

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

For many years, The Episcopal Church has studied, debated, prayed over, and sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the nature of same-sex relationships and how the Church might best provide a genuinely pastoral response to gay and lesbian couples in our Church. At the 77th General Convention of The Episcopal Church in 2012, the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops concurred on the manner in which genuine and holy relationships experienced by gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in our parishes would be recognized and affirmed by the community of faith.

I understand that this matter still presents many questions for sincere people who may or may not agree with the actions of General Convention. It is with that understanding that I have accepted the recommendations of a special Task Force I formed to address this important pastoral matter for our diocese. With their guidance, I undertook extensive consultation among clergy and lay leaders throughout the diocese and have decided to publish three documents that intend to give direction and guidance for the parishes in our diocese.

These documents include:

1. *A Pastoral Statement* intended to provide a brief summary of the principles involved in acknowledging the covenantal relationships of same-sex couples.
2. *Frequently Asked Questions about Same-Sex Blessings in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania* intended to provide concise summaries of information about many of the questions that arose during our consultations.
3. *Guidelines for the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania* that outline the criteria and the process for obtaining permission to celebrate the approved rite.

I hope that these resources will provide the necessary guidance for parishes to discern how God is calling them to respond to the pastoral need presented by same-sex couples in our faith communities.

These documents, and a short theological summary, excerpted from the report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and the approved rite, *I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing*, are available on the diocesan website (www.diocesecpa.org). The entire set of liturgical resources from the report of General Convention are available from Church Publishing and includes a theological essay, guidance on canon law, materials to prepare couples for a blessing service and teaching materials inviting congregational conversation and theological reflection

I am grateful for the dedicated work of the Task Force and the guidance it has provided over the last three years in moving the diocese forward in this important matter. Their careful study, prayerful reflection, and pastoral sensitivity have provided a model for how we can address difficult issues in our diocesan family.

Lastly, I am personally grateful to all who provided their counsel as we deliberated and discerned our response in this matter. It is a testament to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Now that these documents have been published, I look forward to hearing from leadership in each of our parishes as they determine their respective pastoral responses. Be assured, that each request for permission will be carefully considered and a prompt response will follow.

Yours in Christ,

+Nathan