

BECOMING A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

How Grace Episcopal Church and Grace St. Paul's Church evolved into liberal Christianity, 1982-2008

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Prologue

Pilgrim Souls is a wonderful account of the history Grace Episcopal Church, beginning in the 19th century, leading up to the merger with St. Paul's Episcopal Church in 1991, and the creation of the new Grace St. Paul's parish. Author Kay Bigglestone's research of church documents was very thorough. Yet there was one aspect of parish history that received only passing attention in *Pilgrim Souls*. I think that Kay knew that the official documents had disappointed her, had failed to yield information on a most striking aspect of our history. That was the transformation of a middle-of-the-road parish into a cutting-edge progressive organization challenging the assumptions and comfort of much of the Episcopal Church.

The information Kay would have needed simply wasn't in the documents. The changes weren't matters that the Vestry would have been asked to approve, and they weren't likely to be noted in newsletters. The transitions that were to become so obvious began quietly, out of the limelight, in ways that did not require vestry decisions or parish-wide discussions until about 1999 when the parish voted on becoming a Welcoming Congregation. An account of that part of our history should be recorded while some of those involved are still able to do so. What if, in fifty years' time, someone begins to ask questions?

In the 1980s, my friends George Price and Bruce Anderson and I found ourselves swimming in the deepest water and strongest currents of change. That is a retrospective view, and I don't think that any of us truly understood how our participation in the affairs of the parish might play out. Our rector, Jack Potter, understood much better.

What follows isn't a researched history; that isn't ever going to be possible given the lack of formal sources. Rather, it is a personal memoir of a wonderful and challenging chapter of my life that turned out to have implications far beyond my own spiritual growth. It covers the period between my arrival in Tucson in 1982, and the retirement of our rector Gordon McBride in 2008. Others may have different or complementary perspectives, and I would encourage them to record what they remember. I can be sure as I write this at the age of 68 that some of my memories have faded, especially recollections of what happened in a particular year. I have not chosen in all cases to arrange the material in a strictly historical sequence. My memories emerge as a series of overlapping narratives, each of which I felt should be brought to completion before beginning the next. I have allowed myself to add an interesting or amusing story as an aside here and there.

First impressions

It was the first weekend of May, 1982, and I was driving a university car around the north and east sides of the University of Arizona. The Geosciences Department, my new employer, had kindly arranged the vehicle so that I could get myself organized with an apartment and a car of my own. In addition to

those, I was on the lookout for an Episcopal church, which I thought might provide some continuity with my Anglican past in Australia. As a longer-term goal, I was also in search of ways to make a thorough break with another aspect of my past, by finding a way into gay society. I didn't anticipate any progress on that front during my Saturday morning drive.

I was exploring with very little idea of the layout of the city, and consequently, I found myself in some neighborhoods with no apartments or car yards. However, I did find an Episcopal church, to which my attention seemed drawn. It was as though someone tapped me on the shoulder and said, "That's the church you should go to." So, a few weeks later, on the Sunday before Pentecost, I found Grace Episcopal Church again and walked through the door.

I sat towards the back on the Gospel side. In later years, as I considered how to welcome newcomers, I was told that impressions gained in the first few minutes will decide whether a newcomer returns. My first impression was that there was a large pipe organ (I could see the console, though I was puzzled as to where the pipes might be), and that was a definite attraction. My second impression was abrupt and so powerful that I was astounded. The organist came to sit at the console, and as he was moving into place, his eyes and mine met briefly across the length of the nave. To me, the contact was electric, an unmistakable experience of gaydar. Clearly, I had actually been making some progress towards finding gay society in Tucson that first Saturday! I knew immediately that I would not be alone in this parish. I met the organist, Evan Mauk, a few weeks later at a gay bar. The meeting was no surprise for me, but a definite surprise for him when I introduced myself, saying that I knew he was the organist at Grace Episcopal Church. He never gave me his reaction to the meeting of eyes; perhaps he hadn't noticed anything. The account of my first impressions would be quite lacking without mention of the people who welcomed me after the service: Karen McVean, and the Henwoods, Bill and Joan. Their kindness helped me to feel that I had begun to find home in my new city and country. The following Sunday, Pentecost, was the patronal feast of the parish, complete with a grand pot-luck feast. Even though I had brought no food, the Henwoods insisted that I stay for the meal.

Settling in

My new parish was well attended (probably 200-300 present on a Sunday morning), and middle-of-the-road in matters of belief and liturgical practice. There were two Sunday services, one traditional, by-the-book, and the other featuring guitar music in a *Godspell* mode. I didn't really like the latter service, though I would tolerate it because it gave me a chance to meet some of the younger adult members of the parish. I was encouraged to join a young adults' group. It seemed that the parish was not taking any forefront positions on social issues. Later, I would learn from George and Bruce that there had been one stirring in such a direction, a few years before my arrival. The former rector, Bill Weeks, had discovered that the organist at the time was gay, and was considering whether it was his rectorial duty to terminate the organist's employment. The four Link sisters marched into his office and instructed him not to do any such thing. Helene Link, a retired milliner who attended church wearing wonderful headgear, was later to become an honorary great aunt in my estimation. I had left several elderly great aunts and a grandmother behind in Australia, and Helene filled that void in my life.

I stayed with Grace Episcopal Church, but somewhat tentatively at first, despite the promising early impressions. I was not at all sure how being gay would be received by the congregation in general or by the clergy, so I kept quiet for a long time, well over a year if I remember correctly. I discovered that Father Dan Ferry, the priest who presided at the first services I attended, was an interim priest, and

A threatened species

The older gay men who were so threatened by us included one, Mr. X, whom I knew about. We were never to discuss being gay. I still remember Mr. X each time I bear one of the handsome silver chalices, inlaid with coral and turquoise, he gave to the parish not long before he died. I believe that another, Mr. Y, revealed himself tangentially to me in my role as lay Eucharistic minister. I had the privilege of taking communion to him for several of his last years. This dear gentleman, who had never been married, had spent many years living with a family and acting as an adopted grandfather to the children. He trusted the family to the point of allowing the father access to his finances as mobility became more difficult. The father eventually ceded to temptation and gutted Mr. Y's retirement account. Left with nothing but Social Security income, he finished his days in a very plain assisted care facility run by a couple who had resolved to provide lodgings for elders with limited funds. They had good hearts and did a creditable job with the resources available. Despite the circumstances that had placed him there, Mr. Y was a cheery, positive presence in a home filled with disadvantaged people who desperately needed cheer. In 1998, my husband James and I held a commitment ceremony at Grace St. Paul's, and invited Mr. Y. His health by this stage was in serious decline, and there was no real expectation that he would attend. He responded to our invitation by commenting: "Please don't change the rules." I could sympathize with his position after a life lived according to the possibilities available to him, but changing the rules was exactly what I had in mind.

about four weeks after I arrived, a new rector appeared. He was Father Jack Potter, a man I would come to think of as a remarkable influence in my life. I kept my distance for a long time, during which I came to know George Price and Bruce Anderson as fellow gay men. It appears that George and Bruce both made appointments, quite by coincidence, with Father Jack on the same Saturday morning early in Jack's rectorship. In both cases, the appointment was for the purpose of coming out. Jack dutifully never breathed a word of what he thought about that. He kept a careful eye on who was associating with whom in his parish, and so I came to be identified by the company I was keeping. George eventually told me that Jack would most likely invite himself to lunch at the University, and that the subject of my being gay was very likely to be discussed. That day came very soon, and I was quite ready to spare Jack the trouble of bringing the subject up himself.

Setting an example

What followed was quite remarkable for me. Jack had no intention of letting me or other gay people sit anonymously in the back of the church. He had a vision, and a place in it for any who could cope! Bruce, George and I found ourselves delegated to duties. Jack had also asked a woman of our generation to participate in his plan, but she felt unable. We weren't the only

gay people in the parish; he later told us that he knew of certain older men, and that we, by being willing to work with the parish openly, "scared the pants off them." He said this by way of encouragement to us – we should seize the moment! Father Jack regarded us as parish members who might be able to bring about change by taking our share of ownership in the parish community while being open about exactly who we were. Thus began a long period of entirely unanticipated spiritual growth for me (and for Bruce and George, I'm sure), and years of unanticipated spiritual growth for the parish. Bruce and George had been members of Grace Church since childhood and were therefore well known. George had been married and had two children. Bruce had remained single. He was given the task of running in the election for Junior Warden, and he was elected. George was asked to give a

Sunday morning talk about being gay. As for me, the gay man less known to the parish, I collected two jobs. First, I was asked to teach Sunday School, and second, to be a member of the Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality. The former task was a challenge indeed – not so much for me, but for those in the parish who would need to come to terms with a gay man interacting with the children. The second would open me to the wonderful intellectual ferment of the Episcopal Church.

George's task was a daunting one indeed. Jack wanted him to tackle that challenge, because George was well known to the parish, and had married a member of the congregation who was also a staff member. The small group of gay men at Grace Church (we numbered five by that point) all attended, and sat together except for George who was in the speaker's position at the front; the parish hall had standing room only. George spoke eloquently, and answered questions capably. One of my striking memories of the occasion is of looking around at the audience. I happened to catch a glimpse of an older lady who was looking in the direction of our cluster of gay men. As the truth revealed itself to her, I saw her mouth literally drop open. As I was leaving, one of the married men asked me if I, too, was gay. Thinking fast about what George had just gone through, I found myself able to answer in the affirmative – and to feel truly happy about doing so.

Sunday School

To have a gay man teaching Sunday School was a defiant gesture in the eyes of conservative Episcopalians in the 1980s. The age-old but misconceived fear of gay men molesting children always lurks somewhere in the background. Nevertheless, I plunged enthusiastically into the job, which I was to keep for almost 10 years. New curricular materials would appear continually, so that teachers could keep a class running with minimal creative effort. I liked to create my own activities alongside the curriculum, even from the beginning; I particularly favored story-telling and art. As the years passed, I found I liked teaching the 11 to 13-year-old class best. They were actively discovering how to have meaningful discussions about stories and life. I felt particularly honored when one of the boys, whose father did not live at the boy's usual home, asked me to show him how to knot a necktie. At just that time, someone from the parish whispered in his mother's ear that there "were gay people teaching Sunday School." She told me of the gossip, and also that she had informed the person that the teacher concerned would be just the person she would trust to show her son how to make the necktie knot.

In due course, I found myself running the whole Sunday School for a year, after our assisting priest at the time, Jessica Hatch, took a job in the diocesan office. I was to keep the operation going until a new assisting priest arrived. One of my main functions was recruiting volunteer teachers. There were never quite enough of them to staff classes with two teachers each, and they weren't in many cases happy to continue very long with the task. We finally allocated one of the classes to a paid teacher from outside the parish. The new teacher did the job, but I did not feel entirely comfortable with her. I discovered why in an explicit way when I looked into her classroom one day and noticed a map of the Bible Lands on the wall. It had been printed with a "probable location of the garden of Eden." That was emblematic of exactly what I didn't want to be teaching the children in Sunday School. I felt strongly that I had plenty of support from both clergy and laity on that position.

I was developing some firm ideas about Sunday School education, and one of them was that my class of 11 to 13 year olds should not shy away from discussing the sexual/social content of certain stories of

scripture at some level. Why was the Annunciation such a difficulty for Mary? What was going on with Potiphar's wife? I also resolved that compassion – in particular for their peers at middle school, where everyday life sounded rough to me -- should be taught in an unforgettable way. So I began work on my own curriculum for about six weeks of classes. In the first class, we spent a long and intense time listing all of the words they had heard hurled abusively at other children. The clearly-stated understanding was that we could all mention those words when we were discussing the words and their meanings, rather than using them as insults. The children produced what I regarded as a very comprehensive list that I wrote on the board. We discussed them, word by word. I doubt that any of the children was able to listen to the goings-on at school in the same way afterwards. Another class that worked well was the discussion of physical disability. In fact, it wasn't just a discussion; there was a practical component. I asked them to choose a disability, and to make their way upstairs into the sanctuary for the Eucharist (where the congregation had been advised that there was no joking involved) with the disability imposed. For instance, one had a blindfold, another was in a wheelchair, and another had the use of only one leg and crutches. Some of the classes worked better than others. I would have liked to polish that curriculum with subsequent offerings, but it didn't happen. I was soon to be diverted into other aspects of parish leadership.

Sexuality would occasionally crop up in unexpected ways. My necktie student had surplus energy, so I gave him a project – to read and think for a few weeks about the story of Joseph in Genesis, and then talk about the story to the class. I was perfectly prepared to enter into a discussion of the role of Potiphar's wife. The day came, and he surprised me by opening Genesis to the story of Onan. He had clearly been reading widely! I promised him that we could discuss Onan after class, if he would return to the story of Joseph in the meantime. He didn't ever accept my offer. A considerably less amusing instance of budding awareness of sexuality arose from another boy student. He was a problem. He was very intelligent, but was using his abilities to hone his skills in manipulation. Furthermore, his single mother was using church as free child-minding opportunity; she would drop him at Sunday School and drive off for a non-church break. One morning, I had asked one of our newly-arrived Sudanese Lost Boys to tell his story to the class. I introduced the class, touching this boy on the shoulder as I gave his name. His response was "Don't touch me." I had a fairly clear understanding about where this would eventually be leading, given the boy's behavior problems, but I still waited a while before discussing it with clergy. When I did, the clergy resolved upon telling the boy's mother that her son was no longer welcome at our Sunday School.

Another firm idea in my mind was that any effort to counteract the hyper-stimulation of the children's daily lives was worth pursuing. I would try having the class sit in silence for a while after we had returned to the classroom following Communion. Two minutes was the best we ever managed. One day, I pointed out to the class that the Men's Spirituality Group would sit in silence for twenty minutes. At the end of the class, I asked what the children had learned that day. A girl responded immediately "That the Men's Spirituality Group does very boring things."

The Diocesan Human Sexuality Commission

Father Jack had another project in mind for me, at the Diocesan level. The Triennial Convention of the Episcopal Church had mandated the formation of Diocesan Commissions to foster the study of human sexuality in the context of the church. Our Presiding Bishop, Edmund Browning, had asked the church to

find another room in which we could have frank discussions of sexuality in a spiritual context. Jack was convener of the Arizona Commission during my first year of membership, and I was to be the gay member. I now see that project as the foundation of a new spiritual life for me, as well as a decisive step in the evolution of the parish.

I no longer remember many of the details of what the Commission did, but I do recall that the other members were most interested in what I had to say. We were meeting during the mid-80s, when one of the glaring issues arising from sexuality was the AIDS epidemic. We sought wording for a public statement on AIDS, and I was able to address that statement to “gay and straight people alike.” We considered workshops led by outside experts. I went home from one meeting with homework: read a book edited by one potential leader. I found his contribution to the book to be negatively conservative and quite unsatisfactory. On the other hand, I found a chapter by another author, Ann Ulanov, on living in spiritual tension between alternative ideas, to be uplifting and a basis of much of my subsequent spiritual growth. The Commission heeded my response to the book. Instead, we resolved upon inviting Bill Countryman, Professor of New Testament Theology at the Episcopal Seminary in Berkeley. Bill would provide me with further strong spiritual foundation.

Not the audience she anticipated

Bill Countryman was at peak productivity and was producing a stream of books at the time. The books ranged from thorough and academic to engaging and pastoral. He had sent me a copy of *Good News of Jesus – Reintroducing the Gospel*. At the time, I was directing adult spiritual formation classes. I discussed the book with Jessica Hatch, our assistant priest. She was most enthusiastic about it, and wanted to summarize it for a class, but not in too much detail, she said, because it provided so many good ideas for sermons. We agreed upon a Sunday morning for her presentation. In the meantime, Bill announced that he would like to visit Tucson for some hiking and socializing. I will never forget Jessica’s reaction when I informed her that Bill would be at her presentation. Of course, she did a creditable job.

Bill was to give workshops in Phoenix, and a year later, in Tucson. He became a friend whose writings, at once erudite and pastoral, have laid a firm spiritual foundation for me. In the workshops, he outlined the material in his book *Dirt, Greed, and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and Their Implications for Today*. The book is a thoroughly-researched examination of what the Bible says about sexuality on the context of Jewish purity and property law. A principal conclusion of the work is that the conventional simplistic, negative attitudes to homosexuality, putatively based on Scripture, are not rigorously founded. Bill’s presentation in Phoenix was not without controversy. A small group of conservative Episcopalians from Phoenix was there with the intention of making noise and trouble; Dr. Countryman was an admitted homosexual, so what could

he have to say of value on the topic of sexuality? Bill was very direct about putting such people in their place; a professor is unlikely to think much of heckling from people who have done little study in his field. I was very proud when David Wachter, one of our Tucson group attending the Phoenix workshop, told one of the hecklers to keep quiet. While Bill was in Tucson, he led an educational hour at the church of St. Philips in the Hills. A woman who was clearly most upset with the material questioned him from the audience about why gay and lesbian people were so anti-family. Bill responded immediately that most were not anti-family, and that the questioner might consider the Gospel reports on the attitude of Jesus to his own family.

Parish Workshops

Another important development that arose from the Commission was quite unplanned. I was in Phoenix for a weekend of activities, and the rector of the Church of the Epiphany had offered me one of his guest bedrooms. Another guest bedroom in the house was occupied that night by Bill Maxwell, Dean of St. Mark's Cathedral in Salt Lake City. We had an evening of conversation to ourselves. St. Mark's was an island of liberal religion in a sea of Mormon conservatism, and as a result was a magnet for gay and lesbian people who had been rejected by the Mormon church and community. Dean Bill described how a group of the gay men had put together a set of meetings for the broader congregation, with the aim of communicating some of their experience of sexuality and community. He considered their efforts a great success and was clearly hoping that I might initiate something similar at Grace St. Paul's. His efforts weren't lost on me. That conversation seems to have been one of the decisive moments in changing Grace Church from the perspective of the laity. Out of it grew a five-meeting program that we called "Finding Another Room" in which several gay and lesbian members of the parish invited anyone who would join us for frank discussion of aspects of sexuality. We offered the program three times, once at Grace Church and twice after the parish merger that recast us as Grace St. Paul's Church. About 70 parish members participated. That substantial fraction of the congregation compared in size and composition with the group who later met during one Lent in the mid-1990s to brainstorm the future of the parish. We leaders were impressed with the number of elderly folk who took part; they appeared more comfortable than members of the generation that was actively raising families. What was important was having a nuclear group of gay

Comparing the Churches in the USA and Australia

The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Australia are fellow members of the Anglican Communion, but are very different institutions. The Australian church in the 1960s and 1970s must have thought it was still dominant in numbers and influence. There was a time when the majority of the Australian population would have claimed affiliation. The Australian church was less intellectual in its approach to educating clergy and laity, and was lacking in financial resources. Its principal province decided to persecute gay people, despite being in Sydney, the most progressive city in the country, with its vibrant gay community. The church in Australia began to wake up as the edifice was crumbling around it. In contrast, the Episcopal Church had long since relinquished any pretense to dominance in numbers or political influence in the USA. Stripped of the temptations of power, it focused on the spiritual life of those 2.5 million who remained. The American church maintained an intellectual approach to the education of clergy and produced some significant scholarship and an environment in which many people have found spiritual sustenance they had not anticipated elsewhere. Had I stayed in Australia, I might easily have wearied of my involvement with the Anglican Church there. When I returned to Tasmania, I would go to church (a hospital chapel dedicated to St. Paul, and built on the site of old St. Paul's church that my mother's great-grandfather had designed, and which had been demolished to allow for the hospital expansion) with my mother, but I would find the experience static, and tiresome in many respects. Not everyone in Tasmania is resigned to a dying church, however. In 2019, I attended the much larger church of St. John in Launceston and discovered an old school acquaintance who had undertaken much of the reading recommended for me in the Episcopal Church.

and lesbian participants who would speak up. The experience was not automatically transferrable to other parishes. I recommended our curriculum to a priest with a suburban parish in Phoenix, but when he tried it the gay participants just wouldn't talk much.

We were to have another successful lay-led workshop on sexuality later in the 1990s.

Mutual permission: clergy and laity

Both Jack Potter and Gordon McBride (rector of St. Paul's Church before the merger, and subsequently of the merged Grace St. Paul's parish) were ready to lead a congregation into new territory that one might call liberal or progressive. Their progressive interests encompassed liturgy, social outreach and congregational diversity. Father Jack needed to initiate the process and saw the opportunity I have described above. The rest of the congregation might or might not have followed; some didn't. I didn't completely understand the roles George, Bruce and I were playing at the time. We were in effect creating a new situation for the congregation, encouraging it to go along with Father Jack's progressive ideas. I believe that is what Father Jack meant when he told the Integrity group (see below) that they were important people for the Church. Father Gordon was undertaking a similar exercise in the much smaller parish of St. Paul's.

In the Diocese of Arizona, Jack Potter and Gordon McBride were not alone in wishing to lead the Church in such new directions. Many of our clergy had received a liberal seminary education that led them far beyond what their eventual congregations would accept. This was made abundantly clear to me by the rector of a small congregation in the Phoenix metropolitan area. Grace St. Paul's was hosting a weekend workshop led by Bishop John Spong, and had invited other clergy to a lunch gathering to meet him. I, too, attended in order to welcome our guests. I found myself sitting next to the Phoenix rector, and our conversation turned to what his congregation would think of the gathering with Bishop Spong. He told me that he had had to attend in secret, for fear of his congregation's negative reaction. I felt very sad for him and was reminded that my parish was not at all typical of the Episcopal Church. Simply having a clergy person who wished to lead the laity in the progressive direction was not sufficient. Clergy and laity each had to give the other permission for that kind of change. The dance was a complicated one, not learned quickly.

The Integrity Chapter

In 1984, George, his partner Robert, Bruce and I met with Father Brian Way, the assistant priest at the time, at George's and Robert's apartment to discuss how we might form a group for gay Episcopalians in Tucson. Father Brian persuaded us to affiliate with the national group, Integrity, which describes itself as "gay and lesbian Episcopalians and their friends." To begin, while there weren't enough of us to make a viable chapter of Integrity, we decided to try participating in the activities of Dignity, which is a similar organization for Roman Catholics. Eventually we accrued about 10 potential members, and announced that we would form our own group, the Tucson Chapter of Integrity. The silence from the Dignity folk was overwhelming. The match really hadn't been very good, because our relationship with Episcopal Church hierarchy was evolving in a very different way from anything the Roman church could have developed at the time.

A Tucson Chapter had been tried previously but had persisted only briefly. Our second attempt lasted about a decade, thanks to a conjunction of multiple dedicated leaders and supportive clergy in every

Tucson parish. George, Bruce and I alternated in occupying the Convenorship. We even had a newsletter, the *Desert Rose*, for several years. The newsletter opened our eyes to the persistent strain of hatred and opposition to gay people in the community. On one occasion, I went to an Alphagraphics shop to have the newsletter copied. The attendant at the counter pretended he didn't know whose the original copy was, and showed it to other customers in the store in order to embarrass me. That was the last time I ever used the services of that company. On another occasion, George mailed between 50 and 100 copies of an issue at the Sun Station post office. None of them was delivered, and the post office found it too difficult to investigate the matter or refund the postage cost. Subsequently, we split the mailings between post offices.

One of the main activities of our Chapter was a monthly Eucharist held on Saturday evenings, followed by a shared meal. We made a point of visiting every parish in Tucson, as a way of introducing ourselves to the city-wide community of Episcopalians. In that way, we came to know all the rectors in Tucson. At times, we would gather at the homes of members. On two occasions, we met with our bishops. On the retirement of Father Charles Ingram (rector of St. Andrew's Parish), Bishop Joe Heistand attended a celebratory dinner. Our chapter was pleased to present each of them with a framed document thanking them for their support. On an earlier occasion, we met with Bishop Wesley Frensdorff over scones and tea at Grace Church. The meeting was wonderful and supportive. It was not long afterward that we were deeply saddened by news of his death in a plane crash. From time to time, we would travel further afield, for instance to visit the Phoenix Chapter; I recall meetings in churches in Phoenix and in Coolidge, and many visits to Superior.

The National leadership would occasionally ask the local chapters what activities they were undertaking as ministry. For chapters lacking ideas, the leaders suggested ministry to people with AIDS. Neither George nor I favored that direction as an activity for our chapter, because we were both already deeply involved with the Tucson AIDS Project in individual capacities. AIDS ministry at smaller scale was to lead us in an unanticipated and most rewarding direction, however. Roger and David, a gay couple, were living in Superior, a small mining town about 100 miles north of Tucson. They had joined St. John's Episcopal Church in Globe, another mining town, and so knew the retired priest of the parish, Peter Boes. He also lived in Superior. Their life in Superior became untenable following an AIDS diagnosis and a breach of confidentiality at a doctor's office in Florence. After a brick was thrown through one of

their windows, they consulted with Father Boes about their future. He decided to bring them to Tucson, to Grace St. Paul's. Bruce happened to be at the church that afternoon. The contact he made grew into a ministry of visiting in Superior as Father Boes became housebound through old age and illness. Our chapter's involvement with Father Boes is the basis of a wonderful set of stories that need to be told elsewhere. Father Boes encouraged us greatly as an Integrity Chapter, to the extent of announcing that he would leave the Chapter a sum of money to help with its continuance. He was therefore most disappointed when I had to inform him of the chapter's impending demise.

Jack Potter proposed that we should take our message to the Annual Convention of the Diocese of Arizona. I can remember attending three, and they were reality checks. Not everyone in the Diocese was ready to embrace the movement. For the first convention we attended, in Phoenix, we prepared a short video presentation of a Saturday evening worship service led by Father Robert Williams at St. Andrew's Church, Tucson. We played this from a table situated in the outer angle of a bend in the passage leading to the convention hall. Apart from the video, my main memory is of clergy and others bumping into the corner on the other side in their haste to get past our table. A year later, in Prescott, we presented a poster on welcoming gay teenagers. My main memory is of arriving in the room in

An encounter with a bogeyman

In Arizona and other dioceses, a group called Episcopalians for Revelation, Renewal and Reformation (EURRR) formed with the purpose of opposing liberal trends in the Episcopal Church, notably the prospect of accepting gay and lesbian people. I have never understood their three R's as they appeared to. Their leader had clearly resolved to make an impression at Diocesan Convention. I was not attending as a convention delegate, so I was free to staff tables for both Integrity and the Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality. The EURRR noticed and took exception to my presence at both tables. While I was at the Integrity table he confronted me, saying: "I thought I saw you at the Human Sexuality table a little while ago." His tone conveyed that I would not be a suitable representative of human sexuality. By this stage, a group of people was clustering around to support me. I don't know where the words came from, but I quickly rejoined: "When I'm over here, I'm being gay, and when I'm over there, I'm being sexual." The circle of would-be supporters dissolved into laughter, and the EURRR man had no alternative but to leave and write a bitter letter of complaint to the Bishop, who did nothing.

which display tables were placed. I found a lady who seemed to be an organizer and asked her where Integrity's table was to be. She reacted with high anxiety, as though her worst fears had just come home to haunt her. Another year on, the convention was in Tucson, at the Holiday Inn. This time, I had two jobs: the Integrity table, and the table of the Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality, with results described in the accompanying text box.

We had run the chapter intentionally as an inclusive group, and our wish was to set a better example than the ones we gay people were frequently shown. It was probably inevitable that we would eventually find ourselves with a problem member. Member Z was a problem indeed, with aspirations for ordained ministry, but a need for control and a flair for manipulation in order to gain it. The last year of the chapter's existence was unpleasant for all of us. Bruce, George and I announced that we were no longer willing to take on the Convenor's role and that if nobody else stepped forward, we would dissolve the chapter. As all of this unfolded, I had a conversation with Father Gordon. He asked whether I could give the chapter up without feeling personally diminished. I found that I

could; I had also begun to weary of manipulative attitudes coming from the National leadership of Integrity. Perhaps it was no longer necessary to have an Integrity chapter in Tucson. In the parishes that we attended, being gay or lesbian was no longer the contentious issue it had been a decade prior. It was time to find something new to do.

Communication with Bishop Shahan

When Robert Shahan became Bishop of Arizona in 1992, he embarked on a series of “town hall” meetings across the Diocese. He seemed to feel the need to command rather than listen at the meeting held at Grace St. Paul’s, and his position did not sound welcoming to gay and lesbian people. This did not impress Member Z, who responded with some aggressive questioning that led to a public argument. For me, the legalistic and cautious substance of Bishop Shahan’s initial approach undercut the evangelism that Grace St. Paul’s had been successfully extending, not just to gay and lesbian people, but also to many allies. The issues arising from the meeting eventually transmuted into the responsibility of the whole Integrity chapter. Rev. Jessica Hatch insisted that some of us go to speak to Bishop Shahan about the matter. Jim Lemmon and I made an appointment and set off for Phoenix in a state of trepidation. The meeting began stiffly, with Bishop Shahan explaining the difficulties of establishing himself as a new bishop. I was thinking that the meeting was turning out to be nothing but a lecture when Bishop Shahan abruptly asked what we would have liked to happen at the town hall meeting. Time suddenly stood still; a voice inside me was saying “This is the chance you wanted – go ahead and say what you think!” That’s what I did, but more diplomatically than Member Z. I said that I would have preferred to hear that all would be welcomed into the Episcopal Church. He heard me and responded just as I wished in the next Diocesan newsletter. A decade and a personal health crisis later, he was a different man. With retirement impending, he decided that he needed to hold a very different set of meetings in every church of the Diocese. At those meetings, he announced that in future the Church in the Diocese would allow the blessing of all same-gender relationships and that sexual orientation would not be an obstacle to ordination in the Diocese. I was so moved by the contrast that I told him publicly that I knew how difficult it must be to make such announcements across the Diocese, and that I was certain that he had the support of GSP for his proposals. The audience applauded, and he responded, “Bless you for saying that, Chris.”

A cycle in Parish leadership.

Developing a sound spiritual relationship to money is a challenge. I doubt that I am the only parish member ever to have struggled with that. A symptom of a poor spiritual relationship with money in my case was a deep aversion to being involved with any financial aspects of parish leadership. My aversion evaporated abruptly one Sunday morning in the mid-1990s when I happened to pass Henry Dirdadian in the undercroft. He suggested that I would be a suitable member of the Stewardship Committee, which took responsibility for encouraging financial commitment to the parish. A conversion happened then and there as I realized that I could indeed handle the task.

There was a considerable amount to learn. I need to acknowledge Father Tom Murdoch, a retired priest who was attending Grace St. Paul’s, for his help with the spiritual underpinnings. I had not up to that

point understood certain currents in American Christianity, notably Prosperity Gospel, a set of beliefs that had no place at Grace St. Paul's. In addition, it was clear that I needed to be able to read the parish's financial reports. By the end of a couple of years, I had made sufficient progress in the latter direction to give the spoken presentation at the annual Stewardship Dinner. That year's Stewardship Committee felt it had made progress in raising the annual level of giving to about \$180,000.

This public display of a certain level of understanding of parish finances was to have consequences. At that time, the parish needed a new treasurer. Normally, the vestry would look for a parishioner who worked in financial administration; apparently, no such person emerged. I was approached by Jane Pundt one Sunday morning. She asked if I would consider being treasurer, saying that she thought I would be able to do it. I could not have taken on keeping professional records because I had no training in accountancy, but I could conceivably act as the responsible officer, signing checks, transferring funds, knowing what was happening and making reports to the vestry. The parish employed a professional book-keeper, Patti Morrison, who could maintain the records properly and use modern accounting software. Would I ever consider doing the job again? Not under circumstances like those. We were about five years into the merger of Grace and St. Paul's Churches, and we had sold the St. Paul's property for \$700,000. We had employed an Associate Rector at relatively high salary and we had debt from a re-building project. Giving was falling considerably short of covering operating costs. On the more positive side, we had received three bequests that together made up a very useful sum. Part of the money had designated uses, but most of it was available for use as needed. I resolved, vestry approving, to tackle three needs: paying off most of our building debt; aiding the rector in establishing equity in a house; and funding a set of small, visible improvement projects for which I solicited suggestions.

My function as I understood it was to see that bills and salaries were paid, not to see that we had enough income. The latter was the vestry's responsibility. I found myself transferring tens of thousands of dollars from our investments to operating funds, while making it very clear to the vestry and clergy that I was having to do so. I also found myself calculating how long the investments would last at the existing rate of withdrawal, and the answer was not very many years. I felt highly stressed after each transfer from investments. The nightmare came to an end (for me) when Father Gordon asked me to become Senior Warden, beginning 1999.

During the preceding two years, I had been working on a project suggested to me by Dottie, an influential member of Integrity. She visited Grace St. Paul's for Sunday worship, and asked me why Grace St. Paul's had not yet declared itself a Welcoming Church, Integrity's formal designation for congregations that stated publicly their desire to welcome gay and lesbian members. The answer was that we clearly were such a congregation, but just hadn't made the move to designate ourselves. I wrote a position piece for the rector. He published it in the parish newsletter and secured the vestry's approval for a year of study. The year was to culminate in a parish-wide vote at the 1999 Annual Meeting, when my appointment as Senior Warden would also be announced. The Welcoming Parish proposal was adopted enthusiastically. We placed a tile-mosaic rainbow flag on the wall of our cloister as a visible sign of welcome, and we often fly a rainbow flag from our flagpole. It became common for most parish members to wear name-badges with rainbow bands as a sign of welcome to newcomers who might feel shy about their sexual orientation.

Commented [CE1]: Bruce, can you remember her surname? White?

I was to serve as Senior Warden for two years. I led vestry meetings, put out political “fires” (some of which the administration never found out about), and did my part in holding the parish together during the rector’s sabbatical leave in England. The appointment had a problematic aspect however; the project I might have liked to bring to completion during my tenure achieved completion on the day I was appointed. The next urgent project that emerged was one for which I was not the ideal hands-on leader.

An unintended consequence

Bill Countryman likes to speak of jokes of the Holy Spirit. What happened following our Welcoming Church designation constituted a fine example of the genre. Our declaration seemed to require no change in our practices concerning gay and lesbian newcomers. However, I would on occasion remind parish members that those who felt themselves to be totally inclusive would inevitably be challenged, for example by issues like mental illness and personal hygiene. An unforeseen challenge of a very different kind was to arise for Grace St. Paul’s within a year or so of the successful parish vote.

The Federal Government had decided to accept a large number of young men, the Lost Boys of the Dinka People of southern Sudan, as refugees, and was distributing them to cities throughout the USA. These young men had fled their homeland as children in order to escape genocide and ensure the survival of a remnant of their people. Many survived unspeakable hardships and settled in refugee camps in Kenya, where they grew to be young men. About twenty of them, initially, joined the congregation of Grace St. Paul’s.

I consider their arrival to be a joke of the Holy Spirit because we as a parish thought we were subscribing to a highly liberal status in declaring ourselves a Welcoming Church. What we were very soon called to do was welcome a group of extremely vulnerable conservative Anglicans into our midst. I am confident that the Welcoming Church discussions prepared us very well for what we were about to do. We provided mentoring and physical resources for the young men and incorporated them into worship – the Gospel would be read in Dinka on occasion, and they would have a drumming service on Christmas Eve. I could not see a strong role for myself as a gay man, beyond giving my approval as Senior Warden, and soliciting help and donations as need arose. I tried having their leader Abraham to dinner at home, but the situation proved to be uncomfortable. Rev. Elaine Breckenridge and Dan and Anagrace Misenheimer as substitute grandparents proved to be ideal leaders. I did try to influence one visible aspect of their presence. I did not want them to sit in a row at the back of the church. I would also have encouraged them to wear their colorful African Sunday best clothing to church, but they wished to conform to our customs in dress. Beyond such considerations, I did not think it would be helpful to become more directly involved, because they could not so quickly have overcome what they had been raised (and church) with: an aversion to homosexuality. The Lost Boys said that they were happy to accept us at Grace St. Paul’s as they found us, but am not sure that they ever really understood how the parish’s welcoming of gay and lesbian people had informed our response to their arrival.

The Church in Africa.

During the 1990s, Father Gordon developed a relationship with an Anglican diocese in Uganda, and would send money on behalf of the parish to support the ministry of that diocese. Their bishop eventually came to visit us. I approached him in the narthex before the Sunday service he attended and asked him about AIDS in his diocese. I think it was the manner of his brush-off, more than his saying that it wasn't a problem, that offended me. Over the ensuing few years, pronouncements from Uganda, both from politicians and the Church, became ever more strident on the topic of homosexuality. Father Gordon concluded that it was not acceptable to send money, a substantial proportion of which came from gay parishioners, to fund Anglican ministry in Uganda.

The Primate of the Province of Nigeria was also raising a strident voice in the early 2000s. The Episcopal Church had offended the Nigerian Anglicans with its evolving and progressive attitude to gay and lesbian people. It was soon to outrage them, in 2003, by electing Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire. The Archbishop of Canterbury barred Robinson, a gay man, from the 2010 Lambeth Conference. The result was the publication of the Windsor Report, a document that attempted very uneasily to lay a foundation for a reconciliation between the progressive and conservative parts of the Anglican Communion. Father Gordon asked me to participate with him in an evening workshop on the Windsor Report. Affairs in Nigeria seemed rather remote from Tucson until a gay Nigerian Anglican appeared in Tucson on a speaking tour. He related an incident in which the Primate of Nigeria had engaged the police in Abuja to arrest and mistreat him and others who were attempting to protest the church's restrictive attitude to homosexuality. The mistreatment amounted to torture. When I reported the story to Father Gordon, he said that he found it quite credible. Through various discussions about the rift within Anglicanism, we did try to see matters from the conservative point of view: how did gay liberation look in a Province bordering a region in which conservative Islam was militant?

The Windsor Report has slid into obscurity. The Episcopal Church continues unabated on its chosen path, and currently has multiple gay and lesbian bishops. The stridency from African Provinces seems to have fallen in volume. For the 2020 Lambeth Conference, following the one from which Bishop Robinson was excluded, it was proposed that the partners of gay and lesbian bishops would not be invited to participate in social functions, a concession of far less consequence than the exclusion of Gene Robinson from the 2010 Lambeth Conference.

M.R. Ritley and Bill Countryman published *Gifted by Otherness – Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church* in 1999. The book brought together insights arising from the authors' unlikely, grace-filled spiritual journeys and from Bill Countryman's career in seminary teaching and writing. To my knowledge, nothing approaching it has been produced elsewhere, and it remains a crucially relevant work on gay and lesbian spirituality after two decades. My initial response to the book was as a grateful *consumer of religious goods and services*, to use a term that I first heard from Bishop Shahan, if I remember correctly. In saying that, he meant that lay people should progress to being *providers of religious goods and services*. The book provided a resource for doing just that; I spent some months contemplating how I might use it as a teaching resource at Grace St. Paul's. I selected a set of six chapters that I thought would make a framework, one per week, but felt uneasily that something was missing. While in San Francisco for a conference, I went to Grace Cathedral on a Sunday afternoon, hoping for a service of Advent lessons and carols. The service turned out to be a week later, and so I found myself sitting in the cathedral listening to the choir rehearsing in the distance. In an experience of great grace, I was led to the missing element -- my own experience. I spent an hour writing exuberantly on the only, tiny piece of writing paper I had on hand. For me, Grace Cathedral is truly a thin place, like those of the Celtic Christians of Ireland.

G's story, from a Gifted by Otherness meeting (shared with G's permission).

G used to attend a Methodist church. She was already in advanced middle age and participated in a women's spirituality discussion circle, in the days just before she came out as lesbian. At one meeting, the leader proposed an ice-breaker exercise: each participant should write something about herself on a piece of paper and place it anonymously in a hat or some similar vessel. The offerings would then be shared in the group. G wrote, "I am lesbian." When read out, this statement caused high anxiety. "Who wrote that?" the leader demanded. Nobody said a word. After a period of pious fluster, the group decided that they didn't need to know, and moved on.

The course included meditative reflection, abundant sharing and story-telling, and a strong focus on dialectic (both-and) rather than binary (either-or) thinking. I was able to offer it five times at Grace St. Paul's, and twice at St. Phillips. It worked better at Grace St. Paul's and was attended by at least 60 people there. Some were not members of the parish.

Workshops and visiting speakers.

Bill Countryman visited Tucson at the request of the Diocesan Commission on Human Sexuality around 1990. He presented material from his book *Dirt, Greed and Sex* at a weekend workshop held at St. Paul's Church, at the time before the parish merger, when Gordon McBride was rector at St. Paul's. The workshop was small, with an audience of about 20. Bill was the first in a series of distinguished speakers who provided an authoritative foundation for the evolution we were experiencing. By Palm Sunday, 1991, Father Gordon was leading the newly-merged parish Grace St. Paul's. Under his direction, the combined parish pursued its study of progressive theology in the Episcopal Church by inviting a succession of well-known speakers to lead weekend workshops. These occasions were attractive well beyond the confines of Grace St. Paul's and outside the Episcopal Church; we had no trouble raising audiences to fill either the parish hall or the nave, and we soon raised enough money from registration fees to provide a "seed" fund for planning the next event. Bill Countryman returned to Tucson to

present material from his book *Forgiven and Forgiving*. The list of speakers grew to include Bishop John Spong, Marcus Borg (twice), John Dominic Crossan and Roberta Bondi. The series ended when an invited speaker was forced by personal circumstances to cancel, pushing finances into difficult territory at a time when we could no longer take the risk of accruing a loss. For me, the most memorable occasion was the Friday evening session with which Crossan opened his workshop. His discussion of Fundamentalists as would-be practitioners of genocide was gripping, but his “one-liner” about Scriptural (in)errancy has stayed in my mind: “The reason we have four gospels [that disagree in detail] is to assure us that none of them is the literal truth.”

The Mass for the Third Millennium

As the turn of the Millennium drew near, Gordon McBride felt that the *Zeitgeist* demanded a new, more experimental form of worship than the forms offered in the Prayer Book. So began the Mass for the Third Millennium. Twenty-two years later, the service persists under the name Spirit Now – it has clearly provided a nourishing spiritual experience to many parish members. The service has passed through many permutations and has occupied several different times in our weekly schedule. Kristopher Lindquist’s beloved chants, many of them composed while he was our organist, have consistently made up the musical core of the liturgy. Some chants are settings of traditional liturgy; others introduce texts from a long tradition of Creation Theology both within Christianity and from non-Christian traditions. In like fashion, readings have commonly included, in addition to the Gospel, texts from continuing Christian revelation and from other faith traditions. Liturgical dance has been incorporated at times; movement to the music of the chants has been encouraged. Offerings of music and the visual arts have on occasion substituted for literary readings. In place of a sermon, time has always been reserved for group sharing about the theme of each service.

M3M and Spirit Now have influenced and informed the main Sunday liturgy. The Lindquist chants are frequently used, and in certain seasons of the liturgical year, non-Scriptural texts are read in place of the Epistles. The services have attracted new parish members. Some of the new people initially found that the innovative liturgy spoke to them in a way that traditional liturgy could not, but eventually were attracted to the broader community worship on Sundays.

Final reflection: where we find ourselves in 2020.

For the past 15 years or so, it has not been important to have an identifiable gay and lesbian group within the parish. Few parishioners have seemed concerned about who is gay or lesbian, or more recently, trans-sexual. I commented on this to Father Gordon while he was rector, and he responded, “Then we have succeeded.” That is probably true, but on the other hand there are gay and lesbian people who arrive in our midst and would like the companionship of a group that they could find easily. The parish is still a good place for the gay, lesbian and trans-sexual members to experience spiritual growth along with everyone else. Meanwhile, the attitude of younger people to categorization of sexuality appears to be evolving away from the binary notions that George, Bruce and I adapted to.

The progressive energy of the parish has directed itself more towards innovative liturgy and social justice. Our food ministry is a model of compassionate outreach, and we have offered sanctuary to immigrants in need. Our present rector, Father Steve Keplinger, is at the leading edge of the

movement to establish a Season of Creation as a major segment of the liturgical cycle. The parish identifies with the Emerging Church movement.

As I put the finishing touch to this memoir, dark shadows have fallen across our parish life. We are all contemplating how the parish might emerge from a months-long shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when we cannot meet in person. No less as concerns are the degree to which racial discrimination and bigotry are paraded openly in the current political climate, and the fears over what may happen following the November election.

Appendices:

The curricula of the workshops Finding Another Room and Gifted by Otherness.

FINDING ANOTHER ROOM

4

The Curriculum

Week 1: What are your hopes and fears surrounding your participation in this program?

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Leader's Introduction:

Why are we doing this?

First and foremost, General Convention has called the Episcopal Church to enter into dialogue among individuals on the topic of sexuality. To foster such dialogue, each Diocese has a Human Sexuality Commission. The Human Sexuality Commission in the Diocese of Arizona has prepared this curriculum. General Convention's statement included the following:

"**Resolved**, the House of Deputies concurring, this General Convention affirms that the teaching of the Episcopal Church is that physical sexual expression is appropriate only within the lifelong, monogamous 'union of husband and wife in the heart, body, and mind intended by God 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'; and be it further resolved,

"That this church continue to work to reconcile the discontinuity between this teaching and the experience of many members of this body; and be it further resolved,

"That this General Convention confesses our failure to lead and to resolve this discontinuity through legislative efforts based upon resolutions directed at singular and various aspects of these issues; and be it further resolved,

"That this General Convention commissions the bishops and members of each diocesan deputation to initiate a means for all congregations in their jurisdiction to enter into dialogue and deepen their understanding of these complex issues; and further this General Convention directs the president of each province to appoint one bishop, one lay deputy, and one clerical deputy in that province to facilitate the process, to receive reports from the dioceses at each meeting of their Provincial Synod, and report to the 71st General Convention"

The Body of Christ is in dissension to the point of breaking, and the central issue is sexuality. How can we achieve unity — bring liberals and conservatives and any other varieties of Episcopalians back on to speaking terms? General Convention's wisdom is that we should speak frankly to each other, starting out in our parish families where we are known to each other. No measure of unity will result if we only speak and share within comfortable, polarized groups. I cannot imagine any better way to work on church unity than to sit down and talk and listen in a parish family group such as this one — a group that certainly is not of one mind on the subject of sexuality.

So we are instructed by General Convention to take a step in the direction of unity, and it is a tough step to take. Each of us, I imagine, feels he or she has something crucial to lose — the confidentiality of a secret, peace of mind, a long-held belief, perhaps — in taking the step. Yet General Convention is telling us that we should take just such risks in the name of unity. I encourage you to focus not so much on

possible loss as on possible gain.

Sexuality moves us as profoundly as any aspect of our being. We are sexual beings, through and through. To live is to be sexual. To deny our sexuality as individuals is to deny our very spirit and to invite aberrations in all aspects of our lives — *if one member suffers, all suffer together with it*. Yet to stand face to face with the sexuality of humanity as a whole is to look upon a spectrum of belief and behavior that is too broad as a whole for anyone among us to be entirely comfortable with. What we are about to do may not leave us any more comfortable with this or that problem, but at the very least we may emerge with a better ability to put human faces to the problems.

How are we going to proceed?

We're going to take a topic each week — many of you have already seen the list of topics. Everyone in the group is going to have a chance to contribute his or her experience. The topics *are* matters of personal experience. We won't be treating hot issues as topics — for example, we aren't going to ask everyone to give their opinions on pre-marital sex.

There are some rules we will observe. There's a very good reason for the rules — we all, every one of us, feel uneasy and vulnerable talking about our own experience of sexuality. If all of us are to feel secure enough to share, then the environment must be safe for everyone. So:

1. We recount our own experiences, if we wish to do so. There will be a timer so that we all have an equal opportunity.
2. We remain non-judgmental of others. To this end, I am asking you not to comment on what is said, during or after the speaker's turn. The facilitator will interject only to keep things flowing.
3. We do not use Scripture to condemn one another.
4. Everything said in this room is confidential and stays in the room. It is being shared in trust.

Final comment

All this is only a first step, and it may be that some of us will have problems, particularly with Scripture. If this is so, we should probably follow this up with some organized study of Scripture. Please let someone know.

Week 2: How did you first obtain information/misinformation about sex? Describe your first awareness of sexuality.

Scripture: Leviticus 12:1-5; 15:16-24

Leader's Introduction:

From the *Book of Common Prayer*, Service of Baptism:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?
I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
I will, with God's help.

This week, we begin to tell our personal stories of relating to other people. I think that many people realize that nearly all contact between humans has some sexual content. For instance, a mechanic may explain a car repair in less detail to a woman than to a man. I'm not saying that all human contact is *sensual*, but that gender, appearance and attraction (or its absence) are usually involved.

Tonight we will tell our personal stories of when we discovered the sexuality that existed in our contact with other people. That realization may have occurred in an overtly sexual manner, or in a more subtle way. We will also discuss the ways that we have learned about sex. What we're doing is setting the stage. This is because when we listen carefully to each other's stories, we discover that those stories have some significant similarities and differences. Also, as stated last week, a process such as this can be the beginning of a wonderful community. It is not the person who openly disagrees with me that is my enemy. Rather, an enemy is the person who wishes me harm for disagreeing. In the Baptismal vows we are asked if we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, and if we will respect the dignity of every human being. And last week we heard that the body of Christ is not complete without any one of us. Therefore, I urge you to be as honest as you can be without an excess of discomfort. It is important to remember to speak of your own personal experiences, tonight and on the nights that follow.

Week 3: How do or how did you go about seeking a permanent relationship?

Scripture: Song of Solomon 2:8—3:5

Leader's Introduction:

First, I would like to read a passage that isn't directly connected with the topic for this evening, but it does relate to what I said concerning the link between sexuality and spirituality at our first meeting. In fact, I almost read it then, but it seemed a better idea to use the excerpt from the General Convention resolution. It is from a chapter entitled "Two Sexes," by Ann Belford Ulanov, and is from the book *Men and Women*, edited by Philip Turner.

"..... Christian tradition provides us the framework to which individually and together we bring the stresses and possibilities of our experiences as men and women. In the gap between our understanding of Christian tradition and our day-to-day experience we find and work out our sexual and spiritual lives, with all their dominant and recessive currents. If we are not given, or fail to make for ourselves, an environment of tradition, we disperse our resources, we trickle away, we suffer a fundamental loss of being. We are like a motherless child, a child orphaned by its father, to whom nothing is given to be found. Everything then must be started over again, invented. If we fail to bring into conscious being our own actual experiences of putting together our identities as women or men, our experiments and discoveries, our knowledge of what feels good and works sensually and spiritually and what frustrates and wounds, then we bring nothing to the human family. We refuse to let our little rivulet of water flow into the sea of human experience, whose deep springs rise from a mysterious source to renew us all. We contribute nothing. We dry up, dissipate our strengths, sap our energies, for lack of boundaries, or never allow anything of our cardinal being to emerge into its own channel. Sexually and spiritually we live and die good little girls and boys, unevoked, unplumbed, infantile, barely having been alive. We miss the God-given grace of being and becoming our own unique person, our personal self, weaving its own way through, say, the conflict over having babies or career, or threading into place the male mid-life crisis in its own particular colors or the not-unrelated lives of menopause, making our way to death with no firm connection between soul and body, with personhood all but unannounced.

"To lose either the spiritual tradition or the bodily experience means failing to enter the space between them where we can do our own making of being, womanly being, manly being....."

Tonight's topic takes us further beyond the more individual aspects of sexuality that we've talked about to date. We've covered topics including our own fears and hopes in talking about sexuality, and our first impressions of, and information about, sexuality. These are quite individual matters. But sexuality is very much a matter of relating to other people, and tonight we're going to consider the topic "How do you or did you go about seeking a permanent relationship?" In the weeks to come, we'll talk about gender roles and the family, both clearly concerned with relationships with others. Tonight's topic must truly be one of the great sexual obsessions of our culture; if you don't think it is an obsession, take a moment to reflect on the lyrics of popular songs. Nobody much sings about husband or wife — rather, about boyfriend or girlfriend. The subject is overwhelmingly courtship rather than marriage. The search for that special other person drives us intensely, to the point that (if others are at all like me) we are prone to involve ourselves in rather extreme behavior, some of which it is difficult to be completely proud of.

Week 4: How have gender role expectations shaped/affected your life?**Scripture: Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:8-15****Leader's Introduction:**

(Members of the group had been asked to bring along an advertisement that spoke to them in a particular way about gender roles. The leader brought along a videotape from *Saturday Night Live*. The tape was a parody of the type of beer commercial that features swimming pools, bathing suits and numerous young, extremely attractive men and women having a wonderful time; in the parody, all the heterosexual allusions are replaced with analogous homosexual ones. It is not difficult to find material emphasizing / exploiting / illustrating gender roles in the print media; such material — even though less spectacular and less amusing — could be used here instead of the video.)

Our training in what is expected of us as males or females probably begins very soon after we are born, whether or not our parents are aware of this. Whom we play with, how we play, what we are expected to help with at home, and many other things — all are preparation for the roles expected of us as adults. Lessons taught in this way are firmly fixed in our minds as we reach maturity, and are brought to bear as we establish relationships. It all works out happily, I suppose, provided everyone agrees on what the roles should be. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, particularly as regards the roles of women nowadays. The mythology of our society nonetheless reinforces a certain set of gender roles (macho Dad, domestic Mom, children following suit) that is at its most obvious in advertising. Have you ever considered what it might be like if you were one who doesn't conform to the paradigm? (Are they the majority or the minority in your group? See how the group feels about this at the end of this session.) Here's an example of what I mean: (videotape).

Week 5: How do you define “family?” What is it that makes a family a family?**Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18****Leader’s Introduction:**

We live in an age in which choosing / creating / finding a definition for “family” is no simple matter. Though the familiar image of Mom and Dad, Janie and little Billy, still springs to mind for many of us, the truth is this is no longer typical. Though hardly extinct, the *nuclear* version is only one of numerous manifestations of the phenomenon of “family.” The following article contains some examples of how our public and private institutions are seeking to respond to the definition question. (Continue with the accompanying *Newsweek* article.)

The real trick in answering this question is in personalizing it. What is it about the relationships you have experienced in your life that make some of them “family matters” and others something else? What is the central qualifier: blood relationship, marriage, commitment, sacrifice, unconditional love?

GIFTED BY OTHERNESS

WEEK 1: Whose Problem are we?

Reading: Chapter 1 For meeting, read aloud *Beginning to relearn*, pp.7, 8

Plan:

1. Introductions: where are you from; why are you here?
2. Norms: confidentiality; allowing everyone a chance to talk. Spending time in silence.
3. Reading.
4. Leader's introduction – see below.
5. Silence, 10 minutes
6. Participants' reactions to the Manifesto.

My comments:

1. What is specifically Episcopalian about the book? On the surface, not much; written by two Episcopal priests. Beneath the surface, there are clear references to the spiritual tradition of the Anglican Church (read some of Bill Countryman's other writings on poetry). Underlying all is the assumption of Incarnational theology. What is Incarnational theology?

Polarities in Christianity: Christmas vs. Holy Week and Easter; incarnation vs. resurrection/salvation; goodness of life (God chose to participate in it) vs. evil of life (God chose to redeem it). All Christians regard these poles as important, but there is a tension between them. Which pole has primacy? For Incarnational Christians it's the Christmas+incarnation+goodness of life pole. (Fred Masterman's sermon: once you accept that God found life good enough to become one of us, this will affect the way you live your life from that day on.) The polarity affects radically institutional and individual approaches to sexuality.

Incarnational: sexuality is good, but can be turned to evil ends.

Resurrectional: sexuality is evil, or at best suspect, and can only be turned to good through procreation within church-sanctioned institution of marriage.

2. Whose game are we going to play? In the 70s and 80s, the fashion in pro-GL literature was to deal with the negative scriptures. GL people who have been wounded by the church still want to go through this exercise. It may fill a need, but it's not my intention to spend any time on that in this series. To do so is to dance to a fundamentalist/legalist tune. We should dance to our own tune, and that is the position of Countryman and Ritley in *Gifted by Otherness*

WEEK 2: .Our journeys

Reading: Chapters 2 and 3. In class: p 20, Surprised by Grace, 2 paragraphs; pp 9-10, Ritley's introduction.

Plan:

1. Check-in. Brief reactions to last time?
2. readings
3. Leader's Introduction
4. Silence
5. Sharing: tell something of your personal journey.

Leader's Introduction: I didn't intend to be where I am now. I'm not at all sure that I intended any particular outcome with mature understanding when I was in my 20s. But whatever I intended then, it wasn't what I am now. In particular, it had little or no place for being gay. I'm not at all sure that I've had any real control along the way. I am certainly aware that I haven't liked some of the turning points that have been imposed on me.

Another reflection on polarity of belief: Liberal/Progressive Christianity vs. Conservative Christianity. Hand out Center for Progressive Christianity's list of 8 points. Refer to Karen Armstrong: the Battle for God. Discuss history – reactions to scientific discovery in 19th century; two reactions: repudiate science and claim inerrancy of scripture, or repudiate scripture and claim inerrancy of science. Mythos vs. Logos -- both of the reactions are strong on logos.. During 20th century, a third way has evolved, with renewed emphasis on mythos.

WEEK 3: God's flaming laughter

Reading: Chapter 6. In class, read pp 43 (What really) to p.44, para. 2.; then p 51, F.F. God to bottom of page.

Plan:

1. Check-in. Brief reactions to last time?
2. readings
3. Leader's Introduction
4. Silence
5. Sharing: how do you react to humor, subversion in context of religion. Any stories about this?.

Leader's introduction:

To be ordained or not? Answer was: you have to operate outside the hierarchy, be a thorn in the flesh, a presence the church should deal with. Have I been that? Not generally in a way that's obvious, but certain parts of the church have had to adapt to me and my friends.

Every so often the question is asked, in public, with the expectation of a public response, "what image do you have of God? The answer that used to – still does? – come to me, with little effort, so it's worth considering, is of a person running away, laughing, after doing something that outraged a stiff and starch human authority figure. Perhaps I have done some things a bit like that anyway. There was a Diocesan Convention in Tucson, and our chapter of Integrity (GL Episcopalians had a booth. The Diocesan Human Sexuality Commission also had a booth, and I was the only person available to staff both at one stage of the proceedings. A member of Episcopalians United (a very conservative group dedicated to opposing anything positive about GL people in the church) was outraged to see me at one table, and then the other (how could a homosexual satisfactorily represent wholesome sexuality to the Diocese?). He came over to Integrity's table and said: "Didn't I see you at the human sexuality table a moment ago?" A group was gathering around to hear the exchange by this stage. I replied: when I'm over there, I'm being sexual; when I'm over here I'm being gay"

Polarities of belief: God of Love vs. God of Law. Refer to Bruce Bawer, *Stealing Jesus*.

WEEK 4: Erotic Spirit

Reading: chapter 9. In class: p 75 The Trinity is.... To p. 76, ... catch all term.

1. Plan: Check-in. Brief reactions to last time?
2. readings
3. Leader's Introduction
4. Silence
5. Sharing: How do you balance love, friendship, affection, attraction? How does religion help, not help?

Leader's Introduction: I have a rather brief and regrettable experience of a relationship in which any other manifestation of Eros/attraction was to be excluded. Guilt, jealousy and manipulation were used as enforcers. I've since decided that Eros -- attractions in general -- are too wonderful to limit in this way; life is too short to be so limited. I allow myself to experience the joy of attractions, even if with some limits. If you're in a relationship, this raises the question of what is and isn't OK. Casual sex, friendly sex, committed sex only? But Eros goes way beyond setting up possibilities for having sex. The possibilities include positive and negative ones, in areas of life where involvement of erotic attraction would be firmly denied by many people. Negative example; consider how good looks improve one's general chances in life; this works even between straight men. A positive example: my morning at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. I had been sitting in a pew full of gay men (none of whom I knew); after inspiring music and liturgy, I left and walked down

California Street, floating along on the inspiration of it all. I noticed that a young man who had been sitting in the pew was walking beside me, neither drawing ahead nor falling back. We began talking and finished up spending the rest of the afternoon together in town, before I caught my plane back to Tucson. I have never forgotten that man (in contrast to some people involved in sexual encounters); I still glow somehow when I think of the positive experience, for both of us as far as I could tell.

Polarity of Belief: : ideas of God. Theistic versus panentheistic. Refer to Borg, *the God We Never Knew*.

Theistic: God personified, lawgiver, judge, creator at some point in time, acting in history.

Panentheistic: God as ground of being, loving, creating continuously, co-creating.

What, then, is an atheist/a-theist?

WEEK 5 Coming out as spiritual journey.

Reading: Chapter 12. In class: read 1. p 107, crossing the sands; 2. p 111 Patterns of spiritual growth.

1. Plan: Check-in. Brief reactions to last time?
2. readings
3. Leader's Introduction
4. Silence
5. Sharing: How does your coming out story relate to the patterns of spiritual growth?.

Leader's introduction: Moving to Tucson, which for the first time in my life allowed me to be gay in any truly free way, was a journey into the Wilderness for me. It wasn't chosen at a certain level – the job chose me as much as I chose it; once given the opportunity of a first academic job anywhere one cannot appear too picky – I gave up/lost all I had had – left family and friends far away, knew nobody here; started new job in uncharted territory. I have no desire to do that again!!! Where was the surprise of grace in the process? It turned out to have grace written all over it. Finding Grace Episcopal Church; getting to know the new rector; finding myself doing things that I had never imagined (in fact I had never really imagined much more than sitting quietly in a rear pew – but that was not to be allowed! One of the first things was to deal publicly with being gay.

Polarity of belief: Nature of sin: individual versus societal/systemic. Individual sin commonly seen as sexual. Societal sins – matters of social justice, exploitation, lack of care for children etc.

WEEK 6 Our priesthood.

Reading: Chapter 14. In class: read 1. p 139, Being a blessing; 2. eucharistic prayer C – solace vs. strength.

1. Plan: Check-in. Brief reactions to last time?
2. Readings
3. Leader's Introduction
4. Silence
5. Sharing: How do you perceive your priesthood?

Leader's introduction:

Polarity of belief: Being Right or Wrong vs. Living the Questions. Faith permitting doubt, or not?

Reflection: TBA