

Guidelines for Rites of Same-Sex Blessings
Diocese of Missouri
Advent 2012

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2:1-2)

Aware of the joy which the newly available rites for same-sex blessings brings to some of us, and the apprehension which they bring for others, the Bishop of Missouri presents these guidelines for their use within the Diocese.

- The materials in *I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing*, as amended by the 77th General Convention in 2012, provide the norm for same-sex blessings in this Diocese. A PDF of the rites, along with a brief theological introduction, is found here <http://goo.gl/9KKmY>. A link for ordering the full text of *I Will Bless You*, in print or eBook format, is on the same page. The enabling resolution for these resources places their use under the direction of the Diocesan Bishop, and that office thus plays a crucial role in implementing the rites, as described in the guidelines below.
- Each congregation intending to implement the use of the rites for same-sex blessing must engage in discernment and, in due course, signal a clear affirmation before moving ahead.
 - The Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge must support the move to use the rites and contact the Bishop before beginning a process of discernment in the congregation. A congregation may not begin this process during an interim period.
 - The community will undertake a season of prayer and study, including as many parishioners as possible in this process, and taking into account especially whatever theological and social diversity there may be. That is, this process should be thoroughly inclusive.
 - The community can use the study materials and discussion guides in *I Will Bless You*. Alternatively, the congregation can engage the process developed and used by Oasis Missouri. Other plans of study and discernment are permissible, with the Bishop's consent. For congregations who have already completed a robust process of discernment, like Oasis, the Rector, Vicar, or Priest-in-Charge may consult with the Bishop about omitting or adapting parts of the process.

- o The Vestry should participate fully in the discernment in the congregation, at the end of which time they will deliberate and vote at a regular or called meeting to determine whether to move ahead. A majority vote is required, but a higher threshold is desirable. After the Bishop's assent, the congregation may then proceed with offering the rites of blessing.

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- As is the case in helping a couple prepare for marriage, so is it the responsibility of the Priest to provide, or arrange for, adequate preparation for the life-long commitment envisioned by the Church's rite of same-sex blessing. The materials in *I Will Bless You* provide a good framework, although the Priest, at his or her discretion, may refer the couple for professional counseling.
 - At least one of the couple must be an active participant in the life of a congregation of this Diocese, and regular in worship. For a couple in a congregation where these rites are not available, the Priest should work with them to seek another congregation where their relationship might be blessed.
 - The couple will consider and sign the Declaration of Intention for a Lifelong Covenant, found in *I Will Bless You*, and the Priest will keep a copy of the signed document in the Church's files. He or she will also present a copy for the couple to keep.
 - At his or her discretion, the Priest may apply to the Bishop for a marital judgment, in the event of a prior marriage(s) or long-term relationship(s).
 - The Priest will convey to the Bishop in writing that these guidelines for the couple have been met. The Priest may also confer with the Bishop, if there is any cause for concern or lack of clarity about how to proceed.
 - Other matters—length of time for prior notice before the Blessing, the decision to adapt and publish banns, liturgical particulars, honoraria, etc.—are made at the local level.

These rites of blessing are an action of the Church, for the people of the Church, and they are offered in a spirit of pastoral generosity and care. The development of these materials for the 77th General Convention resulted in such curiosity and interest in the deeper meaning of marriage between husband and wife that a task force has been commissioned to research these matters and report on them to the 78th General Convention.