



Diocese of Easton

The Episcopal Church in Eastern Maryland

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April 30, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Attached are the guidelines for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage or a Union of Same-Sex Couples in the Diocese of Easton.

The process leading to this policy included solicitation of comments and suggestions, and the assistance of a Task Force in the writing of the document. Following review by the clergy of the diocese as well as the Chancellor, revisions were made and submitted to the Standing Committee for review and comment. After several editing sessions and analysis, this is the final text of the guidelines that outline how marriages of same-sex couples and blessing of same-sex couples are to be administered.

The debate on human sexuality has been before the Episcopal Church for years. The process by which our church addresses controversial issues is grounded in our understanding of scripture, reason, and tradition, the Anglican way. The General Convention, by allowing generous pastoral oversight in states where same-sex marriages can be performed, allows us to conduct marriages. The liturgies provided by General Convention are the authorized ones which I am permitting to be used.

Our Catechism states: "Holy Matrimony is Christian marriage, in which the woman and man enter into a life-long union, make their vows before God and the Church, and receive the grace and blessing of God to help them fulfill their vows. (BCP p. 861).

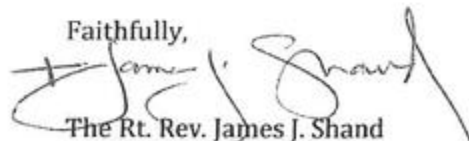
By allowing homosexual persons to be married, we are witnessing to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of our church and our culture. It is important to remember that fidelity and faithfulness is a prerequisite for *any* marriage, and adequate counseling by a cleric, coupled with responsible care and love for each individual being married, is a necessary ingredient for all.

As we move forward in our life together, it is essential that we respect the dignity of every human being, as all God's children are equal in God's eyes.

I am fully aware of the anxiety and apprehension, as well as the joy and peace, that accompanies this policy. With God's grace, and our attentiveness to the feelings, faith, and relationships we share as believers in Jesus Christ, I pray that we will continue to be supportive of one another and love one another as Jesus commands.

Thank you again for your leadership and faithful pastoral care of parishes.

Faithfully,



The Rt. Rev. James J. Shand
Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Easton

**Guidelines for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage or a
Union of Same-Sex Couples in the Diocese of Easton
May 1, 2013**

The General Convention of 2012, meeting in Indianapolis, authorized the use of a liturgical resource for the blessing of same-sex relationships with special pastoral provision for those churches in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is legal.

As of January 1, 2013, the State of Maryland allows for the marriage of homosexual persons under the Marriage Equality Act of 2012.

I hereby give my permission for the members of the clergy in the Episcopal Diocese of Easton to officiate:

- A. At the marriage of same-sex couples and to sign the marriage license,
- B. At the blessing of a civil marriage and or the blessing of the union between heterosexual couples as well as couples of the same sex; provided, however, that
- C. Members of the clergy are not obligated to officiate at either same-sex marriages or blessings.

The following pastoral guidelines are to be adhered to by the members of the ordained clergy canonically resident in the Diocese of Easton, beginning May 1, 2013:

1. Every member of the clergy shall conform to the laws of the State of Maryland governing marriage.
2. The clergy of the Diocese of Easton shall not officiate at the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage where prohibited by law of the State of Maryland, or when either or both parties are currently married or civilly united to another, or when either or both parties do not intend to create a marriage of mutual and exclusive fidelity and are not prepared to make a lifelong commitment to each other.
3. The members of the clergy are required to provide adequate pastoral and premarital counseling prior to the marriage.
4. I respect the pastoral judgment and decisions of the clergy under my pastoral oversight. Two persons of the same sex may now be married in a civil ceremony as authorized by the Maryland Marriage Equality Act of 2012. Clergy in this diocese are authorized to use the liturgical rite "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant" for such couples of the same sex, and, for that matter, for heterosexual couples. No priest of this diocese shall be required to use this liturgical rite; neither shall any priest of this diocese be required to bless any civil marriage performed in another state.
5. Congregational guidelines regarding the use of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage from the Book of Common Prayer and "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant" as authorized by the 77th General Convention already exist in some parishes of this diocese. Where no such guidelines exist, the leaders of said parish (clergy and lay) are encouraged to develop appropriate guidelines in a collaborative manner and communicate the same to members of the parish.

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6. No member of the clergy of this diocese shall solemnize any marriage until they have completed the following procedures:
 - a. Two parties who intend to contract a marriage should make the arrangements at least 30 days prior to the date of the ceremony.
 - b. There shall be at least two witnesses for the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage.
 - c. The members of the clergy shall record the ceremony in the parish register including the date, the place, the names of the individuals being married along with the names of their parents, the age of the individuals, their residence, their church status (with one of the individuals being a baptized person), the names of the witnesses, and the signature of the cleric officiating.
7. Deacons are not permitted to officiate without the permission of the bishop.
8. If the proposed marriage is to be solemnized in a jurisdiction other than the Diocese of Easton, it shall be the responsibility of the member of the clergy to abide by the civil laws of that Episcopal jurisdiction regarding the creation of a civil marriage as well as obtain the permission of the bishop of that diocese where the ceremony is to take place.
9. I give permission to the clergy and congregations of the Diocese of Easton to use the liturgies and teaching materials, "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant," from the Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing. In all situations, I urge the clergy of this diocese to provide a generous pastoral response to individual situations which honor the boundaries of the clergy's personal conscientious principles and these guidelines.
10. It is the responsibility of the clergy consenting to perform any blessings, to make full disclosure that any blessing of a civil union or the blessing of a civil marriage, where no license is signed as part of the service, carries no legal status.

Authorized modifications of liturgy from "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing":

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 today to witness N.N. and N.N. publically committing themselves to one another in marriage according to the laws of the State of Maryland and, in the name of the Church, to bless their union.

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, and inasmuch as N. and N. are united in marriage under the laws of the State of Maryland, I now pronounce that they are bound to one another in a holy covenant as long as they both shall live. Amen.