

**C056 Task Group Chairs
Teleconference Meeting Minutes
October 28, 2010**

Participants: Ruth Meyers (convener), Keri Aubert, Thad Bennett, Jay Johnson, Tom Little, Susan Russell

Welcome and Prayer

Approval of minutes of 4 October 2010 Teleconference of Task Group Chairs

The minutes were approved as revised.

SCLM Hearing with Representatives from Province I, Concord, 19 October 2010

Folks would appreciate an executive summary of the testimony.

For the hearing, the room was set up with tables for the SCLM on one side and a table for those speaking on the other, with general seating behind that table. Each diocese had 30 minutes to speak, except Rhode Island, which had 15 minutes, because they've done less on this subject. Western Massachusetts has also done less, but they sent the largest group, seven people. Four bishops were present, and most dioceses sent clergy as well as lay persons. Some themes of the testimony:

- Some people asked for the Book of Common Prayer rite or something like it, while others asked for something different.
- In states with civil marriage, there has been power in using the terms “husband” and “wife” after marriage became legal for same-sex couples.
- There was much about how powerful blessings were for the congregation as well as the couple.
- Some couples and clergy spoke about the pain of not being able to be open about this.
- There was note of the need to recognize couples who've been together for a long time and are just now able to have their unions legalized or blessed.
- There was concern about creating rites for same-sex couples that are “separate but equal,” but also acknowledgment of the complexities of this issue.
- This was seen as an issue of mission and evangelism, including mention of people coming to church to raise families, but seeking a welcoming church.
- Pastors mentioned the power of these blessings in healing extended family relationships as well as relationships with church.

- There was discussion of separating civil marriage from the church, but also clergy not wanting to lose the ability to do civil marriage now that same-sex couples are getting married.
- Regarding language, both “same-sex” and “same-gender” were used, sometimes by the same person, so there did not seem to be consensus or precision on this.

The SCLM follow-up conversation included the following:

- Standing Commission on Constitutions and Canons observer Juan Antonio Rosario de la Cruz noted the lack of participation in the hearing by people under age 30. This raises questions about the participation of young adults at the March church-wide meeting.
- The SCLM follow-up conversation noted the complexity of the diversity of the canons and the various civil jurisdictions, not just in the U.S. but in other countries that are a part of TEC. The thought was to create a list of conditions in each place.
- There was some discussion of wanting to help congregations to understand what is before us now—this would be a step further back than that of preparing congregations to bless same-gender unions.
- The members of the SCLM seemed to hear anew the complexity of the work, and also the importance of doing the work. People were deeply moved and even overwhelmed by what they heard.
- All this wasn’t new to everyone on the SCLM, since some have been working on this for years. But some aspects of it raised new awareness. For example, hearing that Bishop Scruton of Western Massachusetts won’t move forward until the church does makes the work seem more urgent. Even for those who have been working on it, awareness was raised by hearing that there are some who are not even having this conversation yet.

It was noted that, whether people called this marriage or something else, all claimed the sacramentality of the action. It was also noted that there is much diversity in language in many aspects of this work—for example, some same-sex couples want to use “husband” or “wife,” while others attach negatives to those terms. We can keep moving forward despite all this by continuing to return to exactly what the resolution says, which is blessing unions.

How can we invite the wider church to appreciate the conversation that took place? This is also important to keep in mind as we plan for the March meeting—we need to figure out how to bring these stories to the wider church. The church-wide consultation gives us the opportunity to start helping people begin to grapple with just how complex this is.

One idea suggested is a project like the currently viral “It Gets Better” videos. We don’t have time to do such a project, and it could come across too much like a PR campaign. This group should use the official avenues of PR; for example, we can ask the ENS to figure out how to help people listen to the audio from the hearing. Perhaps Neva would do a press release when the archive gets populated—it would say what’s been posted, including the audio files. An outside group, such as Integrity, might be willing to do a video project.

Planning for Combined Task Group Meeting in Burlingame, 29 November-2 December 2010

The group reviewed the GCO draft schedule of events that was distributed this week. It was suggested that each chair set objectives for what they'd like to accomplish during the meeting and give their group members a list of what they want them to have done before the meeting.

Ruth will make sure there's a way for people to socialize and unwind during the evening.

Keri will distribute the schedule for Burlingame by the first part of next week.

Task Group Check-ins

Pastoral and Teaching Resources Task Group

The group put together a Survey Monkey vehicle that asks about 24 questions. As of today, they've had 36 responses, with a majority reporting that they have not had same-gender blessings in their congregations. The survey has had limited distribution so far, and they would like ideas for how to get it distributed more broadly. They'd like to have 200 responses by the meeting in Burlingame. Thad sent the survey materials for Spanish translation but has not received anything back; Ruth will follow up. Once this is received, Thad will set up a parallel Spanish-language survey. Once that is complete, Ruth will ask Bonnie Anderson to send it to the deputies and Neva Rae Fox to send it to the diocesan communicators.

One member of the group is contacting every Episcopal seminary to learn what they're teaching newly ordained people about how to counsel couples of any orientation for marriage.

A question arose at the SCLM meeting about Latino/Latina representation on the task groups. Ruth replied that we did our best to recruit Latinos/Latinas. Meanwhile, at the Houston conference, Ruth met Jaime Case, Canon for Multicultural Ministry in the Diocese of Texas. He said he is open to conversation about participating. It would be great to have someone from Province VII, and it would be great if they can be in Burlingame.

Theology Task Group

In early October, Jay emailed the task group about the House of Bishops meeting, and included the table questions, the conversation notes, his presentation, and the liturgical resources handout. He asked them to collect whatever theological resources they already have, to reinforce that they're trying to use materials already developed. He feels like the group is in good shape, in terms of the group members being on the same page in terms of the theological principles. The question is how they'll proceed, and how they will handle varying cultural contexts.

Ruth observed that the work should not be overly technical and academic; it should be written for a church audience rather than an academic audience. It needs to be accessible to clergy and educated laity. This is true of all the resources created.

Jay will try to have another short teleconference with his group before Burlingame. It will be less substantive and more about planning the process for their work in Burlingame. He is eager to hear suggestions and advice from others about how they will facilitate their task group's work in Burlingame. He would like to discuss this during our next teleconference.

Canonical and Legal Task Group

Tom reports that five people are signed up for the task group, but two can't attend the meeting in Burlingame. Ruth sent him two more names of possible group members; he's thinking that he'll build up a list of advisors that he can tap in the future. Tom will organize a conference call for the group within the next ten days to begin to outline agenda for Burlingame. With that in mind, he thinks he needs to give them a better mission statement for the task group. Tom will send that question to this group, asking what we think are questions they are to answer or issues they are to address. He doesn't think people are concerned that doing blessings creates violations of state laws, as long as it is clear that a blessing is not a marriage.

Earlier this year, Katherine Grieb solicited info from chancellors about local canons and state laws regarding same-sex unions, and he'd like to take advantage of that resource. However, Tom has been unsuccessful getting it, either through David Beers or directly from Professor Grieb. Ruth will call her.

Tom suggested, and others agreed, that it will helpful to categorize states in one of five ways:

- States with marriage for lesbian and gay persons
- States with civil unions (not marriage but a parallel status)
- States with less than civil unions but more than nothing
- States with something like a defense of marriage act
- States with nothing whatsoever

The group acknowledged that there are additional peculiarities, such as the two states that don't allow for contracting unions but do recognize unions from other states, and when folks from one state marry in another state where it's legal and go home where it's not.

Input from the Anglican Communion

Ruth has put together a small gathering next week at CDSP, including Jenny Te Paa from New Zealand and Rowan Smith from South Africa. She's also invited Jay, Jane Shaw (the new dean at Grace Cathedral) and four international doctoral students.

The SCLM has tossed around the idea of having, rather than one meeting in the US, smaller conversations in different parts of the world where TEC already has dioceses. Pierre Whalon could host one in Europe; additional possibilities would be Taiwan and Province IX. These meetings won't happen this year.

Other

After Burlingame, the next meeting in person is January 12-14 in Atlanta. We'll probably start afternoon of 12th and end at noon on the 14th.

The church-wide consultation is March 18-19 at a yet-to-be-finalized facility near the airport in Atlanta. We'll need to arrive on the 17th.

Next Task Group Chair Meeting

Pending confirmation with Pat, the next teleconference will be Monday, November 15, from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Eastern time.

Respectfully submitted,
Keri Aubert
Project Manger