

**Christ Church Cathedral
Unity in Mission Task Force
Report to the Vestry
December 2, 2014**

In anticipation that the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2012) would approve a liturgy for the blessing of same-sex relationships, the Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle, Bishop of Texas, convened a task force to determine the manner in which parishes in the Diocese of Texas would navigate the issue of blessing same-sex unions. The document resulting from this task force's work, issued in April 2012, is *Unity in Mission: A Paper on Common Mission and the Challenge Posed by Division*. Subsequently, the 77th General Convention did, indeed, approve the rite "I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing."

The liturgy approved by the 77th General Convention is not a rite for same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage is presently prohibited by Texas law and is not acknowledged by either the Episcopal Church's Canons or the Book of Common Prayer (both of which refer to marriage as between a man and a woman). Even so, Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church (2000) acknowledged that there are same-sex couples in the Church "who are living in other life-long committed relationships" and enjoined that "such relationships will be characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." It is for such couples that "I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing" is intended.

In *Unity in Mission*, Bishop Doyle says:

If General Convention approves rites for same-gender blessings (either as trial rites or for general use), I will permit clergy desiring to do so to use this new liturgy and materials. First, to protect the pastoral relationship between the rector, the congregation's leadership, and the congregation, I will require evidence that the congregation supports the rector's desire to offer such a liturgy. To that end, I will require clergy who believe this is an important part of their ministry to read the documents produced by General Convention to prepare themselves for the work of providing this liturgy to people who request it. Likewise, I want congregations interested in this ministry to have gone through the materials provided in the Liturgical Resources 1 text on same-gender covenants. Therefore, prior to officiating a rite for blessing a same-gender covenant in an Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Texas, a rector will be required to have the congregation complete the congregational education portion of the process. The rector shall affirm to me in writing that the congregation has completed a time of discernment (having used the Liturgical Resources material) and is prepared to participate in the blessing of same-gender

covenants. I am also requesting that the Senior Warden write to confirm that this discernment work has been carefully undertaken. This work needs to be done well in advance of conducting any service and not a rushed process. I am requiring this preparation also out of my pastoral concern for individuals seeking the Church's blessing and who deserve when blessed within the Church to have the community stand and support their commitment to God and to one another. The promise of the congregation in the liturgy to support the new couple is an important one and a promise that the community cannot make without having discerned its meaning. After having fulfilled this process, the rector will notify me, and I will approve at a time of my choosing when the congregation may be given permission to do these rites. (Unity in Mission, 113-114)

During the fall 2013 visioning process, numerous parishioners inquired when the Cathedral would undergo this discernment. At the beginning of 2014, the Cathedral's Justice and Peace Council also expressed a desire to make Unity in Mission discernment one of its annual priorities. At its retreat in January, 2014, Dean Thompson informed the Vestry that he was prepared to empanel a Cathedral Unity in Mission Task Force to represent the parish and undertake the educational discernment outlined by Bishop Doyle. At its June meeting, Dean Thompson commissioned the Unity in Mission Task Force and announced its membership to the Vestry. Members of the Task Force were very intentionally selected to represent a cross-section of the Cathedral congregation.

The Cathedral's Unity in Mission Task Force was charged to study the issue of same-sex blessings and return to the Vestry with the results of its study. The Vestry granted the Task Force flexibility to bring to the Vestry a recommendation for or against allowing same-sex blessings at Christ Church, or to bring a study document without recommendation.

Dean Thompson subsequently reviewed the Cathedral's discernment process with Bishop Doyle to ensure that it met the Bishop's expectations, and Dean Thompson received the Bishop's endorsement.

The Task Force's creation, membership, and process were announced to the Cathedral community via a lengthy article in the July 2014 issue of *The Bulletin* (Appendix 1). Additional announcements were made subsequent to Rally Day in two Sunday service leaflets. Dean Thompson further announced the Task Force's work during two sessions of the well-attended World War I series at the Sunday morning Dean's Hour. These sessions, and therefore the announcements, were posted on YouTube and linked to the Cathedral's web site. In every announcement, Cathedral parishioners were encouraged to contact Dean Thompson and Task Force members with questions and input. Several Task Force members received such input and communicated it to the Task Force at our meetings. Most inquiries were about the process itself. One person expressed concern about potential parish discord. Several parishioners expressed support for blessing same-sex relationships. No one expressed disapproval of blessing same-sex relationships.

It is important that the Vestry be aware of the depth and care with which the Task Force approached its work. Each Task Force member studied all of the documents before us. We engaged in lively, respectful, and prayerful conversation. We were candid in our comments and thoughtful in our listening. Below is a detailed synopsis of the Task Force's work, followed by our recommendation to the Vestry. We thank you for entrusting us with this task. We have grown in the process, both in faith and in relationship with one another.

With greetings in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Lily Barsenas

Robin Bullington

John Cater

Linnat Deily

Ted Dom (Vestry Representative)

John Flanagan

Elizabeth Goza

Patrick Hayes

Roy Nolen

Charlie Pringleau (Vestry Representative)

Catherine Randall

The Very Reverend Barkley Thompson

The Unity in Mission Task Force

Session One: June 9, 2014

The Task Force first convened on June 9. After opening the initial meeting with prayer, Dean Thompson asked each Task Force member, rather than offering a preliminary opinion on the issue of blessing same-sex unions, to name his or her stake in the issue. Responses included:

- ❖ “The Cathedral is a leader in the Diocese, and other parishes will look to see how we navigate this process. We can show other parishes how to address the process of discernment about same-sex blessings thoughtfully.”
- ❖ “We must work on a plan that reflects God’s will and wishes.”
- ❖ “I look forward to studying the work of thoughtful and educated people as opposed to relying solely on what people say from a personal point of view.”
- ❖ “I am a libertarian who wants to reconcile the feeling of not interfering with anyone’s rights where they don’t infringe on biblical doctrine.”
- ❖ “I have [gay and lesbian] friends in committed relationships who are either in terror of someone finding out or are in the open. Without a ceremony to give validity to their relationships, they may be predisposed to move to another parish.”
- ❖ “I want this process to have an outcome that will not be divisive and will retain wholeness in the Cathedral community.”
- ❖ “Regardless of the ultimate decision Christ Church makes, it is important to conduct this process well. If we do, then people will respect and understand our recommendation.”

Next, Dean Thompson set before the Task Force the process for its work. Conversation for subsequent sessions was structured using the model of the Cathedral’s Faith & Society Seminar (Appendix 2). Dean Thompson selected the following primary texts for future sessions:

- ❖ Holy Scripture
- ❖ *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, written by the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary¹
- ❖ *Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing*, produced by the Episcopal Church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music²
- ❖ “An Ethic of Marriage and Family,” by Greek Orthodox theologian Vigen Guroian.³

Additionally, Dean Thompson asked Task Force members to study *Unity in Mission: A Paper on Common Mission and the Challenge Posed by Division*.

More will be said about why these texts were selected throughout the body of this report.

¹ Seow, Choon-Leong, ed. *Homosexuality and Christian Community*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

² Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. *Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing* (New York: Church Publishing, 2012).

³ Guroian, Vigen. “An Ethic of Marriage and Family,” in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 322-330.

Session 2: September 9, 2014

The Task Force first reviewed statistics produced by the Pew Research Center that reflect the increasing acceptance of homosexuality by American society. The Task Force agreed that while statistics are helpful as background to our study, public approval or disapproval of homosexuality should not be a deciding factor in our theological consideration of same-sex blessings.

As a primary text of study, the Task Force focused on *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, a collection of essays written by faculty members at Princeton Theological Seminary. Princeton's faculty, among the nation's most prominent biblical scholars and ethicists, collaborated on this collection upon discovering that they were of divided opinion on the virtue or vice of homosexual expression within the Church. Modeling constructive dialogue rather than rancorous division, Princeton's professors each offered a theological reflection on homosexuality and Holy Scripture. Their essays are wide-ranging and balanced.

For session 2, the Task Force studied the following essays:

"Creation and Human Sexuality," by Richard E. Whitaker

"Creation, Sexuality, and Homosexuality in the New Testament," by Ulrich W. Mauser

"A Heterosexual Perspective," by Choon-Leong Seow

"Reading and Understanding the New Testament on Homosexuality," by Brian K. Blount

Highlights of this study include:

- ❖ Whitaker acknowledges that the Bible has no understanding of homosexuality as part of the natural order.
- ❖ Whitaker interprets the purpose of human sexuality in Genesis 1 solely as procreation. However, the emphasis on Adam's and Eve's relationship in Genesis 2 is cooperation and companionship, not procreation.
- ❖ Whitaker suggests that the power to name all things in creation, which God grants to human beings in Genesis 2, includes the freedom to name categories in the natural order that are unknown to the biblical narrative, including committed, monogamous homosexual relationships.
- ❖ Mauser argues that the image of God (*imago Dei*) in humans, mentioned in Genesis 1, is found only in men and women together. It is only in heterosexual union, Mauser believes, that God's image is discerned.
- ❖ Seow focuses on the Holiness Code in Leviticus, often cited in arguments against homosexuality. The Holiness Code explicitly seeks to render the practices of the ancient Israelites distinct from those of their Canaanite and Egyptian neighbors, for reasons of preserving the health and identity of Israel (see Lev. 18:3). Chapter 18 of Leviticus focuses on sexual holiness. Other portions of the Holiness Code focus on other activities, including prohibitions against tattoos (Lev. 19:28) and rounded haircuts (which resembled those worn in pagan funeral rites, Lev. 19:27). Maintaining holiness in these and other ways was the primary means (besides making sacrifice in the temple) that the

Israelites showed their fidelity to God. The term “abomination,” which is used to describe same-sex sexual intercourse in Leviticus, is employed indiscriminately in Leviticus and elsewhere to refer to several breaches of God’s law. For example, eating shellfish is also referred to as an abomination (Lev. 11:11), as is remarriage of a woman after divorce (Deut. 24:4).

- ❖ Seow also discusses the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. The story is the account of a mob of men demanding that Lot turn over the male guests in his home (who turn out to be angels) to them so that the mob may have sex with the guests. In context, Seow says, this story is clearly about a particularly perverse form of sex—namely, forced sex, rape—rather than a commentary on homosexual practice generally.
- ❖ Seow ends with a discussion of the wisdom books in Holy Scripture (i.e.—Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, etc.). The wisdom tradition teaches us, Seow says, that in addition to divine revelation in the Bible, human beings also gain knowledge “through the observation of nature and human experiences...It calls on people to investigate—study the natural and social sciences” in order to discover some of God’s truths in the world. Seow affirms that we must, therefore, take into serious account what medical science and psychology tell us about human sexuality. The Bible itself, through the wisdom books, encourages us to do so.
- ❖ Blount focuses upon the Apostle Paul’s mentions of homosexuality, particularly in Romans 1:18-32 (the New Testament’s only extended discussion of the topic). In the case of Romans 1, Blount says, the teaching point of the passage is not homosexuality, but rather the sin of idolatry. The heart of the passage is that human beings “worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). In other words, human beings have a tendency to forget that God is God, and in God’s place we give our hearts to the things of this world. Then, as an example of idolatry, St. Paul discusses lust and “degrading passion,” and among the results of such lust and passion, St. Paul mentions sex between people of the same sex. Blount stresses that same-sex sexual intercourse is not the teaching point of this passage; idolatry is. To the extent that St. Paul does focus on same-sex sex, he is referring to sex that is the result of hedonistic passion and lust. (Whether this accounts for all same-sex sexual relationships is an open question which will be discussed more below.)

Session 3: October 14, 2014

The entirety of this session was dedicated to the study of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music's *Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing*.

We read through the liturgy itself, and we discussed the study portion of the book. The study portion of *Liturgical Resources 1* focuses on four aspects of the Church's life: Mission, Blessing, Covenantal Relationships, and Unity.

Mission

- ❖ The mission of the Church is embodied in St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians 5:18-19: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."
- ❖ It is also the mission of the Church to present to the world an "eschatological vision," an image of what relationships will look like in the fulfilled kingdom of God.

Blessing

- ❖ Blessing sets a relationship apart from other worldly relationships.
- ❖ Relationships are blessed so that they can thank God, seek God's favor in their shared life, and—most importantly—witness to God's grace in the world.

Covenantal Relationships

- ❖ Covenantal Relationships, as modeled in Holy Scripture, are marked by fidelity and accountability.
- ❖ The parties to a covenantal relationship are faithful and accountable to one another; they are faithful and accountable to the faith community of which they are a part; and the faith community is faithful and accountable to them.

Unity

- ❖ Any discussion of unity in the Church must ultimately focus on our core beliefs. What are they? What are the things about which we cannot disagree and still stay together? And does the issue of same-sex blessings fall into this category?

Each of these aspects (Mission, Blessing, Covenantal Relationship, Unity) comes into play when considering blessing same-sex unions, begging the questions:

1. *Would blessing same-sex relationships contribute to the mission of the Church?*
2. *What exactly are we doing when we bless something?*
3. *What is a covenant relationship, and can a same-sex union fall under that definition?*
4. *Will the Church remain unified if we bless same-sex relationships?*

Session 4: November 11, 2014

Though the liturgy for blessing same-sex relationships is not a marriage rite, marriage is the closest analogy already extant in our communal Christian lives. Therefore, we studied two views of Christian marriage: Max Stackhouse's essay "The Heterosexual Norm" from *Homosexuality and Christian Community* and Vigen Guroian's essay "An Ethic of Marriage and Family."

"The Heterosexual Norm," by Max Stackhouse

Arguing from a Western Christian perspective, Max Stackhouse leans heavily on the concept of natural law as defined by biology. Beginning there, he contends, "First, and at the most basic level, homosexuality is contrary to the intentions of creation." Furthermore, Stackhouse identifies procreation as the primary intention of sexual intercourse, and thus of sexual relationships, and this intention is "not capable of being fulfilled homosexually."

Marriage, Stackhouse says, is "first, a procreative bond," and "second, the marriage bond is a community of love between those who are 'other.' This means not simply 'an-other' person, but one who is truly 'other' even, and especially including, both the body, its characteristics, and the social roles and expectations to which males and females are differently exposed."

"An Ethic of Marriage and Family," by Vigen Guroian

Arguing from a Greek Orthodox perspective, Vigen Guroian says that Christian marriage and family draw their identity not primarily from "natural" relationships (including the need for the procreation of children) but from relationships in the kingdom of God. Guroian says that, at its essence, "the family is a school for that personal and virtuous life which prepares persons of a character willing to do service to others and fit for the kingdom of God."

The Christian family is a crucible and an icon. It is the crucible in which family members learn to live with and love one another as Christ loved us (John 14:34). As such, it is the testing ground for a different way of living in the world. It is also the icon by which we give witness to the world that such relationships are possible. Guroian says the Christian family "becomes a witness to the new creation in Christ."

Finally, Guroian argues that the full Christian meaning of family is only realized when "lived within the whole life of the Church."

Recommendation

Here we ask the Vestry to pause. The recommendation that follows derives from the foregoing six-month study, which was thoughtfully and prayerfully undertaken. It is the Task Force's hope that the Vestry will read our recommendation only after having reviewed with care the synopsis of our discernment, which makes up the body of this report.

Throughout our discernment, the Task Force approached and considered Holy Scripture with seriousness and care. Our conclusion is that those passages of scripture that address homosexual behavior do so with regard to specific contexts. The holiness code was an ancient body of purity restrictions designed to define the Israelites in the midst of their neighbors. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah is, at its core, about gang rape and the violation of hospitality. Romans 1 teaches us primarily about the danger of idolatry rather than homosexuality per se.⁴

The most potent biblical argument against homosexual relationships, then, is the Genesis argument made by Max Stackhouse, Ulrich Mauser, and others that homosexual relationships abrogate natural law.

Theologically, the root of the focus on "natural" and "unnatural" relationships is in the western theological tradition beginning with St. Augustine. Because of this emphasis, in western theology the primary rationale for marriage has been the procreation of children, i.e.—the fulfillment of a man's and woman's "natural" function to propagate the human species. Stackhouse, Mauser, and others further this argument.

As a result of our study we are persuaded, however, that the argument from natural law should be tempered both by Choon-Leong Seow's discussion of the Bible's wisdom books and by Vigen Guroian's essay on the Greek Orthodox understanding of marriage.

Seow points out that the Bible itself—through the wisdom books such as Proverbs—encourages us to use our God-given experience, reason, and powers of observation to further our knowledge of the world. Frankly, there are phenomena not addressed in scripture, and among those phenomena are same-sex "life-long committed relationships... characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God." (2000-D039) The Bible is silent on such relationships. God calls us, therefore, to use our experience and

⁴ Homosexuality is also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11. In these passages, men who engage in same-sex sex are included by Paul in a long list of those whom Paul condemns. The others included in the 1 Corinthians list are fornicators (i.e.—those who have sex outside of marriage), idolaters, adulterers (i.e.—those who are unfaithful to their spouses), thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers. The list in 1 Timothy adds those who kill their parents, slave-traders, perjurers, and liars. The lists are not in any rank order. In other words, the person who has sex outside of marriage, the greedy, the drunkard, and the liar are condemned equally with the person who has sex with someone of the same sex. Brian Blount also points out that of the two Greek words usually assumed to refer to homosexual behavior in these passages, one refers to effeminacy. For Paul, the real vice seems to be when one sheds one's masculinity in the sexual act—and when someone else (i.e.—the other partner) facilitates this.

reason faithfully to assess such relationships and determine whether they are appropriate for the Church's blessing.⁵

One avenue through which reason and experience speak to this issue is through medical, psychological, and social science research. For more than forty years, the consensus of the behavioral and social sciences and the health and mental health professions has been that homosexuality is a normal variation of human sexual orientation.⁶

Furthermore, Vigen Guroian grants us the theological lens through which to assess the appropriateness of blessing same-sex relationships. Rather than natural law, Guroian says that marriage—or covenant relationships analogous to marriage—should be judged by whether or not they serve as a “school for that personal and virtuous life which prepares persons of a character willing to do service to others and fit for the kingdom of God.”

Our study of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music's work supports this. Blessings, the Standing Commission says, intend to give thanks to God, ask for God's favor, and send the blessed ones out into the world as witnesses to God's grace. Covenantal relationships, the Standing Committee says, are marked by fidelity and accountability. Therefore:

- ❖ If we believe that same-sex relationships serve the couple as that school for virtuous life and service to God's kingdom...
- ❖ If we believe that those in a same-sex relationship can be witnesses to God's grace in the world...
- ❖ If we believe that same-sex relationships can be marked by fidelity and accountability...
- ❖ Then we find it compelling that such relationships should receive the Church's blessing.

Prior to the 77th General Convention, the Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, Episcopal Bishop of Olympia, addressed these questions in a blog post. Bishop Rickel refers to the possibility of same-sex blessings as “a conservative proposal.” He says:

“It seems to me we have held our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in a ‘catch-22.’ We say they cannot live up to our values because they cannot be married, or even blessed in their union. While many of them have begged for this, it is still not possible. What they ask of us, the Church...is to put boundaries around their relationship, to hold them in the same regard and

⁵ It's important to note, also, that neither the 1928 nor the 1979 Book of Common Prayer articulates the natural function of procreation as marriage's primary rationale. In the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the rationales for marriage are listed in this order: “for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children...” (BCP 423). Mutual joy, help, and comfort are all ranked above marriage's natural function of procreation. In other words, the Episcopal Church has long understood the partnership of marriage to be about much more than the “natural.”

⁶ In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder. See <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>.

with the same respect, which would also mean that we expect the same from them...They are asking to be accountable, as a couple, in community. To me, this is a conservative proposal.”⁷

One member of our Task Force voiced the consensus of us all with these words: “Isn’t it better for all concerned to have loving partnerships looked upon with favor, rather than disdain, by Christ’s church? Just as loving partnerships between a man and a woman are more likely to succeed if the couple has benefitted from a Christian marriage, I believe that a church blessing of a same-sex union is likely to produce a more loving and beneficial relationship to the couple and society than if it were withheld.”

With regard to unity in the Church, we don’t believe that blessing same-sex relationships should divide us. Blessings, furthermore, should be conducted in a manner that is pastorally-sensitive to those who have authentically-held scruples against blessing same-sex relationships. It is our hope that drawing more committed and faithful couples into the life of the Church, and embracing together our central core belief in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, will bind our Cathedral family in an even greater degree of unity than we have known until now.

It is, therefore, the unanimous recommendation of the Christ Church Cathedral Unity in Mission Task Force that Dean Thompson and the Vestry endorse, and seek the Bishop’s approval for, the use of “I Will Bless You And You Will Be A Blessing” at Christ Church Cathedral.

⁷ <http://bishoprickett.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/marriage-equality-a-conservative-proposal-2/>

Appendix 1: Text of the July 2014 Bulletin article announcing the Cathedral Unity in Mission Task Force

Unity in Mission Task Force Commissioned

In 2012, the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorized for provisional use the liturgy entitled, “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant,” for the blessing of monogamous, same-sex relationships that intend to be lifelong. In anticipation of General Convention, Bishop of Texas Andy Doyle chaired a diocesan task force with former Secretary of State James Baker and others that issued the “Unity in Mission” paper, which provides guidelines for individual parishes in the Diocese of Texas to discern whether or not The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant will be made liturgically available in their congregations. The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant is not a marriage rite, as neither same-sex marriages nor civil unions are recognized by Texas law. A decision to allow or disallow the use of the liturgy in any particular parish comes after a lengthy process of prayer and study, with the ultimate decision made by the Vestry and rector and the approval of the Bishop.

During the fall visioning process, numerous Cathedral parishioners inquired when Christ Church would undertake this process of discernment. In response, Dean Thompson and the Vestry have commissioned a task force to do this work. During the fall, the task force will study Holy Scripture and theology, as well as the liturgical resources prepared by The Episcopal Church. The task force’s work will be thoughtful and deliberate, and it will result in a report issued to the Vestry, likely in December. The Vestry will then use this report as the topic of its own thought and prayer as it considers with the Dean whether The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant will be made available at Christ Church.

About this process of discernment, Dean Thompson says, “The issue of whether to bless same-sex unions is a very important one, but it is not the central or defining issue in our lives of faith. Our identity as Christians, as Episcopalians, and as Cathedral parishioners is centered in our shared faith in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have been formed as a people who find our identity in the saving grace of Jesus, I believe the Cathedral can and will navigate whether to bless same-sex unions with grace, and we will grow stronger in the process. As St. Paul says in my favorite words from Holy Scripture, we will continue to “allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts, clothe ourselves in love, and bear with one another in this and all things.” (Colossians 3:12-15)

Members of the Cathedral Unity in Mission Task Force are Dean Thompson, Lily Barsenas, Robin Bullington, John Cater, Linnet Deily, Ted Dom (Vestry Representative), John Flanagan, Elizabeth Goza, Patrick Hayes, Roy Nolen, Charlie Prioleau (Vestry Representative), and Catherine Randall. Please keep the task force in your prayers.

Faith and Society Seminar Christ Church Cathedral

Welcome! This seminar is designed to allow participants to engage in serious and lively conversation about Holy Scripture, faith, and the society in which we live. The seminar will wrestle with vexing issues not necessarily in an attempt to uncover singular, unequivocal answers but to better ground participants in the range of faithful responses Christians might have. The seminar will follow the format of The Aspen Institute’s “Seminar on Leadership, Values, and the Good Society.”

For the seminar to work, and to ensure that the process is marked throughout by Christian charity, we’ll agree to abide by some ground rules for our conversation:

1. Each participant will grant that all participants share faith in the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. At no time will a participant deny the faith or salvation of another participant.
2. Conversation will spring from the shared readings. Participants will arrive prepared to engage and discuss the readings.
3. Participants are free to cite passages of Scripture other than those selected for the course. However, participants will refrain as much as possible from citing readings other than those on the reading list, since such readings are unlikely to have been read by all in attendance.
4. Participants will not make *ad hominem* comments about other participants. Opinions may be challenged (dispassionately), but people may not be challenged.
5. Participants will not speak over one another or engage in “sidebar” conversations.
6. If a participant experiences his emotions getting the better of him, he will remove himself from the conversation until his emotions are in check.
7. Barkley will moderate conversation. The moderator’s role is to ensure that 1.) every voice has an opportunity to be heard, 2.) conversational rules are followed, and 3.) all sides of an issue come to the fore. Within #3, the moderator may ask provocative and probing questions that do not necessarily embody his own beliefs and opinions.