

## Same Sex Blessings

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### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please join us for the Annual General Meeting of Liturgy Canada on

Monday, April 11  
at 4 pm at the  
Queen's Inn,  
161 Ontario Street,  
Stratford, Ontario.

[www.liturgy.ca](http://www.liturgy.ca)



# Liturgy Canada

## Same Sex Blessings: Where Are We Now?

To listen to some people inside and outside the church, you'd think all we talk or care about is sex! Those of us involved in parishes and congregations know otherwise, of course, but we can't deny that over the past many years much time and effort has been spent on how the church responds to same-sex couples who seek God's blessing on their relationship within the church community.

In past issues of Liturgy Canada, we have used these pages to hear from people on both sides of the issue (in fact, it may be more accurate to say *all* sides, as there are probably more than two

sides here). In many ways, the controversy rages on. But in this issue, we want to report on where things are "on the ground". What is actually taking place because of—or in spite of—the rulings and conversations of international, national, diocesan and synod bodies? Let us be clear. We are not taking sides and saying the issue has been decided. But we thought it would be a good time to see what various parts of the Anglican and Lutheran churches are actually doing.

First of all we present an unscientific survey of the websites of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and all of their synods and dioceses. Then we present a summary of what some Anglican dioceses are doing. This information is in the public domain and readily available either on the web or by contacting the diocese concerned. We thought our readers might find it helpful to know where things stand across the country. As always, we welcome your feedback.

We are grateful to the leadership of each of the dioceses whose rites and processes we have quoted for giving us permission to reprint portions here.

John Wilton+  
and Peter Wall+  
Editors of this issue of Liturgy Canada

Diocese  
rite  
same-sex  
blessings  
liturgy  
gender  
commitments  
couples  
General Synod  
civil  
marriage

## How We Got to Where We Are

The history of attempts to fully include gays and lesbians in the life of the Anglican Church (and I dare say the Lutheran Church) in Canada is a long one, a story that is not finished. One of the subsets of that story is the desire of some for a rite which acknowledges the committed relationship between two people of the same gender. The following are some excerpts from recent documents which place the rites published in this edition of *Liturgy Canada* in some context.

Just before the General Synod of 2007, the Canadian House of Bishops released a pastoral statement which they hoped would clarify its stand. The following is selected from that statement:

*...In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

*The House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting from April 16-20, 2007, once again discussed the question of the blessing of same-sex unions. Once again a number of diverse opinions were expressed. Again questions were raised about theology, scripture, discipline, and our church's constitution. However we did find a common strong concern for the pastoral care of all members of our church. While not all bishops can conceive of condoning or blessing same-sex unions, we believe it is not only appropriate but a Gospel imperative to pray with the whole people of God, no matter their circumstance. In so doing we convey the long-standing Gospel teaching that God in Christ loves each person and indeed loves him/her so much that Christ is calling each person to change and grow more fully into God's image and likeness. To refuse to pray with any person or people is to suggest God is not with them. All of us fall short of the glory of God but all are loved by God in Christ Jesus.*

*...We are committed, as bishops in Canada, to develop the most generous pastoral response possible within the current teaching of the church. We offer the following examples of possible pastoral responses:*

- When a civilly married gay or lesbian couple seeks our church's reception of their civil marriage and asks their parish's recognition, it may be possible, with their bishop's knowledge and permission, to celebrate a Eucharist with the couple, including appropriate intercessory prayers, but not including a nuptial blessing.*
- When a gay or lesbian married or committed couple seeks to hold a reception or celebration in a church for their life in Christ, again intercessory prayers for their mutual fidelity, the deepening of their discipleship and for their baptismal ministry may be offered, not*

*including the exchange of vows and/or a nuptial blessing.*

*...To those who experience these pastoral statements and possible pastoral provisions as inadequate or insufficient, we recognize that they are less than the blessing of same-sex unions or marriage. However it is the discernment of the majority of the House of Bishops that as of today the doctrine and discipline of our church does not clearly permit further action, although we acknowledge that General Synod 2007 will vote on several resolutions on the blessing of same-sex unions.*

*To those who fear that these pastoral provisions have gone too far, we assert that this discipline is entirely consistent with the doctrine of the Church and with our membership in the Anglican Communion, and fits within the pastoral guidelines of the Windsor Report (paragraph 143). We call upon every member of the Anglican Church of Canada to continue in their faithful discipleship and the work of theological and scriptural reflection and dialogue. We are each called to participate in God's mission in the world and we believe we will do this by the grace of the Risen Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.*

*Looking ahead, we ask the Primate and General Synod for a report on:*

- 1. The theological question whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine (St. Michael Report)*
- 2. The implications of the blessing of same-sex unions and /or marriage for our church and the Communion (The Windsor Report)*
- 3. Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships.*

*We ask that this report be available in advance of General Synod 2010.*

*We commit to taking this ongoing conversation to the Lambeth Conference 2008.*

*During that General Synod, the Synod passed the following motions which in part responded to the request of the Bishops noted above:*

*That this General Synod accept the conclusion of the Primate's Theological Commission's St. Michael Report that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, but is not core doctrine in the sense of being credal and should not be a communion breaking issue. (Source: Gs/2007 June 19-25/Act 33)*

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*That this General Synod resolves that the blessing of same-sex unions is not in conflict with the core doctrine (in the sense of being credal) of The Anglican Church of Canada. (Source GS/2007 June 19-25/Act 42, Act 43)*

### **General Synod 2010**

At its meeting last year, General Synod held lengthy discussions around the many issues of same-sex blessings. The following is the final report of those discussions:

*The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met in Halifax, Nova Scotia in June of 2010. Together we entered into intentional conversations in order to hear where our Church is at this time in its life in relation to the matter of blessing of same gender unions. Our conversations were marked by grace, honesty and generosity of spirit towards one another. There was robust participation in the conversations. In dialogue we shared our passion for the mission of God in the world and our thoughts, feelings and convictions. We were attentive to each others' perspectives, experiences and stories and we shared a commitment to continued theological reflection and scriptural study as a foundation to our ongoing dialogue and discernment.*

*We engaged these conversations within the particularity of our Canadian context – a country that is diverse and many cultured. Canadians have been learning how to dialogue across their diversities over the course of our national life. We do so with deeply held commitments to transparency and openness, an approach that is not without risk and that we affirm as a great gift. Often, in processes of discernment, the task is to see our way through a paradox.*

*Our conversations affirmed the full inclusion of gay and lesbian members in our churches, aboriginal voices in our midst, and the wide range of perspectives on the issue of same gender blessings across all dioceses. Our dialogue has been a positive and helpful step in our discernment. At this time, however, we are not prepared to make a legislative decision. Above, in and through all of this, and despite all our differences we are passionately committed to walking together, protecting our common life.*

*We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses. We recognize that these different approaches raise difficulties and challenges. When one acts there are implications for all. There can be no imposition of a decision or action, but rather we are challenged to live together sharing in the mission of Christ entrusted to us, accepting that different local contexts call at times for different local discernment, decision and action.*

*We are in a time of ongoing discernment which requires mutual accountability through continuing dialogue, diocese to diocese and across the wider church. It also requires continued theological and scriptural study and dialogue on the wide range of matters relating to human sexuality.*

*For many members of General Synod there is deep sadness that, at this time, there is no common mind. We acknowledge the pain that our diversity in this matter causes. We are deeply aware of the cost to people whose lives are implicated in the consequences of an ongoing discernment process. This is not just an 'issue' but is about people's daily lives and deeply held*

*faith commitments. For some, even this statement represents a risk. For some the statement does not go nearly far enough.*

*In the transparency and openness we have experienced with one another, we have risked vulnerability but it is in such places that we grow closer in the body of Christ and behold each other as gift. Abiding with each other, and with God we are sustained through struggle, patient listening, and speaking from the mind and heart together. We have experienced these conversations as a gift for us here at Synod and hope that they will be a further gift to the Anglican Church of Canada and to the wider Church.*

## Trolling the Websites

The following is the result of a couple of hours spent visiting the websites of the Anglican and Lutheran national churches, synods and dioceses in January of 2011. The purpose was to see what a casual visitor might learn about the debate and where each church stands on the issue of same-gender relationships. In every case, only the home page of each website was looked at, except when there was a clear link or reference to further pages.

*Anglican Church of Canada:* Under the *Faith, Worship and Ministry* header, there is a link to the "Human Sexuality" page. Documents from General Synod 2010 and 2007, plus a number of resources for further study are available there.

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada:* Under "Resources", there is a link to the Human Sexuality page, which contains a draft of a proposed Social Paper on Human Sexuality. Feedback on this paper was invited by September 2010 and the National Church was expected to issue a final version of this paper after its February 2011 meeting.

*Lutheran Synods:* None of the five Lutheran Synod websites had any mention of the issue on their home pages.

*Anglican Dioceses:* Only four of the thirty Anglican diocesan websites had reference to the issue on their home pages. Even some of those who have developed or are developing various liturgical rites do not have a clear mention on their website's home pages.

*Diocese of Montreal:* Link to a page called Liturgy for Blessing Civil Marriage. (See later in this issue)

*Diocese of New Westminster:* Link to a separate website devoted to the issue. The website contains an overview of the history and parameters of the discussion in the diocese, the actual rite of blessing, the role of the episcopal visitor, the approval process plus archives and further background to the rite. (See later in this issue)

*Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island:* Link to the October 2010 letter from the Bishops on Human Sexuality. The letter outlines the history of the issue in the Diocese and asks each parish to tell the Bishops what kind of pastoral response they choose to make to those who ask for a blessing of their union in light of the Canadian House of Bishops' statement of 2007. The Bishops say these responses will help them determine the "mind of the Diocese" on this matter. The letter also says the Diocese may not need to make

## What is Happening?

any legislative decision on the issue.

*Diocese of Toronto:* Link to a page on Same-Gender Commitments. (See later in this issue)

### What is Happening Across the Country

In response to the 2007 Bishops' Statement, a number of Dioceses have published rites and/or guidelines which are called by various names: Blessing of Civil Marriage, Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants, Celebration of Civil Marriage with Same-Sex Couples, Pastoral Guidelines for the Blessing of Same-Gender Commitments and Rite of Blessing of Civil Marriage. In the articles below, we have attempted to show the "flavour" of each Diocese's response. Full texts are available on the respective Diocesan websites.

### The Diocese of Huron

Huron has issued the following statement from the Bishop, a rite to be used (called Celebration of Civil Marriage with Same-Sex Couples), and a list of protocols, as follows:

*I want to emphasize that nothing has changed in Huron since General Synod of 2007 as it relates to same sex blessings. The Diocese of Huron Doctrine and Worship Committee will meet and develop appropriate prayers for my consideration as per the House of Bishops Statement to members of General Synod 2007. As the House of Bishops Statement says, "When a civilly married gay or lesbian couple seeks our church's reception of their civil marriage and asks their parish's recognition, it may be possible, with their bishop's knowledge and permission, to celebrate a Eucharist with the couple, including appropriate intercessory prayers **but not including a nuptial blessing.**"*

The Guidelines for the rite begin as follows: The Eucharistic Rite for the Celebration of Civil Marriage is the same as all other Eucharistic celebrations *except for PART 3* which is prescribed in the attached document. No part of the text (in PART 3) may be altered.

The presider then will begin the prayers with the following (PART 3).

Presider:

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The Scriptures tell the story of God's enduring covenant with all humankind and indeed with all of creation. God's covenant with Israel was the source of their law and their love for one another. This covenant set them apart to bless and to be a blessing to all creation.

This covenant took flesh in the person of Jesus and has brought us into a new community where there is no male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, but one people united in Christ, to the Glory of God.

We have gathered today to acknowledge and celebrate a covenant already made. The public declaration of commitment which binds these two persons in an enduring relationship is now to be set apart by prayer and by their deep desire to invite God into the midst of their love for one another.

Our prayer is that this covenant, between *N. and N.*, will reflect the glory of the One who came not to be served, but to serve, and who gave his life as a ransom for many. By word and example, *N. and N.* proclaim to us the love which sets us free to be children of God, inheritors of his kingdom and signs of the new creation.

*There follows the text of the Prayers of the People, ending with the following:*

*Then the assembly, stretching their hands toward the couple, says together the following prayer:*

All: Blessed are you, Lord our God, for in your mercy you have created us for love and companionship. We bless you for our creation, preservation and all the blessings of this life. Above all we bless you for our redemption in the great gift of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you, Lord, that in *N. and N.*, we have seen your love made manifest in our midst. May that love be for them a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders and a crown upon their foreheads.

Blessed are you, Lord God, for you bring us all to that table where your saints feast forever in your heavenly home. Amen.

### **Diocese of Montreal**

This Diocese has published a rite for the Blessing of Civil Marriage, adapted from the Book of Occasional Celebrations. The preamble to the rite states:

*This liturgy was commissioned by the Bishop in response to a motion passed at the 2007 Synod of the Diocese of Montreal and affirmed by the 2008 Synod.*

### **2007 Motion**

*Be it resolved that this Synod request that the Bishop grant permission for clergy, whose conscience permits, to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages, including marriages between same-sex couples, where at least one party is baptized; and that the Bishop authorize an appropriate rite and make regulations for its use in supportive parishes and ministries.*

The protocols for use of this rite include provisions that the Bishop must give permission for each blessing, that the blessing be registered in the parish's Vestry Book and as a blessing in the parish marriage register and that no priest is obliged to bless a civil marriage. Only clergy with permission to perform marriages may perform these blessings. Sixty days must elapse between the couple's request for a blessing and the performance of the rite itself.

The Preface to the rite states, among other things:

*The church recognizes the validity of marriages which have been solemnised in accordance with its understanding of marriage, whether or not the exchange of vows took place in the context of an act of worship at which one of its ordained ministers presided. A civil ceremony at which two people took each other as spouses with the intention of lifelong commitment is a complete and valid wedding.*

The rite is almost identical to that contained in the Book of Occasional Celebrations, with the exception that in place of "man and woman" the phrase "couple" is used. There are one or two other minor variations in wording.

### **Diocese of New Westminster**

New Westminster was the first Canadian Diocese to publish a rite, in response to their Diocesan Synod's repeated requests for such a liturgy. The preface to the rite follows:

### **A RITE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF GAY AND LESBIAN COVENANTS**

#### **CONCERNING THE RITE**

*Blessing is a common feature of Christian worship. For centuries the church has blessed people, places and things. Every prayer of blessing is thanksgiving for creation and redemption offered in petition for the fulfillment of God's purpose in the world. All human relationships have the potential to be agents of God's purpose. Regardless of the specific characteristics of the relationship, the act of blessing does not make the relationship more holy but rather, in giving thanks to God and invoking God's holy name, releases*

the relationship to realize its full potential as an expression of God's love and peace.

*The act of blessing recognizes the pre-existent reality of the relationship; confers the community's authority upon the recipients to conduct themselves as formal and public participants in such a relationship; establishes a communal context of responsibility, accountability and privilege; and petitions God to endow the partners with all such grace and strength necessary to fulfill the vows and commitments being made.*

*This Rite of Blessing is a public service of the church and is celebrated before God in the body of the church and in the presence of friends, family and the congregation. Friends and family members are encouraged to participate in the Rite where indicated.*

*All matters relating to the conduct of the Rite shall be in accordance with the liturgical policy and practice of the diocese. It is desirable that the order of service be incorporated into the Eucharist wherever possible.*

## **GUIDELINES FOR ADMISSION**

*In order to request this Rite of Blessing each member of the couple must:*

- a) be free to enter into such a covenant. That is, they must not be in an existing covenantal relationship, including marriage.*
- b) Enter the rite with an understanding that the relationship is to be exclusive of any other partners and have the expectation of permanence.*
- c) Satisfy the requirements of any previous relationship. This involves appropriate support of dependants from any previous relationship and the appropriate dissolution and*

*meeting of obligations that arise from the same.*

After introductory prayers and the Liturgy of the Word, the rite continues with the Covenant and Blessing:

## **THE COVENANT**

*The presider invites the couple to stand in the full view of the gathered community and addresses the couple in these or similar words.*

A covenant is an ancient form of promise, a public declaration of commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible tells the story of God's covenant with human beings. God's covenant with Israel was the basis of the people's liberation from slavery and exile. God's covenant with the followers of Jesus brings us into a new community where there is no male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, but one people united in Christ.

All our covenants with family and friends are signs of God's faithfulness and love. They are living expressions of God's promises to us and sources of hope to others. Today we gather to witness and to bless the public commitment of N. and N. to such a covenant.

*The presider then addresses the couple as follows.*

N. and N., do you believe God has called you into a life-long covenant of love and fidelity?

**Couple: We do believe.**

Will you live together in love?

**Couple: We will, with God's help.**

Will you be faithful to one another?

**Couple: We will, with God's help.**

Will you support one another in love so that you may both grow into maturity of faith in Jesus Christ?

**Couple: We will, with God's help.**

Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the love of God in the world?

**Couple: We will, with God's help.**

*The presider invites the couple to stand in full view of the congregation and to face each other. Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn.*

N., I give myself to you. I love you, trust you, and delight in you. I will share your burdens and your joys. I will go with you wherever God calls us. This is my solemn promise.

## **The Blessing of the Covenant**

*The presider then addresses the community as follows.*

You, friends and members of the families of N. and N., are witnesses to this covenant.

Will you support N. and N. in the promises they have made?

**We will.**

Will you celebrate the goodness of God's grace evident in their lives?

**We will.**

Will you stand by them, encourage, guide, and pray for them in times of trouble and distress?

**We will.**

Do you give them your blessing?

**We do.**

*The presider then says one of the following blessings.*

Let us pray.

We give thanks and praise to you, O gracious God, for your unfailing love and wonderful deeds among us: for the splendour of creation, the beauty of this world, the mystery of our lives and the surprises of human love. We give you thanks and praise for N. and N., because you create in them the desire for intimacy and companionship, calling them out of



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isolation and exile, strengthening them against prejudice and fear, and embracing them in a family of friends and loved ones.

Pour out your abundant blessing upon N. and N. May they grow in love for one another and for all your creation. Lead them into accomplishments that satisfy and delight. Grant that in the years ahead they may be faithful to the promises they make this day, and that in the strength of the Holy Spirit they may grow together in the love, joy, and peace of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**Blessed are you, O gracious God, source of all love, now and for ever. Amen.**

*The rite continues with the Eucharist and concludes with the following:*

### **THE COMMISSIONING OF THE COMMUNITY**

#### **A Litany of Blessing**

*After communion has been distributed, the presider, a friend, or a member of the family leads the community in the following litany of blessing. Additional petitions may be included if so desired.*

Dear friends, N. and N. have been drawn by God into a covenant of mind and body, heart and will. We have celebrated this covenant and pray that the life they share will reflect the love of God for the whole world. Let us join in prayer asking God's blessing upon us as we go forth with N. and N. to proclaim with our lives the reconciling and renewing love of God made known in Jesus Christ.

Abundant God, Lover of all creation, pour out your blessing on us and the covenant we have celebrated.

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our solitude and our companionship,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our acts of tenderness and intimacy,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our delight at knowing and being known,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our acts of self-sacrifice to build up one another,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our being comfort to each other,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our passion for justice,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our generosity and tenacity,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In all our fruitfulness,  
**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

The Diocese of New Westminster's rite also includes an article in which Dr. Richard Leggett outlines the context of the liturgy. The following excerpts are from his article **Text in Context: The Blessing of Same-Gender Covenants in the Diocese of New Westminster** and are taken directly from the Diocesan website.

*I) What do we understand a blessing to be and to mean?.....*

The fundamental question is whether a blessing *imparts* a divine quality to a person or persons that is absent or whether the blessing

*releases* the divine qualities inherent in the person or persons being blessed so that these qualities may work for the enhancement of God's reign. It is this latter view that informed the compilers of the proposed rite.

We bless people not to increase their spiritual dignity but to give thanks for the role they have been called to play within the reign of God and thus to release them to play their part. (*Occasional Celebrations* 1992, 119)

.....

The proposed rite chooses to celebrate God's gifts present in the whole Christian community, whether gay or straight. The rite gives thanks to God for fidelity in a world marked by promiscuity, for reconciliation in a society marked by social, economic and ethnic separation and for the diversity of gifts manifested in the Body of Christ in the midst of a culture tempted by the allure of homogeneity. Without losing sight of the reality of human sin, the rite celebrates the redemption offered freely in Jesus Christ who calls us into relationships of self-giving love.

.....

*III) How is the proposed rite distinct from the marriage rite?*

First, it is only proper to acknowledge that the proposed rite shares a similar structure to marriage, but this similarity is one which reflects the common structure of blessing rites: (a) introductory rite, (b) liturgy of the word, (c) liturgy of the blessing and (d) concluding rite (*Occasional Celebrations* 1992, 121-122).

.....

*[T]he proposed rite differs from the marriage rite in several significant elements.*

1) It is generally acknowledged that the ministers of the sacrament of marriage are a heterosexual couple. They marry each other; the presider blesses what they have vowed. In the proposed rite the couple is not heterosexual but homosexual. The covenant, while sharing some characteristics of marital relationships, is *sui generis*, unique and not to be confused with marriage.

2) In marriage the exchange of consents is deemed an essential element of the rite (Stevenson 1982, 205, 210). Such an exchange of consents is not deemed necessary in the proposed rite. Although the participants in the proposed rite are expected to enter this covenant freely, the implicit and explicit power differentials and impediments that gave rise historically to the exchange of consent in the marriage rite do not pertain here.

3) In the marriage rite the community is given the opportunity to voice any legal and canonical objections to the blessing of the marriage. In the proposed rite no such opportunity is provided. The introductory rubrics, however, are clear that the presbyter or bishop who presides may not bless the covenant if either of the participants is legally married.

4) In marriage the presiding minister declares the couple to be married, a declaration more civil than ecclesial in origin. There is no such declaration in the proposed rite.

5) A comparison of the introductory declaration of the marriage rite of *The Book of Alternative Services* and the declaration that introduces the exchange of promises in the proposed rite will reveal significant differences in the understanding of the rites.

6) The promises of the proposed rite focus on mutual love and edification rather than the "taking" language of the marriage rite.

7) Finally, the actual blessing in the proposed rite is neither derivative of nor similar to the blessing texts of the marriage rite.

8) Whereas the marriage rite presumes marriage to be a conventional social relationship that has the potential for being a sign of God's reign, the proposed rite understands the blessing of same-gender covenants to be an act of public witness and resistance in a world that continues to marginalize gay and lesbian Christians.

.....  
The proposed rite concludes in an act of corporate solidarity. The congregation, couple and presider join in a litany of blessing, witness and commitment, seeking God's favour on the entire assembly as they go forth to live as agents of the reign of God.

## Diocese of Niagara

This Diocese's website includes a rite of blessing of a civil marriage, an outline of which is included below. The site also has a number of theological essays produced for the Bishop. These include *A Theological Justification of Blessing Same-Gender Relationships*, *Blessing as Mission*, *Searching the Scriptures for Wisdom*, *What Christian Teaching Tells Us About Freedom to Change our Minds*, and *Blessing Committed Same-Gender Unions in the Context of the Anglican Communion*.

In addition, essays under the heading "The Blessing of Same-Gender Unions and Holy Scripture: Essays written for the Bishop of

Niagara and as part of a conversation with Anglicans in Tanzania" include *Our Common Understanding*, *Word and Sacrament* and *Two Studies on the Bible and Homosexuality*.

## Niagara Rite of Blessing of Civil Marriage

### Introduction

This rite is intended for the voluntary use of priests who wish to offer a sacrament of blessing regardless of the gender of the civilly married persons who wish to receive the blessing of the church and wish to affirm their life commitment to each other before God in the community of the church. As such it does not imply nor is it intended to suggest that those who do or do not make use of this rite are excluded from the economy of God's salvation. The rite is a means for the church to extend affirmation, support, and commitment to those who present themselves seeking a sign of God's love in response to the love and commitment they express for each other and have already affirmed in a civil ceremony.

It is designed for the blessing of any couple who has been civilly married. It may also be used for the blessing or renewing of marriage vows for a couple celebrating a significant moment in their married life together.

The rite is innovative in that it does not provide a single set structure with content. Rather it has been designed to present a variety of options, drawing on a number of liturgical resources. Thus, a draft structure appears, divided into six sections, around which a service may be designed using the content on the following pages as the basis for a dialogue between a couple and their priest.



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The liturgy of the word includes the option for a reading from a secular source and some appropriate suggestions are here offered. Where there is only one reading, that reading should be taken from the Hebrew or Greek scriptures.

The language in this rite has been edited to be as inclusive as possible and gender-balanced or gender-neutral in references to both the couple and to God. Words in parenthesis should be used and edited according to the circumstances of each couple. While two forms of prayer are offered, the priest or couple should feel free to produce their own. Similarly, while two options are provided for the Eucharistic Prayer, any prayer from the B.A.S. may be substituted.

It is intended that only one of the options presented in each section be used as a rite is produced. The options are in no particular order and should not be 'matched' in a correlating fashion. As this is a blessing upon a couple already civilly married, the renewal of vows and exchanging of a ring or another symbol of covenant love is entirely optional.

Further questions about the use of this rite should be directed to the Bishop's office or the Bishop's liturgical officer.

#### Protocol for Use:

1. This rite is authorized by the Bishop of Niagara for use in the Diocese of Niagara by licenced clergy, and clergy holding the Bishop's permission to officiate, to bless the civil marriages of same-sex couples, one of whom must be baptized.

2. Each cleric who wishes to officiate at such a blessing should contact the Bishop's office, so that a conversation can take place between the Bishop and the cleric involved.

3. In the course of such a conversation, the cleric should be prepared to advise the Bishop details about the couple and should be prepared to have a conversation about the response of the parish to blessings. A date for such a blessing should not be confirmed with the couple until after this conversation with the Bishop has taken place.

4. It is the Bishop's wish that each blessing being contemplated would involve such a conversation.

5. Seeking an affirmative vote at a Parish Vestry is not required; the Bishop prefers that Vestry meetings not take place over these services.

6. This process will be monitored and may be adapted as needed.

The structure of the rite is then described, with a multitude of resources given for putting together the liturgy to be used at any given celebration. The parts of the liturgy are Gathering of the Community, Proclamation of the Word, Blessing of the Union, Prayers of the People, Celebration of the Eucharist (optional) and Blessing and Dismissal.

#### The Diocese of Ottawa

The Diocese of Ottawa's website contains the following excerpt from the Bishop's Charge to the 2009 Synod of the Diocese, which outlines the Diocese's current position:

*Same-sex couples who are civilly married and seek the Church's blessing of their marriage must be welcomed with the same care and solicitude that the church would extend to any other of its members; and, that when the church blesses the marriage of anyone civilly married it does so recognizing that the couple is already married and*

*that the blessing celebrates and deepens a reality that already exists;*

*I give my permission to the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Ottawa to begin offering a rite of blessing to those same-sex couples civilly married where at least one party is baptized, utilizing the rite of blessing for civil marriages found in the Book of Occasional Celebrations, published by the Anglican Church of Canada.*

*The preamble to the rite points out that the role of an ordained minister in a marriage service is to pray for God's blessing on the marriage, which the couple has ministered to each other.*

*I have not chosen to create an entirely new rite as has been offered by at least two dioceses in Canada. My intention is to embrace a liturgical process that will not discriminate between members of the Church on the basis of sexual orientation. This will be Ottawa's offering to the ongoing discernment that is happening throughout the Anglican Church of Canada.*

*It is my conviction that the process of discernment proposed here is fundamentally conservative and traditional. That is, the process of experiential discernment is witnessed clearly within Holy Scripture. A significant instance may be examined in Acts chapter fifteen. There the Church determines to do something, which, on the face of it, is against a plain reading of many other scriptural texts. The reinterpretation of these texts is held to be done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to bring "new things out of old" as they are found in the new creation instituted by the death and rising of Jesus Christ. Such reinterpretation*

is witnessed to elsewhere in both Testaments and in the subsequent life of the Church.

## Diocese of Toronto

This Diocese has recently published a document called *Pastoral Guidelines for the Blessing of Same Gender Commitments*. The introduction to the document and its theological foundation are printed below:

*The following guidelines are presented in order to offer a generous pastoral response to stable committed same gender relationships in our diocesan family seeking a blessing of their commitment. The guidelines were formed after consultation with a Commission of clergy and laity across a variety of theological perspectives and opinions seeking to recognize the sensitivity of the issue while being pastorally appropriate. In our discussions, we have seen that there is great diversity among parishes that are opposed to same gender commitments, similar to the diversity found in parishes that are in favour. Recognition of this diversity affirms that parishes which hold similar viewpoints on this subject are not to be painted with one brush, and represent the rich breadth of life in parishes, with parishioners who are theologically astute and deeply committed Christians. The diversity of our diocesan community demonstrates that we are called to witness to the faith in a variety of ways, and though such witness is rooted in differing interpretations and understanding of holy scripture and the tradition, they are recognizably Anglican.*

*As the practice proceeds, the College of Bishops will evaluate its impact on the mission and ministry of the diocese.*

**Theological Foundation** – *In seeking to meet the needs of gay and lesbian couples in our parishes we recognize the tension between the “gracious restraint” called for in “The Windsor Report” (embodied in the three-fold moratoria) and the “pastoral generosity” called for by the national House of Bishops in their 2007 Pastoral Statement. At the heart of these guidelines is the call of the baptismal covenant on all Christians. We live within our covenant with God, embodied in the tenets of our faith outlined in the Creed and in the daily practice of our lives. We seek to grow in integrity and sanctity as we reflect the life of Christ in ourselves and in our relationships, through worship, reconciliation, proclamation, witness and action. We understand blessing of same gender couples in light of their intention to grow into the fullness of Christ, individually and in their relationship, through faithful reflection of the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).*

## Overview

The intent of the Toronto rite is for the Bishop to authorize a limited number of parishes to offer blessings of same-gender commitments, and only after the parish has engaged in a thorough process of prayer, study, consultation, discernment and consensus-building. Blessings would be conducted only in the context of an ongoing pastoral relationship with a congregation and priest, and one of the couple must be baptized. There is also provision for blessings in the case of couples whose parish or clergy are not authorized to use this rite.

The document gives clear guidelines for what is to be included in the rite of blessing and very specific instructions about what is **not** to be included. Those elements not to be included are: exchange of consents, opportunity for public legal or canonical objections, declaration of union (e.g. “I now pronounce you...etc.”), signing of marriage register and nuptial blessing. It is made clear that an act of civil marriage is not to be included as part of the blessing.

The final section of the document clearly outlines the diversity of the Diocese and of this policy:

**Diocesan Diversity** – *The Diocese of Toronto honours and appreciates the diversity represented in its parishes and clergy. This diversity will continue to be reflected in the selection and appointment of clergy, and in the membership of committees and councils of the diocese. We recognize there are theological and cultural differences across our diocese and within parishes which are strained by both the limits and permission represented in blessing same gender relationships. All congregations and individual Anglicans are called to exercise pastoral generosity one to another.*

*Permission to participate in blessings of same gender commitments will be extended only to those parishes and clergy who fulfill the requirements noted above and are granted permission by the diocesan bishop.*

*No clergy nor parishes will be required to participate in the blessing of same gender relationships.*

*continued from page 10*

*Clergy who object to blessing same gender relationships will be asked to exercise pastoral generosity by referring same gender couples seeking a blessing, if requested, to the Area Bishop.*

*Clergy who support blessing same gender couples will be asked to exercise pastoral sensitivity to those in their parish who are not in agreement with the parish designation.*

## **Coming: Liturgy Canada issue on Participation in the Liturgy**

Despite the work of the liturgical movement of the last several decades, there is a widespread sense among liturgists that the expected renewal of the church's worship has fallen short of expectations. A touchstone of the liturgical movement has been Vatican II's call for the 'full, conscious and active' participation of the laity.

An upcoming issue of Liturgy Canada will re-examine how worshippers might participate in—and clergy might preside at—the liturgy in ways that will deepen the liturgy's transformative potential.

## **Strengthening Liturgical Competencies: an emerging strategy**

*by John W B Hill*

Members of Liturgy Canada Executive, both Anglican and Lutheran, have begun planning liturgy training events, in collaboration with the Renison Institute of Ministry in Waterloo, to serve the newly ordained and liturgical ministers in general. Confronted by persistent reports of liturgical boredom and spiritual disappointment amongst worshippers, we want to help rebuild Sunday liturgy to be engaging and energizing, and centred in vital experiences of Word and Sacrament.

This will entail distinct 'units' to address elements such as • the shape of the liturgy • liturgical space and movement • proclamation • intercession • celebrating baptism • celebrating eucharist • gathering and sending • managing change. Units will be formational (not just informational) and will involve both prayer and music.

Initially, the training events will launch in southern Ontario, but hopefully the model will be portable and will be picked up in other regions. We will consult with bishops, seeking episcopal endorsement and cooperation in recommending the events and in recognizing participants with certificates of some sort.

Some of these 'units' are already in development or trial use, and may be ready to offer more widely this summer. The larger aim is to launch a week-long training event in one or more places in the summer of 2012. Watch for further announcements here and at [www.liturgy.ca](http://www.liturgy.ca).

Meanwhile, we will welcome input from readers. Have you experienced training events that might be instructive for us in the design of one or more of these 'units'? Please contact Steve Harnadek at [sharnadek@cogeco.ca](mailto:sharnadek@cogeco.ca).

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## **Letter to the Editor**

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Letters to the Editor are welcome!  
Send your comments to  
[litcan@liturgy.ca](mailto:litcan@liturgy.ca).

I appreciated Yme Woensdregt's article in the [Michaelmas] issue of Liturgy Canada. I like his theological arguments in favour of open communion as well as his use of group game theory which as a specialist in social work with groups I can fully relate to. The 21st century emergent church should see itself as a "centre set group" which is inclusive and where the cycle of formation is "belong - behave - believe." rather than the reverse. But I also agree with John Hill when he cautions that it is "the explicit invitation to the unbaptized to share in Communion that undermines the meaning of the sacraments." Communion should be open to all but we need to attempt to recognize unbaptized communicants in order to invite them to be baptized and receive the spiritual fullness of both sacraments.

The Rev'd Bob Chandler, St. Matthew's Church, Windsor, ON

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Liturgy Canada Annual General Meeting on Monday, April 11th at 4 pm at the Queen's Inn, Stratford, Ontario! Join us!



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Liturgy Canada is a society of women and men committed to the ongoing renewal of the Church in worship and mission. Our ministry is to provide resources on our liturgical life which focus the debate, inform our practice and evaluate our experience.

We always welcome comments about our articles or what is happening in your parish. If you have been touched, stimulated, informed, angered, inspired, confused or otherwise affected by this issue, we would love to help you share your work with others. Your responses are most welcome!

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