

Beyond Inclusion News

Denver, Colorado

Monday, July 10, 2000

Visit us in Booth 137!

AT THE BOOTH

If your parish is seeking resources for exploring inclusion, we have

- ▽ Liturgies, parish discernment process documents, guidelines, sermons, and resource lists, in both paper and on diskette.
- ▽ Copies of *Heterosexism, an Ethical Challenge*, by Patricia Beattie Jung and Ralph F. Smith for sale at \$20 apiece. Patty will be the speaker at Integrity's Luncheon next Monday, July 11.
- ▽ Brochures, buttons and stickers
- ▽ Popcorn!

After Convention, here's how to contact us:

- ▽ www.beyondinclusion.org
- ▽ 626/583-2740
- ▽ 132 N. Euclid Avenue
Pasadena, California 91001

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT

by The Rev. George F. Regas

Permeating this General Convention is a mighty, life-giving Spirit upholding, sustaining and blessing our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers. Now is the time for this General Convention to act affirmatively on blessing same sex couples in committed, faithful relationships.

First. If 25 years ago we had waited for a consensus to arise in the world-wide Anglican Communion to open the priesthood and episcopacy to women--the American Church would have been immensely impoverished.

When the Bishops and Deputies met in Minneapolis for the 1976 General Convention, there were fierce differences among us. Strong and acrimonious opposition to women in the priesthood and episcopacy was expressed in various ways: threats of schism, accusations that we were betraying the Biblical witness and abandoning our sacred tradition, and, worst of all, we would destroy the unity of the Episcopal Church. I have heard nothing in Denver opposing the blessing of same sex unions that

was not in the rhetoric opposing women in the sacred places of priesthood and episcopacy.

And yet, the Minneapolis General Convention acted courageously and changed the way we viewed ministry, seeing it as fully open to women. What tremendous blessings have come to The Episcopal Church from that courageous vote? All of our ministries are richer and more whole today because our sisters share equally in them. Justice and faithfulness take courage.

Second. There are still substantial differences among us on the issues of human sexuality. The hearings of the Special Committee of 25 have provided a forum for these starkly different convictions to be articulated. These differences will not be resolved easily, quickly or without pain. However, that is not reason for further delay. We have been addressing the issues of human sexuality for years, and now is the time for General Convention to act affirmatively on the blessing of same sex unions. We can act now and trust that God will give us the grace to love each other and grant dignity and respect to those with whom we have a radically different theology. Trusting God's love to hold us together through these anguishing tensions takes courage.

That's what divine love is about--embracing with dignity and respect those with whom we have strong conflicts and profound differences, trusting that God will at last bring us to a place of reconciliation and set us free.

Third. The Bible does allow us to act in radically inclusive ways with our lesbian and gay sisters and brothers. Let's be honest about the Bible. The Episcopal Church does not hold to biblical inerrancy. One day the famous theologian, Paul Tillich, was accosted by a Bible-waving fundamentalist. "Professor Tillich, do you believe this book to be the word of God?" The wise theologian responded, "Yes, I do if it possesses you rather than your possessing it!"

The Bible is central to our lives as Christians and is the foundational document for our church. But if we take the Bible seriously, we cannot read it literally and dismiss what we

have learned in the centuries after the Bible was finished. Today we know gay and lesbian couples who live deeply committed lives of love and integrity, and we see the Holy God in their relationships.

The really serious problems for Christians who live by "The Book" is not how to square homosexuality with a few passages in the Bible which on the surface seem to condemn it--but rather how to reconcile rejection and prejudice against homosexuals with the gracious, unconditional love of Christ

Blessing same sex unions is an act of love and justice. And one thing we know is antithetical to the Bible: it is injustice--the treatment of a human being as inherently immoral, and the exclusion of that person from the holy of holies. Dr. King said long ago, "Justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Now is the time for the General Convention in Denver to act courageously on blessing same-sex unions. In that vote we are affirming a God who is not static, only speaking 2000 or 4000 years ago, but a living God who is revealing new truths to us now. God will bless the Episcopal Church richly for this witness for love and justice.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Heterosexism

The House of Deputies considered Resolution C008 Human Sexuality: Continuing the Dialogue on Gay and Lesbian Relationships, with a first resolved clause calling for continued dialogue and a second resolved clause requiring the House of Bishops to prepare a study guide on "Heterosexism." An amendment was passed to provide for the establishment of a "joint committee of the House of Bishops and "the House of Deputies" for preparation of the Heterosexism study, in place of the request for such study to "the House of Bishops, in consultation with others." Upon the calling by a Deputy for the separate vote on each of the two resolution clauses, only the first clause passed. The clergy also voted for the second clause on Heterosexism, but the lay voted against it.

Safe Spaces

Resolution A009 Identification of "Safe Spaces," as amended by the Special Committee to include safe spaces for not only lesbians and gays but also for "others who understand themselves to be part of a sexual minority, "

passed in the House of Deputies and has been sent to the House of Bishops.

Boy Scouts

The resolution on the Boy Scouts was modified by the Special Committee to tie it to the 1976 General Convention approved policy affirming homosexual persons and to strongly encourage churches which charter or host scout units to open a dialogue with but not to obtain a pledge from unit leaders, scouts and their parents regarding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. This resolution has gone to the House of Deputies and is set to be considered on Monday.

Same Sex Blessings

Friday morning's meeting of the Special Committee included a discussion of a working paper for resolution entitled "Values in Lifelong Relationships," from Bishop Waynick and Bishop Krotz: 1) acknowledgment that "couples in the Body of Christ and in this Church are living in marriage and in other committed relationships"; 2) recognition that this Church communicates certain expectations of persons who enter into lifelong union, including expectations of fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, and careful, honest communication; 3) denunciation of promiscuity, exploitation, and abusiveness; 4) the Church's intention to hold members accountable to those values and 5) direction from the 73rd General Convention to the SCLM "to prepare for consideration by the 74th General Convention rites for inclusion in the Book of Occasional Services by means of which the Church may bless and express support for the persons involved [in all relationships of mutuality and fidelity which mediate the grace of God]." We celebrate this courageous step away from fear towards loving justice.

At Friday evening's hearing, with nearly 1,000 people in attendance, clergy, as well as married heterosexual parents, described the vitality brought to their growing congregations by gay and lesbian members and by performing same sex blessings for committed, prepared couples in their congregations. Youth gave outstanding supportive testimony with sound theological bases.

On Saturday the Special Committee held a short hearing on D045 and D039, two newly proposed resolutions, each of which put off a decision on same-sex blessings for at least three years.

