity, Resolution B012 has removed a portion of the Bishop’s ecclesiastical authority and the implications of that removal are troubling.

Conclusion: The Task Force believes clergy and vestries should study and discuss the implications that are relevant to their context while making space for varying viewpoints. The Task Force believes the clergy of the diocese should support the Bishop in his implementation of Resolution B012. His leadership on this issue is essential.

Observation #2

The Task Force spent many hours in meetings discussing the biblical texts regarding human sexuality. We read academic books and articles on biblical studies, theological studies, ethics, polity as well as personal testimonies, and we discussed our different viewpoints at length. Task Force members held a variety of biblical, theological, and pastoral positions and did so with conviction and grace.

The Task Force recognizes among its members the historical Christian teaching regarding marriage as a sacramental institution intended by God for the lifelong partnership of one man and one woman as the normative and majority model for Christian belief and practice across both time and cultures. Those on the Task Force who embrace traditional interpretations and practices have done so with integrity, pastoral and theological reflection, and as the result of their commitment to Scriptural obedience.

The Task Force also recognizes among its members pastoral and interpretive variance in belief and practice regarding human sexuality and marriage. Those on the Task Force who embrace newer interpretations and practices have done so with integrity, pastoral and theological reflection, and as the result of their understanding that Scripture may be interpreted in such a way that allows for monogamous, life-long partnered same-sex relationships.

While there was movement in position by some members and while everyone felt themselves challenged to refinement, we did not find ourselves moving towards unanimity regarding a biblical, theological, or ethical understanding of sexuality.
**Conclusion:** No one wants anyone else to leave the discussion. The desire to stay together is strong and clear. Due to theological and ethical differences, the Task Force does not see the Diocese achieving unanimity. However, there is an opportunity for us “to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” in our differences (Ephesians 5:21 NIV).

**Observation #3**

The Task Force believes the church is the best place to have the discussion of human sexuality and same-sex marriage. It is the one place where people recognize they are sinners saved by grace, do not have everything figured out, and should be able to extend the same mercy to one another that has been extended to them in Christ. We also recognize that for too many the church has either avoided these discussions or had them among relatively homogenous, like-minded groups.

**Conclusion:** We implore the church and church leaders in the Diocese to engage the discussion outside the confines of their own positions. We believe there is an opportunity for the church to live differently and look differently than the rest of the culture. The Task Force proposes that churches in the Diocese participate in a deliberative process that incorporates the readings, questions, exercises, and discussions similar to that of our Task Force.

**Observation #4**

The Task Force members began their time together by identifying their “starting points,” using Larry Holben’s chart of representative viewpoints. (See “Task Force Resources” document.) We found this exercise to be an essential beginning, as it forced us to reexamine the options beyond “affirming” and “non-affirming” or “conservative” and “liberal.” After our readings and deliberations, we revisited the Holben chart with an eye towards assessing to what extent our individual positions had shifted or grown in complexity. This proved to be a fruitful exercise in cultivating a posture of respect, grace, submission to one another, and respect for one another’s position.

**Conclusion:** We recommend that all church leaders (ordained and lay people) read and discuss together the Preston Sprinkle’s edited volume (*Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*) and Brené Brown’s *Braving the Wilderness*, as well as make use of the Holben chart in various venues such as vestries, Sunday school, bible studies, and other groups (ECW, DOK, BoSA, etc). These conversations can be held at all levels of the life of the Diocese using these and other resources.
II. Getting Started

A. Purpose of the Task Force—Bishop Brewer (Diocesan Convention address, 2018)

“I do believe the formation of a Task Force is a good idea. Therefore, I am calling for the formation of a Task Force to deal with these concerns. I have asked Canon Justin Holcomb to Chair this task force. It will have as its members no more than 15 people, both lay and ordained, whom I will appoint, who represent the theological diversity that presently exists within the Diocese of Central Florida around the question of the Church blessing same sex marriages.

This Task Force will offer a reflection on the recent actions of General Convention in providing liturgies for same sex marriage, and consider the implications both canonical and pastoral for our congregations in Central Florida. That task force will take into consideration the Biblical, theological and pastoral implications of these actions. This reflection will be offered in the form of a report to our next Diocesan Convention.

I have no desire to sweep the issues under the rug. However, I want these issues dealt with in a way that is coherent with what we have already been given in the Prayer Book: meaning living together as a Diocese in a way that genuinely reflects the faith of the apostles, as well as unity and discipline of the Church.”

B. Members

Chair: The Rev. Canon Dr. Justin S. Holcomb
Mrs. Genevieve Brathwaite (St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Lake Mary)
The Rev. Jonathan French (Grace Episcopal Church, Ocala)
The Rev. Richard Gonzalez, M.D. (Church of the Messiah, Winter Garden)
The Very Rev. Dr. Reggie Kidd (Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Orlando)
The Rev. Cameron MacMillan (Church of the Good Shepherd, Maitland)
The Rev. Dr. C. Dawn McDonald (Church of the Holy Presence, DeLand)
The Rev. Dr. Robert Moses (St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Lakeland)
Mr. Stephen O’Connell (St. Richard’s Episcopal Church, Winter Park)
Dr. Robin Reed (Church of the Resurrection, Longwood)
Mr. Clay Rivers (Cathedral Church of St. Luke, Orlando)
The Rev. Dr. E. Daniel Smith (Holy Cross Episcopal Church, Sanford)
The Rev. Dr. James Sorvillo, Sr. (Church of the Ascension, Orlando)
Mrs. Monica Taffinder (All Saints’ Episcopal Church, Winter Park)
The Rev. Amy Turner (The Episcopal Church of the Blessed Redeemer, Palm Bay)

Ten members are ordained and five are lay leaders. The lay leaders serve on vestries or diocesan commissions. Eight members earned doctorates, one of which is an M.D. Two members are therapists.
C. Objectives and desired results

- To offer a reflection on the recent actions of General Convention in providing liturgies for same-sex marriage, and consider the implications both canonical and pastoral for our congregations in Central Florida.
- To take into consideration the Biblical, theological, and pastoral implications of these actions.
- To write a report for our next Diocesan Convention (2019). This report should include background on the Task Force, actions undertaken (list members, meetings, readings, topics, presentations, discussions, papers, etc.), what we learned, recommendations, etc.
- For people throughout the diocese to be engaged in healthy, constructive conversation on potentially divisive issues.
- To model what dialogue across differences can look like.
- To walk together in Christ even when we disagree on important matters.

D. Larry R. Holben, *What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints*

The chart below is helpful in its elaboration of contemporary perspectives on the issue. What is clear is that there is not a binary response: include or exclude, affirm or deny. Rather, there is a continuum of positions held by Christians. Most in our communities are merely a category (or two) away from each other, and not at extreme ends of this spectrum.

How can this help us to move forward in dialogue rather than settling in binary categories and settling for unhelpful caricatures?
The Task Force members self-identified in all categories across the spectrum, except for Category 1:

- Category 2 – 1 member
- Category 3 – 6 members
- Category 4 – 1 member
- Category 5 – 5 members
- Category 6 – 1 member
E. Reading With Charity

In order to read with a hermeneutic of charity, Canon Holcomb introduced an “ethics of reading” chart. We determined that it would be important to evaluate readings in this order:

1. Internal to the worldview of the author, what did they do well in making their argument? [“You nailed it!”]
2. Internal to the worldview of the author, what could they have done better for to make their argument and how can their argument be made stronger? [Maybe this would help your argument.]
3. According to your worldview, what did you appreciate about the author’s argument or point? [Appreciation]
4. According to your worldview, what do you critique about the author’s argument or point? [This is where I disagree.]

The following is a diagram of the approach. The numbers indicate the order we should evaluate if we are reading with charity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>+ (positive)</th>
<th>- (negative)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well is it written/argued?</td>
<td>Identify weakness of approach; offer advice (e.g. “It would’ve been stronger if…”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can be affirmed/applauded in author’s approach?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What you personally appreciated and agreed with</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique of content and explanation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F. Prayer

The Task Force began every meeting with this prayer from Thomas Merton:

*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem lost and in the shadows of death, I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.*
G. Primary Topics for Discussions

1. Regardless of views on same-sex marriage, on what do we agree? What are pastoral implications to consider?
2. Scripture: What does the Bible say, and what does that mean for us today?
3. Tradition and the Church
4. Theology and Ethics
5. Unity and Common Life in the Worldwide Anglican Communion: how are we together and how are we apart?
III. Topics

A. Agreement and Pastoral Implications

Regardless of view on same-sex marriage, on what do we agree? What are pastoral implications to consider? These lists will grow

**Agreement**

Task Force members offered initial thoughts on related agreement statements. We began with this exercise and returned to it frequently.

- We agree that we all affirm the truth of the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds.
- We agree that all people are created in the image of God, therefore we will “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being” (BCP, 304).
- We agree that marriage should be approached covenantally and not primarily contractually.
- We agree that the call to celibacy is an option for all, both heterosexual and homosexual, not just those with same-sex attraction.
- We want to be in full communion with The Episcopal Church and in full communion with the worldwide Anglican Communion.
- For clergy and lay leaders in the Diocese of Central Florida, maintaining emotional and relational connection in the midst of differences is some of the most challenging relational work we do in life, but this is an important space in which we are called to reflect the likeness of Christ to one another.
- We agree that clergy should include biblical and theological studies regarding sexuality in their plans for Christian education.
- We agree that chastity is expected before marriage for all.
- We agree on Richard Hooker’s triad of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason in approaching topics such as homosexuality.

The Task Force recommends that other groups discussing this topic also develop their own list of tenets upon which they agree to.

**Pastoral Implications**

The Task Force members kept a list of pastoral implications as they emerged in our meetings and as participants read, reflected, and prayed.

- **Teen Suicide**
  - Clergy and lay leaders that do not support same-sex marriage need to be sensitive about communicating their theology of marriage in ways that do not increase suicidal
ideation and shame for those who hear them are same-sex attracted or LGBTQI people. This is especially important regarding teens. The suicide rate for LGBTQI teens or same-sex attracted teens is very high and Christians should speak in ways that do not add to this.

- Intimate Partner Abuse (Domestic Violence or Domestic Abuse)
  - All clergy, regardless of their theology of marriage, need to be trained in pastorally caring for and respond to intimate partner violence for all relationships. Intimate partner violence is increased in same-sex relationships, primarily because negative cultural stereotypes can be used by one person in a same-sex relationship as a weapon against the other. In short, negative responses to same-sex marriage can be used by an abusive spouse as an additional weapon that is not available in heterosexual relationships.

- Identity
  - Clergy who support same-sex marriage should not promote the idea that our sexual desire is central to our identity. We are more than our sexual desire. Yes, it is important to our identity, but not primary. LGBTQI or same-sex attracted Christians are more than their sexual orientation.
  - Our primary identity in Christ is positively robust: adopted child of God, bride of Christ, temple of Christ, people of God, body of Christ, pure, perfect, righteous, and without spot or blemish.

- Hypocrisy
  - A traditional theology of marriage rings hollow when those who call for a “biblical doctrine of marriage” ignore non-biblical divorce and remarriage for heterosexual couples.

- Disingenuous
  - It seems disingenuous for clergy and churches who do not support same-sex marriage or same-sex sexual activity to call for celibacy for LGBTQI or same-sex attracted Christians, but not to celebrate and promote other forms of intimacy. See Wes Hill’s book, *Spiritual Friendship*.

- Support
  - How and in what ways can churches actively support, encourage, and empower gay, lesbian, same-sex attracted, and other LGBTQI Christians so they can experience the life-giving character of the historic Christian tradition?

- Spectrum

* Some prefer “same-sex attracted people” and others prefer “LGBTQI people.” This report uses both.
Clergy should use the Larry Holben’s “Six Representative Viewpoints” spectrum as a tool to show the wide diversity within the congregation, and also move past binary ways of thinking and talking about this topic.

- Pastoral care for those in Holben’s #2 and #3 categories
  - Clergy need to be aware of the need to offer pastoral care for those who will be traumatized by the church moving forward with Resolution B012, especially those with same-sex attraction who have ordered their lives according to the traditional teaching on and theology of human sexuality and do not want their same-sex attraction affirmed.

**Reading for further study on pastoral implications:**

- Allberry, Sam, *Is God Anti-Gay?*
- Gushee, David, *Changing Our Minds: Definitive Edition of the Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBT Christians with Responses to Critics*
- Hill, Wesley, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality*
- Hill, Wesley, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian*
- Marin, Andrew, *Us versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community*
- Pascoe, C. J., *Dude, You’re A Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*
- Wilson, Todd A., *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*
B. Scripture: What does the Bible say, and what does that mean for us today?†

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

Holy Scripture is the inspired “Word of God and [contains] all things necessary for salvation (BCP, p. 538). 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.

Given that Scripture is central to our faith, we need to consider how we read and interpret divine revelation in the Bible. We all read the same texts, but how faithful Christians read and interpret them may differ. In his book Those Episkopols, Episcopal priest the Rev. 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)

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.

Assigned Readings for session on scripture

- Sprinkle, Preston, ed., Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church
- Johnson, Luke Timothy, “Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture and Experience”:

† Some of the material is adapted from task force guides created by The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina (2012) and The Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac (2015).
Readings for further study on scripture

- Brownson, James V., *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*
- Gagnon, Robert A. J., *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*
- Peeler, Amy, “Imaging Glory: 1 Corinthians 11 Gender, and Bodies at Worship” in *Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Vision of Human Sexuality* edited by Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson

Questions


“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.”


“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.”

1. How do Johnson and Hays differ in their approach to reading Scripture?
2. How do Via and Gagnon differ in their approach to reading Scripture?
3. How important for reading scripture is the historical/cultural context of the text?
Selected Bible passages for consideration

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.

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.


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).

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 and marriage?
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 is read and understood in the light of tradition and reason. What role do tradition and reason play in interpreting or applying these passages of Scripture to this issue?
C. Tradition and the Church: “We’ve always done it this way”‡

One of the arguments against performing same-sex marriage is that it is a departure from the tradition of the Episcopal Church (TEC) and of the universal catholic Church. Some argue that precedent for performing same-sex marriages 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.

In the history of the Anglican and Episcopal Church, there are instances of significant change in a tradition or teaching.

*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.

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, 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.”

**Assigned Reading**

- James E. Griffiss, “Beginning of Anglicanism” in *Anglican Vision*
- James E. Griffiss, “Identity and Diversity” in *Anglican Vision*

----------------------------------------

‡ Some of the material is adapted from task force guides created by The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina (2012) and The Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac (2015).
• Fredrica Harris Thompsett, “Living With History” in *Living with History*
• Fredrica Harris Thompsett, “Living With Controversy” in *Living with History*

Discussion

Dan. O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon. *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*

*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:
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.

James E. Griffiss, Anglican Vision, pages 25-26

“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:
Griffis 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.


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:
In the Articles of Religion (1801), 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)

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*.
T 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).

T 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; the Anglican
response in the second half of the 19th century to evolution and the Bible.


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” (219)
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.

Questions

1. When has the Episcopal Church made changes in tradition in your lifetime?
2. In what ways were these changes in tradition supportedtheologically, biblically, pastorally?
3. What do you think *does* justify making a change in Church tradition?
4. How might same-sex marriages affect traditional, heterosexual marriages?
5. How is offering same-sex marriage 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?
6. Do other rights issues apply or not?
7. What questions have gone unanswered for you?
D. Theology and Ethics

The central question seems to be: Does God bless lifelong, committed sexual relationships – characterized by fidelity, monogamy, affection, and holy love – between two Christians of the same sex? What is the appropriate ethical response for us as Christians and as the Church?

Ethical considerations include:
- the Church’s historic practice of marriage, as shaped by Scripture: unitive and procreative
- the love of our marriages ideally reflects 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 sex

Assigned Readings for session on theology and ethics

- Radner, Ephraim, “Same-Sex Marriage is Still Wrong,” The Anglican Communion Institute, 17 July 2013
- Rogers Jr., Eugene F., “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life” in Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings
- Rogers Jr., Eugene F., “The Shape of the Body and the Shape of Grace” in Sexuality and the Christian Body

Readings for further study on scripture

- Rogers Jr., Eugene F., ed., Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body
- Rogers Jr., Eugene F., ed., Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings

---

8 Some of the material is adapted from task force guides created by The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina (2012) and The Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac (2015).
• Ward, Graham, “The Erotics of Redemption” in *Cities of God*
• Yarhouse, Mark A., *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*

**Readings**


**Summary:**
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.

http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/03/13/3452229.htm

Summary:
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.


Summary:
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” (Eph. 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.


Summary:
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 bottom. 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

1. Why does Milbank think that same-sex marriage will change the basic meaning of marriage? What does he think is risked in doing so?

2. How might it be argued that same-sex marriages 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. What is at stake in your response to question 3?
E. Unity and Common Life in the Worldwide Anglican Communion: how are we 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. 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 fifteen 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 of Eugene Robinson as bishop, who was 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 dioceses, within individual parishes, and even within families. The sometimes heated conversations ensuing from those actions have strained the common life of a number of parishes.

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. One issue was 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.

Further work on the topic came to fruition 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.

Subsequently, 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 entitled the Anglican Communion Covenant. While the Episcopal Church in this country opted in 2012 to

** Some of the material is adapted from task force guides created by The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina (2012) and The Episcopal Diocese of Fond du Lac (2015).
“decline to take a position” on the Covenant, the work found in the document is helpful for understanding issues of unity.

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.

Questions

1. What do you recall about the controversial actions of the denomination’s General Conventions of 2003, 2012, and 2015? What do you understand to be the most important issues brought to the fore by those actions?

2. 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?

3. What responsibility do our local churches have when it comes to living and serving together?

Assigned Reading

- Rusch, William G., Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity
- 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)

Reading

Excerpt from The Windsor Report, Section A: The Practical Consequences of a Healthy Communion

“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.”

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_a/p2.cfm

Question:

1. 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?

Excerpt from The Windsor Report, Section B, Autonomy

“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.’”

www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_b/p9.cfm#sthash.QHhzxikO.dpuf

Question:

1. How might the Episcopal Church in the United States consider the views and experiences of a wider faith community? How are we both independent and interdependent?

Excerpt from The Anglican Communion Covenant, Section 4 of the Introduction to the Covenant document 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 charm 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

Question:

1. 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?

Excerpt from The Windsor Report: Section B: Adiaphora

“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.”

www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/section_b/p10.cfm#sthash.43sMtyXT.dpuf

Questions:

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 can your congregation and your diocese navigate 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 parishes, in the diocese, in the denomination, and in the Anglican Communion? In what ways are the issues brought to the fore now “essentials”? Nonessentials?
Excerpt from The Anglican Communion Covenant, Sections 2 and 3

(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 (Eph 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.”
http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/covenant/final/text.cfm#sthash.CsAUC

Questions:

1. How has the Episcopal Church in the United States taken seriously these “instruments of unity?” How extensively 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?


Summary (abstract from article):
This article addresses the current state of ecclesiological dissonance in the Church of England and analyses the theological and pastoral issues that are at stake. It tackles the two ecclesiological anomalies that now face the church and compromise its received polity. (a) The College of Bishops includes bishops who are unable to recognize the priestly and episcopal orders of their female colleagues and are unable to be in full sacramental communion with them. This situation raises the question of the ecclesial integrity of the College of Bishops: is there now a single College? (b) Some bishops are unable in conscience to recognize the priestly ordination of some clergy – male as well as female – within their diocese because these clergy are female or have been ordained by a female bishop. Is it possible for the bishop, in that situation, to exercise a full episcopal ministry in relation to those female clergy? The article goes on to explore, by means of the concepts of reception, economy and charity, whether a modus vivendi is possible that would enable the Church of England to live with these two anomalies with theological integrity.

William G. Rusch, Ecumenical Reception

Summary:
Rusch begins with a bird’s eye view of the term “reception” across several disciplines—law, philosophy, literary criticism—before homing in on its theological import. He traces its use as a term and as a practice from the New Testament up to the twentieth century, painting a picture of a dynamic process that fosters unity and diversity among churches and spiritual communities. Finally, he examines the new chapter in the history of
reception due to the establishment of the ecumenical movement and considers what will be necessary for it to continue to move the church forward.
IV. Bibliography

The readings listed here have been listed previously under specific topics and categories

*If a reading is listed a being provided electronically it can be found here:
http://www.cf diocese.org/task-force-reading-list/

Books, chapters, and articles

Allberry, Sam, Is God Anti-Gay?


Brown, Brené, Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone

Brownson, James V., Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships

Gagnon, Robert A. J., The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics

Gagnon, Robert and Dan O. Via, Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003)

Good, Deirdre, Willis Jenkins, Cynthia Kittredge, and Eugene Rogers, “A Theology of Marriage Including Same-Sex Couples: A View from the Liberals,” Anglican Theological Review, Winter 2011 [provided electronically]

Griffiss, James E., Anglican Vision

Gushee, David, Changing Our Minds: Definitive Edition of the Landmark Call for Inclusion of LGBT Christians with Responses to Critics

Haidt, Jonathan, The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion

Haller, Tobias, Reasonable and Holy: Engaging Same-Sexuality


Hiestand, Gerald L., Beauty, Order, and Mystery: A Christian Vision of Human Sexuality


Hill, Wesley, “Reflections on Teaching and Living ‘Traditional’ Sexual Ethics in the Episcopal Church” [provided electronically]

Hill, Wesley, Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality

Hill, Wesley, Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian

Jenson, Robert, “Male and Female He Created Them,” in I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments, edited by Christopher R. Sietz and Carl E. Braaten [provided electronically]


Johnson, Luke Timothy, “Homosexuality and the Church: Scripture and Experience” [provided electronically]

Jordan, Mark D., The Ethics of Sex

Jordan, Mark D., The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology

Jordan, Mark D., ed., Authorizing Marriage?: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions


Loughlin, Gerard, ed., Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body

Marin, Andrew, Us versus Us: The Untold Story of Religion and the LGBT Community


O’Donovan, Oliver, “Homosexuality in the Church: Can There Be a Fruitful Theological Debate?” in Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings

Pascoe, C. J., Dude, You’re A Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School


Rogers Jr., Eugene F., Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God

Rogers Jr., Eugene F., ed., Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings

Rogers Jr., Eugene F., “Sanctification, Homosexuality, and God’s Triune Life” in Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings

Rogers Jr., Eugene F., “The Shape of the Body and the Shape of Grace” in Sexuality and the Christian Body

Rusch, William G., Ecumenical Reception: Its Challenge and Opportunity

Sprinkle, Preston, ed., Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church

Thompsett, Fredrica Harris, Living With History


Ward, Graham, “The Erotics of Redemption” in Cities of God

Webb, William J., Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis


Wilson, Todd A., Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality

Wright, N.T., “Where People Get Scripture Wrong” (Relevant Magazine, April 10, 2012) [provided electronically]

Yarhouse, Mark A., *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture*

Bibliography of Episcopal Church/Anglican Communion documents

*The Windsor Report* (Lambeth Commission on Communion, 2004) [provided electronically]

*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) [provided electronically]

*Anglican Communion Covenant* (Covenant Design Group, 2009)

*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) [provided electronically]

“Task Force on the Study or Marriage” called for in the 2012 at the 77th General Convention [provided electronically]

Appendix 1

This reading was sent to Task Force members before our first meeting.

“Can We Disagree On Homosexuality Yet Remain Together?”
The Rev. Dr. Chuck DeGroat

[This is a shorter and slightly modified version of his larger paper.]

Room for Disagreement

… for the foreseeable future we must find ways to live within the church in a situation of serious moral disagreement while still respecting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. If the church is going to start practicing the discipline of exclusion from the community, there are other issues far more important than homosexuality where we should begin to draw a line in the dirt: violence and materialism, for example.


Richard Hays, a well-respected New Testament scholar at Duke University, holds to a traditional view on homosexuality. His words are timely and important for all who differ, though. Is there room for disagreement on this issue among Christians who affirm the creeds?

Clearly, the answer is yes. Enter any church holding to a traditional view on homosexuality on a Sunday morning and you will find a diversity of views on this and on a whole range of topics, from one’s political allegiance to one’s stance on abortion to one’s view of women in leadership. Churches hold difference all the time. Difference is one of the constitutive aspects of the “body” of Christ (1 Cor. 12). We have lived with difference.

We are faced with a question of remaining unified amidst difference in this time and place.

Case Closed? We Need to Examine Experience and Scripture

Is this case closed?

By “case closed,” I mean to indicate that for some, there is absolutely no reason to re-visit the texts or the science on this.

I’m not nearly as confident as I used to be on what was considered to be “case closed.” I’m wrestling with an issue I never thought I’d question. It makes me anxious. It makes me uncomfortable. But, the gift of our tradition is a sturdy and stubborn commitment to going back to the Scriptures and letting them do their disruptive work on our lives and theology. Growing toward humility is, in fact, an attribute of maturity.
The chart below is helpful in its elaboration of contemporary perspectives on the issue. What is clear is that there is not a binary response: include or exclude, affirm or deny. Rather, there is a continuum of positions held by Christians. As I look at this, I sense that most in my community are merely a category (or two) away from each other, and not at extreme ends of this spectrum. *How can this help us to move forward in dialogue rather than settling in binary categories and settling for unhelpful caricatures?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Christians Think about Homosexuality: Six Representative Viewpoints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Condemnation / Abomination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture makes no distinction between same-sex acts and same-sex orientation; both are condemned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Promise of Healing / Restoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through inner healing, gays and lesbians can move into a heterosexual orientation, though a struggle with homosexual temptations may continue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Call to Costly Discipleship / Celibacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete healing may not be possible for all gays and lesbians; faithful Christians who continue with a same-sex orientation will commit to lifelong celibacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Pastoral Accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed, lifelong monogamous same-sex partnerships can be tolerated (not commended or idealized) as a lesser evil (for instance, better than the chaos of promiscuity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay and lesbian relationships can be affirmed as a positive good; not only heterosexual relations but also same-sex ones can achieve a self-transcending exchange of love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice insists that the heterosexual majority in the church not dictate to gays and lesbians what they can and cannot do with their sexuality. Homophobia, not being gay, is the main evil.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Does this chart help you place yourself? What questions does it raise for you with regard to how others are processing this? What questions might you be asking of your friends?*

**Certainty vs. Confidence: Can We Live With Humility?**

A helpful distinction needs to be made, a distinction between confidence and certainty. *Certainty* is unhelpful, I’d argue. It betrays the epistemic humility to which we’re called as Christians. If Calvin is right and if, indeed, we are just babies babbling about the things of God, then it behooves us to approach debated issues, in particular, with care and charity. The preferred language for Christians, I would suggest, is *confidence*. I would suggest that we use the following categories:

> *Creedal issues* - Christians maintain a very high degree of *confidence* in their conviction (i.e. the Trinity, a literal death, and Resurrection). Where differences exist (with those who deny the Trinity or the Resurrection), unity as a Body cannot be maintained (though relationship and dialogue is encouraged, as is modeled by Miroslav Volf, for instance, in his dialogue with Muslims).
➢ Denominational and Confessional issues – Christians maintain a high but gracious confidence in their convictions (doctrine of scripture, sovereignty and free will, real presence or spiritual presence, atonement approaches). Where differences exist, Christians maintain ecumenical relationship (Protestant and Catholic dialogue).

➢ Charity issues – Christians maintain a humble confidence, knowing that wise Christians disagree with each other. Issues include baptismal practice, ordination, political convictions, approaches to the interpretation of Gen. 1-2 for faith and science, and a variety of moral issues implied in Romans 14 (disputable matters). Christians maintain unity in the body despite their differences, within churches and denominations. Moral issues include use of tobacco and alcohol, divorce and remarriage, contraception, approaches to infertility, etc.

The pressing question is this: Can this be for us a disputable matter? Can we differ on our theological convictions and yet stay together?

As I’ve spoken to a variety of people about this issue, I sense the anxiety, even potential volatility, as it feels like one’s shift on this issue amounts to a Copernican Revolution on the settled issue of human sexuality. Re-visiting the relevant texts in light of science is not new to us, but the anxiety amps up as we consider a variety of factors, including our settled views of Scripture, our relationships with one another, how clergy communicate well with our congregations, and how parishioners communicate with clergy. It feels like a betrayal, for some. We must pause and examine our emotional responses, even before we examine the important texts.

Many are often quick to use strong words, like “apostate,” “unorthodox,” “unbiblical,” even “tragic” or “draconian,” “discriminatory,” and “Neanderthal.” What if instead we saw words pop up like “curious,” or phrases like “interested in understanding more of the story,” or perhaps “What an opportunity to study Scripture together among friends who differ but affirm its authority.” It encourages me that despite the extreme reactions, a common one from our bishop and in our diocese is this: We disagree on this issue but we are eager to maintain unity for the sake of the mission.

As we posture ourselves with humility, we begin first by listening. Because we are fundamentally relational beings, we thrive through connection. And too often, we sabotage connection by reacting rather than reflecting. In listening, we need not agree. But we remain connected where our differences are matters of charitable disagreement. Humility is a sign of a healthy body, not certainty.

Checking Our Hearts

In responding to the question “Can we differ on homosexuality yet remain together?” we might ask ourselves what assumptions we bring that might need to be questioned. If we were to
honestly expose our hearts to scrutiny, we might find that we hold some critical, uncharitable, and ultimately hurtful assumptions within. Can you relate to any of these?

- **Progressives have abandoned Scripture’s authority and sold out to culture.**
- **Traditionalists are simply naïve literalists who aren’t concerned about the science.**
- **Progressives are motivated by a liberal agenda and they want to re-write the Bible so it’s convenient for them.**
- **Traditionalists have never spent time with someone who is gay.**

Amped-up rhetoric that claims that traditionalists are not compassionate or naively literalistic or anti-science is mostly untrue, and not helpful. Accusations that traditionalists are modern-day Pharisees who aren’t open-minded and who are missing the Spirit's leading actually reveal the Pharisaic attitude of the progressives judging them.

Judgments of those who are progressive that include claims of “abandoning the truth” and “leaving orthodoxy” are naive, and miss the real life stories of men and women wrestling with this. Will we privilege one person's story over the next?

In a video interview, Redeemer Church (PCA) pastor Tim Keller critiqued the fact that we've singled this issue out, and that traditionalists (and he is traditional) tend to be self-righteous on it. Wisely, he says that Jesus talks about greed way more than he talks about sexual sin like adultery, for instance. He cautions us about calling homosexuality a sin (though he'd agree with that proposition) because it is misleading - self-righteousness gets you to hell, he says, not homosexuality (and likewise, heterosexuality never got anyone to heaven). We'd be wise to hear Keller's words, whether our self-righteousness animates our certainty as a progressive or as a traditionalist on this. Sadly, the banter I see on social media especially, from all sides, tends toward arrogant certitude and self-righteousness.

*Are we able to critique ourselves? Are we able to see the toxicity of our self-righteousness as far pressing than our agreement on homosexuality?*

**A Third Way?**

Duke University scholar Richard Hays ends a compelling chapter in his extraordinary work *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* with a call to charity. Though he affirms a traditional position, he recognizes that he lives, works, and worships alongside LGBT men and women, and many who hold to more progressive positions. Therefore, he counsels a kind of “third way” which privileges relationship, and calls Christians to tackle issues which he (along with other traditionalists like Tim Keller) views to be far more central to the moral vision of Scripture. Hays writes
…for the forseeable future we must find ways to live within the church in a situation of serious moral disagreement while still respecting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. If the church is going to start practicing the discipline of exclusion from the community, there are other issues far more important than homosexuality where we should begin to draw a line in the dirt: violence and materialism, for example.

There are certainly issues worth dividing over. Hays counsels us to remain connected, though, turning our eyes together to the central evils addressed by Jesus. For some, homosexuality is the “great apostasy of our age,” as one prominent Baptist theologian posted. I understand apostasy as abandoning the Gospel. And I would divide over that. Perhaps, we need to ask ourselves if we believe what this Baptist theologian believes. Or, perhaps we need to ask ourselves how we abandon the Gospel each and every day ourselves.

What is the Gospel? If one claims that another is abandoning the Gospel, what exactly is she abandoning? How do you understand the Gospel as “good news” to the LGBT community?

For the Mission

We exist for the sake of a vision larger than ourselves. This vision addresses the brokenness of our cities with the hope of the Gospel.

How can we rise above the fray of division and remain united? If there is a temptation to cultural accommodation right now, my sense is that the temptation is to join the “crowd” in its polarizing rhetoric and reactivity. It would be tempting to settle for the binary choices of inclusion/exclusion, affirm/deny, in/out. However, that would miss the unique situation we’re in.

Is it possible to live with unity amidst diversity? I suspect that our unity would be condemned by traditionalists who would see unity itself as a watering down of the Gospel and progressives who do not see this as a disputable matter and who are frustrated that someone in category 6 does not go far enough in a pastoral stance.

Can we live together within this complex matrix of relational and theological differences? Is a third-way sustainable, particularly when the Gospel and mission stays central?

We will need to wrestle with these things together, honestly and charitably, naming places of confusion and disappointment, anger and sadness, hope and opportunity.

In doing so, we are perhaps also invited to ask, along with Richard Hays, what the significant moral issues are for us. What will we turn our attention to? How will we together root out evil, violence, materialism, greed, envy, pride, and more in our own hearts and in our cities? Uniting around our common mission is critical.

I can imagine the utter shock of a denomination and among Christians broadly if they see a diocese, classis, presbytery, or synod committed to the mission of being the very presence of Christ for the city maintaining unity in the essential creedal stances, and yet living with
disagreements on the sacraments, homosexuality, and more. Is it possible that we might not just talk about a third way, but live it?
Appendix 2

This summary of Braving the Wilderness (written by Brené Brown) by Jonathan French was sent to Task Force members before the first meeting.

Dr. Brené Brown is a researcher, social scientist, (Episcopalian!) and author of the book Braving the Wilderness. I believe this book is a gift to our culture’s current milieu of animosity, divisiveness and suspension. We don’t have difficult conversations well. Instead, we attack, berate or belittle one another, consequently losing our humanity in the process. BTW is a roadmap to these difficult conversations, disagreeing with one another as appropriate and yet finding reasons to remain together. Hers is a quest for belonging and though I don’t agree with every premise (specifically I find her definition of “spiritually” lacking), I have found her words helpful and full of relevant (if challenging) applications.

In chapter one she writes, “I search for inspiration from the brave innovators and disrupters whose courage feels contagious … I summon up men and women who have shaped the world with their courage and creativity. And who have, at least on occasion, pissed people off. They are a varied bunch.”

Whether we realize it or not, there have been creative and courageous people who have inspired us to stick with it. To stay the course. To not give up on relationship even while dogmas are being thrown like hand grenades. And their bravery has inspired us to get to the point we’re at today. I believe Braving the Wilderness is voice to be both who God is creating us to be while also calling us to be willing to stand-alone with him as necessary.

Braving the Wilderness has four key principles:

1. People are hard to hate close up. Move in.
2. Speak truth to bullshit. Be civil.

According to Dr. Brown, “We’re going to need to intentionally be with people who are different from us. We’re going to have to sign up, join, and take a seat at the table. We’re going to have to learn how to listen, have hard conversations, look for joy, share pain, and be more curious than defensive, all while seeking moments of togetherness.” (Emphasis mine)

The verdict is in: We are more lonely and heartbroken than we’ve ever been. But it doesn’t need to stay this way. We can have hard conversations—disagree as necessary—and still find places of togetherness. The family of Christ needs each other. If we can stop feeling compelled to know everything, stop being dismissive of objective inquire and quit making up false dichotomies during emotional arguments (Chapter 5), we can find a new peace.

This can be a roadmap to a place the Episcopal church hasn’t yet gone. A place where we see each other, refuse to be suspicious, reject specious and easy arguments, agree AND disagree in
love … all while pursuing a common life in Jesus together. This is possible. I believe it with my whole heart. *Braving the Wilderness* can be a starting place for our journey towards that end.
The church needs a new apologetic, a way of thought and life that neither demonizes nor elevates the same-sex desires facing many faithful Christians. This new apologetic must permit us to form a deeper Christian response to homosexuality, one that honors both Scripture, the wisdom of tradition, and people’s real experience.

While I still use the words gay and celibate to describe myself, what ultimately defines me is God’s overshadowing covenant love. And he invites all people, including those like me, into this same holy, covering relationship. There has been much pushback toward this stance. I have multiple reasons for why I hold this position, which I outline in A War of Loves, but I want to hone in on one particular reason in this post.

The love of God is ultimately invitational.

Extending the Invitation

Mainstream secular culture feels alienated by terms like same-sex attracted and gay lifestyle. There is no monolithic gay lifestyle. The term same-sex attracted sounds medical, like a diagnosis—reminiscent of when same-sex desire was seen as a disease. Such terms can place hindrances in the way of those who need to hear the gospel message. When I entered the church and heard these terms, they kept me from feeling included and understood.

On the other hand, the term gay is positive and welcoming for those who are gay or SSA. Christians would do well to focus on removing boundaries—existential, intellectual, and spiritual—in order to know the good news for our own sexual brokenness, and then, further, to share the good news humbly from this place with others.

Identifying with others in the LGBTQI world can open doors to engage people who need to hear about Christ. It can also give us the chance to speak honestly against the horrible ways Christians have often treated the gay community. I pray this third-way apologetic will carry us out of the harmful culture war and into the new frontiers of reaching people for Christ.
Often when Christians focus on the world’s sins, we neglect to communicate the solution: the love of Jesus Christ. In failing that way, we condemn people before they’ve even had the chance to know God’s grace and understand that he is what they are really seeking.

Hear me well: homosexuality is not an evangelistic issue. It is a discipleship issue.

So we must approach it that way. But we also need to remember that without a knowledge of God’s grace, the gift of the Spirit, and an understanding of God’s satisfying love, discipleship kills rather than gives life, condemns rather than convicts.

Celibacy is no different. Gay or same-sex-attracted celibacy must be a response to God’s love, not a legalistic bottling up of our human desires. It is about the redirected affections of a transformed heart.

Once we belong to Christ, we all—no matter our orientation—need to be discipled by him in the Spirit and be willing to be purified in our desires. Churches must not leave LGBTQI people in the dark pastorally and theologically about their particular situation. If they do, the entire body suffers from the idolatrous effects of a disordered love in the whole church body.

The Choice Before Us

Each of us is given a choice: will we escape our self-imposed death sentence by repenting and believing the incredibly good news that God loves us? Jesus Christ put an end to this war of loves between our idols and the true and living God. He stands ready to welcome us into his embrace, if we are willing to lay down our right to define ourselves.

The love of God is where each of us can find freedom from the prison of our own identity. This is what I have experienced. If my story has any message, it is that the love of God can reach any of us, wherever we are.
Appendix 4

“Summary of Studies on Genetic Differences”

The Rev. Richard Gonzalez, M.D.

Recently scientists have begun to study genetic differences in homosexual and heterosexual men. But do genes make people gay? Alan Sanders of the north shore university health system studied 2000 gay and heterosexual males and found some differences.

There were difference in genes 13 and 14 as well as the X chromosome and chromosome 8. Chromosome 13 is a neurodevelopmental gene expressed in the diencephalon part of the brain. The diencephalon relays sensory information between brain regions and controls many autonomic functions of the peripheral nervous system. It connects structures of the endocrine system with the nervous system and works with the limbic system structures to generate and manage emotions and memories. Chromosome 14 is involved in the function of the thyroid gland and interestingly, homosexual men tend to have more thyroid disease then heterosexual males. And there may be a correlation between thyroid function and sexual orientation in men. The Xq28 chromosome difference was also associated with thyroid disease and was found in mothers of homosexual men. Chromosome 8 as well Xq28 are also involved in male sexual orientation.

So, are all men who have these genetic markers gay? No, because many other factors play a role, including the environment. “There are probably multiple genes involved, each with a fairly low effect,” Sanders says. “There will be men who have the form of gene that increases the chance of being gay, but they won’t be gay.”

Our biological understanding of homosexuality in women lags behind that of men. There have been studies suggesting that there is a genetic element to homosexuality in women, but more research has been done in men, says Sanders.

While there seems to be a possible genetic influence in homosexuality, no “gay gene” has been found. It is most likely a combination of genes and the environment and perhaps other yet to be discovered genetic differences.