

Q&As on Marriage Task Force Report: GC2018

1. **Q. What was the Task Force on the Study of Marriage (TFSM) asked to do?**

A. Resolution 2015-A037 directed an expanded Task Force on the Study of Marriage (TFSM) to continue exploration of biblical, theological, historical, liturgical, and canonical dimensions of marriage, as well as contemporary trends and norms, work that was begun by a task force appointed after the 2012 General Convention. The resolution also directed the TFSM to “study and monitor, in consultation with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church.”

2. **Q. How did the TFSM organize its work?**

A. The Task Force organized the assigned work into four working groups based upon the various tasks set forth in the enabling resolution. Phrases in quotes, below, are taken from Resolution 2015--A037.

- **Pastoral:** “consult with individuals and groups” across a variety of relationships statuses “about their experience of faith and church life.”
- **Ecclesial:** “study and monitor ... the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing on our Church” and promote and study “the results of diocesan and parochial study of ‘Dearly Beloved’ toolkit” presented by the previous Task Force on the Study of Marriage to the 77th General Convention in 2012.
- **Academic:** “explore biblical, theological, moral, liturgical, cultural, and pastoral perspectives” on the contemporary trends and norms identified by the Task Force on the Study of Marriage in the previous triennium; “develop written materials about them which represent the spectrum of understanding in our Church”; and “provide educational and pastoral resources for congregational use on these matters that represent the spectrum of understandings on these matters in our Church.”
- **Functional:** explore, study and monitor “the continuing debate about clergy acting as agents of the state in officiating at marriages.”

3. **Q. How did the TFSM consult with the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) on the impact of same-sex marriage and rites of blessing?**

A. A member of the SCLM was appointed as a liaison to the TFSM. The liaison met regularly with the Task Force and some of its subcommittees.

4. **Q. What did the pastoral working group accomplish?**

A. The pastoral working group received 170 responses to a survey on relationships, providing stories that reflect a variety of theological and political opinions on marriage and relationship. Vignettes from several of these stories are woven into the essays developed by the academic working group.

5. **Q. What did the ecclesial working group accomplish?**

A. The ecclesial working group learned that bishops in 93 of the 101 domestic (US-based) dioceses authorized use of the trial liturgies for marriage authorized in 2015. In some but not all of the 8 dioceses where the bishop did not authorize use of the rites, the bishop made provision for all couples seeking marriage in the church to have access to the liturgies, as directed by 2015 Resolution A054.

In response to a survey of leaders of other Anglican provinces and of full-communion partners, 6 Anglican provinces reported a negative impact in their context or that they do not

approve of the marriage of same-sex couples, 1 Anglican province reported a positive impact and that it had taken similar action itself, and 3 full-communion ecumenical partners reported a positive impact.

A survey of the use of the “Dearly Beloved” toolkit for studying marriage, prepared by the TFSM during the previous triennium, found that 18% of respondents had used the toolkit, and the majority of those who used it found it helpful. Reasons for not using it included not knowing about it, deciding to use a different resource, or finding the toolkit not suitable for their context.

6. **Q. What did the academic working group accomplish?**

A. The academic working group developed a series of short essays exploring contemporary trends and norms: Biblical and Theological Foundations for Relationships; Culture, Ethnicity, and Marriage; Householding; Singleness; and Sexual Intimacy: A Complex Gift. To develop these essays, the working group consulted with faculty at all ten Episcopal seminaries as well as other scholars and pastors. Each of these essays concludes with a series of questions designed for groups that use the essays as a basis for study and discussion.

7. **Q. What did the functional working group accomplish?**

A. The functional working group examined the historical role of the Church in officiating marriage, studied the current debate about clergy acting as agents of the state, and recommended recasting the role of the clergy as agent and advocate for the couple rather than agent of the state.

8. **Q. What does the report of the TFSM contain?**

A. The TFSM report to the 79th General Convention brings together the work of these groups and proposes three resolutions. Two of the resolutions propose new liturgical and pastoral resources, and these are appended to the report.

9. **Q. What do the resolutions call for?**

A. **(A085) Trial Use of Marriage Liturgies** extends trial use of marriage liturgies first authorized by the 78th General Convention for the 2018-21 triennium; amends for trial use “Concerning the Service” for the Book of Common Prayer liturgies; adds Rite 1 and Rite 2 versions of a Preface for Marriage 2, and amends and expands the Catechism’s section “Other Sacramental Rites” concerning marriage. It also outlines options for how General Convention might proceed to make these proposals permanent additions and revisions to the Book of Common Prayer.

(A086) Authorize Rites to Bless Relationships, proposes adding two liturgies to the “Enriching Our Worship” series: “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” as revised from the liturgy first authorized by the 77th General Convention and “The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship”, responding to the experiences of Episcopalians who desire to form and formalize a lifelong, monogamous and unconditional relationship, other than marriage, in particular circumstances. The first of these (The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant) addresses same-sex couples who live in parts of the Episcopal Church where it is still not legal to marry; the second (The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship) addresses those for whom marriage would constitute a financial hardship (especially elders); and immigrants for whom a marriage could invoke legal problems.

(A087) Develop Pastoral Resources, recognizes the rising rate and number of U. S. adults in sexually intimate relationships other than marriage and calls for the development of resources that provide spiritual, teaching and pastoral guidance for these relationships.

10. Q. What exactly is “trial use?”

A. Under the provisions of Article X of the Constitution of The Episcopal Church, trial use means that the church is considering revision of a section of the Book of Common Prayer. Revisions to the Book of Common Prayer must be approved by two successive General Conventions.

11. Q. Since General Convention approved these liturgies for trial use in 2015, why aren't they coming back for a second reading?

A. Article X of the Constitution requires that revision of the Book of Common Prayer must be proposed in one meeting of the General Convention, then sent “by resolve” to the secretary of the convention of every diocese, to be made known to the diocesan convention at its next meeting. Resolution 2015-A054 authorized trial use of the marriage liturgies but did not include a clause directing that the proposals be sent to every diocese. The resolution that the TFMS is proposing includes a clause directing that the proposed liturgies be sent to every diocese. It also proposes revision of other sections of the BCP (“Concerning the Service” of marriage, the catechism, and proper prefaces of marriage), so that the language about marriage is consistent throughout the book. Thus, this proposes the “first reading” of this material.

12. Q. Does General Convention have the Constitutional and Canonical authority to adopt the proposed revisions to the Book of Common Prayer?

A. Yes. Article X of the Constitution allows the General Convention to amend the Book of Common Prayer at any time. The provision for trial use explicitly allows a proposed revision to any section or office of the BCP, and Canon II.3.6, which stipulates conditions for trial use, indicates that these proposed revisions can be subsequently adopted as alterations or additions to the BCP. General Convention did just that in 2012 (A059) and 2015 (A067), amending the Proper Liturgies for Special Days (pp. 271-295) to incorporate readings from the Revised Common Lectionary.

13. Q. How does the work of the TFMS relate to resolutions coming from the SCLM regarding revisions to the Book of Common Prayer?

A. The current proposal for trial use of the marriage rites continues a process begun in 2009, when the General Convention directed the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to develop liturgical resources for blessing same-sex relationships (Resolution 2009-C056). The proposal for trial use, with the possibility of a “second reading” and incorporation into the BCP in 2021, would bring this process to its conclusion. In contrast, the resolutions coming from the SCLM propose processes related to the entire BCP, either beginning a 12-year process of revising the entire BCP, or engaging more deeply with the 1979 BCP.

14. Q. The TFMS reports that in 8 out of the 101 US dioceses, the bishop with jurisdiction has not authorized the liturgies for trial use. What would be the expectation in those dioceses if A085 is adopted?

A. The resolution proposes that the liturgies be available for use in every diocese of the Episcopal Church, without further conditions. If the resolution is adopted, these liturgies could be used in any diocese where the marriage of a couple is permitted by civil law.

15. Q. Doesn't trial use have to be under the direction of the Bishop with jurisdiction?

A. Article X of the Constitution, which allows the General Convention to authorize proposed revisions to the BCP for trial use, does not set any limits or conditions for trial use. Canon II.3.6(a) permits the General Convention to specify any special conditions for trial use, but it does not require that there be any terms or conditions. As the 1979 BCP was being developed, liturgies were authorized in 1970 and 1973 for trial use throughout the church and did not require that they also be authorized by the diocesan bishop.

16. Q. What are the new resources proposed in the resolutions?

A. **Liturgical Resources 2**, proposed in **(A085) Trial Use of Marriage Liturgies**, includes

- the liturgies proposed for trial use, which may be used by any couple, same-sex or opposite-sex, where the marriage is permitted by civil law;
- short essays developed by the TFSM during this triennium, offering Christians perspectives on marriage and family life today;
- essays on marriage developed by the TFSM during the 2012-2015 triennium;
- the “Dearly Beloved” toolkit for studying marriage, developed by the TFSM during the 2012-2015 triennium;
- pastoral resources for preparing couples for marriage, adapted from materials in Liturgical Resources 1.

A new volume in the **Enriching Our Worship** series, proposed in **(A086) Authorize Rites to Bless Relationships**, would include:

- The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, a revision of the liturgy for blessing same-sex relationships first authorized in 2012, for use in jurisdictions where the civil marriage of same-sex couples is not permitted;
- The Blessing of a Lifelong Relationship, for couples in particular circumstances who seek the church’s blessing on their lifelong, monogamous relationship without entering into a civil marriage;
- essays on the blessing of same-sex relationships developed by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music during the 2009-2012 triennium and published in Liturgical Resources 1;
- an essay about the rite for blessing a lifelong relationship, prepared by the TFSM during this triennium;
- pastoral resources for preparing a couple for a liturgy of blessing, developed by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music during the 2009-2012 triennium and published in Liturgical Resources 1.

17. Q. Will the proposed changes create greater challenges for our relationships within the Anglican Communion?

A. There are those in our wider Anglican family who will disagree with any changes we make to be more inclusive and there will be those in our wider Anglican family who are watching us for leadership to help them move forward with similar changes. While there continue to be tensions and challenges around a variety of issues – including gender equality and human sexuality – the climate in the Anglican Communion has improved dramatically in recent years and we believe the ties that bind us are stronger than the differences that challenge us.

18. Q. Were the recommendations in the report unanimously agreed to by the TFSM?

A. During the triennium the TFMS was blessed with multiple opportunities to meet both in person and virtually for deep engagement across significant differences. The final report was adopted by all but one dissenting member, who filed a minority report. We are profoundly grateful to be part of a church where we can grapple with theological differences and which provides opportunity for minority perspectives to be registered and received.

19. Q. What does the minority report say?

A. The author of the minority report raises three areas of concern. First, a concern about deliberative process: that if the presiding officers of the Episcopal Church had added to the task force more people of color, representatives of Province IX, and those committed to a traditional view of marriage, the conversation may have been more beneficial. Second, two concerns about Prayer Book revision: that proposals for trial use liturgies typically come from the SCLM; and that in the minds of some Episcopalians, the proposed rites put the Church's teaching in tension with Holy Scripture. Third, a concern about Anglican relations: that new rites that depart from traditional norms might have less of an impact on Anglican unity if they were given an authorized place that stops short of Prayer Book revision, or if they were the product of a Communion-wide prayer book revision commission.

20. Q. Where does the TFMS see the evangelism opportunity in its report to the Church?

A. The Episcopal Church has the opportunity to lift up "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" as the values that make a marriage holy. It has the chance to talk about marriage as vocation of holy love, grounded in biblical values of faithfulness and forgiveness. And it has the opportunity to say we are a community of faith focused on supporting all who are called into the vocation of marriage – not discriminating against some who are called into the vocation of marriage.