

Dear Members of the clergy:

Last year General Convention passed resolution A049, which provides a liturgy for blessing same gender relationships. Since that time several clergy have asked me about a policy for Oregon in this matter. Since my arrival in Oregon I have given my support to clergy who have wanted to bless these unions and I have myself assisted clergy who wished to have their unions blessed. This support continues.

I offer the following under the heading of generous pastoral response which is referred to in A049 in the following resolve:

*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, including adaptation of the liturgy and declaration of intention contained in "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing";*

I offer the following guidelines for those of you who wish to use the material.

1. I expect that pastoral care and counseling with all couples, both same and opposite gender will be done prior to any blessing rite. In the case of same gender couples please refer to the material developed by convention for assistance in how to go about this work.
2. I expect that you will inform the leadership of the congregation that the blessing of same gender union will be part of the ministry of the congregation and that you will seek their support. A priest needs to pronounce the blessing; a deacon may participate.
3. I would ask that you use the liturgy developed by the Episcopal Church unless for pastoral reasons another form is desired and in that case I would ask to approve it prior to its use.
4. I encourage you to record the rite in the Parish register.
5. I request that when there has been a divorce or the end of a previous lifelong union in the lives of one of the couple you ask permission from the bishop's office to perform the blessing.

I am grateful to the church for the opportunity to bless these unions and I pray for marriage equality in the State of Oregon. I am also mindful that not all will feel comfortable with performing these rites and I want to make it clear that doing so is a decision each clergy person must make for themselves. If you choose not to bless same gender relationships please do find a way to provide generous pastoral support to any who seek this rite.

Now that Washington State has approved marriage equality there is additionally a new issue to consider namely whether to call this rite a marriage rite instead of a blessing rite for cases in which a couple has received a Washington State marriage license. Please remember that A049 did not change the prayer book in which it states that Christian marriage is defined as a covenant between a man and a woman. We now live in a time when state laws, such as in Washington state, is not yet realized in the understanding and sacramental theology of the Episcopal Church. That is an ambiguity we will have to live with, and into, in the days and years to come, but as your bishop I want to give you the pastoral discretion to respond liturgically as it meets the needs of the members of this Church. In that spirit it seems nonsensical in cases where a marriage license has been issued not to call it a marriage.