

Same-sex Blessings in the Diocese of Arkansas

The Episcopal Church continues to be in the forefront of the effort to assure that gay and lesbian persons are made welcome in our churches and are afforded equal treatment by society at-large. There is not agreement across the church in how to achieve those ends, but for the last 30 years the Episcopal Church has worked to implement a 1976 Resolution of General Convention which states that Ahomosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.@

It is my belief that seeking ways of recognizing and blessing faithful, monogamous same-sex relationships falls within the parameters of providing pastoral concern and care for our gay and lesbian members. General Convention would seem to agree in a 2003 Resolution stating that Afaith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.@ In the weeks ahead, those congregations that have been addressing the possibility of such blessings will likely move forward. Let me be clear about what this means and doesn=t mean.

Neither the General Convention nor the Diocese of Arkansas has produced or approved official rites for the blessing of same-sex unions. Nor is same-sex marriage a possibility in the State of Arkansas. No congregation, vestry, or priest is expected to interpret the pastoral concern and care of the Church for gay and lesbian persons in a way that includes the possibility of formal rites of blessing. However, those that do, have permission to proceed to work as a congregation to come to clarity around the issues involved when the Church blesses anything or anyone. If a couple seeks blessing in that congregation, they will join in that exploration much to the benefit of the congregation and the couple. This is a pastoral response and it is expected that each case will reflect the uniqueness of the congregation and the couple involved. It is expected that the Bishop will be informed of each process, receive a report of work done, and see any liturgy that is produced before proceeding with a blessing rite.

These guidelines are given so that we can continue to take particular positions on this issue, without the expectation that everyone else will be in that particular position. We have much to learn from one another, knowing that the Spirit has led us into quite different places and that the truth about all this is still emerging.

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