

# A Pastoral Letter and Pastoral Directive

By the Rt. Rev. William H. Love

Bishop of Albany

November 10, 2018

To the People of God in the Diocese of Albany and throughout the World,

I speak to you today both as your Brother in Christ, and as the Bishop, Chief Pastor and Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese of Albany. As Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Jesus commands us to love God first and foremost with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and *secondly*, to love one another (Mark 12: 28-31), remembering as Paul points out in (I Corinthians 12:13), we are all part of the One Body of Christ. What impacts any one part or member of the Body, ultimately impacts the entire body, either directly or indirectly. That is true not only for individuals, but also for congregations, dioceses, provinces, the world wide Anglican Communion and the wider catholic or universal Church. Resolution B012 recently passed at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention of The Episcopal Church is one of those things that will impact all of us either directly or indirectly.

As members of the One Body, not only are we given different gifts, but we are entrusted with different ministries. In Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, he states that "*Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.*" (Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV). With every ministry comes certain responsibilities, all of which will ultimately be judged by Christ. As we prepare to talk about B012, I would like to focus for just a moment on the responsibilities the Lord has entrusted to me as a bishop in the Church.

As stated in the Examination of a Bishop in the Ordination Service in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), I, as a bishop in God's holy Church, have been "*called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and **interpreting the Gospel**, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings*" (BCP 517). I have been "*called to **guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church***" (BCP 517). Along with my fellow bishops, I have been called to "*share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world, [whose] heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope*" (BCP 517). I have been called to "*be faithful in prayer, and in the study of Holy Scripture, that [I] may have the mind of Christ...[to] boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ, enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of [the] people [entrusted to my care]*" (BCP 518). On three separate occasions (my ordinations as deacon, priest, and bishop) I have solemnly declared "*that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of*

*the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and to Contain all things necessary to salvation” (BCP 513). Upon my consecration as Bishop, I was given a Bible and was issued the following charge by the Presiding Bishop: “Receive the Holy Scriptures. Feed the flock of Christ committed to your charge, guard and defend them in His truth, and be a faithful steward of his holy Word and Sacraments” (BCP 521). I take this charge very seriously.*

I share all of this with you in an effort to help you understand the charge and responsibilities that Christ has given to me as I attempt to carry out the ministry entrusted to me as the Bishop of Albany and deal with the various issues such as B012 confronting the Church, particularly as they pertain to this Diocese. By God’s grace and the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, I have tried throughout my 12 years as Bishop of Albany, to be faithful and obedient to the Great Commandment, to God’s Holy Word, and to my ordination vows and the responsibilities entrusted to me as outlined above.

With the passage of B012, the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention of The Episcopal Church in effect is attempting to order me as a Bishop in God’s holy Church, to compromise “*the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*” (Jude 3 ESV), and to turn my back on the vows I have made to God and His People, in order to accommodate The Episcopal Church’s “new” understanding of Christian marriage as no longer being “*a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God*” as proclaimed in the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP 422), but now allowing for the marriage of same-sex couples.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Resolve of B012 states: “Resolved, That in dioceses where the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority (or, where applicable, ecclesiastical supervision) holds a theological position that does not embrace marriage for same-sex couples, and there is a desire to use such rites by same-sex couples in a congregation or worshipping community, the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority (or ecclesiastical supervision) **SHALL** invite, as necessary, another bishop of this Church to provide pastoral support to the couples, the Member of the Clergy involved and the congregation or worshipping community in order to fulfill the intention of this resolution that all couples have convenient and reasonable local congregational access to these rites;” (B012 Marriage Rites for the Whole Church).

When B012 was presented to the House of Bishops at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention, I both spoke and voted against it, sharing my concerns, all to no avail. A few weeks ago, I met with the Presiding Bishop, the Most Reverend Michael Curry, to once again share my concerns regarding B012 and the tremendous damage I believe it will cause not only in the Diocese of Albany, but throughout The Episcopal Church and wider Anglican Communion. I now share with each of you, those same concerns regarding B012, and why it is that I am issuing the Pastoral Directive which follows this Pastoral Letter.

**First:** B012's stated intent of making liturgies for same-sex marriages available for use in every Diocese and parish of the Episcopal Church (where civil law authorizes same-sex marriage) is in direct conflict and contradiction to God's intent for the sacrament of marriage as revealed through Holy Scripture. In so doing, B012 ignores God's Word regarding marriage and thus ignores the authority of Holy Scripture. When asked about marriage and divorce, Jesus stated, *"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh.**' What therefore God has joined together let not man separate"* (Mark 10:6-9 ESV).

As the "Son of God," God incarnate, God -- *"the Word became flesh"* (John 1:14, NIV), it would stand to reason that Jesus would know God's purpose or intent for marriage. Jesus could have allowed for, or made provision for, a wider interpretation of marriage (to include that between two men or two women), but He didn't. Despite what some would have you believe, homosexuality, or same-sex attractions (even that found in monogamous loving relationships) is not unique to our generation. It existed long before Jesus walked the face of the earth, as evidenced in a study of the Ancient Greco-Roman World. Yet from the very beginning of creation (as referenced above), marriage has been between a man and woman. The fact that some in today's sexually confused society (to include 5 of the 9 U.S. Supreme Court Justices in 2015) may have broadened their understanding of marriage to be more inclusive, allowing for same-sex marriages, doesn't mean that God, *"the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth"* (BCP 96) has changed His mind or His purpose or intent for marriage as revealed in Holy Scripture which is the living Word of God.

**Second:** B012 turns upside down over 2000 years of Church teaching regarding the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, and is in direct contradiction of The Episcopal Church's "official teaching" on marriage as outlined in the rubrics and the opening preface of the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer, as well as the Catechism (BCP 861). In the preface to the marriage service we read: *"Dearly beloved, we come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation."* (BCP 423). The rubric in the marriage service states: *"Christian marriage is a solemn and public covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God."* (BCP 422). None of this was changed in the Book of Common Prayer at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention, therefore they remain in effect as the official teaching of the Church regarding marriage. The marriage canon of the Diocese of Albany, recognizes and upholds this traditional understanding of marriage, and as a result prohibits its clergy from officiating at or allowing any marriage to take place on any church property other than that between a man and woman. Thus, to carry out the dictates of B012 would be a direct violation of our own diocesan canons.

**Third:** B012 by its very intent of making liturgies available for same-sex marriages, (while perhaps well intended) is in fact doing a great disservice and injustice to our gay and lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ, by leading them to believe that God gives his blessing to the sharing of sexual intimacy within a same-sex relationship, when in fact He has reserved the gift of sexual intimacy for men and women within the confines of marriage between a man and woman as expressed in the above passage from Mark's Gospel.

**Forth:** B012 through the actions mentioned above, encourages Brothers and Sisters in Christ who have same-sex attractions, to act on those attractions engaging in sexual behavior that God through Holy Scripture has not only NOT blessed, but has identified as sinful and forbidden. In Leviticus, in the midst of a long list of forbidden sexual acts, we read, "*The Lord said to Moses [and the Israelites] ...Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.*" (Leviticus 18:1, 22). In Romans, Paul states, "*Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie...Because of this God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*" (Romans 1:24-25,26-27).

These are just two of numerous passages in both the Old and New Testament that speak to the issue of homosexual behavior as well as a variety of inappropriate or sinful heterosexual acts. For those who would argue that these passages don't apply to the "loving, committed same-sex relationships" we are speaking of in today's modern Western Society, I would encourage you to read the excellent, well researched article written by the Rt. Rev. Grant LeMarquand (a Greek and New Testament scholar) entitled: "Homosexuality: The Bible and the Anglican Crisis." It is posted on the Diocese of Albany Website.

**Fifth:** B012 is contributing to false teaching in the Church regarding marriage and human sexuality, thus opening the door for people with same-sex attractions to fall into sin by disordering God's original design in creation, exchanging the complementary nature of the male and female body to "become one in flesh," with a distorted unnatural expression of sexual intimacy between people of the same sex. In so doing, not only does the same-sex couple come under God's judgement and condemnation, but it also brings God's judgement and condemnation against The Episcopal Church. Jesus said, *Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.*" (Luke 17:1-2 NIV). Recent statistics show that The Episcopal Church is spiraling downward. I can't help but believe that God has removed His blessing from this Church. Unless something changes, The Episcopal Church is going to die.

**Sixth:** B012, as stated earlier, is attempting to force me and every other bishop in this Church to violate our ordination vows, particularly in regard to upholding the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God; interpreting the Gospel of Christ; being a faithful pastor to those entrusted to our care; and guarding the faith, unity and discipline of the Church. To follow the dictates of B012, would require that I ignore what God has revealed in Holy Scripture regarding His intent for marriage and to share a false teaching on marriage, thus preaching a false gospel which could lead the very people entrusted into my care to fall into sin – all of which will contribute to the destruction (rather than the guarding) of the faith, unity and discipline of the Church. There are many in the Diocese of Albany who have made it clear that they will not stand for such false teaching or actions and will leave – thus the blood bath and opening of the flood gates that have ravaged other dioceses will come to Albany if B012 is enacted in this Diocese.

**Seventh:** B012 places a major obstacle in my ability as Bishop, to “*share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world.*” To date, the Diocese of Albany has upheld and honored everything asked of us by the wider Anglican Communion through the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10, the Windsor Report of 2004, and the various requests of the Primates of the Anglican Communion shared through their numerous Communiques in recent years.

As a result of our faithfulness in upholding God’s Word and honoring what has been asked of us, I am one of the very few Episcopal bishops and the Diocese of Albany is one of the very few dioceses of The Episcopal Church that are still welcome and in good relations with the other bishops and dioceses of the wider Anglican Communion, particularly in the Global South. The Diocese of Albany has a long standing history and has been richly blessed by our strong relationship with our fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ throughout the Anglican Communion. B012, if implemented in this Diocese will destroy all of that. The open doors we currently enjoy throughout the Anglican Communion will be slammed shut.

There are some within the Church who believe that The Episcopal Church is being “prophetic” in promoting same-sex marriage – that God is doing “a new thing” in our generation, and that ultimately the rest of the Church will come to see that. In the mean time because this is seen as a justice issue for our Gay and Lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ, if necessary they are willing to walk away from others in the Communion who can’t embrace this “new thing” that they believe God is doing.

I would argue such beliefs are exactly what the Prophet Jeremiah was speaking of when he proclaimed: “*Thus says the Lord of hosts; Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the Word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’*” (Jeremiah 23:16-17)

Or perhaps our generation is the one the Apostle Paul warned Timothy about when he stated: *“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” (II Timothy 4:3).* B012 is a blatant attempt to silence theologically conservative and orthodox bishops in the Church.

While I don’t question the sincerity or the well intentions of many in the Episcopal Church who believe the best way to love and minister to our Gay and Lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ is to embrace them in their sexuality and make provisions for their same-sex attractions through same-sex marriage rites, I do believe they have been deceived into believing a lie that has been planted in the Church by the “great deceiver” – Satan. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul states: *“...stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:11-13).*

The Episcopal Church and Western Society have been hijacked by the “Gay Rights Agenda” which is very well organized, very strategic, very well financed, and very powerful. Satan is having a heyday bringing division into the Church over these issues and is trying to use the Church to hurt and destroy the very ones we love and care about by deceiving the leadership of the Church into creating ways for our gay and lesbians brothers and sister to embrace their sexual desires rather than to repent and seek God’s love and healing grace. B012 plays right into this.

As a lifelong Episcopalian and as a Bishop of this Church, I call upon my fellow bishops and the leadership of this Church to rethink the path we are currently on regarding same-sex marriages. It is not out of mean-spiritedness, hatred, bigotry, judgmentalism, or homophobia that I say this – but rather out of love – love for God and His Word; love for The Episcopal Church and wider Anglican Communion; love for each of you my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, especially love for those who are struggling with same-sex attractions.

In calling for The Episcopal Church to rethink and change its current teaching and practices regarding same-sex marriages, in NO way am I suggesting that we should return to the days of old where our gay and lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ were despised and treated shamefully; when they were branded as being worse sinners than everyone else; and when they were told or led to believe that God didn’t love them and that they were not welcome in the Church. Such behavior is not of God and needs to be repented of.

While we need to resist the temptation to place ourselves in the judgement seat judging and condemning others, recognizing that we are all fallen sinners in need of God’s love, and mercy and redeeming grace, we must also resist the temptation to bless and give permission to sexual behaviors that are in opposition to God’s will and design as revealed through Holy Scripture as B012 would have us do. To do so, does an equal or greater injustice to our gay and lesbian Brothers and Sisters in Christ. When the woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus, He didn’t condemn her, as all those with stones in their hands had done, but neither did he bless her

inappropriate sexual behavior. Jesus said, “*Women...Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.*” (John 8:11 ESV).

Jesus is calling the Church to follow His example. He is calling the Church to have the courage to speak His Truth in love about homosexual behavior – even though it isn’t politically correct. Sexual relations between two men or two women was never part of God’s plan and is a distortion of His design in creation and as such is to be avoided. To engage in sexual intimacy outside of marriage between a man and women, is against God’s will and therefore sinful and needs to be repented of, NOT encouraged or told it is ok. The same is true for heterosexuals. To continue in such behavior, regardless of how much you may love the person is harmful to both your physical and spiritual health and wellbeing. Sometimes the greatest act of love we can share with a loved one is to say: “NO! We love you, we are here for you and will help you in any way that we can, but we cannot give our blessing to a behavior that will ultimately hurt you.”

The Lord is calling the Church to help our Brothers and Sisters in Christ who have same-sex attractions to come to understand that their “identity” and value is not found in their sexual orientation, as they have been led to believe, but rather in their relationship with God, in and through Jesus Christ – the One in whose “*image*” they were created. (*Genesis 1:27*); the One who died for them, offering Himself as a sacrifice for their sins and the sins of the world.

With that said, the Bible does not forbid two people of the same sex from loving one another in the sense of caring deeply or having a strong sense of affection for one another. Strong friendships are a blessing and gift. As already mentioned, God commands us to love one another both male and female. The Bible doesn’t forbid two people of the same sex from sharing a home or life together. It doesn’t forbid two people of the same sex from being legal guardians for one another or health care proxies for one another. All God has said through Holy Scripture regarding relations between two men or two women is that they should not enter into sexual relations with one another, and that marriage is reserved for the joining together of a man and woman.

While the state may have chosen to expand its definition of marriage to accommodate for some of the above legal benefits normally given to a husband and wife, it is not necessary for the Church to change its definition or understanding of the sacrament of Holy Matrimony to match the State’s definition. It is time for the Church to stop functioning as an agent of the State in issuing marriage licenses.

I know I have said several things in this Pastoral Letter that some of the clergy and people of the Diocese of Albany and many in the wider Episcopal Church do not agree with. It has not been my intent to create conflict or divisions amongst us, but rather to share the message that I believe in all my heart God has given me share at this time in the life of the Church. Those of you, who know me, know that I have agonized over this letter and how best to address B012 in the Diocese of Albany and the wider Church. There has not been a single day since General

Convention that I have not thought and prayed about B012. I give thanks to God for all of you here in the Diocese and throughout the world who have been holding me and the Diocese up in your prayers. It means more than I can ever express.

There is no doubt The Episcopal Church and now the Diocese of Albany are in the midst of a huge storm that can rip us apart if we are not careful. That is exactly what Satan wants. We don't have to play his game. If we focus on what divides us, we will be destroyed. If we focus on what unites us – our Lord Jesus Christ -- He will get us through to the other side. I pray the Lord will help us to see one another as He sees us; to love one another as He loves us; to forgive one another as He forgives us.

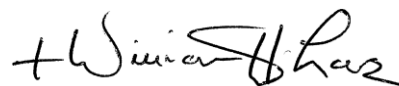
I know there are people of good will on both sides of this issue, and that ultimately, we want the same thing – to know how best to show God's love, and minister to our Brothers and Sisters in Christ who have same-sex attractions. The problem is, we have a very different understanding of how to go about it. I know that for the majority at the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention, B012 was seen as the way forward. However, as I have already alluded to, I believe B012 is misguided, heavily flawed and will ultimately do far more damage than good. As a result, I cannot in good conscience as a bishop in God's holy Church agree to what is being asked for in B012. While I respect the authority of General Convention as an institutional body, my ultimate loyalty as a bishop in God's holy Church is to God.

Therefore, for all the reasons mentioned in the above Pastoral Letter, in my capacity as Bishop Diocesan -- pastor, teacher and overseer of the Clergy of the Diocese, and pursuant to Canons III.9.6 and IV.7 of the Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church, I hereby issue the following Pastoral Direction to all the clergy canonically resident, resident or licensed in the Episcopal Diocese of Albany:

**Until further notice, the trial rites authorized by Resolution B012 of the 79<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church shall not be used anywhere in the Diocese of Albany by diocesan clergy (canonically resident or licensed), and Diocesan Canon 16 shall be fully complied with by all diocesan clergy and parishes.**

May God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit guide and lead us as we go forth in His Name, attempting to discern and carry out His will. In all we say and do, may God be honored and glorified and His Church and people be blessed. Amen!

Faithfully Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William H. Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "L".

Bishop of Albany