

ESSAY 7: Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages

Executive Summary

From the moment it is published, a report entitled, “Changing Trends and Norms in Marriages” will necessarily be challenged to stay abreast of society’s rapidly evolving views, laws, and practices. We also recognize that further research and data gathering from non-U.S. Episcopal Church dioceses and from our ecumenical and Anglican partners is needed.

Our executive summary, therefore, offers a synthesis of some of the emerging trends and norms we have discerned, and suggests questions that our Church might consider. Much has changed in terms of how people approach marriage, and when and how they decide to make such a commitment. Educational differences, economic issues, age, race, and ethnicity are among the myriad of factors impacting marriage in North America and Western Europe, as well as in Latin-American and Asian countries. Yet, the Task Force on the Study of Marriage also noted some trends that transcend all variables:

- The age at which people enter into a first marriage is rising.
- The rates at which people are marrying are significantly declining.
- Student debt and job insecurity are prevalent reasons cited for delaying marriage.
- For women, delayed marriage can often bring an “income advantage” as they pursue their careers.
- Delayed marriage, especially among less-educated adults, has a significant economic impact especially for children raised in households with unmarried partners or with single parents.
- For those young adults, raising children in cohabitating and serial partnerships is becoming the new norm.
- Forty-eight percent of all first births are to unmarried women.
- Cohabitation prior to marriage has increased by nearly 900 percent over the last 50 years.
- Acceptance of same-sex marriage is growing, though not in all racial or ethnic communities.
- As of late 2014, 64 percent of Americans live in states where same-sex couples may marry.
- As of late 2014, 64.3 percent of Episcopalians in 64 U.S. dioceses live in states or jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal.

The rate at which people are marrying has been declining precipitously. The option — especially for young adults to enjoy what they consider the benefits of marriage through cohabitation and extended relationships while remaining single — is increasingly appealing to them. Research consulted by the Task Force reveals, however, that most teenagers report that having a “good” marriage “one day” is still their desire. That same data, however, illustrate that the median age at which both women and men enter into their first marriage is rising.

Researchers have identified this declining trend in marriage alongside the ever-shrinking middle class as the “Marriage Gap,” with noted disadvantages for young adults with less education. Interestingly, we note that the decision to delay marriage does not necessarily mean postponing entrance into parenthood. This has caused the coining of another term by researchers known as the “Great Crossover.” The result is that almost half of all new births now are to unmarried women.

Data are clear that unmarried couples break up more frequently, often leaving young mothers to be responsible for raising their children alone. This contributes to, or begins a cycle of, poverty that can exist for generations. This reality underscores the need for educational, economic, and family policies that do not complicate and unnecessarily stress an already fragile situation for parents and children.

The evidence is irrefutable that a high school education alone is no longer enough to lift individuals out of poverty. At the same time, burdensome student debt can not only prevent a mother, for example, from emerging from poverty, but may also contribute to a delay in marriage. Mass incarceration, particularly of a disproportionate number of young black men, is still another factor contributing to decisions by couples to delay marriage.

The Task Force attempted to better understand the role one's race and ethnicity might play in terms of deciding whether to marry or not. Among the interesting data uncovered was that African-American teens are less likely to date or participate in serious romantic relationships than are teens from other racial or ethnic groups. In the wider Hispanic and Latino community, familial relationships are considered even more essential to community life than the marriage itself, and divorce rates among Hispanic men and Latina women are lower by comparison with the general population.

The clan system found in many tribes in the Native-American community is actively engaged in childrearing, with elders in particular playing important roles. Asian Americans have the highest percentage of marriage and the lowest divorce rate. A high value on marriage where the extended family is an integral component is an aspect of Asian culture.

Additionally, there has been a seismic shift in cultural acceptance of same-gender marriage in the United States, especially within the last decade. However, this shift in increasing acceptance of marriage between same-sex couples is by no means limited to the United States. Indeed, governments and citizens in countries from every continent have embraced marriage equality and have actually outpaced the United States in making this shift.

Virtually every religious tradition has been engaged in discussing what these shifting norms mean for their believers and followers theologically and liturgically. Recent decisions, especially by the Presbyterian Church USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America, have garnered much attention. Even more recently, and as this report was being prepared, bishops in the Roman Catholic Church were wrestling with an expressed desire by Pope Francis to embrace members of the faith that had been excluded due to cohabitation, divorce, and childbearing outside of marriage. A desire not to judge others due to sexual orientation was also recently expressed by the pope. We cite these as significant examples of religious institutions' recognizing and responding to changing norms for and among the faithful.

The Task Force on the Study of Marriage invites you to read the full extent of our research in the pages that follow and to consider the following questions and others that may come to mind as you review this section of our report:

- How might the Church engage the significant justice issues related to marriage that so impact educational and economic opportunities?
- What changes to family law, the tax codes, student loans, and other public policies might address the changing norms around marriage?
- What resources can the Church bring to help alleviate stress and strain on individuals desiring marriage but unable to make such a commitment due to economic and other factors?
- What can the Church contribute to the conversation that would be helpful for young people as they make decisions about cohabitation versus marriage?
- How could the Church lead an effort to bring about alternatives to the mass incarceration of large numbers of young black men that has such dire consequences for marriage and family life in the African-American community?
- What would be the best way for the Church to learn from and share the "best practices" around marriage offered by different racial and ethnic groups?

- What changes might The Episcopal Church make to our liturgies for marriage to better embrace the emerging realities of delayed marriage, childbearing prior to marriage, marriage with blended families, and same-sex marriage?
- What guidelines and pastoral resources might we develop for our clergy that they might better respond and prepare couples for lifelong covenants of mutual joy, respect, and fidelity?

1. The State of Our Unions

On the one hand, our culture seems to be fixated on marriage, from the extravagant \$50 billion spent annually on weddings, to our active debate on same-sex marriage. On the other hand, societal norms and trends concerning marriage are in flux. Divorce rates have declined since the mid-1980s — a positive trend. Yet, another significant trend is emerging. The rates at which people are marrying are significantly declining, especially among those whose highest level of education achievement is a high school diploma. For those young adults, raising children in cohabitating and serial partnerships is becoming the new norm. For example, by age 25, 44 percent of women have given birth, while only 38 percent have married. Overall, 48 percent of first births were to unmarried partners.

Why should we care? Marriage is not merely a private matter; it is also a complex social institution. Stable marriages better the chances for stable families, generally ensuring greater prosperity for individuals and families as a whole. Marriage contributes to the stability of neighborhoods and school systems, and helps families and individuals weather difficult economic times. Indeed, researchers are finding that the disappearance of the middle class in the United States directly correlates in many communities with the decline in marriage.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer emphasizes that marriage is both a private matter for the couple and a public covenant. The underlying assumption in our prayer book is that the very private love of the couple entering into marriage has public and sacramental value to the community as a whole — they are to “make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that [their] unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair” (“The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage,” 429).

What follows in this section of our report are some of the changing trends and norms in marriage in the United States, Canada, and much of Western Europe. This report is based on several studies that are noted at the end of this document. Information about current trends and norms in countries outside the United States where dioceses of The Episcopal Church are located is less available; however, in conversation with bishops from those dioceses, we can identify some of the realities on the ground. Some are similar to those found in the research related to North American and Western European countries, and some are not. Our report highlights some of those findings, even as we continue to do additional research.

In the United States, annual surveys continue to report that teens plan to marry “one day” and that having a “good” marriage is “extremely important” to them. At the same time, the median age for a first marriage has risen sharply — now 27 for women and 29 for men. Researchers link this phenomenon to the rapid rise in rates of cohabitation and to a dramatic increase in the number of children born outside of marriage. A growing number of couples, both young and old, now live together with no plans eventually to marry.

Additionally, as the historian Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has recently written, “Four decades ago, moderately educated Americans led the kind of family lives that looked much like the family lives of the more highly educated.” She continues: “Today, they are less likely to achieve a stable marriage, or even form one in the first place.” The plight of this demographic in our society — that is, those who still aspire to marriage but increasingly are unable to achieve it — may be the silent social and economic issue of our times.

The decline of marriage in America is trending directly alongside the decline of the imperiled middle class and is seen to help foster a society of winners and losers. Pew researchers have referred to this as the “Marriage Gap,” a phenomenon increasingly aligned with the growing income gap. Marriage remains the norm for adults with a college education and a good income but is now markedly less prevalent among those on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder.

2. The Rising Age of Marriage — Costs and Benefits

With the exception of the three decades following World War II, people in the United States and other western nations have been notable for their leisurely approach to settling down. In 1900, the median age of marriage for women in the United States was 23, and for men, about 26.

As noted above, the age at which men and women marry is now at historic heights and is still climbing. A report from a University of Virginia study of marriage entitled, “Knot Yet” explored the positive and negative consequences of delayed marriage for twenty-something women and men, their children, and the nation as a whole. Their findings are recapped below:

Benefits

- Women enjoy an annual income premium if they wait until age 30 or later to marry.
- Delayed marriage has helped bring down the divorce rate in the United States since the early 1980s, because people who marry in their late teens or early twenties are more likely to divorce than couples who marry later.

Costs

- Though couples are postponing marriage into their late 20s and beyond, they are not putting off childbearing at the same pace. Known as the “Great Crossover,” this phenomenon has resulted in a historic new trend in which, by age 25, 44 percent of women have had a child, while only 38 percent have married. Overall, 48 percent of all first births are to unmarried women.
- Twenty-somethings who are unmarried report a higher rate of substance abuse than their married counterparts, and report lower levels of satisfaction with their lives than do married twenty-somethings.
- Evidence shows that there is an earning advantage known as the “marriage premium,” especially for men. Studies are lacking that examine racial-ethnic groups separately to account for discrimination factors.

Marriage delayed is the centerpiece of two different potential life paths for members of the next generation — paths that significantly depend on whether or not the person who delays marriage is college-educated. The University of Virginia marriage research project indicates that the Great Crossover is part of a “sad and ironic cycle” — both a generator of, and a response to, the economic troubles enveloping Middle America. Young couples with children may defer or stay clear of marriage because a parent does not have a decent-paying job. But unmarried couples break up more often, leaving mothers raising children alone, and reinforcing generational cycles of family instability and poverty.

Of particular interest to the Task Force on the Study of Marriage were the conclusions drawn by the researchers involved in the University of Virginia study. Their recommendations focused on three crucial areas: educational and economic policy, family policy, and relationship culture. These recommendations might be of value as our Church tries to better understand our mission to support and sustain living-giving relationships. We cite three interesting examples below:

1. Even when marriage is not immediately on the horizon, we can assist young adults to see their romantic relationships as opportunities to grow in love and commitment.
2. Parents and peers (and we would add faith communities) should encourage today’s twenty-somethings to develop their plans for parenthood and marriage to align with plans for their sexual behavior.

3. Student debt and job insecurity cause large percentages of twenty-somethings to delay or avoid marriage (though not childbearing). What can our Church do to support educational policies and reform that foster relationship and family stability?

3. Explaining the Marriage Delay Phenomenon

Again with a primary focus on data from the United States, in the 1970s, a man (the assumption then being that men were the primary source of family income) with a high school diploma could count on finding a good blue-collar job that paid a living wage at an establishment where he could continue to work until he retired with a comfortable pension. By their late teens or early 20s, the men of this era were ready to support families. Now this world is all but gone. Today young adults without a high school education have little hope for a stable job. Since the Great Recession, the same can be said for those who have completed high school. Marriage for these young adults is delayed until they feel they can find jobs that will provide them with a middle-class lifestyle. Lack of economic opportunity, financial insecurity, and student debt all contribute to the delayed-marriage phenomenon. And one must not forget the impact that the mass incarceration of young black men has had on all aspects of the African-American community, delayed marriage being only one of the many serious consequences.

Another reason for putting off marriage is more personal, especially for women. Today women expect, and are expected, to become economically independent. In addition to the self-fulfillment aspects of a career for women, earning potential is seen as a hedge against poverty should their marriage end. Indeed, a recent poll of high school seniors — those on the cusp of adulthood — found that nearly half did not expect to remain married to the same person for a lifetime, a stunning statistic in its own right. Women also place a high value on a career that brings income and personal meaning — an accomplishment that requires years of education and on-the-job experience.

While earlier generations looked at marriage as their entry point into adulthood and a crucial vehicle for defining themselves as mature individuals, today young men and women expect to achieve individual and autonomous identities before they become bound as a couple. The psychologist and researcher Jeffrey Jensen Arnett calls it “emerging adulthood,” an extended time of exploration and of trying out various possibilities in love and work. In this new environment, marriage is transformed from a “cornerstone” to a “capstone” of adult identity.

Ninety percent of young adults believe that they must be completely financially independent, have finished their education, have substantially paid off student loans, and be stable in their careers before they marry. Twenty-five to thirty-five percent believe they should be able to pay for their own weddings and have purchased a home before tying the knot.

Also helping to redefine marriage is what many sociologists call the “soul mate ideal.” As women have become more economically equal and empowered, marriage for them has been drained of its primary economic incentive. Young adults are now more inclined to focus on marriage for its potential for deep emotional and sexual connections.

4. The Desire to Marry

Some might see the decline or delay of marriage as proof that young people think marriage is obsolete. However, the large majority of young adults in the United States and many western countries say that they hope to marry “someday.” Eighty percent of young adult men and women rate marriage as an “important” part of their life plans. Increasingly, and by dramatic percentages as compared to just 20 years ago, young adults see cohabitation as a necessary step toward marriage. They believe cohabitation as temporary emotional and sexual coupling to be an essential part of emerging adulthood.

There continues to be disagreement among researchers as to whether or not cohabitating couples are more likely to divorce (studied as the “cohabitation effect”). What is less disputed is what scholars call the “inertia hypothesis,” asserting that cohabitation creates inertia in relationships, pushing marriage indefinitely into the future. Also noted is that cohabitating couples create financial and property entanglements that cause them to slide into marriage rather than to make active decisions about the future of the relationship.

Pew researchers find that for those who have never wed, marriage remains a life goal. About six in ten men and women would eventually like to get married. The same study showed that a trip to the altar is not so appealing for those who have been married before. Among divorced or separated adults, only 29 percent say they would like to marry again, with women more likely than men to say they do not want to enter into another marriage.

5. Cohabitation Trends and Consequences

Cohabitation has increased by nearly 900 percent over the last 50 years. More and more, couples are testing the waters before diving into marriage. U.S. Census data from 2012 show that 7.8 million couples are living together without having walked down the aisle, as compared to 2.9 million in 1996. And two-thirds of couples married in 2012 shared a home together for more than two years before they married.

Studies show that cohabitation is also more common among those who are less religious than their peers, among those who have been divorced, and among those who have experienced parental divorce, fatherlessness, or high levels of marital discord during childhood. A growing percentage of cohabiting-couple households — now more than 40 percent — include children.

As noted above, cohabitation prior to marriage is often hotly debated; research is unclear as to whether living together might make a couple more likely to divorce. The true variable seems to be the age at which the couple says “I do,” according to a 2013 study from the nonpartisan Council on Contemporary Families. Among the strongest predictors of divorce was the age of the two people when they entered the marriage.

Some of the current and prevalent trends for cohabitation, marriage, and the definition of family are as follows:

- The percentage of the population who are married is rapidly shrinking; in 1960, 72 percent of the adult population was married; by 2008, that percentage was 52 percent.
- Americans have an expansive definition of what constitutes “family”; only 29 percent say that the decline in so-called traditional families is a “bad thing.”
- Fifty-seven percent of Americans are accepting of cohabitation prior to marriage.
- There is widespread acceptance for premarital sex; 95 percent of all Americans have had a sexual encounter outside of marriage.
- Rates of premarital cohabitation are exploding. In 1960, just 5 percent of people lived together prior to marriage. Today that figure is 60 percent and climbing; 64 percent of cohabitating couples thought of this living arrangement as a necessary step toward marriage.
- Eighty-six percent see no problem with interracial marriage.
- Fifty-seven percent say it is okay for both gay couples and unmarried adults to raise children.
- Seventy-seven percent believe that it is easier for a married person than for a single person to raise a family.
- There is a strong belief that “to get ahead in a career,” it is better to be single.

6. Race, Gender, and Ethnic Differences

Falling marriage rates and the rising average age for first marriages are consistent across nearly all racial/ethnic groups who reside in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Below we recount some the different ways in which marriage is perceived by major ethnic and racial groups in the United States:

Marriage and divorce in the African-American community

During the last several decades, the rates of marriage in the black community have declined, while the rates of divorce, separation, cohabitation, births to single moms, and children residing in female-headed households have increased. Notable trends include the following:

- In 2006, Gallup's annual "Minority Rights and Relations" survey found that 69 percent of black persons said that it is very important to marry when a man and woman plan to spend the rest of their lives together as a couple.
- African-American teens are less likely to date or to participate in serious romantic relationships than are teens from other racial/ethnic groups.
- Eighty-eight percent of African-American teens view marriage as "important"; however, only 72 percent feel well prepared for marriage.
- Churchgoing, African-American, married mothers are 31 percent more likely to report that they have excellent relationships with their husbands.
- Only 45 percent of African-American households include a married couple, compared to 80 percent of white households and 70 percent of Hispanic households (U.S. Census). Fifty percent of black persons said that it is very important to marry when a man and woman have a child together.
- African Americans are significantly less likely than other racial/ethnic groups ever to marry; are less likely to remarry; are more likely to divorce, separate, cohabit, and to bear and rear children out of wedlock (and in mother-only households).
- There is a marriage gap in the African-American community based on educational attainment. Only 28 percent of black individuals with no education are married compared to 55 percent of black persons with a college education.
- Black women divorce at a rate nearly double that of either white or Hispanic women.

Marriage and divorce in the Hispanic and Latino community

Marriage in the Hispanic culture is often seen in a familial context extending beyond the nucleus of the married couple. Familial relationships are even more essential to community life and identity than is the marital relationship. Being a good parent to children, and involving extended family members or close friends as trusted sources of support, are common beliefs and practices upheld by the Hispanic/Latino community, both in the United States and in Latin-American countries.

- Sixty-seven percent of Hispanic households in the United States consist of a married couple; 44 percent consist of a married couple with children under the age of 18.
- When compared to the population at large, Hispanics have higher rates of never marrying. More than one-third of Hispanic men (38 percent) and 30 percent of Hispanic women have never married.
- Thirty-five percent of all low-income married couples are Hispanic; 40 percent of all low-income married parents with children under age 6 are Hispanic.
- Researchers have found that, compared to the overall population, the divorce rates among Hispanic men and women are lower. In the general population, approximately 9 percent of men were divorced, and approximately 11 percent of women were divorced. In comparison, Hispanic men have a divorce rate of 6 percent; Hispanic women have a divorce rate of 9 percent.
- When compared to marriages involving two white non-Hispanic individuals, marriages between a Hispanic individual and a non-Hispanic individual have a similar or lower likelihood of divorce.
- Educational attainment has a positive association to divorce rates for Hispanics. Hispanics with less than a high school education are far less likely than white individuals to divorce. In contrast, Hispanics with post-high school education are more likely than white individuals to divorce. Hispanics are slightly less likely to cohabit than white persons.
- Bishops of The Episcopal Church in Latin-American countries report that the principal concern is with high teenage pregnancy rates. In the Dominican Republic, for example, 35 percent of the young mothers

giving birth are unmarried teenagers. This trend is also prevalent throughout Central America, with higher percentages reported in rural areas, again pointing to poverty and education as influential factors.

The percentage of university-educated women is increasing across Latin America and is matched by rising rates of divorce. As is true in the United States and many industrialized nations, women in Latin America delay marriage to pursue career goals and tend to be disinclined to stay in unsatisfying relationships for financial security.

Marriage and divorce in the Native-American community

- When it comes to defining marriage or family, there is much variety among Native-American tribes. Many tribes have a clan system that is actively involved in childrearing and have elders who engage in family life.
- A higher share of Native-American births is to never-married mothers (58.4 percent compared to 33.2 percent for the United States as a whole).
- Native Americans face many challenges to forming and sustaining healthy marriages. One of the greatest challenges is poverty. The proportion of Native Americans living below the poverty line is more than twice the national average. Native-American children are twice as likely to live in poverty as their non-Native counterparts. They are almost twice as likely to live in a home in which neither parent is employed.
- Native Americans are less likely than those in any other racial or ethnic group to report that they had been involved in a marriage-preparation class.
- Approximately 39 percent of the American Indian or Alaska Native population is currently married (excluding couples who are separated). The same percentage has never been married, and approximately 13 percent are divorced.
- More than half (56 percent) of Native Americans are married to individuals from other racial or ethnic groups.

Marriage and divorce in the Asian-American community

As evidenced by their high rates of marriage, Asian-American cultures generally place great value on marriage. Marriage is considered the means to building families, and families are fundamentally important to Asians. In most Asian cultures, a marital relationship is not solely a relationship between spouses, but involves the extended family as well.

- Many followers of traditional Asian cultures value interconnectedness, in contrast to the western value of independence. This difference can result in a marriage that is considered healthy by eastern standards and unhealthy or codependent by western culture.
- Romantic attachment is the primary goal in the selection of a marital partner in contemporary U.S. society. This provides a dilemma for recent immigrants whose cultural values may consider other factors as more important — for example, financial situation, family status, or ensuring the continuity of family lineage. In some Asian groups, traditional family members want to screen and make the final selection of marriage partners for their adult children.
- As a group, Asian Americans have the highest percentage of marriages (65 percent versus 61 percent for white Americans) and the lowest percentage of divorce (4 percent versus 10.5 percent for white individuals).
- Studies have shown that, in contrast to U.S. families as whole, Asian-American families tend to have lower divorce rates and to have fewer households headed by single women.
- Asian Americans have a high rate of intermarriage (that is, marriage to someone from another racial or ethnic group).
- The low rates of divorce and separation among Asian-American groups may help to account for the relatively low proportion of such families with incomes below the poverty level.

- Divorce and separation rates among native-born Asians differ little from rates of native-born white persons. However, foreign-born Asian women are less likely to be divorced or separated compared to their American-born counterparts.

Marriage and divorce in other cultures and communities

In conversation with the bishop of Taiwan, we found much similarity with many of the above trends in that diocese of The Episcopal Church. In particular, emerging trends in Taiwan include the delay of marriage for economic reasons, the increased pursuit of higher education among women, and the realities of their place in the workforce. Some indication of increased cohabitation prior to marriage is also noted.

In conversation with the bishop of Haiti, we heard that there is a definite “slowdown” in the rate of marriage among young adults, and an increasing rate of divorce among those who do marry. The common trend noted is that many young people subscribe to a “new vision of love” where pleasure and freedom are the norm, and they do not need to get married for those. An increasing number of young adults in Haiti are living together but are not married. While the practice is increasing, even outside urban centers, many people still do not approve of these “free unions.” The bishop did not note a delay in marriage for those who want to be married, but rather an increase in the number of those choosing not to marry at all. There is no legal provision for same-sex union in Haiti presently. A large part of the population is against this, believing that marriage is the union of one man and one woman.

7. Same-Sex Marriage

As of mid-year 2014, a majority of Americans, 53 percent, favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally. Religious groups fall on both sides of the same-sex marriage debate: more than 8 in 10 Jewish Americans, roughly two-thirds of religiously unaffiliated Americans, 62 percent of mainline Protestants, 58 percent of white Roman Catholics, and 56 percent of Hispanic Catholics favor marriage equality for same-sex couples. By contrast, nearly 7 in 10 white evangelical Protestants and 59 percent of black Protestants oppose same-sex marriage. Hispanic Protestants are roughly split on the issue. Majorities of Americans perceive three religious groups to be unfriendly to LGBT people: the Roman Catholic Church, the Mormon Church (LDS), and evangelical Christian churches.

By generation, there is a more than 30-point gap: 7 in 10 young adults (ages 18-29) favor marriage equality, compared to 38 percent of seniors (age 65+). The gap is also geographic: 60 percent of Americans residing in the Northeast and 58 percent of those residing in the West support allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally. A slight majority of Midwesterners, 51 percent, support same-sex marriage, while those residing in the southern United States are split between those who support it (48 percent) and those opposed (48 percent), with a small percentage still undecided.

8. Marriage Equality

In the United States, the changing opinions around same-sex marriage seem to have begun in the mid-1990s when, by legislation or by referendum, states began banning same-sex marriage, culminating with the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996 (Wisconsin banned same-sex marriage in 1979). Massachusetts's Goodridge Decision from the Supreme Judicial Court came down (4-3) in favor of marriage equality in November 2003. The court's response to the legislature's attempt to substitute civil unions was rejected in a decision released in 2004. The first marriage licenses were issued May 17, 2004. Decisions in support of marriage equality in other states followed. In June 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States, in a 5-4 decision, overturned DOMA, ruling that the federal law deprives same-sex couples of liberty without due process guaranteed by the 5th Amendment to the Constitution.

As of November 15, 2014, 33 states and the District of Columbia now allow same-sex marriage. Five states have same-sex marriage bans that have been overturned and where appeals are in process. The other states remain in some form of limbo, awaiting the outcome of appellate rulings or lawsuits. It is expected that the

Supreme Court of the United States will hear one of the appeals on its 2014-2015 docket calendar. As of late 2014, 64 percent of Americans live in states where same-sex couples may marry.

More broadly, many nations have approved freedom for same-sex couples to marry. They include the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Denmark, Brazil, South Africa, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, Canada, and Argentina. Nations that offer some spousal rights and protections to same-sex couples include Andorra, Austria, Australia, Columbia, Uruguay, Ecuador, Mexico, Venezuela, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Switzerland. Same-sex marriage has been constitutionally or legislatively banned in Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia. In 81 countries around the world, including much of Africa and Asia, sexual activity by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons remains a crime, in some cases punishable by death.

According to the Office for Congregational Development, 64.3 percent of Episcopalians (1,200,622) in 64 U.S. dioceses live in states or jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal, although that should not be construed to suggest that all Episcopalians living in those states support same-sex marriage.

9. A Word about Our Consultation with Others

In Resolution A050, the Task Force on the Study of Marriage was asked to consult with ecumenical partners and others from around the Anglican Communion. With our budgetary and time limitations, we were able only to go so far. With the help of our church-wide staff, we gathered some resources from ecumenical partners, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church USA, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ, the Orthodox Church in America, and the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Most of this information came to the Task Force as we were approaching publication deadlines, but it provides some useful material for the continuing work that we believe is needed in our study of changing norms and trends.

From the ELCA we received its “Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” approved by their 2009 church-wide Assembly. We also received documents related to ELCA’s consideration of same-sex relationships. However, no action with regard to this subject has been taken. ELCA remains very interested in our work.

From the Presbyterian Church USA we received two documents: 1) the official publication of their six-week study on marriage that includes biblical and confessional resources; and 2) an unofficial piece — a 2014 book by the theologian Mark Achtemeier entitled, *The Bible’s Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical’s Change of Heart*.

From the USCCB we received the most current document (2009) from its Marriage and Family Committee: “Life and Love in the Divine Plan.”

Our ecumenical office provided us with the 2013 Orthodox Church in America Synodal “Affirmation of the Mystery of Marriage.”

The ecumenical office also provided us with a curriculum about sexuality education and marriage adopted by the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association and entitled, “Our Whole Lives.”

In 2012, the Pew Research Center published a paper entitled, “Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Same-Sex Marriage”

[<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/07/religious-groups-official-positions-on-same-sex-marriage/>], which provides a useful summary.

Members of the Task Force also participated in the consultation on same-sex marriage convened by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music. This consultation included participants from many U.S. dioceses

where civil same-sex marriage is legal, as well as several ecumenical participants and participants from other parts of the Anglican Communion. A fuller report on that consultation is included in the Blue Book report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music.

From the perspective of the work of the Task Force on the Study of Marriage, this consultation provide a unique opportunity to engage in face-to-face conversation about the subject of marriage and, in particular, the topic of same-sex marriage. What we heard from Episcopal, ecumenical, and Anglican-Communion participants was an appreciation for the work of The Episcopal Church and encouragement to continue the effort toward full marriage equality for all. Our ecumenical and Anglican-Communion partners were particularly interested in staying connected to our work and in the many shared resources from their own context.

10. A Word about the Need to Continue Our Work

As noted in this report, much of the data we were able to study focused on the contextual realities in the United States and other western countries. We were also limited in our capacity fully to research the resources of our ecumenical and Anglican-Communion partners, although we did manage to collect some important resources and information that will be useful in deepening our understanding of and engagement with these partners. Clearly, there is a need to gather more data related to the non-U.S. dioceses of The Episcopal Church, and we have asked the bishops from those dioceses to assist us in that work. Likewise, we need to continue our efforts with our ecumenical and Anglican-Communion partners. Additional resources (human and financial) will be needed to accomplish this.

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