



The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia

The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

www.ecww.org

The Rt. Rev. Gregory H. Rickel
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To the Clergy of the Diocese of Olympia,

In my pastoral letter on the passage of Referendum 74 and the approval of marriage equality in the State of Washington, I mentioned new guidelines that were to be forthcoming. The following guidelines, therefore, will supersede all previous such guidelines sent by this office.

Since the issuing of that pastoral letter, I have received questions and requests for clarification which I will now attempt to address. As a reminder, the General Convention resolution A049 did not change the Prayer Book definition of marriage. That official definition is still the joining of a man and a woman in a lifelong, committed relationship. However, Resolution A049, as passed, did contain the following resolve:

Resolved, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions
11 where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal,
12 may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this
13 Church, including adaptation of the liturgy and declaration of intention contained
14 in "I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing";

Part of the "generous pastoral response" I now intend to offer is to allow the usage of the liturgies attached to the prior guidelines, as well as the new rite approved as part of A049. This is a change from my May letter in which I stated that I would authorize only the new rite approved as a part of A049.

After consultation with several of you, several of my colleagues, and much prayer, I have decided to allow all three here in the Diocese of Olympia. Furthermore, I would very much like your feedback on the use of these as you proceed and I would very much appreciate you copying that feedback to Canon Janet Campbell which will help in her liaison role with the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music.

Additionally, there seems to be some confusion as to whether you may call these rites "marriage". As I stated in the prior letter you have my permission to sign the marriage licenses issued by the state, and should you desire to do that, I find no rational reason that you would not call it "marriage."

I do hope, as I said in my first letter, we are able to move to blessing as our official liturgical action in regard to lifelong, committed relationships of all kinds. For me this is the most important work of the church and gets us away from being looked upon as a secondary good whether in heterosexual or homosexual unions. This is what we do: we bless. It is in no way less than the legal state of marriage. This is a transition in thinking that will, of course, take time and formation.

The conundrum, as it often is, is the difference between liturgical practice, and agreed theology in the church. At this point marriage equality as legally defined by Washington state, is not yet realized in the understanding and sacramental theology of the Episcopal Church. That is an ambiguity we will have to live with, and into, in the days and years to come, but as your bishop I want to give you the pastoral discretion to respond liturgically as it meets the needs of the members of this Church.



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There are many questions that shall arise as we continue to live into this new reality. Several of you have brought new ideas and new issues to my attention for which I am very grateful and which have helped me in the evolution of my thinking on the matter. Let's share these with one another as we go. If you have questions, share those questions with me. I will do my best to help guide you through it, and we will all learn in working together in this important area. The New Guidelines and Liturgies are just below. These are a little disjointed and we will be cleaning these up for the website but I wanted you to have them in this basic state. Please read them carefully. We are developing a place on the website for these to reside.

I have been truly inspired by the thoughtful caring way all of you have approached this subject. I urge you to continue that, realizing that not everyone agrees with this new development.

I pray we may find ways for all of us to move forward together as one Body.

Faithfully,

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