



DRAFT

Policy regarding mandatory consultation prior to same gender blessings

Among congregations in the Diocese of Oklahoma, we do anticipate a variety of responses to the General Convention resolution authorizing a rite for trial use for blessing same gender couples. A crucial element of our policy regarding same gender blessings is that no member of the clergy shall be compelled to officiate at such blessings in violation of his or her conscience. Furthermore, because the resolution in question places discretionary authority with the diocesan bishop, we are requiring explicit, written permission from the Bishop of Oklahoma before any congregation proceeds. Prior to any blessings taking place, we expect the clergy to consult with the Vestry or Bishop's Committee and then, at a separate gathering(s) called for the purpose with adequate notice, to consult with the congregation as a whole.

Whether and when to initiate such a process of consultation shall be at the sole discretion of the rector/vicar/priest-in-charge. The precise process for the gathering (s) is to be decided by the rector/vicar/priest-in-charge and the senior warden, making sure that each person present at each gathering has the opportunity to speak and voice support or opposition. (Resources for study and reflection in preparation for congregational gatherings can be found on the diocesan website.) Once these gathering(s) have taken place, at a minimum, the rector/vicar/priest-in-charge and senior warden must report their perceptions to the bishop in writing, noting any dissents from the majority opinion. These reports must be shared with all members of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee, who must be explicitly invited to add their own written comments. Once these documents have been assembled and sent to the bishop, the bishop will grant or deny permission to proceed on a case by case basis. In no case, should a congregation proceed until this permission has been received in writing. In some cases, clarification or additional information may be required by the bishop. It shall be the joint responsibility of the rector/vicar/priest-in-charge and of the senior warden to ensure a full and adequate consultation, and to report the results faithfully to the bishop.

The purpose of this consultation is not to give lay leadership veto power over whether to proceed with unions or over any particular union. Indeed, it is expected that congregations that anticipate blessing same gender unions will ordinarily have this conversation well in advance of any particular request. The purpose, rather, is to ensure an informed response on the part of the local clergy, under the direction of the bishop, that promotes our unity in Christ, the integrity of our witness to the Gospel, and a principled, pastoral response for all people in the Diocese of Oklahoma.