

The Episcopal Diocese of Southwestern Virginia Marriage and Blessing Liturgies of The Episcopal Church

At the 78th General Convention, which met in Salt Lake City from June 25 through July 3, 2015, two resolutions were adopted regarding marriage and blessing liturgies. Following their adoption, the House of Bishops approved a Mind of the House Resolution to clarify how these rites are to be used in the dioceses of The Episcopal Church. I affirm these decisions and set forth the following guidelines for use in this diocese.

Two new rites are authorized for Trial Use during this Triennium. They are *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage* and *The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2*. These rites may be used by all couples beginning on the first Sunday of Advent (November 29), 2015.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer rites for *The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage*, *The Blessing of a Civil Marriage*, and *An Order for Marriage* remain in use for opposite-sex couples.

Until the first Sunday of Advent (November 29) of this year, *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant*, which was adopted at the 77th General Convention three years ago, may be used for same-sex couples. It may not be used with opposite-sex couples who choose not to marry for financial or other reasons. After November 29, 2015, this liturgy of blessing may be used solely for same-sex couples in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is not legal. Because marriage of same-sex couples is legal in Virginia, this rite will not be authorized in the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia after November 29, 2015.

While Section 7 of Canon 18 states that, "It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage," the General Convention Resolution A054 stipulates: "Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority or, where appropriate, ecclesiastical supervision, will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this church to have access to these liturgies. Trial use is only to be available under the discretion and with the permission of the diocesan bishop." Therefore, access to these Rites must be made available to all couples. A Member of Clergy may only decline to personally officiate, but may not represent that they are unavailable. If declining, the Member of the Clergy will inform the Bishop's office so that other arrangements for marrying the couple may be offered.

The following canon on the Celebration and Blessing of Marriage will take effect on November 29, 2015. It states the responsibilities of the clergy and of couples who desire to marry in the Church.

Canon 18: Of the Celebration and Blessing of Marriage

Sec. 1. Every Member of the Clergy of this Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and these canons concerning the solemnization of marriage. Members of the Clergy may solemnize a marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

Sec. 2. The couple shall notify the Member of the Clergy of their intent to marry at least thirty days prior to the solemnization; Provided, that if one of the parties is a member of the Congregation of the Member of the Clergy, or both parties can furnish satisfactory evidence of the need for shortening the time, this requirement can be waived for weighty cause; in which case the Member of the Clergy shall immediately report this action in writing to the Bishop.

Sec. 3. Prior to the solemnization, the Member of the Clergy shall determine:

(a) that both parties have the right to marry according to the laws of the State and consent to do so freely, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to the identity of either, or mental reservation; and

(b) that at least one of the parties is baptized; and

(c) that both parties have been instructed by the Member of the Clergy, or a person known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible, in the nature, purpose, and meaning, as well as the rights, duties and responsibilities of marriage.

Sec. 4. Prior to the solemnization, the parties shall sign the following Declaration of Intention:

We understand the teaching of the church that God's purpose for our marriage is for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort we will give to each other in prosperity and adversity, and, when it is God's will, for the gift and heritage of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of God. We also understand that our marriage is to be unconditional, mutual, exclusive, faithful, and lifelong; and we engage to make the utmost effort to accept these gifts and fulfill these duties, with the help of God and the support of our community.

Sec. 5. At least two witnesses shall be present at the solemnization, and together with the Member of the Clergy and the parties, sign the record of the solemnization in the proper register; which record shall include the date and place of the solemnization, the names of the witnesses, the parties and their parents, the age of the parties, Church status, and residence(s).

Sec. 6. A bishop or priest may pronounce a blessing upon a civil marriage using any of the liturgical forms authorized by this Church.

Sec. 7. It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage.

Click here to read Resolution A054 regarding the authorization of liturgies for trial use:

http://www.generalconvention.org/gc/2015-resolutions/A054/current_english_text