

St. John's Episcopal Church
Same Gender Marriage Consultation Final Report
Presented to St. John's Vestry on December 17, 2019



Consultation Members

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Response A

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

I agreed to serve on the Same Gender Consultation because I knew it was an important issue before the Church and I cared that it be addressed responsibly, with sensitivity and understanding. I trusted this challenge/opportunity would be prayerful, with a diverse group of faithful parishioners who would represent the diversity of our congregation. When asked to serve in this capacity, it was clear to me that although it would be hard, I was not afraid. Upon reflection, I feel like God has been preparing me for this.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

First and foremost, I have great respect and appreciation for each of the Consultation members. All of us have taken this responsibility seriously, we have grown to know, trust and respect each other regardless of differences of opinion. I believe it has been a healthy discernment process for us individually, collectively and for St. John's. Personally, I have learned to listen more carefully - and to be open for God's guidance through scripture, prayer and personal encounters with parishioners. For me, many passages I have learned, or even memorized over the years are no longer the same. I am hearing them differently. For example, the weekly Sunday service guide, the liturgy we follow in each service, the Prayers of the People, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer - "Our Father..." I see and hear "we", "us", "our." It's not exclusive to "me". It is about ALL of us. I have learned that many who hope same-gender marriage will be allowed at St. John's, are praying for their loved ones, not themselves. Their prayers are for others to feel fully accepted at St. John's. I have seen into the hearts of many people who suffer silently. I have appreciated their trust and willingness to share painful experiences they have dealt with through their love and care for others. Their faith, love, prayers and appreciation of St. John's ministries is what sustains them. For those opposed, I have seen a sense of passion for holding onto to tradition, and a sense of uncertainty, and maybe fear, about how same gender marriage could impact St. John's. I have seen sadness with friends who

struggle with accepting this lifestyle and are hurting through this process...because they do not agree. They say they are reluctant to speak out because they do not want to hurt other's feelings. I have also seen those who are annoyed, don't want to talk about it, and do not like that we are faced with this decision. Although some anger is expressed, all remain respectful. I hope these parishioners may eventually grow into acceptance and they will not leave St. John's for this reason alone. However, it is important, that whatever the decision may be, we are prepared to handle the decision responsibly and with appreciation of the "dignity of every human being."

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment? Please list the theme and a brief explanation for each.

Hurt, Anxiety and Hope

- Hurt: I have had approximately 50-75 letters/conversations that have been painful and personal and also inspiring. Many of these people are survivors of the pain and suffering of others. They know the sadness and sense of isolation brought about by this difference of lifestyle. As with all of us, they yearn to feel for all people be totally accepted.
- Anxiety: Those who are opposed, and even those who are accepting of same gender marriage have concerns about how this could "change" St. John's? How will it be handled with the media, the community, etc...? Some reluctantly anticipate that this decision will be accepted. Although they are not supportive, they are accepting. However, they are afraid, and they hope it will not create unwanted attention. They hope we will not be known as the "gay church" and that we will continue to be strong and focused on the many ministries St. John's supports. I agree. If this is approved, we will need to carefully consider how this will be handled as we move forward and attempt to prevent a media spectacle and unwanted attention.
- Hope: During the first forum, one of the closing questions for our table was: "What is one word, image, idea, or feeling that you will bring home with you tonight?" I remember a woman at our table's immediate response was "Hope!" Her reaction was encouragement for the validity of this discernment process. Another brief encounter: One lady, a stranger to me, knocked on the car window when I was parking and she asked if I was "who she thought I was?" then said, "I just want you to know I am in favor of this. I want everyone to have the same opportunity to be happy - as I do!" She smiled and rushed away.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

My recommendation to the Vestry of St. John's is to allow same-gender marriage. I have grown into this decision through this discernment process. I realize more fully our Christian commandment to "Love one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34). As the Consultation, we have reflected on our biblical teachings and we have become more fully aware of how Christianity has changed through the years, and as hard as it may be, "changes" have taken place over the centuries and those changes have made positive differences in how we live today. Personally, I do not feel that we, as parishioners, have the right to judge who can or cannot be married in our church. I trust the Priest, who counsels all couples, to make this decision. In our weekly service we consistently pray for "ALL people in our daily lives." Above all else, and with time and understanding, I believe our St. John's parishioners can agree to disagree. Although we will always have a group of parishioners who are not in agreement, my hope is that ALL will know they are important and appreciated in the life of St. John's. My prayer is that we are reminded that we are ALL God's children and together we can "Go forth in Peace to Love and Serve the Lord."



Response B

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

Because I was asked to serve on this by someone I highly respect, our chairman, Mary Call Proctor. Also, I believed that this was an important committee to serve on and was honored to be asked to serve. I expected this committee's agenda to be different than what it was. We only were presented one side – that of a bishop in Texas who is in favor of same sex marriages within the church.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

I learned more of the history of marriage in the church and more of the history of our church in general. What I didn't learn was more about how the pros and cons of the decision to allow same sex marriages. I would have liked to see some of the explanations both for and against this to have a better understanding of it all. While I think the presentation we studied was a good one, I strongly feel that it didn't delve into the real issue and only presented one side. I don't feel that enough time was spent on the issues at hand considering the depth and consequences of the issues. Never was there a discussion that there are numerous (counted 81 times) the bible talks against homosexuality in both the New and the Old Testaments nor the reading from Mark's gospel - 10:5-9.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment?

1. This was a mixed bag of opinions. I would say that we do have many parishioners that are in favor of this but also have many against. Everyone was in agreement that homosexuals need to have the same legal rights as heterosexuals; however, some of our parishioners felt that marriage between same gender couples should be done in a civil ceremony outside the church. Everyone agreed that we should and do welcome everyone to our church family regardless of color or sexual preference.
2. People against feel if we deviate on this, what is next? Are our Episcopal heritage and beliefs slowly being dissolved?

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage?

That the congregation should have a vote. That our parish have some sort of "blessing of same-gender couples" but not conduct a traditional marriage ceremony. There is concern that we will become the place all the same sex couples come to worship based on our stand on this issue and this is not a reason to grow our parish. There are many couples that are not openly saying this but have said to me that they will not be as active both with their time and talents as well as their pocketbooks. Something to think about – affirmation of marriage between man and wife: Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he (Moses) wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male & female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no

longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Mark 10:5-9



Response C

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

I agreed to serve on the Consultation because I care deeply about St. John’s remaining a community unified around Jesus Christ. The thoughtful and prayerful approach of the Consultation was important to me, as I know that the people of St. John’s have different opinions on Same Gender marriage. My hope is that the approach we’ve taken as a parish, with its focus on discernment, will keep us together in unity after the vestry makes its decision. Listening has been such an important part of this process—we have tried to listen carefully, with open hearts and minds, to each other and parish members.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

Through careful listening to Consultation and parish members, I’ve learned that this issue need not divide us as a parish. People of good faith can disagree on Same Gender marriage but still come together for worship, fellowship, Christian education and service to others in the name of Christ. The Consultation itself contains multiple viewpoints on whether St. John’s should offer same gender marriage. Yet we were able to journey together for close to a year in a mutually supportive environment in which each Consultation member felt heard, valued and loved. I’ve accepted that we all won’t be of the same mind as a parish about this issue, but I’m also confident that differing opinions on this matter will not prevent us from continuing to flourish as a church. As Christians, we find our unity in Christ, and here at St. John’s we seek to embody our core values of worship, openness, community, compassion and stewardship.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment?

a) Same Gender Marriage is about people and relationships (i.e. it's not just an abstract issue): Those in support of Same Gender marriage reminded me that this isn't an issue "out there." This decision will affect real people at St. John's. Many people expressing support for Same Gender marriage made it clear that their experience with real LGBTQ people—family members, parishioners, friends, co-workers, etc. —favorably shaped their opinion. In other words, they glimpsed the holiness evident in the Same Gender marriages of the people close to them and desire that the church bless such partnerships. I did speak with some individuals who are not supportive of Same Gender marriage. Some of these individuals were concerned that homosexuality isn't natural; that it goes against the teaching of the Bible; that St. John's could possibly become just a "gay church." Many opposed to Same Gender marriage were concerned that some people, people whom they care deeply about, could leave the church or become less involved as a result of our decision on this matter.

b) Gratitude for this discernment process: I heard almost universal praise for the thoughtfulness and transparency of the process. My sense is that everyone, whether they were for, against, or undecided about Same Gender marriage felt like their voice was respected and valued.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage?

I wholeheartedly support Same Gender marriage at St. John's. LGBTQ Christians are baptized as full members into Christ's church just like me, so why would we have "second-class" citizens in the church? It breaks my heart that we currently exclude a group of people—simply based on sexual orientation—from a Sacrament of the church. Marriage is holy because it's a covenant between two people to love and care for each other until death parts them. It's lifelong faithfulness that defines Christian marriage, not the gender of the two people. My support of Same Gender marriage is based on my interpretation of the Bible. In the fullness of the Bible, I see the Spirit of God leading the church to greater inclusivity and welcome. For example, in the early days of the church, when the church was exclusively Jewish, Gentiles, who were once considered outsiders by their Jewish brethren, were admitted into the Body of Christ. When those who were previously considered ritually unclean and unworthy of God's blessing are fully admitted into the church, we see how the Holy Spirit leads God's people to change longstanding tradition. I personally have

witnessed the holiness of single and married LGBTQ people. I have seen LGBTQ parents loving and caring for their children with Christ-like love. It is time to fully extend the church's blessing to all couples who desire to offer their lives to each other in self-giving love.



Response D

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

I felt it was vital for St. John's to determine our way forward as a 'family.' I have been very hurt that we have bishops who hold their personal judgements above the intent/desire and needs of the Episcopal communion to offer marriage blessings only to heterosexual couples.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

I learned how cyclical the church practices and biblical teachings have been over the centuries as well as how many 'inhumane and discriminatory' practices are evident through the years. I also learned just how much we have evolved in just the last 100 years when it comes to marriage practices in the world and how 'behind' we are here in the U.S.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment? Please list the theme and a brief explanation for each.

- The desire to move ahead with providing the same marriage blessing to all couples.
- The desire to expand how we think about and how we provide marriage blessings and marriage support to all couples in our church. (marriage mentors, support group)
- The desire to agree to disagree on this issue like we do on so many other issues.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

I strongly recommend that we offer same gender marriage to couples that meet all of the required elements currently in place (baptized member of the church, etc.) and that they be supported and celebrated with all of the same rights and responsibilities of any other couple married at St. Johns. The fact that a couple at St. John's has to be 'approved' by a bishop in another diocese is discriminatory and makes them 'less than' in the eyes of larger church. Once there is a change in our leadership, I feel that the new bishop should approve those couples in the Diocese of Florida, the same as any other married couple.



Response E

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

I agreed to serve on the Consultation committee mainly because I was asked to serve. I thought that if those who determined the makeup of the committee believed that I should be on the committee, they had a reason. I presumed that I was chosen to represent a particular group or that I was believed to have some insight based on my life's experiences. In either event, I thought it was my duty to serve.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

As a member of the Consultation group, I learned that the vast majority of Episcopal Churches already offer marriages in the Church for same gender couples. I have come to believe that the large majority of members of our Parish favor our doing the same. I also learned that a majority of the community is accepting of same gender marriages. Most importantly, I learned that our acceptance and blessing of same gender marriages in the Church is consistent with Jesus' teachings.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment? Please list the theme and a brief explanation for each.

From the parish forums and conversations, there seem to be these themes or questions:

- (A) Is same gender marriage consistent with the mission and doctrine of the church?
- (B) Is blessing same gender marriages consistent with Christianity?
- (C) If we condone same gender marriages, how will we be regarded in the community?

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

My recommendation is that St. John's Church go forward and offer same gender marriages.

My reasons in response to the themes as set out in question 3, include the following:

- (A) Important in the mission of the Church is that we love and welcome all people as part of God's family regardless of their race, gender or sexual orientation. They are all members of God's family and should be welcomed and treated as such.
- (B) According to Matthew 22:36-40, when Jesus was asked "...which is the greatest commandment in the Law? his reply was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." If I am to love my neighbor as myself, it is not only consistent with Jesus' commandment but required that I permit my neighbor who has a sexual orientation bestowed upon them that differs from mine to receive the spiritual blessings that are so meaningful to me and my partner in our marriage.
- (C) The vast majority of the community as well as our legal system has already realized that sexual orientation is not normally chosen but is acquired by individuals naturally. Therefore, a same gender couple is entitled to receive the same benefits as well as acquire the same responsibilities by entering into a marital contract as a different gender couple. Some churches already accept and bless same gender marriages. The view prevails that same gender marriage will be acceptable to more churches and religious denominations as time goes on.



Response F

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Sex Gender Marriage Consultation?

The last time we went through something this divisive, I watched from the sidelines as our church imploded. I joined this committee because I saw it as an opportunity to take an active role in helping the church traverse a difficult time. I am also a mother and I've often told my kids that they should do the right thing, even when it means some people they like won't approve. I tell them when they look back on their life, doing the right thing will give them a deep sense of satisfaction. This was my opportunity to "practice what I preach."

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

I went into this consultation thinking there was no way we could come to an agreement about same gender marriage. What I learned is that we don't have to come to an agreement, but we can still worship together. I realized we could simply "agree to disagree." Not every issue has to be a win or lose proposition and I believe same gender marriage qualifies as one of those issues. Part of the reason I think this is because I also re-evaluated what marriage means when it's performed in different locations. I came to the conclusion that a marriage can be holy anywhere a couple invites God into their hearts to be a part of their union. My grandparents were four of the most devout Christians I have ever known and neither couple were married in the church. I can assure you they took their vows seriously and considered them sacred. So, I learned through this process that although I prefer a church wedding, as a personal choice, the site of a wedding does not make it any less valid in the eyes of God. What matters is the intent and the heart of the two people entering into marriage. So, for me, allowing a same gender marriage is not something that conflicts with my fundamental beliefs and therefore it is not something that would cause me to leave the church.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment?

Please list the theme and a brief explanation for each.

- Same gender couples should be allowed to marry at St. John's. This was the most common theme I heard from parishioners. Many thought that the church should reflect the times and change as societal norms change. Many others felt that parishioners who are directly affected by this discernment process love one another and should not be denied the ability to get married in their church home. And if they are denied, how can St. John's be their church home? They felt they would be relegated to a second-class membership. They can tithe and volunteer, but they can't get married.
- Same gender marriage is a non-issue. Marriage in the church should not be divisive. Same gender marriage is legal. Couples are getting married all the time. A couple who wants to get married in the church wants to because they love their church, and that shouldn't get people so upset.
- Same sex marriage is a sin. This theme was consistent throughout the process by a determined and sincere minority. I believe these parishioners feel this conviction deeply and it is not an indication of intolerance. The Bible is used to re-enforce this view.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

I recommend that we allow same gender marriages, as long as the couples have the same requirements that heterosexual couples have such as pre-marital counseling, membership, Baptism, etc. I make this recommendation after much thoughtful consideration, listening, and praying. I have come to this conclusion for a number of reasons. First, the majority of parishioners who talked with me, emailed me, and sat with me during forums were for it and I believe our job on this team was to listen and hear what others wanted and act accordingly. Second, personally I think it's the right thing to do. I've gotten to know same gender couples the last few years. It's been a growth experience for me. I've seen firsthand the love and commitment they share with each other. Why should we deny them the opportunity to be married at St. John's? Finally, as I mentioned in the beginning of this response, doing what you think is right when it may not be popular, gives you a deep sense of

satisfaction in the future. If we approve same gender marriage; I think future generations of St. John's parishioners will look at this decision, as well as our process that led us to this decision, and get a deep sense of satisfaction because we did the right thing.



Response G

1. Why did I agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

I believe that it was God's will.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

I learned that the Bible would not be the basis for discussion nor toward guiding a recommendation.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment?

In the parish-wide forums, there seemed to be only a favorable opinion voiced. If there were other opinions, they were kept to themselves for fear of alienation. In the conversations I have had with others I think there is a sense that this was a done deal from the start and there really isn't much that can be done to avoid what will come next.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage?

It is my opinion that the Church will never be able to reverse a "yes" decision. A postponed or "no" decision maintains the status quo; as well as 5000 years of Judeo-Christian traditional and

canon. Based solely on my Biblical understanding and Judeo-Christian tradition, I would recommend that the vestry make no change to the current use of St. John's Episcopal Church and Chapel for the Celebration of Marriage.



Response H

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

When Mary Call asked me to serve on this consultation, I was honored and immediately said yes. She had told me that she, Fr. Dave, and the Vestry wanted someone from a younger demographic to be a member of the group. I wanted to be a point of contact for all individuals, regardless of age, and be someone with whom they could address, discuss, and discern their concerns. Ultimately, I felt this was an incredibly significant opportunity to serve God and God's people through this essential process of prayer and discernment.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

I could go on and on about everything I have learned through this process- about the Episcopal Church, the Bible, theology, marriage, and more. Primarily, though, I learned that we cannot read the Bible in a silo. The Bible is not necessarily the authority- God is our authority. We must interpret the Bible with the Holy Spirit to provide us understanding of the context, times, and circumstances that existed when Biblical scripture was written or actually occurred. We use our current sociocultural context to understand the Bible and how we can apply it to ourselves in present day. Lastly, and most importantly for St. John's, I have learned the importance of unity over unanimity. We will not all agree on this issue, but that is okay. This issue can be adiaphora – an issue about which one can disagree without dividing the church. Whatever decision is made, St. John's can and should remain a united body committed to serving Christ, loving one another as he loves us.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you've had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you heard during this time of discernment? Please list the theme and a brief explanation for each.

Most of what I have heard from parishioners in forums and conversations regarding same gender marriage has been general support, the reasoning for which takes either a secular/practical stance or a spiritual tone. In regard to the first theme of practicality, many parishioners voiced that, given our current sociocultural world, we should offer same gender marriage. In the secular world, these commitments are recognized and to not do so within the church would be taking a step backward, going against the changing times. The love between two people is what matters and to even consider not recognizing the commitment seems antiquated. The other reasoning though, the spiritual one, centers on the sacramental vows we take as Episcopalians. In our baptismal covenant, a foundational centerpiece to our Episcopal tradition, we vow to represent the dignity of every human being. Denying someone, anyone, one of the seven sacraments means acting in the utmost opposition to our baptismal vows. Jesus called us to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we are to truly love our neighbor, we must grant them the opportunity and dignity of marriage that we, ourselves, are blessed to be afforded.

4. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you've heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry regarding whether St. John's should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

Based on my experience with the consultation and my communications with parishioners, I recommend that the Vestry should, on behalf of St. John's Episcopal Church, decide to offer same gender marriage. Many parishioners have voiced their support of this decision to me; however, the reason for which I believe St. John's should offer same-gender marriage goes beyond individual parishioner support. St. John's is committed to serving all people, wherever they are on their spiritual journey. We say we welcome and serve all persons; however, right now, we are not doing that. Episcopalians have Baptism and Eucharist as central pillars of our faith. These are our Gospel sacraments - ones that Jesus gave to the church and humankind as signs of God's grace. Together we come to the altar, all baptized individuals who have made a commitment to Christ, partaking in this sign of grace. Yet, we have created a sacramental exclusivity in marriage, allowing parishioners, God's own people, to partake in certain sacramental rites, yet not others all because of who and by whom they are loved. If we are to fulfill our baptismal covenant, we must love and respect God's

children - every one of them - granting them the opportunity to partake in a sacrament love, showing their outward and spiritual sign of God's inward and spiritual grace to whomever they so choose.



Response I

1. Why did you agree to serve on the Same Gender Marriage Consultation?

It was not a hard decision...I recognize that this is an issue that has the potential of causing concern and conflict within St. John's. I had no preconceived position and felt that I could be objective and effectively participate in the Consultation. Having served on the Vestry shortly after the split made me acutely aware of the different positions parishioners take on particular issues, even those that appear to me to be very straightforward. Given that, I appreciate Father Dave's desire to involve the Parish rather than making the decision himself.

2. What did you learn from serving on the Consultation?

Serving on the Consultation gave me a much greater understanding of the depth to which the Episcopal Church has addressed this issue. Prior to serving on the Consultation, while I was aware that the Episcopal Church was moving toward same gender marriage, I was surprised to learn that the large majority of Bishops in the Episcopal Church favor same gender marriage. Personally, I had not given the issue that much thought as it was not an issue of personal concern—I wasn't personally impacted one way or the other. It was easy to look at marriage in the traditional sense. Within St. John's there are strong feelings for and against same gender marriage, some of which will never change. Serving on the Consultation has given me a broader understanding of Christian marriage as a sacrament—the commitment two people make before God and their church family.

3. Taking into account the parish-wide forums and conversations that you have had with parish members, what are the 2-3 key themes you have heard during this time of discernment? Please list the themes and a brief explanation for each.

In my conversations there are two key themes expressed by the parish—what is described in our materials as the traditional view and the liberal view on same gender marriages or blessings. The parishioners that expressed the traditional view believe that marriage is between a man and a woman, and that this view is supported by scripture as well as the Book of Common Prayer. It is interesting that some in this group are not opposed to a blessing of a same gender marriage, but do not believe that marriage between same gender couples should be offered. Those parishioners favoring same gender marriage seem to focus more on the qualities of Christian marriage—love, respect and commitment. There also seems to be a much greater importance placed on the sacramental nature of marriage and commitment before the congregation for those supporting same gender marriage. While not exactly a theme, there was concern expressed by several parishioners that if St. John’s were to offer same gender marriages that parishioners would leave, that we would be inundated with requests and that it would impact the character of St. Johns.

1. Based on your experience of serving on the Consultation and what you have heard from the parish, what is your recommendation to the Vestry on whether St. John’s should offer same gender marriage? Please explain your recommendation.

This has been a thoughtful and prayerful process, and not without concern. However, I believe St. John’s should offer same gender marriage. Based on my conversations I believe a majority of the parish supports this. However, I recognize that this will not be well accepted by many in the parish, and we should be cognizant of that in the implementation if we chose to go forward. For many this is a win-lose proposition—there really isn’t a middle ground. As pointed out in our materials, we should strive to have unity without unanimity. Finally, I recognize that this is contrary to the position of our Bishop. I worked directly with Bishop Howard during my time on the Vestry and have nothing but respect for him and his commitment to St. John’s. I understand that he has indicated that he will support us regardless of our decision, but it remains a concern.

