

## Letter to clergy regarding pastoral guidelines for the blessing of same-gender commitments

Nov. 3, 2010

To the Clergy of the Diocese of Toronto

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

I attach the Pastoral Guidelines for the Blessing of Same-Gender Commitments that I am authorizing for use in the Diocese of Toronto, effective today. They are, as you will see, provisional, and they are intended to respond to the pastoral needs of our own parishioners.

Several General Synods, including the most recent one in June 2010, affirmed the place and the welcome that this Church offers to all, including our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in Christ, while also recognizing that in the Church both locally and globally there is no common mind about how to respond to their committed partnerships.

General Synod recognized, with regret, that we could not come to a common mind on blessings, but did agree by full consensus that a legislative approach was not appropriate at this time, that there are and will be a variety of practices across the Church, that we needed to exercise the greatest pastoral generosity possible, and that we would continue to work, talk and pray together as we seek to discern God's call to engage in God's mission to his world.

General Synod adopted the approach that our own Diocesan Synod took in May 2009 that a pastoral response within some limits was preferable to a formally legislated option. A number of neighbouring dioceses have taken the latter route, as you know.

The Pastoral Guidelines are issued after discussion at Synod, May 2009, in response to a Draft proposal presented in January 2009 by the College of Bishops. It follows from our two decades of discussion in the Diocese and takes into account the theological, biblical and political discussions across the wider Church.

As I said at the conclusion of our Diocesan Synod, I commissioned a 12-member working group, representing a broad spectrum of our diocese, to advise me and the area bishops on guidelines for a pastoral response. They presented their advice to me in late spring. Based on this advice, and with the prayerfully considered consensus of the College of Bishops, I issue these Guidelines now. The Guidelines suggest what might be included and what must not be included in any blessing.

I anticipate that there may be 5 – 10 parishes that may wish to begin the initial discernment. The same Commission will review the implementation and implications for mission of the Guidelines over the next two years and make further recommendations at that time. I welcome your feedback.

Not all will welcome this development: some because it goes too far, some because it is not nearly enough. You will note that there are strong affirmations in these guidelines assuring a

continued and honoured place in all aspects of diocesan life for those who do not agree with this response.

All of us need to extend to each the most generous Christian charity that our Redeemer calls us to exercise as we, together, seek to discern and live out God's will.

Yours faithfully,

The Most Rev. Colin R. Johnson  
Archbishop of Toronto