

APPENDIX 2: Dearly Beloved: A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage

We are pleased to offer to The Episcopal Church a resource for study and discussion about marriage. This topic is of historic and timeless significance for the Church. Practices of marriage are undergoing social change in our own day, and our Church, acting through General Convention in 2012, asked that we develop tools for discussion on this subject.

So it is a time for us to reflect about and communicate our understanding of marriage. We do so — as we always do when discerning our way forward — by considering those three sources of Anglican authority on the subject: scripture, tradition (including theology, liturgy, canon law, and history), and reason (including our human experience).

We are 12 appointees: bishops, theologians, educators, and pastors. As the Task Force that was charged with providing resources for this reflection, we have deeply explored marriage through the lenses of scripture, tradition, and reason. We are eager to invite the Church into discussion at the local level.

Our hope is that you will take advantage of this moment in our history to be a part of discerning our way forward. In our day, what is God calling us to understand, to say, and perhaps to do in regard to marriage?

We offer three different formats for engaging your community of faith in this process, in the hope that you will find one that fits your circumstances. Your involvement is critical, so that this becomes a church-wide conversation about this timely and important subject that affects our personal lives, our families, and our communities.

In Christ,
The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, Chair
Task Force on the Study of Marriage

Dearlly Beloved: A Toolkit for the Study of Marriage

Welcome to the toolkit of resources for the study of marriage. These resources have been created by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage established by the 2012 General Convention of The Episcopal Church in response to the charge “to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage.” In this toolkit you will find:

Overview of the Task Force and the Work

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Overview of the Task Force and the Work

At the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church in 2012, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music submitted a resolution calling for a task force on the Study of Marriage. Their Resolution A050 (text below) included the following explanation:

As the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed liturgical resources for blessing same-sex relationships, it faced repeated questions about marriage. What makes a marriage Christian? What is the relationship between the Church's blessing of a relationship, whether different-sex or same-sex, and a union, "marriage" or otherwise, created by civil law? Is the blessing of a same-sex relationship equivalent to the marriage of a different-sex couple, and if so, should this liturgy be called "marriage"? Because the Church's understanding of marriage affects so many of its members, the Commission believes it is important to engage in a church-wide conversation about our theology of marriage.

The resolution called for a task force on the Study of Marriage to be appointed by the Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, and by the President of the House of Deputies, The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, to study and consult broadly on the subject of marriage. They were asked to explore historical, biblical, theological, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage, and to do so in consideration of the "changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures" of our time.

The members of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage are:

The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, *Chair*, Diocese of the Rio Grande
Ms. Joan Geiszler-Ludlum, *Vice Chair*, Diocese of East Carolina
The Rev. Tobias Stanislas Haller BSG, *Secretary*, Diocese of New York
Ms. Carolyn M. Chilton, Diocese of Virginia
The Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Ely, Diocese of Vermont
The Very Rev. Gail Greenwell, Diocese of Southern Ohio
The Rev. J. David Knight, Diocese of Mississippi
The Rev. Canon W. (Will) H. Mebane, Jr., Diocese of Western New York
The Rev. Dr. Cameron E. Partridge, Diocese of Massachusetts
The Rev. Canon Susan Russell, Diocese of Los Angeles
The Very Rev. Dr. Sylvia A. Sweeney, Diocese of Los Angeles
The Rt. Rev. W. Andrew Waldo, Diocese of Upper South Carolina

"This task force is charged not only to take the pulse of our current theological understanding of the meaning of marriage, but to assist the faithful in conversation and discernment about marriage, in particular what the church might hold up as 'holy example' of the love between Christ and his church," noted House of Deputies President, The Rev. Gay Jennings when announcing the appointment of the task force.

The Episcopal Church's theology and practice of marriage has changed significantly over the centuries, and we need to understand more clearly what we as a church mean when we use that word."

Text of Resolution A050

Task Force on the Study of Marriage 2012 General Convention of The Episcopal Church

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 77th General Convention direct the Presiding Bishop and President of the House of Deputies to appoint a task force of not more than 12 people, consisting of theologians, liturgists, pastors, and educators, to identify and explore biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage; and be it further,

Resolved, That the task force consult with the Standing Commission on Constitution and Canons and with The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to address the pastoral need for priests to officiate at a civil marriage of a same-sex couple in states that authorize such; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult with couples living in marriage and in other lifelong committed relationships and with single adults; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consult with other churches in the Anglican Communion and with our ecumenical partners; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force consider issues raised by changing societal and cultural norms and legal structures, including legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships between two people of the same sex, in the U.S. and other countries where The Episcopal Church is located; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force develop tools for theological reflection and norms for theological discussion at a local level; and be it further

Resolved, That the Task Force report its progress to the 78th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution.

EXPLANATION

As the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music developed liturgical resources for blessing same-gender relationships, it faced repeated questions about marriage. What makes a marriage Christian? What is the relationship between the Church's blessing of a relationship, whether different-gender or same-gender, and a union, "marriage" or otherwise, created by civil law? Is the blessing of a same-gender relationship equivalent to the marriage of a different-gender couple, and if so, should this liturgy be called "marriage"? Because the Church's understanding of marriage affects so many of its members, the Commission believes it is important to engage in a church-wide conversation about our theology of marriage. The Dioceses of El Camino Real and North Carolina have both recently undertaken studies of marriage, with reports available from the Digital Archives.

Purpose of this toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to help The Episcopal Church and its people discuss and study what we mean by marriage. What does it mean to be married? What does the Church have to say about marriage? What makes a marriage Christian? What is the role of the Church in marriage? In a rapidly changing culture in the United States, what values does the Church hold as indispensable to marriage? How can the Church continue to speak to people about relationships, faithfulness and life in Christ? And how does marriage serve as an icon of the love of Christ not just to the couple but to their larger communities?

These questions, and many more, are at the heart of the conversations around the Church on marriage. This toolkit is designed to promote and facilitate your conversations so that together — as the Body of Christ — we can be witnesses to Christ’s love for each other, for the Church and for the world.

Who should use this toolkit?

These resources are designed for study groups, large and small, for adults and teenagers in the Church and in the wider communities around your Church. Suggestions include provincial and diocesan meetings; deanery clericus meetings and diocesan clergy conferences; Sunday morning congregational education offerings or special evening or Saturday classes. They can be used as one-time events with groups already in existence, such as Education for Ministry (EfM) groups, other Bible study classes, men’s and women’s groups, Episcopal Church Women (ECW), youth groups, young adult classes, or in partnership with a neighboring Episcopal Church or ecumenical partner.

Many of life’s richest experiences come in conversation and fellowship with people from all walks of life. For these classes and groups, intentionally including as diverse a group of participants — people of different ages, races, cultures, genders, sexualities, marital/partnered status, cohabiting couples and singles (including, where possible, those who feel a special vocation to the single life) — is strongly encouraged.

How to use this toolkit

The resources in this toolkit have been organized in three suggested formats:

Format 1: Carry-On Conversations: This discussion format offers two design options: a 90-minute evening or Saturday program, or three 35-minute sessions.

Format 2: Forums: This format provides resources for four 45-minute forums designed for use on the typical Sunday morning Christian Formation format or with existing groups (such as ongoing small groups or EfM groups.) Any or all of them can be used as part of a series of classes or meetings; or as one-time, stand-alone classes.

Format 3: Study Groups: This format is intended for those who would like to “go deeper.” It provides reflection questions for a study group that reads some or all of the seven essays on marriage included in Appendix 1 in the Report to the 2015 General Convention of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage.

Whichever format you choose, we recommend appointing both a group facilitator and a scribe.

The role of the facilitator is to:

- Create a welcoming, safe, and comfortable environment of dialogue, not debate.
- Talk as little as possible. The facilitator is not there to lecture, argue, rebut, revise, or otherwise to get in the way of people expressing their questions and feelings.
- Encourage conversation.
- Manage the conversation so that everyone has a chance to contribute. This includes inviting the introverts to speak, and inviting the extroverts to listen to others.

The role of the scribe is to:

- Provide notes — whenever possible, on newsprint or a whiteboard so that the full group can see what is being recorded.
- Free up the facilitator to focus on the people and the conversation.

The role of the bishop and the diocese

Bishops, among their other roles, are the chief teachers of the Church and their diocese. This is particularly true when the bishops meet together as the House of Bishops. The role of chief teacher and pastor includes the encouragement and advancement of opportunities for study and conversation on topics of particular importance to the Church and the world, including marriage.

The Task Force asks bishops across the Church to:

- Publicize and encourage the use of this toolkit throughout their diocese.
- Offer classes and discussion groups themselves as part of their parish visitations, conferences and retreats, and on their own staffs.
- Provide for the study of these materials with their General Convention deputation, with the clergy in their dioceses and at provincial meetings.
- Engage with their peers in studying and discussing these materials in preparation for the 2015 General Convention.
- Encourage diversity in groups.
- Be prayerful about the role of the Church in this area, and encourage others to follow their example.

The role of the clergy and laity

The clergy, among their other roles, are teachers and pastors in their particular churches. Like bishops, this includes the encouragement and advancement of opportunities for study and conversation on topics of particular importance to the Church and the world, including marriage. Members of the laity, like bishops, priests, and deacons, are called to represent Christ to the world. They bring to this important conversation the breadth and depth of their own experience of marriage — their own and/or those they've experienced in the context of relationship with family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues.

The Task Force asks clergy and laity across the Church to:

- Publicize and encourage the use of this toolkit in congregations and communities.
- For clergy in particular, we ask you to lead by example in supporting and providing contexts for the congregational use of these resources.
- For the laity in particular, we ask you to urge your clergy and lay leaders — diocesan and congregational — to utilize these resources.
- Be open and welcoming to different points of view.
- Encourage diversity by intentionally inviting and including a broad spectrum of participants.
- Be prayerful about the role of the Church in this area and encourage others to follow your example.

Publicizing your forums or event

- Three to four weeks prior to your event, advertise it to your congregation by bulletin announcements, verbal announcements, website, and social media (by creating a Facebook event, for example)
- Send a press release to your local newspapers and your diocese.
- Send an invitation to nearby congregations, and reach out to ecumenical partners.
- Send an email or letter of invitation to selected people in your congregation —remember to invite a diverse group of people.
- Send an invitation to other groups in your church asking if you can offer this study with them.

Send us your input

Even though the initial work of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage has been completed in its report to the 2015 General Convention, the Task Force's members have requested that their work continue in the 2015-2018 triennium. In order to help them understand how the Church is receiving their work and to thereby give input to further study and reporting, it is essential for them to hear from those who have conversations on marriage based upon this toolkit.

After your session(s), write a one-page summary of your experience and of how you would advise the Task Force to continue its work. Then email it to the Chair, The Rev. Brian C. Taylor, at bctaylor@me.com. Thank you for your help!

FORMAT 1: Carry-On Conversations**Introduction**

This format offers an outline for a 90-minute discussion group designed to be used as an evening or Saturday program — perhaps including a light meal or other refreshment. Alternatively, it can be divided into three 35-minute sessions held at different times. In addition to the designs for the two different approaches, a one-page handout for each topic is provided, along with a facilitator’s guide, suggestions for ways to invite participation, and a form for reporting on your event.

We have also provided a separate PowerPoint presentation that walks you through the various components and provides some visuals that may be useful to you as you make use of this resource.

Until the summer of 2015, the PowerPoint will be available at the General Convention website for the Task Force on the Study of Marriage: <http://www.generalconvention.org/ccab>

- Then, under “Find CCABs ...,” click on “Choose a category”;
- Choose “Task Force of General Convention”;
- Click on “Task Force on the Study of Marriage”;
- Click on “Documents”; and
- Click on the downloadable “Study of Marriage Task Force PowerPoint Presentation for Carry-on Conversation.”

After the summer of 2015, this Power Point will be removed from the General Convention website and can be obtained by contacting the Chair of the Task Force, Brian C. Taylor, at the email address, bctaylor@me.com

Design Principles

This “carry-on” is designed for:

- Conversations that feature participation, engagement, and collaboration;
- A process that is open, welcoming, upbeat, stimulating, and flexible enough for a variety of settings, group sizes, and demographics.

Invitation Strategy

- Try to involve people who offer divergent points of view about marriage;
- Try to involve people who are single, newly married, married for a long time, in other partnered relationships, divorced, widowed, etc.;
- Try to involve people who are currently active in the Church, those who are less active, and those who have little or no affiliation with the Church; and
- Offer to do sessions for groups that are already meeting for another purpose.

Invitation Sample

Dear (Friend, Colleague, Church Member, etc.):

We invite you to participate in a church-wide conversation about marriage: its history, biblical and theological dimensions, and changing trends. In 2012, General Convention created a task force that has developed resources for this purpose. Using these resources, we are holding a 90-minute session (or three 35-minute sessions) on (day and date) at (time) at (location). We would be pleased if you could join us in this important conversation. Please let us know if you are interested and are available to participate.

- WHO: Everyone and anyone who is interested in marriage and the future shape of marriage;
- WHY: In 2012, The General Convention of The Episcopal Church created a task force to study marriage. Members of the Task Force are encouraging conversations about marriage throughout our Church. We invite you to participate in a conversation about the history of marriage, its biblical and theological dimensions, and changing norms and current trends.
- WHEN: _____ WHERE: _____

The Facilitator's Role

- Create a comfortable, welcoming environment.
- Encourage participation by all present.
- Explain the purpose of the event and time constraints.
- Outline the structure for the event and distribute materials.
- Avoid any temptation to lecture, explain, argue, rebut, revise, or otherwise get in the way of allowing people to express themselves. We want to hear from them!
- Consider appointing someone to record key responses from participants.

Designs (two options)

One 90-Minute Session

- Welcome, Prayer, and Overview
- One-Minute Story of a Relationship in Which You Have Seen the Image of God
- History of Marriage
- Changing Norms and Trends
- Biblical and Theological Dimensions
- Thank You and Closing Prayer

Three 35-Minute Sessions

- Welcome, Prayer, and Overview (each session)
- One-Minute Story of a Relationship in Which You Have Seen the Image of God (each session)
- Session One – History of Marriage
- Session Two – Changing Norms and Trends
- Session Three – Biblical and Theological Dimensions
- Thank You and Closing Prayer (each session)

Facilitator Guides

“Carry-On Conversation” Facilitator Guide for 90-Minute Session

Module	90-Minute Design (Suggested times are flexible.)
<p>WELCOME & OVERVIEW 5 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering and introductions • Prayer for Guidance – #57 or #58 BCP page 832 • Overview and context for this conversation • Hand out packets with three one-page summary documents for use during the session
<p>STORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS 5-10 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the Church upholds for its members in relationships: "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:" <p>— Tell a one-minute story about your relationship or one you know well in which you have seen the image of God (in groups of three)</p> <p>— Invite people to record and send one-minute video to taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com AND/OR post written response to: www.facebook.com/A050taskforce</p>
<p>HISTORY OF MARRIAGE 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of the key aspects regarding the history of marriage (pg 17). • Conversation and sharing of responses to these questions: (large group) <p>QUESTIONS:</p> <p>— What did you find surprising/affirming/unsettling about this historical synopsis?</p> <p>— How does this history help inform our contemporary understanding of marriage? (Record key responses.)</p>
<p>CHANGING NORMS & TRENDS 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of key trends and changes in norms vis-à-vis marriage (pg 18). • Conversation and sharing of responses (in small groups or 5-6) <p>QUESTION: How might these trends, and others of which you are aware, influence how the Church understands marriage?</p>
<p>BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of key biblical and theological themes or issues regarding how the Church understands marriage (pg 19). <p>QUESTION: Which of these themes is most central to your understanding of Christian marriage? (small groups of 5-6)</p>
<p>THANKS & PRAYER 5 minutes</p>	<p>Thank You</p> <p>Closing prayer: Lord’s Prayer or one chosen by facilitator</p>

“Carry-on Conversation” Facilitator Guide for Three 35-Minute Sessions

Module	Three 35-Minute Sessions Design (Adjust times to fit your needs.)
<p>WELCOME & OVERVIEW 5 minutes</p>	<p>Each time you gather, begin with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering and introductions • Prayer for Guidance – #57 or #58 BCP page 832 • Overview and context for this conversation
<p>STORIES OF RELATIONSHIPS 5-10 minutes</p>	<p>Each time you gather, begin with this exercise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the Church upholds for its members in relationships: "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:" <p>— Tell a one-minute story about your relationship or one you know well in which you have seen the image of God (in groups of three)</p> <p>— Invite people to record and send one-minute video to taskforceonmarriage@gmail.com AND/OR post written response to: www.facebook.com/A050taskforce</p>
<p>Session One HISTORY OF MARRIAGE 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of the key aspects regarding the history of marriage (pg 17). • Conversation and sharing of responses to these questions: (large group) <p>QUESTIONS:</p> <p>— What did you find surprising/affirming/unsettling about this historical synopsis?</p> <p>— How does this history help inform our contemporary understanding of marriage? (Record key responses.)</p>
<p>Session Two CHANGING NORMS & TRENDS 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of key trends and changes in norms vis-à-vis marriage (pg 18). • Conversation and sharing of responses (in small groups or 5-6) <p>QUESTION: How might these trends, and others of which you are aware, influence how the Church understands marriage?</p>
<p>Session Three BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS 20-25 minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use one-page summary of key biblical and theological themes or issues regarding how the Church understands marriage (pg 19). <p>QUESTION: Which of these themes is most central to your understanding of Christian marriage? (small groups of 5-6)</p>
<p>THANKS & PRAYER 5 minutes</p>	<p>Do this for each session:</p> <p>Thank You</p> <p>Closing prayer: Lord’s Prayer or one chosen by facilitator</p>

Handout 1: Our Experience of Grace in Relationship

Guided by principles laid out in General Convention Resolution D039-2000, which names values that the Church upholds for its members in relationships: “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...”

Break participants into groups of two or three for the purpose of telling a one minute story about their relationship — or one they know well — in which they have seen the image of God. There is no need for the triads to report back to the larger group.

Handout 2: Historical Considerations and Questions

The following considerations and questions are designed to offer an opportunity to explore together the history of marriage and reflect together on the questions it raises. Depending on the size of the group, conversations can happen in groups of two or three, in larger break-out groups, or with the whole assembly.

a. Among the several patterns we see repeated in history in regard to marriage, one essential element of marriage that almost always occurred was a process of betrothal.

Question: What happens during a betrothal process to the couple and to the rest of the kinship and community network? Does contemporary Episcopal practice give due respect to the ancient practice of betrothal? Does this practice still have relevance in our contemporary understanding of marriage?

b. Different historical periods interpreted the marriage ritual in different ways. Eastern and Teutonic cultures believing that the marriage rite dramatically changed and blessed both the husband and the wife, while Romans believing that the wedding day was in fact the bride's day.

Question: How do we still see this ancient question being played out in contemporary marriage practices? How does the concept of same-sex marriage further inform this ancient divergence of viewpoints?

c. For much of history, the expectation and necessity of formal, legal marriage was one left to those with power, status, and property. In our own day, we do not believe that economic or social status should have any impact on people's right to marry.

Question: How does this change in the Christian understanding of who can marry change our contemporary understanding of the nature and purposes of marriage?

d. Throughout history, access to legal marriage has been closely related to the right to give consent – a right directly related to one's ability to act and choose autonomously. Only those with the right to act autonomously could exercise the right to choose marriage. Often this has meant that those who were oppressed and subordinated in a patriarchal and colonial context could not decide their own lives. Access to marriage became a means of controlling the powerless in a society.

Question: Are there situations in contemporary society in which access to marriage is still being controlled by the powerful and privileged to the detriment of those with less power?

e. In much of the history of marriage, the decision to cohabit without the legal sanction of civil and religious authorities was a means of expressing suspicion and distrust for the institutions of the church and the state, choosing less formalized models of authority and validity.

Question: Is this still one of the reasons that so many couples in The Episcopal Church choose to cohabit rather than to marry today, or are there new reasons and rationales for cohabitation?

f. Since at least the time of Augustine, at various periods in history marriage has been understood as a sacramental rite. While The Episcopal Church acknowledges only two primary sacraments instituted by Christ (Baptism and Eucharist), The Episcopal Church also gives special honor to marriage as one of the historically recognized sacramental rites of the Church.

Question: Who is the primary actor in a sacramental rite, the Christian(s) or God?

Handout 3: Changing Norms in Contemporary Context

The cultural landscape continues to shift around many aspects of the institution of marriage — a shift evidenced by the statistics represented in the following data points illustrating examples of changing norms. Share these data points with participants and then discuss using the questions below.

1. Marriage as a precursor to childbirth is seen as a relic of the past by many young adults. From “Knot Yet: The National Marriage Project,” University of Virginia, 2011
2. In previous generations, marriage was seen as a cornerstone of launching into adulthood. Today, young adults are delaying marriage due to financial insecurity, fear of divorce, and a desire for career stability. *Ibid.*
3. Ninety percent of young adults feel they must be completely financially independent before they marry. *Ibid.*
4. The cohabitation rate of unmarried senior citizens is rising: up 50 percent since 2000. *Ibid.*
5. Sixty-five percent of all couples who eventually marry lived together before marriage. from Pew Research Study: “The Decline of Marriage and Rise of New Families,” 2010.
6. The vast majority of adults in their twenties (80 percent) see marriage as an “important part of their life plan.” “Knot Yet,” University of Virginia.
7. The “ideal” for marriage has shifted from providing economic security to finding a “soul mate” — often with idealistic and unmet expectations. *Ibid.*
8. Marriage remains the norm for adults with a college education and good incomes; markedly less prevalent for those with less education or economic stability. *Ibid.*
9. In the past 7 years, 35-40 percent of all marriages began with on-line dating. “Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Twenties,” Jeffrey Arnett; Oxford.
10. As of June 2014, 31 states prohibit same-sex marriage, 20 states and the District of Columbia allow same-sex marriage, and 47 percent of Episcopalians in 40 dioceses live in states or jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal. Office for Congregational Research, DFMS.
11. Two-thirds of all adults see living together as a necessary step to marriage. Cohabitation has become a routine substitute for marriage. Pew Research Study.
12. In 1960, two-thirds of all adults in their twenties were married. By 2008, that number was only 26 percent. *Ibid.*
13. Divorce rates leveled off in the US in 1980 to 45 percent of all marriages and has held steady for the past 35 years. For senior adults, the divorce rate has jumped 35 percent. “The All Or Nothing Marriage,” Eli J. Finkel, a Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University, published in the *New York Times*, 2014.

Discussion Questions:

- The changing norms around marriage may challenge the way some of us have experienced dating and marriage. How does your experience differ or align with these current trends?
- Are there trends that strike you as impacting the institution of marriage positively? Others negatively?
- Discuss the impact of larger societal issues reflected in these statistics (i.e. feminism; civil rights; marriage equality and economic justice movements).
- Given the influence of social media on the changing landscape of human interaction, how do you understand its impact on courtship and marriage?
- What opportunities or challenges do you believe these trends will represent for the Church in our care and concern for all human relationships?

Handout 4: Biblical and Theological Considerations and Questions

Each set of passages below — from the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage and from Scripture passages assigned for use in that celebration — highlights a key theme or themes inherent in the Church’s understanding of marriage. In small groups, take five minutes for each set, read through and savor the texts, and then reflect on the questions after each set of passages.

“...intended by God for their mutual joy ... to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.” (BCP 423, 427) “... for love is strong as death ...” (Song of Solomon 8:6) “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” (John 15:9) “[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:7-8)

How have you experienced the love of God in your life? In your relationships? What does it mean to “abide in love?” What helps you to do so?

“Established by God in creation ...” (BCP 423) “... not good that the man should be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)

What does it mean to be “alone”? What do these passages say to a newlywed couple? To a widow or widower? To a single person who feels called to a single life?

“intended by God ... for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity ... faithful ... as long as you both shall live ... to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health” (BCP 423, 424, 427) “live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us ... Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:2,21)

How have you experienced love in difficult times as well as happy times? How is mutual love played out in your life and in the lives of those you know?

FORMAT 2: Forums

This format provides resources for four 45-minute forums designed for use in a typical Sunday morning Christian Formation format or with existing groups (such as ongoing small groups or EfM groups.) Any or all of these sessions can be used as part of a series of classes or meetings or as one-time, stand-alone classes. Each handout is one or two pages long for easy distribution.

You may want to begin each session with the “Stories of Relationships” exercise described in Carry-On Conversations. This is not only a good ice-breaker, but also a way to help focus the conversation.

The first two resources follow the Describe/Listen/Reflect format and provide an opportunity to engage with the questions of what makes a marriage Christian, and the relationship between culture and marriage. The third resource is a Bible study on the passage from Ephesians that is the source for one of the dominant images in Christian marriage as a metaphor for the relationship between Christ and the Church. The final resource in this section offers an opportunity to examine the text of the opening to the marriage liturgy in the Anglican tradition.

FORUM 1: What Makes a Marriage Christian?

Describe

Many people get married in the courts with no religious ceremony. Vows of commitment are an integral part of civil and religious marriages. For those seeking God's blessing through ritual marriage in the Church, marriage rites also articulate values and obligations rooted in scripture and tradition. For example, The Blessing of a Civil Marriage (BCP 433) includes this charge to the couple:

N. and N., you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and the Church upon your marriage. I require, therefore, that you promise, with the help of God, to fulfill the obligations which Christian marriage demand.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (BCP, 423), declares that the covenant of marriage represents "the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church." It asks God to so bless "these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace."

Listen

Using the questions below, discover what others in your group understand and experience with regard to the obligations of marriage.

- Why seek the blessing of God? Why seek the blessing of the Church? Is one OK without the other? What power (importance) is in such blessings? How does the blessing impact a marriage?
- How have you seen married couples fulfill these obligations?
- How have you witnessed this in other relationships?

Reflect

As you end this time together, consider what you will take away from listening to others' understandings of marriage.

- What have you heard today that especially made you think?
- What is one thing you'll do differently in the next week as a result of this reflection?
- In what aspect of this conversation will you seek God's guidance through prayer?

FORUM 2: Marriage and Culture

Describe

The institution of marriage has been shifting throughout history and continues to shift in our culture. Since the 1980s, 45 percent of marriages end in divorce; children of divorced parents often delay marriage or may be reluctant to get married; people frequently cohabit prior to or instead of marrying; and marriage equality is becoming increasingly common.

Individuals respond to these shifts in a variety of ways. Within our Church, some seek to reclaim and reassert what they understand to be a traditional view of marriage. Others in our Church seek to address these issues by revising its practices, including its liturgies.

Listen

Using the questions below, discover what others in your community understand and experience with regard to these cultural shifts.

- What did previous generations of your family (e.g., grandparents, parents) teach you about marriage? How did they define marriage? What examples of marriage did they set?
- What shifts in marriage are you seeing in your community?
- What do you see as the benefits to marriage, if any? To marriage blessed by the Church?

Reflect

As you end this time together, consider what you will take away from listening to others' understandings of marriage.

- What have you heard today that especially made you think?
- What is one thing you'll do differently in the next week as a result of this reflection?
- In what aspect of this conversation will you seek God's guidance through prayer?

FORUM 3: Marriage and the Bible: A Bible Study

The following passage (Ephesians 5:1-2, 21-33, NRSV) is commended for use as a reading in the BCP “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.”

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,²⁰ and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.²² Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior.²⁴ Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word,²⁷ so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind — yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,³⁰ because we are members of his body.³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”³² This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.³³ Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Reflection questions

- In the 1928 revision of the marriage rite, The Episcopal Church removed the wife’s vow to “obey” her husband. How do you feel about this in relation to the biblical text? Is this a text you would want read or did have read at your own marriage? Why or why not?
- Verse 24 calls on wives to be “subject ... to their husbands” “just as the Church is subject to Christ.” How is the Church “subject” to Christ? As one’s body is to one’s head (vs 23)? What does that mean?
- How is mutual obedience (vs. 21, “Be subject to one another”) expressed in this passage? How do you understand it in your own relationship or marriage?
- The author sets up an analogy between Christ or Church and the organic Head or Body. In keeping with 1 Corinthians 12 (especially v 21: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ ”) What does this concept of organic unity say to you about marriage? Is the head of the body separate from the body?
- Verses 28-29 describe the wife as identical to the husband’s own body, on the analogy of Christ and his Body, the Church. What, if anything, does this say to you about gender in relation to the body?
- To what extent do you see verse 33 as an echo of Leviticus 19:18 (“... love your neighbor as yourself...”) included by Jesus in his Summary of the Law?
- Under Roman custom and law, the father of a family had almost unlimited authority over that family (*patria potestas*). In what way does a call for mutual submission and a husband’s responsibility to love his wife in a sacrificial and tender way represent a movement away from that patriarchal model?

FORUM 4: History of a Liturgical Fragment

This forum offers a comparison of the opening of the marriage liturgy in historical contexts dating from the Medieval English rite of Salisbury (Sarum) up through the 1979 BCP.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Sarum rite is the location: the couple stands with the minister for most of the liturgy at the entrance to the Church, entering it for the mass that follows and forming a part of the marriage rite. Note, however, that even our present BCP includes the option of celebrating marriage in a place other than a church.

As you compare the evolution of the marriage rite in the English/Anglican/Episcopal tradition, you'll note that the changes (both in terms of content and ordering) have been substantial, reflecting different attitudes and the prevailing "style" of liturgy.

One important feature of the marriage rites used in The Episcopal Church from its beginnings until the 1979 revision is the omission of the language about the "causes" or reasons for which marriage was said to have been instituted or established by God.

Note also the reordering of these reasons as well as the change in the sequence of references to creation, the metaphorical application of marriage to Christ and the Church, and the wedding at Cana.

Questions to consider

- What does the location of marriage "in the Church," as opposed to at its entrance, "in some proper house," or "another appropriate place" say to you?
- Would you feel your own marriage to be different if the location had been or were different?
- Does this say anything about the Church being used as a "venue" by people with little church connection? Or about any distinction between the sacred and the civil nature of marriage?
- What significance, if any, do you see in the reordering of the "causes" or reasons for marriage in the 1979 BCP? What about their absence from the marriage liturgy used in The Episcopal Church for almost 200 years (1789-1979)?

Sarum (tr. Hoskin)*	1662 BCP	BCP 1789/90	BCP 1892	BCP 1928	BCP 1979
<p>... the man and woman shall stand before the entrance of the church ...</p> <p>Behold, brethren, we have come hither in the sight of God, the angels, and all his saints in the presence of the church,</p> <p>to join together two bodies, of this man and of this woman,</p> <p>[at the altar during the mass:</p> <p>... when the beginnings of the universe were laid down...</p> <p>... so excellent a mystery, that thou signifyest the sacrament of Christ and the Church ...]</p> <p>[at the blessing after mass:</p> <p>... the six water jugs in Cana of Galilee ...]</p>	<p>... the persons to be married shall come into the body of the church ...</p> <p>DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together</p> <p>this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate,</p> <p>instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church;</p> <p>which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God;</p>	<p>... the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house ...</p> <p>DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this</p> <p>company, to join together</p> <p>this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate,</p> <p>commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be</p> <p>entered into unadvisedly or lightly,</p> <p>but</p> <p>reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.</p>	<p>... the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house ...</p> <p>DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this</p> <p>company to join together</p> <p>this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate,</p> <p>instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church:</p> <p>which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is</p> <p>commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men; and therefore is not by any to be</p> <p>entered into unadvisedly or lightly,</p> <p>but</p> <p>reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.</p>	<p>... the Persons to be married shall come into the Body of the church, or shall be ready in some proper house ...</p> <p>DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this</p> <p>company to join together</p> <p>this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honorable estate,</p> <p>instituted of God,</p> <p>signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church:</p> <p>which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is</p> <p>commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be</p> <p>entered into unadvisedly or lightly,</p> <p>but</p> <p>reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.</p>	<p>... the persons to be married ... assemble in the church</p> <p>or some other appropriate place ...</p> <p>Dearly beloved: we have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony.</p> <p>The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God at creation,</p> <p>and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.</p>

Sarum (tr. Hoskin)*	1662 BCP	BCP 1789/90	BCP 1892	BCP 1928	BCP 1979
	duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.				The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God
[<i>at the blessing of the wife during mass:</i> May she be rich in children ... and see the sons of her sons all the way to the third and fourth generation ...]	First, It was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name. Secondly, It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body. Thirdly, It was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.				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 and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accord with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

* The Sarum liturgy has a short prologue that differs substantially from the 1662 version. However, other portions of the Sarum liturgy contain allusions similar to those in the 1662 prologue, and they are included in brackets, with an indication of where they fall in the liturgy.

FORMAT 3: Study Groups

Read and discuss essays found in Appendix 1 of the Blue Book Report to General Convention 2015 of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage.

These study questions pertain specifically to particular essays on marriage that we have produced. You may use these study questions for individual or small groups or parish- or diocesan-wide forums. These questions may be used with any of our essays.

The essays in Appendix 1 of the Blue Book report are:

- A Biblical and Theological Framework for Thinking about Marriage
- Christian Marriage as Vocation
- A History of Christian Marriage
- Marriage as a Rite of Passage
- The Marriage Canons: History and Critique
- Agents of the State: A Question for Discernment
- Changing Trends and Norms in Marriage

Notes to the group facilitator:

1. This design is based on a 45-minute group discussion.
2. Ask people to read the essay(s) prior to the group meeting.
3. Because there are several essays in the Blue Book documents, each varying in length, you may want to study one essay per meeting. If you choose to discuss all essays at one session allow two-three hours.
4. It may be helpful to individuals and to your group discussion process to ask people to do questions 1-4 individually, writing down their answers prior to the full group discussion.

Questions:

1. What are two or three points in the essay that stood out for you?
2. How do these points affirm, challenge, or enlarge your personal understanding of marriage?
3. What do you think is the significance of this essay for you, your church, your community, your diocese or The Episcopal Church in the U.S.?
4. How has your understanding of marriage been changed by reading this essay? What will you do about it?
5. What are possible next steps for you, your church, and The Episcopal Church?
6. What can you — or your church or diocese — do to advance the discussion of the points in this essay?

Note: The essay on A History of Marriage contains its own discussion questions at the end of the text, which are more specific to its content. The facilitator may use either set of questions for discussion when considering that essay.