



Statement from the Standing Committee

July 3, 2015

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (EPHESIANS 4:15-16)

Two landmark decisions, one judicial and one legislative, have been delivered in the past days. On Friday, June 26, the Supreme Court released its ruling which mandates the recognition of same-sex marriage in the civil sphere throughout the United States. This week, the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church made changes to the canons to remove the definition that “Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman,” issuing as well certain trial liturgies for the blessing of same-sex unions for dioceses in which the Diocesan Bishop has granted permission for their use.

We acknowledge that there are many in the Episcopal Church and in the wider culture who have longed to see marriage redefined to include gay and lesbian people who desire lasting, legal commitments with their partners. The developments of this week represent for them, and for many who love them, a validation of the full and equal place of homosexual persons in society and the Church.

But is marriage primarily about equal rights, equal dignity, or even the simple desire to love and be loved? The Book of Common Prayer, Holy Scripture, and the tradition of the Church teaches that marriage is about something else, and for this reason the majority of Christians in our world (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglicans) believe marriage is beyond the redefinition of any human agency.

“The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation.” (BCP 423) If these words are true, then marriage is not a human institution or a social arrangement that has evolved over time. Scripture describes marriage as *God’s* idea, woven into nature and even imprinted upon the bodies of men and women. The creation account reaches its theological summit with the words, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (GENESIS 2:24) The goal of God’s making us male and female is precisely so that two persons of complementary sexes can be put together in an exclusive, physical, spiritual, lifelong union, giving life to a new generation of children and giving structure to society for the flourishing of all. Though married men and women always fall short of the full goodness and glory of marriage as God intended, it is to the ideal and design of creation that Jesus himself pointed when he was asked about marriage: “From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’...So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (MARK 10:6-9¹)

If marriage has been established by God in creation, as most of the world’s Anglicans believe, then no Church council or civil court can ever redefine marriage. This week’s attempt to do so will cause considerable concern worldwide, acknowledged by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his recent expression of “deep concern” about how the Episcopal Church’s actions will add to the stress and distress throughout the Anglican Communion. Of course, the constitution of the Episcopal Church defines us as “a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the

¹ cf. Matthew 19:5 f., Ephesians 5:31



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Book of Common Prayer.”² The Diocese of Dallas desires and intends to live out these words by respecting the Communion’s teaching on marriage³ and by upholding the Book of Common Prayer and the authority of God’s Word. We are grateful for the General Convention’s appropriate acknowledgement that trial rites will not be used in a diocese without the permission of the Diocesan Bishop.

The Diocese of Dallas has a canon on marriage that reads, in part, that “As used in this Diocese, the terms ‘Holy Matrimony’ and ‘Marriage’ shall refer to the exclusive physical and spiritual union of one man and one woman, by mutual consent of the heart, mind and will, and with the intent that it be lifelong. The blessing of sexual relationships between persons of the same sex is prohibited in churches, missions and congregations of this Diocese; and clergy persons resident or licensed in this Diocese are prohibited from performing such blessings in any venue.”⁴

The Episcopal Diocese of Dallas has an important part to play in the larger church, seeking to be true to the Episcopal Church’s constitution, to the Prayer Book, and to the wisdom and truth of Holy Scripture. We also acknowledge that within our diocese we are not altogether of one mind, and we therefore call on all baptized believers to extend grace, respect, and care to one another, “speaking the truth in love.” We who look to the cross of Christ for our salvation know that love always involves a struggle, but in this struggle Jesus promises us peace: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (JOHN 16:33)

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Rev’d David Stangebye Houk
The Rev’d William J. Cavanaugh
The Rev’d Michael R. Gilton

Mr. G. Thomas Graves III
Mr. Robert A. Hulsey
Ms. Cathleen Dolt

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² Preamble of the Constitution of the General Convention, 2012.

³ See the [Lambeth Conference 1998 1.10](#) statement on human sexuality.

⁴ [Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas](#), Section 12.1 and 12.2.