

The Episcopal Diocese of California

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The Rt. Rev. Marc Handley Andrus
Bishop of California
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October 4, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

During our time together at the recent clergy conference, I welcomed the conversation and responses that followed my comments concerning the blessing of same-sex unions in the Diocese of California. Now, after further conversation with the board of Oasis, I am writing you to affirm my commitment to the full inclusion of gay and lesbian persons in the life of the Church, and to summarize my expectations as together we respond to the pastoral needs of our people.

I believe these expectations to be faithful to Resolution C051, as adopted by the 2003 General Convention, and sensitive to the desire of many gay and lesbian persons to find welcome and blessing in the Church. However, they are certainly not the conclusion of our conversation. Ours is a continuing journey that involves receiving the witness and experience of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters, and remaining in dialogue with the wider Church.

- The decision to bless a holy union is, in the first instance, a discernment made by the couple in consultation with their priest. Vestry approval is neither expected nor necessary. Nonetheless, since the entire community benefits by our continuing discussions about Christian relationships of fidelity and love, and since such conversations can reduce possible misunderstandings in the congregation, I urge you to initiate such important discussions in your communities long before couples present themselves seeking a blessing.
- As part of my pastoral response to the needs of our people, I expect to be informed of forthcoming blessings. I also expect that you will engage in the same careful counseling and preparation required of other couples.
- While at this time the Episcopal Church has no official rites for the blessing of holy unions, the Commission on Marriage and Blessing is developing liturgical resources for our pastoral use. Please consult with me about the liturgy you plan to use for the blessing.

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- The liturgies we develop or provide are not intended to be a challenge to C051, but to be a part of exercising responsible pastoral ministry. They are for use in our Diocese, under my direction.
- The blessings of same sex couples in our churches are celebrations of Christian love and vocation, and deserve the same expressions of joy and excitement that others enjoy. So, for example, it is entirely appropriate that invitations be sent and newspaper announcements be made.

Finally, I emphasize that this summary of expectations is near the beginning - not the conclusion - of our conversation about our roles as faithful pastors in these important matters. I welcome your comments, as well as questions about particular situations or circumstances you feel need greater clarification.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Marc Handley Andrus". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

The Rt. Rev. Marc Handley Andrus
Bishop