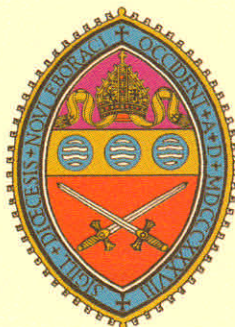


DIOCESAN WEBSITE ADDRESS
www.episcopalwny.org

DIOCESAN EMAIL ADDRESS
diocesanoffice@episcopalwny.org



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE
OF WESTERN NEW YORK

1064 BRIGHTON ROAD
TONAWANDA, NEW YORK 14150
716-881-0660
FAX 716-881-1724

PASTORAL LETTER

Sunday, July 24, 2011
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I stayed up late on the evening of June 24 to see if the marriage equality bill would pass the New York State Senate. When the bill passed and was signed by Governor Andrew Cuomo at 11:55 pm and fireworks burst over the night sky in North Buffalo, my heart was filled with pride at the democratic processes of our state being fulfilled. The people had spoken. A barrier had fallen. My personal view of the Marriage Equality Act is that this was another advance in the long march of the Civil Rights Movement which has brought forward the full equality of all Americans, without regard to race, gender, and now sexual orientation. At the same time, I was keenly aware that many in our Church are distressed by this legislation and anxious about the shape of things to come.

As Bishop of Western New York I am called on now to lead our diocese into the new era which dawns today, July 24, as this state law goes into effect. I act under the highest human authority in our Episcopal Church, the General Convention, which is made up of the Bishops and the elected representatives of the clergy and laity. In 2009 the General Convention voted in Resolution CO56 that: "Resolved, 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; and be it further resolved that this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality...."

My goal as Bishop is to make available this generous pastoral response to all our people, those who welcome the legislation and those who do not.

The first step for me was to listen. I held meetings with all the gay and lesbian priests of the diocese, and with all the rectors and vicars of our parishes who hold traditional views on human sexuality. I also attended a general meeting for any member of this diocese who had something to say on marriage equality, whether in favor or in opposition. I consulted the committees and officials elected by the Convention of our diocese: the Standing Committee, the deputies to the 2012 General Convention, the Deans of the Diocese, and the Diocesan Chancellor.

Out of these meetings I have learned that there is broad support for me to authorize the following:

1. Four liturgies that rectors, vicars, and priests-in-charge may allow priests and deacons to use within their parish church in order to respond pastorally to the New York State Marriage Equality Legislation.
2. Bearing in mind that there are other views, rectors, vicars, and priests-in-charge are not obligated to sanction the use of these liturgies in their parish.
3. Resources for clergy that include an outline of current guidelines on marriage preparation that will be in effect for all couples, and theological resources to assist clergy in making the decision for how each of our parishes will proceed with its pastoral response.
4. I will encourage the laity who have an important role to play in this process in making their views known to the clergy, in making their own personal discernments, and in interpreting what our diocese is doing with regard to marriage equality to the public at large.
5. If they so choose, clergy and parishes who intend to use the new liturgies may list their names with me. Those clergy and parishes who do not intend to use the new liturgies may also list their names with me.

These regulations will remain in force until the General Convention authorizes official liturgies for same gender blessings or marriage for the entire Episcopal Church.

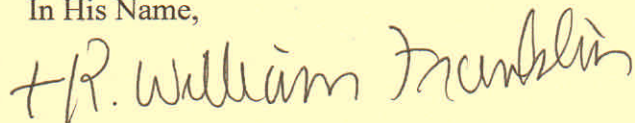
As your Bishop, I believe that I am acting out of the tradition of the VIA MEDIA, the middle way, which has been a key to the identity of our Church for centuries. We do not all have to agree to remain in one diocesan community. For example, in the matter of private confession, our Church has always said: "All may, none must, some should." In the matter of the ordination of women to the priesthood, diaconate, and episcopate: some parishes in our diocese accepted this quickly. Others took their time. But we stayed together. So it is my hope on marriage equality.

We are one in our loyalty to the Apostolic Faith in Jesus Christ handed down to us through the centuries. But how this Apostolic Faith is lived out in changing times we discern by listening, learning, and tolerating diversity.

In the Epistle assigned for this day, the Apostle Paul speaks directly to us:

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In His Name,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "R. William Franklin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

R. William Franklin

XIth Bishop of the Diocese of Western New York