

## **Three Steps in WTN for the use of the Provisional Liturgies of Blessing** (Effective as of the First Sunday of Advent, 2012)

Is the Rector willing to consider providing blessing liturgies for same sex couples?

**STEP 1: Study of the Blue Book materials (minimum) by the Rector** (or priest in charge) to determine whether the Rector is open to using the Provisional Liturgical Materials approved at General Convention.

- This material for study includes "I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing" found in the General Convention's Blue Book materials along with the final approved form of the Provisional Liturgy resources from General Convention 2012.
- These materials will serve as the minimum basis for the study expected of Vestries (Mission Councils) who have been asked by their Rector to consider using the approved Provisional Liturgical resources.
- Note: There were many changes made at GC to the liturgical resources published in the Blue Book. What is printed as the 'liturgy' is therefore misleading. Clean copy has not yet been published, but it should be available before Advent.

Having studied the materials, if the Rector is willing to consider their use in the parish:

**STEP 2: The Rector will inform the Vestry of the need to begin their own study of the Blue Book materials** and to have discussions among themselves (others as appropriate if, for example, they choose to do a parish-wide study) of the concepts and implications for their parish in support of the Rector's request to provide the Provisional Liturgical resource during the Triennium (until the next General Convention, at which time other Convention action may cause the process currently in place to be modified.). The Rector is requesting consensus of the Vestry to support the Rector and any couples who use the blessing liturgies during the Triennium.

- While it is not required, the Bishop encourages Vestries to use the Discussion Guide in the Blue Book materials to facilitate their consideration of using the Provisional Liturgical resource in their congregation.
- The Rector is the liturgical officer of the parish. The Vestry's consensus to the Rector's request is being sought not as giving the permission of the Vestry for the blessing liturgy but as a statement of the Vestry as the elected parish leaders to signify that they believe their parish is ready and willing to support the Rector, the couples and one another in this decision, should the liturgical materials be used.
- Key: The consensus of the Vestry to the Rector's request to use these liturgical materials is a statement of support by the Vestry to consent to the blessings of same-sex relationships in general. It is not to support a specific couple who may desire a blessing. The consensus therefore is for the principle of blessings using the approved materials, and it is not to be personality driven. Once the Vestry's consensus has been established, the Vestry will not be asked to give consensus for other couples during the Triennium.

- There is no specific amount of time required for the Vestry to complete its study, discussion, prayerful consideration and support. When ready, the Rector will call for the decision of the Vestry – whether or not there is a consensus to the Rector’s request.
- Consensus of the Vestry to the Rector’s request will be accomplished when at least 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total Vestry membership acknowledge that they are in favor of conducting blessings in the parish. Rectors wishing to set higher levels of consensus support may do so as they see fit. Such Vestry action will be recorded in the Vestry’s minutes along with the names of those who express their support. Once consensus is given, the Rector will publish the decision of the Vestry to the parish, letting parishioners know that after prayerful study and reflection, the Rector has decided to do so with the support of the Vestry.
- The Rector will inform the Bishop of the Rector’s decision, the Vestry’s consensus and the notification to the parish to provide the use of the Provisional Liturgies.
- Once the consensus of the Vestry to the Rector’s request is given, the Rector will decide on a case by case basis whether or not the materials will be offered for any given couple. The Rector may delegate such responsibility to other clergy members of the staff or to other canonically resident priests of the Diocese who are in good standing. Thereafter, priests from other dioceses may be invited by the Rector to officiate with the Bishop’s express permission.

What is expected of a couple seeking a blessing using the Provisional Liturgies?

**STEP 3: Preparation of qualified couple is expected.**

- To qualify for consideration for the use of the blessing materials, at least one member of the couple must be an active baptized member of the parish in which the blessing is sought.
- The Blue Book materials provide in the section “Hearing, Seeing, and Declaring New Things, Preparing Same-Gender Couples for a Liturgy of Blessing” a useful outline for the preparation of couples for the use of the Provisional Liturgical materials. The Bishop expects clergy charged with the responsibility of preparing couples for this liturgy to be certain that the Blue Book areas and content as contained in this study guide are covered. The Bishop does not require that the materials be presented in the exact format provided by the Blue Book.
- It should be made clear to the couple that this liturgy is not the same as a civil marriage blessed by the Church. The laws of the State of Tennessee do not allow for this interpretation, and the Church does not understand this blessing to be for the same purpose as a civil marriage in Tennessee.
- Once the Rector (or delegated clergy person) and couple complete their preparations for the use of the liturgy, the Rector is authorized to set the date and time for the Liturgy of Blessing.
- The liturgy may take place as seems appropriate, but not at the time of the regular Sunday or weekday liturgies of the parish.
- A record of all blessings shall be maintained in a file designated as such.