

**The Rev. Kathy Crary**

**December 13, 2008**

Greetings, and my thanks to the St Paul's crew that invited me to participate this evening. I have just flown into town from my brother's college graduation in Salt Lake City. Gene, my brother, is an accidental icon for the LGBT community's journey from the days before Stonewall to this day in December 2008. Dreams can come true, a bachelor's degree at age 53, equal rights in my lifetime?

What is my primary role here this evening? Since we are hosted by an Episcopal Church, I am here to talk about the Episcopal Church, our faith, our work and our practices that support of Marriage Equality.

If you have never been to a regular Sunday morning worship service in an Episcopal Church, I am going to describe a regular practice from that service that is relevant to the topic.

We have a quirky and lovely little business that happens about halfway through the service called Anniversaries, Birthdays and Blessings. People come up to the front of the congregation for a delightful number of reasons. Usually the individuals and couples who present themselves are asking for blessings for birthdays, wedding anniversaries or anticipating travel in the next week or so.

Occasionally you get a real surprise. I've prayed on the birthday of numerous deceased relatives or friends, for a pet who has taken ill, for new jobs, for anniversaries of sobriety dates from addictions. I've prayed over and blessed friends who reconciled

after years of enmity, blessed people at the announcement of their nuptials and blessed people traveling to Minnesota, Liberia, India and everywhere in between.

We, the members of the Episcopal Church, are in the blessing business. I've often said one of the delights of Episcopal ministry is blessing everything that moves and a number of things that don't, including houses, rosaries, boats, cars, bicycles, lop eared bunnies, children's playground injuries and people on gurneys going into major surgery.

In our Diocesan convention in October 2008, our church said, unequivocally, that the issue of marriage is a civil rights issue relating to a civil, social contract between two adults.

And in my opinion, once we have a social contract of marriage, the government doesn't much care about what happens next except in certain circumstances like finances and taxation, children, health care or divorce.

After the State Supreme Court's ruling on May 15, 2008, which overturned the ban on gay marriages, the Diocese of California set a policy that marriages, regardless of the gender of the parties, should be entered into at the civil or state level. The church would bless the relationship later. This mirrors our history with English law and practice wherein a couple is married before the local county clerk. Later, in the company of family, friends and the gathered community, the couple is blessed by the local priest.

That was our stance before Prop. 8 narrowly succeeded with California voters, a vote rooted in fear and not in love.

That Election Day decision has not changed who we are as the people of God or the Episcopal Church as an inclusive institution. We will continue to bless relationships

whether the state considers a couple as married or not. And many of the people and clergy of this denomination continue to work hand in hand with organizations to restore the rights of civil marriage to the LGBT community.

We will continue to welcome, bless and support the people who have been through so much to discover their orientations and then find the people who will be their partners, sometimes paying high costs around employment, family relationships and safe places to call home.

The Episcopal Church will continue to be a place to nurture couples in all life circumstances, in days of joy and sorrow, in days of hope and despair, in all the daily living in which all of us are engaged. In this church we are here to worship God, pray, teach, work, alleviate the suffering of others, laugh and cry, dance and mourn and to see the face of Jesus in each and every person, however hard that might be.

The relationships God brings together are tended to by the people in those relationships along with their family, friends, support communities and faith communities. For many in the LGBT community, we have been one of those faith communities.

We will continue our work in partnership with other organizations to insure the full and inclusive rights for all peoples, with no regard to their gender, language, ability level, orientation, country of origin, or ethnic group. On some days we are more successful than others. You will continue to find support in this Episcopal family, because we recognize LGBT relationships are valid relationships.

Finally, my partner Carol and I wish you every good blessing of the holiday season and in your family gatherings during this holiday season.

Consistent with my job description as a priest I close with this blessing of my own  
design:

**May the One who sees each of us equally  
place that vision in your eyes.**

**May the One who gives you arms to hug  
and hands to hold  
give you opportunity to comfort, love  
and care for others.**

**May the One who wishes peace for all  
give you the bright ideas  
and the means to accomplish them  
as you work for peace on Earth.**

**May the One who has brought us safe thus far,  
give you joy and strength in the face of all adversity.**

**And may the blessing of the one and holy God be and remain with you always.**

**AMEN.**