



PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR CLERGY

Pastoral ministry offered by clergy to same-gender couples prior to the blessing of their union will be in many ways similar to the advice, care, and counsel shared with those of the opposite gender who are preparing to be married:

- (1) clergy should seek guidance from the marriage canons and their own pastoral experience as to what topics need to be covered.
- (2) the same standards for seeking a Godly judgment from the bishop apply, where one or both partners have been previously married in a heterosexual relationship or in a same-gender civil union; and in cases where one or both partners have received a church blessing but not in a civil same-gender partnership.
- (3) in lieu of the declaration of intent, the “pastoral understanding” provided by the diocese should be signed and dated by the couple
- (4) the same standards set forth in the canons shall apply regarding the time that must elapse between the first conversation with the clergy and the date of the blessing

There are important pastoral issues that may be unique to the same-gender couple, including but not limited to issues around coming out and related dynamics in families of origin. A list of resources is available here (www.epiok.org). In particular, the following should be noted:

- (1) As with an opposite-gender marriage, the clergy have discretion to seek advice of professional counselors or to refer the couple to a professional counselor if there are issues that need to be addressed that are beyond the competence of the typical parish priest.
- (2) The pastoral conversations around pre-union counseling may provide an opportunity to reestablish a more positive relationship with Christ and his Church, where there has been a history of estrangement or rejection.
- (3) Care should also be taken to advise the couple of the lack of legal status that same-gender unions have in the State of Oklahoma and many other jurisdictions and to encourage them to seek legal counsel to do what they can to secure such things as visitation rights, inheritance rights, power of attorney, and other matters that married opposite-gender couples may not have to consider.