

**COVENANT BETWEEN THE RECTOR AND VESTRY OF CHRIST CHURCH
CONCERNING THE BLESSING OF SAME-GENDER UNIONS***

We, the Rector and Vestry of Christ Church, enter into this covenant concerning the blessing of same-gender unions in order to provide clarity on an issue that lies at the heart of the present controversy facing the Episcopal Church.

We affirm the Mission of Christ Church as adopted by the Vestry in February 1994:

Christ Church is part of the Body of Christ where the Word of God is taught, heard and lived, and which provides a welcoming place of worship for all people, ministers to the needs and aspirations of its congregation, and extends Christian outreach to the community and the world.

We affirm that persons who are homosexual are welcomed as full members of our faith community.

We recognize that in the Episcopal Church and in our congregation there is passionate disagreement and lack of clarity on various issues concerning homosexuality. The possibility that blessing of same-gender unions might be authorized by the church is one such issue.

We hereby enter into a covenant with one another that blessing of same-gender unions will not occur at Christ Church without the mutual agreement of the Rector and the Vestry, with the awareness of the congregation, and with the permission of the Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina.

This agreement concerning blessings of same-gender unions shall be effective for the full tenure of the present Rector of Christ Church, the Reverend Winston B. Charles. Under the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church and of the Diocese of North Carolina, all rights and responsibilities for the worship of the church are vested in the Rector of a parish. As such, it is beyond our power to enter into an agreement that would be binding on any subsequent Rector of Christ Church.

This agreement is effective not only for the Rector but also for all clergy under his charge as Rector of Christ Church.

Agreed upon on the third day of December in the year of our Lord 2003.

The Reverend Dr. Winston B. Charles, Rector
Martin H. Brinkley, Senior Warden
Pamela B. Dickson, Clerk
Ann L. Proctor
John I. Mabe, Jr.
Sandra A. Anthony
Martha C. Leak

John F. Nash, Junior Warden
John B. Davis
Anne H. deRosset
M. Dixon McKay
John L. Cramer
Assad Meymandi

*NOTE (June 20, 2004): The term "same-gender union" is intended to mean the same thing as the more commonly used phrase "same-sex union."

December 11, 2003

Dear members of our Christ Church parish family,

The actions of the 2003 General Convention approving the election of the Reverend Canon V. Gene Robinson as Bishop-Elect of the Diocese of New Hampshire and allowing the blessing of same-gender unions under the authority of diocesan bishops have created great stress for our Episcopal Church and, more specifically, for our parish. Episcopalians of authentic faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and of genuine commitment to his church sincerely disagree on the wisdom of these actions. Undeniable agony has touched churches, parishes, and even families.

Faithful parishioners of Christ Church argue passionately on all sides, reflecting deeply held convictions. Whenever such strong emotions are present, it is important to take extra care to listen to one another, to respect one another, to see Christ in one another. It is important not to demonize or objectify persons, but to see each other as unique, precious children of God, redeemed by our Savior, and touched by the Spirit of love.

My fervent, prayerful desire is that Christ Church will continue to include all persons in our parish family. As we disagree on this issue, we continue to carry on the important work of the church: offering our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, proclaiming the Word of God, administering the sacraments of grace, praying for healing, nurturing our spiritual lives, loving our children and youth, caring for those who are in crisis, reaching out in witness to those who are need, entering into the joy of Christian community. There is a foundation deeper than our disagreement on this issue; that foundation is Christ.

I am committed to insuring that all members of Christ Church are respected, can participate in the ministry of our parish, and receive the pastoral care of the church. The attached covenant, agreed on by the Vestry and me, seeks to maintain this essential unity of our community as the Body of Christ and to provide time and space for our conversations to continue as we faithfully live together.

Persons who are homosexual have been members of Christ Church for decades. They contribute significantly to our communal life, provide leadership in many of our ministries, and have become close friends and fellow journeyers in Christ. As our parish mission statement states (passed by the Vestry in February of 1994), we welcome all persons into our parish family.

One of the major issues lying at the heart of our conversation is the blessing of same-gender unions at Christ Church. The Episcopal Church has not reached a decision on fully authorizing the blessing of same-gender unions. The General Convention recognized that these liturgies are already being performed in a number of dioceses and allowed such experimentation over the next three years under the direction of diocesan bishops. To perform such a blessing at Christ Church would be extremely detrimental to the unity of our community. For these reasons, the Vestry and I have entered into a covenant stating that the blessing of same-gender unions will not take place at Christ Church without the mutual agreement of Rector and Vestry during my tenure as Rector. This is effective not only for me but also for all clergy on the Christ Church staff.

Everything in this covenant I have said previously in sermons or in written articles; however, I hope this document will bring a degree of clarity that is important in times of disagreement. I realize that different portions of this covenant will be disappointing and perhaps even painful to members of our parish family, depending on what one's convictions are. Nonetheless, I pray that this will provide some ground on which we can stand together as we go forth in our life as a community, discuss the issues that come before us, and seek ways to care for all members of our parish family.

Part of the richness of Christ Church is its diversity. We differ in a variety of ways, and that diversity is strength. Much of the world seeks uniformity and homogeneity, we seek community. God calls us all into one fellowship centered in the one Lord. We do not create our unity; it is a gift that comes from Christ. As a community we discover it, honor it, and claim it as we stand side by side in worship and service of God, who creates, redeems and sustains. May our hearts be open to God's grace and to one another.

Yours in Christ,

The Reverend Dr. Winston B. Charles
Rector