

## Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music

### THE BLESSINGS PROJECT

Responding to the 2009 General Convention Resolution C056: Liturgies for Blessings

### Preparing for General Convention

# Educational Material for Diocesan Meetings of Deputies

held before the release of the Commission's Report

After receiving requests for material to help diocesan deputations consider the work of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music when they meet in this fall, we are making these educational materials available before the General Convention Office releases the final version of resources for blessing same-gender relationships. They are designed for a small group and should take approximately 30 minutes for each session.

We are providing a variety of approaches to help deputies understand the charge and work of the Blessings Project, which responds to 2009 General Convention resolution C056. We invite you to decide what would be most helpful for your deputation. For some, a review of “how we got here” might be helpful, especially if you have many new deputies. For others, jumping right into the theological and liturgical “meat” of the report might be best, and you can do this with the most recent revisions of theological and liturgical principles (they’ve changed a bit since the church-wide consultation in Atlanta). Others might want to facilitate a conversation about the similarities and differences between “blessing” and “marriage” (we think this will be helpful because so many comments have come back to the Commission regarding this question).

We think all deputations will benefit from a basic introduction to the work of the Commission in response to Resolution 2009-C056 (Session A).

Also available is some basic material for use at a Diocesan Convention: a brief PowerPoint presentation and a discussion guide for various topics that can be used at tables and/or in congregations. In addition, the material presented here could be easily adapted for congregational use.

We hope that you find the following material helpful for your use and/or adaptation. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Commission at [sclm@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:sclm@episcopalchurch.org).

The educational material here is organized into five sessions:

#### A. UNDERSTANDING RESOLUTION 2009-C056 AND THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION

A short, interactive process invites participants to engage the resolution and understand the work of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. The handouts include an introduction from the Rev. Dr. Ruth Meyers, Chair of the Commission, describing the rationale for the work, the breadth of the data and input received, and the open process the Commission implemented. The text of Resolution 2009-C056 is also included. We recommend that these two documents be shared with all of your deputies.

**B. UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY: HOW WE GOT HERE**

A worksheet guides participants in reflecting upon how and for how long the Episcopal Church has been discussing same-gender relationships and blessings. A discussion follows. “A Review of General Convention Legislation” is distributed as a resource and discussed.

**C. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Using a document summarizing the theological resources the Commission has developed, a facilitator invites participants to reflect upon their own relationships and then upon faithful, committed, same-gender relationships.

**D. PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATING LITURGICAL MATERIALS**

Using the document, “Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials,” which guided the development of the liturgy, a facilitator invites participants to reflect upon and discuss qualities of Anglican liturgy.

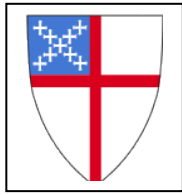
**E. EXPLORING THE COMPLEXITY OF CIVIL AND CANON LAW**

Using an exercise to look at the secular and sacred benefits and obligations of marriage and of blessing, this session helps participants understand the legal, canonical, and spiritual issues which blessing a same-gender couple brings to the fore.

**Appendices**

The following resources are included at the end of the document:

- Introduction: Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships
- General Convention Resolution 2009-C056
- Worksheet: Understanding the History
- A Review of General Convention Legislation
- Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationship: A Summary of “Faith, Hope, and Love”
- Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials



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## A. Understanding Resolution 2009-C056 and the Work of the Commission

**Purpose:** To help deputies understand the charge given in Resolution 2009-C056 and the way the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music responded.

**Preparation:** Ask deputies to read both Resolution 2009-C056 and “Introduction: Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships” and bring their copy to the session.

1. Open with prayer.
2. Have everyone read Resolution 2009-C056.
3. Ask the participants: What are the “action items” this resolution calls for? What does it say to you?

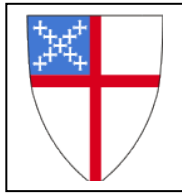
[NOTE: The main action items the Commission identified are in the second and third “Resolved”:

- a. ... devise an open process for the conduct of its work inviting participation ...
- b. ... collect and develop theological and liturgical resources...]

4. Ask participants: What might be some of the ways the Commission could or did go about meeting the requests of the resolution?

[NOTE: This should reflect people's reading and understanding of the information in the “Introduction.” Encourage participants to refer to the document to help recall details. The deputies who participated in the church-wide consultation in Atlanta can describe their experience of that meeting, which was part of the Commission's action plan. The purpose is to get people thinking about the charge from the resolution and to reflect upon the depth of the Commission's work.]

5. As the conversation continues, invite participants to consider any resulting insights about the work of the Commission.
6. After about 30 minutes, begin to wrap up the conversation and invite an articulation of the three most important things to take away from the conversation.



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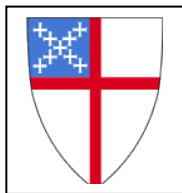
Educational Material for Diocesan Meetings of Deputies  
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## B. Understanding the History: How We Got Here

**Purpose:** To help deputies learn about the history of the Episcopal Church's official actions regarding the blessing of same-gender relationships.

**Preparation:** The facilitator prepares sufficient copies of "Worksheet: Understanding the History" and "A Review of General Convention Legislation."

1. Open with prayer.
2. Distribute the worksheet and give participants about 10 minutes to complete it.
3. After everyone has had time to write something, ask everyone to share their answers to A (how long the Episcopal Church has been talking about same-gender relationships and its gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members). Continue by inviting deputies to share whatever is comfortable from B for each decade. Listen to see whether there is a thread or theme that runs through the memories.
4. Distribute the document "A Review of General Convention Legislation" and discuss it in light of the responses to the worksheet.
5. After about 30 minutes, begin to wrap up the conversation and invite an articulation of the three most important things to take away from the conversation.



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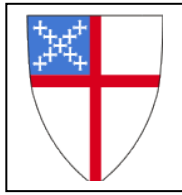
## C. Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationships

**Purpose:** To engage deputies in theological reflection in response to the resources the Commission is developing.

**Preparation:** Ask deputies to read the one-page document “Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationships: A Summary of ‘Faith, Hope, and Love’” and bring their copy to the session.

1. Open with prayer.
2. Invite participants to reflect on their own significant relationships using this question:
  - How have you found God in your relationships? Give an example in your own life.

This discussion should last for about 10-15 minutes, depending on the size of the group.
3. Next, review the theological themes that the Commission has articulated for same-gender relationships: covenantal vows as a form of spiritual practice, vocation, households, fruitfulness, and mutual blessing. Then, ask participants to reflect specifically on same-gender relationships, either the relationships of others they know or have blessed, or their own same-gender relationships, using these questions:
  - Which of these themes speak most directly to your own experience of lifelong monogamous relationship, either your own or a relationship in your community?
  - What other ways would you describe the spiritual significance of committed relationships in the life of your community?
4. After about 20 minutes, begin to wrap up the conversation and invite an articulation of the three most important things to take away with them from the conversation.



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## D. Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials

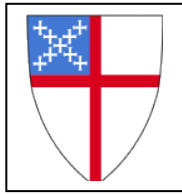
**Purpose:** To introduce deputies to the principles that guided the Commission in developing liturgical resources for blessing same-gender relationships.

**Preparation:** Ask deputies to read the one-page document “Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials” and bring their copy to the session.

1. Open with prayer.
2. Ask participants to take out the document, “Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials.” Then invite participants to reflect upon an Episcopal liturgy (such as a wedding, blessing, baptism or Eucharist) they have recently attended or that is particularly memorable, using this question:
  - What was it about the liturgy that was most memorable or that has remained with you to this day?

This discussion should last for about 10-15 minutes, depending on the size of the group.

3. Next, remind the group about the principles that have been articulated for liturgies to bless same-gender relationships. Then, ask participants to reflect upon how these qualities were present in the liturgies they described or in what they heard from the stories of the other participants.
4. Finally, refer to the document Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials, and ask participants if any of the other items jumped out or caught their attention. If some did, ask why they caught the person's attention.
5. After about 20 minutes, begin to wrap up the conversation and invite an articulation of the three most important things to take away with them from the conversation.



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## E. Exploring the Complexity of Civil and Canon Law

**Purpose:** To help deputies reflect upon their own understandings of what it might mean to bless a same-gender relationship and get a sense of the complexity of the situation in the Episcopal Church and in the contexts of various civil jurisdictions.

**Preparation:** Set up two pieces of newsprint, each with two columns:

*One piece of newsprint:*

### Marriage

Secular Benefits/Obligations

Sacred Benefits/Obligations

*The other piece of newsprint:*

### Blessing

Secular Benefits/Obligations

Sacred Benefits/Obligations

1. Open with prayer.
2. Invite people to brainstorm about the secular benefits and obligations of marriage, and note their answers in that column. Then ask about the sacred benefits and obligations of marriage and note their answers. Now, do the same under the heading blessing – secular benefits and obligations first, then sacred benefits and obligations. Step back and ask people what they notice about the four lists. Have a conversation.

**NOTE:** The following is a list of some of the kinds of responses people might give; the Commission is not advocating a particular position but rather is introducing the complexity we discovered as we developed the resources:

## MARRIAGE

### Secular Benefits/Obligation

Legal status given by the State: global for different-gender couple; local/state for same-gender couple

Defined by some States as only between a man and a woman – supporting the traditional view of marriage  
Part of the institution of marriage and its social benefits  
Potential financial benefits – joint tax returns, automatic joint ownership, etc. – global for different-gender couple; local/state for same-gender couple  
Clarity about the relationship – fits a known model, people know what you are talking about if you say you are married; clarity about monogamy and faithfulness  
Legal responsibilities shared by the couple  
Social status  
Usually, acceptance of parents, family and friends of the relationship

## Sacred Benefits/Obligations

God's blessing proclaimed by the church  
Recognition of spiritual nature of relationship  
Public religious and spiritual commitment of love  
Spiritual preparation and counseling prior to ceremony  
“Church wedding” and social recognition and support of religious community  
Exchange and blessing of symbols of relationship (ring(s))  
Done as part of the BCP and Episcopal Church norms – not true for same-gender couples

## BLESSING

### Secular Benefits/Obligations

Possible gained clarity about the relationship; commitment statements made to one another  
Possible social status  
Possible acceptance/recognition of parents, family and friends

### Sacred Benefits/Obligations

God's blessing proclaimed by the church  
Recognition of spiritual nature of relationship; clarity about monogamy and faithfulness  
Public religious and spiritual commitment of love  
Spiritual preparation and counseling prior to ceremony  
“Church wedding” and social recognition and support of religious community  
Exchange and blessing of symbols of relationship (ring(s))  
Falls within Episcopal Church norms, if permitted by bishop as pastoral response

### SUMMARY:

- When the church blesses same-gender couples such blessings seem to carry most but not all of the “sacred benefit” that one finds in marriage.
- When the church blesses same-gender couples such blessings seem to carry much less of the “secular benefit” that one finds in marriage.

3. After about 30 minutes, begin to wrap up the conversation and invite an articulation of the three most important things to take away with them from the conversation.



**Introduction:  
Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships**

**prepared by  
The Episcopal Church Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music**

For more than 30 years the Episcopal Church has been responding to the challenge to seek and serve Christ in its members who are gay and lesbian. In 1976, a resolution of General Convention affirmed that “homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.” Since then, we have been in a church-wide discernment process about how we live out that resolution. Some congregations and their clergy have welcomed same-gender couples and offered liturgical blessings of their relationships, and some dioceses have developed guidelines for such blessings. Resolution C051 of the 2003 General Convention recognized “that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.” Six years later, General Convention called for the collection and development of resources for those blessings.

Resolution C056 of the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to “collect and develop theological and liturgical resources” for the blessing of same-gender relationships. This resolution instructed the Commission to work in consultation with the House of Bishops and to “devise an open process for the conduct of its work, inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals who are engaged in such theological work, and inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion.” We have understood the process for our work to be as important as the resources themselves.

The Scope of Our Work

Because Resolution C056 directed us to “collect and develop resources,” we have not debated whether the church should bless same-gender relationships. Nonetheless, we recognize that Episcopalians and Christians throughout the Anglican Communion have disagreed about whether such blessings are a legitimate development within Christian tradition or an unacceptable departure from biblical teaching. Resolution 2009-C056 (as well as previous General Convention resolutions) acknowledged this dispute in the resolve “that this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality.”

As we developed the resources, many people asked whether we were actually preparing a rite for same-gender marriage. In accord with Resolution 2009-C056, the Commission has understood our charge to be the development of a liturgy of blessing, not marriage. Nonetheless, there are a number of parallels to different-gender marriage, as General Convention Resolution 2000-D039 suggested when it acknowledged that “there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships.” That 2000 resolution then set forth the expectation that “such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in

such relationships to see in each other the image of God,” and denounced “promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members.” These expectations have shaped the Commission’s understanding of same-gender relationships, which we recognize as having significant parallels to marriage: two people publicly make a lifelong, monogamous commitment to one another in a ritual that pronounces God’s blessing on their life together.

The question of marriage is complicated by ongoing changes in American civil law. As of August 2011, six states and the District of Columbia issue marriage licenses to same-gender couples, five states allow civil unions, and seven recognize some form of domestic partnership; on the other hand, thirty states have adopted constitutional language defining marriage as between one man and one woman and thirty-nine states have statutes defining marriage in this way.<sup>1</sup> The civil law in other countries where the Episcopal Church is located adds further complexity. Both The Book of Common Prayer and the Canons of the Episcopal Church require clergy to conform to the laws of the State regarding marriage and describe marriage as being between a man and a woman.

Following the wording of Resolution 2009-C056, we are using the term “same-gender” rather than “same-sex” to describe these relationships. Previous General Convention resolutions, along with the diocesan resources we have collected, are not consistent in their choice of terminology.

### Collecting Resources

The Commission has gathered a vast amount of material, including official studies, service leaflets from liturgies of blessing, and diocesan and provincial guidelines for these blessings. The Archives of the Episcopal Church established a digital archive for the project, <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/SCLM/index.html>, where anyone may review the materials we have gathered.

Resolution C056 allows bishops to provide “generous pastoral response” to meet the needs of the church’s members, so in December 2009, the chair of the Commission asked all diocesan bishops to report what provisions they were making and what resources they were commending to their dioceses. Twenty-seven bishops responded to this request, and a number of these bishops included theological, pastoral, teaching, and/or liturgical resources. Seven other dioceses subsequently submitted materials. All diocesan materials that we received are available for review in the digital archive for Resolution 2009-C056.

We gathered liturgical resources from many places. Clayton Morris, who served as Liturgical Officer for the Episcopal Church until 2009, had accumulated numerous materials over the course of nearly two decades. The Commission received resources from lay and ordained Episcopalians throughout the church, including some of our own members. Commission members reviewed all of these as we began the process of developing liturgies. A representative sampling of the resources is posted on the digital archive, and all of the resources will be permanently housed at the Archives of the Episcopal Church.

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<sup>1</sup> This information is from the website of the National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=16430>.

## Developing Resources

At our March 2010 meeting, the Commission began our work in response to this resolution with a day of theological reflection. That conversation resulted in a brief outline of the resources to be developed:

- one or more essays setting forth scriptural and theological foundations for blessing same-gender relationships;
- one or more rites for blessing same-gender relationships;
- pastoral and teaching resources to assist clergy and congregations as they consider these blessings; and
- resources designed to help communities understand and address canonical and legal matters.

This proposed outline became the basis for four task groups formed to develop materials. These groups were advisory to the Commission.

In forming the task groups, the Commission sought the wisdom and experience of lay people and clergy from both academic and congregational contexts. Members of the task groups reflected the diversity of the Episcopal Church: age, gender, race/ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation. The task groups met four times in 2010 and 2011, and the chairs of the task groups met monthly by telephone or video conference. The Commission discussed the work at each of its meetings during the triennium.

## An Open Process... Inviting Participation

*Consultation with the House of Bishops.* In September 2010, the chair of the Commission and four of the task-group chairs presented to the House of Bishops a draft of theological and liturgical principles that would guide this work. Responses from the bishops helped refine those principles. At the March 2011 House of Bishops meeting, bishops serving on the Commission and/or the task groups updated their colleagues, and at the September 2011 meeting, bishops had an informal opportunity to discuss the final draft of the resources with the bishops who are members of the Commission.

*Province I Hearing.* In October 2010, the Commission meeting in New Hampshire included a hearing with bishops, other clergy, and same-gender couples from each of the seven dioceses in Province I, which comprises the six New England states. The evolving legal status of civil unions and marriage equality in those states has meant that many of the dioceses have been addressing questions of blessing same-gender relationships for many years. Province I is the only province of the Episcopal Church to develop a resource for clergy ministering to same-gender couples, and a majority of the dioceses in this province have guidelines for blessing these relationships. Thus Province I offered a good opportunity to consult with those engaged in this work, as directed in Resolution 2009-C056.

At the hearing, 33 people, lay and ordained, testified about their experiences. Many told the Commission that congregations were transformed when they joined in the celebration of a blessing; for one congregation, the blessing of a civil union as part of the regular Sunday liturgy was especially powerful. Clergy and couples alike were surprised at how jubilant congregations were. We also heard about the cost of secrecy in places where relationships had to be hidden and blessings could not be openly celebrated. Couples and clergy spoke of the joy that came when relationships could be openly acknowledged. A few couples told powerful stories of

reconciliation that happened within their families when their relationship was celebrated and blessed in a church liturgy.

*Churchwide Survey Regarding Pastoral Counseling and Teaching Materials.* In October 2010, the Task Group on Pastoral and Teaching Resources created a web-based survey asking what resources congregations were using to prepare same-gender couples who came to the church seeking a blessing, and what teaching materials and resources were used or would be needed to help congregations in a discernment process about welcoming the blessing of same-gender relationships. The Commission used both official and unofficial channels to invite responses to the survey: a press release sent to diocesan communicators, a letter to all members of the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops, invitations on the unofficial list-serve for bishops and deputies, and networking by members of the Commission and the task groups.

Between October 2010 and January 6, 2011, we received 1,131 responses to the survey from 111 dioceses and all 9 Provinces. Twenty-three percent of the respondents stated that the blessing of same-gender relationships already occurs in their congregations, and of these, 55% confirmed that their congregation had engaged in an educational and/or discernment process before the blessing of same-gender relationships began. With regard to preparing same-gender couples, 32% of respondents said that their preparation differed from that provided for different-gender couples, and 43% expressed a need for additional resources. The data from this survey helped guide the development of the pastoral and teaching resources.

*Churchwide Consultation.* The Commission invited every diocese in the Episcopal Church to send two deputies, one lay and one clergy, to an overnight consultation at the conclusion of its March 2011 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. Three goals were set forth:

- to **inform** deputies about the work of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music in response to Resolution 2009-C056;
- to **engage** in theological reflection in response to the Commission's work, and to give feedback that would inform the Commission and its task groups as they continued their work;
- to **equip** deputies to report to the rest of their deputations and engage them in ongoing theological reflection about the blessing of same-gender relationships.

Materials distributed to participants at the consultation are available for review in the digital archive, <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/SCLM/index.html>, which also includes links to the webcast of the entire consultation.

One hundred ninety-five deputies from 98 dioceses registered for the gathering. Most responded enthusiastically to the process. A significant majority stated on the evaluation form that they felt either "completely equipped" or "somewhat equipped" to discuss this work in their diocese and at the 2012 General Convention. When asked what they valued most, one responded, "the thoughtful and prayerful way that people with differing opinions were able to discuss this important work." Another deputy noted, "the opportunity to speak and listen to other people and the broader perspective I gained from those interactions; the opportunity to engage the process, principles and issues that are in play as we do this work together; the real and abiding sense that we are doing this work 'together.'" A few deputies commented on the absence of opposing viewpoints in the plenary sessions. One wrote, "The only thing lacking for me was an opportunity for those who are new to engaging this conversation or who are opposed to have enough space to express their reservations, be heard, and maybe to hear constructive, respectful responses."

*Review of Draft Resources.* After the task groups presented a complete first draft of the resources to the Commission in June 2011, we made the drafts available to a group of consultant reviewers. During July 2011, 133 people, lay and ordained, representing all nine provinces of the Episcopal Church, offered thousands of comments on the draft resources. In August, the task groups made extensive revisions, leading to final drafts for the Commission.

### Inviting Reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion

In addition to the direction of Resolution 2009-C056, the Commission was mindful that the 2004 *Windsor Report* urged “all provinces that are engaged in processes of discernment regarding the blessing of same sex unions to engage the Communion in continuing study of biblical and theological rationale for and against such unions” (par. 145).

Knowing that the Anglican Church of Canada has been addressing this subject for many years, we requested and received liturgies from several of the Canadian dioceses. The digital archive includes, under “Church-Wide Resources,” an issue of *Liturgy Canada* which gives an overview of the history in that Province of the Anglican Communion and summarizes the guidelines and rites available on diocesan websites in the Anglican Church of Canada.

*International Anglican Liturgical Consultation (IALC).* The IALC, a biennial gathering, includes liturgical scholars, representatives nominated and sent by Provinces of the Anglican Communion, and members of liturgical commissions of Anglican Provinces. Since Provinces may refer matters to the Consultation, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music requested time on the agenda of the August 2011 meeting. The IALC Steering Committee not only granted a half-day for this discussion, but also met in March 2011 with representatives of the Commission to learn more about the work and prepare for the discussion in the full Consultation.

The IALC meeting included 55 people from 19 Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The official representatives of the Episcopal Church, Ruth Meyers (Chair of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music) and Thomas Ely (Bishop of Vermont and a member of the Commission), presented a summary of the theological rationale and liturgical principles guiding the development of resources, along with a draft of the liturgy. Not all participants in the IALC meeting supported the Episcopal Church’s decision to develop these resources, but all joined in respectful conversation in a small-group format. In the written notes submitted from the small groups, some stated that the work of the Episcopal Church would be helpful for their own province, while others indicated that blessing same-gender relationships is not on the agenda for them.

Participants in the IALC conversation asked for development of the scriptural foundations for blessing same-gender relationships and clarification of the concepts of blessing and covenant. They urged that the theological and liturgical resources make clear that the Episcopal Church is envisioning these relationships as monogamous and lifelong. Many found the liturgy to be strikingly similar to marriage. They encouraged greater clarity in the liturgy about the nature of the covenant and a more robust form of blessing. The task groups received a detailed report of the comments from the IALC meeting and took account of them as they prepared the final draft of the resources.

### Funding

Resolution 2009-C056 calls for an open process inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, individuals, and also inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican

Communion. Funds designated in the Episcopal Church budget for the commission's work have been used for this project, but the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music determined that an open process with widespread participation required more funding. The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society contracted with Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSP) to support this work. CDSP secured major grants from the Arcus Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.

### Conclusion

"I will bless you," God declared to Abraham, "so that you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2). At every step in this process, the Commission and its task groups have been reminded of the many blessings God has bestowed on our church. The unprecedented opportunities we have had to engage with our sister and brother Episcopalians in every province of the Episcopal Church and with Anglicans from the wider Anglican Communion, have illustrated for us the rich diversity of our life together in the Body of Christ. This work has been a divine gift and a blessing to us, which we are eager to share.

We offer these resources with the hope that they will strengthen our shared witness in the Episcopal Church to the love and grace of God in Christ. As in every other aspect of our life together as God's people, we offer these resources, not relying on ourselves alone, but on God, who "is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine," and always for the sake of God's glory in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:20-21).

*Ruth Meyers*

*Chair, Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music*

*September 2011*

## **Resolution 2009-C056**

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention acknowledge the changing circumstances in the United States and in other nations, as legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships for gay and lesbian persons is passed in various civil jurisdictions that call forth a renewed pastoral response from this Church, and for an open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, collect and develop theological and liturgical resources, and report to the 77th General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, devise an open process for the conduct of its work inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals who are engaged in such theological work, and inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion; and be it further

*Resolved*, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the members of this Church be encouraged to engage in this effort.

# Worksheet:

## Understanding the History

Please use this worksheet to record your memories and thoughts about the history of dealing with same-gender issues over the last few decades.

- A. The Episcopal Church has formally been talking about same-gender relationships and its gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender members for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Under each decade list briefly - using just key words - what you remember about:
1. What was going on in your own life?
  2. What was going on in the world and/or the church?
  3. What was going on with issues of same-gender relationships?

Decade/What I remember	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010
In my own life					
In the world/church					
With issues of same-gender relationships in the church and the world					



## A Review of General Convention Legislation

### Introduction

The legislative history here shows the development of General Convention deliberations about the place of gay men and lesbians in the life of the church, particularly with regard to the blessing of their faithful, monogamous, lifelong relationships. Successive conventions have both acknowledged the work of their predecessors and reached new decisions. Resolution texts are from the website of the Archives of the Episcopal Church: <http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/acts/>.

**Minneapolis, 1976:** For the first time, General Convention adopted a resolution that acknowledged and affirmed the presence of persons of homosexual orientation in the church:

Resolution 1976-A069:

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, That it is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

**Anaheim, 1985:** General Convention reaffirmed the 1976 resolution and encouraged dioceses to deepen understanding:

Resolution 1985-D082:

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 68th General Convention urge each diocese of this Church to find an effective way to foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, to provide pastoral support, and to give life to the claim of homosexual persons "upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral care and concern of the Church" as recognized by the General Convention in 1976.

**Phoenix, 1991:** General Convention affirmed the traditional understanding of marriage as between a man and a woman, and acknowledged "discontinuity" between that teaching and the experience of many members of the Episcopal Church:

Resolution 1991-A104

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church affirms that the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong monogamous "union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind" "intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord" as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Church continues to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this General Convention confesses our failure to lead and to resolve this discontinuity through legislative efforts based upon resolutions directed at singular and various aspects of these issues; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this General Convention commissions the Bishops and members of each Diocesan Deputation to initiate a means for all congregations in their jurisdiction to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues; and further this General Convention directs the President of each Province to appoint one Bishop, one lay deputy and one clerical deputy in that province to facilitate the process, to receive reports from the dioceses at each meeting of their provincial synod and report to the 71st General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this General Convention directs the House of Bishops to prepare a Pastoral Teaching prior to the 71st General Convention using the learnings from the diocesan and provincial processes and calling upon such insight as is necessary from theologians, theological ethicists, social scientists and gay and lesbian persons; and that three lay persons and three members of the clergy from the House of Deputies, appointed by the President of the House of Deputies be included in the preparation of this Pastoral Teaching.

**Indianapolis, 1994:** General Convention added sexual orientation, along with marital status, sex, disabilities and age as categories of people to whom non-discrimination in church membership is assured.

Resolution 1994-C020:

*Resolved*, the House of Bishops concurring, That Title I, Canon 17, Section 5 be amended as follows:

No person shall be denied rights, status [in], or [access to] an equal place in the life, worship, and governance of this Church because of race, color, [or] ethnic origin, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by [this] Canon.

**Indianapolis, 1994:** General Convention called for a study of “the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex”:

Resolution 1994-C042:

*Resolved*, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 71st General Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission and the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops to prepare and present to the 72nd General Convention, as part of the Church's ongoing dialogue on human sexuality, a report addressing the theological foundations and pastoral considerations involved in the development of rites honoring love and commitment between persons of the same sex; and be it further

*Resolved*, That no rites for the honoring of love and commitment between persons of the same sex be developed unless and until the preparation of such rites has been authorized by the General Convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the sum of \$8,600 be appropriated to support this work, subject to funding considerations.

**Philadelphia, 1997:** General Convention reaffirmed the traditional understanding of marriage and called for continuing study:

Resolution 1997-C003:

*Resolved*, That this 72nd General Convention affirm the sacredness of Christian marriage between one man and one woman with intent of life-long relationship; and be it further  
*Resolved*, That this Convention direct the Standing Liturgical Commission to continue its study of theological aspects of committed relationships of same-sex couples, and to issue a full report including recommendations of future steps for the resolution of issues related to such committed relationships no later than November 1999 for consideration at the 73rd General Convention.

**Denver, 2000:** General Convention acknowledged relationships other than marriage:

Resolution 2000-D039:

*Resolved*, That the members of the 73rd General Convention intend for this Church to provide a safe and just structure in which all can utilize their gifts and creative energies for mission; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we acknowledge that while the issues of human sexuality are not yet resolved, there are currently couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in marriage and couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church who are living in other life-long committed relationships; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we denounce promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness in the relationships of any of our members; and be it further

*Resolved*, That this Church intends to hold all its members accountable to these values, and will provide for them the prayerful support, encouragement, and pastoral care necessary to live faithfully by them; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we acknowledge that some, acting in good conscience, who disagree with the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality, will act in contradiction to that position; and be it further

*Resolved*, That in continuity with previous actions of the General Convention of this Church, and in response to the call for dialogue by the Lambeth Conference, we affirm that those on various sides of controversial issues have a place in the Church, and we reaffirm the imperative to promote conversation between persons of differing experiences and perspectives, while acknowledging the Church's teaching on the sanctity of marriage.

**Minneapolis, 2003:** Acknowledging continuing differences, General Convention recognized “that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions”:

Resolution 2003-C051:

*Resolved*, That the 74th General Convention affirm the following:

1. That our life together as a community of faith is grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ and expressed in the principles of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral: Holy Scripture, the historic Creeds of the Church, the two dominical Sacraments, and the Historic Episcopate.
2. That we reaffirm Resolution A069 of the 65th General Convention (1976) that "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."
3. That, in our understanding of homosexual persons, differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions; and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same.
4. That we reaffirm Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention (2000), that "We expect such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God," and that such relationships exist throughout the church.
5. That we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.
6. That we commit ourselves, and call our church, in the spirit of Resolution A104 of the 70th General Convention (1991), to continued prayer, study, and discernment on the pastoral care for gay and lesbian persons, to include the compilation and development by a special commission organized and appointed by the Presiding Bishop, of resources to facilitate as wide a conversation of discernment as possible throughout the church.
7. That our baptism into Jesus Christ is inseparable from our communion with one another, and we commit ourselves to that communion despite our diversity of opinion and, among dioceses, a diversity of pastoral practice with the gay men and lesbians among us.
8. That it is a matter of faith that our Lord longs for our unity as his disciples, and for us this entails living within the boundaries of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. We believe this discipline expresses faithfulness to our polity and that it will facilitate the conversation we seek, not only in The Episcopal Church, but also in the wider Anglican Communion and beyond.



The Episcopal Church  
Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music  
Addressing General Convention Resolution 2009-C056, *Liturgies for Blessing*

**Theological Reflection on Covenantal Relationships:  
A Summary of “Faith, Hope, and Love”**

October 2011

**Baptism, Eucharist, and the Paschal Mystery**

All Christians are called to bear witness to the good news of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered for such witness by our covenantal relationship with God. Baptism initiates us into that covenant, making us Christ’s own forever and members of Christ’s Body, the Church. The eucharist sustains us in that covenantal life and strengthens us to be Christ’s witnesses in the world.

Our covenantal life with God can shape and be expressed in our relationships of commitment and faithfulness with others. Our committed relationships can thus reflect a sacramental character (making divine grace visible) and evoke eschatological hope (our ultimate union with God). These relationships thus invite further reflection on the mission of the Church, what it means “to bless,” and the distinguishing marks of a covenantal relationship.

**Themes for Theological Reflection**

A sacramental framework for covenantal relationships suggests several other key theological themes for reflection and shared discernment, including the following:

- ***Vocation:*** God calls people into various kinds of relationship, whether as single people, in monastic communities, or as intimate couples. These vocational callings can empower our witness to the gospel. The decision to enter into a covenantal union is likewise a vocation marked by these characteristics: “fidelity; monogamy; mutual affection and respect; careful, honest communication; and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.”
- ***Households:*** Covenantal relationships are often lived in households in which we practice daily the giving of ourselves for the good of another. While households take many different forms, they create a space of mutual trust and accountability. The joy, intimacy, and shared vulnerability of households can thus help us learn the spiritual disciplines of compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation in lives of committed monogamy and fidelity.
- ***Fruitfulness:*** The divine grace that sustains a covenantal relationship bears fruit in countless ways, not only for the couple but for the wider community as well. Covenantal couples manifest this grace in their shared gifts for ministry and in lives of service, generosity, and hospitality.
- ***Mutual Blessing:*** A blessed relationship is set apart for a divine purpose: to bear witness to the creating, redeeming, and sanctifying love of God in the world. As the Spirit empowers the couple for this witness, the Church is likewise blessed and strengthened for its mission and ministry.

In all of these ways and more, the blessing of a same-gender relationship invites the couple and the whole Church to renew our commitment to the Baptismal Covenant. That commitment is expressed by faith in the good news of Jesus Christ, in the hope for union with God that Christ promised, and with the love that knits us together as the Body of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, we live our life together as God’s people with faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).



**The Episcopal Church**  
**Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music**  
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**Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials**

**October 2011**

Materials proposed for blessing same-gender relationships must above all be consistent with the implicit theology and ecclesiology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. This would suggest, for example, that they must reflect the Prayer Book's underlying assumption that the entire life of the Church finds its origin in baptism.

Nearly as important is that the proposed liturgical materials embody a classically Anglican liturgical ethos and style. Recognizing the varying notions of what makes public prayer recognizably Anglican, the task group identified these qualities:

- It resonates with Scripture and proclaims the gospel.
- It is rooted in Anglican theological tradition.
- It has high literary value; it is beautiful according to accepted and respected standards.
- It uses the recurring structures, linguistic patterns, and metaphors of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*.
- It is formal, not casual, conversational, or colloquial.
- It is dense enough to bear the weight of the sacred purpose for which it is intended.
- It is metaphoric without being obtuse.
- It is performative: that is, it effects what it says.

At the same time, these rites must resonate as natural speech in contemporary ears. A religious or sacred tone must be achieved without the use of arcane or antiquated words or patterns of speech.

The rites should provide explanatory notes and rubrics. The material must be considered as the script for an event, not merely a collection of texts.

Any rite of blessing must be an expression primarily of the entire Church, not of the couple seeking a blessing. These rites must allow for robust communal participation, reflecting the baptismal ecclesiology of the Prayer Book. Related to this, since the eucharist is the symbol of the unity of the Church through unity with Christ, these services of blessing should normatively take place within a celebration of the eucharist.

Such rites must enact the notion of sacramental reciprocity by suggesting that, even as the Church blesses the relationship of the couple, the relationship of the couple is a blessing to the Church.

Options for various elements of the rites, particularly Scripture and the Prayers of the People, must be provided so that this action of the entire Church—this common prayer—does not degenerate into a generic rite.

Any rite of blessing a couple must hold up the two people making the covenant as the primary ministers within this action of God and of the entire Church. Such rites should give expression to the Church's understanding that the couple is freely assuming a vocation that can be expected to yield the fruits of mutual fidelity for the couple, for the Church, and for the entire world, and that points ultimately toward the fulfillment of all human relationships and unity in the eschatological Reign of God, when God will be all-in-all.

The rites must be what they purport to be—liturgical prayer—not didactic or polemical statements in the guise of liturgy.