



## **Pastoral Guidelines for Same-Sex Marriages**

### **Anglican Diocese of Toronto**

#### **GUIDELINES**

*“All Christians are called to bear witness to the good news of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are empowered for such witness by our covenantal relationship with God.*

*“Baptism initiates us into that covenant, making us Christ’s own forever and members of Christ’s Body, the Church. The Eucharist sustains us in that covenantal life and strengthens us to be Christ’s witnesses in the world.*

*“Our covenantal life with God is expressed in relationships of commitment and faithfulness. We celebrate these relationships as signs of God’s love, to pray for God’s grace to support couples in their life together, and to join with these couples in our shared witness to the gospel in the world.*

*Liturgical Resources 1: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing  
-The Episcopal Church*

The following guidelines are presented in order to offer a generous pastoral response to stable committed same-sex relationships. We have seen that there is great diversity among parishes that are opposed to same-sex commitments, similar to the diversity found in parishes that are in favour. Recognition of this diversity affirms that parishes that hold similar viewpoints on this subject are not to be painted with one brush, and represent the rich breadth of life in parishes, with parishioners who are theologically astute and deeply committed Christians. The diversity of our diocesan community demonstrates that we are called to witness to the faith in a variety of ways, and though such witness is rooted in differing interpretations and understanding of Holy Scripture and the tradition, they are recognizably Anglican. As the practice proceeds, the College of Bishops will evaluate its impact on the mission and ministry of the diocese.

## 1. Theological Foundation

In seeking to meet the needs of gay and lesbian couples in our parishes we recognize the tension between the “gracious restraint” and the “pastoral generosity”. At the heart of these guidelines is the call of the baptismal covenant on all Christians. We live within our covenant with God, embodied in the tenets of our faith outlined in the Creed and in the daily practice of our lives. We seek to grow in integrity and sanctity as we reflect the life of Christ in ourselves and in our relationships, through worship, reconciliation, proclamation, witness and action. We understand blessing of same-sex couples in light of their intention to grow into the fullness of Christ, individually and in their relationship, through faithful reflection of the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

## 2. Permission

**The norm for the Church continues to be the marriage of couples of opposite sex. The Anglican Church of Canada is currently in the process of changing this to include same-sex couples.**

**Until that decision has been finalised, and as an interim pastoral response, the Bishop of Toronto, responsible for the pastoral care and oversight of this Diocese, will permit selected priests, licensed to the cure of souls in a community, to preside in their parish at the marriage of a same-sex couple in certain specific instances. Both priest and congregation must concur that this ministry will be offered.**

The Diocesan Bishop will make that determination based on the following criteria:

- 2a. The Parish will have demonstrated a process of prayer, education, consultation, discernment and consensus development that widely engages the parish community.
- 2b. When the Priest, Churchwardens, and Advisory Board/Parish Council feel that consensus has been reached, the Churchwardens will write a letter to the Diocesan Bishop outlining the process and decision reached and request permission be granted.
- 2c. The Priest will separately communicate his/her support of such a decision and concurrence that the parish is ready to participate in accordance with these guidelines. If either the priest or Churchwardens do not concur then the process ceases.
- 2d. The Diocesan Bishop, at his discretion, may grant permission to the priest in the context of the parish in which s/he has pastoral responsibility.
- 2e. Permission will be given no longer than General Synod 2019. At the end of that period, permission may be renewed or withdrawn after review.
- 2f. Permission is granted for the clergy/parish relationship at that time. When a cleric leaves a designated parish the designation will be revisited with the Diocesan Bishop upon the appointment of a new cleric.
- 2g. The priest will confer with the diocesan bishop prior to presiding at any marriage offered under this provision.

These provisions parallel the provision for the “Blessing of Same-Gender Commitments” issued in 2010. It is assumed that some priests or parishes that have been permitted to offer blessings may

choose not to offer same-sex marriages. This is a separate consideration that the priest and parish must determine.

The provision for blessings will continue as a pastoral response in a number of cases, such as situations where couples have already been civilly married.

### **3. Same-Sex Marriages**

This pastoral response is extended to same-sex couples in our midst who seek to live in mutual love and faithfulness in a stable, life-long, committed monogamous relationship. A blessing may be made available to couples who have previously been civilly married.

- 3a. The blessing or marriage of any same-sex couple is expected to be part of an existing pastoral relationship with a priest and local congregation.
- 3b. At least one of the couple must be baptized.
- 3c. All requirements of civil law must be followed, including proper legal documentation.
- 3d. The marriage must be registered with the government and recorded in the proper parochial registers.
- 3e. The same theological and moral values, pastoral care, liturgical and other parish policies and practices apply equally to both heterosexual and homosexual couples. This includes, but is not limited to, expectations and provisions for:
  - Who may be married in the church
  - Premarital preparation
  - Signing of the Declaration of Intention by the couple
  - Requirements regarding remarriage after divorce
  - Signing of the marriage licenses by the officiating minister
  - Entry of the marriage in the parish register
  - Parish policies with regard to use and availability of facilities.
- 3f. The marriage liturgy will take place in the church.

Every member of the clergy retains the right to decline a request to officiate at a marriage according to the Church's marriage canons.

### **4. Same-Sex Couples in Parishes not Designated**

- 4a. It is expected that no one will be excluded from receiving the eucharist or baptism in any parish on the basis of their sexual orientation or their views on the issue of same-sex blessings or marriage, whether in favour or opposed.
- 4b. Same-sex couples in a parish not designated to perform blessings or marriages may approach the Bishop to seek an alternative. It is expected that the couple and the priest designated will first seek to develop a pastoral relationship before a blessing is offered.

- 4c. A cleric who serves in a parish not designated but who wishes to assist in a same-sex marriage in a designated parish must consult with the diocesan bishop.

## 5. **Authorised Liturgy**

The Episcopal Church's trial liturgy authorized for use by the 78th General Convention in 2015

[The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage](https://www.churchpublishing.org/contentassets/104caa0c8b8741819c171f642de395a3/the_witnessing_and_blessing_of_a_marriage.pdf)

[https://www.churchpublishing.org/contentassets/104caa0c8b8741819c171f642de395a3/the\\_witnessing\\_and\\_blessing\\_of\\_a\\_marriage.pdf](https://www.churchpublishing.org/contentassets/104caa0c8b8741819c171f642de395a3/the_witnessing_and_blessing_of_a_marriage.pdf)

will be the only liturgy authorized for the marriage of same-sex couples, and that authorization is further extended for alternative use in any marriages celebrated in the Diocese of Toronto until General Synod 2019.

The rites "Solemnization of Holy Matrimony" in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1962) and "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage" in the *Book of Alternative Services* (1985) are **not** permitted for use for the marriage of same-sex couples until explicitly authorized by General Synod.

## 6. **Diocesan Diversity**

The Diocese of Toronto honours and appreciates the diversity represented in its parishes and clergy. This diversity will continue to be reflected in the selection and appointment of clergy, and in the membership of committees and councils of the diocese. We recognize there are theological and cultural differences across our diocese and within parishes which are strained by both the limits and permission represented in blessing same sex relationships.

- All congregations and individual Anglicans are called to exercise pastoral generosity one to another.
- Permission to participate in marriage of same sex couples will be extended only to those parishes and clergy who fulfill the requirements noted above and are granted permission by the diocesan bishop.
- No clergy nor parishes will be required to participate in the blessing of same-sex relationships or the marriage of same-sex couples.

While there is one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, there remains deep and painful differences about marriage in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. We continue to hold one another in tender regard as we gently and respectfully move forward as a Church.