

R13-1

Resolved, the 107th Annual Council of the Diocese of Atlanta, meeting at Holy Innocents Church and School, Atlanta, November 8 and 9, 2013, supports our Bishop's stated vision to "draw the circle wider" through intentional and specific outreach to the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) community; and be it further

Resolved, that our diocese shall establish an LGBT Ministry Commission to coordinate ministries for and with LGBT Episcopalians, and to engage in ministry to the wider LGBT community throughout our diocese, and be it further

Resolved, that, in response to our baptismal promises to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being, the LGBT Ministry Commission shall provide resources for parishes as they explore and live into what it means to be welcoming and affirming toward LGBT persons.

EXPLANATION

Among the initiatives proposed by Bishop Wright in his address to the 106th Annual Council was to create a task force to determine "the scope and scale of our mission to and with our lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender brothers and sisters." Last February he appointed a task force made up both of lay and ordained LGBT and straight members. The task force determined first that it was important to listen carefully to members of the LGBT community, both within and outside the Episcopal Church, and to others who care about them. E-mails were sent to each convocation dean and college chaplain of the Diocese indicating a willingness to come to any parish or other group that requested a listening session. Ten sessions were held between April and September with members of Integrity, at St. John's in College Park, at the Rush Center in Atlanta with organization leadership and later an open meeting, at St. Francis in Macon, at All Saints' in Atlanta, at St. Bartholomew's in Atlanta, at Holy Comforter in Atlanta, at St. Benedict's in Smyrna, and at St. Gabriel's in Oakwood.

Our LGBT brothers and sisters shared heartbreaking stories of rejection by both Episcopal parishes and churches of other denominations. We also heard uplifting stories of welcome and inclusion. We learned that our LGBT brothers and sisters seek an intentional welcome and inclusion in the community. They need the church to educate everyone about issues of sexuality and gender identity and their biblical and theological underpinnings. They want us to be clear about where The Episcopal Church stands on these issues and to go out and proclaim the good news. Finally, we learned of their desire to support the church with their time, talents and treasure and of their unique ability to offer models of the healthy living out of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Although we give thanks for the progress we have made to offer welcome to members of the LGBT community, there is still much work to be done. Many outside of the church are unaware of where we stand on these issues. Many LGBT people who are members of our parishes still feel they are merely tolerated rather than fully accepted as equal members. We have the opportunity to proclaim and live out the good news of our baptismal covenant to all who yearn for a welcoming and affirming faith community. An LGBT Ministry Commission can help us do just that.

Submitted by the LBGT Ministry Task Force
The Rev. Barry Q. Griffin, chair

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