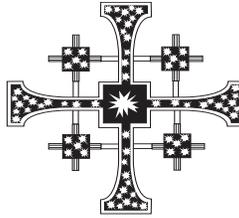


To Set Our Hope on Christ

A Study Guide for Congregations and Groups

Not everyone, of course, will agree, just as Christians in the past have disagreed on certain matters involving both theology and faithful Christian living, as, for example, remarriage after divorce. But the Episcopal Church's response to the Anglican Consultative Council offers a gracious and well-reasoned biblical, theological and ethical case for the full discipleship and place in the Church of celibate Christians of same-sex orientation and those who are committed, alongside heterosexual disciples, to leading life in faithful relationships while seeking to follow the Lord Jesus.

The Right Reverend Frederick H. Borsch, Former Bishop of Los Angeles



December 2005

Answering a request of the Anglican Communion's international Lambeth Commission, the Episcopal Church commissioned "To Set Our Hope on Christ: A Response to the Invitation of Windsor Report, Paragraph 135." In the foreword, Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold writes:

The Episcopal Church in the United States welcomes the request made in paragraph 135 of the Windsor Report: 'We particularly request a contribution from the Episcopal Church (USA) which explains, from within the sources of authority that we as Anglicans have received in scripture, the apostolic tradition and reasoned reflection, how a person living in a same gender union may be considered eligible to lead the flock of Christ.'

The Episcopal Church has been seeking to answer this question for nearly 40 years, and at the same time has been addressing a more fundamental question, namely: how can the holiness and faithfulness to which God calls us all be made manifest in human intimacy?

Though we have not reached a common mind we have come to a place in our discussion such that the clergy and people of a diocese have been able, after prayer and much discernment, to call a man living in a same sex relationship to be their bishop. As well, a majority of the representatives of the wider church -- bishops, clergy and lay persons -- have felt guided by the Holy Spirit, a gain in light of prayer and discernment to consent to the election and consecration.

As this paper is an explanation of how this action could have been taken by faithful people it makes the positive case. It does not attempt to give all sides of an argument or to "model a debate" or "to replicate or summarize the conversations that have taken place in the church over nearly 40 years. The Appendix does that."

And what this study guide does is offer a process to include the "people in the pews" into the ongoing discussion invited by the Windsor Report: discussion focused on better understanding how the Spirit has led us to this place so that we might be better prepared to live into God's future. And may the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Romans 15:13*

“To Set Our Hope on Christ”: A Study Guide for Parishes and Groups

How To Use This Study Guide

This study guide is intended to help small groups engage with one another around the material in *To Set Our Hope on Christ*, which is available:

- For purchase in bound copies from <http://www.episcopalbookstore.org>,
- As a free download from <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/documents/ToSetOurHopeOnChrist.pdf>

Should you wish to provide copies of *The Windsor Report* as well -- or should group members wish to have or print out their own copies -- it can be found at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/>

(It is helpful to note that the Windsor Report is the report of a commission rather than adopted legislation; the process of “reception,” by which various bodies of and in the Anglican Communion discern how they might be called to respond to ideas put forward in the report, is ongoing.)

If you have the resources to do so, it would probably be easiest for your group study to provide each participant with a notebook with tab dividers, each section containing the group study materials in the front of the section and the relevant sections from *To Set Our Hope on Christ* at the back of the section. That way, participants may find it easier to consult *To Set Our Hope on Christ* during group sessions, and it increases the chance that participants will come to sessions with both the study guide and the committee report in hand.

The study guide was designed with a format in mind of small groups (6-8 participants) meeting in six two-hour sessions. The issues addressed by *To Set Our Hope on Christ* are both emotional and, at points, complex. Meeting in a small group with stable membership rather than a large class with fluctuating or unpredictable membership both gives each participant more opportunity to comment and allows groups opportunity to build relationships in which people feel free to share things that might feel risky in other contexts.

Two-hour meetings also give groups more time to develop relationships in which each person feels safe to share and encouraged to do so. Some congregations may choose to use this study in a Sunday morning context in which meetings must be shorter and it may be harder to keep stable small groups. If your circumstances require you to do this, please feel free to abbreviate or adapt the study as is most helpful in your community: the best class is, after all, one in which people will show up, and which will start and end on time! However, please consider carefully whether the format you choose for the study will allow the depth of relationship-building and careful consideration of questions that the important questions raised by *To Set Our Hope on Christ* deserve.

In any case, though, the study guide provides more material than most groups will be able to cover in each session. The idea is that group leaders may stay longer with questions that are sparking fruitful discussion and quickly move on from or cut entirely questions that seem less fruitful to pursue in your unique circumstances. Please don't feel that this guide is "required material" that must be covered completely; it's intended more as a resource that busy people in Episcopal congregations may use in any way that's helpful.

In this spirit, please feel free to adapt opening and closing prayers, as anything else in the guide, to the needs of your community. We do suggest making use of liturgies and prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer* as frequently as possible, and with minimal adaptation, though it can be appropriate to build in time to talk about how the language of liturgies and prayers resonates with participants and how it stretches them. This is an opportunity to explore both the riches and limitations of our common prayer.

We recommend opening prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer* or *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, but leave the closing prayers up to you for most sessions (and when we don't, feel free to change it). A format that allows group members to share spontaneously their thanksgivings and petitions both in general and in response to what they've experienced in that session followed by prayer together – e.g., the Lord's Prayer, a prayer from the Compline liturgy, or whatever seems most appropriate given the meeting time and background of your group.

This study guide was commissioned by the Board of Integrity as a gift to the church in this Advent 2005.

The author of this study is Sarah Dylan Breuer. She is available for consulting, speaking, and group facilitation, and will be pleased to be in dialogue as time allows with those who use this guide. She, may be contacted at dylan@sarahlaughed.net; her website is <http://www.sarahlaughed.net>.

Session #1: Starting Our Journey Together

Opening Prayer:

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this [parish] family of faith. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

— “For the Parish,” BCP, p. 817.

Opening Questions:

- How would you sum up in a paragraph how it came to be that you’re a Christian?
- How would you sum up in a paragraph how you came to be in the Episcopal Church?
- What drew you to this study group? What do you hope to gain from it? Do you have any fears or reservations, and how could the group make this a space in which you feel safe and welcomed over the course of our time together?

Group Norms:

- Read aloud Section 1.5 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*:

We also derive hope and seek counsel from the teaching of the Apostle Paul to churches in conflict. In Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, addressing early Christian communities that were in serious disagreement about major issues, St. Paul spends his time and energy working for Church unity across the lines of division. He does this in several ways: He invites those who over-simplify the issues to focus instead on the needs of the neighbor whom God welcomes (Rom 14:3), whom Christ welcomes (15:7), and for whom Christ died (1 Cor 8:11). Thinking of those with whom we may disagree as those for whom Christ also died changes the climate in which the discussion is held. Paul argues in Romans 14-15 that the conflicted churches are to welcome one another — but not for quarreling. Instead, they are to see, each in the other, those whom God has welcomed and therefore whom they should welcome. Jesus was open to the outcast as well as the respectable, seeking always to restore unity among them (“go show yourself to the priest” (Matthew 8:4). For Peter and the rest of the disciples who would soon deny and abandon him, Jesus utters the profound “high priestly” prayer, “may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me.” (John 17:21). Given such acts of compassion, generosity and availability on the part of our Lord, how much more should we continue in *koinonia* and hospitality with those with whom we disagree.

Groups often find that developing a set of norms the group wants to follow can help in creating and nurturing an atmosphere of “*koinonia* (community) and hospitality” for all members.

You may wish to consider writing a group covenant together that addresses points that group members feel will make the group safer and more welcoming to them, and that will bring out the best in group members. Group covenants often address points like this:

- Attendance and starting and ending times (e.g., “Group members will do their best to attend every session from start to finish, and will let the group facilitator know if they plan to be absent. Meetings will start and end on time, and will run over the allotted time only by mutual agreement.”)
- Confidentiality (e.g., “What’s said in the group stays in the group,” or “Group members will share what a person said with others only if they have that person’s specific permission. This applies even to sharing something that was said without identifying the speaker.”)
- “Cross-talk,” i.e., saying something that comments positively or negatively on what someone else in the group has said. Some groups find that members feel safest when they know that they can share without their views being criticized and avoiding comments like “I agree with Jim” can prevent group members feeling “ganged up on” if their views are in the minority; other groups find that “cross-talk” can provide helpful opportunities to clarify views and provide affirmation. Your group may decide either to prohibit or allow “cross-talk,” and may also agree that the issue can be revisited if something in the life of the group makes that seem helpful (e.g., a particularly tense session or sense that discussion is revolving too much around one group member’s contributions may lead a group that normally allows “cross-talk” to decide not to use it for part of all of a session).
- What structure will best allow each group member to contribute. For example, some groups use a “talking stick” to make sure that members speaking are not interrupted. Some use a process of “mutual invitation” to make sure that every member is invited to share, and members listen fully to others as they speak rather than thinking about whether the person is finished, and so on. Some group members use an egg timer to make sure that one person’s sharing for longer times doesn’t impinge on others having time to share. Your group can decide on any structure or lack of structure that seems helpful.
- How group members want to speak to take responsibility for their views and respect that others’ views may differ. For example, some groups agree to use only “I-statements” (e.g., “This biblical passage is important to me, and I believe it says ...” rather than “The Bible says this is right/wrong,” “Conservatives/liberals think,” “Everybody knows,” or “Christians believe.” In some cultures, “I-statements” feel awkward or seem disrespectful, and other ways of speaking are more appropriate.
- It’s often helpful for a group to agree that norms can be revisited and revised or expanded if members think of something in a subsequent session.

Bible Study:

Group meetings will include bible study; it will usually come after the beginning of the session, following the opening prayer. Please bring your bible to each session, or the group leaders may provide them for the group. For the first session, it may be helpful for the group facilitator(s) to bring bibles or photocopies of Ephesians 1 for the group.

Read together Ephesians, chapter 1.

- What stands out to you from this passage? Why do you think it struck you as it did?
- What does this passage suggest comes to us by grace in Christ and through Christ's ministry? How does this encourage and/or challenge you personally?
- What does this passage suggest should characterize our life together as Christ's church? How does this encourage and/or challenge you personally?

For Next Session:

- Read pages 1-30 (Part I and Part II) of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*. We'll talk about Part II for the next two sessions, but it bears rereading, so please try to read all of it this week as well as next.
- Read Acts 10:1 – 11:18.
- Pay particular attention to Section 2.10 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*, which draws points from Acts 10 and 11 that the committee felt were particularly relevant to our discussions about human sexuality.

Closing Prayer

Session 2: Parts I and II of To Set Our Hope on Christ

Opening Prayer:

Let us give thanks for Peter and Paul, two saints one in Christ in the midst of their differences with each other:

Almighty God, whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you by their martyrdom: Grant that your Church, instructed by their teaching and example, and knit together in unity by your Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, which is Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Bible Study: Read Galatians 5:1-15 aloud together.

- A major issue in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is that other Christian teachers have convinced some Galatians that Christian men ought to be circumcised, as God has asked of God's people since Abraham. What phrases in Galatians 5 stand out to you as showing how strongly Paul feels about this issue?
- If Paul believes that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything," then why do you think he is so upset that some Christian men in Galatia are submitting to circumcision?
- Paul challenges his readers to use their freedom in Christ to serve one another. How do YOU feel challenged to serve others? Can you think of ways in which you could serve those with whom you disagree on issues of human sexuality?

Group Discussion:

- Read aloud Section 2.4 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* (and note that section 2.16 provides a good concrete example of the principle at work here):

As part of Judaism, Christianity ... continued the long tradition of Israel of settling its disputes and controversies by appealing to Scripture. This was no easy or automatic process, as if one could just look up the answer in Scripture. From the beginning, Scripture was seen as complex and contested: two creation stories; two rival accounts of how Israel got its first king; the argument of the Deuteronomist that the good are always rewarded and the bad always punished countered by Job; the argument against taking foreign wives in Ezra and Nehemiah countered by Ruth; the argument for exclusivism [i.e., that the God of Israel is saving only the people of Israel, and that Israelites should avoid intermarriage with other nations] countered by traditions of inclusion in Second Isaiah and Jonah. Scripture itself corrected and amended earlier versions of scripture in some cases; in other cases, rival arguments were allowed to stand side by side unresolved. The idea that there is only one correct way to read or interpret scripture is a rather modern idea. For most of its history, especially in the period of its great patristic interpreters, Scripture has been understood as a living, vibrant, forum where God and humanity engage one another, seeking truth in the process of resolving difficulties, seeking understanding in the process of believing: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit... able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

- How would you summarize this section in a sentence? How does it overlap with your view of scripture? How does it differ? What is intriguing or helpful about this section? Is there anything about it you find difficult or unsettling?

- Section 2.6 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* says, “The more we study the New Testament as a whole, and Paul’s letters in particular, the more we see a group of churches fighting very much the way churches fight now ... These things [about which the churches were fighting] were not considered unimportant, matters of indifference (*adiaphora*), but vital matters upon which the Church nevertheless found itself in disagreement.” Can you remember other issues about which churches have fought in your own lifetime, or in your parents’ lifetime? What is comforting about remembering conflicts of previous generations, or conflicts within the church that we see in the New Testament? What is unsettling about remembering such conflicts? How do you think God works in such situations?
- The story of Peter and Cornelius from the book of Acts shows the early church wrestling with the question of how Gentiles can join God’s people, and whether circumcision should be one of the requirements for Gentile men seeking to join Christian communities. What sources of authority do the various characters (Peter, Cornelius, the church in Jerusalem) use – in other words, from what do they draw to make their decisions?
- How do their positions change over the course of the story? Does one source of authority end up outweighing others, and if so, what? (You may want to glance at Section 2.10 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* as you consider these questions.)

Closing Prayer

For Next Session:

- Review Part II of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*, and Galatians 5. If you have time, feel free to read more of Galatians.
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Session 3: Part II (cont’d) of To Set Our Hope on Christ

Opening Prayer:

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

— Collect for Proper 28, *book of Common Prayer*, p. 236.

Bible Study:

Read Galatians 5:13–25 together.

- Both the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of the Spirit” for St. Paul are characterized by traits of relationship. The “works of the flesh” Paul lists correspond very well with what scholars call “vice catalogues” in ancient writers – lists of vices that ancient philosophers (like the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, for example) used to refer to things they say divide people from one another and from God’s purposes. Do you think this list carries over well into our culture? What about categories like “sorcery” and “idolatry”? Do these have corresponding elements in our culture, and if so, what?
- What would change in our community and in our world and by how much if we consistently exhibited the “fruit of the Spirit”? Do you think that this is a reasonably complete indicator of what is “guided by the Spirit”? Why or why not?

Group Discussion:

- Take a look at Section 2.16 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*:

Following the work of many contemporary biblical scholars, we note that when it comes to ethics, the overwhelming concern of the Bible focuses upon justice for the poor. Issues of wealth and poverty, concern for widows, orphans, refugees, and those who are oppressed are the most central and important ethical issues in the Bible. Nevertheless, the biblical writers speak about many other issues, as well. Because they write at different times and in different circumstances, they do not always agree with one another. There is usually not just one biblical point of view. So when someone says, “The Bible says this!” our faithful response is to ask, “In what book? When was it written and in what circumstances?” What are the reasons given and do those same reasons apply in the same way in our own situation? For example, it is helpful to know that when Ezra (chapter 10) commands the men of Israel to divorce their wives, it is because they had married foreign wives, who are seen to be a danger to Israel in exile. But there is another belief about foreign wives in the Book of Ruth, probably written at about the same time. The author of Ruth believed that Boaz acted faithfully when he married the Moabite Ruth and King David was descended from this marriage of an Israelite to a foreign wife. Today, in some situations, it may be faithful to follow Ezra, while in most situations it is faithful to follow Ruth.

Has there been a time in your life when you turned to scripture for guidance about something? How did you find passages that seemed to address the area in which you wanted guidance? Did you find passages that seemed to be in tension with one another, and if so, how did you try to figure out what guidance God was offering in scripture?

- In Section 2.15, the committee says this: In addition to giving a constructive account of the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15), built on biblical foundations, we know that honoring the biblical text, and honoring all our brothers and sisters in Christ who read Holy Scripture with us, requires us to honor all of the biblical texts. We take seriously the biblical passages that seem to oppose our position.

Can you think of any biblical texts that seem to oppose your position on issues of human sexuality? What might it look like for you to take them seriously? What might it mean to take a different position seriously even if you don't finally agree with it?

- Sections 2.20-2.21 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* deal with specific biblical passages often used in discussions about the morality of same-sex relationships. What questions do you want to ask about the case the committee presents regarding these passages? If your mind changed about the meaning of these passages, would your mind change about the morality of same-sex relationships? Why or why not?
- Sections 2.22-2.23 of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* deals with the relationship between scientific discovery and theological development. Do you think this is an important point for our current discussions? Why or why not?
- *[Optional: Pass out to the group the lyrics – available at <http://www.atu2.com/lyrics/lyrics.src?VID=135&SID=591> – of U2's song "Miracle Drug," from the album How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, or better yet, watch a live performance of the song from U2's Vertigo 2005: Live from Chicago DVD.*

The song is unusual as a kind of love song written by Christians paying tribute to science and reason as a way to connect people, and it's remarkable in its optimism about science as a tool for good. Does U2's optimism on this point resonate with you? How, or why not? What differences do scientific conclusions make for moral life and decisions?]

- Sections 2.25-2.31 discuss the ways in which the blessing of same-sex unions displaying holiness in terms of the "fruit of the Spirit" described by St. Paul in Galatians 5:22-23 might serve as a furtherance of and testimony for others to God's work in the world, including:
 - The "unitive" dimension of mutual love between partners can serve as a sign of God's self-giving love for us that draws us into communion with God and invites us to love others as God loves us.
 - The creative energy of partners in a faithful and loving relationship can prove a gift to the world not only in raising children, but in energizing household members for caring ministry in the world; indeed, the church's theology of marriage has over generations recognized more and more this kind of caring ministry as "fulfilling ... [the] procreative purpose of marriage," in the world of a 1997 report by the Standing Liturgical Commission and Theology Committee of the House of Bishops.

- The church acknowledges that in same-sex relationships, as in heterosexual marriages, it is the couple's choosing one another that constitutes the union, and any liturgy in the church does not serve to unite the couple, but rather gives the worshipping community to give thanks to God for what they see of God's gifts in the life of the couple in community. For this reason, a community that witnesses the liturgical blessing of a same-sex couple is bearing witness to God's work in their lives.
- Blessing faithful same-sex unions which show signs of holiness serves as a witness to the world of the full humanity of gay and lesbian people, to the call to all people to relationships of love and fidelity, and, in all of this, to God's work in hearing the voice of the outcast and calling all to break down the walls that separate us from one another to love and serve those most in need.

How does this match up with how you've experienced the blessings of committed relationships, heterosexual or same-sex, in your life or in your community? How would you describe what a solid and Christ-centered relationship does not only for the partners, but for the community and the world?

Closing Prayer

For Next Session:

- Read Part III of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*.
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Session 4: Part III of To Set Our Hope on Christ

- Reflecting on the ways in which the American church has been called to conversion, the committee in Section 3.2 says, "In short, we are something of a contentious lot, but we find that when, in fidelity to Jesus, we put his mission first, our differences by the Spirit's power often translate into a fruitful evangelical appeal to many sorts and conditions of people." How have you experienced this, or something like it, in Christian community? What kinds of mission do you think have the potential to bring us contentious Christians together across other differences?
- Sections 3.3-3.13 describe the development of polity (church governance) in the Episcopal Church in the U.S., and of the evolution of responses to crises regarding slavery and race relations and the role of women in the church. What stood out to you from these histories? Was anything surprising? Did you have any "a-ha" moments of connecting something you see in the church today to these prior struggles?

- *[Optional: The Windsor Report in 2004 described an orderly and gradual process of reception for ordaining women; the sections containing this description are included in an appendix. Section 3.13 of To Set Our Hope on Christ describes this process in very different terms. What are some of the differences you see? What do you think is at stake in establishing the process surrounding the ordination of women as gradual or rapid, orderly or contentious? Do you think that any of our continuing struggles in the church are related to the struggle regarding women's ordination, and if so, how?]*
- Sections 3.14-3.22 describe “A Long Season of Listening and Consultation” in the church regarding the role of lesbian and gay people. What stood out to you from these histories? Was anything surprising?
- How long has your congregation been actively engaged in study, listening, and prayerful discussion of the issues described in Sections 3.14-3.22? What has that process been like for you?
- Read aloud this part of Section 3.22:

... the Gospel calls us into a great mystery, the reconciliation that Christ has won for us upon the Cross, and which can be wrought among us only by the grace of Christ. Learning to trust the faithfulness of those with whom we disagree can fuel the lifelong process of conversion for all. This mutual trust bears witness not only to the power of the bonds of unity, but it also points quite beyond us to that mysterious power of divine grace at work in the Church's unity. And this, we believe, may continually inspire hope for an even deeper unity of the sort none of us can yet imagine. In this sense, and as we have historically struggled to learn, the Gospel calls the Church to the kind of reconciling ministry the world can scarcely understand. A unity-in-difference that reconciles divisions and holds out compassion to all can bear real witness to the power of Jesus' prayer that we “may all be one,” which John's Gospel tells us was his fervent desire: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (17:21).

We pray that the struggles of our Episcopal Church may always be used by the Lord to exhibit the power of God's reconciling grace, “so that the world may believe that” God has sent the world's Redeemer.

What stands out to you from this vision of how God can work amidst our differences? What is inspiring about it? What is daunting? Do you see anything YOU could do to help your parish live more deeply into “the power of God's reconciling grace”?

Closing Prayer

For Next Session:

- Read Part IV of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*.
- Read 1 Corinthians 11-12.

Session 5: Part IV of To Set Our Hope on Christ

Set aside extra time in this session to decide who does what in the “For Next Session” materials.

Opening Prayer:

O God, by the preaching of your apostle Paul you have caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world: Grant, we pray, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may show ourselves thankful to you by following his holy teaching; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

— Collect for the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul the Apostle, *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, p. 141.

Bible study:

- Read together: Acts 1:8, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:41, and 13:31. In light of these verses and 1 Corinthians 11-12, what do you see as the “marks of an apostle,” characteristics of those who carry on the ministries of people like St. Peter and St. Paul? Have you observed someone whose ministry is like this? What did this person’s ministry accomplish in you, and in the community?

Group discussion:

- Section 4.0 says this:

We begin by reminding ourselves that the Church’s life springs from the death and resurrection of Jesus; we do so because we know that those who share in episcopacy are “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” (Examination of a bishop-elect, Book of Common Prayer, p. 517). This capacity to bear authentic witness to Christ’s resurrection and sovereignty definitively marks the identity of the apostles (see Acts 1:8, 2:32, 3:15, 5:32, 10:41, 13:31) and lays the irreplaceable foundation and context for all the other qualities needed in one called to exercise *episkope*.

What does the “capacity to bear authentic witness to Christ’s resurrection and sovereignty” mean to you? Has there been a time when you’ve seen this happening in a particularly vivid way, and what was that like?

- St. Paul’s view of his own apostolic ministry was, according to Section 4.1, “marked by the upending and conversion of his own life for the sake of the Gospel. St. Paul was forced to reflect on leadership because of God’s disruptive grace, shattering his life and destroying his ‘eligibility’ for leadership in any normal sense of the word.” How does the phrase “God’s disruptive grace” strike you? Have you ever experienced God’s grace in this way? If God’s grace can be disruptive, what does it disrupt?

- Part IV of *To Set Our Hope on Christ* deals in some depth with how our polity in the Episcopal Church preserves balance in discernment: there is a local process of discernment in which the laity, deacons, and priests of the diocese in which the new bishop will serve have an opportunity to search candidates prayerfully for the qualities of personal holiness needed in a bishop; then laity, clergy, and bishops throughout the church have voice in whether to confirm the potential bishop's election; and finally, bishops of other dioceses must participate in a new bishop's consecration for it to be valid. What struck you from this part of the document? What did you learn? How would you respond to someone who refers to bishops being "appointed" in the Episcopal Church, or who says that people from one or more orders of ministry don't have a voice in the process?
- *To Set Our Hope On Christ* discusses at several points the category of *adiaphora* – "things that don't make a difference" – and clearly and repeatedly argues that the criteria by which bishops are chosen by the church are NOT *adiaphora*, but that members of the church can still "agree to disagree" about the choice of a particular bishop. How would you summarize the argument the committee makes about this? Do you find it persuasive? How would you respond to someone who says that the church must be in complete agreement about all matters of importance?
- Section 4.21 says:

The communion we all seek to share more deeply with one another can only be that which Jesus won for us at the cost of his passion and death. Putting our whole trust in him, we find strength, for the sake of a broken world, to reach beyond a unity of mere like-mindedness towards that blessed Divine Communion which alone can heal the world's divisions. Such communion is manifest and brought to light out of the diversity of voices through which surprising movements of the Spirit are discerned. Like women bishops, African American bishops, and all those bishops raised up from formerly colonized peoples before them, bishops of same-sex affection have the capacity, in virtue of Spirit-filled lives of holiness, to embody this salutary diversity for the greater good of the whole Communion. They are signs not only of the Church's unity but especially of its diverse and comprehensive catholicity. It is by way of this very diversity-in-unity, by way of all these diverse voices, including those previously unheard, brought together in a communion of mutual listening and learning, that we are brought more fully into the fullness of God's truth.

What effect does it have on discussion to frame the communion we seek as a product of Jesus' ministry rather than the result of our own efforts? How might this view be helpful? How might it be less helpful, or with what do you think it should be supplemented? What needs to happen for people to experience being in "a communion of mutual listening and learning" with people with whom they disagree, even passionately?

For next session:

- Look as a group at page iv of the Table of Contents, which lists the content of the Appendix. Have the group break into smaller groups of two or three. Each group of two or three will agree to take on a chunk of the chronology of beliefs and policies regarding sexuality in the church, and in the next session will summarize for the group the part of the chronology they read. For example, in a small group of eight members, one group might take the years 1964-1977, another 1979-1988, a third 1990-1995, and a fourth 1997- “The Vagaries of Journal Organization and Convention Practice.”
- Read Part V (only a page and a half!) of *To Set Our Hope on Christ*.

Closing Prayer:

Take a moment of silence.

While the group is in prayerful silence, one or two members read aloud Section 4.20:

Bishops are the symbol of unity and communion not by reflecting some easy prior existence of those things, but by symbolizing in their persons the way a life of mutual responsibility and love in Christ can be created and sustained in these between-times of brokenness and disagreement, before Christ comes again to bring us all final reconciliation and peace. We might reflect here on the place where Jesus builds his new community — at the foot of the Cross. At the hour of his death, Jesus’ concern is for his mother, a vulnerable widow whose oldest son is now leaving her, and for his Beloved Disciple, who will be deeply grieved at his death (John 19). He gives them to one another formally, in words that enact what he speaks, thus creating a new family, a new community among those who had not previously walked together. Might we not also lift this up as a model for our life together in Christ, especially in these trying times? In the midst of death and disunity, grief, loss, and betrayal, Jesus’ concern is to build community. We could do worse than to imagine meeting those from whom we feel most estranged at the foot of the Cross.

Take a moment in silence as a group to do just that – to imagine meeting those from whom we feel most estranged at the foot of the Cross. Imagine the scene. Who else is there? Who speaks, and what do they say? How do you feel as you witness this scene?

Allow group members to pray as they feel led, closing together with the Lord’s Prayer.

Session 6: Part V and Appendices of To Set Our Hope on Christ

Opening Prayer:

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy Catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. Amen.

— “For the Church,” *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 816.

Group Reports: Pause after each group report to discuss what would be good to understand about this history.

Liturgy of celebration:

If there is a priest in the group, it would be ideal to celebrate the Eucharist, and to include the group’s reflections in the offertory. Otherwise, it would be appropriate to use a form of the Daily Office appropriate to the time of day in which the group meets, inviting group members to offer thanksgiving for what they’ve gained from the group and prayers for their intentions to carry what they’ve learned into their communities and ongoing walk with Christ.

Reflections to offer prayerfully to God in worship:

- Share one or more of these as you feel led:
 - What was a moment in the life of the group for which you’re particularly thankful?
 - What was an “a-ha” moment for you? What did you learn?
 - How has being in this group challenged you? What support and prayers would you like in responding to these challenges?
 - Where have you seen Christ at work in the life of this group?
 - What from your experiences in this group would you like to carry forward into your ministry?

Appendix: Sections 12-21 of the Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion (2004) – available at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/>.

12. The story of ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate provides us with a recent example of mutual discernment and decision-making within the Anglican Communion.

13. The background to the story was a period of debate and disagreement both before and after the ordination to the priesthood of Florence Li Tim-Oi in 1944. The story gathered pace in 1968, when the Diocese of Hong Kong & Macao brought the question of women's ordination to the priesthood to the Lambeth Conference. The Conference was not ready to respond because, as it stated in Resolution 34, "The Conference affirms its opinion that the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive". The Conference recommended that before any regional or national church or province made a final decision to ordain women to the priesthood they should consider carefully the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council.

14. The Bishop of Hong Kong & Macao sought out the advice of the Anglican Consultative Council at its first meeting (in Limuru, Kenya) in 1970. After lengthy debate the Anglican Consultative Council advised the Bishop of Hong Kong & Macao that if, with the approval of his Synod, he were to proceed to the ordination of a woman his action would be acceptable to the Council, and that the Council would use its good offices to encourage all provinces of the Communion to continue in communion with that Diocese. The resolution passed (for: 24; against: 22).

15. What needs to be noted is that Hong Kong did not understand itself to be so autonomous that it might proceed without bringing the matter to the Anglican Consultative Council as requested by the Lambeth Conference 1968. Furthermore, action was only taken with the co-operation of the Instruments of Unity.

16. The 1978 Lambeth Conference addressed a situation where Hong Kong, Canada, the United States and New Zealand had all ordained women to the priesthood and eight other provinces had accepted the ordination of women in principle. In response, the Conference passed Resolution 21: Women in the Priesthood, which in part stated, "The Conference also recognises...(3a) the autonomy of each of its member Churches, acknowledging the legal right of each Church to make its own decision about the appropriateness of admitting women to Holy Orders". The Resolution also noted that such provincial action "has consequences of the utmost significance for the Anglican Communion as a whole", and that "The Conference affirms its commitment to the preservation of unity within and between all member Churches of the Anglican Communion". This resolution passed with 316 for, 37 against, and 17 abstentions.

17. In 1985 the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA) expressed the intention "not to withhold consent to the election of a bishop on the grounds of gender". Aware that such a possible action would indeed affect the whole Anglican Communion, the then Presiding Bishop brought the question to the newly established Primates' Meeting in Toronto, Canada. 3 The Archbishop of Canterbury and the primates requested the

Primate of Australia, John Grindrod, to head a committee to prepare a paper for the 1988 Lambeth Conference after requesting the opinions of the provinces of the Communion. This report's first chapter was entitled 'Listening as a Mark of Communion'.

18. The Grindrod Report presented two options to the Lambeth Conference: first, to counsel restraint in the hope that the moral authority inherent in a gathering of all the bishops of the Communion would find a response at the provincial level. Second, if a province went ahead, persuaded by compelling doctrinal reasons, by its experience of women in the priesthood and by the demands of mission in its region, and with the overwhelming support of the dioceses, such a step should be offered for reception within the Anglican Communion.

19. In response, Resolution 1 of Lambeth 1988 stated: "That each province respect the decision and attitudes of other provinces in the ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate, without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the provinces which differ". This long resolution went on to recommend courtesy and respect and open dialogue with those who differ, and asked the Archbishop of Canterbury, in consultation with the primates, to appoint a Commission to ensure the process of reception, to monitor and encourage consultation and to offer pastoral guidelines for the churches of the Communion. This resolution passed with 423 for, 28 against, and 19 abstentions.

20. The Commission on Women in the Anglican Episcopate ('The Eames Commission') worked throughout the period between the Lambeth Conferences of 1988 and 1998. A monitoring committee of the Commission made a report to Lambeth 1998.

21. Anglicans can understand from this story that decision-making in the Communion on serious and contentious issues has been, and can be, carried out without division, despite a measure of impairment. We need to note that the Instruments of Unity, i.e. the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' Meeting, were all involved in the decision-making process. Provincial autonomy was framed by Anglican interdependence on matters of deep theological concern to the whole Communion.