

March 2003

“Claiming the Blessing” is a collaborative ministry of organizations and individuals throughout the Episcopal Church working to abolish prejudice and oppression, to promote wholeness in human relationships, and to heal the rift between sexuality and spirituality in the church. Toward that end, we are asking General Convention 2003 to finish the work begun in Denver in 2000 and to authorize for inclusion in the Book of Occasional Services liturgies for the blessing of unions other than marriage as described in D039.

We do so knowing that neither the church nor the culture is yet of one mind on many questions of human sexuality but believing that one of the most distinctive features of Anglicanism is its ability to maintain unity without requiring uniformity. We do so convinced that our proposal for a way forward – authorizing optional rites for use by those who choose to offer them in response the pastoral needs of their constituency – is in the best spirit of Anglican comprehensiveness and is our best hope for the future of this church we love. We do so weary of the pitched battles of the past and convinced that our larger mission as a people of God is too important to be held hostage by arguments over whether a percentage of the baptized should continue to be excluded from a percentage of the sacramental life of the church.

The fuller inclusion of all the baptized into the Body of Christ is not an issue which will split the church but an opportunity which will move the church forward in mission and ministry – if we will claim it and proclaim it. It is an opportunity for evangelism which will breathe new life into our work and our witness to those yearning to hear an alternative to the strident voices of the religious right who have for too long presumed to speak to the culture as representing Christian Values. We have Good News to tell and it’s time to get on with the business of telling it.

In July we will return to Minneapolis where the 1976 General Convention took its prophetic step forward on behalf of the fuller inclusion of women in the mission and ministry of the church. We believe the time has come to take an equally prophetic step on behalf of GLBT persons striving to live in monogamous, life-long relationships of mutual fidelity and commitment and to claim the vision of a church ready to embrace all of the baptized fully into the Body of Christ. And we believe our position to be firmly grounded in the traditional Anglican balance of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, as detailed in the Claiming the Blessing Theology Statement.

Along with a Theology of Blessing, it includes scripture and tradition perspectives by noted scholars Walter Bruggemann and Bill Countryman, a “Message to the Church” by Michael Hopkins on behalf of Claiming the Blessing and answers to the questions most frequently asked by the church at large. We offer it for your consideration and for your conversation. We invite you to join with us in discussion and in dialogue. And we ask you to add your prayers to ours for this church we love as we journey together toward Minneapolis and into God’s future.

Faithfully,

The Reverend Susan Russell
Executive Director, Claiming the Blessing