THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS FROM LOUIE, AND THE WORD WAS INTEGRITY.

Louie, of course is Dr. Louie Crew, Founder of Integrity. In a 1974 epiphany of the wholeness he sensed through the love of his partner Ernest, and a profound sense of Jesus' love, he was led to publish a newsletter titled "Integrity". Louie says: "I knew that God promiscuously loves everybody! When I returned to rural Georgia (from Berkeley, CA) I took out ads in church and gay papers announcing a new publication, called INTEGRITY."

From that mustard seed grew the ministry of Integrity. Those were heady times for civil rights, women's rights and gay rights. That year, eleven women deacons were ordained to the priesthood in Philadelphia, three years before General Convention regularized such ordinations. By the end of the year chapters were forming. In 1975 a national organizing convention was held at the Cathedral of St. James in Chicago and in November Integrity was incorporated in Illinois. Ellen Barrett, a candidate for Holy Orders in New York who in 1977 was make headlines when New York Bishop Paul Moore ordained her in spite of protests that she was an out lesbian, was elected along with Jim Wickliff as first national co-president.

In New York Fr. Michael Koonsman had been meeting privately with a number of interested persons. Following the Chicago Convention, Louie and Jim Wickliff came to New York and called a meeting which met at Calvary Church where Fr. Tom Pike was rector. The New York chapter of Integrity was born. By October it was incorporated as a 501-C-3, not-for-profit membership organization under the laws of New York State. The chapter first met at St. Peter's, Chelsea, then the Church of the Ascension, St. Luke in the Fields, Holy Apostles and now, in what is almost a full circle, is back at the Church of the Ascension.

Gay Episcopalians from many parishes came to worship in an openly gay environment, to meet other gay Episcopalians, to socialize, to learn, and to lobby for lesbian and gay justice and causes. Integrity/NY members formed an important part of the first openly gay caucus at the 1976 General Convention. Over the years programs ranged from the very serious such as the ever gracious Dr. Mathilde Krim speaking about AIDS to the slightly silly such as the leather garbed dominatrix who pulled one sex toy after another out of her big black leather bag and explained its use.

While many embraced Integrity, others feared it. On the one hand, from the beginning the chapter was determined to be "out": full names would be used in bulletins and publications, the chapter name would appear in full on mailings, speakers would be provided to parishes and other groups, etc. On the other hand, rumors were spread that the chapter was going to out closeted gay clergy (we didn't) and the post office frequently examined the bulk-mailed chapter newsletter -- anything gay was
suspected to be pornographic (it wasn't) -- and delayed its mailing.

Fast forward to 2001. The freedom, openness and candor gay Episcopalians once sought and found at Integrity has spread to more and more parishes in the metropolitan area. Conventions have moved from heterosexuals scrutinizing homosexuals to gay people initiating the discussion of issues important to them, from gays being excluded to gays having a seat at the table. In New York where Integrity was at one time the sole Episcopal presence on Gay Pride Day, the diocese now organizes parish participation and bishops, priests and deacons join the march. We've moved from "Integrity welcomes you" to "The Episcopal Church welcomes you — lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered."

Thanks to Integrity, we've come a long way. On Tuesday 11 September we will lift that up and celebrate it as we observe the New York chapter's 26th Anniversary on the Eve of the Observance of John Henry Hobart, one of the greatest of New York's bishops, with a sung Eucharist at the Church of the Ascension with its rector, Fr. Andrew Foster celebrating and the President of our Board of Directors, Fr. Paul Woodrum preaching.

Join Integrity/New York as it celebrates another anniversary of service of, by and for lesbians and gay men on behalf of the whole church.

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