



TEC Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music  
Addressing General Convention Resolution C056, *Liturgies for Blessing*

Outline of Theological Principles  
December 31, 2010

## I. Baptismal Grounding

The Christian life is rooted in the sacrament of baptism, an effective sign of our participation in God's mission in the world and a reminder of our hope for the fulfillment of all things in God-in-Christ. Every covenant and commitment we make as Christians offers an opportunity to live out our baptismal covenant in new ways.

## II. Theological Retrieval

Rooting the blessing of covenantal relationships in baptism suggests a fruitful retrieval of three key touchstones from Christian history concerning the significance of those covenants, including same-gender relationships:

1. The *sacramental* character of covenantal relationships (committed relationships make God's presence and divine grace visible);
2. The *Trinitarian* imprint of covenantal life (the perpetual and mutual self-giving and other-receiving of the Holy Trinity);
3. The *eschatological* vision inspired and evoked by covenantal relationship (the desire that leads us to commit ourselves to another person reflects the human desire and hope for union with God-in-Christ).

## III. Renewing the Church's Theological Reflection

Retrieving the sacramental character, Trinitarian imprint, and eschatological vision in committed relationships can renew the church's theological reflection on covenantal relationships, including same-gender unions, with these five key principles:

- *Vocation*: People are called into long-term committed relationships, as a vocation;
- *Covenant-making*: Loving faithfulness can participate in and reflect God's own covenantal commitment to God's creation;
- *Households*: Covenants create households as "*schools of virtue*" for life-long formation in spiritual discipline nurtured by divine grace;
- *Fruitfulness*: Faithful love in relationship enables the offering of countless gifts to the wider community that would not be possible in the same way apart from that relationship, including: lives of service, compassion, generosity, and hospitality;
- *Mutual Blessing*: The liturgical blessing of a covenantal relationship acknowledges the fruits of the Spirit in that relationship and in turn becomes a blessing to the faith community, strengthening the community for its mission and ministry in the world.

## IV. Summary of Theological Principles

Covenantal relationships are one way for Christians to live out their baptismal calling in the world. As the Church discerns the fruits of the Spirit in faithful commitments – such as households marked by compassion, generosity, and hospitality – these commitments become a blessing to the wider community. Blessing covenantal relationships, including same-gender unions, thus belongs to the mission of the Church in its ongoing witness to the good news of God-in-Christ and the Christian hope of union with God.



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**Principles for Evaluating Liturgical Materials**  
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Materials proposed for blessing same-gender relationships must above all be consistent with the implicit theology and ecclesiology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. This would suggest, for example, that they must reflect the Prayer Book's underlying assumption that the entire life of the Church finds its origin in the baptismal font.

Nearly as important is that the proposed liturgical materials embody a classically Anglican liturgical ethos and style. Recognizing the varying notions of what makes public prayer recognizably Anglican, the task group identified these qualities:

- It resonates with Scripture.
- It has high literary value; is it beautiful according to accepted and respected standards.
- It uses the recurring structures, linguistic patterns, and metaphors of the 1979 BCP.
- It is formal, not casual, conversational, or colloquial.
- It has a ritual or sacral register.
- It is dense enough to “carry the freight” of the sacred purpose for which it is intended.
- It is metaphoric without being obtuse.
- It is performative.

At the same time, these rites must resonate as natural speech in contemporary ears. A sacral register must be achieved without the use of arcane or antiquated words or patterns of speech.

The rites should provide explanatory notes and rubrics. The material must be considered as the script for an event, not a mere collection of texts.

The proposed rites must be an expression primarily of the entire Church, not the couple seeking a blessing. These rites must allow for robust communal participation, reflecting the Baptismal ecclesiology of the Prayer Book. Related to this, since the Eucharist is the symbol of the unity of the Church though unity with Christ, these services of blessing should normatively be celebrated within the Eucharist.

These rites must enact the notion of sacramental reciprocity put forth by the C056 Theological Resources Task Group, suggesting that, even as the Church blesses the relationship of the couple, the relationship of the couple is a blessing to the Church.

Options must be provided so that this action of the entire Church—this common prayer—does not degenerate into a generic rite. The Prayers of the People will be important in this regard, as will other texts. There must be a provision of numerous options.

The rites must hold up the two people making the covenant as the primary ministers within this action of God and of the entire Church. The rites should give expression to the Church's understanding that the couple is freely assuming a vocation, which can be expected to yield the fruits of mutual fidelity for the couple, itself, for the Church, and for the entire world, pointing ultimately toward the fulfillment of all human relationships and unity in the eschatological Reign of God, when God will be all-in-all.

They must be what they purport to be—liturgical prayer—not didactic or polemical statements in the guise of liturgy.