

The Rt. Rev. Gladstone B. Adams III

The Diocese of Central New York

June 27, 2011

Dear Clergy of Central New York:

As you are aware the New York State Legislature has voted and the Governor has signed into law a provision for same-gender marriage. The law goes into effect July 24, 2011, barring any legal challenges that would prevent that occurring. Many of you, I am sure, are wondering what this may mean for you in your pastoral care of all God's people in the faith communities where you serve.

I am hereby giving permission, deferring to your pastoral judgment on local application, for the possibility of you presiding over same-gender marriages. The last General Convention passed a resolution seeking "a generous pastoral response" from the Church for dioceses where same-gender marriage is legal. Now that we are one of the six states providing for this possibility, it is in my mind, based on the best reflection I can do as supported by scripture, tradition and reason, meet, right and just that we provide this pastoral response to the LGBT people of our Diocese. The entire history of marriage in the Church over the centuries has gone through significant changes in perspective and theology. Here we are in the midst of such shifts once again.

The people of Central New York are not of one mind on this matter. The decision of the State has prompted rejoicing for some and deep sadness for others. This is true amongst the faithful of our Diocese and my own decision as Bishop will cause similar responses. Whatever your response to these decisions, I encourage you to be measured as you care for each other, for as a community of faithful people in Christ we are still called to support one another as we seek to be "*The passionate presence of Christ for one another and the world we are called to serve.*"

Even though we did not at the time know the outcome of the Legislature's vote, several weeks ago I asked the Liturgy and Music Commission of the Diocese to prepare a rite to be used in the Diocese for same-gender marriage. Up until this time we have allowed the blessing of relationships in parishes as pastoral circumstances warranted, but we have been clear this has not been marriage. We are now in a new place. I would, however, request that you be in touch with me when you prepare to bless a same-gender marriage in order that I might be supportive and helpful as well as have a sense of how often it is occurring.

Regarding processes and procedures, let me be clear that no clergy person of this Diocese is required to preside at a same-sex marriage. Such discretion on the part of the clergy is true already for heterosexual marriage. I will be supportive of you in the decisions you need to make.

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Not only do you have to consider your own theological and pastoral sensibilities, you must consider the realities of your own parochial setting. I trust you to make decisions that are prayerful and that are part of an open conversation within your parishes and faith communities. Secret actions are not appropriate in Christian community.

I do expect that the canons regarding preparation and instruction will be followed. One of the parties, at least, must be a baptized Christian. The ceremony must be attested by at least two witnesses, and the marriage must conform to the laws of the State and the canons of this Church. In other words, the appropriate sections of Canon 1.18, "Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony," will apply to same-gender marriage. Unless "weighty cause" is established and reported to me as the Bishop, the expectation of thirty days notice to the clergy person is in place. The language in the Declaration of Intention in the case of same-gender marriage will read in part in Sec. 3(e), "...do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of two people..." In Sec. 3(f) it will read, "We believe that the union of two people in heart, ...and when it is God's will, for the raising of children and their nurture..."

We will take up this topic for a further conversation at our October clergy gathering. If you have any questions between now and then I encourage you to contact me.

Blessings to you all in Christ and hope for a grace-filled summer,



Gladstone B. Adams III
Bishop

GBA/kdm