

Summary report on the Survey of the Clergy of the Diocese of Iowa regarding activity with marriages since the Iowa State Supreme Court Ruling.  
Submitted by Alan Scarfe, Bishop of Iowa

8 September 2010

In an effort to see how much activity has been generated by the equal marriage ruling in Iowa, I surveyed the clergy via "Survey Monkey", posing my own questions, which may not have had as complete a response as an independent survey might have produced.

In terms of the number of total marriages performed (of all couples) over the fifteen months since April 3, 2009, to the time of the survey, twenty priests and one deacon responded that they had officiated at 53 marriages. In that same period fifteen priests indicated that they had had requests for 56 marriages of same gender couples. To the question as to whether these requests came from within or without Iowa, 12 priests responded with 21 marriage requests being from Iowa, and thirty one from outside.

Between April and October 2009, when I had asked clergy only to officiate with a state agent and not sign marriage licenses, 8 priests indicated that they had officiated at a total of 12 blessings of a civil marriage. After my new guidelines were given post General Convention, 5 priests performed 10 marriages of same gender couples as the sole officiant. 3 priests answered that they had performed a total of 7 marriages with a state agent signing the license. 7 priests said that they had declined 23 same gender marriage requests. A few of these were due to circumstances that did not work out with the couples at the time, while the priest was willing.

3 priests performing 7 marriages reported that they had recorded the service in the parish register. 7 priests worked on the development of the rite to be used, and 11 promised to submit the rite used which they got from other clergy in the diocese. In two services by one priest the Prayer Book was barely adapted.

To put these statistics in perspective, it was reported in May 2010 that 2020 same gender marriages were recorded in Iowa in the first year since the Ruling. Sixty percent of these were from people out of state. In the same time period overall 19,904 couples (opposite and same gender) have been married in Iowa. The Diocese of Iowa parochial reports for 2008-9 reported 73 marriages in all congregations. With our survey reporting 53 marriages total from the 21 respondents, we are looking at a reasonably accurate picture of our activity in this regard.

Individual comments by clergy were invited and I am offering them to you to hear all voices.

**If applicable, tell where you have gone for the development of rites you have used for marriage or blessing of a civil union of same-gendered couples?**

To my standard ceremony offered to all couples which blends BCP with the Union Ceremony service I offered couples when I was a UCC ordained clergy person (no one takes up my offer to use straight out of the BCP--not even straight couples; I serve in an ecumenical ministry small college setting not affiliated with The Episcopal Church).

The New Zealand Prayer Book J. Philip Newell's A Celtic Benediction

Having had no requests for the marriage or blessing of a civil union of same-gendered couples, I have not needed to search for such rites.

New Zealand Prayer Book, BCP, From other priests, and Other traditions

Charles Pope's phone message suggests he would use the one developed by Willa and Bishop Epting prior to your coming to Iowa (however he cannot find it at the moment and thinks you have it on file)

A variety of sources I can't me off the top of my head.

Thus far have done some looking at the BCP marriage rite, the occasiol Rite for the Blessing of Homes, the rite for the celebration of the adoption of a child. Have not looked to other rites as of now but probably will.

I have consulted with Maureen Doherty, but have not yet had occasion to develop anything. That's why I marked "No" on No. 12 above.

some web sites, the couples involved, the canons of our church

Prayer Book and work by Willa Goodfellow

**If the development of rites for marriage or blessing of a civil union of same-gendered couples occurred with participation of your local vestry, please describe that process.**

Charles Pope's phone message of 6/23/10 did not mention any

Vestry is supportive of the idea of equal marriage but does not get involved with developing rites. This is left to clergy.

no vestry

Not that your survey showed an interest, but the Vestry did discuss whether we should allow same-sex blessings or same-sex marriage in the church on a couple of occasions over the past two years. The Vestry felt that no matter what they felt persolly about the subject, the blessing of same sex marriages would not be supported by the majority of the parish.

By August 15, 2010, I will send policies to the Bishop; said policies being developed in our local church relative to marriage or blessing of a civil union of same-gendered couples.

If the development of policies in your local church relative to marriage or blessing of a civil union of same-gendered couples occurred with participation of your vestry, describe that process.

Policies for the marriage of all couples (whether or not they are same-gendered) are in development with vestry. Have not had need to ask the vestry about this. I have one very vocal against currently on vestry - so have not wanted a "no" in advance. If there were a couple in the church, I think vestry might support.

Yes  
No

Vestry supports decision of rector in deciding who the rector will marry. All marriages performed in this church must with people somehow related to this congregation. This was presented at vestry prior to present rector's arrival and was approved by consensus of vestry.

No  
No  
No

At Trinity's Vestry meeting of October 12, 2009, the following statement was unanimously approved: The clergy of Trinity Episcopal Church may officiate at the marriage of any couple regardless of sexual orientation. The decision is to be based on the clergy's assessment, premarital counseling, and the couple's relationship with the parish. We developed a group for research and Biblical study, presented it to congregation in Adult Forum and took it to the Vestry and diocesan bishop Charles Pope's phone message of 6/23/10 did not mention any

No  
No  
No

Policies are the same for same-gendered couples as for male/female couples. Local Church has no policy on same gendered couples

No  
No  
No  
Yes

We voted to allow this last July and all signed a letter indicating our common mind.

No  
Yes  
No

The vestry was informed of same gender blessing requests. After Bishop Scarfe gave okay for marriages vestry voted to support the blessings of couples and marriages as policy in the church

Yes  
No  
No

Because the canons give clergy their own discretion in all marriages, I made my own decision not to participate or officiate in these marriages; the question did arise as to whether the parish buildings could be used this way if another clergy-person officiated; since the canons give Rectors this decision, I consulted with the Vestry and then made the decision myself not to allow a same-gender marriage in the buildings. The Vestry did not like this and there was a year or so of unpleasantness. The Vestry's role, by canon, is more a matter of information and communication than policy-setting.

No

I presented a suggested guideline for all marriages at St. John's for the Vestry to use as a starting point. It was no different from the guideline we already had in place, other than a widening of the language to include same-sex couples. We did not want two different policies or guidelines, one for heterosexual and one for same-sex. The Vestry adopted them at a regular meeting and they were shared with the parish in our newsletter and in our annual meeting.

Yes  
No  
No  
No

No  
Yes  
No

Not that your survey showed an interest, but the Vestry did discuss whether we should allow same-sex blessings or same-sex marriage in the church on a couple of occasions over the past two years. The Vestry felt that no matter what they felt personally about the subject, the blessing of same sex marriages would not be supported by the majority of the parish.

No

1. Question of same-gendered marriages in parish setting brought before vestry. 2. Vestry immediately ready to approve. Rector recommended vestry members assess parish members before formal approval. 3. Vestry consensus at following month's meeting: approved without hesitation. 4. No official policy written - decision reflected in vestry minutes.

No

Yes

No  
No

No  
No

...ere is anything additional you would like to share on the topics covered in this survey, please do so here in the space provided.

Beginning August 1, 2010, I will no longer act as an agent of the state (we don't sign death or birth certificates, so why are we signing marriage legal documents?). Since a large percentage of couples --straight and gay--seek me out like I'm some kind of Vegas wedding chapel pastor, I'm now only providing services for those seeking blessing of their civil union--who take theology of marriage seriously. Perhaps this is a solution for clergy in our denominations politically (given our splintering over this issue) and otherwise. Treat all couples--gay and straight--equally by blessing rather than legally marrying couples.

1. No request has come in Iowa Falls. 2. Should a request come, I would gladly refer to you. 3. Since the ecclesiastical discipline of the Diocese of Springfield forbids me to officiate at such blessings, the issue is moot for me personally, but I am responding so that you can have a report from St. Matthew's. EHB

NA

Linda and I developed our own liturgy both for our union and 10 years later, for our legal marriage. I'd be happy to share both with Bishop Scarfe. Our union service could be adapted for use as a wedding. If I do say so myself, it is a theologically sound and lovely service created with great care.

Think both same sex and opposite sex people should be treated with reasonably comparable parity. Think opposite sex people should get civil marriage before seeking blessing of church. Expect both kinds will resist the normal things the church asks; premarital counseling, simplicity in the service, etc. I hope I don't have to do either very often. It's hard work, especially around questions of compliance with the church's disciplines.

No comments

The key to interpreting the letter the Vestry wrote is the phrase "reasonable relationship." Of those same-gender couples who have come seeking the church's blessing on their marriage, there was no such relationship to speak of; and among those indicating a willingness to come into relationship with St. Thomas, there was no actual follow-through. So it remains that at this point no such services have taken place. I'm glad you've allowed this and appreciate the low profile you've taken. Thanks so much.

The only official marriages that have been done were after okay to do them. requests are really few and far between (one marriage coming up July 10) I will not participate in the development of any rites or policies regarding same-sex unions nor will I preside over a same-sex "marriage" or bless any same-sex union. I believe as the Church we need to uphold the Apostolic faith and teachings of the Church as received, regardless of man-made laws. As pastors we should be counseling against same-sex unions while at the same time welcoming all into a transformative life in Christ Jesus, regardless of the descriptive labels we apply to ourselves.

N/a

I am alarmed that the 'pastoral discretion' of the bishops is moving so far from the language of the marriage canons and the Declaration of Intent. I think an effort should be made to make substantive changes in the language of the canons rather than changing church policy 'unofficially' through such vaguaries as 'generous pastoral discretion.' For those of us who still try to follow the canons, that course puts us in a difficult spot. If TEC is going to embrace same-sex marriage, we need to do so officially, in an open and transparent manner, by a change in the canons. Clergy who take the canons seriously are in the strange position of asking same-sex couples to sign the Declaration of Intent which clearly states an ideology that rules out same-sex marriage; either that, or a bishop who is in the ambiguous position of advising clergy to ignore a canon of General Convention. This stretches 'generous pastoral discretion' way beyond the boundaries of our polity. In the Canons it is always GenCon that approves liturgy; bishops merely provide accountability to the standards GenCon has set down. In Iowa we had the additional absurdity of a policy set by the bishop that included the command, "Do not use the Prayer Book for these services." As much as I appreciate the care for not upsetting the BCP apple cart here, I see a red danger flag when a bishop approves a liturgical action but has to prohibit the use of our own BCP if we do it! This interim time of 'generous pasto

pegeneux@msn.com

I support the efforts in this Diocese to develop guidelines and rites for blessing same-gendered couples, but this issue has not yet arisen for me, and probably never will. Should any ask me (and none have!) I would decline to function as an agent of the state in the civil registration of a marriage of any couples, whether same- or opposite-. I think it is time for us to get out of this business. Blessings of civil marriages (same- or other-), yes.

St. John's Vestry and I decline to provide same-gendered marriage services; however, I have referred all three couples who have contacted me to the Diocese of Iowa for contact with priests/congregations who support their request.

I have never officiated at a service of Holy Matrimony, and do not intend to do so. I will leave the above to my priest and/or vestry, as appropriate. I have, when appropriate, assisted with preparation for Holy Matrimony and have been a "stand in" for the priest at rehearsal, but have never been asked to assist at a service of Holy Matrimony.

Why do we call this a survey? A survey attempts to figure out what people are thinking on a particular subject and usually tries to avoid or hide a bias. This exercise simply assumes that everyone is doing same sex marriages and blessings, and so the report back to the SCLM will be distorted. How is the church served by such an exercise? And how is the dialogue supposed to be maintained? With respect to those couples that have asked for their relationships to be blessed or celebrated as a marriage, I have agreed to do them if they could convince me from Scripture that such is allowed, the thought being that if this is a leading of the Spirit, the truth will be there. From my perspective, the discussions have been polite but passionate. And each has understood my desire to be corrected if wrong and to help them if right. A few of the "drive-bys" have, of course, been confused that not every Episcopal church performs them as that is what we are known for in Missouri! (most non attendees have been from St. Louis metropolitan area).

We need a consistent process for previously married persons - whether they are same or opposite gender. (I am aware of conflict with canon language.)

You've already decided that this is the direction you are going despite everything so why bother with something like this survey. You are outside God's standards so it really doesn't matter what you do - while I understand there is no 'easy' answer - doing God's will is most often counter cultural yet you have chose to jump into the deep end of the culture without remorse and it's sad.

I was asked if I might officiate, but the couple chose another officiant, so I have never officiated (and would not bless). the rest of the questions aren't applicable.

At this point in time all I could do in good conscience would be to meet with the couple after their civil service for private prayers and devotions, and a blessing on their lives. Fortunately, I m not likely to be asked. IF THESE FOLKS ARE COMMITTED TO A LIFELONG, RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER; then who am I to judge.

not applicable