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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Eucharist Draws 1200 LGBT Persons and
Friends to Trinity Episcopal Church In Columbus
*Bishop Robinson Preaches "Love Them Anyway"***

by John Gibson

The Rev. Susan Russell, President of Integrity, was chief celebrant at last night's Integrity Eucharist—which has become a signal event on the Episcopal Church's General Convention calendar. According to Jim Bliiek of Trinity Episcopal Church, where the service was held, over 1200 worshippers attended—including a block-long file of vested lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) clergy in procession. The congregation filled the historic church literally from balcony to undercroft. Late-comers spilled into the churchyard and surrounding streets.

The service featured the Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson, Bishop of New Hampshire, preaching a sermon that culminated in one of his most emotionally revealing appearances. It will surely be remembered as another watershed moment for LGBT persons in the church and their search for full inclusion in its orders and blessings. The evening encapsulated the great strength LGBT persons draw from each other as well as the strength of numbers and spirit they bring to the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Robinson shared his personal witness of coming out as a gay man and entering into a lifelong relationship with another man. He reflected on the pain of his coming out and, later, his election as the Episcopal Church's first openly gay bishop. Robinson quoted at length from John Fortunato's "Embracing the Exile" (Harper, 1982). In the passage he cited, Robinson read of an encounter with God's love that had only one requirement: that when it came to those who would inflict pain on you, "you have to love them anyway."

A podcast of Bishop Robinson's sermon is available at www.integrityusa.org/gc2006. (Scroll down to the Sermons section.)

The service included the presentation of the Louie Crew Award—named for the pioneering activist who founded Integrity in 1974—to Bishop Robinson. The Rev.

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Michael Hopkins, the immediate past president of Integrity and its chief legislative strategist at this convention, was also honored with an award for his years of service to Integrity and the cause of LGBT persons in the church.

Where others—including a few of the dissident conservative blogs—saw apocalypse for the Anglican Communion in this assembly of LGBT Episcopalians, their families, and friends, Robinson urged his congregation to look around themselves because “this is exactly what heaven will look like.” Indeed, the diversity of race, gender, age, nationalities, and orders, was remarkable even for an Integrity event. It was this spirit that pervaded the corner of Broad and Third streets, where Trinity Church sits—directly across from the Ohio Statehouse.

In this convention’s search for clarity and honesty in our position as Episcopalians in an ongoing conversation with Anglicans around the world, few images could have been more clear in their depiction of the overflowing church of full inclusion for all the baptized. That is an image, and a reality, to share with the worldwide Anglican Communion.

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