
An Open Letter Concerning My Vote and Work At the General Convention of the Episcopal Church

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip, Atlanta
Clergy Deputy to General Convention

Dear Friend in Christ:

Please excuse the formal nature of this letter, which I am trying to send to everyone who has contacted me about upcoming issues at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church. Almost every piece of correspondence I have received has been about the resolution to develop a liturgy of same-sex blessing or about giving official consent to the election of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire.

I know many of you personally who have contacted me, and I thank you for your voice. Whether I know you or not, I also know that all of you are sincere and faithful in your promises to keep me in your prayers. I need those prayers right now. I especially appreciate the prayers of those who have disagreed with me in the past. Indeed, these issues of homosexuality in the Church are not new issues. I have been ordained twenty years now, and the issue of homosexuality has been persistent throughout my ministry.

Thus, I have studied and prayed and talked and prayed very, very much about this issue. I believe I have heard, and appreciated, almost every conceivable argument—both for and against—the current issues of homosexuality.

Over the past several years, then, I have come to form opinions. I share them with you so that you will know how I stand. However, I share them humbly, because I believe God calls each of us to special humility in this time. The world wants us to be angry and divisive over a very controversial issue. I believe we live according to a different standard; we can have disagreements on this issue and still be united in the Church and in Christ's love.

I also share these views humbly because I know I might be wrong. I have been wrong before, and the very complexity of homosexuality issues certainly counsels caution. Given my caution, however, here is where I stand:

1. We are saved by the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. This is the foundation of our unity and our communion in the Church.
2. In human society, there will always be a small percentage of people who are homosexual in orientation. Others might be able to choose, or not to choose, this orientation; but I believe that a certain percentage of us is naturally homosexual. For this percentage, "according to nature" means being homosexual.
3. This rather small percentage does not threaten the institution of marriage or the family. The marriage of a man and a woman in lifelong, faithful commitment is a powerful sacrament, and a sign of the love and commitment which we have for God, and which God has for us.
4. There are certainly sexual sins; but homosexuality is not, in and of itself, a sin.
5. I count four verses of our Scripture which seem to speak against homosexuality, but I do not think they speak against

what I know today as God-given, natural, sexual orientation.

6. Even if homosexuality is natural for some people, God does not bless any relationship -heterosexual or homosexual -- just because it is natural. Rather, God blesses relationships that point to the commitment and covenant that all human beings ought properly to have for God.

7. There are some homosexual relationships-faithful, life-long, permanent, and self-sacrificing-that mediate grace, and which can indicate the kind of faithfulness which all human beings ought to have for God.

8. For these reasons, if a vote comes to the floor of the House of Deputies on whether to develop liturgies which bless non-marriage relationships, I expect that I will vote for the resolution. The pre-filed resolution (C005) does not assume that the Episcopal Church would immediately authorize same-sex blessings. Rather, the Church would have three years to develop and study those liturgies before they were officially authorized.

9. On the issue of the election of Gene Robinson, I expect that I will vote to give consent for his consecration. I acknowledge that his open partnership with another man is a new thing in the Church, but I believe that partnership is faithful, life-long, self-sacrificing, and grace-filled. Thus, I believe his conduct constitutes a "wholesome example" (which is the only phrase used in our Constitution and Canons about the required moral character for ordination), though it is certainly a new example.

I know that some of you who read these opinions are heartened, and I know that some of you are disheartened. I do not like having a position that disheartens people. I certainly do not want faithful Christians to leave their churches because of how I vote, or because of how General Convention proceeds on these matters.

My most certain opinion is this: No sexuality issue is powerful enough to divide the Episcopal Church, or the Christian Church. Though many of us feel quite passionately about our side of the debate, this is not an issue worthy of division. I believe we can live faithfully in the Christian community while still disagreeing on the issue of same-sex unions. As you pray and discuss this issue, I pray that each of you will honor your Christian brothers and sisters who disagree with you, on whatever side they may be on.

Whatever General Convention votes in the next few days, I also know that our conversations are not concluded. I promise to continue to serve this Church, and to serve each of you, faithfully and prayerfully in days to come.

Finally, I thank you again for your prayers. I am praying for each of you who has contacted me, too. I believe that through this prayer, God will hold us together even if you and I are on different sides of these issues.

(Meanwhile, there ARE other issues in our Church! I hope that God is moving in your parish and that the world knows something more of Jesus Christ through your service and love.)

Blessings to you, in Jesus Christ our Lord,

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip