



the episcopal diocese of rhode island
office of the bishop

April 17, 2013

Dear Friends,

As you know, the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church engaged deeply with questions related to the blessing of same-sex couples. In resolutions A049 and A050 the General Convention provided for a rite of blessing for same-sex couples and invited the church to study canonical and liturgical limitations related to marriage equality. Resolution A049 states in part:

Resolved, That the 77th General Convention authorize for provisional use “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing” (Church Publishing Company, 2012) beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2012, under the direction and subject to the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops may authorize adaptation of these materials to meet the needs of members of this Church ...

Last year at Diocesan Convention, I reiterated my support for the implementation of such same-sex blessing liturgies in the Diocese of Rhode Island. In my address, I called for the creation of a special “Same-Sex Blessings Task Force” to assist me in creating guidelines for use by congregations seeking to offer blessing liturgies for same-sex couples entering into civil partnerships here in Rhode Island or a civil marriage in another state.

Under the provisions of **A049**, Rhode Island State Law, and now with my authorization, clergy may preside over a same-sex civil union using the *adaptation* of *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant* and sign the license. I approve the blessing of same-sex couples only in congregations where both the clergy and vestry agree to provide this generous pastoral response to same-sex couples.

To assist you and your congregation as you begin offering same-sex blessings, I commend to you the “Guidelines for Addressing Same-Sex Blessings in the Diocese of Rhode Island.” Additionally, there will be a workshop for clergy to ensure that you and your congregations are aware of the possibilities and limitations surrounding same-sex blessings here in Rhode Island.

I am aware of the ongoing struggle for civil marriage equality taking place in the Rhode Island General Assembly. Indeed, I have expressed my hope and desire that the State of Rhode Island will extend marriage equality to all of its citizens in the near future. When such legislation does occur, I will revisit the rites for same-sex blessings as well as the guidelines in light of the new legal realities. As necessary we will revise and republish the rite and the enclosed guidelines.

I give thanks for the diligent work of the *Same-Sex Blessings Task Force*: The Ven. Janice Grinnell (Chairperson), the Rev. David Dobbins, the Rev. Edmund Harris, Ms. Susan Hurn, the Rev. John Pallard, the Rev. Joyce Penfield, the Rev. Tim Rich and Dr. Karen Whelan-Berry.

This comes with my deep gratitude for our new shared ministry in Christ and my prayers for you and your congregations during this holy season of Lent.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. N. Knisely". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "N".

The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely
Bishop of Rhode Island