

## **CIVIL UNION TASK FORCE INTERIM REPORT**

**December 1, 2007**

The Civil Union Task Force is a response to the State of New Jersey's passing of the Civil Union law defining a legal relationship for Gay and Lesbian couples. The Civil Union Task Force recognizes both the legal benefits of Civil Union and, at the same time, its inherent inequality compared to legal marriage. The inequality of Civil Union and Marriage is an issue of justice.

In response to a query in the diocese, 45 reported civil unions have been performed by the clergy.

The Task Force was created by the Diocesan Council of Newark. Bishop Beckwith appointed Ms. Barbara Conroy and the Rev. Phillip Dana Wilson as co-chairs in March, 2007. Members of the Task Force were sought to widely represent the Diocese and bring legal expertise to the group. The following are the members of the Civil Union Task Force:

Barbara Conroy and Phillip Wilson: Co-Chairs

John Simonelli: Secretary

Matthew Piermatti: Chair Policy & Procedures Committee

Stuart Smith: Chair Liturgy and Pastoral Committee

Joseph Harmon, Chair of the Education Committee

Melissa Hall: Member

Sky Howell Henley: Member

Kathryn King: Member

Geri Livengood, Member

Greg Perez: Member

The work of the Task Force is still in progress and incomplete at this time. We will continue into 2008.

The goals of the Task Force are as follows:

1. To support and assist same sex couples in committed relationships to claim the benefits of Civil Union and to celebrate their sacred commitment publicly and with the support and blessing of the church.
2. To educate and assist the Bishop and the Clergy of the Diocese of Newark so that they can better understand and conduct civil unions.
3. To educate people and parishes of the Diocese of Newark as to the meaning, value and theological underpinnings of Civil Union.

To advance these goals the Civil Union Task Force has done the following:

1. Established a Civil Union Policy and Procedures Committee to review the New Jersey Civil Union law and the Canon of the Episcopal Church related to marriage.
2. Established a Liturgy and Pastoral Committee to address pastoral and liturgical issues particular to the Civil Unions.
3. Established an Education Committee to draft information documents and events for parishes, websites and educational forums.
4. Created a possible liturgy for a Civil Union that is available along with others that have been created in different places.
5. Developed a Checklist of concerns in performing a Civil Union.
6. Conducted a survey among the clergy to determine the number of civil unions performed to date.
7. Produced Reports, when possible, to be presented at the 2008 Diocesan Convention.

The work of the Civil Union Task Force has just begun. There is much more work to be done as we live into a new reality and learn as we go. This is a work in progress and new questions will certainly arise as we continue this ministry.

Additional information will be posted on the diocesan website as it becomes available.