Jesus and Drag Queens:
A Study of the Gay Rights Movement in the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A

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On the evening of August 6, 2003, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A convened to either confirm or deny Gene Robinson's election as the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire. Under the impatient watch of the media, the world-wide Anglican Communion, and activists on both sides of the gay rights issue, a majority of the delegates voted to accept Robinson's election, making him the first openly gay bishop in the history of the church. Not only does Robinson's confirmation signify a tremendous victory for the gay rights movement in the Episcopal Church, but it also marks a turning point for the movement with regard to the tactics it used.[1] Prior to 2003, gay rights activists in the church relied on three tactics: changing church law, revising church liturgy, and reinterpreting scripture. Following Robinson's confirmation, the movement has taken a more active role in the broader gay rights movement by collaborating with non-religiously affiliated gay rights advocacy groups, lobbying policymakers, and targeting a broader audience. David Snow and Robert Benford's work on movement ideology helps explain this transformation: Robinson's confirmation was the catalyst for a change in the movement's ideology, which affected how gay rights activists framed their message, which in turn affected their choice of tactics.

I will begin with an explanation of Snow and Benford's theory on framing, followed by a description of the structure and hierarchy of the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A (ECUSA). I will then examine the tactics used prior to, and following, Robinson's confirmation. This change in tactics will be explained within the framework of Snow and Benford's three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing.

[1] For the purposes of this essay, "gay rights" will refer to rights for any sexual minority (gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual and intersex).

Theoretical Framework

Research quickly reveals that the tactics of the gay rights movement in the ECUSA changed after 2003; what is not as easily discernable is the impetus for this change. Two popular social movement theories—resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structure—fail to provide an adequate explanation. The church did not accumulate more resources, identify new allies, recognize political openings, or exhibit any of the other factors attributed to movement growth by these two theories. The ECUSA has always had considerable access to resources and political opportunities—not only does the church have financial clout, but it also enjoys respect and influence on Capitol Hill. The long-standing ties between church and government are illustrated by the fact that the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. is an Episcopal parish.

The change in tactics was not caused by a fluctuation of resources or political opportunities; instead, this shift is indicative of a change in the movement's ideology. Activists in the ECUSA felt that it was time to expand their message of tolerance and acceptance to a larger community and to fight for rights beyond those afforded by the church. David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford recognize the inability of other frameworks to account for such ideological considerations. They write: "The relationship between ideological factors—values, beliefs, meanings—and identification with social movements and participation in their activities has rarely been treated systematically or dialectically in either the theoretical or empirical literature" (Snow and Benford 197). In resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structure, movement ideology is seen as ubiquitous and therefore analytically useless in explaining movement emergence, success or mobilization. While ideology is considerably more difficult to analyze than

are resources, a comprehensive understanding of social movements cannot be reached purely through examining tangible assets.

In order to examine a movement's ideology, one must look to the movement's framing. Snow and Benford define framing as assigning meaning to and interpreting "relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (198). The framing of a movement articulates its grievance, goals, strategies, and justification for action. Snow and Benford break down the concept of framing into three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing involves the "identification of a problem and the attribution of blame or causality" (Snow and Benford 200). Prognostic framing suggests solutions to the problem and identifies strategies, tactics and targets (Snow and Benford 201). Lastly, motivational framing is a "call to arms or rationale for action that goes beyond the diagnosis and prognosis" (Snow and Benford 202). The first two tasks are directed at achieving consensus mobilization. The last task achieves action mobilization (Snow and Benford 199). The ECUSA began to view the problem of discrimination against gays as one afflicting all of society rather than simply the church. This change in diagnosis likewise affected the prognostic and motivational framing, eventually leading to a reorientation of tactics.

History and Hierarchy of the Episcopal Church

In an article published in *Christian Century*, Kevin Eckstrom describes Episcopalians as "notoriously—and proudly—hard to pin down. They are not fully Protestant yet not quite Catholic; hierarchical yet independent; scripturally literate but not literalistic; equal parts New York and Nairobi" (14). The ECUSA is also famous for

igniting controversy. Its causes have not only put the church at odds with the public but have also put it at odds with its members. During the 19th century, the church protested slavery, despite the noticeable minority of Episcopalians who supported the status quo. During the early 20th century, the ECUSA was embroiled in the debate over whether married couples should have access to contraceptives. The church alienated both conservative and moderate denominations when it spoke out in favor of family planning. During the second half of the 20th century, the ECUSA tackled the question of women's right to seek ordination. The topic severely divided the church, yet in the end Episcopalians voted to accept women into the priesthood. The history of the Episcopal Church of the U.S.A has always been politically contentious. With the church taking a role in the fight for gay rights, the 21st century appears to be shaping up no differently.

The Episcopal Church of the U.S.A was founded in 1789 after the U.S. colonies proclaimed independence from Great Britain. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the Episcopal Church was part of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. Because the Church of England is the official religion of the British state, Anglican clergy are required to accept the supremacy of the British monarch. After independence, the ECUSA was created to resemble the Anglican Church in almost every way, save for this one detail (Manross 172). Today, the ECUSA is governed by a General Convention which meets once every three years. The General Convention is bicameral; there is a House of Bishops and a House of Deputies, the latter made up of both priests and lay persons. Each diocese (of which there are 108) elects four clergy and four laypeople as delegates to the convention (Manross 365).

The ECUSA, the Church of England, and all Anglican dioceses throughout the world create an international community called the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion is deeply divided on the topic of homosexuality. The North American provinces—the ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada—along with Western European provinces favor equality for gays. Conversely, the provinces in South America, Africa and Asia are staunchly opposed to granting equal rights to homosexuals. There is also a small but vocal opposition in the North American provinces. The American Anglican Council, the Concerned Clergy and Laity of the Episcopal Church, and similar conservative groups actively oppose gay priests and bishops and the blessing of gay unions. Although they form the right wing of North American Anglicanism, they are aligned with the mainstream of worldwide Anglicanism—which is overwhelmingly anti-gay.

As the ECUSA becomes more outspoken on behalf of its gay members, tensions have increased between it and the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion has struggled over the question of whether a national or regional convention has the authority to deviate from the policies established by the international community. Once every ten years, delegates from every Anglican province meet at the Lambeth Conference in Canterbury to address concerns and set policy. At the 1998 Lambeth Conference, a noticeable split developed between the European and North American delegates who supported equal rights for homosexuals and the delegates from Africa, Asia and South America who condemned the concept. Ultimately, the majority of delegates passed a resolution stating that the church rejects "homosexual practice as incompatible with the Scripture" and that "in view of the teaching of the Scripture…abstinence is right for those

who are not called to opposite-sex marriage." The Anglican Communion further resolved that the church "cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing or ordaining of those involved in same-gender unions" (Resolution V.35). The Anglican Communion's resolution had little impact on the course of action of the ECUSA. At the 2003 General Convention, the ECUSA deviated from these guidelines, angering the Anglican Communion, by confirming the election of The Right Reverend V. Gene Robinson as the Bishop of New Hampshire.

Tactics and Framing before the Confirmation of Gene Robinson

Robinson's confirmation thrust the ECUSA into the media spotlight; however, the church had actually been supporting gay rights since 1976. The gay rights movement in the ECUSA is rooted in the women's rights movement. During the 1960s and 70s, the church grappled with the question of women's proper role in the church. When women were finally allowed to seek ordination in 1976, attention was turned to the role of gays in the church. Once women's rights had been firmly established, the rationale for not extending those same rights to homosexuals became vulnerable (interview with The Reverend Penny Pfab, 11/21/05). The diagnosis of the problem by activists was that gays were not equal in the church. The important characteristic of this diagnostic framing is that it was focused internally; activists were addressing discrimination in Episcopal congregations, not in society at-large. Activists believed that the reason for this discrimination was that Episcopal law and liturgy did not encourage church members to openly discuss sexuality or to interpret scripture as promoting equality. The prognostic framing articulated three main tactics: change church law in order to mandate greater acceptance of, and opportunities for, gay members of the church; rewrite church liturgy

so that tolerance becomes a chief tenet of the religion; and invoke the New Testament as justification for the extension of gay rights.

Activists pursued the first tactic by encouraging the passage of resolutions at the General Convention that would put the ECUSA on record as being supportive of the gay community. The ECUSA officially announced its commitment to equality for gay members of the church the same year it embraced women's ordination. In 1976, the General Convention passed a resolution which stated: "It is the sense of this General Convention that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church" (Resolution A-69). This resolution is rather ambiguous; it does not discuss gay ordination or gay marriage, nor does it delineate a course of action for the church. However, the ECUSA's stance on homosexuality in the church was now official, and this resolution would initiate a flood of resolutions in subsequent conventions reinforcing the ECUSA's acceptance of sexual minorities.

Gay rights activists in the church continued to seek a change in church law at the 1979 General Convention, but with less success. In 1976, the General Convention had deferred the decision of whether to allow known homosexuals to be ordained until the report of the Joint Commission on the Church in Human Affairs was available (Resolution B101). When the General Convention convened in 1979, the church established that it was not appropriate "to ordain a practicing homosexual, or any person who is engaged in heterosexual relations outside of marriage" (Resolution A053). The delegates claimed that the issue at hand was not sexual orientation, but instead sexual relations outside marriage—hence the second phrase of the resolution. Still, the

opposition did not allow this resolution to pass quickly or quietly. In particular, the Bishop of Southern Ohio, John Krumm, wrote a "statement of conscience" which formally indicated his disagreement with the resolution. The statement was signed by 21 other bishops who felt that such a policy would make homosexuals second class citizens in the church ("The Episcopal Church and Homosexuality").

While the movement's first tactic failed, its second tactic—changing church liturgy—was a success. Despite the church's refusal to ordain openly gay priests, the 1979 General Convention did take important steps towards ensuring equality for gays by ratifying the revised Book of Common Prayer. The Book of Common Prayer contains the order of service for the administration of the sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the church. The Book of Common Prayer plays a central role in all Episcopal services; adherence to its creeds and covenants is the defining characteristic of the faith. The book is so integral to the ECUSA that there is even a day on the church calendar designated to celebrate it (interview with The Reverend Penny Pfab, 11/21/05). Before the book was revised in 1979, it had gone untouched since 1928. The revised Book of Common Prayer established a new language of inclusiveness and openness that emphasizes tolerance. An example of such language is found in "The Prayers of the People," which are offered at every Episcopal church service. Form II of "The Prayers of the People" asks for "prayers for peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people" (386). Form IV reads: "Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and service the common good" (388). Finally, Form V prays for "the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples" (390). The Book of

Common Prayer also includes a set of prayers for social justice, including prayers for prisons and correctional institutions and for the conservation of natural resources (825-827).

One part of the Book of Common Prayer has been especially important for the gay rights movement—the Baptismal Covenant. During a Baptismal service, the congregation reaffirms their own commitment to the religion by repeating this covenant (*The Book of Common Prayer* 305):

> *Celebrant:* Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?
> *People:* I will, with God's help.
> *Celebrant:* Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
> *People:* I will, with God's help.

The language in this passage is forthright and proactive; phrases such as "seek and serve" and "strive for justice" propound a clear message that Episcopalians commit themselves to a life of social justice activism. The Episcopal Baptismal Covenant differs significantly from the covenants of other Christian denominations. The Lutheran Baptismal Covenant, for example, asks the candidate if he/she believes in God and if he/she desires to be baptized, but the candidate is not asked to make a commitment to social service (interview with The Reverend Theo Park, 12/7/05).

The importance of the Baptismal Covenant is not lost on gay rights activists in the church. They have used the Baptismal Covenant as the foundation for the motivational framing; according to the covenant, which is committed to by all baptized Episcopalians, members of the church have a *duty* to fight discrimination against others. The Baptismal Covenant is prominently displayed on the websites of such Episcopal gay advocacy

groups as Integrity, Beyond Faith, and the Episcopal Women's Caucus. In every interview conducted for this study, not a single interviewee failed to mention the Baptismal Covenant as a source of inspiration for activism. The Reverend Theo Park of St. James Episcopal Church in Minneapolis described the Baptismal Covenant as "a mandate for social action" (interview, 12/7/05). Bishop Robinson asserted: "These promises have become the purpose statement of who we really are…they propel us into social activism" (interview, 12/16/05).

The full impact of the revised Book of Common Prayer was made evident at the General Convention of 1985, where the resolutions passed took a noticeably more proactive stance. After revising the Book of Common Prayer, the church had reason to call on its laypeople and parishioners to work to change the status quo. The resolution passed in 1985 affirmed "That the 68th General Convention urges each diocese of this Church to find an effective way to foster a better understanding of homosexual persons, to dispel myths and prejudices about homosexuality, and to provide pastoral support" (Resolution D082s). The Book of Common Prayer established that the Episcopal faith was not only a faith of acceptance but a faith of *action*.

The General Convention of 1989 resembled the convention of 1985 in that it passed resolutions providing clearer detail as how the ECUSA would bring about change. The resolution read:

> This 69th General Convention decries the increase of violence against homosexual persons and calls upon law enforcement officials across the land to be sensitive to this peril…be it further Resolved, that the Executive Council be directed to communicate with the Attorney General of the United States, and the Attorneys General of the several States to express the wishes of this General Convention that such violence be decreased markedly. (Resolution A085)

While previous resolutions had simply acknowledged homosexuals' equal claim to God's love, these resolutions demanded action. The gay rights movement used the Book of Common Prayer to transform the church from one characterized by passive toleration to one characterized by active acceptance.

1990 proved to be a watershed year for gay rights activists as the ECUSA finally confronted the issue of gay ordination. In 1979, the church permitted the ordination of celibate homosexuals, yet it continued to refuse ordination to active homosexuals (Resolution A053). The Reverend Pat Gillespie of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Towers, Minnesota, describes her experience in seminary in the late 1980s: "We've always had gifted gay ministers, both lay and clergy, in the church. Until 1990, they were recognized as GLBT by some, but the prevailing attitude remained 'don't ask, don't tell'" (interview, 11/12/05). In 1990, Bishop Walter Righter of the Diocese of Newark ordained Barry Stopfel, a gay man involved in a committed relationship. While it was technically not against canon law, Righter's actions elicited fierce retaliation and a hearing was held to determine if he had disobeyed scripture. Despite intense debate and threats of schism, the charges were eventually dropped. In a groundbreaking decision, the church held that neither scripture nor the doctrine of the church prohibited the ordination of a non-celibate homosexual person living in a committed relationship (Turner 30).

The events of 1990 ushered in a new tactic: the use of the New Testament as justification for gay rights. Until now, the Bible had largely been a weapon of the opposition, who cited passages in the Old Testament that decry homosexuality as an abomination. After the church proclaimed that Righter's actions did not disobey

scripture, activists began reinterpreting the New Testament. The justification for gay rights offered by the New Testament was a prominent theme in the interviews conducted for this study. The Revered Frank Wilson of St. John the Evangelist Church in St. Paul notes that Jesus does not mention homosexuality once, though he does condemn divorce, which most churches now accept (interview, 11/20/05). Jason Lucas, Youth Minister at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis argues that the story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is "all the proof you need that Episcopalians are called to protect each other" (interview, 11/12/05). The Reverend Penny Pfab of St. Luke's Episcopal Church discredits a passage in Leviticus that condemns homosexuality by arguing that the book was written at a time in history when Jews had to reproduce or face possible extinction (interview, 11/21/05). Integrity, a gay rights group, provides responses on its website to traditionally anti-gay Biblical passages. Integrity's website states: "We employ our God-given intellect to interpret the Bible. In the past, the Bible has been used to justify slavery and the domination of women. Even so, the Holy Spirit is leading the church into a greater understanding of the truth about homosexuality" (www.integrityusa.org).

Using scripture made perfect sense considering the movement's diagnostic framing. Since the goal was to change the church, the movement had to speak the language of the church. In his article "Episcopalians, Homosexuality, and World Mission," Willis Jenkins recounts a conversation with a Ugandan bishop who was an outspoken opponent of homosexuality. The bishop asked "Willis, I don't want to offend anyone, but what I still don't understand is how those who allow homosexuality can ignore what Scripture clearly says." Willis replied with the argument of biblical inclusivism which cites the tolerant behavior of Jesus. The bishop leaned back and said

somewhat dejectedly, "Well…at least that's a biblical argument" (303). By turning the weapon of the opponents back on them, proponents of gay rights made significant headway towards full equality for gays.

A poignant example of use of the New Testament in defense of homosexuals occured after a young gay man from Laramie, Wyoming, named Matthew Shepard, was murdered. The ECUSA rallied around Shepard's family and loudly protested the public proclamations made by Jerry Fowell that Shepard was a sexual deviant who, to put it bluntly, deserved what he got. Dr. Mel White, leader of the gay rights group Soulforce[2], wrote a sermon that was read in Episcopal churches throughout the country:

> Let's remember another cruel and tragic death suffered by a young Jewish teacher almost 2,000 years ago. Both young men were condemned by political and religious leaders. Both were humiliated by their peers. Both were brutally bashed then tied to wooden stakes and left alone in the cold to die…Matthew left us no last words to guide our response to his death, but the last words of Jesus are painfully clear: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'

The murder of a homosexual is depicted as being as sinful and unjust as the murder of the son of God himself. The ECUSA's ability to reclaim scripture from televangelists like Fowell proved to be a powerful weapon.

After Bishop Righter's actions in 1990, church communities throughout the U.S. felt comfortable applying the resolutions of the General Convention. In 1996, the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania endorsed same-sex relationships and recommended that the church create "a rite or rites for the blessing of committed relationships between persons of the same sex." This request was echoed by the General Convention of 1997, which asked the Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church to develop a blessing for

[2] Soulforce is a non-denominational religious group that seeks "freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance" (www.soulforce.org).

same-sex unions. A supporter of the resolution, The Reverend Jane N. Garrett of Vermont, said: "We are not attempting to subvert the sanctity of marriage…Far from it. We are asking to join in the sanctity of marriage through full participation in it" ("The Episcopal Church and Homosexuality"). While the resolution passed the House of Deputies, it did not pass the House of Bishops. The convention did, however, approve a resolution that authorized individual dioceses to offer health insurance benefits to domestic partners of clergy and church employees, both heterosexual and homosexual (Resolution 21).

The motivational framing of the movement, reinforced by the General Convention and the Baptismal Covenant, resonated with individual parishes, which began taking steps to ensure equality as well. In 1993, St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis took to heart the words of the 1985 General Convention (which encouraged individual churches to promote dialogue on sexuality and to dispel stereotypes) by approving a statement on sexuality. Based on the Baptismal Covenant, the statement affirms homosexuals as part of the church community and asserts that sexual orientation is a biological factor, not a choice. The statement concludes: "We, the members of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, welcome and affirm persons of all sexual orientation into the community…as equal recipients of God's grace" ("St. Luke's Statement on Sexuality and Faith"). This statement represents the proliferation of the movement's framing established at the national level.

At the same time the Statement on Sexuality was passed, St. Luke's also began performing commitment ceremonies. The Reverend Frank Wilson, who led the congregation until 1999, was aware of the fissures this might cause in the church

community. Before performing the first ceremony, Wilson sought the unanimous approval of the Vestry (the parish's governing body). While the Vestry supported the action, members decided not to put the members of the Altar Guild in an uncomfortable position by asking for their help during the ceremony. However, the Altar Guild learned of the Vestry's decision and on the day of the commitment ceremony arrived at the church to prepare the altar in a "moving display of solidarity" (interview with Wilson, 11/20/05).

In the neighboring city of St. Paul, the Episcopal Parish of St. John the Evangelist was taking steps of its own to move towards a more liberal understanding of sexuality. After serving St. Luke's, Wilson moved to St. John's where he has used the pulpit three times to promote gay rights (interview with Wilson, 11/20/05). Furthermore, services at St. John's include the Collect for St. John, a prayer that reinforces the idea of tolerance. The Collect states: "Build us up in the knowledge and love of Him that we may *welcome all people* into this community of faith, and show forth our service to You in our service to others" (emphasis added).

Two hours north of St. Luke's and St. John's, the Church of the Good Samaritan in Sauk Centre, Minnesota, was also turning the words of the General Convention into action by actively welcoming members of the gay community to their services. The Reverend Pat Gillespie was founder and pastor of a GLBT congregation called the Living Waters, which met in several Central Minnesota churches, including the Good Samaritan. Its mission was to provide pastoral care and a safe place of worship for GLBT Christians. In one of her sermons, Gillespie reassures her diverse congregation:

> When someone sins against you…refuses to welcome you as the child of God that you are, Jesus says to us: Let it go…brush off even the little stuff that clings like

> dust: the misunderstandings, the people's blindness to who you really are, the good intentions to change you into something else so you'll be really happy. Let it go. (July 5, 1998)

Gillespie uses the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus to reaffirm the place of sexual minorities in the church. Philip Turner describes this development as clergy preaching "an enlightened religion attuned to the latest trends within liberal culture" (28).

While Snow and Benford have provided the primary theoretical background for this study, other social movement theorists offer helpful explanations of these developments as well. Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow use the term "diffusion" to describe the adoption/adaptation of organizational forms, framing techniques, or targets by activists in one region from activists in another (3). In the Episcopal parishes of St. Luke's, St. John's and the Good Samaritan, the tactics and framing of the activists working at the General Convention level were adopted in order to ensure gay rights on a local level. Tactics were easily transferred (or diffused) from the national level to the local level, showing the capacity and durability of the movement's framing.

In 1976, the ECUSA was not sure if it was willing to allow women to stand in a pulpit. By 2003, the idea of prohibiting a qualified candidate of any gender, race or sexual orientation from seeking ordination was, to many, inconceivable. The growing consent within the ECUSA that gays deserved equal treatment shows that the diagnostic and prognostic framing successfully achieved consensus mobilization. There are, of course, exceptions: the Episcopal Diocese in Fort Worth, Texas, and Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, have been particularly outspoken against gay rights. They are joined by dioceses in California, Florida and Pennsylvania (interview with Pfab, 11/21/05). However, the overwhelming willingness of a large number of individual churches to

adhere to General Convention resolutions and to adopt new church liturgy illustrates the success of the movement's motivational framing. These successes encouraged the movement to expand its ideology—to consider in what ways they could address intolerance on a larger scale. As the ideology began to change, the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing began to change as well.

Momentum Builds:
Tactics used in the time leading up to the General Convention of 2003

While this study claims that Robinson's confirmation was the turning point in the gay rights movement in the ECUSA, it is certainly true that a change in ideology and tactics is present in the years leading up to the General Convention of 2003. The General Convention of 2000 witnessed increased activity by the gay rights movement that was beyond its customary tactics. At this convention, over 70 protestors were arrested. The protestors wanted the church to stop focusing on a dialogue that pertained only to Christianity. One of the protestors, Jimmy Creech, chairperson of Soulforce, pleaded with the Church to "open your arms; open your doors; open your hearts. Stop the debate. Be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ" ("The Episcopal Church and Homosexuality"). Until this convention, proponents of gay rights in the church focused on traditional means of obtaining their goal: working within church governance. However, activists in the church were growing agitated with the stagnation of the gay rights movement in the ECUSA. While they had largely achieved their goal of equality in the church, discrimination continued to persist in full force throughout society.

Gay rights activists saw their opportunity to take their message public when the General Convention convened once again in August 2003. While the Convention discussed several controversial topics, the most notable was the confirmation of Bishop

Gene Robinson. Robinson had been elected by the Diocese of New Hampshire as its next bishop, but before he could assume this position, a majority of the delegates had to vote to consecrate his election.

Gay rights activists in the church realized that Robinson's confirmation would be watched by non-Episcopalians throughout the country and that the convention would attract significant media attention. As activists prepared for the convention, the focus shifted from what Episcopalians thought of each other to what the world thought of the ECUSA. The Reverend Penny Pfab actively advocated on Robinson's behalf and encouraged parishioners to attend the convention to show their support. In the July 2003 issue of St. Luke's newsletter, *The Herald*, Pfab implores members to volunteer or visit the General Convention to "support our delegates as they grapple with important (and sometimes controversial) issues…[Minnesota] is once again on the leading edge" (Pfab 2, 91.7).

A feeling of urgency resonated throughout the church: new actions must be taken to ensure Robinson's confirmation. Sheila Foster, Youth Minister at St. Luke's, began devising new strategies that would refresh and energize the movement. Foster was in charge of the children's services during the convention and demanded that children register for the convention at the same front table as the delegates—right in front of the anti-gay protestors who flocked to the convention hall carrying signs that read "God Hates Fags" and hurling vulgar insults at the participants. The children's services were then held in a park across the street from the convention hall, still in clear view of the protestors. This situation made parents uncomfortable; however, Foster and other church leaders felt that the presence of youth encouraged openness on the part of bishops and

clergy (interview, 11/14/05). By involving the children in the controversy, Foster could teach them "not only to tolerate, but to accept and to embrace." Older youth from St. Luke's were also engaged in the convention. They were sent to committee hearings and were encouraged to offer testimony in front of the delegates (Walter 4). Foster and fellow youth minister, Jason Lucas, felt that the elevated role of children in scripture would affect the way the voting bishops and clergy interpreted their opinions. In politics, children are considered uneducated and naïve; in the church, children are considered pure and innocent—better vessels of God's message (interview with Jason Lucas, 11/12/05).

The months leading up to Robinson's confirmation also showed a change in motivational framing. Instead of invoking "Christian duty," Pfab invoked the history of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota to rally parishioners to the cause. The 1976 General Convention, which approved the ordination of women and called for equal treatment of gays in the church, was held in Minneapolis. This invokes feelings of pride in many Minnesotan Episcopalians; now, 29 years later, they had an opportunity to take part in yet another landmark General Convention.

Tactics and Framing after the Confirmation of Gene Robinson

On August 6, 2003, the selection of V. Gene Robinson as Bishop Coadjutor of New Hampshire was assented to by the House of Deputies and then by the bishops at the 74th General Convention. On March 7, 2004, the service of investiture for Gene Robinson began with the tradition of a trio of raps on the door of St. Paul's in Concord, New Hampshire. The new Bishop issued a clarion call for action during his sermon: "God is always calling us out of our comfort zones and into risky places," he said, "If all

our faith does is give us comfort we have missed half of what God intends for us" (Nunley).

Gene Robinson's confirmation resulted in a shift in the ideology of Episcopal activists. No longer was the focus on changing the institution of the ECUSA, but on changing U.S. society. This change in ideology was partially due to the fact that the greater public recognized the ECUSA as an advocate of the gay community. The Reverend Pat Gillespie discussed the results of the convention: "Some have joined our church—because they are GLBT and feel affirmed or because they want to be a part of a group that takes this stand" (interview, 11/12/05). The church had a new role to play as a source of security and inspiration for new members that were specifically drawn to the ECUSA because of its reputation for gay rights activism. In the September 2003 edition of *The Herald*, Pfab wrote "This summer, 'Episcopal' became a household word when the Rev. Gene Robinson's election…was debated and finally affirmed. I am proud of the way our denomination did its work so very publicly and with civility" (Pfab 2, 91.9). Pfab reminded parishioners that their work was not over—indeed it was just beginning now that the eyes of the nation were upon them. Pfab also continued to motivate her congregation by referring to the Statement on Sexuality that St. Luke's crafted in 1993. She congratulated the congregation for "being way ahead of the curve" (Pfab 2, 91.9).

This change in ideology was influenced not only by the newly elevated role of the ECUSA in the gay rights movement but also by the fact that the movement had been largely successful in its original aims. A gay man had been elected to one of the highest offices in the church. Robinson's confirmation not only validated the ordination of hundreds of gay and lesbian priests but also effectively closed the debate on whether or

not gays were welcome in the Episcopal community. When asked about changes in the ECUSA, The Reverend Pat Gillespie answered:

> GLBT clergy and lay leaders are increasingly more likely in the past five years to be out and most often that is no big deal. Our diocesan convention is run by a transgender woman and our diocesan staff is led by a gay man. Most people are more concerned that they do their jobs well than about their gender or sexual orientation. (interview, 11/12/05)

This is not to suggest that controversy has ceased to exist in the ECUSA. A strong and vocal minority persists and a few churches decided to leave the ECUSA. However, generally speaking, Episcopalians now believe that homosexuals deserve equal access to all rights (and rites) offered by the church. Pfab argues that the church has done all that it can do without the support of the government. While she has been recognizing gay marriages, union in the church has little salience if not recognized by the government. According to Pfab "now it is the state that is in our way" (interview, 11/14/05). In order to adjust to this new change in ideology, three new tactics were employed by Episcopal activists following Robinson's confirmation: increased involvement with the broader GLBT rights movement, the direct lobbying of policymakers, and greater visibility in the mainstream public.

In the months after the General Convention, Episcopal activists began to participate in the broader GLBT rights movement. In June 2004, the Diocese of Minnesota organized a presence at the annual Minneapolis Pride Festival—the second largest gay pride celebration in the country. Minneapolis-area Episcopal clergy and church members walked together in the parade as Gillespie administered the Eucharist off the back of a pick-up truck. Throughout the weekend, Episcopal clergy performed commitment ceremonies for GLBT couples in Loring Park, Minneapolis (interview with

Gillespie, 11/12/05; interview with Park, 12/7/05). These actions represent a change in the diagnostic framing. The problem no longer was that gays were not equal in the church but that gays were not equal throughout society. Participation in the gay pride festival, which has no religious affiliation, indicates an effort on the behalf of the ECUSA to address a problem that extends well beyond the confines of the institution of the church.

In addition to participating in the activities of other advocacy networks, the ECUSA also began making a concerted effort to collaborate with other non-religious organizations. Throughout the spring of 2003, Integrity collaborated with Stonewall DFL (a GLBT caucus in the Minnesota legislature) and Outfront Minnesota to organize demonstrations at the state capitol. Additionally, The Reverend Theo Park, along with other Episcopal clergy, have fostered a collaboration between InterFaith and the Human Rights Campaign (interview with Park, 12/7/05). The collaboration between the ECUSA and the broader GLBT rights movement was cemented when national gay and lesbian newsmagazine, *The Advocate*, named Gene Robinson its "Person of the Year" describing him as the "gay priest that just says no to the Christian right" (Steele and Caldwell 34).

Groups such as Integrity have collaborated with other groups not only to extend their participation in the movement but also because their original goals had been largely achieved. Integrity defines itself as "a witness of God's inclusive love to the Episcopal Church and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community" (www.integrityusa.org). It was founded in 1974 and grew into 60 chapters with over 2,000 members. Integrity had active chapters throughout the Diocese of Minnesota in the early 90s; however, its activities have noticeably decreased in recent years. Gillespie

says this is because "at least in the Twin Cities, open GLBT folk are actively welcomed in most congregations" (interview, 11/12/05). In addition to Integrity, other groups, such as Beyond Inclusion, have changed their mission statement and goals because there is now a greater need for equality in society than there is in the ECUSA. Beyond Inclusion's mission, which is to "celebrate the ministries and commitment of gay and lesbian people in the Episcopal Church," has been recently revised to include a commitment to the fight against "racism, sexism, and xenophobia in addition to homophobia because they are all related. Where you find one, you are likely to find others" (www.beyondinclusion.org).

In addition to engaging the broader GLBT rights movement, the gay rights movement in the ECUSA employed a second powerful tactic: directly lobbying policymakers. For example, Episcopal clergy joined state legislators, lobbyists and concerned citizens on the steps of the capitol in 2004 to protest Governor Pawlenty's initiative to put a constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriage on the ballot. The Reverend Theo Park argued that "We need to do more. We need to counter forces that want state and national constitutional change. We need to oppose those who oppose parity" (interview with Park, 12/7/05). Bishop Robinson expressed a similar sentiment when he said "it is all too tempting to stay inside the church and take care of yourself, instead of going out where the real ministry is" (interview, 12/16/05).

The politicized nature of the ECUSA is not entirely new. In 1991, the General Convention adopted a body of work called "The Social Policies of the Episcopal Church," which outlined the church's position towards international peace and justice, human rights, immigration, welfare, poverty, hunger, health care, violence, civil rights,

the environment, racism, and issues involving women and children. The social policies of the ECUSA are then represented by the Episcopal Public Policy Network, which brings the position of the church to lawmakers. At the time of writing, the Episcopal Public Policy Network was working on defeating the reauthorization of the Patriot Act, stopping the drilling in the Arctic, and lobbying against Congressional Budget Reconciliation (www.episcopalchurch.org/eppn/). Bishop Robinson believes that while the role of the church is to "critique not control," it remains imperative that the church "comment on what is going on in the world from a religious perspective" (interview, 12/16/05).

While political engagement clearly did not start with Robinson, the gay rights movement following Robinson's confirmation put words into action more so than had been the case in the past (interview with Park, 12/7/05). While "the Social Policies of the Episcopal Church" had been handed down by the governing bishops, actions taken at the local level were the result of community organizers. The activities of the Episcopal Public Policy Network were mostly confined to Washington D.C.; however, following 2003 there has been a greater emphasis on promoting the ECUSA's social agenda at the neighborhood and state level. Early in 2006, Bishop Jelinek of the Diocese of Minnesota will announce the creation of a focus group that will discuss how Episcopalians can be better involved in public policy advocacy at the state level (interview with Park, 12/7/05).

Finally, activists employed a third new tactic, which was to gain more publicity with a larger public. They did this by actively opposing anti-gay Christian denominations. On November 11, 2005, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported that a group of Episcopal priests had gathered to protest a conference of conservative clergy people

and conservative legislators to discuss an anti-gay marriage amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. The article was accompanied by a color photo of The Reverend Theo Park who joined protesters in vigil outside Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. Park's sigh read "God created us to be Gay! It is not a choice. Get over it already!" (Scott A1). This message is obviously different than the more subtle messages found in the Book of Common Prayer. The Episcopal Church began using messages directed at non-Episcopalians and started placing those messages in a media that was reached by a larger audience.

In addition to being more broadly focused, the new tactics of the ECUSA were also more politically contentious. As previously stated, the ECUSA has enjoyed an amicable and beneficial relationship with the U.S. government. The recent actions of the ECUSA have seriously jeopardized its position in politics, particularly with the Bush administration (even though George Herbert Walker Bush is an Episcopalian). Furthermore, the relationship between the ECUSA and the Anglican Communion is becoming increasingly strained. In summer 2004, the Primates of the Anglican Communion (the Archbishops of all the Anglican provinces) met at the Lambeth Palace in Canterbury where they issued the Windsor Report that expressed great dissatisfaction with the ECUSA and discussed a possible division of the Anglican and Episcopal Church. This was the first meeting of the Anglican Primates in 215 years in which the Archbishop of the ECUSA was not invited (interview with Pfab, 11/21/05). The actions of the ECUSA have costs them allies in the U.S. government and in the church abroad.

This study examines the movement before and after Robinson's confirmation as utilizing two separate sets of tactics. However, other social movement theorists would

describe this change in the context of Sidney Tarrow and Doug McAdam's concept of scale shift. Tarrow and McAdam define the process of scale shift as "a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities" (Tarrow and McAdam 125). In other words, the tactics are not necessarily different, but applied to a larger movement. Tarrow and McAdam also offer the concept of brokerage which proves helpful in this analysis. Brokerage is "information transfers that depend on the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites" (Tarrow and McAdam 127). The ECUSA and the broader GLBT rights movement had been largely isolated from one another before Robinson's confirmation. The ECUSA was still working through the question of gay rights and had not yet come to a consensus that it was a justice issue. Once a majority consensus had been reached in the ECUSA, activists began to broker with other movements to increase the scale of their contentious actions, include new tactics, collaborate with other activists, and expand their movement.

While these theorists offer interesting insights, this essay maintains that the framework and tactics of the movement had fundamentally changed. The diagnostic framing had changed from addressing a problem that concerned only the ECUSA to addressing a problem that was prevalent throughout all of U.S. society. In order to promote this new diagnosis, the prognosis had to offer new strategies directed at the greater population. In response to their new call to work for greater equality, gay rights activists collaborated with other gay rights groups, lobbied policy makers and sought greater visibility. The motivational framework remained largely tied to the Baptismal Covenant and to a sense of Christian duty. Activists interpreted the pledge in the

Baptismal Covenant to "seek and serve Christ in all persons" as a call to fight for the rights of those outside the church. As Sheila Foster says, "we have to make our commitment to equality real. We have to push the envelope. If we don't go all out, nothing we've done will be of any consequence" (interview, 11/14/05).

Conclusion: Turning Towards the Future

From refusing to ordain gay ministers to lobbying the government on the steps of the capitol for complete equality, the journey of the ECUSA has been truly impressive. This essay has broken the gay rights movement in the ECUSA into two time periods. The first period—before Robinson's confirmation—was characterized by tactics that aimed at internal change. Following Robinson's confirmation, tactics targeted larger scale change. While this division is analytically useful, it is also oversimplified. There is evidence of political activity long before Robinson's confirmation, and gay rights activists are still fighting for equality in more conservative congregations. Furthermore, while Robinson's confirmation played an important role in encouraging gay rights activists to expand the movement, this event alone is not responsible for the change in ideology. The focus of the gay rights movement in the ECUSA has been perpetually readjusting as members became more accustomed to the GLBT presence in the church. Nonetheless, dividing the movement's history into these two categories highlights the change in framing and provides a case study for Snow and Benford's core framing tasks. Studying the movement in this before/after fashion illustrates more clearly the use of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing and how they reflect movement ideology.

While the ECUSA has changed a good deal over the past few decades, most activists agree that it has not changed enough. While The Reverend Theo Park says he rejoices in the support Robinson received, he is saddened by what he sees as "only a tiny minority putting words into action" (interview, 12/7/05). Regardless, Episcopal proponents of equality continue to press on. At the end of our interview, Park shared an anecdote: An old man passed away and went to Heaven. When he arrived at the Pearly Gates, God asked to see his hands. When the man asked why, God responded "I want to see that you found something in your life worth fighting for." Activists in the ECUSA will continue to fight for equality, not only for sexual minorities, but for all that are marginalized. In the words of Bishop Gene Robinson "it will never end until all of God's children are embraced by the church."

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