

Easter(n) Dialogues



Guide for Initiating Parish
Conversations around
Human Sexuality
in the Diocese of Eastern
Newfoundland and Labrador



Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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Dear Friends,

I write at this time to offer my heartfelt endorsement of this guide, ***Easter(n) Dialogues: A Guide for Initiating Parish Conversations around Human Sexuality in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador***. It is a remarkable and highly original creation, arising from conversations between Canon David Burrows and Archdeacon Charlene Taylor in 2014 that eventually included me as we reflected upon that valuable space between General Synod 2013 and General Synod 2016. We affirmed the need for new resources to assist the church in its conversation around human sexuality and at our own Diocesan Synod in 2014 a motion was passed unanimously to begin this work.

The working group who completed this document includes the following persons:

Chair: The Rev.'d Canon David Burrows, B.A., M.Div.
Members: Mr. Rick Hibbs, P.Eng.
Mr. Lester Pike, RN
Mr. Harold Press, Ed. D.
The Rev.'d Jonathan Rowe, B.A. (Hons.), M.Div.
The Venerable Charlene Taylor, B.A., M.Div.

The working group met twelve times from January to June of 2015 with meetings comprising a total of 15 hours. Additionally, individual research and learning added approximately another 25 hours for each member, totaling about 165 working hours for the entire group. I thank these people for their fine work on behalf of all the members of our church.

It is my hope and prayer that ***Easter(n) Dialogues: A Guide for Initiating Parish Conversations around Human Sexuality in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador*** will be put to good and wholesome use across our diocese in 2015 and beyond and that it may enable all of us to grow in grace and in faith. I appreciate the way in which the document is designed to be flexible in its adaptation for use in local settings. It is also my hope that ***Easter(n) Dialogues*** will find a place in the wider church beyond this Diocese and become a gift to others as they too reflect and pray together on this important matter for all of God's People.

With my every blessing,

+ Jeffrey: Eastern Newfoundland + Labrador

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoff Peddle

Easter(n) Dialogues

Guide for Initiating Parish Conversations around Human Sexuality in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

Background

In 2013 the General Synod passed a resolution to draft a motion to change Canon XXI (On Marriage in the Church) to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in the same way as opposite-sex couples (see Appendix 1). This resolution will be considered by General Synod in July 2016. In 2014, our own Diocesan Synod passed a motion to enter into a period of prayer, learning, and dialogue, to discern the presence of the Holy Spirit with respect to these and similar discussions of human sexuality (see Appendix 2). It is reasonable to assume that some of this prayer, learning, and dialogue will carry over into the discussions at Diocesan Synod in the spring of 2016. Conversations at both of these Synods will impact Anglicans in our parishes, in our diocese, throughout Canada, and around the world. Regardless of outcome, some may feel rejected and betrayed and some may feel affirmed and assured. It can be difficult to discuss complex and challenging issues like those surrounding human sexuality. Yet digging deeper into what we believe and how we live together can enrich our life as a Christian community. Now, more than ever, the work of theological reflection is needed in the Church.

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to help facilitate a conversation amongst Anglicans in anticipation of the upcoming Synods taking place in 2016. We perceive this conversation will take place within parishes over a four week period. This conversation may take many forms. For example, in some parishes, this may best be achieved through a series of 'dialogue sermons' which can be led either by the clergy or an appropriate lay leader. In others, the most appropriate vehicle might be discussion and reflection in the context of a traditional Bible study or book study group. In still others, it might be best to offer 'lunch and learn' sessions over a set time period. Whatever the means of reflection, the hope is that through a pattern of prayer, questions, discussion and dialogue over this period, parishes will be able to engage in conversations concerning the Bible, Change and Diversity, Human Sexuality, and Marriage and Families.

We recognize that for many these are very difficult topics, and affect people in deeply personal ways. Some may not wish to speak at all, while others may wish to speak about only certain parts of the issue, and others may wish to speak on every component. Some may wish only to speak privately with their parish clergy. All approaches are valid and respected. Within this context, we can never dismiss the value of listening within community.

The issues are complex enough that they cannot be represented by a single question. In fact, the questions presented here in no way represent the entirety of the issues surrounding human sexuality. They are intended only as a background to enable the start of a respectful conversation on the subject. They may best be seen as ‘jumping-off points,’ and some conversations may naturally flow into other relevant tangents. This is to be encouraged: we hope that whatever conversations begin may continue.

The goal of this process is simply to facilitate conversations, and not for parishes or groups to arrive at decisions *for* or *against* anything. Nor is the goal to direct General Synod delegates to vote according to a position arrived at by the Diocese. It is our desire that Anglicans in our diocese have an opportunity to participate in open and respectful conversations on the issues, as church leaders prepare to reflect on these complex issues and to make difficult decisions. The primary concern is dialogue and discernment rather than decisions.

How to Start the Conversation

This is only a guide. It does not have to be followed in the way it is presented. Some parishes and clergy may want to initiate these conversations in their own way, and creative approaches are encouraged. We suggest that over the course of four weeks, parishes facilitate a conversation about the complex issues of human sexuality, using the suggested themes as focal points for each week’s discussion.

Formal reporting of the conversations is not necessary, and in many cases, may prove unhelpful. Far more important than making concrete decisions, or keeping track of who said what, is the opportunity to have our opinions heard, to respectfully listen to the opinions of others, and in general, to get the feel of the ‘temperature’ around some of these conversations in our faith communities.

This guide does not provide categorical opinions or explicit moral leadership. To help make the most of each gathering we ask that everyone agree to honour the following.

During the discussion, we will:

- begin and end each session with prayer;
- respect people’s integrity as members of this faith community;
- assume that as people of faith we are all sincere in our beliefs, including our reverence for Holy Scripture;
- assume that lesbian and gay persons are present;
- use language known to be affirming rather than offensive;
- respect others by being concise and not interrupting;
- speak in the first person; and
- respect the privacy of others.

Guidelines for a Parish Resource on Human Sexuality

Goal of this Resource

To enter into a conversation and to reveal the presence of the Holy Spirit within the topic of Human Sexuality and how it affects the community of faith.

Format of the Resource

The resource is designed with four areas of discussion:

1. *The Bible*
2. *Change and Diversity*
3. *Human Sexuality*
4. *Marriage and Families*

The resource can be used over a four week period or it can be used in one week over four consecutive days/evenings. Each session is composed of a prayer, preamble, questions to start the conversation, suggested resources for reflection, and a litany.

Suggestions of How to Use this Resource

- *Dialogue Sermon*
The conversation can take place as a sermon series with opportunity for participants to enter into a dialogue during the sermon. This format may give the parish the opportunity to reach a large number of people in a worship setting.
- *Parish Study Group*
The conversation can take place in a study group similar to a traditional Bible study. This format may give the parish the opportunity to gather in small or large groups outside a worship setting.
- *Lunch & Learn*
The conversation can take place over a meal for discussion and learning.
- *Online Dialogue*
The conversation can take place online through the use of various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, and other online forums. In consultation with the Bishop, appropriate boundaries must be established in order to maintain open and respectful online dialogue.
- *Prayer*
Whatever format is used, prayer is essential throughout the process. While suggestions for prayer are offered for use with each weekly session, they are also recommended for use at other times in the life of the Church. They may be incorporated into the Prayers of the People in Sunday or weekday liturgies, or used by Parish prayer groups or individuals.

- *Be Creative*

These guidelines are suggestions on how a parish may enter into a respectful conversation on the topic of human sexuality. This resource is adaptable and can be used in a variety of ways depending on local context and resources.

Week 1: The Bible

Prayer

(Adapted from Celebrations Along the Way)

In all honesty, O God,
we would sometimes not open a conversation with you,
or with each other.
It is easier to pretend we do not hear, see or feel your invitations.

Silent reflection

The shadowlands of our old standing places feel safer to us
than the light of new possibilities,
or the colours of your dreams for us.

Silent reflection

But do not stop calling us,
God of our pilgrim journey.
Forgive our lack of courage and hope.
Beckon us on into your brave conversations of *the Bible*
and open our hearts to each other, O God. Amen.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Preamble

The Bible is a story—a long story made up of many shorter stories—about the relationship between God and God's people. That is why it is also called the Word of God. The stories are told in many different ways, in poetry and in prose, through prophecy and law, in gospels and in letters. Week by week in worship and in Bible study, we retell the story and make it alive in our own lives, as individuals and as communities.

Questions

Getting Started:

- **How do you use the Bible?**

Prompt: How is the reading of the Bible part of your life?

Prompt: Does the Bible challenge you to ask questions?

Digging Deeper:

- **Are there discrepancies and inconsistencies in the Bible and, if so, how should we handle them?**

Prompt: How do you deal with the differences in the Christmas Stories (Matthew and Luke) or accounts of the Crucifixion as outlined in the various Gospels?

The Heart of the Matter:

- **If two readers of the Bible have different understandings of a passage, can both be right? Can both be wrong?**

Prompt: How might reading and understanding the Bible be a voyage of discovery?

For Further Discussion:

- **Can our understanding of the Bible change over time?**

Prompt: Imagine a father reading portions of the Bible to his children back in the 16th or 17th century and he comes to one of a number of passages that refer to slavery (Matthew 10:24/24:45-46, Ephesians 6:5, 1 Timothy 6:1-4). He might well have supported slavery and have benefited from it. It is very likely most people here today find slavery abhorrent.

Litany

(From Flames of the Spirit)

Holy Spirit,
Enter our lives,
Free us from all fear.
Give us strength to carry on.
Give us hope and joy sufficient for each day.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit,
Give us power to be the church, Impart your many gifts to our members,
that we may be the body of Christ's presence in the world.
Free us from all fear and renew our life together.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit,
Bind us together,
not only with the sheep of this fold,
but all of Christ's people.
Forgive the pride, prejudice, and self-righteousness which separate us from one another.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

That all may be one in Christ,
source of all true unity,
who is with us today and always,
even to the end of time. **Amen.**

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Week 2: Change and Diversity

Prayer

(Adapted from Celebrations Along the Way)

In all honesty, O God,
we would sometimes not open a conversation with you,
or with each other.
It is easier to pretend we do not hear, see or feel your invitations.

Silent reflection

The shadowlands of our old standing places feel safer to us
than the light of new possibilities,
or the colours of your dreams for us.

Silent reflection

But do not stop calling us,
God of our pilgrim journey.
Forgive our lack of courage and hope.
Beckon us on into your brave conversations of *Change and Diversity*
and open our hearts to each other, O God. Amen.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Preamble

Most religions do not readily accept change. Many alter their beliefs only after great agony, internal conflict, and even schism and violence. Sometimes it takes centuries to complete the process. Within our Anglican faith tradition, we see numerous examples of diversity: worship expressions, pastoral responses, and acts of service, to name a few. There are numerous examples of change of Christian doctrine, such as polygamy, baptism of Gentiles, celibacy or marriage of priests, slavery, ordination of women, and divorce. The incorporation of different languages, cultures, and styles of ministry has enabled great diversity and change within the family of those who follow Jesus.

Questions:

Getting Started:

- **Why is change within the Anglican Communion particularly difficult?**

Prompt: Is it because of the diversity within a world-wide church? Is it because of historical traditions of the church? Is it due to current interpretations of the Bible? Is it

because the church tolerates a broad range of beliefs? Is it due to a fundamental misunderstanding about how the Anglican Church makes decisions?

Digging Deeper:

- **What would constitute acceptable change in the Anglican Church?**

Prompt: Grounded in scripture? Informed by church history? On moral grounds alone? The church adjusting to the society in which it finds itself? Must the whole Church come to consensus before change takes place?

The Heart of the Matter:

- **There are so many other issues facing us, why does human sexuality dominate our time and cause division?**

Prompt: Is it because any conversation about human sexuality is strange, difficult or even out-of-bounds? Is it because it has implications on marriage, families, our values, prayer, and Scripture?

Prompt: Does this have more to do with our culture than our faith?

For Further Discussion:

- **How has the face of the Anglican Church changed since you were younger?**

Prompt: Has it become more diverse; or more homogenous? What are the blessings and challenges of the diversity that is the Anglican Church today? Is that a good thing? What are the implications and consequences of more change?

Litany

(Bruce Prewer)

Loving God, we are an odd mob.

**We thank You for the widely different types of people,
and expressions of faith,
which constitute the membership of your Church in this century.**

We give thanks for those who appear born to express faith
through rigid creeds and behaviour.

We give thanks for others who seem destined to follow Christ
among innumerable questions and doubts.

We give thanks for members whose faith appears to be
a profound, childlike simplicity, unhurried and unworried.

We give thanks for those who seem unable to find one satisfying word
**with which to describe You,
yet whose faith is constantly renewed by a wordless awe
in the presence of Unnameable Love.**

Lover of diversity, God of all souls,
**continue to give us the grace to treasure each other with all our oddness
and to use these differences as we minister to the diversity of people
who share this twenty first century with us. Amen.**

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Week 3: Human Sexuality

Prayer

(Adapted from Celebrations Along the Way)

In all honesty, O God,
we would sometimes not open a conversation with you,
or with each other.
It is easier to pretend we do not hear, see or feel your invitations.

Silent reflection

The shadowlands of our old standing places feel safer to us
than the light of new possibilities,
or the colours of your dreams for us.

Silent reflection

But do not stop calling us,
God of our pilgrim journey.
Forgive our lack of courage and hope.
Beckon us on into your brave conversations of *Human Sexuality*
and open our hearts to each other, O God. Amen.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Preamble

There was a time in our society when human sexuality could not be thought of as a question: you were male or female; mother or father; wife or husband; son or daughter. We no longer live in that black and white social setting. There now exists a rainbow of human sexuality including bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, straight, and transgendered. Even those who long for a return to past conventions, at times, are questioned on their sexuality; it is no longer acceptable to assume. Human sexuality is now part of our identity, yet talking about human sexuality makes many of us uncomfortable.

When we think of human sexuality, what do we mean? Some form of physical contact? Human reproduction? Feelings when you see an attractive person? Human sexuality is all these things and more. Discussions of human sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, have been at the forefront of deliberations in the Anglican Communion for many years.

Questions

Getting Started:

- **What does it mean to be a sexual being created in the image of God?**

Prompt: How important is procreation to your understandings of sexuality and faith?

Prompt: How important is human pleasure to your understandings of sexuality and faith?

Prompt: How important is relationship to your understandings of sexuality and faith?

Digging Deeper:

- **How does my sexuality shape and inform my understandings of faith, family, culture and science?**

Prompt: How do we recognize the lens with which we see the world?

Prompt: Do we recognize and affirm other ways to see the world?

Prompt: Can we empathize with others?

The Heart of the Matter:

- **Is being non-heterosexual a sin?**

Prompt: If it is not a sin, what is the general objection? Should non-heterosexual people be baptized? Confirmed? Married? Ordained? Buried according to the rites of the Anglican Church?

Prompt: Many argue the bible teaches us that homosexual acts are an abomination; others say Jesus taught us to accept others for who they are. How does the Church live with this tension?

Prompt: If someone truly believes they do not fit in the normal definition of heterosexual, then is it sinful for them to follow what they believe to be their true identify? Is it sinful to make them conform?

For Further Discussion:

- **What messages are you hearing from the church about sex?**

Prompt: Have these messages and teachings changed since you were young? In what ways?

Litany

(Adapted from Flames of the Spirit)

As we have celebrated our common faith, so may we worship God where we are every day.

We trust God to stand by us in our struggles and help us change and grow.

Look beyond the accumulation of things to those relationships with people that give life meaning.

We will dare to share ourselves with all people God loves, that we may more fully understand each other .

Hear the stories our sisters and brothers want to tell, for God may speak to us through them.

We want to feel their pain and their joy, to live in mutual acceptance and peace.

The peace of God go with us and be shared through us.

Amen.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Week 4: Marriage and Families

Prayer

(Adapted from Celebrations Along the Way)

In all honesty, O God,
we would sometimes not open a conversation with you,
or with each other.
It is easier to pretend we do not hear, see or feel your invitations.

Silent reflection

The shadowlands of our old standing places feel safer to us
than the light of new possibilities,
or the colours of your dreams for us.

Silent reflection

But do not stop calling us,
God of our pilgrim journey.
Forgive our lack of courage and hope.
Beckon us on into your brave conversations of *Marriage and Families*
and open our hearts to each other, O God. Amen.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Preamble

Our culture holds certain ideals about what a family should be. Traditionally, this has meant a husband and wife, married with children. Not all, and perhaps very few, families meet this ideal. Modern families claim to come in all shapes and sizes: single parents; extended; multi-generational; blended; childless; same-sex, etc. Egalitarian views in Western Societies contend that all families can be of equal value and importance.

God's salvation history is filled with stories of families and relationships. Some of these relationships are foreign or appalling to our modern sensibilities, while others are familiar and comforting. A consistent message throughout these stories is faithfulness and commitment to God and each other.

Questions

Getting Started:

- **What does the church say that informs our current understanding of marriage and family?**

Prompt: Is our understanding of marriage consistent with our Baptismal Covenant? As Anglicans we are called at Baptism to participate fully in the body of Christ and the sacraments. We are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

Prompt: How do you interpret what the church says about marriage?

Digging Deeper:

- **Canon XXI (The Marriage Canon) states that the purposes of marriage are “mutual fellowship, support, and comfort, and the procreation (if it may be) and nurture of children, and the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfillment in a community of faithful love.” What is marriage fundamentally about? Must all of these apply? Must any of these apply?**

Prompt: What are the modern expectations of marriage?

Prompt: What is the definition of family for you?

Prompt: What roles do church hold in marriage and family?

The Heart of the Matter:

- **How can current understandings of the sacrament of marriage include same-gender relationships?**

Prompt: Does the current Canon regarding marriage need to be changed in order to uphold the sanctity of same-gender relationships? Does it need to be changed? Should it be changed? Can you live with the results?

Prompt: Does the current Canon regarding marriage need to stay the same in order to affirm the present teaching and practice of the church?

For Further Discussion:

- **What is our future?**

Prompt: What do you think God wants us to do?

Litany

We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

I am married,
and single
and in a covenant relationship.
We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

I was married,
and in a holy union,
and never married,
and married twice,
and widowed.

We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

I am older
and younger,
and in between,
facing my first serious relationship,
knowing the joy of love,
enduring betrayal,
tasting the grief of a dying partner.
We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

I am an only child,
and have ten siblings
and have raised two children
and no children.
We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

I am part of a family,
the human family
the family of faith
my family of origin
the family of my choosing.
We are the people of God.
Together we are family.

Other prayer resources are found in the Appendix.

Appendix 1: General Synod Resolution

In 2013 the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada passed a resolution directing the drafting of a motion to change Canon XXI.

Resolution C003: Preparation of a motion to change Canon XXI on Marriage: Direction to COGS

Moved by: Ms. Michelle Bull, Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI

Seconded by: Ms. Jennifer Warren, Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI

Be it resolved that this General Synod

direct the Council of General Synod to prepare and present a motion at General Synod 2016 to change Canon XXI on Marriage to allow the marriage of same sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples, and that this motion should include a conscience clause so that no member of the clergy, bishop, congregation or diocese should be constrained to participate in or authorize such marriages against the dictates of their conscience.

This motion will also include support documentation that:

- a) demonstrates broad consultation in its preparation;
- b) explains how this motion does not contravene the Solemn Declaration;
- c) confirms immunity under civil law and the Human Rights Code for those bishops, dioceses and priests who refuse to participate in or authorize the marriage of same-sex couples on the basis of conscience; and
- d) provides a biblical and theological rationale for this change in teaching on the nature of Christian marriage.

Source: Member

Submitted by: Ms. Michelle Bull, Diocese of Nova Scotia and PEI

Does this motion contain within it any financial implications? Yes No X

If yes, has the General Synod Expenditures Committee considered the implications? Yes No

EXPLANATORY NOTE/BACKGROUND

It has been 6 years since General synod last debated this issue. Since then, some dioceses have proceeded in a manner they deemed necessary to meet the local pastoral and other needs with respect to the blessing of same sex civil marriages. It has been over 10 years since such civil marriages were legal in Canada. The general public has become much more accepting of same sex unions since we last discussed it. This is also true of the church, though not, of course, universally so.

It seems like a good idea to ask COGS to draft this motion, so that it will be done correctly and with the benefit of appropriate legal and theological advice as to wording, so that the motion will do all and only what we wish it to.

We believe that it is necessary that there be a conscience clause so that anyone who is not in favour of same sex marriages will not be constrained to participate in them. It is not our intention to force everyone to conform in this matter, but only to allow those who wish to allow same sex marriage in the church to go ahead.

PROCEDURE FOR ADOPTION (G)

In the normal course, an ordinary motion must be passed by a majority of the Order of Bishops, and by a majority of the Orders of Clergy and Laity voting together.

Six members of General Synod may, prior to the question being put, require a vote by Orders, with a majority of each Order being necessary to pass.

If a question passes on a Vote by Orders, any six members (two from each of three different dioceses) may require a vote to be taken by dioceses. A motion passes if a majority of dioceses (or a tie) vote in favour.

Source: Section 5 of the Declarations of Principles and sections 18, 19 and 20 of the Rules of Order and Procedure

Note: If Resolution A030 is given second reading, the required majority will be all Orders voting together.

CARRIED BY ORDER AS AMENDED

Appendix 2: Diocesan Synod Resolution

In 2014, the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador passed a resolution directing the diocese to enter into a period of prayer, learning and dialogue.

We call for the presence of the Holy Spirit: A motion of Prayer, Learning, and Dialogue concerning Human Sexuality

Whereas The Anglican Church of Canada in subsequent General Synods (1995 onwards) has continued open dialogue and reflection concerning the respect and dignity of all human beings, specifically in relation to gay and lesbian persons within the body of Christ in Anglicanism.

And Whereas The Anglican Church in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador upholds the Baptismal Covenant as outlined in the Book of Alternative Services (pp.158 – 159) as one of the guideposts of the marks of the Christian life.

And Whereas The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada will be making decisions in 2016 as to the place of liturgies and practice of the blessing of Same Sex Unions and Holy Matrimony within the Canons of the Church.

Be it Resolved that This Synod of the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador enter into a period of Prayer (prayer days, prayer resources), Learning (small group gatherings, workshops, information sessions), and Dialogue (including all members of the Body of Christ), within Archdeaconries and Parishes, to discern the presence of the Holy Spirit over the next eighteen months, in which archdeaconries and parishes will avail of Diocesan and National Resources.

Moved: The Rev'd Canon David J. Burrows, Parish of the Ascension, Mount Pearl

Seconded: The Venerable Charlene A. L. Taylor, Parish of the Good Shepherd, Mount Pearl

Appendix 3: Additional Prayer Resources

The Bible

Opening Prayer - *may be used each week*

(Flames of the Spirit)

Creating God, who brought us into this world, breathed your Spirit into us, and endowed us with your likeness; we give thanks to you for our creation and for the cords of love that bind us and nourish us in the community you have created. We pray for your continued presence to feed and sustain us as a family you have formed and which bears your name. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Opening Prayer

~ written by Stephen M. Fearing (inspired by John 20:19-31)

Resurrected God,
though we have hidden ourselves in a locked room
and huddled together as ones who build barriers,
send your Living Word through our locked doors
and into our guarded hearts
that we might be witnesses of your grace
and couriers of your goodness.

By the power of your Holy Spirit,
grant us the trust to believe the Gospel
not because we see it
but because we have been seen by it
and transformed through it. Amen.

Closing Litany

(Iona Abby Worship Book - based on Creation Story)

Out of darkness came light

And the power of God was revealed.

In the running of wave and the flowing air, in the quiet earth and the shining stars

And the power of God was revealed.

Out of dust came life

And the image of God was revealed.

In the human face and the gentle heart, in the warmth of flesh and the depth of soul

And the power of God was revealed.

Out of justice came freedom

And the wisdom of God was revealed.

In the need to grow and the will to love, in the chance to know and the power to choose.

And the wisdom of God was revealed.

And God looked at the creation,
And behold , it was very good.

Closing Litany

(From Flames of the Spirit)

Holy Spirit,
Enter our lives,
Free us from all fear.
Give us strength to carry on.
Give us hope and joy sufficient for each day.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit,
Give us power to be the church, Impart your many gifts to our members,
that we may be the body of Christ's presence in the world.
Free us from all fear and renew our life together.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Holy Spirit,
Bind us together,
not only with the sheep of this fold,
but all of Christ's people.
Forgive the pride, prejudice, and self-righteousness which separate us from one another.
Come, Holy Spirit, come.

That all may be one in Christ,
source of all true unity,
who is with us today and always,
even to the end of time. **Amen.**

Change and Diversity

Opening Prayer

(Adapted from Diversity Resources, Diocese of Toronto Anglican Church of Canada)

God of the nations, you call us to share in the life and ministry of your Church. Enable us to celebrate our oneness in you and the shared inheritance of your Kingdom. Prosper our work as we endeavour to build bridges of love, understanding and cooperation in the midst of change and diversity, that transformed and renewed by your Holy Spirit, we will be no longer strangers to one another, but together, as members of your household, through your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Opening Prayer

(Adapted from Diversity Resources, Diocese of Toronto Anglican Church of Canada)

O God, who created all peoples in your image,
We thank you for the wonderful diversity we find in this world.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship,
And show us your presence in those who differ most from us,
Until our knowledge of your love

Is made perfect in our love for all your children;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, **Amen.**

Closing Litany

(Adapted from Celebrations Along the Way)

For the people of our church gathered here, that we may celebrate our faith together, embracing all that we share, and acknowledging our diversity. Lord we pray.

Hear our prayer.

For those who are yet to discover the love and community that is to be found in the fellowship of the church. Lord we pray.

Hear our prayer.

For those who share faith, that we may seek to understand and learn from each other in changing times. Lord we pray.

Hear our prayer.

Human Sexuality

Opening Prayer

(Adapted from Touch Holiness)

We come to this time of conversation and listening where we bring our needs and longings. Each of us have travelled different roads and conceived diverse thoughts this week. But underneath our differences lies the same basic needs for love and acceptance. That's why we are here - to admit to each other our need for love. Let us celebrate the most marvellous fact of the universe - God loves us and accepts us just as we are. **Amen.**

Opening Prayer

(Lisa Frenz. Re:worship)

In a time before all knowing, God is,
and God's breathe fills the emptiness, creating:
a universe, a world, an ecology, a biology and us, humankind.
All humankind, no exceptions, no imperfections;
and all of us beloved just as we are.

*In a time before all knowing,
Christ Jesus watches the creating,
and steps out into creation:
becoming, living, dying, and rising, all for us.
All humankind, no exceptions, no reservations;
all of us just as we are, God's beloved.*

In a time before all knowing the Spirit is,
and moves through every part of creation:
consoling, interceding, leading, and refreshing all the world, including us.
All humankind, no exceptions, no differentiations;
all of us just as we are, God's beloved. **Amen.**

Closing Litany

(adapted from <http://www.united-church.ca/planning/theme>. Based on Song of Songs 2:16; 3:1-3; 8:6-7 - United Church of Canada)

My Beloved is mine, and I am my Beloved's.

Day after day, I seek my Beloved;

I seek but do not find.

Have you seen my Beloved?

Truth is her name!

Waters cannot quench, nor floods drown Truth!

I arise and go about the City.

In the streets and in the squares

I call for my Beloved:

Justice is his name!

Waters cannot quench, nor floods drown Justice!

In the church, I seek my Beloved

with heart and soul, mind and strength.

Have you seen the one my soul loves?

Hope is her name!

Waters cannot quench, nor floods drown Hope!

Have you seen my Beloved?

At home? In the city? In the church?

Passion is his name!

Waters cannot quench, nor floods drown Passion!

O friends and companions,

come, let us seek our most desired:

Truth, Justice, Hope, Passion!

Waters cannot quench, nor floods drown Love!

Marriage and Families

Opening Prayer

(Adapted from Creative Ideas for Evening Prayer)

We gather to celebrate what it means to be 'family'. Not only do we acknowledge and give thanks for members of our own family, but we consider who else might be part of our Christian family. In our baptism liturgy, when we welcome a new member to our church family, we affirm that we are children of the same heavenly Father - the Father who has searched each one of us out, who loves us and who knows us intimately. And as our baptismal covenant reminds us, may we remember that we are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

(<http://www.thomasmorecenter.org/Resources/Prayers/PrayerforFamilies/tabid/1530/Default.aspx>)

Lord, God, we thank you for the gift of family. We acknowledge that our image and name as family come from you. We believe that within our family lies a homemade holiness. We affirm that it is in this household of faith that we experience your presence, your forgiveness, and your love.

We are Family. We give thanks to you for the many joys and blessings that have come to us through family.

As a family we sometimes feel pain. And so we offer you our disappointments, frustrations, and hurts. Help us to forgive those members of our family, including ourselves, who have caused pain.

We pray for the strength to be a light within our family. May we open our hearts, our eyes, and our ears and carry our light to those in need.

God, Creator of the earth and all its people, help us to be mindful that, as members of one global family, we are equal in your eyes. Help us to continue to appreciate the diversity of persons in our homes and in our world. As members equal in human dignity, may we build a better world and proclaim our willingness to be the holy people you call us to be. **Amen.**

Closing Litany

(Iona Abby Worship Book)

For the roots of our Community, and of all our communities,

We thank you, living God.

For what we share together here, and for the life we share with others,

We thank you, living God.

For the path that lies before us now, and our futures in your hands,

We thank you, living God.

Closing Litany

The peace of God go with us this day, reigning within us, and in our families

God's peace will make a difference in our lives, in all our relationships.

Walk in confident friendship with Christ, who suffers and rejoices with us.

Christ's presence will transform and strengthen us, wherever our journeys take us this week.

Live by the Spirit, acknowledging God's rule in our hearts and in our actions.

We welcome the fire of the Holy Spirit, the refreshing wind of God's surprising grace. Amen.

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