

Dear Parishioners of Saint Francis in Springboro,

You are very likely to be aware of the controversy in the Episcopal Church over the recent General Convention, which has concluded in Minneapolis. The controversy focused around The Rev. V. Gene Robinson. The Rev. V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay clergyman, living in a gay partnership, was elected by the Diocese of New Hampshire to be their next Bishop Coadjutor. A Bishop Coadjutor succeeds the Diocesan Bishop, after their own consecration and the retirement of the Diocesan Bishop. The Rev. Robinson (who presently serves as assistant (Canon) to the current Bishop of New Hampshire) was elected within 120 days of the General Convention. Church Canons require that all persons elected by their Diocese within 120 days of the General Convention need the approval of the majorities of both houses. The process, which ordinarily takes place, if the election does **not** fall within the 120 day ‘window’ of a General Convention, involves the approval of the majority of Diocesan Standing Committees from around the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA), along with the affirmation from the majority of Diocesan Bishops. Since Rev. Robinson has been living in a same sex relationship with his partner Mark Andrew, his confirmation was expected to be contentious. I believe it exceeded all expectations.

The issues as I see them, are as follows:

1. Many current proponents of the approval and blessing of “Same Sex Unions” within the Episcopal Church, who are serious students of biblical language, custom, culture and history admit that the New Testament admonitions against engaging in homosexual behavior are unambiguous and therefore highly problematic to their argument. Consider reading what I believe to be the definitive and final word on subject, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics, by Robert Gagnon, PhD., Abingdon Press, 2001. Rather than trying to persuade us that the Scriptures in question really don’t say what they clearly **do say**, they often argue against the claims of biblical inspiration and authority (ask them to try to explain the “Oath of Conformity” BCP 513, 526, 538ff or Article VI of the 39 Articles sometime if you wish to see some revisionist gymnastics), or they even deny the historic doctrines of the Virgin Birth, the Hypostatic Union, the Atonement, and the Resurrection.

The God who they claim is doing “a new thing” is clearly not the God revealed in the Holy Scripture. Their contemporary arguments often present a Jesus, who is at best a contemporary articulation of the heresy of “Adoptionism”.

2. The 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of the Book of Romans and the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter of 1 Corinthians articulate numerous sins, of which homosexual practice appears. Its sinfulness is clear, but so are other practices, which are enumerated. That issue is not the focus of this point. It is here where I think the Lord has shown me a key to understanding our dilemma and offers us an understanding. The Church **is, has been, and will always be** a hospital for sinners. In Romans 2:4 we find:

*<sup>4</sup>Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness<sup>A</sup>, tolerance<sup>B</sup> and patience<sup>C</sup>, not realizing that God's kindness<sup>D</sup> leads you toward repentance<sup>E</sup>?* (Please note footnotes follow this article.)

God understands sin, but he abhors it. It separates us from his love. God allows sinners to experience, to some limited degree, the fellowship (koinonia) of the Church, even though he knows we bring our sinful baggage along. God's patience and forbearance exists only in the hope that during the intervening time we gather in fellowship (*koinonia*), we may hear the truth of God's Word, experience the conviction of his Holy Spirit, and repent and believe. We mistakenly suppose that God sanctions our sin, but rather, he allows us to experience his Word proclaimed and his liturgy celebrated, in the hopes that we will ask him into our lives that he might "create in us clean hearts and renew a right Spirit within us." However, God's forbearance is transitional and not terminal. God's forbearance and patience exist only to enable repentance and God's transforming love.

I believe the General Convention made a serious error in allowing the Episcopal Church to now believe that homosexual behavior is not sin. They have side stepped the Scriptures. Many in today's contemporary Church have abandoned the concept of sin. In this therapeutic age, the concept of sin has been exchanged for the concepts of sickness, *predisposition* or *dysfunction*. God knows that sin separates us from Him. It separates us from our neighbor. It even creates separation and conflict within our self. Finally, God desires our repentance to redeem us from the inevitable consequences of sin.

3. With this in mind, St. Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of this same Chapter, reminds us of the need **we all have** for the Lord's forgiveness. He reminds us of our **common plight**. If you have come to church over the past ten, twenty or thirty years, or even as late as last month, and you and your friends haven't noticed a dramatic transformation in your life....and your corresponding habits and dispositions, you might well ask yourself if you have ever really given God the keys to your heart? The whole concept of repentance (*metanoia*, see footnote E) is an attending change of life. You see, **all people** are welcome at St. Francis Parish. **We all need the Lord's forgiveness and his Holy Spirit to enable us to live for him.** But that sort of change is initiated "by dying to self" and "living for him." We have to get beyond telling God *who we perceive ourselves to be and wish to remain* and to ask, rather, that the Father might redeem us through the gift of his Son Jesus Christ and transform us by "molding and fashioning us into the image of Jesus, his Son." Refusing to acknowledge our sin does not lead us to repentance. The faster we can admit our need for forgiveness and fall on our knees before his throne, the better. The longer we hang onto our familiar, habitual sin, the more likely we might reach the point where repentance becomes impossible. God may actually permit us to get what we apparently want...a hardening of our heart similar to that of Pharaoh in the Exodus account. Finally, because all of us are in need of forgiveness, when we malign, make fun and mock gay and lesbian people, we demean their struggle, their predicament, their humanity, their value before God and their giftedness. I will not tolerate such insensitivity. To criticize others without seeing our own equally profound need of God's transforming power... is more than insensitive...it is sinful. We need to remind ourselves that such folk are parents, siblings, children, relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbors and parishioners. Over the course of

the past several decades, the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Lutheran and many other Protestant denominations have, rightfully I think, begun to consider the concept of “predisposition” when considering homosexuality. These denominations have generally agreed that “predisposition” does not necessarily constitute “sin,” although such “predispositions” undoubtedly reveal something of the fallen-ness and brokenness of creation. These Churches agreed that persons who struggled with such predispositions, but who honored the Scriptures and the Church’s teaching and chose to remain celibate and chaste could ...enter fully into the life and ministry of the Church.

A very large leap has taken place at this past General Convention from the Church’s previous position which honored the Scriptural admonitions against homosexual practice...to now celebrating “same sex blessings” or at the least, the allowing of Dioceses (with the approval of their Bishop) to develop liturgical rituals and blessings which go from the acknowledgment of simple companionship to the promotion of homosexual intimacy, albeit committed. Further, it has approved an individual who, however talented, dedicated, personable and capable, fails to live up to the historic teachings of the Church and the witness of Sacred Scripture in the area of human sexuality. Further, The General Convention might have explored more diligently St. Paul’s First Letter to Timothy; where the third Chapter articulates the Church’s classical definition of the character and qualifications of an “overseer”.

4. From the Creation account in the Book of Genesis we understand that God created man (humankind) in his image, and that he created them, male and female. From the beginning, the procreative aspect between man and woman is inherent in God’s creative design for sexual intimacy.

However, as a consequence of sin, the created order was distorted, which is attested to by the story of the Fall. The point I wish to make here is that God realized, “it is not good for man to be alone”. Human beings seek companionship. It is a part of their nature. We have all experienced loneliness. Each of us can affirm the human desire for relationship. But, the issue of homosexuality often confuses companionship with sexual intimacy. In the Greek, unlike English, there are several words for love; these are *phileo*, *storge*, *eros*, *epithumia* and *agape*. For the Christian, the Scriptures are clear, there can be only two norms of sexual expression, which are acceptable...monogamous heterosexual marriage and sexual abstinence.

Further, all of us would attest to the fact that some types of love must never be expressed sexually, e.g. mother/son, father/daughter, sister/brother. The church merely says based on God’s revealed Word, that “same sex unions” are included in these prohibitions.

Now some might suggest that God in his wisdom prohibited familial sexual unions merely because of the destructive genetic implications. But consider this, the sexual revolution with the development of contraception has made the genetic implications far less of an issue. That reality, coupled with the fact that human sexuality has often taken on a more *recreational expression*

(however tragic), that some might even question why society must still cling to such outdated sexual prohibitions. You catch my drift! *We continue to value these prohibitions based on centuries of experience; experiences which demonstrate the tragic spiritual, emotional and physical consequences of incest and consequently embraces the biblical and historic restraints.*

5. Having raised two sons, having once been an adolescent myself and having been a parish priest for over fifteen years, I have come to the conclusion that adolescents are, by their nature, inquisitive, impressionable, loyal, often confused and often, as well, rebellious. It has something to do with changes in their body and brain chemistry, motivated by emotional and hormonal transformation and sexual maturation. It is a time when they question who they are and who they wish to become. They are defining themselves as independent from parents and guardians, most often against the families that attempted to nurture them. These adolescents come from single and traditional families. They are raised by parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, guardians and even strangers. They have experienced a host of environments that range from loving and mildly dysfunctional to profoundly unfriendly and downright abusive. I am distressed by The Rev. V. Gene Robinson's affiliation with an organization that admittedly exists as a resource for young people who are seeking to understand their sexual identity. There is, I believe, often a fine line between acting as a resource to promoting a particular point of view or lifestyle. While I admittedly have done **no** research into the methods, policies and tactics of this particular organization, I remain concerned that many adolescents, in their rebelliousness and need for independence often choose concepts, ideals and behaviors that stand in direct opposition to the values of those who have raised them. If a parent or guardian says "up", adolescents are often determined or even compelled to say "down". A parent says "Sunday school, church or curfew" and adolescents in their understandable desire for independence rebel. In these confusing times, lifestyles and behaviors that appear to be avant-garde and alternative are highly appealing. And because sexuality is by its nature highly pleasurable, their experiences are mediated by the added confusion of that pleasure. And their confusion is fused into self-definition and the cycle begins.
6. Finally, I am amazed that after knowing that the Archbishop of Canterbury recently had asked the Rev. Jeffrey Johns of England (who was recently elected a Bishop) to step down over the same matter...and after reading a letter from the Archbishop imploring the greater church to refrain from authorizing liturgies that celebrate same sex unions, at this time ...still we proceeded to have our own way. The American church has attempted to legislate a new theology without a firm grasp of the eternal, spiritual implications or the international ramifications of such erroneous decisions. Once again the Episcopal Church has attempted to formulate a political solution to a profoundly spiritual issue.

**The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Dr. Rowan Williams has called an unprecedented meeting of the Primates for October of this year to**

**discuss this serious matter. I pray that the Primates will be granted wisdom and strength; that the Holy Spirit may inspire their deliberations and decisions.**

Finally, I realize there is much more to say on these subjects. Possibly, as a parish, we can begin a process of study, which will lead us to even more clarity and unity on these subjects. I am personally encouraged by the vote of our beloved Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Herbert Thompson, and believe that he will not authorize such Rites in our Diocese. I can assure you that as long as I am Rector here at Saint Francis Parish, I will not perform Rites that are clearly in opposition to the historic teachings of the Church. I pray that our Diocesan Bishop will give us even more direction regarding these matters, in the very near future, and that he will affirm each parish's right to oppose or dissent from the unprecedented actions of the General Convention, which effectively abandon the unity and collegiality of the Anglican Community and precepts of our historic faith. May we continue to pray for the Lord's wisdom in the days that lie ahead.

Faithfully in Christ,

The Rev. Joseph Herbert Redmond, Jr., Rector  
St. Francis Church – Springboro, Ohio

August 17, 2003 final