

TASK FORCE ON COMMUNION ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Membership

The Rt. Rev. John Bauerschmidt, <i>Convener</i>	Tennessee, IV	2021
The Rev. Canon Susan Russell, <i>Convener</i>	Los Angeles, VIII	2021
Ms. Megan Allen	Ohio, V	2021
The Rt. Rev. Gregory O. Brewer	Central Florida, IV	2021
Mr. Fred Ellis	Dallas, VII	2021
The Rt. Rev. Thomas Ely	North Dakota, VI	2021
Mr. Miguel Escobar	Long Island, II	2021
The Rev. Scott Garno	Albany, II	2021
The Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves	North Carolina, IV	2021
Ms. Anna Haeffner	Southwest Florida, IV	2021
The Rev. Canon Jordan Hylden	Dallas, VII	2021
The Rt. Rev. Moises Quezada Mota	Dominican Republic, IX	2021
The Rev. Canon Tanya Wallace	Western Massachusetts, I	2021
Dr. Christopher Wells	Dallas, VII	2021
The Most Rev. Michael Curry, <i>Ex Officio</i>	North Carolina, IV	
The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, <i>Ex Officio</i>	Ohio, V	

Mandate

2018-A227 Communion Across Difference

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies to appoint jointly a Task Force on Communion across Difference, consisting of not more than 14 people, who represent the diversity in this Church including members from countries other than the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That half of the members appointed hold that marriage is a “covenant between a man and a woman” (BCP, 422), half of whom hold that marriage is a “covenant between two people” (Resolution 2018-A085), in the presence of God, and that all of those appointed seek a pathway toward mutual flourishing in The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force seek a lasting path forward for mutual flourishing consistent with this Church’s polity and the 2015 “Communion across Difference” statement of the House of Bishops (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/mind-house-bishops-statement-‘communion-across-difference’>), affirming (1) the clear decision of General Convention that Christian marriage is a

covenant between two people, of the same sex or of the opposite sex, (2) General Convention's firm commitment to make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to authorized liturgies; and also affirming (3) the indispensable place that the minority who hold to this Church's historic teaching on marriage have in our common life, whose witness the Church needs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult widely with members of this Church who represent its diversity of cultural background, age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, particularly its members in countries other than the United States; and also with representatives reflecting the diversity of views and voices of the Anglican Communion, our full-communication ecumenical partners, and those churches with whom we carry on ecumenical dialogues; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force report and make recommendations to the 80th General Convention, ending its term at that time except by further action of General Convention.

Summary of Work

“Put Out into the Deep Water”: Communion across Difference as a Christian Call

Preface

In 2018, General Convention granted churchwide access to authorized marriage liturgies for all couples (Resolution 2018-B012). At the same time, General Convention sought to identify a “lasting path forward for mutual flourishing” upon which both a majority of Episcopalians and a decided minority could walk together despite disagreeing about marriage (Resolution 2018-A227). For the latter purpose, the present task force was appointed, composed equally of those who hold the theological view that Christian marriage is the union of two people regardless of gender, and those who support the view that Christian marriage is only between one man and one woman. As Resolution 2018-A227 made clear, this work would need to be consistent with the Church's polity, consonant with General Convention's clear decision about marriage, and careful to protect the “indispensable place that the minority who hold to this Church's historic teaching on marriage have in our common life, whose witness the Church needs.”

At our first and only face-to-face meeting, we articulated the following commitments⁽¹⁾ as part of a working definition for mutual flourishing:

To grow together in mutual love, affection, and trust, recognizing our differences;

To honor the polity of The Episcopal Church and the authority of the General Convention;

To respect the dignity of one another as we engage the challenging work of discernment and transformation, so that all members, faith communities, and dioceses of The Episcopal Church may experience an equal, indispensable, and unqualified place and voice in the shared Body of Christ;

To speak and listen to one another and strive, wherever wounds may exist, to do all in our power to labor together toward reconciliation, walking together in the way of love so that God's reconciling mission may flourish;

To pray without ceasing for one another and for God's grace to guide us more deeply into loving relationships.

In turn, we have sought to understand and describe something of the richness of Christian reconciliation, and our persistent communion with one another, even "across" important differences. This is hard work, and we believe it must continue beyond the current triennium. We are energized both by the dialogue, rooted in our common life in Christ, and by the opportunity to "put out into the deep water" (Luke 5:4), where we can learn together the ways of discipleship for the building of the Church. As Jesus said to Simon Peter: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people" (Luke 5:10)!

With this hope, we have organized our work under three headings, each of which addresses a very real question:

Call to Communion across Difference: How do reconciliation and communion across difference reveal our common sharing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

Life Together: Virtues and Practices: Can we commend particular practices of life together that reflect our call "to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ" (BCP, 855)?

The Path of Mutual Flourishing: Walking Together: What specific steps can we take along a "lasting path forward for mutual flourishing," given our commitment to protecting an equal place and voice for one another in The Episcopal Church?

1. Call to Communion across Difference

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any koinonia in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy," St. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, "make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil. 2:1-2). The koinonia, or communion, of Christian life together consists in our sharing in Christ, who teaches the way of compassion and sympathy by himself modeling them. We learn to follow this way of Jesus through devotion "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42), which together constitute the Church's communion of love. By these means of grace, and in the Christian life of neighbor love that flows from them, the followers of Jesus hope for glory, and are enabled to persevere with joy along the pilgrim way.⁽²⁾ In every case, God goes before by claiming us, and teaching us to claim one another. This is the mission of the

Church: that God “reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18; cf. BCP, p. 855).

Our presiding bishop speaks of reconciliation as “the spiritual practice of seeking loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God and one another, and striving to heal and transform injustice and brokenness in ourselves, our communities, institutions, and society.”⁽³⁾ We wish, in what follows, to reflect on this very practice of reconciliation, and to apply it to the task with which we have been entrusted, to “seek a lasting path forward for mutual flourishing,” recognizing that the path has, in important respects, yet to be found. We, the members of this task force, accept that communion and reconciliation already form the basis of our life together in Christ. We have not yet arrived, however, at a “lasting path” for our common pilgrimage. We do not always find ourselves at the same point along the road. Sometimes we disagree about the path itself, where exactly it may be found, even when we share a sense of common mission along the way.

Seeking deeper communion across difference, we hope to be conformed more fully and deeply to Christ and to one another, doing “nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard[ing] others as better than [our]selves” (Phil. 2:3). In the present context of disagreement about marriage, we have asked how we can “look not to [our] own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4). How, in the words of our working definition for mutual flourishing, can we put our respect for one another’s dignity to work, so that all may find in The Episcopal Church an experience of equality and indispensability, and therefore feel both at home and heard (“place and voice”)?

It is helpful to recall that communion comes in several forms, all of which are overlapping to one degree or another, even as they also demonstrate our differences and disagreements.⁽⁴⁾

A first, most basic form of communion is baptismal, rooted in profession of the baptismal or Apostle’s Creed. To profess the creed, and be made one in Christ in baptism, is to share a common membership in the one Body of Christ across space and time. Here, we may speak of basic Christian orthodoxy, rooted in the apostolic faith of the early and undivided Church.

A second kind of communion is ecumenical, given the reality of distinct denominations or churches within the Body of Christ. Most churches today have little trouble recognizing Christians who belong to other churches as fellow members of the Body of Christ. In most cases, we ourselves did not initiate the divisions between us; we inherited them. And yet very real, often painful disagreements about important matters touching on the Church’s faith and order also conspire to keep us apart. At our best, we see one another as a large, though no-doubt divided, extended family in Christ, but we do not yet share all things in common (cf. Acts 2:44). We share the communion of baptism and (usually) a basic, creedal faith, but still seek restoration of the fullness of unity.

A third kind of communion is denominational. Here, Christians of a particular tradition commit to walking together with “the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord,” as St. Paul says (Phil. 2:2), which has meant for most churches that faith and order are shared in their entirety. As in The Episcopal Church and other churches of the Anglican Communion, beliefs are spelled out in canons, and common structures are adhered to, including structures of governance and decision-

making. Ostensibly, the communion is “full,” and more than that, the church is singular and unitary, not differentiated. In most instances of denominational communion, this means that little or no variation is possible, either in terms of belief or practice, unless looser structures permit more local patterns of decision making, or some other suitable accommodation of disagreement is found in the name of tolerance or breadth.

In point of fact, Anglicans, and Episcopalians in particular, have often laid claim to tolerance and breadth, and we historically have learned to put up with a good deal of doctrinal diversity, especially between self-nominated parties and schools. As the long 19th century gave way to considerable tumult in the 20th, Episcopalians and global Anglicans, working side by side, laid claim to—and often led—the burgeoning ecumenical movement, turning erstwhile inter-ecclesial swords into plowshares of hopeful reconciliation. Ripples of interest in this work arose in The Episcopal Church starting in the 1850s and crested in the wake of the devastating Civil War, the horror of which made Christian unity seem urgent. With the gospel at the forefront, leaders like William Augustus Muhlenberg and William Reed Huntington, priests who resisted party affiliation, began to imagine that different, even incompatible perspectives could sometimes complement each other on the way to revealing the whole truth. Huntington’s *Church Idea* (1870) helped inspire the tidal wave of distinct “memorials” that crashed into the General Convention of 1886, submitted by the dioceses of Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, and another signed by roughly one thousand clergy and two thousand lay persons, each calling in its own way for a prioritization of “Christian re-union.” The General Convention assembled an Episcopal Committee on Christian Unity on the fly, and on the 13th day of the Convention, the Bishop of Long Island presented a report, part of which now appears among the Historical Documents in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, including the so-called “Chicago Quadrilateral.”⁽⁵⁾ Rightly remembered as an orienting text for the ecumenical movement of the next century, the Quadrilateral steadily shaped Anglican ecclesiology as well by proposing principles that could guide a nascent Communion consciousness. Arising from an American context of inter-denominational self-awareness and a pragmatism placed in service of the gospel, Episcopalians seeded the notion that structural differences might be accommodated both between and among Christian denominations.

In the important prologue to the Quadrilateral as published by the General Convention in Chicago, the House of Bishops addressed itself “especially to our fellow-Christians of the different Communion in this land,” in order to “solemnly declare” The Episcopal Church’s readiness “in the spirit of love and humility to forego all preferences of her own.” Rather than seeking “to absorb other Communion” into The Episcopal Church, we would attempt to cooperate with them “on the basis of a common Faith and Order, to discountenance schism, to heal the wounds of the Body of Christ, and to promote the charity which is the chief of Christian graces and the visible manifestation of Christ to the world” (all from BCP, pp. 876-77). Grand language, to be sure, and also inspiring for Anglicans and other Christians the world over to read and contemplate. Coming to the four-part program for which the Quadrilateral is named and best remembered, the final point seemed to stick the landing in an impressive, if underdeveloped fashion. The historic episcopate, a calling card for

Anglicans the world over, might be “locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church” (p. 877). Underdevelopment has its benefits, as it enables experimentation, flexibility, and a readiness to learn from others in a spirit of missiological exchange. Ever since the Lambeth Conference made the Quadrilateral its own in 1888 (see BCP, pp. 877-78), Anglicans have continually recurred to its principled ideals to capture something of its potent promise, both ecumenically and with reference to our own life together across difference.

In this perspective, the challenge before the present Task Force is not only not new but also plays to a strength of The Episcopal Church, for which we are renowned. Can we view our present disagreements through the lens of a given communion in Christ, and can we imagine ways of walking together that enact the respect, forbearance, and Christian love to which we have long committed ourselves? Stated in terms of the foregoing kinds of communion: since we share an initiating and transformative communion in Christ and “have left everything to follow” Jesus (Mt. 19:27), can we express this faithfully despite, and even through, our disagreements over marriage? Can we imagine ways of living together, both affectively and structurally, that will accommodate our difference, and permit us still to say that we share a common faith and order as Episcopalians and as Anglicans — while peering, like our forebears, over the horizon to the larger body of Christ? Finally, if our differences seem quite fundamental, as this Task Force believes they are, might we nonetheless find some old or new means of flexibility (“local adaptation”) that could permit us to carry on in one church and one Communion? If so, our witness may again be heard as resounding testimony to the love of Christ in a time of great division in our country, our Communion, and our world.

The pages that follow show where our work has led us, in common prayer and discernment. We have taken to heart the most-serious call to unity and to Christian friendship, modeled by Jesus (see John 15:15), who died for us. We want to be together, to remain together, to walk together, when we can, and to guard and protect the path for one another even when we need to take some space or walk at different paces. We have sensed that this is a call from Jesus himself, who is our Way of Love.

We seek, as faithful Episcopalians, mindful of the wider Anglican Communion in which we have been placed, to try to find a way to live together in peace that will be a blessing both to ourselves and to those we are called to serve. God helping us, we seek to “put out into the deep water” because we dare to hope that we also, all together, may be given a great harvest of fish, even to the point that our nets begin to break; even when we are tired, having “worked all night long but caught nothing” (Luke 5:4-6). Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief!

2. Life Together: Virtues and Practices

A. Virtues to Embrace

In the conviction that we have already been called by God and remade as members of Christ’s body, we want now to say something more about life in the Church as a God-given school in communion and reconciliation. Are there practices to which we are committed, or that we might take up, that

already and prospectively demonstrate our “mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ,”⁽⁶⁾ that can help us sustain communion across difference in the Episcopal Church and beyond? To ask this question is to start to explore the texture and pattern of Christian life together, described variously in Scripture as a call to peacemaking (Matt. 5:9; Rom. 14:19) and forgiveness (Eph. 4:32), to justice, mercy, and humility (Micah 6:8), and to Spirit-inspired fruitfulness, namely, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23; Luke 19:42). That Christians are called to such work suggests both that it needs doing and that we might not otherwise get around to it or find it appealing, if left to our own devices. Differences, disagreements, and difficulties between fallen human beings are to be expected. The way of love, which is God’s own faithfulness in Christ, provides “the way out,” as a path of endurance and blessing (1 Cor. 10:13 and following).

We start with the virtues that help to sustain Christian communion. Classically, a virtue is a stable quality of character. One is loving, brave, honest, or merciful as a pattern of life. For Christians, virtuous living depends upon Christ as exemplar and means, set within a sacramental pattern and the gift of communal constraint itself. “Increase in us,” we pray, “the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command” (BCP, p. 235).

Love

Above all else, Christians are called and commanded to love God and neighbor, as God loves us (Mark 12:30-31; Eph. 5:2). In fact, love begins from a recognition of union as God’s own act, rooted in the Passion of Christ, who loves us “to the end” (John 13:1). Abuse has no place in loving relationship. Under all circumstances, truth must be sought and prized, even when it seems hidden away. Love strives to listen well, to build up and not destroy, to repent and forgive, and to repair bonds of affection when they fray. Love wishes to bear witness rather than defeat or erase, even when it perceives grave error. As it imparts a spirit of sacrifice, love serves as the wellspring and nursery of all other virtue (1 Cor. 13).

Patience and forbearance

“When you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor. 11:33). By this injunction, St. Paul urges patience with our inevitably frustrating siblings — and patience with ourselves, as we pray for the grace to advance in wisdom and truth, subject to the Spirit of mercy. Tolerating a degree of messiness comes with the territory of Christian life, on the way to renouncing vice and growing in virtue. Forbearance names, from another angle, what putting patience into practice looks like, as a loving accompaniment of those whom we believe to be mistaken or seemingly insufferable, out of reverence for Christ (Matt. 25:31ff.). Patience does not turn a blind eye to falsity, tolerate injustice, or otherwise accommodate sin. Relying on the “full armor of God” (Eph. 6:10-18), patience rests in the confidence of God’s power to change hearts and form consciences (John 16:8), without resort to human coercion.

Zeal

Seeking communion across difference does not amount to a laissez-faire attitude about biblical faithfulness, holy living, true doctrine, justice for all, or full inclusion. We on the Task Force are zealous about these matters, and we will not give that up. Fierce conversations should be welcome in the Church, resourced richly by Scripture, the tradition of Christian teaching, and reasoned reflection on the experience of the faithful. Zeal for truth, holiness, and justice can easily turn into intolerant zealotry when not joined with love, patience, and forbearance, but joined with them zeal is a virtue and not a vice. Zeal requires courage, as any struggle for what is true and good will meet many obstacles over the long haul. “Be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord,” urges St. Paul, “because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Justice

It is sometimes forgotten that justice is a virtue, not only a state of affairs in which everyone receives their due. Following the example of Jesus, the just Christian truly wants to treat all persons with the utmost fairness, to hear them out, and to see that justice is done in those places where injustice persists. This means that the just person will both be committed to struggles for justice in the Church and our civic communities and be committed to treating everyone in these struggles justly, even when we think others are deeply mistaken. The just person will respect the dignity of every human being, as we pledge in our Baptismal Covenant.⁽⁷⁾

Humility

In our zeal for truth, holiness, and justice, we also need humility to admit when we are wrong, even about important matters. Humility serves the virtue of teachableness, which is the willingness to admit that we have much to learn, and that our minds will change as we listen to others. Humility also inspires repentance and penance. Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but more like thinking less about ourselves — taking the focus off of our own egos and moving past defensiveness. Humility avoids the arrogant certitude of self-righteousness and is willing to admit “I was wrong. I’m sorry I hurt you. How can I make this right?”

If we are filled with such fruits, we will have no great love for conflict, controversy, and winning victory over those we may consider enemies. We will enter into conflict reluctantly and always on the way to reconciliation and restored communion. The virtuous Christian, formed by love of God and of one’s fellow members in Christ, will have the prudence to know what to do and how to do it in the many challenges of life together. Such a person will know the “things that make for peace” (Rom. 14:19) in the midst of conflict and strive to edify the whole body. Without love, and the associated virtues for which we pray to God, every effort we make at communion across difference will fail.

B. Practices to take up

The above Christian virtues are not qualities of character that can be had simply by choosing to have them but instead are formed in us by God’s grace through the Church’s communal practices. As such,

we will now proceed from our overview of the virtues that make for peace to consider four practices of the Church that form us in those virtues. For each practice, we will offer examples of what we mean. No doubt, other examples could be identified, but we provide these to spark the imagination and to encourage members of our church to create more of their own.

1. Common prayer, Scripture, and teaching

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). As Anglicans, we must start here, formed as we have been for centuries by a Book of Common Prayer and the Bible. Narratives have the power to connect, encourage, and transform us. We experience this in our sharing of the saving realities of Baptism, Eucharist, and the Daily Office, which are enacted in our common liturgical practice and prayer. Our common life is experienced by many Episcopalians and other Anglicans as powerfully drawing us together through the shared narrative of Holy Scripture. And while our common prayer brings together Episcopalians from a wide array of locations and backgrounds, we are able to recognize in each other a shared commitment to the beliefs and practices that the BCP sets forth, even if we might understand or emphasize some of them differently. This is as it should be. To avoid common prayer because of our differences is to enact division rather than seek unity.

When we encounter Jesus Christ in Holy Scripture, we participate in an alternative reality that would bind us together rather than divide. Sometimes, the stories that people tell about their identity and experience are pitched as rivals to other group narratives, rooted in deep wounds and grievances: think, for instance, of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland or partisan politics in the United States. Yet when we are able to share our stories and tell our truths within the wider biblical story of what God in Christ has done to create and reconcile us as one family, it becomes possible to share our stories in a way that brings us together rather than keeps us apart. To this end, this Task Force encourages the sharing of personal narratives and experiences in the context of common prayer and Holy Scripture, to build up our mutual understanding and cultivate awareness of how Christ brings us together and calls us to the work of reconciliation.

An example of this can be found in the Engagement across Difference initiative in the Diocese of Los Angeles: a three year diocesan-wide commitment to a narrative based process including prayer and the reading of Scripture, focused on understanding, healing, and reparation. Another example is the Communion across Difference Facebook page created by our Task Force, which has over 1,800 members. While this page did encourage many to share stories and seek mutual understanding, the limitations of social media were clear insofar as some conversation threads did not achieve mutual understanding in charity. This speaks to the importance of gathering in person and, again, should inspire us to make prayer, Scripture, and teaching the ordinary norms for our life together.

2. Common service

While it may take many forms, the shared work of Christian service is critical for deepening bonds of communion across difference. As is well known, service forms would-be disciples into fit servants,

not least as Christ-like friendships naturally grow from the soil of common mission. The very act of service transforms all who are involved, far beyond the immediate purpose of the project at hand.

One example was the three-way partnership between the dioceses of El Camino Real, Western Tanganyika, and Gloucester from 2008-2015, initiated specifically to engage their significant differences in point of view regarding human sexuality. Representatives from the three dioceses gathered for worship, conversation, and acts of Christian service, all of which nurtured mutual understanding and bonds of affection. Along the way, they learned how much they shared in Christ, even though differences and some degree of distance remained. Today, friendship and conversation continue between them, even though that particular dialogue and its projects were completed.

While not a panacea, Christian service always helps to foster trust, common purpose, and friendship, all of which are essential to Christian communion in its fullness. In our differences, there will be areas of service in which we inevitably diverge; we will not all be able to join Anglicans for Life and the Religious Council for Reproductive Choice at the same time, for instance. This makes those areas in which we do converge all the more important. As we seek to grow into the beloved community Christ calls us to be, the Task Force encourages more forging of relationships and common service across difference, particularly with those we may not see as obvious partners.

3. Cultivating common bonds of affection

Building relationships, especially across difference, is indeed a practice that requires intentionality. We naturally gravitate toward people who look, think, and act like us. But when we take seriously our shared experience of Christian narrative, prayer, and service, we make it a point to seek out genuine relationship with those in the body of Christ with whom we might seem to share little in common. As we have begun to experience on this Task Force, the practice of forming bonds with one another changes us over time. We learn that people with whom we disagree are not simply caricatures, but complex and thoughtful persons about whom we care. Without the cultivation of such connection, we are liable to prefer division to reconciliation, and to focus on what keeps us apart rather than what unites us.

While there are many avenues to building relationship, we encourage participation in guided practices centered in the local context, where people can engage together in sacred truth telling across differences. Early in the course of our work, the present Task Force developed an exercise grounded in our working definition of mutual flourishing. More recently, Presiding Bishop Curry has highlighted resources for racial reconciliation and healing that we commend for any conversation across difference.⁽⁸⁾ All of these are included in the Supplemental Materials section of this report. While trust and safety build over time, we believe that there is value in hearing in plain and clear language the “truth” of what each “side” of a conflict or disagreement wants or needs for itself, as well as what it needs or wants from the “other” side. As we have experienced in our conversations as a Task Force, this kind of frank conversation, including honest discussion about how we feel we have been wronged or hurt, is a critical part of the truth telling that is a prerequisite for genuine

reconciliation. Our hope is that through speaking our truth to one another we will grow in our common desire for deeper communion and reconciliation.

4. Discerning the common good

Episcopalians and other Anglicans have long had a rich conception of the ecclesial common good. We are not simply individuals who happen to like liturgical worship, but Christians committed to accepting Christ as Savior and serving Christ as King “in the fellowship of His Church,” as Archbishop Temple’s famous definition of evangelism puts it. We share the Church and communion with the triune God and are continually remade to love God and our neighbors through the effective power of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If this is so, then what we are doing when we debate some disputed point is not simply seeking to advance an individual agenda or to further some party position, but always first and foremost discerning the common good of our whole church. We readily admit the difficulty here, since we often do not agree on what that common good amounts to. We must not surrender this call, however, which means that we must learn to make it a habit. In what follows, we will suggest two practices that can form us as persons who genuinely seek the common good of God’s Church, rather than simply our own private goods or the good of a partisan sub-set of the whole.

C. Seeking outcomes acceptable to all

In any setting in which decisions are made by vote, majorities and minorities can find themselves locked in pitched battles that end in bitterness and alienation. To be sure, routine matters of business do not present much of a problem in this regard; one hopes that all could live with a decision to shift headquarters from New York to Chicago, notwithstanding preferences one way or the other. Problems emerge, however, when the point at issue carries existential and/or conscientious import for majority and minority alike. Proceeding with an unnuanced decision in such a case may lead to the exit of minority members from the community, both individually and en masse.

The Episcopal Church lacks at present an adequate practice of seeking out and listening to minority voices in a bid to accommodate their concerns. To be sure, exemplary instances may be found, one of which was the conversation leading up to Resolution 2018-B012 at the 79th General Convention. Both before and during the convention, self-described progressives and conservatives on the matter of marriage sought one another out to find a path forward that would be acceptable to all concerned.⁽⁹⁾ While we did finally reach such an agreement, the process was frankly painful and bruising for some on both sides, as mistrust, alienation, and perceived disrespect hindered, and nearly derailed, the work at several points. We have started to speak honestly about these hurts on this Task Force and striven to hold one another’s perspectives in a sacred trust, to listen non-defensively, and to apologize for the hurt we caused, as we are able.

Some members of our Task Force who participated in these conversations testify that the ground had been prepared, as well, by indaba groups in the House of Bishops, following the lead of the 2008

Lambeth Conference, as a means of seeking consensus through Bible study, prayer, and conversation in lieu of winner-take-all outcomes.⁽¹⁰⁾ We urge the church to normalize this kind of practice in our deliberations, whenever disputed questions are felt to carry an immediate, personal urgency.

While this commendation clearly applies to all our disputes about marriage and sexuality in the last forty years, it stands on its own as a principle worth preserving for other pressing matters as they come along. If we follow the lead of Resolution 2018-A227, the practice of seeking outcomes acceptable to all will typically involve making a clear decision at a churchwide level, while seeking to accommodate minorities for whom the decision carries conscientious and/or existential weight. The nature of those decisions and accommodations will of necessity vary from case to case. The important thing is committing to a practice that will be followed and respected by all, on the way to discerning the common good of the whole rather than simply a part.

D. Discerning together the mystery of God's will

Legislative assemblies like General Convention are, by definition, outcome oriented, as well-crafted resolutions developed in committees, thoughtful debate, and broad coalitions enable leaders to discern, as best they can, the mind of the church at a given time. Local and regional synods have always been thus, set as they are within a wider testing of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*) over time, on the way to universal agreement. God's mysterious will is difficult to discern. Viewed in this way, we see the importance of flagging local and regional councils as provisional in nature, always awaiting wider reception over time, through which, we trust, wisdom will prevail in the Spirit-inhabited catholic and apostolic Church.

Seminaries, conferences, journal symposia, Bible studies, and many other such common pursuits enable Christians to take counsel about matters of concern. Here the point is less about outcomes than it is formation, fed by careful study, deliberative discernment, and collegial conversation, always set in a context of common prayer. Patience, commitment, humility, and perseverance are all required in this work, which will not be accomplished in a single triennium, nor indeed by one task force, with or without Zoom. Deliberative, non-outcome-oriented discernment, like love, never ends, but rather provides a healthy diet for a fit and properly functioning body (1 Cor. 13:8; cf. 12:12ff.).

A case in point is the recent consultation sponsored by the House of Bishops Ecclesiology Committee and hosted by Virginia Theological Seminary, "When Churches in Communion Disagree."⁽¹¹⁾ Here, a number of leaders from The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion, including some members of this Task Force, gathered to "explore strategies for maintaining unity within the Anglican Communion in the midst of deep theological differences."⁽¹²⁾ In her paper on "the grammar of communion," Professor Katherine Sonderegger compared our differences over marriage to the disagreement between Franciscans and Molinists, which perdured for hundreds of years before finally achieving recognition as acceptable schools of opinion within one church. Other papers from a variety of perspectives similarly sought to make theological sense of our disagreements and divisions, without immediate recourse to resolutions or political considerations.

Many other examples could be named. On all counts, the key is non-outcome-oriented deliberation across difference about fundamental issues for our common life, fed by a spirit of cooperative inquiry. Such a practice may be especially important for theological and other minorities, as a way for their voices to be heard and understood by majorities. Step by step, waiting for one another, we may confidently expect to be “transformed by the renewing of [our] minds, so that [we] may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

3. The Path of Mutual Flourishing: Walking Together

For more than 40 years, The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion have labored to discern wisely and come to agreement regarding matters of human sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity, the meaning of marriage, and larger questions about how decisions are made and the limits of diversity. In an important sense, none of this is fully settled: disagreements remain, debate continues, and many questions about next steps remain unanswered, even as working answers in both the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion are in place, writ in terms of majority and minority views. We wish now to focus specifically on The Episcopal Church and try to describe the present reality of “communion across difference” following the last several General Conventions. What progress have we made and what outstanding questions and differences remain?

Here are the principal actions of the last two General Conventions regarding marriage, common prayer, and communion across difference:

- Resolution 2015-A036: Amend Canon 1:18 [Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony]⁽¹³⁾
- Resolution 2015-A054: Authorize Trial Use of Marriage and Blessing Rites in “Liturgical Resources I”⁽¹⁴⁾
- The 2018 Blue Book Report from the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, including Canon Jordan Hylden’s appended minority report⁽¹⁵⁾
- Resolution 2018-B012: Marriage Rites for the Whole Church, including matters referred to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) from Resolution 2018-A085, submitted by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage⁽¹⁶⁾
- Resolution 2018-A227: Task Force on Communion Across Difference⁽¹⁷⁾
- Resolution 2018-A068: Create a Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision⁽¹⁸⁾

We find here a noteworthy both/and pattern. In 2015, the General Convention both enacted a change to the marriage canon and accepted the trial use of new marriage liturgies for all couples and rites for blessing of same-sex relationships; and provided that such trial use be under the direction and with the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority and welcomed the minority voice of the Communion Partners as indispensable.⁽¹⁹⁾ Similarly, the 2018 General Convention both authorized additional trial use marriage rites for all couples and blessing rites for same-sex couples in dioceses where civil marriage is not legal; and underscored the canonical authority of rectors or priests-in-charge over worship in their congregations and the ecclesiastical authority of bishops

acting as chief liturgical officers in their dioceses, including those who cannot support marriage for same-sex couples on theological grounds. In concert with this, 2018-B012 called for bishops to continue leading the church in comprehensive engagement with the trial use rites and to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of all members. Finally, while the work of ongoing liturgical revision was authorized, the 1979 Book of Common Prayer was memorialized, ensuring its continued use.

Springing from this context of compromise, our Task Force was charged not with trying to resolve the fundamental differences between us but with seeking to accommodate them as a necessary gift. To quote our authorizing resolution (2018-A227): given “the clear decision of General Convention that Christian marriage is a covenant open to two people of the same sex or of the opposite sex” and “General Convention’s firm commitment to make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to authorized liturgies,” The Episcopal Church also affirms “the indispensable place that the minority who hold to this Church’s historic teaching on marriage have in our common life, whose witness our Church needs.” Holding all three points together, Resolution 2018-A227 charged our Task Force to “seek a lasting path forward for mutual flourishing” for the two sides or perspectives — the majority and the minority — on marriage, and it provided a heading for the work: “communion across difference.”

The commitments embedded in our own Task Force’s working definition of mutual flourishing, referenced earlier, center on spiritual aspects of our life and labor as Episcopalians, including the commitment to honoring the polity and authority of our church. Strengthened by God’s grace and our own resolve, we are able to grow together in love and trust, to serve side by side in The Episcopal Church, respect, listen to, and pray for one another. All of these commitments ground and orient the work of building and sustaining communion across difference and we have reflected on them in the first two sections of this report. We confess that we have not always done this well over the years and acknowledge the many ways that people on all sides of our various differences have hurt one another along the way. With a legacy of lawsuits, mutual recrimination, church division, and crisis in the Anglican Communion on our watch, reparations and reconciliation still seem to us a way off. At the same time, we are grateful for many good-faith attempts at mutual listening and learning that we pray are seeding a new spirit in our church, turned outward in hopeful conversion and restoration — truly, a Way of Love.⁽²⁰⁾

More pointedly, the second and third commitments in our working definition of mutual flourishing touch on the concrete challenge at hand, if all are to flourish in the communion of one church. How can the members, communities, and dioceses of the majority and minority experience an equal, indispensable, and unqualified place and voice within the given structures of The Episcopal Church? This is a critically important question. The present report will not and cannot provide a definitive answer, although we are grateful to offer our own perspectives and suggest some ways forward. We urge the whole church to commit itself to careful listening, study, and prayer, so that we may be equipped for the continuing work that lies ahead.

We believe that the establishment of this Task Force represents a kairos moment, given providentially by God at this time to help Episcopalians and Anglicans find a path forward together. The circumstances leading up to the passage of Resolution 2018-B012 (Marriage Rites for the Whole Church) by the 2018 General Convention, and its subsequent authorizing of this Task Force, marked a hard-won compromise that many did not imagine possible. Significant bridge-building work on the part of the proposers of 2018-B012, the Communion Partners, including those from Province IX, members of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, the Presiding Bishop's staff, Legislative Committee 13, and countless other bishops and deputies enabled all voices to be heard and listened to, in as full a way as possible. At the conclusion of the 79th General Convention a variety of voices welcomed the widely touted compromises and looked to the present Task Force for next steps.⁽²¹⁾

If the work of the last two General Conventions set an important precedent of cooperation between majority and minority in The Episcopal Church, it also bequeathed to the present Task Force on Communion across Difference signposts toward a lasting path forward for mutual flourishing. The General Convention has demonstrated that diversity and difference, incorporating real disagreement about important matters, need not necessitate division, if a spirit of compromise is cultivated to protect the place and voice of all.

What are some further steps that The Episcopal Church might take in order to sustain difference-in-communion on the way to the flourishing of all? As before, we pose questions that provide openings for carrying forward this work, both in the present triennium and thereafter, organized around the threefold typology of communion — baptismal, denominational, ecumenical — that we introduced in section one.

Solidarity of love: Baptismal bonds

Jesus Christ called his disciples friends (John 15:15), and in his body, the Church, all who are baptized in his name are re-made as his members (Col. 1:18; Rom. 6:3-14). Each member is indispensable, including those who seem to be “weaker” or “less honorable” — whom, St. Paul says, we are called “to clothe with greater honor.” For “God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it” (1 Cor. 12:22-26).

These scriptural descriptions of the whole Church apply to all denominations that seek faithful conformity to the pattern of life in Christ. Can we in The Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion decide to disagree without causing dissension? Can we guard our differences without yielding to division? As is perfectly clear from our own recent struggles and from the history of the Church, this is not easy. It is not, however, impossible. If and as we are able to commit to walking together, however duly differentiated or distanced, we will be claiming our call as brothers, sisters, and siblings whom Jesus befriended and invited to join him on the way of love and loyalty “to the end” (John 13:1).

Presuming place and voice for both the majority and minority on marriage, can we commit ourselves to continual, careful listening as a demonstration of Christ-like solidarity, “always carrying in the body” the stories and experiences of one another (2 Cor. 4:10) as the precious gifts they are? Can we agree “not to neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another” (Heb. 10:25), especially in person, because we profess the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, and pray to be “become like him in his death, if somehow [we] may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10-11)? And can we cultivate communion with Anglicans the world over, and with the wider body of Christ, on the way to sharing, by degrees when necessary, “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, ... the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42)? All of this and more follows from our having been claimed by Christ in baptism, which sacrament is the principal building block for all forms of communion, as the beginning of the journey of discipleship in the body.

Communion across Difference: Episcopal precedents

If baptismal solidarity orients our life together as Christians in The Episcopal Church, our commitment to protecting both place and voice in the same church for the majority and minority on marriage presents a specific opportunity to practice communion across difference. As described above, our church has struggled to hold together both clear decisions reached by legislative majorities and to safeguard space for minorities who in good conscience cannot agree but wish loyally to remain both in the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. This was true in the early years of the struggle for the full inclusion of LGBTQ members and it is true today for the Communion Partners. Given our recent history, the suggestion of accommodating minority views in perpetuity may seem strange. However, Episcopalians have long cherished ideals of openness and flexibility and are known among Christians for welcoming diversity.

In the first section of this report, we recalled the 1886 General Convention’s influential offering of a locally adapted episcopate to Christians of other jurisdictions, which has borne considerable ecumenical fruit.⁽²²⁾ Might the achieved compromise of the 79th General Convention signal the start of a new era in our church’s history, as a time when we began giving the gift of the Chicago Quadrilateral to ourselves to enable all to flourish? Locally adapted disagreement with respect to marriage might take various forms, ranging from simply deciding to accept diversity, as we have done recently in The Episcopal Church, to more ambitious structural reforms, of a sort that others in the Anglican Communion are attempting. There may be good reasons for both at different times, and some degree of flexibility can aid experimentation on the way to wise and peaceable settlements.⁽²³⁾ We will come to several examples in the Anglican Communion in the next subsection. For now, it bears repeating that the 2018 General Convention accepted diversity between dioceses by enabling flexibility in the oversight of parishes. Built upon the precedent of DEPO, this solution reflected, in the words of 2018-B012, our continued commitment “to honor theological diversity in regard to matters of human sexuality” (2018-B012 §13).

Here we register some of our own questions about the limits of diversity, and the sustainability of the peace that General Convention brokered in 2018. Given that we seek to be comprehensive, is it

nonetheless a bridge too far to adapt ourselves to two doctrines of marriage (or of anything else) within one church (recognizing, for instance, canonical discrepancies between diocesan and churchwide definitions of marriage)? Moreover, is differentiated oversight of some parishes from their geographic dioceses — both “majority”-identified parishes within “minority” (Communion Partner) dioceses, and vice versa — sustainable in the long, or even medium term? On both sides, clerical leaders as well as members of those parishes sometimes feel out of sorts with their dioceses, disrespected by colleagues, and alienated from their bishops. As members of our Task Force testified, such feelings have been common among both self-identified LGBTQ and conservative clergy, laity, parishes, and dioceses for at least a generation. Add to this questions about succession of leadership for all concerned — “majority”-minded clergy in “minority”-identified dioceses on the one hand; Communion Partner dioceses themselves, and “minority”-identified clergy and parishes elsewhere, on the other; and finally the wider ecclesiological question of what it means for the minority in this instance to hold the majority view of the Anglican Communion. Some say that 2018-B012’s “supplemental episcopal pastoral care” has worked well, just as the older delegated episcopal pastoral oversight (DEPO) still serves its purpose for parishes in various dioceses on both sides. Even so, one, uniform policy to accommodate all arrangements of adapted episcopal care seems requisite, if heretofore ad hoc arrangements are to find their feet as settled means of negotiating communion across difference.

On all counts, more work should be done to understand and receive the compromise of the 79th General Convention, as a step toward sustaining difference-in-communion for the flourishing of all. We recognize that other church-wide groups such as the Task Force on Women, Truth and Reconciliation, the Executive Council Committee on Anti-racism and Reconciliation, as well as the SCLM and Task Force on Liturgical and Prayer Book Revision are laboring in this and adjoining fields. We believe that attention should be given to the ecclesiological questions raised in the present report, especially to do with the exercise, role, and range of episcopal ministry, since the ministry of bishops necessarily incorporates local, regional, and worldwide aspects. In a world that seeks to overcome disagreement through enforced uniformities, differentiated communion in an episcopal key may contribute a much-needed leaven of principled diversity, set within provisional structures that model humility.⁽²⁴⁾

Walking together at a distance: Ecumenical connections

We noted above that locally adapted disagreement may take various forms, and we wish finally to touch on several other models, drawn from colleagues in the Anglican Communion, with whom we were charged to consult (2018-A227 §4). If these models tend toward more structural solutions to the challenge of communion across difference, they also share a commitment to finding ways of walking together in order to enable mutual flourishing, typically with recourse to concepts developed in ecumenical settings.

Walking together entered the contemporary lexicon of the Anglican Communion with the well-known conclusion of The Windsor Report (2004), which warned: “There remains a very real danger

that we will not choose to walk together. Should the call to ... find ways of continuing in our present communion not be heeded, then we shall have to begin to learn to walk apart” (§157). Less-often remembered is the same text’s earlier reference to walking together, which excavated the literal Greek meaning of the phrase: synodality. As the report summarized: “It is by listening to, and interacting with, voices from as many different parts of the family as possible that the Church discovers what its unity and communion really mean” (§66). The image of walking together returned at the historic 2016 Primates’ Meeting, Archbishop Welby’s first, which all the primates attended, including Presiding Bishop Curry. At meeting’s end, all professed a “unanimous desire to walk together,” even when some “distance” may seem necessary on the way to persevering in love.⁽²⁵⁾

The 2018 General Synod of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia provides a second example of walking together at a distance on the way to resolving neuralgic conflict. In a first step, the motion on marriage accepted by synod retained the traditional formularies while allowing bishops to permit the blessing of same-sex unions within their dioceses. In turn, however, the non-geographic Diocese of Polynesia, culturally distinct from the other two ethnic groupings in that province’s “three-tikanga system,” chose to opt out of the motion’s provision for same-sex unions as not in keeping with its theological and cultural understanding of marriage. While the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia is uniquely structured in a way that can accommodate the latter decision, the Indigenous minority in the Anglican Church of Canada is now pursuing a similar structural differentiation from its province as a whole. Such developments can be painful, to be sure. At the same time, as Secretary General Josiah Idowu-Fearon noted about the resolution in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Polynesia, it “recognized that difference without division is possible” — difference, in this case, incorporating a non-geographical diocese within the wider church.⁽²⁶⁾

A third instance of differentiated walking together may be seen in the Church of England’s “Five Guiding Principles” with respect to women’s ordination, according to which a traditionalist “society” was created within the wider church to accommodate the minority, with force of canon and without limit of time.⁽²⁷⁾ Our own Resolutions 2018-B012 and 2018-A227 resemble these principles, which in the Church of England’s case begin by marking the “clear decision” of the church about women’s ordination before proceeding to enable the “mutual flourishing” of majority and minority moving forward. The Church of England’s Faith and Order Commission, in a significant study, called the settlement “a remarkable adventure in how ecclesial communion can be sustained without agreement in belief and practice on something that has been considered to be of decisive importance for ‘full’ communion.”⁽²⁸⁾ As in New Zealand, not all have been pleased with this outcome. The new-fashioned space of structural differentiation has, however, arguably enabled the Church of England to avoid schism, through a creative application of ecumenical lessons to its internal denominational life.

All three examples of walking together at a distance may help us imagine next steps along a “lasting path forward for mutual flourishing” in The Episcopal Church, both together and as differentiated dioceses. We said above that seeking a lasting path forward suggests the path has yet to be fully found, but we differ also on the nature of the path itself, to do with how decisions should be made

about marriage. In studying this very question, the Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops recently pointed up two views — a majority view that believes the General Convention capable of deciding the matter, and a minority one that believes Anglican consensus is required.⁽²⁹⁾ Here again, ecumenical ecclesiology, as a school in charity, can help relieve the felt need of being in identical places along the road, even as we remain committed to discovering the pilgrim way of discipleship and of love.⁽³⁰⁾ A commitment to mutual flourishing for all Episcopalians — and for all Anglicans, and all churches with which we share varying degrees of communion — must likewise commit itself, as we on this Task Force have done, to finding and defending place and voice for all with whom we are walking. There should be no question of walking in lock step, but only a shared hope that, Lord willing, we may continue to advance together toward Christ, and in that Way find one another as well.

Conclusion

The assignment to reflect on communion across difference suggested for this Task Force a focus on how we remain bound together in Christ and in the Church notwithstanding — even, perhaps, aided by — deep disagreement. The directional metaphor “across” brings to mind a bridge, that may be traversed when traveling from one side or part of the Church to another. Each side of the bridge, each part of the Church, has a divine purpose, and so should be respected and protected, just as the bridge enables and invites communication and sharing, by God’s grace. Stated in terms of our presenting challenge, we resolutely accept General Convention’s clear decision about marriage, its firm commitment to providing for all couples seeking to be married, and its affirmation of the indispensable place of the minority, whose witness the Church needs (2018-A227).

While the recent actions of the General Convention are clear enough, we on this Task Force, representing the majority and minority of The Episcopal Church on the subject of marriage, do not know exactly what should come next and what may be possible. We have made a theological argument for communion across difference, raised questions for continuing work, and suggested several adaptive models that may prove useful for our purposes going forward. We wish to live together peaceably in the same church without agreeing on marriage because adding to division in the body of Christ would be a failure both of witness and love. All Christians and churches are struggling with the same questions about sexuality and marriage, and the road is littered with failed attempts at listening, forbearance, transparency, and charity. We accept responsibility for some of this. At the same time, we rejoice that we have been placed together, and within a worldwide communion of Anglicans, that, by God’s providence, is called to solidarity in the Body of Christ.

May God give us the grace to uncover and defend a proper diversity and breadth in the Body, that will encourage many to persevere with joy in the work of communion across difference, “so that the world may believe” (John 17:21).

Postscript

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Task Force met only once in person and seven times using Zoom technology. These challenges hampered our efforts, given the relational focus of conversations about communion. Even so, we have pressed on with courage, and rejoice in the friendships that have grown “across distance.” We are proud of the work we have accomplished and commend it to The Episcopal Church and to our colleagues in the Communion, with genuine faith, hope, and love.

End Notes

- (1) Adopted by the Task Force on Communion Across Difference, St. Louis, March 19-21, 2019.
- (2) See “General Thanksgiving,” BCP, p. 101.
- (3) Presiding Bishop Curry speaking on racial reconciliation, available online: <https://episcopalchurch.org/racial-reconciliation>
- (4) For three classic texts in the development of what we today call communion ecclesiology, see the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886, 1888); World Council of Churches, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982); Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Church as Communion (1990).
- (5) BCP, pp. 876-77. Since the report was written as a “solemn declaration” of “bishops assembled in council,” the House of Deputies needed only to respond, which it did with its own resolution on the 18th day, to wit: “The House of Bishops concurring, that a Commission consisting of five Bishops, five Clerical and five Lay Deputies, be appointed to open communications with the various Bodies of Christians in this land, with a view to ascertaining, from a duly authorized representation of said Bodies, if a disposition exist among them to promote organic unity upon the basis of ‘The Apostles’ Doctrine and Fellowship and in the Breaking of the Bread and the Prayers;’ and further, in the event this disposition does exist, to inquire what benefits they think we can mutually impart to one another, and what advantages in their opinion would result in furtherance of the evangelization of the world; and that this Commission be requested to make a report of its action to the General Convention of 1889.” The next day, the House of Bishops concurred with several amendments. See Journal of the Proceedings of the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Assembled in a General Convention, Held in the City of Chicago, from October 6 to October 28, Inclusive, in the Year of Our Lord 1886 (1887), pp. ix, 10, 16, 21, 35, 40, 79-80, 135, 138, 145, 146, and Appendix XXII, pp. 840-44; available online: <https://www.episcopalarchives.org/governance-documents/journals-of-gc>
- (6) Toronto Anglican Congress (1963), available online: http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto_mutual1963.html Cf. the consequent “Special Program” of General Convention 1967 and the “Venture in Mission” of General Convention 1976.
- (7) See further the work of Dr. Donna Hicks on conflict resolution and the essential elements of dignity in the Supplemental Materials section of this report.
- (8) Included with his sermon preached at the House of Bishops virtual meeting on September 16, 2020 entitled “What Did Jesus Do?”; available online: <https://episcopalchurch.org/posts/publicaffairs/presiding-bishop-currys-word-church-what-did-jesus-do>

(9) A press release from the Diocese of Long Island accompanying the filing of B012 recounted the pre-Convention conversations: “The minority of ‘Communion Partner’ bishops in our church have felt unable as a matter of conscience to permit congregations under their care to practice same-sex marriage, for theological and ecclesiological reasons. They have told us that [the proposed solution of alternative oversight] allows them to maintain their conscientious position, and Communion Partner clergy have told us that it is important for there to be at least some dioceses in The Episcopal Church that both teach and practice marriage alongside the majority of the Anglican Communion. This proposal allows conservatives to flourish within the structures of The Episcopal Church, but not at the expense of progressive congregations in conservative dioceses. While at first glance it may sound unnecessarily complex, it is a ‘middle way’ that makes room for all in one church.” The Communion Partner bishops, in turn, “pledged in writing to implement [B012] in their dioceses, if it is passed.” Documents available online: <https://www.dioceseli.org/media/diocesan-news/marriageforthewholechurch/> and: https://communionpartners.org/the-vocation-of-anglican-communion/#_ftnref5

(10) Resources on Continuing Indaba may be found on the Anglican Communion’s website: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/reconciliation/continuing-indaba.aspx>

(11) Jan. 13-14, 2020. Additional sponsors of this event were the dioceses of Texas and Dallas, and the Living Church Institute. Papers are in process of publication.

(12) Mark Michael, “Seeking Communion in the Midst of Disagreement,” available online: <https://livingchurch.org/2020/01/20/seeking-communion-in-the-midst-of-disagreement/>

(13) https://episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2015-A036

(14) https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2015-A054

(15) <https://extranet.generalconvention.org/staff/files/download/21189>

(16) https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2018-B012

(17) https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2018-A227

(18) https://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution-complete.pl?resolution=2018-A068

(19) From the Communion Partners Website: <https://communionpartners.org/about-communion-partners/>

(20) “The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life,” available online: <https://episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love>

(21) Episcopal News Service, “Convention lets its ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ agreeing to give church full access to trial-use marriage rites,” July 13, 2018, available online: <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2018/07/13/convention-lets-its-yes-be-yes-agreeing-to-give-church-full-access-to-trial-use-marriage-rites/> Communion Partners, “Austin Statement,” July 13, 2018, available online: <https://communionpartners.org/austin-statement-july-13-2018/> The Rev. Susan Russell, “Episcopal Church Says ‘We Do’ to Marriage Rites for the Whole Church,” available online: <https://inchatatime.blogspot.com/2018/07/episcopal-church-says-we-do-to-marriage.html>

(22) See especially the multilateral landmark Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (1982), which embraced a broadened episcopé, retrieved from the New Testament, as a way of imagining a larger pattern of oversight than that simply associated with “bishops” in the traditional sense; available online: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text>

(23) Cf. the 2009 statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (with which The Episcopal Church is in full communion), *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*; available online: <https://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/SexualitySS.pdf> The ELCA recognized four positions of “bound conscience” on same-sex sexuality within their church. Rather than adjudicating between them, the ELCA called for “mutual respect in relationships” and for life together in disagreement, by which they would “accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.” Since the ELCA lacks a prayer book that functions as a doctrinal standard, they simply published supplemental liturgies that are now used for same-sex marriages without modification to their standard books of worship.

(24) For the suggestion that The Episcopal Church accepts a principled diversity with respect to marriage and sexuality, see the Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Consultation in the U.S.A., *Ecclesiology and Moral Discernment: Seeking a Unified Moral Witness* (2014), §64; cf. §§51, 56. Available online: <https://iarccum.org/archive/USA/ARC-USA-2014.pdf>

(25) Primates’ Meeting communiqué, “Walking Together in the Service of God in the World” (Jan. 15, 2016); available online: <https://www.anglicannews.org/features/2016/01/communique-from-the-primates-meeting-2016.aspx> Cf. Gavin Drake, “Presiding Bishop Michael Curry speaks on Primates’ statement,” ACNS (Feb. 15, 2016).

(26) Anglican Communion News Service, “Anglican Church in New Zealand opens the door to blessing same-sex relationships,” available online: <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2018/05/anglican-church-in-new-zealand-opens-the-door-to-blessing-same-sex-relationships.aspx>

(27) Church of England The Five Guiding Principles, available online: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-02/5_Guiding_Principles.pdf

(28) General Synod, *Communion and Disagreement: A Report from the Faith and Order Commission* (2016), §68; available online: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/communion_and_disagreement_faoc_report_gs_misc_1139.pdf

(29) Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops, *Re-membering and Re-Imagining: Essays on the Episcopal Church*, published as an issue of *Sewanee Theological Review*, 61/2 (2018); available online: https://www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/02/str_ecclesiology_report_2018.pdf The recent consultation at Virginia Theological Seminary, “When Churches in Communion Disagree,” Jan. 13-14, 2020, carried this work forward. See commentary from Jean Cotting, available online: <https://www.vts.edu/anglican-commentary-detail?pk=1306135>

(30) See, for instance, the argument for ecumenical synodality by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission in its latest text, appropriately titled *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to be the Church—Local, Regional, Universal* (2018). Cf. Communion Partners, “The Way of Anglican Communion” (2018), available online: <https://communionpartners.org/the-way-of-anglican-communion-walking-together-before-god/>

Proposed resolutions

A056 Communion Across Difference

Resolved, the House of ____ concurring, That the 80th General Convention directs the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint a second Task Force on Communion Across Difference to continue the work started but limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, consisting of not more than 12 people, who represent the cultural, generational, racial, ethnic and theological diversity in the Church, including especially members from dioceses outside the United States; and be it further

Resolved, That half of the members appointed hold that marriage is a “covenant between a man and a woman” (BCP, 422), half hold that marriage is a “covenant between two people” in the presence of God (Resolution 2018-A085), and that all of those appointed seek a pathway toward mutual flourishing in The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force will seek to build on the Blue Book report of the previous triennium, continuing to seek a lasting path forward for mutual flourishing consistent with this Church’s polity and the 2015 “Communion across Difference” statement of the House of Bishops, affirming (1) the clear decision of General Convention that Christian marriage is a covenant open to two people of the same sex or of the opposite sex, (2) General Convention’s firm commitment to make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to authorized liturgies; and also affirming (3) the indispensable place that the minority who hold to this Church’s historic teaching on marriage have in our common life, whose witness our Church needs; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force develop and publicize further tools for engaging the members of this Church in the substance of the Task Force on Communion Across Difference Blue Book Report to this Convention, including but not limited to videos documenting experiences across this Church that demonstrate positive examples of communion across difference, and materials that broaden the conversation beyond matters of human sexuality and marriage; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult widely with members of this Church who represent its diversity of cultural background, age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation, particularly its members in countries other than the United States; and also with representatives from the Anglican Communion, our full-communication ecumenical partners, and those churches with whom we carry on ecumenical dialogues; and be it further

Resolved, That the 80th General Convention commends to dioceses, parishes, and churchwide staff the Conversation Tool created by the Task Force on Communion Across Difference included in the Supplemental Materials section of their Blue Book report to this Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force report and make recommendations to the 81th General Convention, ending its term at that time except by further action of General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$75,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

The 79th General Convention directed the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies to appoint jointly a Task Force on Communion across Difference, consisting of not more than 14 people, who represented the diversity in this Church including members from countries other than the United States, half of whom held that marriage is a “covenant between a man and a woman” (BCP, 422), half of whom held that marriage is a “covenant between two people” (Resolution 2018-A085), in the presence of God, and all of whom sought a pathway toward mutual flourishing in The Episcopal Church. Our Task Force reported and made recommendations to the 80th General Convention, and our enabling resolution specified that our Task Force would continue only at the request of the next General Convention.

The Task Force did its best despite the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 epidemic to accomplish this work, the fruit of which is contained in its Blue Book Report to this Convention. Of particular note is the working definition of “mutual flourishing” developed by the Task Force and a “conversation tool” to assist members of this Church in engaging that definition and the conversation more broadly. The Task Force also articulated a helpful theological framework for engaging communion across difference, recognizing the many challenges and tensions present in that work. While we believe we have done significant theological and relational work on what it means to walk together as disciples of Jesus on the Way of Love, we have only begun a process that cries out for further exploration. We believe that reconciliation and “mutual flourishing” should continue to be our goal, by God’s grace, but that the truth-telling, transformation, and relationship building that are necessary on the way to that goal do not come quickly or easily.

Members of the current Task Force believe that building the kind of relationships needed to take this work further were severely hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic and our inability to meet face to face. We propose that to do this work well, funding for at least two face-to-face gatherings over the next triennium will be necessary, and ideally three. Our suggestion to appoint not more than 12 members is meant to make multiple face-to-face meetings financially possible, but a larger membership with a larger budget would also be welcome.

Supplemental Materials

1. Task Force Conversation Exercise

- English: <https://tinyurl.com/CAD-english>
- Spanish: <https://tinyurl.com/CAD-espanol>

2. Resources for Conversation commended by the Presiding Bishop

- “Make Me an Instrument of Peace: A Guide to Civil Discourse,” online curriculum from the Office of Government Relations <https://www.churchnext.tv/library/make-me-an-instrument-for-groups/109669/about/>
- “Learn, Pray, Act: Resources for Responding to Racist Violence,” curated by Episcopal Church staff for Racial Reconciliation and Justice and the Office of Government Relations <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/responding-to-racist-violence/>
- From the Center for Racial Healing and the Diocese of Atlanta <https://www.centerforracialhealing.org/>
- “With Malice Toward None,” a program designed for churches and groups to provide a way for understanding and healing for all sides of our political divisions for both before and after the November election <https://braverangels.org/what-we-do/with-malice-toward-none/>

3. Dignity Resources from Dr. Donna Hicks

- <https://drdonnahicks.com/>
- “Ten Essential Elements of Dignity” and “Ten Temptations to Violate Dignity” <https://tinyurl.com/CAD-DonnaHicks-Dignity>
- Dignity Declaration: <https://declaredignity.com/>

Communion Partners

“Communion Partners is an episcopally led fellowship of individuals in the provinces of the Anglican Communion devoted to promoting deeper communion in the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. With evangelical fervor, we pursue and support the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. In a spirit of mutual love, we commit ourselves to honoring the authority and boundaries of our local churches, working in concert with them to pursue that unity for which our Savior prayed: “That they all may be one ... so that the world might believe” (John 17:12).

Our Mission

As Communion Partners, we seek to act within the context of a shared commitment to prayer and to regular meetings for the purposes of learning, fellowship, encouragement, and common action. We actively encourage the historic bonds of affection across the Anglican Communion, as well as new networks and links between dioceses, parishes, and individuals. We also provide pastoral and theological resources for the churches of the Communion by supporting study and teaching.

Membership is open to all clergy and lay people who are prepared to endorse and uphold the traditional teaching of our several Books of Common Prayer and the principles of The Windsor Report and The Anglican Communion Covenant. Based primarily in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church (spanning the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America), we seek to maintain a visible link to the whole Anglican Communion on the way to resolving important questions of faith and order.

We are committed to transparent communication with all of our colleagues, including the primates of our churches and the Archbishop of Canterbury as a focus of unity (Covenant 3.1.4), and to patient participation in the councils of the Communion.”

For some members of the task force it is important to clarify that this fellowship is not and should not be interpreted to be the only way Episcopalians are in partnership with our wider Anglican Communion siblings, including but certainly not limited to the stellar work of Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD)."

For other members on the task force who self-identify as Communion Partners, it is important to clarify that the use of the term Communion Partners is not intended to imply that other Anglicans who do not maintain those requests do not also understand themselves as faithful members of the Anglican Communion.