



A network of faith communities
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July 8, 2013

A Pastoral Letter to the Clergy of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On August 1, 2013, the new law providing marriage equality for all Minnesotans goes into effect. Many have already begun planning weddings for same-gender couples, while others are beginning conversations with our faith communities, exploring the meaning and impact of this new law. My hope for this pastoral letter is to provide you with some guidance and resources so that we can continue working together to provide contextually-appropriate pastoral ministry to the people of God.

Guidance for Pastoral Ministry in Minnesota

Foremost in my mind is the need for each of us to offer a generous pastoral response to members of the Body of Christ as a means to both “seek and serve Christ in all persons,” and to “respect the dignity of every human being.” This is a baseline expectation for each of us, and as I have come to know you all, I believe that this is one of our strongest gifts. What this means in specific terms: it is important for each member of the clergy canonically resident in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota to determine for herself or himself what a generous pastoral response might be to same-gender couples who present themselves for marriage.

For those clergy who are engaged in congregational ministry, it is important for you to be in conversation with your vestries or bishop's committees, and with the members of the wider faith community. Ideally, each faith community will engage in conversation and discernment about what is the best pastoral response for their context and culture. There are many helpful models for conversation and discernment. You may find the Discussion Guide on page 250 of [*I Will Bless You, and You Will Be a Blessing*](#) especially helpful. Additionally, your team of missioners is well prepared to facilitate this kind of process, and they are available to you as a resource: most especially Amanda, Rolf, Karen, and Michael.

I also want to invite you into conversation with one another about the exercise of your pastoral ministry, especially with regard to marriage. Explore ideas together, share resources, and support one another.

Guidance for Conducting Same-gender Blessings

For those who have determined that they will bless same-gender unions and have the support of their faith community in doing so, please know that we will continue forward as we have with marriage. Primarily this means that we will continue the practice of meaningful premarital mentoring; preparing all couples for the blessings and challenges of a covenant relationship. I



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also want to remind you that all clergy need to seek my permission for individuals who wish to remarry after divorce, or after their civil unions have dissolved.

In terms of the liturgy, in 2012 General Convention adopted an amended resolution (A049) to "[Authorize Liturgical Resources for Blessing Same-Gender Relationships](#)," and I want to commend this resource to you.

Additionally, General Convention authorized 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."*

By way of this letter, I am authorizing the use of this liturgy for clergy canonically resident in Minnesota. Clergy licensed to serve in Minnesota also have my permission to use this liturgy, provided you also have the approval of your canonical bishop. This is the only liturgy approved for use in the Episcopal Church in Minnesota for the blessing of covenanted relationships of same-gender couples. As has been our policy, the marriage liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer is not currently authorized for use with same-gender couples.

When using "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing" for the marriage of same-gender couples, the following adaptations are to be used:

1. In the Opening address to the assembly, you may add the words in italics below, so that the address reads:

Dear friends in Christ,
we have gathered together today
to witness *N. N.* and *N. N.* publicly committing themselves to one another
in marriage according to the laws of the State of Minnesota,
and, in the name of the Church, to bless their union:
a relationship of mutual fidelity and steadfast love,
forsaking all others,
holding one another in tenderness and respect,
in strength and bravery,
as long as they live.

2. In the Pronouncement, you may add the words in italics below, so that the Pronouncement reads:

Inasmuch as *N. and N.* have exchanged vows of love and fidelity
in the presence of God and the Church,
I now pronounce that they are bound to one another
in a holy covenant,
as long as they both shall live
and united in marriage according to the laws of the State of Minnesota. Amen.



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Lastly, I would also ask that you keep me informed of your questions, needs, experiences so that we can pass along our learnings to the House of Bishops and to our General Convention deputies.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like further clarification.

Blessings,

The Rt. Rev. Brian N. Prior
IX Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota