

# How we got from there to here

A history of the Episcopal Church's  
engagement with LGBTQAI inclusion

*Susan Russell | Spring 2021*

*“We learn our history in order to back up into  
our past and get a running start on our future.”*

-- Fredrica Harris Thompsett

- The General Convention of the Episcopal Church is a bicameral legislative body made up of lay people, clergy and bishops. It meets every three years and is the only body that can authoritatively speak for the whole church.



- The Episcopal Church has been officially debating the issue of human sexuality, particularly as it applies to gay and lesbian people, since 1976 when General Convention resolutions began to frame the parameters of the debate.



# Integrity

- Founded in 1974 by Dr. Louie Crew, Integrity had its first national conference in 1975 in Chicago and by the 1976 General Convention had an influential voice.





# Minneapolis [1976]

(A069) Recognize the Equal Claim of Homosexuals

*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.

# 1985: “No Outcasts”

- Elected in 1985 as the 24<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Bishop Ed Browning declared in his acceptance speech that “there will be no outcasts” in this church.
- His commitment to stand with LGBT people was inarguably a factor in the movement forward toward fuller inclusion.





## Phoenix [1991]

- In 1991, at the General Convention held in Phoenix acknowledged its inability to resolve the complex issues surrounding human sexuality by means of the normal legislative process.
- The Convention opted instead for a process of continued study and dialogue across the whole church, with a report to be issued from the House of Bishops.





# Indianapolis [1994]

- In 1994 the report from the House of Bishops -- “Continuing the Dialogue” -- was published.
- Also in 1994, General Convention adopted the following resolutions:

**(C042) Prepare Report Considering Rites for Same-Sex Commitments**

**(D006) Call on US Government to Extend Benefits to Gay and Lesbian Couples**

- While resolutions from General Convention are important aspects of our polity - the process through which we govern the church - they are generally perceived to be recommendatory and therefore lacking the force of a canon or law.
- The only canon to deal with the issue of homosexual orientation in any specific way was adopted in 1994:

# Title III, Canon 4, Section 1

"All Bishops of Dioceses and other Clergy shall make provisions to identify fit persons for Holy Orders and encourage them to present themselves for Postulancy. No one shall be denied access to the selection process for ordination in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, or age, except as otherwise specified by these Canons." -- *Title III, Canon 4, Section 1 of the Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, p. 60*

# The Righter Trial [1996]

- In 1996, the Court of Trial for a Bishop refused to hear charges filed against Bishop Walter Righter for ordaining a gay man living in a relationship.
- The court determined that there was no doctrine against such an ordination and that there is no canonical bar to gay and lesbian ordination in the Episcopal Church.





## Philadelphia [1997]

**(C024) Approved health care benefits for domestic partners**, to be extended to the partners of clergy and lay employees in dioceses that wish to do so.

**(D011) Apologize for the Church's Rejection of Gays and Lesbians** -- its members who are gay and lesbian and to the lesbians and gay men outside the Church -- for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church and affirm that this Church seeks amendment of our life together as we ask God's help in sharing the Good News with all people.

# Lambeth Conference [1998]

- In 1998, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops, meeting in July at their every ten-year gathering in Canterbury, passed Lambeth Resolution 1:10 which was entitled "Human Sexuality."





It included the majority opinion of the bishops gathered at that conference that "homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture" and that they "cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions."

- Much energy has been spent over the intervening years debating whether that language was descriptive of the bishops gathered at Lambeth '98 or proscriptive for the wider communion.







2000 [Denver]

(A009) The **Identification of “Safe Spaces,”** establishing a formal process for congregations to identify themselves as safe spaces for GLBT people

(A046) **Conversation with youth and young adults about sexuality**

(A080) **Dialogue on Fidelity in Human Relationships**

(C031) recommending that congregations engage in dialogue with the **Boy Scouts of America Regarding Their Policy on Homosexuals**

(D039) **Acknowledge Relationships Other Than Marriage and Existence of Disagreement on the Church's Teaching.**

# 2000 - D039

## **Acknowledge Relationships Other Than Marriage and Existence of Disagreement on the Church's Teaching**

Passed overwhelmingly by a voice vote in the House of Deputies and by a 119-19 margin in the House of Bishops, this important resolution broke new ground by acknowledging the reality of couples living in “other life-long committed relationships” within the Body of Christ and articulating a common set of values the Episcopal Church expects for all relationships.

The resolution read:

- *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.

# Claiming the Blessing: 2002

- Claiming the Blessing [CTB] was convened in 2002 as an intentional collaborative of organizations and individuals within the Episcopal Church advocating for full inclusion of all the baptized in all sacraments of the church.
- Integrity
- Beyond Inclusion
- OASIS Ministries
- Witness Magazine
- Episcopal Women's Caucus



# Claiming the Blessing

*"I will bless you so that you will be a blessing."*  
— GENESIS 12.2

The General Convention of the U.S. Episcopal Church resolved in 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." Since that time great strides toward realizing that "full and equal" claim have been taken. There are a growing number of places in the church where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (lgbt) persons are welcomed, affirmed in their ministries and blessed in their committed relationships. There are, however, many more places where they are still not fully included in the life of the church. A coalition of leading justice organizations in the Episcopal Church — Integrity, Beyond Inclusion and diocesan Oasis ministries — along with numerous individual leaders, are determined to see the 1976 resolution become a reality. To that end, this partnership, called "Claiming the Blessing" ([www.claimingtheblessing.org](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org)), has committed itself to obtaining approval at the 2003 General Convention of a liturgical rite of blessing, celebrating the holy love in faithful relationships between couples for whom marriage is not available, enabling couples in these relationships to see in each other the image of God.



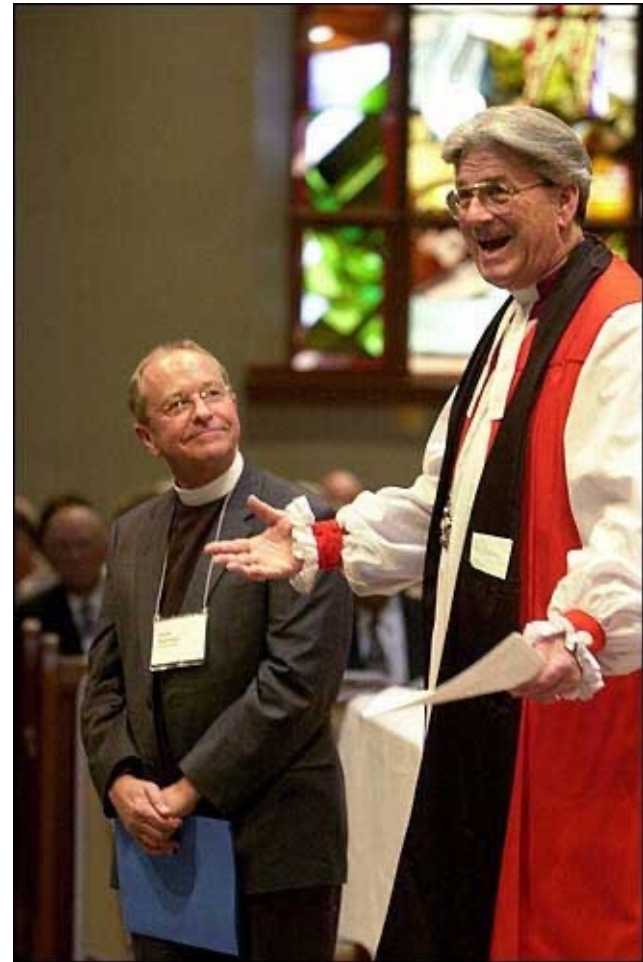
**Claiming the Blessing**  
132 N. Euclid Avenue  
Pasadena, CA 91101-1796  
[www.claimingtheblessing.org](http://www.claimingtheblessing.org)  
tel: (626) 583-2740

- Charge was to “identify an achievable goal and create a strategy to achieve it”
- Initial goal was “obtain approval for liturgical rites of blessing for couples for whom marriage is not available”
- Created Theology Statement and hosted national conference in St. Louis in November 2002



# Bishop-elect Gene Robinson

- On June 7, 2003 the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire elected the Reverend Gene Robinson to be their 9<sup>th</sup> bishop diocesan.
- CTB added “securing consents” to his election to the 2003 General Convention legislative agenda





# Minneapolis [2003]

In addition to consenting to the election of V. Gene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire, the 2003 General Convention in Minneapolis passed a landmark resolution moving the church forward on the blessing of same-sex unions:

## **(C051) Blessing of Committed Same-Gender Relationships**

Key resolves included:

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.

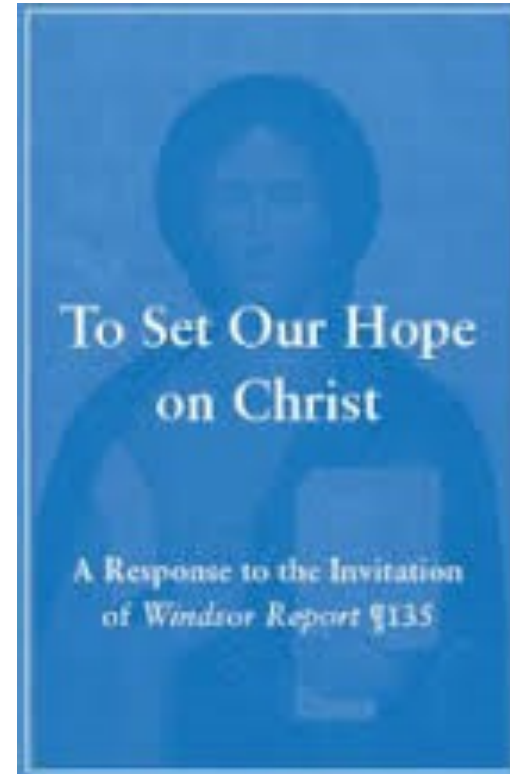
# Bishop Gene Robinson: 2003



Following the decisions made to consent to the election of Bishop Gene Robinson and to recognize same-sex blessings, pressure was put on the Archbishop of Canterbury and the wider Anglican Communion to censure the American Episcopal Church.



- In 2004 "The Windsor Report" was published.
- In 2005 the Episcopal Church presented its response to the Windsor Report -- "To Set Our Hope on Christ" -- at the Nottingham meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.



- Efforts to “vote the Episcopal Church off the Anglican Island” failed





## Columbus [2006]

The 2006 General Convention was consumed by responding to the Windsor Report and by the question of whether or not American bishops would be invited to the 2008 Lambeth Conference.





- After nine day of legislation, a series of "response to Windsor" resolutions were passed:
- Resolutions submitted calling for "compliance" with aspects of the Windsor Report that recommended moratorium on the blessing of unions or discrimination against partnered gay or lesbian candidates for bishop were rejected.
- The following resolutions *were* adopted:

**(A159) Affirm Commitment to the Anglican  
Communion**

**(A160) Express Regret for Straining the Bonds of the  
Church**

**(A165) Commend the Windsor Report and Commit  
to the "Windsor Process"**

**(A166) Support Development of an Anglican  
Covenant**

- In addition, General Convention 2006 voted to:

**(A167) Reaffirm Church Membership of Gay and Lesbian Persons**

**(A095) Reaffirm Support of Gay and Lesbian Persons**

including language opposing "any state or federal constitutional amendment that prohibits same-sex civil marriage or civil unions"

**(D005) Oppose Criminalization of Homosexuality**

# 2006 - B033

- On the 10th and last legislative day, an unprecedented joint session of the Houses of Bishops & Deputies was presented with Resolution B033 by then Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold.
- The resolution – which was adopted by both houses was entitled "**Exercise Restraint in Consecrating Candidates.**" It read:

- *Resolved*, That the 75th General Convention receive and embrace The Windsor Report's invitation to engage in a process of healing and reconciliation; and be it further
- *Resolved*, That this Convention therefore call upon Standing Committees and bishops with jurisdiction to **exercise restraint by not consenting to the consecration of any candidate to the episcopate whose manner of life presents a challenge to the wider church and will lead to further strains on communion.**

- This de facto moratorium on the election or consecration of any additional LGBT bishops was widely understood to be the price of sending our TEC bishops to the 2008 Lambeth Conference
- It was also – ironically – adopted at the same convention which elected the first woman Presiding Bishop in the Anglican Communion.



# Chicago Consultation: 2007

- Formed in 2007 in the wake of dramatic setbacks at the Episcopal Church's 2006 General Convention, the Chicago Consultation brought together academics, activists and bishops to organize and strategize for LGBT inclusion.
- Relationships across the Anglican Communion have also been central to the Chicago Consultation's work since its inception.





# Lambeth 2008

- In 2008 the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops was held in Canterbury.



- The Bishop of New Hampshire was not invited to attend.



# Inclusive Communion @Lambeth Conference

- Integrity and the Chicago Consultation fielded a team to join Anglican colleagues for a month-long “Inclusive Communion” witness at the 2008 Lambeth Conference



- That witness included a celebration of the Eucharist on the hills overlooking Canterbury Cathedral





# Anaheim [2009]

(C056) **Liturgies for Blessings** (calling for the collection and development of liturgical and theological resources for the blessing of same-sex relationships)

(D025) **Commitment and Witness to Anglican Communion** (ending the de facto moratorium on election of gay or lesbian bishops)

# The Blessings Task Force

- The Blessings Task Force was convened in response to Resolution C056. Their process included reports from four working groups: theology, liturgy, pastoral care and teaching resources and a church-wide consultation held in Atlanta in 2011.



THE BLESSINGS PROJECT

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The Episcopal Church  
Standing Commission  
on Liturgy and Music

# Bishop Mary Glasspool: 2010

- Elected by the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles as a Bishop Suffragan Mary Douglas Glasspool was ordained and consecrated in May 2010 becoming the second openly LGBT bishop in the Episcopal Church.





# Indianapolis [2012]

The Blessings Task Force generated two resolutions – both adopted-as-amended at General Convention 2012

**(A049) Authorize Liturgical Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships**

**(A050) Create Task Force on the Study of Marriage**

Also adopted in Indianapolis in 2012:

**(D018) End Discrimination Against Same-Sex Marriages** (supporting civil marriage equality)

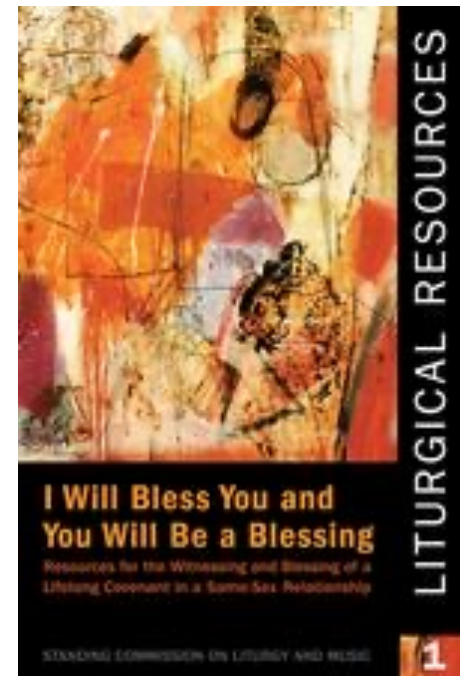
**D002 Affirming Access to the Ordination Process**  
(ending discrimination against transgender ordination)

**(D019) Adding Gender Identity and Gender Expression to Non-Discrimination Canons**

# A049 –

## I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing

The resources approved by General Convention in 2012 – including a liturgy for the blessing of same-gender relationships – were made available for use throughout the Episcopal Church (subject to the approval of the bishop diocesan.)





# A050 – Task Force on the Study of Marriage

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage was given the charge to “*identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage*” and to “*address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same- sex couple in states that authorize such*” and to report to the 78<sup>th</sup> General Convention in Salt Lake City.





# 2015 [Salt Lake City]

In 2015, the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church met in Salt Lake City — where we saw extraordinary progress toward the goal of ending marriage discrimination with the adoption of resolutions that amended our canons on marriage and approved liturgies for equal use by same and opposite sex couples.

Additionally, on the second legislative day (June 26, 2015) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on *Obgerfell v Hodges* and held in a 5–4 decision that the Fourteenth Amendment requires all states to grant same-sex marriage and recognize same-sex marriages granted in other states.



Action regarding marriage:

A036 - Amend Canon I.18 [Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony]

A037 - Appoint Expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage

A054 - Authorize Trial Use of Marriage/Blessing Rites

Authorization of the rites for marriage were placed under the authority of the bishop with jurisdiction with the caveat:

*"Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision, will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies."*

Other LGBTQI action in Salt Lake City in 2015:

D051 - Support LGBTI Advocacy in Africa

C037 - Support and Sponsor Boy Scout Units  
[Supporting the move to inclusive scouting]

D037 - Amend Church Records to Reflect Name Changes



## Austin [2018]

- A compromise resolution -- "Marriage Rites for the Whole Church" -- was adopted by an overwhelming margin and gave rectors or clergy in charge the ability to provide access to the trial rites for marriage.
- Changes to the prayer book on marriage were deferred along with other prayer book revisions.
- And a resolution calling for a Task Force on Communion Across Difference -- to "seek a pathway toward mutual flourishing" -- was also adopted.

## Resolutions adopted in Austin:

- B012 - Marriage Rites for the Whole Church
- A227 - Communion Across Difference
- A088 - Proposed Guidelines For Amending Church Records
- A086 - Authorize Rites to Bless Relationships

# Still some work to do ...

- There remain 8



# 2019: And then there were five ...

- Thomas Brown, Bonnie Perry & Deon Johnson were elected as Bishop Diocesan in Maine, Michigan and Missouri respectively.



Here endeth the presentation.

**THE END**