



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Clergy Resources

Bishop's Guidelines Regarding the Blessing of Same-Sex Marriages or Unions

Effective January, 2013



These guidelines are for the clergy of the Diocese of Maryland in keeping with [Resolution CO56](#) of the 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church that states that bishops “may provide generous pastoral responses to meet the needs of members of this Church,” and that we “honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality.” Furthermore, the 2012 General Convention authorized the use of liturgical resources for the blessing of same sex relationships ([Resolution A049](#)), with special provisions for dioceses, such as ours, within civil jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is now legal.

1. As to whether or not to engage in performing and blessing same-sex marriages within the diocese, I respect the pastoral judgment and decisions of the clergy under my pastoral oversight. No priest of the Diocese of Maryland, canonically resident or licensed in accordance with the canons of The Episcopal Church, shall be required to officiate at the marriage of persons of the same sex, neither shall they be required to bless a civil marriage performed in another state.
2. Before the marriage or blessing can take place, the priest shall comply with all diocesan requirements that pertain to heterosexual marriage, including those relevant to previous marriages that have ended in

divorce. Couples shall be prepared to make a lifelong commitment to each other, and must have received adequate pastoral counseling prior to the ceremony.

3. Episcopal priests from outside the diocese are permitted to enter the Diocese of Maryland to officiate at same-sex marriages if their bishop permits them to do so.
4. For same sex marriages or blessing of unions, it is not appropriate to use the marriage liturgy in The Book of Common Prayer in any modified form. The appropriate rite to be used is listed below in [I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing](#). For a marriage, the opening sentences and pronouncement should be modified to include the civic language of marriage (see sample below).

The Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

Sample modification of liturgy from [I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing](#)

In the Opening address to the assembly, you may add the words in italics below, so that the address reads:

Dear friends in Christ,
we have gathered together today
to witness N. N. and N. N. publically committing themselves to one another in marriage
according to the laws of the state,
and, in the name of the Church, to bless their union...

In the Pronouncement, you may add the words in italics below, so that the Pronouncement reads:

Inasmuch as N. and N. have exchanged vows of love and fidelity
in the presence of God and the Church,
I now pronounce that they are united in marriage and bound to one another in a holy covenant,
as long as they both shall live. Amen.

Resources

[The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant](#) (Adobe PDF)

Liturgical Resources for Blessing Same-Sex Relationships (Authorized by General Convention, 2012)

[I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing](#)

Full version by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music

[Theological Reflection on Blessing Same-Gender Unions](#)

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