



The Commission on Marriage and Blessing

Report to the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California

October 2007

Contents

CMB Roster	2
Resolution for the 158 th Convention	3
Introduction to the Commission on Marriage and Blessing	5
CMB's Initial 'Charge'	7
Bishop Andrus' Letter to the Clergy on the Blessing of Same-Gender Unions	9
CMB Endorsed Rites (Introduction)	11
Concerning the Service	12
Lectionary	15
Book of Common Prayer Adaptation/s	17
New Zealand Prayer Book Adaptation	29
New Westminster Adaptation	37
CMB Resources (Introduction)	45
Church and State (Introduction)	47
Websites of Interest	48

**Commission on Marriage and Blessing
Roster (8/07)**

Joseph Lane, co-chair (Belmont, CA)
josephlane@marriageandblessing.org

Lynette Morlan, co-chair (San Ramon, CA)
dlmorlan@marriageandblessing.org

David Abernethy-Deppe (San Francisco, CA)
former member

Anne Cox Bailey (Walnut Creek, CA)
ponderanew@marriageandblessing.org

Michael Barham (Moraga, CA)
on.pilgrimage@marriageandblessing.org

Bill Countryman (Oakland, CA)

Mark Henderson (San Francisco, CA)
deaconhenderson@marriageandblessing.org

Tom Jackson (Berkeley, CA)
tcjackson@marriageandblessing.org

Joe McDonough (Belmont, CA)
joe.mcdonough@marriageandblessing.org

Brother Richard Jonathan (San Francisco, CA)
Kendrick05@marriageandblessing.org

M. R. Ritley (Emeryville, CA)

Susan Roberts (Danville, CA)
former member

Louis Weil (Berkeley, CA)

Resolution for the 158th Convention

The Liturgical Covenanting, Blessing, and Sending Forth of Couples in Committed Same-Gender Relationships

RESOLVED, that this 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California commend to the Bishop of California the lectionary, rubric entitled “Concerning the Service,” and three rites endorsed by the Commission on Marriage and Blessing, and urge the Bishop to approve the trial use of these forms as resources in the Diocese of California for formalizing the blessing of same-gender unions.

Explanation:

The Commission on Marriage and Blessing, in response to a resolution passed at the 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, has adapted three extant rites for use in the liturgical blessing of same-gender unions in this diocese. The rites are adapted from:

- *The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (as well as The Blessing of a Civil Marriage and An Order for Marriage) in The Book of Common Prayer*
- *A Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants, commonly referred to as The New Westminster Rite, from the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada*
- *Marriage Liturgy, Second Form, in A New Zealand Prayer Book*

In endorsing these rites/resources, the Commission celebrates the intention of the Episcopal Diocese of California to support and bless both same-gender and ‘straight’ couples in godly relationships, while hoping for the day when ‘marriage equality’ will be the reality in our Church and State.

The Commission calls particular attention to the part of the rubric ‘Concerning the Service’ which sets forth, in addition to the familiar material adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, the expectation that the use of liturgies of blessing for marriage and union occur in the context of Christian community and with the community’s understanding of its role in fostering godly relationships.

The rites and other materials referred to in the Resolution may be found in the Commission’s Report to the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California and on the Commission’s website (<http://marriageandblessing.org>) along with other

materials such as a bibliography for use in pre-marital/pre-union counseling and examples of particular rites drafted or used over the years which are offered, without endorsement, for informational purposes.

Commission on Marriage and Blessing

The Rev. Joseph Lane, Co-chair
Good Shepherd Episcopal Church
1300 Fifth Avenue
Belmont, CA 94002
josephlane@pacbell.net

The Rev. Lynette Morlan, Co-chair
St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church
678 Enos Way
Livermore, CA 94551
dmorlan@comcast.net

Commission on Marriage and Blessing

Episcopal Diocese of California

(<http://marriageandblessing.org>)

Thank you for your interest in the Episcopal Diocese of California's new Commission on Marriage and Blessing! We would like to take this opportunity to introduce ourselves and to report on the work we've accomplished in 2005, 2006, and Early 2007.

Before we begin, here's a thought that underlies all of our work...

The Commission on Marriage and Blessing celebrates the intention of the Episcopal Diocese of California to support and bless both same-gender and heterosexual couples in godly relationship, while hoping for the day when 'marriage equality' will be the reality in our Church and State.

2005

Diocesan Convention passed three resolutions in October 2005 relating to the new CMB, the successor to the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing. The resolutions may be summarized as follows:

- A. Resolution establishing the CMB through the 161st Diocesan Convention in October 2010
- B. Resolution charging CMB with developing resources for catechesis with couples and communities of faith. These resources would be for clergy's use in pre-marital/pre-union counseling, as well as to help congregations better understand their role in fostering/supporting good relationships.
- C. Resolution charging the CMB and the Commission on Liturgy and Music together to develop a rite or rites for the liturgical covenanting, blessing, and sending forth of couples in committed same-gender relationships.

2006

In February 2006, Bishop Swing appointed the Rev. Joseph Lane as CMB co-chair, and instructed Joseph to appoint his co-chair. Joseph felt it would be best to wait to appoint a co-chair until he and the new CMB had a sense of who would be serving on the Commission, and until he could nominate someone to the new bishop.

CMB met once (April 18) prior to the May's episcopal election, then again immediately following the election, on May 9. Joseph and the Rev. John Kirkley, president of Oasis/California (O/C), met with Bishop-elect Marc Andrus on May 10. At that time Bishop Marc enthusiastically encouraged CMB to "do the work." CMB met again on May 31 to discuss how to best proceed with our new bishop. Joseph was present at an O/C board meeting with the Bishop Marc on October 3, which resulted in Bishop

Marc's letter to the clergy, dated October 4, setting forth his expectations regarding the blessing of same-gender unions in the Diocese of California, as well as his expectation that CMB would develop "liturgical resources for our pastoral use" in the diocese.

CMB met again on October 10 (with the Rev. Rick Fabian, co-chair of the Commission of Liturgy and Music) and November 16, and developed this timeline for its work leading up to Diocesan Convention in October 2007:

- October — November '06 – Commissioners choose one or more subgroups:
Rites, Resources, Church and State
- December '06 — February '07 – Subgroups define and begin their work.
- March '07 – Saturday retreat for subgroups to present drafts to CMB:
 - a. Rite/s (extant and/or new)
 - b. Resources (draft documents and/or create a bibliography of extant resources)
 - c. Church and State (compose a position paper and, perhaps, craft a resolution similar to the one being considered in the Diocese of Massachusetts)
- April/May/June – Complete work required for Diocesan Convention in October '07, including resolutions.
- Early September '07 – Complete any last minute edits before materials go to press and to deanery convocations.
- Early October '07 – Incorporate feedback from deaneries.

Writing to Bishop Marc on October 15, Joseph nominated the Rev. Lynette Morlan to be co-chair of CMB, and Bishop Marc affirmed the appointment on October 24. Shortly thereafter, Joseph and Lyn formally submitted a list of names of people to serve on CMB, including individuals who had expressed interest in serving to Bishop Swing during or following Diocesan Convention in 2005, as well as a few additional recruits.

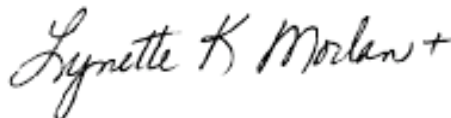
2007 and Beyond

The various CMB subgroups have been meeting during the first part of 2007, including a working CMB retreat on March 31. We anticipate having a website up and running by early summer, with sections on rites, resources, and matters of church and state. (<http://marriageandblessing.org>) We plan on reporting to Diocesan Convention in October, commending a list of Commission On Marriage and Blessing Endorsed Rites and Resources for consideration by Convention, the Diocese, and Bishop Marc.

Having completed the initial phase of our work on rites, our primary tasks in 2008 will include continued development of resources for couples, clergy, and congregations (per the second of the three resolutions cited above) and work on matters of church and state, especially the issue of whether clergy should act as functionaries of the State in marriage/civil union, etc.



Joseph Lane
Co-chair



Lynette Morlan
Co-chair

CMB's Initial 'Charge'

Diocesan Convention Resolutions – October 2005

Note that the explanations are not, technically speaking, part of the resolutions. They are included, however, for clarification, as they appeared at the 156th Convention.

Resolution One: Commission on Marriage and Blessing

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California recommend that the Bishop establish a Commission on Marriage and Blessing to continue the work of the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing appointed at the 155th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, and to present its final report to the 161st Convention of this Diocese, after which the Commission shall cease to exist.

Explanation:

In addition to the issues relating specifically to a rite or rites for blessing same-gender unions, the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing (2004/2005) has raised and only begun to work with other issues that call for further reflection. The task force quickly learned its work was not only about the wedding/liturgical blessing but about the marriage/union that follows the ceremony—the couple's actually living together in the context of a community of faith, along with catechesis and formation, nurturing, and mentoring all covenanted, loving, committed relationships.

We have tabled, for now, questions about whether clergy should act as agents of the state. The commission might well consider such concerns in the coming years.

The five-year life of the commission is designed to respond to actions at the next two General Conventions (2006 & 2009). A sunset clause offers hope that the Commission will respond positively to a time certain deadline, and continuation of the new Commission after Diocesan Convention in 2010 would require further action by the Bishop, diocesan council, or diocesan convention.

Resolution Two: Resources for Catechesis with Couples and Communities of Faith

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California direct the Commission on Marriage and Blessing to develop, for distribution at the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, resources relating to the ethics and pastoral theology of lifelong committed relationships in order to:

1. foster the discernment and articulation of the ways in which marriages and same-gender unions manifest and strengthen Christian discipleship by encouraging a

- better understanding of the Christian vocation to lifelong union as grounded in the Baptismal Covenant, and thereby
2. help to offset the causes and influences that contribute to the fragile state of marriage and other lifelong unions in our current culture, and
 3. help local congregations understand their proper role in supporting and nurturing such relationships, and
 4. prepare couples seeking marriage or other rites of blessing, and support them in their continuing life together.

Explanation:

The clergy are required to prepare couples when they seek rites of blessing. Furthermore, couples require support in their continuing life together. And the faith community must learn its role in nurturing such relationships.

Resolution Three: The Liturgical Covenanting, Blessing, and Sending Forth of Couples in Committed Same-Sex Relationships

RESOLVED, that this 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California, building on the Bishop's long-standing practice permitting the blessing of same-gender unions in this Diocese, direct the Commission on Liturgy and Music and the Commission on Marriage and Blessing to jointly prepare for consideration by the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California a rite or rites which formalize the blessing of same-gender unions in the Diocese of California, together with a policy for the use of said rite or rites.

Explanation:

It is anticipated that the rite or rites will reflect the context of a couple and a community of faith, for the liturgical covenanting, blessing, and sending forth of same-gender couples in committed relationships "characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection, and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God" [Resolution D039 of the 73rd General Convention], together with a policy for the use of said rite or rites.

Bishop Andrus' Letter to the Clergy on the Blessing of Same-Gender Unions

The Episcopal Diocese of California

1055 Taylor Street
San Francisco, CA 94108

The Rt. Rev. Marc Handley Andrus
Bishop of California
Tel. (415) 673-0606
Fax. (415) 673-1510

October 4, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During our time together at the recent clergy conference, I welcomed the conversation and responses that followed my comments concerning the blessing of same-sex unions in the Diocese of California. Now, after further conversation with the board of Oasis, I am writing you to affirm my commitment to the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the Church, and to summarize my expectations as together we respond to the pastoral needs of our people.

I believe these expectations to be faithful to Resolution C051, as adopted by the 2003 General Convention, and sensitive to the desire of many gay and lesbian persons to find welcome and blessing in the Church. However, they are certainly not the conclusion of our conversation. Ours is a continuing journey that involves receiving the witness and experience of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, and remaining in dialogue with the wider Church.

- The decision to bless a holy union is, in the first instance, a discernment made by the couple in consultation with their priest. Vestry approval is neither expected nor necessary. Nonetheless, since the entire community benefits by our continuing discussions about Christian relationships of fidelity and love, and since such conversations can reduce possible misunderstandings in the congregation, I urge you to initiate such important discussions in your communities long before couples present themselves seeking a blessing.
- As part of my pastoral response to the needs of our people, I expect to be informed of forthcoming blessings. I also expect that you will engage in the same careful counseling and preparation required of other couples.
- While at this time the Episcopal Church has no official rites for the blessing of holy unions, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing is developing liturgical resources for our pastoral use. Please consult with me about the liturgy you plan to use for the blessing.

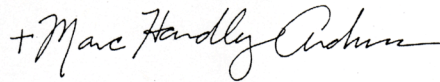
October 4, 2006

Page 2.

- The liturgies we develop or provide are not intended to be a challenge to C051, but to be a part of exercising responsible pastoral ministry. They are for use in our Diocese, under my direction.
- The blessings of same sex couples in our churches are celebrations of Christian love and vocation, and deserve the same expressions of joy and excitement that others enjoy. So, for example, it is entirely appropriate that invitations be sent and newspaper announcements be made.

Finally, I emphasize that this summary of expectations is near the beginning – not the conclusion – of our conversation about our roles as faithful pastors in these important matters. I welcome your comments, as well as questions about particular situations or circumstances you feel need greater clarification.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Marc Handley Andrus".

The Rt. Rev. Marc Handley Andrus
Bishop

Introduction to Commission on Marriage and Blessing Endorsed Rites

In reviewing a number of extant marriage and union rites, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing has selected three extant rites for adaptation and endorsement:

- “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” and derivative rites from *The Book of Common Prayer*
- “Marriage Liturgy, Second Form” from *A New Zealand Prayer Book*
- “A Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants” from the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada

CMB acknowledges that we have determined to let each rite ‘speak for itself’ in terms of the theology of relationship inherent in each rite. Other than to adapt the rites for use in blessing the relationships of same-gender couples, we have not, therefore, undertaken to change or adapt the underlying theology or understanding of holy union in the three rites.

For example, some question the teaching set forth in *The Book of Common Prayer* (page 423), which asserts “our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee,” viewing this assertion as an overstatement of what that story is really telling. Is the story in John 2:1–11 intended as a teaching on or endorsement of holy matrimony as it was known in the first century CE? Or is it, as suggested in *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, a teaching about “new beginnings,” represented not only in the union celebrated therein but also in Jesus’ creation of wine from water: “A wedding is one of life’s great moments, a time for good wishes, feasting and joy. St. John tells us how Jesus shared in such an occasion, and gave there a sign of new beginnings.” (*A New Zealand Prayer Book*, page 779)

We leave it to the clergy, couples, and congregations to explore the theology underlying each rite and to make such reasonable adaptations as seem appropriate. We trust such study and use of the rites will assist the church in continuing to develop its understanding and theology of marriage/union, with regards to both same gender and heterosexual couples.

We welcome your feedback on these adaptations, as well as the documents “Concerning the Service” and “Lectionary.” (<http://marriageandblessing.org>) Lines are numbered in each rite to assist the user in offering feedback to CMB.

In engaging the task before us, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing celebrates the intention of the Episcopal Diocese of California to support and bless both same-gender and heterosexual couples in godly relationship, while hoping for the day when ‘marriage equality’ will be the reality in our Church and State.

Concerning the Service

The following rubrics are adapted and expanded from The Book of Common Prayer, page 422, and the 'Additional Instructions' on pages 437–8. Related material from 'A Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants', commonly referred to as 'The New Westminster Rite', from the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada is also included.

Christian marriage or union is a solemn and public covenant between a two people in the presence of God. In the Episcopal Church it is required of those to be married that one, at least, of the parties must be a baptized Christian, and the Commission on Marriage and Blessing Endorsed Rites assume the same requirement for same gender couples seeking the celebration and blessing of their union; that the ceremony be attested by at least two witnesses; and that the marriage/union conform to the laws of the State, the canons of this Church, and the rubric in paragraph three, page 13 of the Book of Common Prayer.

As with couples seeking marriage, same gender couples seeking the blessing of their union 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.

It is expected that the use of liturgies of blessing for marriage and union occur in the context of Christian community and with the community's understanding of its role in fostering godly relationships. Every effort should be made, therefore, to fulfill the hopes that the ongoing relationship of the couple would (a) be supported by the community both before the service and after, and in turn (b) enrich the life of the community. It is particularly appropriate that the blessing take place in the context of a Eucharist in which the members of the community participate,

Some couples presenting themselves for marriage/union will have been in their committed relationships for a longer period of time, while others will have been together for a shorter period of time. Although this is a certainly a matter to be explored with the priest in premarital/pre-union counseling, it may also have some impact on the actual liturgy of marriage/union. Liturgies with couples that have been together for a briefer period of time might convey more explicitly the sense of joining the partners together, i.e., the sense of creating a new union. Liturgies with couples that have been together for

1 a longer period of time and whose relationships are, therefore, more established, will
2 likely convey the sense of validating a union that, in some sense, already exists.

3
4 At such time as the state should allow persons of the same gender to be married, and if
5 the bishop so allow, the word 'marriage' may be used throughout, as it is in *The Book of*
6 *Common Prayer*.

7
8 A priest or a bishop normally presides at the Celebration and Blessing of a Union,
9 because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing the blessing, and of
10 celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

11
12 When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce
13 the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

14
15 A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the charge, ask for the Declaration of
16 Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

17
18 Where it is permitted by civil law that deacons may perform rites of union, and no priest
19 or bishop is available, a deacon may use the service which follows, omitting the blessing
20 which follows The Prayers.

21
22 It is desirable that the language of the rite conform to the custom of the congregation in
23 which the service takes place, and such adaptations may be made throughout this rite.

24
25 It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay
26 persons.

27
28 In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N.N.), the full names of the persons are
29 declared. Subsequently, only their given names are used.

30
31 *If Banns are to be published, the following form is used*

32
33 I publish the Banns of Holy Union between N.N. of _____ and N.
34 N. of _____. If any of you know just cause why they may not be
35 joined together in Holy Union, you are bidden to declare it. This is the first
36 (or second, or third) time of asking.

37
38 The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union may be used with any authorized liturgy
39 for the Holy Eucharist. This service then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the
40 Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

41
42 After the Declaration of Consent, if the couple is to be presented by sponsors, the
43 Celebrant asks,

44
45 Who presents these two *women/men* to be joined in Holy Union?
46

1 To either question, the appropriate answer is, "I do." If more than one person responds,
2 they do so together.
3

4 For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple to be joined in Holy Union
5 remain where they may conveniently hear the reading of Scripture. They may approach
6 the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the Blessing of the Union.
7

8 It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may
9 be provided for the wedding party, so that all may be seated for the Lessons and the
10 homily.
11

12 The Apostles' Creed may be recited after the Lessons, or after the homily, if there is one.
13

14 When desired, some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of the ring.
15

16 At the Offertory, it is desirable that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by
17 the newly joined persons. They may then remain before the Lord's Table and receive
18 Holy Communion before other members of the congregation.
19

Lectionary for Use in the Blessing of Same Gender Unions

One or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings. The length of any Reading may be adapted at the discretion of the Celebrant.

Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)
Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24 (A man cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh)
Genesis 12:1-3a,c (I will bless you so that you will be a blessing)
1 Samuel 18:1-5 (David and Jonathan)
Ruth 1:16-17 (Where you go I will go)
Song of Solomon 2:1-13 (My beloved is like...)
Song of Solomon 2:10-13; 8:6-7 (My beloved speaks; many waters cannot quench love)
Ecclesiastes 4:9-11 (Two are better than one)
Tobit 8:5b-8 (That she and I may grow old together)
Romans 12:9-21 (Love one another with mutual affection)
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Love is patient and kind)
2 Corinthians 5:16-20 (In Christ there is a new creation)
Galatians 5:13-14, 22-26 (Called to freedom; fruit of the Spirit)
Ephesians 3:14-19 (The Father from whom every family is named; rooted and grounded in love)
Ephesians 4:25-27; 29-32 (Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving)
Ephesians 5:1-2 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)
Philippians 2:1-4 (Be of the same mind, having the same love)
Colossians 3:12-17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)
1 John 3:18-24 (Love in truth and action)
1 John 4:7-16 (17-21) (Let us love one another for love is of God)
Revelation 19:6-9 (The Lamb's marriage supper)

Between the Readings, a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate Psalms are 23; 67; 100:1-5; 107:1-9; 108:1-5; 111; 112; 121; 126:1-3; 127; 128; 133; 139:1-18, 23-24; 145, and 146.

Matthew 5:1-12 (The Beatitudes)
Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the light . . . Let your light so shine)
Matthew 7:24-29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)
Mark 10:6-9, 13-16 (They are no longer two but one)
Luke 6:35-38 (Love and do good)
John 2:1-11 (The wedding in Cana of Galilee)
John 15:9-12 (Love one another as I have loved you)
John 17:1, 18-26 (That they may all be one)

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The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union

Adapted from The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage in The Book of Common Prayer

At the time appointed, the persons whose union is to be blessed, with their witnesses, assemble in the church or some other appropriate place.

During their entrance, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Then the Celebrant, facing the people and the couple, addresses the congregation and says these or similar words

Dearly beloved [or, Beloved Community]: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of these two people in Holy Union. The bond and covenant of holy union was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people. The union of two people in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; [and] for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; [and, when it is God's will, for the nurture of children in the knowledge and love of the Lord.] Therefore such a union is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Or the Celebrant may comment briefly upon the teaching of the Church concerning same gender unions, as currently declared in the formularies and canons of this Church, for example, General Convention Resolutions D039 (2000) and C051 (2003), and the policy of the Bishop of California.

Into this holy union N.N. and N.N. now come to be joined. If any of you can show just cause why they may not (*or may not lawfully*) be joined, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

Then the Celebrant says to the couple

1 I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of
2 you know any reason why you may not (*or* may not lawfully) be united, and
3 in accordance with God's Word, you do now confess it.
4
5

6 **The Declaration of Consent**

7
8 *The Celebrant says to each of the two partners in turn*
9

10 *N.*, will you have this *man/woman* to be your spouse (*or* partner, *or some*
11 *equivalent term*); to live together in covenanted-holy union? Will you love
12 *him/her*, comfort *him/her*, honor and keep *him/her*, in sickness and in health;
13 and, forsaking all others, be faithful to *him/her* as long as you
14 both shall live?
15

16 *The partner being addressed answers*
17

18 I will.
19

20 *The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying*
21

22 Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold
23 these two persons in their union?
24

25 *People* We will.
26

27 *If there is to be a presentation, it takes place at this time. See Concerning the Service.*
28

29 *A hymn, psalm, or anthem may follow.*
30
31

32 **The Ministry of the Word**

33
34 *The Celebrant then says to the people*
35

36 The Lord be with you.

37 *People* And also with you.
38

39 Let us pray.
40

1 O gracious and everliving God, you have created humankind in your image:
2 Look mercifully upon these two *women/men* who come to you seeking your
3 blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast
4 love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through
5 Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
6 Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

7
8 *Then one or more passage from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a*
9 *passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

10
11 *When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister*
12 *appointed says*

13
14 The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____.
15 *People* Glory to you, Lord Christ.

16
17 *After the Gospel, the Reader says*

18
19 The Gospel of the Lord.
20 *People* Praise to you, Lord Christ.

21
22 *A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.*

23 24 25 The Union

26
27 *One of the partners, facing the other and taking the other's right hand in his/hers, says*

28
29 In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my spouse (*or partner, or some*
30 *equivalent term*), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for
31 worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
32 until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

33
34 *Then they loose their hands, and the other partner, taking the first partner's right hand in*
35 *his/hers, repeats the vow to the first.*

36
37 *They loose their hands.*

38
39 *The Priest may ask God's blessing on rings as follows*

40
41 Bless, O Lord, these rings to be a signs of the vows by which these two

1 women/men have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our
2 Lord. Amen.

3

4 *The giver places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's hand and says*

5

6 N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all
7 that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of
8 the Holy Spirit (*or* in the Name of God).

9

10 *Then the Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says*

11

12 Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows,
13 with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, I pronounce
14 that they are one (*or* joined in Holy Union), in the Name of the Father, and
15 of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

16

17 Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

18

19 *People* Amen.

20

21

22 **The Prayers**

23

24 *All standing, the Celebrant says*

25

26 Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

27

28 *People and Celebrant*

29

30 Our Father, who art in heaven,
31 hallowed be thy Name,
32 thy kingdom come,
33 thy will be done,
34 on earth as it is in heaven.

35 Give us this day our daily bread.

36 And forgive us our trespasses,

37 as we forgive those

38 who trespass against us.

39 And lead us not into temptation,

40 but deliver us from evil.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those

who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial,

and deliver us from evil.

1 For thine is the kingdom, For the kingdom, the power,
2 and the power, and the glory, and the glory are yours,
3 for ever and ever. Amen. now and for ever. Amen.

4

5 *If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.*

6

7 *The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following prayers, to which the People*
8 *respond, saying, Amen.*

9

10 *If there is not to be a Communion, one or more of the prayers may be omitted.*

11

12 Let us pray.

13

14 Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver
15 of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which
16 your Son gave his life, and especially upon these persons whom you make
17 one flesh in Holy Union. *Amen.*

18

19 Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that
20 each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a
21 comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. *Amen.*

22

23 Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in
24 your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another
25 all the days of their life. *Amen.*

26

27 Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge
28 their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. *Amen.*

29

30 Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken
31 world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and
32 joy conquer despair. *Amen.*

33

34 Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the
35 grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. *Amen.*

36

37 Be with the children in this family, and give this couple the grace to bring
38 them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. *Amen.*

39

40 Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out

1 in love and concern for others. *Amen.*

2
3 Grant that all who have witnessed these vows may find their lives
4 strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. *Amen.*

5
6 Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children
7 are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed
8 by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where,
9 O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect
10 unity, now and for ever. *Amen.*

13 The Blessing of the Union

14
15 *The people remain standing. The couple may kneel, and the Priest says one of the*
16 *following prayers*

17
18 Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending
19 Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make
20 the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for
21 consecrating the union of two persons in his Name. By the power of your
22 Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon these two
23 men/women. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let
24 their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their
25 shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in
26 their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and
27 in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring
28 them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home;
29 through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and
30 reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

31
32 *or this*

33
34 O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of holy union that in it is
35 represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his [*or the*] Church: Send
36 therefore your blessing upon these your servants [*or children*], that they may
37 so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in
38 wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and
39 peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the
40 Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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The Priest adds this blessing

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. *Amen.*

The Peace

The Celebrant may say to the people

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

The newly joined couple then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the couple and their attendants leave the church.

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

At the Eucharist

The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the newly joined couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Preface of Union

If it is desired that a Proper Preface specific to the occasion be included, this form may be used

Because in the love of two persons joined in Holy Union, you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem, adorned as a bride for her bridegroom, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who loves her and gave himself for her, that he might make the whole creation new.

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly joined couple receive Communion first, after the ministers.

1

2 *In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said*

3

4 O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: We give you
5 thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood
6 of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, *N.* and *N.*, now
7 joined in Holy Union, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and
8 peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you; for the
9 sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

10

11 *As the couple and their attendants leave the church, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be*
12 *sung; or instrumental music may be played.*

1 The Blessing 2 of a Civil Union

3
4

5 *The Rite begins as prescribed for celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, using the Collect*
6 *and Lessons appointed in the Marriage service or appropriate for Holy Union.*

7

8 *After the Gospel (and homily), the couple stands before the Celebrant, who addresses*
9 *them in these or similar words*

10

11 *N. and N., you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and of his*
12 *[or the] Church upon your union. I require, therefore, that you promise, with*
13 *the help of God, to fulfill the obligations which, in the context of the Church,*
14 *such union demands.*

15

16 *The Celebrant then addresses each partner in turn, saying*

17

18 *N., you have taken N. to be your spouse (or partner, or some equivalent*
19 *term). Do you promise to love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep*
20 *her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, to be faithful to*
21 *her/him as long as you both shall live?*

22

23 *The Partner answers* I do.

24

25 *The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying*

26

27 Will you who have witnessed these promises do all in your power to uphold
28 these two persons in their union?

29

30 *People* We will.

31

32 *If rings are to be blessed, the two partners extend their hands toward the Priest, who says*

33

34 Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows by which these two have
35 bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

36

37 *The Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says*

38

39 Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

1

2 *The Congregation responds Amen.*

3

4 *The service continues with The Prayers in The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union.*

5

An Order for Holy Union

If it is desired to celebrate a union otherwise than as provided in The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union, this Order may be used.

Normally, the celebrant is a priest or bishop. Where permitted by civil law, and when no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may function as celebrant, but does not pronounce a blessing.

The laws of the State and the policy of the bishop having been complied with, the couple, together with their witnesses, families, and friends assemble in the church or in some other convenient place.

1. The teaching of the Church concerning same gender unions, as is currently declared in the formularies and canons of this Church, for example, General Convention Resolutions D039 (2000) and C051 (2003), and the policy of the Bishop of California.

2. The intention of the couple to enter into holy union, and their free consent, is publicly ascertained.

3. One or more Readings, one of which is always from Holy Scripture, may precede the exchange of vows. If there is to be a Communion, a Reading from the Gospel is always included.

4. The vows of couple are exchanged, using the following form

In the Name of God, I, *N.*, take you, *N.*, to be my spouse (*or partner, or some equivalent term*), to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

5. The Celebrant declares the union of the couple, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

6. Prayers are offered for the couple, for their life together, for the Christian community, and for the world.

7. A priest or bishop pronounces a solemn blessing upon the couple.

8. If there is no Communion, the service concludes with the Peace, the partners first greeting each other. The Peace may be exchanged throughout the assembly.

1
2 9. If there is to be a Communion, the service continues with the Peace and the Offertory.
3 The Holy Eucharist may be celebrated according to the custom of the congregation in
4 which the service takes place.
5

1 Liturgy for Holy Union

2 *Adapted from Marriage Liturgy, Second Form, in A New Zealand Prayer Book.*

3

4

5 **Introduction and Declarations**

6

7 *The Priest says to the people*

8

9 We have come together

10 to ask God's blessing on *N.* and *N.*,

11 to witness their union

12 and to bring them our love and support.

13

14 I ask you now to pray for them;

15 and not just to pray today

16 or only in this place

17 but to pray in your hearts continually

18 and over the years.

19

20 It is praying, their prayers and ours,

21 which will fulfill God's purposes for *N.* and *N.*

22 Praying is an outlook, a sustained energy,

23 which creates a union

24 and makes love and forgiveness life-long.

25

26 Eternal love never fails;

27 our love needs to forgive and be forgiven.

28 as we pray and forgive we minister reconciliation.

29 Those who join together in holy union

30 are God's ministers to each other

31 of reconciliation and change.

32 As they grow together,

33 these two *men/women* foster one another's strengths,

34 they provide each other with the reassurance and love

35 needed to overcome their weaknesses.

36

37 From the beginning

38 God draws them now to a completely new life.

39 They become awake to each other,

1 aware of each other,
2 sensitive to each other's needs.
3
4 *The Priest says to the couple*
5
6 N. and N., you are welcome.
7 Pray that God will uphold and cheer your life together,
8 that your promises be honored,
9 your words true,
10 now and in time to come.
11
12 For our part we ask you to make your public declaration.
13
14 *Each partner says in turn*
15
16 I love N., and I want to be united with *her/him*.
17
18 *The Priest may say to the sponsors*
19
20 N. and N., will you accept and support this union?
21
22 *The sponsors respond*
23
24 We will. May God bless you both.
25
26 *The Priest may say to any children of the partners*
27
28 N., will you help N. and N. in their life together?
29
30 *Children* Yes, I will.
31
32 *The Priest may say*
33
34 May God's grace surround you
35 and keep you all,
36 and so we pray
37
38 The peace of God
39 which is beyond our understanding,
40 keep and guard over your thoughts and hearts.
41

1 God keep you friends with one another,
2 forgiving one another in kindness.
3
4 May you follow Jesus in happiness or suffering.
5 May hope keep you joyful.
6 Stand firm in trouble.
7 Be strong in prayer.

8
9 May God make you compassionate and brave.

10
11 Above all,
12 may there always be love
13 to bind and keep you whole.
14
15

16 The Ministry of the Word

17
18 *A suitable Reading (or Readings) follow here or before The Prayers.*

19
20 *A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.*
21
22

23 The Vows

24
25 *The Priest may pray*

26
27 Jesus, do for N. and N.
28 as you did in Cana of Galilee.
29 Take the old water, their busy individual lives,
30 and turn them into gospel wine.

31
32 *The partners face each other, join hands.*

33
34 *One says*

35
36 N, I take you to be my spouse (*or partner, or some equivalent term*).
37 All that I have I offer you;
38 what you have to give I gladly receive;
39 wherever you go I will go.

1 You are my love.
2 God keep me true to you always
3 and you to me.
4
5 *The other says the same vow.*
6
7 *The Priest receives the rings and prays*
8
9 Christ our light,
10 encircle these rings with your blessing,
11 to show the love of N. and N.
12 Bind them together
13 and keep them in your love eternally.
14
15 *The giver places the ring on the other's finger and says*
16
17 N., this ring I give to you,
18 with my body I honor you.
19 God make me you true spouse (*or partner, or some equivalent term*)
20 in the spirit of Jesus Christ.
21
22 *The Priest joins their hands together and says*
23
24 God so joined you together that nothing shall ever part you.
25
26 Blessed are you, heavenly Father:
27 You give joy to this couple.
28
29 Blessed are you, Jesus our Redeemer:
30 You have brought new life to us all.
31
32 Blessed are you, Holy Spirit of God:
33 You bring us together in love.
34
35 Blessed are you, Creator, Savior, and Giver of life:
36 One God to be praised for ever. *Amen.*
37
38 *The Priest continues*
39
40 N. and N.,

1 May Christ's love purify your love for each other,
2 Christ's humanity keep you sensitive and practical.

3
4 May the Light of the world illuminate your way ahead,
5 the Bread of heaven nourish you,
6 the true Vine enliven you.

7
8 May Christ be the beginning
9 of a new life, fulfilled and blessed life,
10 and Christ the end.

11
12 *The register may be signed here in the presence of the congregation.*

13
14 *The Ministry of the Word may follow here.*

15 16 17 **The Prayers**

18
19 *The Priest may say to the couple*

20
21 *N. and N., we welcome you now, united by your love and your vows.*
22 *Pray, and we will pray with you.*
23 *May God enrich the life you have chosen,*
24 *and fulfill your hopes.*

25
26 *Some or all of these petitions may be used, the People responding as indicated*

27
28 Gracious God we pray for *N. and N.* and give thanks that you have brought
29 them together in love.

30 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*

31
32 We thank you for the love and care which[, through their parents,] has
33 guided *N. and N.* to maturity, and prepared them for this commitment.

34 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*

35
36 Help them [to be wise and loving parents and] to grow together in
37 faithfulness and honesty, in mutual support and patience.

38 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*

1 Make their life together a sign of your love in this broken world; may
2 forgiveness heal injury and joy triumph over sorrow.
3 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*
4
5 Be with them in their work and renew them in their leisure.
6 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*
7
8 May they welcome into their home both friends and strangers and so reflect
9 Christ's love for all people.
10 *Spirit of God, bless this Union.*
11
12 In all their future together may they enjoy each other's lives and grow
13 through the love they share. *Amen.*
14
15 *One or more of these prayers may be said*
16
17 Father of all: We thank you for this family,
18 and for everything these parents
19 and their children have to share.
20 By your Spirit of peace draw them together
21 and help them to be true friends to one another.
22 Let your love surround them and your care protect them;
23 through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*
24
25 Dear God: You are merciful and forgiving.
26 Grant that *N.* and *N.*,
27 their families, and all who care for them,
28 may accept your generous love.
29 Heal their memories, comfort them
30 and send them all from here,
31 renewed and hopeful. *Amen.*
32
33 Creator Spirit:
34 We thank you for your gift of sexual love,
35 by which this couple
36 may express their delight in each other,
37 find refreshment,
38 and share with you the joy of creating new life.
39 By your grace may *N.* and *N.* remain lovers,
40 rejoicing in your goodness. *Amen.*

1
2 God, the source (*or* author) of love:
3 We pray now for all who are committed to each other in love.
4 Through their love may they know your love,
5 and so be renewed for your service in the world. *Amen.*
6
7

8 **The Blessing**

9
10 *The Priest blesses the couple, saying*
11

12 All praise and blessing to you, God of love,
13 Creator of the universe, maker of humankind in your likeness,
14 Source of blessing for covenanted life [*or* all of life).
15 All praise to you for you have created the love between two people,
16 joy and gladness, feasting and laughter, pleasure and delight.
17 May your blessing come in full upon *N. and N.*
18 May they know your presence in their joys and in their sorrows.
19 May they reach old age in the company of friends,
20 and come at last to your eternal kingdom. *Amen.*
21

22 *Then the Priest blesses the People, saying*
23

24 And the blessing of God almighty:
25 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
26 be with you and remain with you forever. *Amen.*
27
28

29 **The Peace**

30
31 *The Priest says*
32

33 The peace of the Lord [*or* Christ] be always with you.
34 *People* And also with you.
35

36 *The newly joined couple then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged*
37 *throughout the congregation.*
38

39 *When Communion is not to follow, the couple and their attendants leave the church.*
40

1

2 The Holy Communion

3

4 *This rite may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist.*

5

6

7 **The Dismissal**

8

9 *The Deacon gives a suitable dismissal.*

10

The Celebration of a Covenant

Adapted from A Rite for the Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Covenants, commonly referred to as The New Westminster Rite, from the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada

The Gathering of the Community

As the community gathers, a hymn, anthem, or canticle may be sung. Instrumental music may also be played.

The Presider welcomes the community, saying

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.

People *Amen.*

After the greeting the Presider may continue as follows:

Holy and Eternal God, in the quiet night you have called us each by our own name.

In our very heart you have named us beloved.

You surprise us with your grace.

We are the expressions of your boundless love.

On our exodus way you nourish and free us.

You give us companions for our journey.

You set us apart, shaped by our love, yet call us into the midst of your people,

Where we will be your word of blessing.

The Presider says

Let us pray,

Almighty and eternal God, you are pleased to dwell among us and to fill our lives with your presence: May N. and N. who seek your blessing upon their union be filled with your love and may their life together be to us a sign of

1 your promised reign of justice and peace; in the name of Jesus Christ our
2 Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and
3 for ever. *Amen.*

4
5 *or this*

6
7 Searching and saving God, whose unfailing love alone can satisfy our
8 longing: In your mercy you befriend those who wander in loneliness and
9 shame, those oppressed because of difference, those who do not know the
10 value of their unique and sacred gift; and by you Holy Spirit you awaken in
11 them the dignity of humankind and the responsibility of embodied love, as
12 perfected by Jesus Christ, who loved and gave himself for us, showing us the
13 way to intimacy with you and with one another; we offer praise and thanks
14 to you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Life-giver, for your love endures for
15 ever. *Amen.*

16 17 18 The Word of God

19
20 *Then one or more passage from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a*
21 *passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.*

22
23 *A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.*

24 25 26 The Covenant

27
28 *The Presider invites the couple to stand in the full view of the gathered community and*
29 *addresses the couple in these or similar words.*

30
31 A covenant is an ancient form of promise, a public declaration of
32 commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible tells
33 the story of God's covenant with humankind.

34
35 The Hebrew Scriptures teach us that God's covenant with Israel was the
36 basis of the people's liberation from slavery and exile. Paul teaches us of
37 God's covenant with the followers of Jesus bringing us into a new
38 community where there is no longer male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave
39 nor free, but one people united in Christ.

1
2 All our covenants with family and friends are signs of God's faithfulness
3 and love. They are living expressions of God's promises to us and sources of
4 hope to others.

5
6 Today we gather to witness and to bless the public commitment of N. and N.
7 to such a covenant.

8
9 *The Presider then addresses the couple, and they respond as follows*

10
11 N. and N., do you believe God has called you into a life-long covenant of
12 love and fidelity?

13 *We do.*

14
15 Will you live together in love?

16 *We will, with God's help [or in God].*

17
18 Will you be faithful to one another?

19 *We will, with God's help [or in God].*

20
21 Will you support one another in love so that you may both grow into
22 maturity of faith in Jesus Christ?

23 *We will, with God's help [or in God].*

24
25 Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the
26 love of God in the world?

27 *We will, with God's help [or in God].*

28
29 *The Presider invites the couple to stand in full view of the congregation and to face each*
30 *other. Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn.*

31
32 N., I give myself to you. I love you, trust you, and delight in you. I will share
33 your burdens and your joys. I will go with you wherever God calls us. This
34 is my solemn promise.

35
36
37 **The Prayers**

38
39 *All standing, the Presider says*

40 Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

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People and Presider

Our Father, who art in heaven,	Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,	hallowed be your Name,
thy kingdom come,	your kingdom come,
thy will be done,	your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.	on earth as in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.	Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,	Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those	as we forgive those
who trespass against us.	who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,	Save us from the time of trial,
but deliver us from evil.	and deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,	For the kingdom, the power,
and the power, and the glory,	and the glory are yours,
for ever and ever. Amen.	now and for ever. Amen.

If Communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following prayers, to which the People respond, saying, Amen.

Blessed are you, O God, for you awaken our desire for companionship and our hope for community with you and with one another. *Amen.*

In your mercy you call us out of solitary darkness and redeem us to love you with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. *Amen.*

Renew in us a sense of true belonging and call us to love our neighbor as ourselves. *Amen.*

We pray the covenant of faithfulness and love we celebrate today will reflect your unending faithfulness and great love for the world. *Amen.*

May *N.* and *N.* so love one another that they may be a blessing to you and all whom they encounter. *Amen.*

We ask these things in thanksgiving and praise to you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, one God now and for ever. *Amen.*

The Blessing of the Covenant

The Presider then addresses the community, the People responding as follows

You, friends and members of the families of *N.* and *N.*, are witnesses to this covenant. Will you support these two *women/men* 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 may ask God's blessing upon rings, which the couple may then exchange. (A form is provided in The Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union.)

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

or this

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

1 satisfy and delight. Grant that in the years ahead they may be faithful to the
2 promises they make this day, and that in the strength of the Holy Spirit they
3 may grow together in the love, joy, and peace of our Savior Jesus Christ.

4
5 *The People conclude the Blessing, saying*

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

7 Amen.

10 **The Peace**

11
12 *The Presider says*

13 The peace of the Lord [*or* Christ] be always with you.

14
15 *People* And also with you.

16
17 *The newly joined couple then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged*
18 *throughout the congregation.*

19
20 *When Communion is not to follow, the couple and their attendants leave the church.*

21
22 *A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.*

25 **The Holy Communion**

26
27 *This rite may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist. The Preface for*
28 *Marriage may be adapted, or this Preface may be used*

29
30 Blessed are you, gracious God, creator of heaven and earth; you are the
31 source of light and life for all your creation, you made us in your own image,
32 and call us to new life in Jesus Christ our Savior.

35 **The Commissioning of the Community**

36
37 *Following the postcommunion prayer, this litany may be used, the People responding as*
38 *indicated. Additional petitions may be included if so desired.*

39
40 Dear friends, N. and N. have been drawn by God into a covenant of mind

1 and body, heart and will. We have celebrated this covenant and pray that the
2 life they share will reflect the love of God for the whole world. Let us join
3 in prayer asking God's blessing upon us as we go forth with *N.* and *N.* to
4 proclaim with our lives the reconciling and renewing love of God made
5 known in Jesus Christ.

6
7 Abundant God, Lover of all creation, pour out your blessing on us and the
8 covenant we have celebrated.

9 *Bless us, O God.*

10
11 In our solitude and our companionship,

12 *Bless us, O God.*

13
14 In our acts of tenderness and intimacy,

15 *Bless us, O God.*

16
17 In our delight at knowing and being known,

18 *Bless us, O God.*

19
20 In our acts of self-sacrifice to build up one another,

21 *Bless us, O God.*

22
23 In our being comfort to each other,

24 *Bless us, O God.*

25
26 In our passion for justice,

27 *Bless us, O God.*

28
29 In our generosity and tenacity,

30 *Bless us, O God.*

31
32 In all our expressions of faith,

33 *Bless us, O God.*

34 35 36 **The Dismissal**

37
38 *A hymn or anthem may be sung before the dismissal or instrumental music played. The*
39 *Deacon gives a suitable dismissal.*

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Introduction to Commission on Marriage and Blessing Resources

“The union of two people in heart, body and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity....not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly...” adapted from BCP, p. 423

The Commission on Marriage and Blessing has been charged with developing resources for catechesis with couples and communities of faith relating to pre-marital/pre-union counseling and to help congregations better understand their role in fostering godly relationships “characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.” (General Convention Resolutions D039, 2000 and C051, 2003)

The development of such resources (and the identification of extant resources) is a major component in the ongoing work of the CMB — work that we have only just begun. For example, we are currently working on ways to include same-gender couples in pre-marital workshops (see below), and we are always on the lookout for articles, books, and other resources to pass along to clergy, couples, and congregations. Such resources will be added to this website as they are developed and/or discovered.

In engaging the task before us, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing celebrates the intention of the Episcopal Diocese of California to support and bless both same-gender and heterosexual couples in godly relationship, while hoping for the day when ‘marriage equality’ will be the reality in our Church and State.

Resources for Clergy and Couples

There are several programs available to assist clergy with counseling couples preparing for marriage/union. One of the goals of counseling is to provide couples with tools for building and sustaining their relationship. Some of those programs currently used by clergy in the Diocese of California are listed below:

Prepare–Enrich – Requires clergy to attend a one-day training session to become familiar with the program. There are different inventories, depending on the circumstances of the couple. This program can be used for people who are already in union and are seeking help to improve or reestablish their relationship. The inventory surveys 11 areas and provides the clergy and couples with starting points for counseling. While there is no inventory specifically designed for same gender couples, the inventories provided are general enough for adaptation with same gender couples.

Couples’ Workshop – Bishop Andrus has encouraged CMB and leaders of Basics4Marriage to work together to create a program open to *all* couples. (A team at St.

Paul's Episcopal Church in Walnut Creek created Basics4Marriage, similar to the familiar Engaged Encounter workshop.) We are striving to have a pilot program completed in time to offer a workshop in 2008. The one-day format would be designed to be used *in conjunction with*, not in lieu of, individual clergy/couple's counseling, and would provide couples with tools for enhancing communication. In this model, while those leading the workshop make presentations to the group, the discussion that follows is between each couple, not in a small group. Stay posted for updates!

Resources for Congregations

There are two parts to resources for congregations. The first involves education for the congregation's own preparation for hosting same gender blessings and the second involves supporting all couples in their union/blessing.

In his October 2006 letter to the clergy (see page 9, herein) Bishop Marc wrote "since the entire community benefits by our continuing discussions about Christian relationships of fidelity and love, and since such conversations can reduce possible misunderstanding in the congregation, I urge you to initiate such important discussions in your communities long before couples present themselves seeking a blessing."

The CMB encourages congregations to engage in study regarding same gender relationships. Congregations have successfully used book studies to open conversation about homosexuality and the blessing of same gender couples in holy union. Such study will also help gauge the response of the congregation to same gender unions. We suggest one or two presenters to facilitate discussion over a four to six week series.

The second task of the congregation is to support *all* couples in their unions. Borrowing from an idea in Dignity USA's Couples Ministry Resource Guide, your congregation might develop a pastoral team for holy unions. The team would be made up of clergy who fill the role of pastoral leader and lay couples who would be partners in commitment. With this model, the clergy assume responsibility for counseling and preparing the liturgical rite with the couple. Partners in commitment serve as mentors — couples in longstanding, committed relationships to share experiences and ideas with the couple preparing for a rite of holy union. The partners in commitment would continue to support the new couple through their first year of union, and hopefully for years to come. The pastoral team might also be responsible for creating and planning a yearly retreat for all couples to explore and deepen their relationship.

Bibliography

CMB is beginning the process of identifying books and study guides useful for clergy, couples, and congregations. Examples of resources we've found to date that you might find helpful include:

- Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing, *Report to the 156th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California*, including Five-Session Resource/Study Guide, Bibliography, Timeline, General Convention Resolutions, etc. (2004)
- Claiming the Blessing, *Theology Statement* (2003)
- Countryman, L. William and Ritley, M. R., *Gifted by Otherness: Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church* (2001)
- Ellison, Marvin M., *Same-Sex Marriage? A Christian Ethical Analysis* (2004)
- Ford, Michael, *Disclosures: Conversations Gay and Spiritual* (2004)
- Gleason, Edward S., *Redeeming Marriage* (1988)
- Helminiak, Daniel A., *What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality* (2000)
- Integrity USA Resources, *To Set Our Hope on Christ with Study Guide* (2005)
- Marshall, Paul V., *Same-Sex Unions: Stories and Rites* (2004)
- Temple, Gray, *Gay Unions – In Light of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason* (2004)

Please contact us with feedback relating to resources you know of, or ideas for the types of resources we might consider developing. (<http://marriageandblessing.org>)

Introduction to the Commission on Marriage and Blessing's Work on Matters of Church and State

In addition to the development of rites for the blessing of same-gender unions and resources for use in catechizing couples and congregations about holy relationships, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing has also determined to engage matters of church and state. For example, the question of whether or not clergy should act as functionaries of the State in marriage/civil union was raised numerous times by both clergy and laity in the context of the work of our predecessor group, the Bishop's Task Force on Marriage and Blessing.

Having completed the first phase of our work in developing rites, we will turn our attention in 2008 to matters relating to church and state. Please contact us with feedback and willingness to participate in this work. (<http://marriageandblessing.org>)

In engaging the task before us, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing celebrates the intention of the Episcopal Diocese of California to support and bless both same-gender and heterosexual couples in godly relationship, while hoping for the day when 'marriage equality' will be the reality in our Church and State.

Websites Worth Checking

Commission on Marriage and Blessing
<http://marriageandblessing.org>

Oasis/California
www.oasiscalifornia.org

Claiming the Blessing
www.claimingtheblessing.org

Integrity USA
www.integrityusa.org

The Oasis (Newark)
www.theoasis.dioceseofnewark.org

Marc Andrus' Blog
<http://bishopmarc.vox.com>

John Kirkley's Blog
<http://www.revkirkley.blogspot.com>

Episcopal Diocese of California
www.episcopalbayarea.org

Episcopal Church
www.episcopalchurch.org

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The Commission on Marriage and Blessing

Report to the 158th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of California

October 2007