



The
Episcopal Diocese
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Same Sex Marriage & Blessing Policy Defined

June 29, 2011

Bishop Sisk sent the following letter to the clergy of the Diocese of New York on June 29, 2011. In it, he states:

"I do not believe that Resolution C056 empowered bishops to authorize clergy to perform such marriages. Nor do I believe that it is appropriate for clergy to circumvent the vows we have taken by becoming separately licensed by the state to perform such marriages."

To my sisters and brothers of the Clergy of the Diocese of New York:

I send you this letter to address my views on offering a pastoral response to the recent passage of the New York State Marriage Equality Act.

I continue to have confidence and trust in your good pastoral instincts. All of us are being asked to carry out our pastoral ministry in a context that has been affected significantly by the passage of this historic Legislation.

The first and most obvious question is: what is the policy of the Diocese of New York with regard to the marriage of same sex partners?

It is my conviction, as I have expressed on numerous occasions, that the state has acted properly in its sphere of authority. That action, however, does not determine how the Church understands marriage. That, as we all know, is a matter of on-going debate within the life of the Episcopal Church. However, the situation in which we currently find ourselves was anticipated at our General Convention of 2009. During the debate on the blessing of same-sex unions, Resolution C056 was adopted. That resolution said, in part, that "bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church..."

It is my belief that though this resolution does not supersede the canon that we have all vowed to uphold, it does offer an opening for a generous and grace filled accommodation to local circumstances.

In that light, it seems to me entirely within the spirit of Resolution C056 that clergy who wish to bless a couple who are members of the Church and who have entered into a same-sex civil marriage may feel free to utilize The Blessing of a Civil Marriage (BCP page 433).

I do not believe that Resolution C056 empowered bishops to authorize clergy to perform such marriages. Nor do I believe that it is appropriate for clergy to circumvent the vows we have taken by becoming separately licensed by the state to perform such marriages.

I leave to your good judgment the sometimes difficult balancing of the

pastoral needs of the particular individuals, the interests of the parish community, the needs of the larger Church, and specific questions as to the exact logistics of when and where marriages and blessings take place.

Further, in the spirit of the opportunity provided by this new law, it is my expectation that all those who are currently living in committed relationships, will, in due course, have those relationships formalized by the state of New York. This is an especially high priority for clergy who have vowed to "pattern (our) live(s) in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that (we) may be (a) wholesome example(s) to all people."

Faithfully yours,

The Rt. Rev. Mark S. Sisk

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