

Address to the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California
October 20, 2007
Joseph Lane and Lyn Morlan
Co-chairs, Commission on Marriage and Blessing

Joseph:

I was at one of the deanery meetings a couple of weeks ago and someone said, “I downloaded your 48-page report, Joseph,” so I said, “Well, it’s that long because it includes liturgical material and, you know, we Episcopalians do tend toward a certain wordiness in our prayers.”

We’re not going to regurgitate that 48-page report this morning but we do commend it to your reading if you haven’t already done so.

Later today, you’ll have an opportunity to debate and vote on whether or not to commend a set of Commission on Marriage and Blessing-endorsed liturgical resources to the bishop. We’ve already discussed the resolution and the rites at all of the deanery meetings. I do, however, want to address one question relating to the Commission’s work and what we’re hoping you will do today. It’s one of those ‘elephant on the table’ kinds of things. Several people have called or emailed me to ask about any effect or impact the recent House of Bishops meeting might have had on this work. Bishop Marc spoke to that question from his perspective this morning, so let me just add two comments from the Commission’s perspective...

Firstly, speaking broadly, I can’t imagine any action by either House or Convention, or certainly, God love them, the primates, keeping us, the constituent members of the Diocese of California, from staying true to ourselves as we seek to fulfill the Gospel as we understand it. That’s exactly what we’re doing in preparing and setting forth these liturgical resources. We believe it’s important to be proactive and to continue asking for what we need.

I should note here that Lyn and I agreed to make sure our presentation this morning comes in well under our 15 minute limit, but had we not made that decision, I think I’d be showing an excerpt from “Annie, Get Your Gun.” We’re (*sing*) “Doin’ what comes natch-rul-ly.”

Secondly, speaking more specifically, we understand our work as very much in keeping with General Convention’s affirmation in 2003 “that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing [same-gender] unions.” We’re asking this diocesan convention to urge the bishop to approve the trial use of these rites as liturgical resources in this diocese. We are not, per se, asking him to establish an ‘authorized liturgy’.

Besides, in offering up three very different rites, we’re taking a more creative approach than drafting one ‘one size fits all’ rite would allow as, liturgically speaking, things emerge and evolve in the coming years. As we pray, the best — if never quite final — forms will emerge. With that in mind, in offering these liturgical resources, we do hope you’ll keep us informed about how they are helpful (or not), what in them works (or doesn’t) — in other words, give us the feedback we’ll need for the next phase of this work.

There’s also a sense of ‘here we are again-ness’ in this work, since, as you all know, rites have been developed and affirmed by earlier diocesan conventions. The current Commission on Marriage and Blessing wants to commend our predecessors in this work: the Task Force on Marriage and Blessing two years ago, a national consultation in 1995, the Bishop’s Theology Group in 1987, the Commission on Liturgical Renewal in 1984. The rosters of those groups include many of our friends and mentors. See me later and I’ll show you the list of names. * Our

current work simply builds on their good efforts and reframes the work for our own day, which, Bishop Marc, we see as a new day in the Diocese of California.

Now, I'd like to introduce my co-chair on the Commission, Lyn Morlan, who will tell you a bit about another facet of the Commission's work.

Lyn:

The Commission's focus for 2008 will be resources for clergy and couples to use in preparation for union blessing and resources to help congregations develop a sense of their role in nurturing and supporting couples in the faith community. Some of the books/articles we have found useful as starting points can be found in the Bibliography on the CMB website and in the written report. We have begun work on a "couples" workshop, meaning inclusive, which is very exciting. Completing the workshop curriculum and fleshing out our other ideas to create useful programs and information will be the focus of our work in the future.

Please take some time to prayerfully consider if you are being called to assist in this work. There is a sign-up sheet on our table (at the back or wherever it is) for those who are interested in helping. If you would like more information, join us for lunch and talk about today's resolution and developing resources for clergy, couples, and congregations. This work will benefit the whole church.

* Jerry Brown, Chris Butler, Bill Countryman, Dorothy Curry, Dennis Delman, Jack Eastwood, David Forbes, Michael Merriman, Bonita Palmer, Bill Rhodes, Kitty Lehman, John Kirkley, Tom Skillings, Fred Heard