

Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music
Consultation on Same Sex Marriage
With Representatives from Episcopal Church dioceses
with Marriage Equality
And invited Anglican and Ecumenical partners

June 3-5, 2014
Kansas City, MO

Follow-up evaluation report
July 7, 2014

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Executive Summary

The objective of this follow-up evaluation report for the SCLM Consultation on Same Sex Marriage is to probe for further insights and reflections on the resources discussed in the Consultation, on the value of the indaba-style conversation to the overall process, on the inclusion of other Anglican Communion and ecumenical participants in the Consultation, and to gather suggestions for next steps. The report is based on a sample of seven in-depth participant interviews bringing together perspectives from within the Episcopal Church, from other Anglican Communion Provinces, and from an ecumenical standpoint.

Respondents highly valued the Consultation experience, including both the content that was presented and shared and the opportunity to hear and learn from other contexts. The Consultation also served to reinforce the interconnections among those deeply involved with this topic yet deeply embedded within their own congregational, diocesan, provincial, or denominational contexts.

The resources were broadly affirmed. For TEC participants, they were seen as fully answering why the Episcopal Church is blessing same sex relationships. The absence of a blessing substantively similar to that used in the BCP Marriage Rite was the only concern raised over the liturgy. International and ecumenical responses were complimentary, but they also noted some need for local adaptation. The resources addressing biblical and theological issues were viewed as usable as-is across a range of differing contexts. A request was made to translate the resources for use in another Province.

All respondents found the mixture of TEC, international, and ecumenical participants highly informative and deeply moving. The Consultation's inclusion of those voices also demonstrated the Episcopal Church's interest in engaging other Anglican Communion Provinces and seriously listening to their contexts. This step also helped to dispel stereotypical assumptions held by some participants about other contexts, and it helped some to realize that the Provinces could talk to each other in less formal ways about topics of mutual interest.

The indaba-style conversation at-first appeared to suffer from a lack of diversity in viewpoints, but participants also found value in being able to explore other facets, which allowed subtle but important nuances to emerge. The indaba approach was particularly effective in helping participants move to a deeper level of conversation and understanding. International participants also hoped to apply aspects of this experience to future indabas in their own Provinces.

Suggested next steps focused on two themes: 1) rethinking marriage overall in the context and life of the Church, and 2) immediate advocacy as a social justice issue. Other suggestions included supplementary materials for deputations along with more publicly visible actions.

In conclusion, respondents felt hopeful about the work of the SCLM and for the Church's leadership on this topic which was described as "cutting edge." Both interview responses and a review of the questionnaire data suggest that the Consultation was an invaluable step for participants personally and for working within the Church interactively for broad social change.

The Consultation on Same-Sex Marriage invited participants from several dioceses in states where marriage equality is legally recognized to share their experiences and contexts and also to provide responses to the resources that the SCLM subcommittee had developed. Additionally, the Consultation also invited participants from other Anglican Communion provinces having marriage equality as well as representatives from other mainline Protestant denominations, which added both international and ecumenical dimensions to the discussion.

The intensive two-day consultation (Tuesday evening through Thursday evening) included both an indaba-style conversation, with the objective of structured mutual listening to diverse contexts and concerns on the topic of marriage equality, and a focused workshop to provide responses to the work of the SCLM subcommittee on the resources. Recorders for small groups captured the key points of the resources discussion.

At the end of the Consultation, a short evaluative questionnaire was distributed to solicit feedback from participants on their experience and personal responses to the meeting. Although the survey response rate was over 50 percent (N=36) and provided some helpful feedback, other questions remained that needed following up.

Follow-up evaluation

The scope of the follow-up evaluation was to focus on interviews with a stratified sample of participants in order to gather further thoughts on the consultation, to probe for insights and suggestions that would be helpful to the SCLM subcommittee in reviewing the various outcomes of the Consultation, and to consider next steps. It was conducted at the request of the SCLM Chair. The questionnaire responses of those participants selected for interviews were analyzed to form a basis for follow-up questioning, but an evaluation of the survey responses overall was not part of the follow-up project.

The names and contact information of seven questionnaire respondents who had volunteered to be contacted for a follow-up interview were selected by the SCLM Chair. They included two international, one ecumenical, and four TEC participants (two ordained and two lay). This group also consisted of four men and three women. Some in their interviews made references to spouses of the same-sex, which suggests diversity in sexual orientation. From their questionnaire responses, diversity in thought was represented as well.

The follow-up interviews were held one to three weeks following the consultation. All were conducted by telephone or Skype, except one face-to-face interview with a translator present. All interviewees signed an interview permission form (Appendix) based on standard protocols for human subjects research, assuring confidentiality and anonymity in sharing their responses

except where permission was specifically asked and granted to share publicly identifying content. The interviews lasted 25-40 minutes, averaging about 30 minutes each.

For each interview, a set of semi-structured questions formed the basis of the conversation. The content and shape of the questions varied according to the questionnaire responses, which allowed the interview to probe or clarify any key information they contained. Respondents also were given the opportunity to make additional reflections or to discuss other content if they wished.

The semi-structured questions followed a general format:

- Request for new thoughts or reflections on the Consultation.
- Focus questions about the resources:
 - How well they answer the question of why the Episcopal Church is doing same-sex blessings.
 - Responses to “I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing.”
 - Other responses to the resources.
- Next steps hoped for or to suggest to the subcommittee.
- Focus questions about the Anglican Communion and ecumenical participation.
Any helpful new insights or learnings from:
 - Participants from other provinces in the Anglican Communion.
 - Ecumenical participants.
- Focus questions on the indaba-style conversation experience:
 - Follow-up probe to the questionnaire comments.
 - Effect or not on the next day’s conversation about resources.
 - Overall value of the Consultation.
- What if anything could have been differently that would have been helpful.
- Probe for final thoughts they would like share.

This content sought to address the subcommittee’s interest in follow-up insights on the resources, the inclusion of other Anglican Communion and ecumenical participants, the indaba-style conversation, and suggestions for next steps.

Reflections on the Consultation

All of the interviewee reflections on the Consultation were highly positive. All chose to comment on different aspects, however, which resulted in an overview of noteworthy features but did not identify those that were significant or stood out in some way. Overall, the meeting was viewed as very well organized. A high level of commitment was noted about the participants, as they had actually read the documents before arriving at the Consultation. The warmth of the hospitality extended by the cathedral community and within the small groups was appreciated, especially by an international participant. Small details such as the use of a flower, with a different colored petal for each group, offered both content (information) and powerful symbolism.

The intensity of the consultation was remarked upon, not only because of the meeting's packed agenda but also the candor and depth that participants invested when sharing their stories. "It was moving to be in the company of clergy who were in gay marriages and unions and to hear their stories," noted one respondent for whom this was an unusual and very moving experience.

There was some surprise at how similar were participant views on the topic. One TEC respondent noted that the lack of diversity in viewpoint "limits our ability to understand what needs to happen in order to make this change in the church." Another participant who came from a context with strident opposition had not expected to find "no one opposed or even doubtful about the issue." He made it clear that this was not a criticism, but a sign that TEC had been able to move to a place where subtle discussion of particular emphases could occur.

Some respondents wished for a slightly longer Consultation, partly because of the intensity of the schedule, the emotional exhaustion of the conversation, and to be able to discuss applications and next steps together. Yet they were mindful of limited funding for the Consultation and felt that everyone had made very good use of the time available.

A few specific suggestions were made as to what could have been helpful. These included having targeted questions for

"I thought the shape of the Consultation was excellent. Tuesday night we were asked to go deep. Bible studies were really key on both days. [They] allowed all of us to get to know each other and to speak very openly with each other. The small groups with clergy and deputation were able to really say the frustration they felt not understanding some of the decisions that have been made. That helped us clarify on Thursday [in discussing] the liturgy and all that. It was structured very well."

small group discussion of the resources, the use of more multimedia such as overhead projectors or video, identifying unstructured time in the agenda, and having specific takeaways from the meeting. The latter might include something to go home with, try, or talk about, perhaps even an elevator speech.

The overall value of the Consultation was summed up by a few participant remarks such as having a much better sense of where others are on the topic, including the liturgies and practices, which is difficult to perceive from a specific parish ministry standpoint. Another noted that it was very helpful, and affirmed what she had hoped was true in other parts of the church. Thus, besides the content of the Consultation itself, it held strong value in sharing information and reinforcing the connectivity of persons who are concerned and deeply involved with this topic.

The resources

“If someone asked you why is the Episcopal Church blessing same sex relationships, how well do you think the resources would answer such a question?”

According to all of the respondents from TEC, the resources offer everything needed to answer effectively why same-sex relationships are blessed in the Episcopal Church. International and ecumenical respondents were complimentary but acknowledged different contexts and also raised questions. The geographic and denominational distance offered viewpoints that yielded both clarity about aspects of the resources which were universally relevant and those which needed to be contextualized. They also offered thought-provoking questions that might be helpful for the subcommittee to consider.

The resources responding to the biblical and theological issues were highly praised. International participants thought that they could be used as-is in other Provinces. The pastoral resource, however, would require adaptation to the particular needs of local contexts, especially outside TEC. The blessing also was viewed as needing to be considered according to the local context.

Two questions were raised by international respondents. In reflecting on the US context, one asked, “why isn’t TEC marrying rather than blessing [same sex couples]?” The quality of the materials, the preparation, and liturgy seemed to be clearly directed toward marriage, according to this respondent. With rapid changes in some state laws, it was a question that was felt in need of being addressed in the resources. A second, theological question was raised over

the blessing of people following a civil marriage as compared to marrying them. A respondent felt that this also needed some clarification.

From an ecumenical standpoint, the resources were helpful in responding to the question of why is the church blessing same-sex relationships but they would not necessarily be convincing to everyone, primarily because of a fundamental difference in methodology of “doing scripture, theology, and what constitutes the church.” The respondent added that for some, faith is a propositional experience where the bible viewed as a rule book, prescribing proper actions for morality. For others, faith is an open experience of God where the Bible is viewed as a story line of the people of God with every generation reinterpreting it for their context. This insight may have been helpful in relation to the divisions within TEC prior to the departure of ACNA, AMIA and other dissident networks of Episcopalians, but perhaps is more relevant for other denominations facing such cleavages today.

“I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing”

Among the Episcopal Church respondents, “I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing” either is already in use or its context is familiar. Comments were very positive. As one respondent described,

The couples that I counseled all looked at the BCP and compared it with the draft liturgy. They all chose the draft liturgy as what they really wanted, even over the BCP. They liked the context of the Baptismal liturgy and that it read like a confirmation instead of the historic marriage service.

She then explained a particular practice within the liturgy that both the couples and the parish value:

...One of the things we do that we really like is that after the sermon, we sing a hymn and process to the font for the declaration of consent and the prayers, which include the prayers for the world. Then we go back with an anthem and the vows take place at the altar for the blessing.

One need also was expressed. The blessing from the Book of Common Prayer is often requested. A blessing such as that one, available to everyone, “is a critical piece that is missing.”

One respondent referred to an argument that had been emerging between a same-sex blessing separate from a marriage ceremony and that for a marriage ceremony. Given that the BCP addresses the blessing of a civil marriage, it was less clear that a separate liturgy was as

necessary. This needed further clarification, as well as suggests that there may be sizable differences over next steps.

Other thoughts about the resources

Other areas of discussion focused on sensitivity to different constituencies and adapting the resources to other Provincial contexts. One TEC respondent emphasized that a resource around education developed years ago in his diocese is seldom used today because it was directed toward those who were new to the conversation on the topic. Those in their congregations today have a different awareness, and need another approach. Perhaps a next-step resource such as one about marriage, and what we mean by marriage, would be useful today.

The international respondents viewed the resources as representing best practices. One noted that the serious attention paid to the preparation of the couple and the congregation beforehand is as helpful as the liturgy itself: “Tying them together is important; it helps me to think about a larger package rather than just the liturgy.” However, since that Province is less structured about marriage preparation, it would require some adaptation.

The international respondent Martinez Bassotto (her name used with permission) requested permission to translate the resources into Portuguese for use in her Church as it begins a reflection process on this topic. She is especially interested in the theological and pastoral resources. They could be very helpful to prepare for her Church’s 2015 General Convention.

From an ecumenical standpoint, the bibliography was also seen as especially valuable.

An ecumenical and Communionwide consultation

The effort to include both ecumenical and other Anglican Communion voices was viewed by all respondents as both helpful and informative. One response noted TEC’s desire to be in listening conversation with other Provinces by saying,

The international and ecumenical participation was brilliant. The last thing we want is for the Anglican Communion to say, ‘America is going off on what [it] want[s].’

Participants from other provinces affirmed the value of this step, one saying, “I feel like the Episcopal Church is paying attention to what other Provinces have to say.”

Respondents typically referred to their small group conversations, where they were able to listen closely to others and their contexts in relation to their own. References were made in similar percentages to international and ecumenical perspectives, suggesting that both provided consistently valuable insights. TEC respondents expressed gratitude for this dimension of the Consultation. One commented that the international participant in their small group,

taught me things that I will be unpacking the rest of my life. There are people who risk their lives and ordination by speaking the truth. That is humbling. How can we not work hard at this because of that?

Several noted how much richer the small group discussion was as a result of sharing differences, which made them more aware and appreciative. One respondent noted that learning about what was being done in South Africa had helped to counteract negative overall impressions regarding the continent. Learning about New Zealand and Brazil were also mentioned as helpful and stimulating. The different ways in which churches were structured led to fresh insights including, as one TEC participant put it, “the way we do business is messy, but it works.”

Several felt affirmed to hear that TEC was seen by others as leading the way on this topic. As one respondent put it,

They are so grateful. They don’t want us to stop. They want us to keep having these messy family meetings... The example we are setting is [that] living in this tension is important for things.

The international respondents affirmed TEC’s leadership, noting that others don’t seem to be having the advanced discussions that are occurring here. They remarked on how different is the situation in the U.S. when compared to their own context, noting that in the US laws differ by state and clergy serve as agents of the state in marrying couples. They also valued being able to learn about a range of different contexts. One expressed the realization that those from different Provinces actually could talk with one another, especially without Church of England involvement.

The value of learning about other contexts, other ways of “being church,” was echoed from an ecumenical perspective, which noted how differences in polity affect a denomination’s ability to address the topic. In congregational contexts, for instance, the wider church “speaks to our congregations; we never speak for our congregations.” A TEC respondent mentioned that a Presbyterian ecumenical partner had raised an idea of working in consultation together, and hoped that perhaps this could be yet another way that the Consultation could reach out.

One comment summed up the international and ecumenical presence as “a symphony of voices.” Besides informative, it was profoundly moving.

The role of indaba-style conversation

The use of an indaba-style approach to conversation brought skepticism at first, primarily because of the lack of conflicting viewpoints on same-sex blessing and same-sex marriage, which they had understood that the process was designed to address. This view also echoed some of the ambivalence expressed in the questionnaire responses. Another participant assumed, when the indaba process was introduced, that that this would be just another “group process.” Yet these respondents noted that, upon further reflection, their view of the indaba-style process had changed. As one commented,

At first it seemed that it wasn't the right tool for the setting. But we discovered that there were some nuances that came out, especially those that were ecumenical and international. Indaba helped unfold these different nuances that people are struggling with. It also helped show that not all gay and lesbian couples think marriage is the greatest institution in the world... the way this institution is currently talked about...

Another noted that the indaba-style conversation,

got us out of our heads and into common ground. Maybe that was indaba. We were on the same team in regard to this issue, but by doing Lectio in this way, we realized that we were on a much larger team. We were able to be brother and sister in Christ, not brother and sister in marriage equality.

A delayed ‘indaba effect’ emerged for some. At one level they felt that it wasn't working effectively because of the lack of conflict, yet at a deeper level, “it really did work.” Another noted that it was on the way to the airport that the effect of the indaba on the Consultation hit home.

Some felt that the indaba approach had worked effectively as a form of icebreaker that allowed participants to go much more deeply in their sharing. “It broke open our souls, as Christians, people of faith,” admitted one participant. Another participant noted that, “There was a moment when we thought, ‘Oh my God the Holy Spirit has been in our midst. God provided a period. Let's just stop.’” Others valued the process for making space to hear the voices who don't feel

“It was the lack of diversity that was a problem. Two weeks out, I realize the benefit of that, what it did do was allow us to have some very sacred time that influenced the work we did the next day. We need to have a framework where we sit in sacred time and bible study. It laid a spiritual foundation that allowed us to do the work we did.”

that they are being heard, or those who otherwise might not speak up. Another take-away was a new methodology for community organizing, which might reduce the fear of difference.

The excellent plenary facilitation of Janet Marshall was remarked upon, particularly her ability to enable the conversation to reach a significant level of depth. The design of the process also helped at least one respondent to feel like the small group was at the center, with the plenary echoing the small groups, which turned out to be a very constructive experience. The helpfulness of having an indaba experience also urged for those who would be going to General Convention.

The influence of the indaba-style conversations on the next day's discussion of resources was mixed. Most of those interviewed felt that it had a positive effect by making it easier to talk with one another. The listening and sharing of stories had opened people up in a fresh way. However, one observed an unintended consequence. His small group began sharing their experiences of using the resources which led to anecdotal conversation that, while interesting, was not transformative. One respondent felt that the indaba and the resource conversation were so different that there was no carryover effect.

Future indabas

Both international respondents spoke of take-away insights to use with *indabas* in their own Provinces. This fall in Brazil three indabas will be held, which will include all of the 2015 General Convention delegates along with other representatives from the dioceses. The topics will be gender identity, sexuality, and family.

The indaba [provides] a relation of respect, [and] space where everyone is invited to talk. It is a way [in which] we will help everyone to engage more on the topics. The method of sharing stories breaks barriers between people. Using the story telling will be a powerful way of change. Because of the method of indaba, we believe that things will be changed.

In another Province a planned indaba, related to same sex blessings, will include both opposed and supportive voices. The respondent noted that the type of conversation modeled at the start of the Consultation will be used in that indaba prior to the small group conversations.

Overall, the indaba experience appeared to play a helpful role in the Consultation by making space for people to listen and hear new ideas, insights and experiences. What it lacked in conflict, it appeared to enrich conversations in other ways. None of the respondents felt that it was unhelpful or detracted from the Consultation.

Next steps

Several “next steps” were mentioned that respondents thought might be helpful or possible for the subcommittee and the Church to take. Those from TEC offered immediate as well as longer-range steps. International and ecumenical participants were more guarded, yet their suggestions offered a broad perspective. Two suggestions were repeatedly mentioned: 1) move to a focus on marriage overall, and 2) immediate advocacy as a social justice issue.

Rethinking marriage overall

Many viewed the blessing and marriage of same-sex couples as pointing toward the larger issue of revisiting the theological understanding of marriage itself and the role of marriage in the church. As one respondent suggested, “Through the gay and lesbian experience, they are inviting you to look anew at what these sacred God-blessed relationships mean.” It also should include a theological reflection about both marriage and blessing for all. Another response offered further, specific suggestions:

The whole canon of marriage really needs to be re-evaluated, looked over, just like we’ve reevaluated other canons in the Episcopal Church. ... I see this draft liturgy opening up the whole area and open[ing] up the canon. The BCP and other language is the equivalent [of] separate but not equal...The language around blessings is a key part of the next part of work. Everyone wants to feel blessed. The words need to be the same for everyone.

Premarital counseling as part of this overall review of marriage was recommended as well:

Indaba made me think about counseling interfaith couples. It’s been difficult to think about how do we walk that line in the Episcopal Church--people from different parts of the world, blended families, adopted families, and so forth. So much is [absent] in our resource materials. It would be an important place for the church to grow in the 21st century.

Having the study about marriage also involve the church at the parish and diocesan level was suggested as a way to engage people in a manner that makes the church relevant to their lives.

Justice for all

Others emphasized that a justice issue is involved in the topic of same sex blessing and marriage and that it should be addressed as such. They see a justice approach as rooted at the parish and diocesan levels, which can offer concrete advocacy opportunities for parishioners to “sink their teeth into” as well as extending it worldwide. As one pointed out,

Specifically, marriage between two consenting adults isn’t a given in the world. We need to be outraged.

They also saw the need to move with haste. Gay Jennings’ remark, ‘If we don’t do something, it is going to be like women’s ordination,’ was cited as a justification for a justice response. “She spoke so profoundly that we must not let that happen,” noted one. It was urged that a decision be made quickly at General Convention next year, with approval for “trial use” as the minimum acceptable step. There was earnest hope that the Blessings liturgy will be approved.

Public advocacy also was encouraged, such the idea of five or six ecumenical forums across the country in a year, each hosted by different denominations. This would draw resistance from conservatives, but it also would attract younger people, who tend to be more open-minded on the topic.

Other next steps

Respondents who will be deputies to General Convention noted that the thought of next steps is weighing on their mind as to whether to push for a canon change, for trial use, or something else. An immediate next step would be to develop additional discussion material that could be sent out to deputations. It also was urged that specific options be posed.

Another suggestion was made that the Primates of the Anglican Communion have a conversation about the Kansas City Consultation. Ecumenically, this could serve as a useful model for other Communion. Publications also were urged, perhaps in conjunction with conversations related to one or more of the steps suggested above. A periodical such as *Christian Century* could effectively attract a broad readership.

Overall, respondents across all contexts saw opportunities to move forward in a continuing inclusive direction. In The Episcopal Church “there is a wide diversity of discussion and possibilities,” as one international participant remarked.

Further reflections

Respondents offered overall insights from their experience of the consultation. The power of sharing personal stories as part of the group reflection was often mentioned. Some felt that these stories would be helpful in examining more deeply “what kind of a church we want to be,” and “what is the mission of God”. Others took away renewed appreciation for their own context, such as living in a marriage-equal state. Occasionally respondents noted surprising insights, such as not having previously thought about the “separate but not-equal quality” of the BCP marriage liturgy and others, including the message that it sends to those desiring equal treatment.

In conclusion, respondents felt re-energized and even more hopeful for the work of the SCLM. They hoped the Consultation and its outcome would “nourish the roots for change.” There was hope that the Consultation was a place where the Church could demonstrate its relevance to wider society. Yet as one response from outside TEC concluded, the Episcopal Church “is light years ahead of most other denominations in adjudicating this transition... worldwide.... It is on the cutting edge.”

The cutting edge can be a difficult and sometimes lonely place for a denomination, but it was clear that others valued the struggle that has been undergone and the hope that is offered for the future. The Consultation itself was cutting-edge in many ways, hopeful but also uncertain of the outcome. Yet the responses and a cursory review of the questionnaire data suggest that it was an invaluable step for many along their own journeys of justice and social change.

Appendix

SCLM Consultation on Same Sex Marriage June 3-5, 2014

Consent to Participate in a Recorded Interview

As part of the evaluation of the SCLM Consultation on Same-Sex Marriage, I would like to hear about your experience as a participant in more detail and invite you to take part in a phone interview. The interview will take around 30 minutes (depending on how much you would like to say). I will ask you about your experiences regarding the June 2014 SCLM Consultation on Same-Sex Marriage in Kansas City. I will also ask you about any further reflections you might have, any challenges you faced, how the experience has benefitted you, and how your participation in has affected your understanding of other churches in the Anglican Communion. Finally I am interested in any suggestions you might have for how the process could have been improved, based on your experiences.

You are free to decline to answer any question that you are not comfortable with, and you can ask that the recorder to be switched off at any time. Any information that you provide in the interview will be treated confidentially and shared in a way so that you personally cannot be identified unless your permission is asked and received to have your name attached. If you agree, please initial the boxes following each statement:

**Please initial
each line:**

1. I agree to be interviewed and to allow this interview to be digitally recorded. _____
2. I give permission for information from my interview to be used for evaluation and review of the event, and I give copyright permission if any anonymised quotations from my interview might be used in the evaluation report and any related publications. _____
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without penalty at any time. _____

Participant's Name.....	Date.....
Signature (if completed online, just put your initials here).....	

Thank you for your time. The Rev. Paula D. Nesbitt, Ph.D., evaluator. Paula_nesbitt@post.harvard.edu.

If you have any concerns about the interview or the statements above, you may contact The Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers, Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, CA rmeyers@cdsp.edu.