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BISHOP OF MILWAUKEE

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August 29, 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

On June 7 of last year, following a conversation with the clergy of the diocese, I wrote to you regarding the implementation of the 2012 General Convention Resolution A049—Authorize Liturgical Resources for Blessing Same Gender Relationships. That resolution set forth a provisional rite for blessing same gender relationships, subject to the direction of the diocesan bishop. In that letter I stated that, while I was not authorizing the rite for use at that time, I was “aware that many of our clergy feel the need to offer a generous, pastoral liturgical response to gay and lesbian couples.” I also agreed to the formation of a task force to consider and propose a way to provide such a response. In consultation with the Standing Committee, in their role as council of advice to the bishop and at their urging, I passed this work on to them. The only caveat I gave them in their work was that I would not authorize the rite set forth in A049.

I am grateful for the good work of the Standing Committee in facilitating a conversation that in the past has been difficult to have in this diocese. I am also grateful for all of you, who, over these past months, have taken the time and risk to have these conversations. It is clear to me from the Standing Committee’s report, and from my engagement with many of you, that attitudes in the diocese have shifted from when I became bishop 11 years ago. I am also aware that some of this shift may be due to the fact that some of our more conservative members felt that they no longer had a place in this Church, and have left us in spite of my best efforts to assure them of the importance of their presence within our community.

Of course, there are other factors contributing to this attitudinal shift. We are living in a time in American culture when civil marriage equality is becoming the norm. In June, this state’s ban on same-sex marriage was declared unconstitutional. While that ruling is currently stayed pending appeal, in all likelihood the ruling will be upheld by the appellate court, and same-sex marriage will become legal in Wisconsin. Along with another bishop in this circuit, I signed an amicus brief that supports the overturning of the ban on same-sex civil marriage because of my belief that all persons deserve equal protection under the law.

It is within this context that I receive and respond to the Standing Committee’s report and recommendation. I take my responsibility as chief pastor and teacher of this diocese very seriously. As the Apostle Paul makes clear, those who teach will be held doubly accountable. As such, I cannot and will not authorize the use of the provisional rite outlined in General Convention Resolution A049. Liturgy is one of the principal ways that Anglican Christians are formed. The law of prayer is the law of belief set forth in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

My concerns regarding A049 are clearly stated in my blog post, "Yes to Bless or Christian Marriage for All," (<http://milwaukeebishop.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/yes-to-bless-or-christian-marriage-for-all/>) which I again commend to you for reflection. In summary, my concerns are as follows:

- In seeking to create "justice" for one group of people (gays and lesbians) it creates an injustice for another group (those who cannot marry because they would suffer dire economic consequences.)
- A049 creates a second class of citizens in the church: those who can marry and those who cannot.
- A049 obscures this Church's teaching that the proper place for sexual intimacy is marriage.
- A049 assumes a trajectory of the actions of previous General Conventions that places consensus resolutions clearly on one side of the issue.

Moreover, I am grateful to my colleague and friend, the Rt. Rev. Dorsey McConnell for his well-reasoned critique of the rite, which I commend to you. This critique articulates some of my own rationale in not authorizing the rite in its entirety. His comments may be found here.

<http://www.episcopalpgh.org/docs/PastoralLetter131125-FINAL.pdf>.

The Standing Committee report, with its recommendation that I grant permission for a "local option," errs in its definition of local. In Anglican ecclesiology the local church is not the parish church, but rather the diocese, because it is only in the diocese that the fullness of apostolic ministry resides. This ecclesial truth is a reminder that we are never Christians alone.

As chief pastor, I have to balance my own theological conviction with humility, and a willingness to create space for those who disagree with me. I must also consider what is best for the diocese. My personal position is that, given the disputed witness of Scripture and Tradition in this matter, I see the blessing of same sex couples by the Church as a pastoral provision, informed by modern insights into human sexuality and human development, not unlike the blessing of marriages of persons who have been divorced.

Therefore, after much prayer, consultation, and reflection I am willing to allow clergy of this diocese to bless the marriages of same sex couples who are civilly married. An appendix accompanying this letter outlines the guidelines for such blessings, and sets forth a form I have approved for use in these instances. Officiating at such blessings is contingent upon both following the guidelines, and using the modified form.

Once again, I am aware that this decision will be seen as going too far by some, and not far enough by others. As your bishop, I believe it offers a way forward that is consistent with our teaching regarding the place of marriage, and offers support and prayer for all marriages in the context of Christian community.

Yours in Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Steven A. Miller  
Bishop of Milwaukee

Attachments: Guidelines for Blessing of Same Sex Civil Marriages  
Blessing for Same-Sex Civil Marriages – Diocese of Milwaukee  
Section 7 (excerpt from Report of Diocesan Dialogue Task Force on Human Sexuality)

## Guidelines for the Blessing of Same Sex Civil Marriages

No priest may be compelled to bless a same sex civil marriage in violation of his/her convictions.

The rector of a congregation wishing to offer blessings of same-sex civil marriages in that congregation must bring the matter before the vestry of the congregation for a vote. Prior to the vote the vestry is to review the supporting materials in A049. The Vestry and clergy are also to review "Section VII" of the 2004 Report of the Diocese on Human Sexuality ("Section VII" will be posted at [www.diomil.org](http://www.diomil.org) ) Persons wishing to review the entire Report from 2004 may obtain printed copies from the Diocesan Office at 804 East Juneau Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202. A two-thirds (2/3) affirmative majority vote of the vestry is required if same sex blessings are to be offered within a parish church.

Any congregation that offers same-sex marriage blessings must also engage the congregational study set forth by Resolution A049, and outline in writing to the bishop how it will make generous space for those who disagree with the rector and vestry's decision, and provide for the pastoral care of these persons.

At least one member of the couple whose marriage is to be blessed must be an active member of the congregation.

Both members of the couple must participate in pre-blessing counseling using the guidelines set forth on A049.

Clergy desiring to bless the same-sex marriages of persons who have been previously married must apply to the bishop for permission under the diocesan guidelines for Marriage after Divorce.

# Blessing for Same-Sex Civil Marriages

## Diocese of Milwaukee

*This form is normally used in the context of the Holy Eucharist. The Collect and Lessons may be that of the day or taken from the resources provided below*

### **The Collect**

Almighty and everliving God:  
look tenderly upon N. and N.,  
who stand before you in the company of your Church.  
Lift them up in joy in their life together.  
Grant them so to love selflessly and live humbly,  
that they may be to one another and to the world  
a witness and a sign of your never-failing care;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, to the ages of ages. *Amen.*

### **The Lessons**

Ruth 1:16-17  
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12  
Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7  
Micah 4:1-4

Romans 12:9-18  
2 Corinthians 5:17-20  
Galatians 5:14, 22-26  
Ephesians 3:14-21  
Colossians 3:12-17  
1 John 3:18-24  
1 John 4:7-16, 21

*Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate Psalms are*

Psalm 65  
Psalm 67  
Psalm 85:7-13  
Psalm 98  
Psalm 100  
Psalm 126  
Psalm 127  
Psalm 133  
Psalm 148  
Psalm 149:1-5

Matthew 5:1-16  
Mark 12:28-34  
Luke 6:32-38  
John 17:1-2, 18-26

## The Prayers

*Leader* For N. and N., seeking your blessing and the blessing of your holy people;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For a spirit of loving-kindness to shelter them all their days;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For friends to support them and communities to enfold them;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For peace in their home and love in their family;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For the outpouring of your love through their work and witness;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For the wisdom to care for the children you may entrust (*have entrusted*) to them;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For the growth of their children from strength to strength;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For the strength to keep our vows and commitments;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*After a time of silence, during which the assembly voices its petitions, the leader may add the following biddings*

*Leader* For all who have been reborn and made new in the waters of Baptism;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For those who lead and serve in communities of faith;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For those who seek justice, peace, and concord among nations;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For those who are sick and suffering, homeless and poor;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For victims of violence and those who inflict it;  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.

*Leader* For communion with all who have died in the hope of rising again [especially \_\_\_\_\_];  
Lord, in your mercy (*or* Lord, in your goodness)

*People* Hear our prayer.



*The Presider concludes the Prayers with the following or another appropriate Collect*

Giver of every gift, source of all goodness,  
hear the prayers we bring before you  
for *N.* and *N.*, who seek your blessing this day.  
Give them a share in the saving work of Jesus,  
who gave himself for us,  
and bring about the fullness of life he promised,  
who now lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

### **Blessing of the Couple**

*As the couple stands or kneels, the Presider invokes God's blessing upon them, saying*

Let us pray.

Most gracious God,  
we praise you for the tender mercy and unfailing care  
revealed to us in Jesus the Christ  
and for the great joy and comfort bestowed upon us  
in the gift of human love.  
We give you thanks for *N.* and *N.*,  
and the covenant of faithfulness they have made.  
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit upon them.  
Keep them in your steadfast love;  
protect them from all danger;  
fill them with your wisdom and peace;  
lead them in holy service to each other and the world.

God the Father,  
God the Son,  
God the Holy Spirit,  
bless, preserve, and keep you,  
and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace,  
that you may please God in body and soul.  
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity  
manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior,  
and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet,  
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*If there is a communion, the liturgy continues with the offertory.*

## Section 7. An Emerging Point of View

### An Excerpt from the Report on the Work of the Diocesan Dialogue Task Force on Human Sexuality Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee (2004)

#### 7. An Emerging Point of View

This is a summary of the line of thought which gradually emerged, over the course of the meetings, to give a theological rationale from the viewpoint of Christian faith for recognizing the legitimacy of committed same-gender sexual relationships.

7.1 First of all, any Christian theological argument for the legitimacy of committed same-gender sexual relationships must take into account the data of Scripture. As we have seen, there is no basis in Scripture for judging any kind of same-gender sexual intimacy to be legitimate.

We who, nevertheless, are still open to the possibility of legitimate same-gender intimacy in a committed, faithful, life-long relationship are obliged to make clear what view we hold of the nature and authority of the biblical writings that allows us to relativize the force of the biblical data.

As we do this, we will be articulating a view of the Bible that is markedly different from that of some other Christian believers. How we are to understand the nature and authority of the Bible is the issue that actually underlies current disagreements about sexual morality. We do not expect that all fellow-Christians will agree with what follows, but we offer it as our present understanding of the issue.

7.2 On the one hand, the Scriptures are thoroughly human, showing the cultural assumptions and thought-forms of the people who wrote them. On the other hand, faith recognizes God as the ultimate Author of the religious truth expressed in them. In order to attend to this divinely given truth, however, we need to appreciate and take into account the humanness of the writings.

As Reginald Fuller, an Anglican scripture scholar, notes: “. . . the Bible is . . . the work of many human authors over a period of a thousand years or more, and all of them conditioned by the cultural assumptions of their age. Biblical criticism has further shown that the Bible is a highly pluralistic work, containing the personal views of many different writers, views that are shaped by the particular situations in which they were written.”<sup>33</sup>

In this view, the “Word of God” cannot be equated in a simple way with every part of every text in the Bible. The truth and holiness of God do shine through these writings in their entirety. But to hear faithfully the word that God is speaking, one should look to the overarching themes and principles that run through the varied writings

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<sup>33</sup> R. Fuller. *The Study of Anglicanism*. Stephen Sykes & John Booty (Ed.), 1988, pp. 79-80

Particular texts are to be interpreted in the context of the larger whole, and full account is to be taken of the cultural limitations of some passages.

In this view, inspiration is understood as the influence of the Holy Spirit upon human beings that enabled them to express new God-given insights into the mystery of God and the God-human relationship. But they did this in the words and thought-categories of their own culture. From our present perspective, some of their taken-for-granted assumptions and categories of thought can be recognized as mistaken or no longer adequate without qualification. The authentic "Word of God" is to be discerned in and through the very human words of the writers.

7.3 From this point of view, what is to be said about the Bible's relevance to the question we are struggling with? First of all, we need to recognize that the question itself has arisen only because of the new and perhaps unprecedented idea that there could be a legitimate sexual union of two committed persons of the same gender. This idea is now widespread in Western culture, though not affirmed by all. In contrast, the idea is unknown and unthinkable in Africa and other non-Western cultures. It is also alien to the cultural contexts out of which the biblical writings came. A legitimate, same-gender sexual relationship is nowhere envisaged in the Bible, not even as something to be condemned.

Does this mean that the Bible is irrelevant to the question under discussion? By no means. Its positive relevance will be examined below. But for the moment, we can at least relativize the biblical prohibitions that otherwise seem to settle the question so decisively.

7.4 What about Church tradition? As we have seen, there is no basis in tradition for judging any kind of same-gender sexual intimacy to be legitimate. We who, nevertheless, are still open to the possibility of legitimate same-gender sexual intimacy in a committed, faithful, life-long relationship are obliged to make clear what view of the nature and authority of Church tradition we hold that allows us to be open to a possibility that is nowhere recognized by the tradition of the Church.

We understand tradition (in the context of Church life) as "the continuous stream of explanation and elucidation of the primitive faith, illustrating the way in which Christianity has been presented and understood in past ages."<sup>34</sup> But tradition in the Church also sometimes "means simply customs and ideas which have grown up imperceptibly and been accepted more or less uncritically."<sup>35</sup>

In either sense of the word, tradition is a major factor in Church life. It is precious but also ambiguous. It always needs to be tested critically to see "(1) whether it is in accordance with the principles embodied in divine revelation, and (2) whether it can be justified by right reason."<sup>36</sup> The Church can come to a judgment that some particular feature of the tradition needs to be modified in accordance with these criteria.

Tradition, in its Christian meaning, is best understood as the process by which the Church keeps its sense of identity by remembering and staying in continuity with its beginnings in faithfulness to the New Testament writings while changing and developing

<sup>34</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., p. 1388.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



in its understanding and living out of the faith. This has involved and still involves much more than compiling collections of teachings from past ages of the Church.

The Church itself could be regarded as a living tradition that is able to persist and continue only by creatively re-appropriating its heritage in response to the ever-changing cultures in which it exists. This sometimes involves the re-thinking of its basic beliefs and doctrines as well as the creation of new forms of Church life.

A helpful formulation of the Anglican understanding of tradition is found in the 1998 Virginia Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission: "Tradition refers to the ongoing Spirit-guided life of the Church which receives, and in receiving, interprets afresh God's abiding message. . . . Tradition is not to be understood as an accumulation of formulae and texts but as the living mind, the nerve centre of the Church. Anglican appeal to tradition is the appeal to this mind of the Church carried by the worship, teaching and the Spirit-filled life of the Church."<sup>37</sup>

7.5 But what is to be done when sincere Christian believers disagree about what the mind of the Church is on some disputed question? This has happened, of course, more than once in the history of the Church, and it has often taken many years for the final resolution of an issue.

In order to recognize a valid development of the living tradition, the Church must always practice spiritual discernment. As Christian believers explore an issue, they seek to recognize the authentic leading of the Holy Spirit by staying together in prayer, Scripture study, and mutual charity. This requires patience and genuine openness to the insights and convictions of one another.

The current controversy about sexuality is a case in point. The Church is presently faced with a cultural situation altogether different from anything envisioned in the cultures that produced the biblical writings or in the cultures through which the Church has moved thus far. From this angle, the question would be whether the Church might come to a point where it could affirm a positive ethic for homosexual persons—as a legitimate further development of the Church's living tradition.

7.6 Thus far we have been talking about Scripture and tradition, in order to argue that the agreed-upon data of these important sources of Christian thought do not necessarily settle definitively the question of the moral status of committed same-gender relationships. While continuing to attend to both Scripture and tradition, we need now to consider the present-day experience of human sexuality in our culture as it raises new questions for the Church.

The traditional doctrine of the Church affirms that it is only in marriage between a man and a woman that sexual intimacy finds its proper place. In recent years, however, the public has become aware that there are people in our midst whose sexual attraction is for someone of the same gender. Many of these people say that their sexual orientation is not something that they choose, but rather is a given, like the color of their eyes. If this is true, the Church is confronted with a significant new pastoral issue: how to minister to

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<sup>37</sup> *Some Issues in Human Sexuality -- A Working Party of the House of Bishops*. London: Church House Publishing, 2003, p. 51.

such people in a faithful way, and what kind of guidelines to give them for responsible sexual behavior.

The Church has never had to face the reality of homosexuality until perhaps the past thirty years or so, when homosexual men and women began to insist upon recognition and equal rights. Prior to that, sexual contact between people of the same gender had simply been regarded as a perversion of normal human sexuality, that is, as sinful behavior.

If it is granted, however, that some human beings simply are homosexual quite prior to any choice, then the Church needs to consider what, for such people, is a responsible way of living their sexuality. What kind of sexual morality is appropriate for them?

Until now, the Church has simply affirmed the traditional sexual morality as it applies to heterosexual people. Consequently, homosexual people are, in effect, told by the Church never to act on any of their sexual impulses with another person. They are expected to be celibate in the sense of repressing their sexuality altogether.

Many in our Church are now questioning whether that is reasonable and sound pastoral advice. If not, then does the Church need to re-think its traditional norms of sexual morality in order to be more realistic? Does the Church need to work out a sexual morality for homosexual people that would uphold strict standards of moral behavior for this population and that would be analogous to the standards upheld by the Church for heterosexual people?

Any effort to formulate a sexual ethic for homosexually oriented persons would have to draw upon the wisdom of Sacred Scripture and be consonant with the main tradition of the Church on sexual morality. In what follows, we attempt to meet this expectation.

7.7 We begin with the affirmation that human sexuality is good, as part of the order created by God, but that it is distorted by human sinfulness. In this view, human sexuality as such is not the result of the Fall, but the way in which we experience human sexuality is to a greater or lesser extent affected by the Fall.

What does sinful, unredeemed human sexuality look like? In general, it is self-oriented, that is, concerned only or mainly with one's own intense pleasure. It tends to be merely physical without personal involvement or commitment. It could be labeled cold-hearted. It often takes the form of exploitation of another person for one's own gratification. It can be an expression of the dominance of one person over another. It can take perverse forms of sadism/masochism. It can even find expression in bestiality.

What does human sexuality look like when it is restored by the grace of Christ to its natural goodness as intended by God? It is oriented toward the other person in appreciation and delight. It desires to give pleasure to the other person as well as receive pleasure from her/him. It is the expression of a deep and permanent commitment to the other person in faithful love.

But Grace goes beyond restoring the order of creation; it brings about a new creation in which the power of the Paschal Mystery transforms all aspects of human life in accord with the reality of Christ. What is the "more" to which human sexuality is elevated by the transforming grace of Christ? Perhaps it is the dimension of self-sacrificing love, without which no lasting commitment to another person can endure. In

Scripture, the quality of love that a husband should have for his wife is compared to the love with which Christ laid down his life for the Church. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word . . ." (Ephesians 5:25-26).

The ideal of redeemed sexuality, as sketched above, is realized, if at all, only after much experience and learning. The grace of God is at work in every person's life, drawing him or her toward the fullness of redeemed human existence, which includes sexuality. But the achievement is never perfect.

We have to recognize how much sexuality is bound up with a person's sense of identity. Physical intimacy between two persons involves each one in an experience of their own deepest selfhood in interaction with the deepest selfhood of the other. There is mutual vulnerability, and the possibility of mutual cherishing and mutual delight.

Sexuality is very powerful—for good or for evil. It can take demonic forms when it is detached from personal relationship. It can also break a person out of isolation and self-preoccupation.

For heterosexuals, sexuality finds its proper and full expression in a life-long commitment to another person in marriage. But it is obvious that it takes most people a lot of time and experience before they can reach that fullness of integration. So, we tend to judge heterosexual behavior in terms of its relationship to commitment. There is bound to be experimentation that falls far short of that. We need to look at sexual experimentation from a human development perspective rather than simply a moral perspective, in which a commandment of God has been violated. And we need to judge immoral any kind of coercion, violence, exploitation, or similar behavior.

7.8 What about persons who find themselves to be homosexually oriented? Can we say anything about what a reasonable sexual ethic for them would be? Could we develop an argument that starts from the analogy of heterosexual relationships? In these, as noted, the norm is a committed, life-long relationship with a partner (marriage). Short of that, sexual interaction is always somewhat distorted and insufficiently human.

Could something analogous be said about homosexual relationships? That is, could we posit as the ideal a committed, lifelong relationship with another person of the same gender? Is that a realistic ideal? If it is, then all forms of sexual interaction between homosexual people that fall short of that ideal are not morally adequate. But here, too, one has to see sexual behavior from a developmental perspective. And here, too, one must condemn all forms of exploitation, domination, and violence.

7.9 Is there any basis for this ideal in Sacred Scripture? If we look to the canon of Scripture as a whole, we discover the mystery of God as committed, self-giving, sacrificial Love. If that is the central reality revealed to us by God's presence and action in Jesus, why couldn't it be recognized that same-gender couples are called to embody that in their own way, just as heterosexual people do in marriage?

Here is a relevant passage from *Issues in Human Sexuality*, written about heterosexual marriage. It could also be applied, we suggest, to a permanent, committed same-gender union.

“... fulfillment, both of the individual partners and of their partnership, will not come without cost, hard work and self-denial. A true marriage reflects Christ’s own love for us all. He too gave himself to others ‘for better, for worse, till death.’ In it we learn to break down our pride and self-concern, to be open to our partner as he or she really is, to treasure what is good and forgive faults, to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the other, to be loyal whatever the price. In these ways marriage becomes a means of grace, making us more like Christ both in ourselves and in our dealings with the world around us.”<sup>38</sup>

7.10 Can we find in Church tradition any point of contact for developing a responsible sexual ethic for homosexually oriented persons? The document cited above (*Issues in Human Sexuality*) presents a thoroughly positive and balanced expression of the Christian ideal for human sexuality as it is to be lived out in marriage between a man and a woman.<sup>39</sup> Following this, in Section 3.2, there is a significant formulation of a principle or guideline for judging matters of sexual morality.

“Because of this affirmation of the body, one basic principle is definitely implicit in Christian thinking about sexual relations. It may be put this way: *the greater the degree of personal intimacy, the greater should be the degree of personal commitment.*” [emphasis added]

Further in the same section, we read the following paragraph.

“For Christian tradition this has been, as it were, codified in the principle that full sexual intercourse requires total commitment, that is, in the words of the marriage service, ‘faithful’ and ‘forsaking all others,’ ‘to have and to hold ... for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.’”

This account of the Church’s tradition is helpful because it formulates sexual morality in terms of commitment. We suggest that this principle might be applied to a same-gender relationship as well as a male-female relationship. The common denominator is the proportion between physical intimacy and commitment.

7.11 We can and should recognize that the male-female polarity is basic to human nature and that heterosexual marriage is the norm for the vast majority of the population. This arrangement may be viewed as founded in the created order of things willed by God. At the same time we can recognize that a small percentage of the population lives with a homosexual orientation without trying to settle the vexing question of the causes of that orientation.

This raises some questions, however. Should homosexual orientation be regarded as a legitimate and natural variation of human sexuality? Should it be regarded also as part of the created order willed by God?

<sup>38</sup> *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement by the House of Bishops of the General Synod of the Church of England*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, December 1991, Section 3.3, pp. 20-21

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Sec.3.1, p.19.

If one answers both these question in the affirmative, a further question arises. Should the Church then recognize the legitimacy of such persons making a permanent sexual commitment to each other as life-partners?

7.12 We recognize that an affirmative answer to this last question would lead toward a development of the Church's living tradition that is not yet acceptable to the vast majority of Christian believers. But we believe that the possibility needs to be examined thoughtfully, in prayerful discernment.

New knowledge and new social realities play a big part in this kind of discernment. The role of reason in theology is legitimate and necessary, as Anglicans have always recognized. When reasonable people consider the new insights into human life that have become available through science and through experience, they rightly try to re-think Church positions that are affected by this new knowledge. Not to do so would be to place revealed truth in opposition to the truth discovered by natural reason. And this would lead to an ultimately irrational form of faith-life that does not engage the culture of the time.