

**Claiming the Blessing: An Occasional Newsletter – Vol. 1, No. 3
March 2003**

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son; Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the winds of war swirl about us it seems there has never been a better time to pray this “prayer for the human family” from our Book of Common Prayer. It speaks to me today of all that we work and pray and strive for on the other side of this time of death and destruction – all we hope for – for all people everywhere. It also speaks to me of our hopes and dreams for this church we love – and I offer it to you today as foundational to our work as we prepare for General Convention 2003. And I offer as well this third in our series of “Occasional Newsletters”: meant to both bring you up to date on some matters pertaining to Claiming the Blessing and to keep you on board with how you can help our ongoing effort.

The House of Bishops: To say that the House of Bishops Theology Committee Report was a deep disappointment would be to default to the most profound of understatement. I commend to you the strong response issued by the Integrity Board (one of our CTB partners in ministry) which can be found at www.integrityusa.org and on www.everyvoice.net. I also reassure you that we do not consider this report from a few bishops and handful of scholars definitive in any way. Not only does it fail to offer any genuine theological scholarship – merely reiterating the often articulated positions advanced from different perspectives – but its recommendation that the House of Bishops forgo legislation on the question of blessing unions was soundly dismissed when the bishops gathered in Kanuga March 14-19 declined to adopt it as a “mind of the house” resolution but instead “received it with thanks.” We are grateful that a significant percentage of the bishops are committed to continuing the conversation on this issue and, more importantly, committed to including the House of Deputies in the decision making process.

Winners and Losers: Whenever possible, speak against the presumption that we (CTB, Integrity, et al) are “pushing for a solution which creates winners and losers.” Nothing could be further from the truth. If our resolution passes, the winners are those seeking approved liturgies to use in response to the pastoral needs of their communities AND those who fear being forced to offer blessings against their conscience. Optional rites in the Book of Occasional Services meet both those needs and will end “for a season” our seeming inability as a church to focus on anything else. The only “losers” are those committed to continued polarization and polemic -- and we must not let their agenda continue to hold the rest of the church hostage.

The Reconciliation Project: The question before us at this point therefore seems to be not IF we will consider blessings in Minneapolis but HOW that process will happen. In that regard I commend to you the “National Conversation” being sponsored by the Diocese of Los Angeles Reconciliation Team scheduled for May 7-10. A brochure is enclosed and I encourage both your

prayers and your presence at this important gathering. Our initial hope was that the AAC would join us with official representation and be part of the conversation Michael Hopkins invited them into at the CTB Conference in St. Louis. Sadly, it appears today that they are not willing to do so. However, minds could change between now and May and I ask for your prayers in that regard.

The Theology Statement: The final edition of the CTB Theology Statement has been published and was distributed to every member of the House of Bishops prior to their meeting in Kanuga. It will shortly be mailed to every Deputy as well, and is also available online at the above referenced websites or by mail by contacting the CTB office. We hope that it will be as widely disseminated and discussed as possible prior to General Convention and need your help in making that happen. Talk to your bishops and deputies. Bring it to the attention of your parish clergy. Schedule education opportunities and use the discussion questions included in the Theology Statement to facilitate conversations. Contact us if we can help in any way.

Financial Support: Continued thanks to those who have pledged or contributed to Claiming the Blessing. We would not be where we are without you. And we will not get where we need to go without additional and continued support. If you have already given, please consider an additional contribution. If you have not, please consider doing so at this time or hosting a fundraising event in your area. Help is available through the CTB office – just ask!