Our Covenant of Understanding for the Liturgical Resources for Same-Sex Marriage

Diocese of the Rio Grande
I Advent 2015
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Pastoral Letter:
An Introduction to
Our Covenant of Understanding
for the
Liturical Resources for Same-Sex Marriage

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Blessings, Peace and Grace be upon you this holy season of Advent and Christmastide. "Emmanuel," the Lord is with us.

In conformity with the discernment of General Convention 2015 concerning the trial use of same-sex marriage liturgies and with the pastoral endorsements of both our Standing Committee (October 24, 2015) and Diocesan Council (November 18, 2015), I officially commend to the Diocese of the Rio Grande in New Mexico and Far West Texas the approved liturgical resources for Same-Sex Marriage.

This cover letter is in addition to my Pastoral Letter 2013 simply highlighting the added new documents and resources now permitted to be used. You will find here:

1. The approved Liturgical Resources for "Same-Sex Marriage."
   Please note that the resources for the "Blessings of Same-Sex Relationships" are now null and void, and not to be used, given the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of the legality of same-sex marriage in all 50 of the United States. You will note the historical resources will remain in the appendix as historical documents.

2. "Same-Sex Declaration of Intent" form.
   This form is to be used for marital counseling to ensure the understanding and consenting to the core values of a Marriage Covenant, just as is required of heterosexual couples. The declaration includes a promise to a lifelong union, fidelity, monogamy and faithfulness to a Christian manner-of-life, worship and conduct.

   This explanation parallels the requirement of the Bishop’s permission for use of liturgies contained in Enriching Our Worship. It states that “only the material so authorized shall be available as an alternative for the said Book of Common
In regard to same-sex marriage, I have stated that no one, by conscience or contrary mind or theological perspective, will be obliged to perform these marriages.

I commend these resources to you asking you to pray for each other, for those who commit themselves to a Covenant of Christian Marriage, that we all remain faithful to Christ in these changing times and pledge to continue the work and mission of our Lord's Gospel.

May the season's celebration of the gift of Divine Love Incarnate remain in your heart, mind and soul. The Lord is with us.

A Blessed Advent,

+ Michael
IX Bishop, Diocese of the Rio Grande

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July 8, 2015

A Pastoral letter to faithful clergy and people of the Diocese of the Rio Grande

Grace to you and Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the week after the close of the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I write this Pastoral Letter to you recalling St. Paul’s words to the Church in Corinth:

“Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” [1 Corinthians 13:4-7]

For the first time the House of Bishops elected a person of color to be our next Presiding Bishop. The Rt. Rev. Michael B. Curry, Bishop of North Carolina, is a devout man of God, a great preacher and a true evangelist, and he will lead our Church for the next nine years.

The House of Bishops and the House of Deputies also addressed several somewhat controversial resolutions. Among the debated resolutions were:

- Restructuring the mission priorities and administrative bodies of the church for this 21st Century;
- Addressing the Task Force report on Marriage and, following the Supreme Court ruling on Marriage, recognizing and providing for same-sex marriage.
- Discussing the complicated issues around our culture’s social and political will to identify the causes of systemic social violence and to end gun violence by advocating laws for stricter background checks and licensing; and
- Addressing the issues of alcoholism and addiction in the Church, and providing guidelines for dioceses and congregations.

Needless to say these are all very complicated, and yet to date unresolved issues. In this pastoral letter, I would like to focus on a few important critical distinctions in resolutions A036: Amend Canon 1.18 Marriage and A054: Adopt Resources and Rites from “Liturgical Resources I...” that will go into effect 1 Advent and which are the result of forty years of study, debate and enabling resolutions. These distinctions may not be apparent to those of you who were not able to follow General Convention, and have relied on news reports and the opinions of others for your interpretation of what General Convention approved.

As we begin to implement the decisions of General Convention, I intend to immediately initiate a pastoral process to make the approved provisions by General Convention for same
sex marriage available in the Diocese of the Rio Grande. Once again, I will consult with Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, COMB and the members of the original Council of Advice, which resulted in our “Covenant Of Understanding for Same-Sex Blessings,” and will be prayerful, intentional, patient and pastoral as I fulfill my vows with you to obey the Doctrine, Discipline and Worship of the Episcopal Church.

Christians in every age are encouraged by both Christ’s example and teaching to endure through every circumstance. Today the circumstance of many controversial issues, global and local, political and spiritual, continue to challenge faithful people who hold differing beliefs and perspectives. On February 6, 2014, you may recall that I wrote to you following New Mexico’s Supreme Court ruling providing for same-sex marriage, and as Bishop pastorally encouraged both the laity and clergy to maintain the love of Christ in respectfully and prayerfully continuing in godly dialogue and discernment. Maintaining our collegiality and good relations with each other throughout our Diocese by reminding the faithful of our Anglican ethos of unity in diversity is always my goal. Now following the decisions made at our 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, I once again appeal to everyone to maintain this balance of unity within diversity, lovingly moving forward. As one of our senior clerics recently wrote: “We are called to unity in God despite our personal differences.” Because we have done this over the past six years our Diocese is both spiritually healthy, growing and actively focused on mission.

First, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies concurred on two resolutions: A054 and A036. A054 focused on permitting “trial use” of several liturgies that are written to recognize marriage for both same-sex and opposite-sex unions, beginning in Advent 2015. A036 changed the wording of our National Canons, which described marriage as the union between a man and a woman, replacing sex specific language with reference to “two people.” Canon I.18.1 on the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony is now pertinent for clergy. It states: “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 also to the laws of this church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.” However, please also note that Canon I.18.4 states: “It shall be within the discretion of any member of the clergy of this church to decline to solemnize any marriage.”

Traditionally married couples are asked to sign the Church’s “Declaration of Intent.” These declarations also will have different language, but retain identical core values of Christian moral and ethical teachings, and expectations of life-long, monogamous, committed marriage covenants in the Church.

The term “trial use” refers to Article X of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church. The legislation does not amend the Book of Common Prayer. Revision of the Prayer Book, and redefining the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony would require the action of two successive General Conventions. There are currently no amendments proposed.

The service of the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage still refers to men and women, husband and wives. Nevertheless, as the Presbyterians have recently stated, “traditionally marriage is between a man and a woman...” yet, as a careful read of Church history reveals doctrine and tradition evolves in understanding and can change. Our
understanding and theology of marriage has changed over the centuries. I ask you to continue reading and studying the question. You may be very surprised.

Secondly, both the House of Bishops and House of Deputies intentionally embraced our distinctive Anglican polity, which I believe spiritually is a very healthy realization that for the Common Good the Church can live into two seemingly conflicting principles of Canon Law. The National Canons referring to marriage now say, “two persons” and the Prayer Book, which is part of our Constitution says, “man and woman.” What the Episcopal Church decided to do in this time of uncertainty and global Christian discernment is live with ambiguity in adopting these resolutions. The Church is still not of one mind even though the resolutions passed roughly 80/20. Remember the Anglican Communion has no official legal existence or any governing structure, which might exercise authority over member churches. Catholicity for Anglicans does not mean conformity or sameness but rather the universality of unity in Christ Jesus. Anglican unity is evidenced in what we describe as “Instruments of Communion” – since all churches (Provinces) of the communion participate – and they are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lamberti Conference (first held in 1876), the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates meetings (first met in 1979). During a time of Christian discernment and transition Anglican diversity and a centrist perspective provides a place at the table for those who are contrary mind. St. Paul also said to the Corinthians, “Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture. But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless” (1 Corinthians 13:9-10). This is the God-given spiritual genius and incarnate love of Christ in Anglicanism.

We have much to be thankful for and the gift of Christian community and the human family is one of them. As the body of Christ we now live faithfully despite diversity and personal beliefs and in every circumstance courageously trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Christ’s Blessings be upon you,

Bishop Michael

The Right Rev’d Michael L. Vono, D.D.
IX Bishop, Diocese of the Rio Grande
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am pleased to announce that the excellent work of the Advisory Committee on same-sex covenanted unions is complete and now made available to you. These guidelines were developed in the spirit of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, and are a continuation of the “via media,” which continues to inform the rich diversity of Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church. These official guidelines represent “Our Covenant of Understanding” in the Diocese of the Rio Grande regarding the Witness and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant of same-sex unions.

In this packet you will find comprehensive pastoral guidelines for clergy, as well as educational materials for lay leaders, vestries, and an appendix of available resources for adult education and discussion forums in our congregations. You also will find the Episcopal Church’s official liturgy authorized for use in this diocesan family specifically for the blessing of committed, life-long, faithful unions of gay and lesbian Christians. I am so grateful to the Lord for the steadfast efforts and wisdom of the Advisory Committee members, who prayerfully worked together to develop these initial resources. Our Diocese is wonderfully vast, and it truly has been a blessing for me to collaborate with such a diverse and dedicated group of clergy and lay leaders whose commitment to the people of God and Church of Jesus Christ is so clear. First I would like to offer a few brief theological reflections from my pastoral perspective on the content, history and broader context of these guidelines. I pray these will be helpful for you.

The trust and conviction behind these pastoral guidelines reflect the belief that the faithful, loving, and lifelong union of two persons of the same sex is capable of signifying the unconditional and never-failing love of God in Christ. I have come to both trust and believe that such unions can be sources and signs of grace and reconciliation not only for the church and the world, but also for a faithful couple seeking a covenanted spiritual life together in Christ. All baptized persons who confess the faith of Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior appropriately need to be surrounded by the prayers, witness, love, and fellowship of the Christian community. The body of Christ is one in witness to the Church’s baptismal promises. Diversity of perspectives and contrary mindedness on any particular contemporary or historic church issue does not divide us, but rather reveals the unique Christian charisma of our oneness in Christ within our diversity. As St. Paul teaches, the body can only function as wholeness within its unique differences.
For more than a century an historic shift and change, not unlike others in Church History in
discerning Scripture, Tradition, and Reason, intentionally has been under way. Holy
Scripture and human sciences have been in serious dialogue in addressing the mystery
of human nature, human relationships, and the moral and ethical dignity of Christian
intimate behaviors. The blessing of same-sex unions represents a shift from centuries of what
the church and various societies in their cultural contexts have judged to be unacceptable. Yet,
as we are all well aware, there have been several other highly historic controversial shifts in
our church and world culture. In hindsight, these shifts have come to be seen as faithful
responses to a deepening understanding and revelation of what it means to be human. These
shifts revealed how God in Christ is reflected in loving human relationships and
in community.

† Recall that there was a time when slavery was defended officially by western
cultural interpretations of biblical texts, and the church at large struggled to
understand and discern the will of God for black people.
† It was not so long ago that Jesus' prohibition (Matthew Chapter 19) of divorce and
remarriage meant that divorced and remarried people could not receive Holy
Communion in the Episcopal Church, nor could a divorced Priest continue in
ordained ministry.
† Within the past 35 years the church has discerned that women and children deserve
equal status of human dignity, and are thus eligible for all temporal, political, and
spiritual privileges that previously only men received.
† Those interpreted biblical texts that inhibited women from inclusion and
leadership in the church's ministries gradually were understood in new ways and
reinterpret to allow full inclusion of women in the life of the Church.

Just as our theological and cultural perspectives on these matters have changed dramatically,
so now our evolving understanding of the complexity of human sexuality, and specifically
homosexuality, inspired further discernment. This brought focus to the need for specific
pastoral care, and liturgical rites to be celebrated in community, to be offered to all
baptized members of the church.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorized diocesan bishops to provide a
"generous pastoral response" to gay and lesbian members of our church who seek the
blessing of life-long unions by providing the prayers and support of the Church in
congregational contexts. These guidelines for the Diocese of the Rio Grande have been
prepared under the provisions of the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy
and Music, which were approved by both the House of Deputies and House of Bishops
at General Convention 2012. Our efforts and intention is to provide the church with a
liturgical option, and permission to preside over same-sex blessings.

These guidelines also recognize the range of convictions on this matter. No priest or
congregation is required to offer these liturgical blessings. My prayer is that as a loving,
compassionate, and wonderfully diverse Diocese, we remain bound together in Christ, and, as
we grow faithfully, to respect the various theological and ecclesial differences and interpretation of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, which model the best of our inherited Anglican polity. As Episcopalians we will continue to witness and to live into the roots of our Anglican faith tradition. We are bound together within a charismatic polity of unity within diversity, and holy tolerant respect within contrary mindedness. This is our diocesan Covenant of Understanding. May all our faithful relationships in the church become Holy Signs of God's Grace and unconditional Love, especially now in a world that continues to find it easy to divide and judge people as unacceptable.

Blessings and the Lord's peace be with you,

Bishop Michael

+ Michael

IX Bishop, Diocese of the Rio Grande
Covenant of Understanding

Historical context

For over 4 decades, members of the Episcopal Church, others of the Anglican Communion, and our ecumenical friends have generated studies, articles, books, conferences, and other forms of dialogue and commentary on the subject of the church’s response to intimate, committed same-sex relationships. Biblical interpretation, theology and history, social sciences, and other disciplines have all been brought to bear on this work, resulting in a variety of conclusions.

In 1976, the first of many resolutions on this matter was passed at General Convention, stating that, “Homosexual persons are children of God, who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.”

Related discussions and resolutions took place at subsequent General Conventions in 1985, 1991, 1994, and 1997. In 2000, our church offered clarity about what was expected of same-sex relationships, namely that they would be “characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God.”

This resolution, like many others, also acknowledged that there continued to be different perspectives on this issue within our church, and that we were committed to ongoing dialogue about these matters both within the Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion.

In 2003, General Convention acknowledged that liturgies blessing such relationships were, in fact, already taking place “within the bounds of our common life.” In 2009, a resolution asked the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) to “collect and develop theological and liturgical resources” for the blessing of same-gender relationships, and report to the following General Convention, in 2012.

From 2009-2012, the SCLM and an expanded group totaling approximately 30 scholars, bishops, lay leaders, and parish clergy worked together to carry out this mandate. In conformity with the 2009 enabling resolution, this work was shared in a broad and open process as it was being developed with the House of Bishops, Provincial hearings, a church-wide consultation, hundreds of reviewers from various perspectives, all Anglican bishops worldwide, and with representatives of 19 Anglican Provinces at the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation.

Once finished, the theological and liturgical resources were presented in a SCLM report to General Convention in 2012. At this convention, they were approved for provisional use in those dioceses where bishops allow it.
Meanwhile, the Diocese of the Rio Grande had its own history on this issue. Bishop Terence Kelshaw (1989-2004) upheld a traditionalist teaching and practice regarding same-sex relationships, and took what he described as a “plain sense” approach to biblical texts on the subject. He opposed biblical interpretations that diminished the current relevance of these texts because of their original historical contexts. He also opposed the notion that biblically-based teachings on these relationships could rightly be included among other teachings that could be allowed to evolve through history.

Bishop Jeffrey Steenson followed (2004-2007), and his approach, while similarly conservative, was different in other ways. Kelshaw, as an evangelical, had emphasized a scriptural argument. But Steenson, as an Anglo-Catholic, emphasized the tradition of church teaching over the centuries, and the danger of harming our relationships with the wider Anglican Communion and our ecumenical partners, including the Roman Catholic Church.

During these years, there was often a polarized atmosphere on this and other issues in the diocese. Clergy and laity argued the matter often, and emotionally, including at our diocesan conventions. A number of diocesan clergy and laity left the Episcopal Church because of the direction it was taking, and this movement continued after Kelshaw’s retirement and Steenson’s departure to the Roman church.

The diocesan atmosphere gradually became less polarized, and opposition to the direction that the Episcopal Church was taking began to decrease. When the candidates for bishop were presented to the diocese in 2009-2010, four of six held a progressive position on this matter.

Michael L. Vono was elected, and made it clear early on that if General Convention approved rites for blessing same-sex relationships, he would allow them in the diocese. After a year in office, Bishop Vono sought and received the support of the Diocesan Council and the Standing Committee for moving forward in our diocese with the rite of blessing approved for provisional use by General Convention 2012. He based his own support for these blessings upon the Anglican tradition of keeping Scripture, tradition, and reason in dialogue.

In the spring of 2012, Bishop Vono then appointed a council of advice consisting of some 18 laity and clergy “to create a holy environment in which opposing views may be held together in loving and creative tension for the health and welfare of the Church in the Rio Grande. I am asking a council of advice, composed of a broad spectrum of laity and clergy with differing ecclesiological, doctrinal, and theological perspectives, to draft policy guidelines for same-gender blessings for the Diocese of the Rio Grande,” and to send them to Diocesan Council and Standing Committee for their review and consideration.

The theology of the SCLM report
The materials that the 2012 General Convention approved for use in the Episcopal Church include a theological resource, canonical and legal considerations, a discussion guide for congregations, a guide for preparing same-sex couples for blessing ceremonies, and the liturgy itself. What follows is a summary of the theological section.

The theological section begins with *Mission*, asserting that everything we do as church is intended to support God's redeeming and reconciling love in the world, including any new rites of the church, such as this. A connection is made between God's blessing of Israel and the expectation that, because of this blessing, they would be a blessing to the nations. In the New Testament, grace is received in Christ not for the church alone, but so that it could bear witness to that grace "to the ends of the earth." Similarly, same-sex couples are to be blessed not only for themselves, but in order to witness, by their holiness of life, to the world around them, so that all might see the grace of God at work.

Same-sex couples may be blessed because the church has seen in their relationships, and continues to see, the gifts of God's grace already bestowed upon them – namely, those characteristics identified by the church in 2000 – "fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God."

In this sense, by pronouncing a blessing the church is naming what many see God evidently doing. But when it does so, the church not only celebrates what God has done thus far in the lives of the couple. We also pray that God's grace may continue to support them as they grow in holiness of life; and we pray that they might become a witness to God's grace for others whose lives they touch. Thus, again, a committed relationship that is touched by God's redeeming grace becomes a part of God's mission in the world.

The theological section then speaks of the nature of covenants. First, it is acknowledged that in many ways we live in covenant with God. Creation is itself a covenant with the Creator, in that we are accountable to live according to God's ways, and to be good stewards of what is entrusted to us. Baptism is the covenant of our life in Christ. And in Eucharist, we celebrate the new covenant of reconciliation every time we share the Sacrament.

Covenant relationships between humans also comprise part of our life as people of faith. In the widest sense, we are to love our neighbors, whoever they may be, as ourselves. We are sometimes called into more specific relationships that bear the responsibility and joy of holy covenant: monastic households, extended families, marriage, and others. Same-sex couples who commit themselves by their promises before God are a part of this, too. And in all cases, where there is faithfulness to the covenant into which God has called us, the fruits of the Spirit are evident over time.

Finally, the theological section deals with Christian Unity and Biblical Interpretation. Some might have preferred that this come first, and that there be a vigorous biblical debate therein between those who are "for" and "against" doing blessings. But the SCLM considered that after nearly 40 years of debate, our church had already articulated
various points of view on the subject. And General Convention, in their enabling resolution of 2009, decided it was time to collect and consider resources for these blessings.

And so the SCLM chose not to create a biblical defense for blessings. Instead, they wrote about the challenge of living with our differing ways of interpreting scripture. Historical examples, beginning with the earliest church, were used to show how the church has handled serious doctrinal and biblical disagreements. These include the inclusion of Gentiles who did not follow Jewish law; usury; the canon of scripture; the use of vestments and music; the role of ordained ministers; economic reform and the Social Gospel in the Industrial age; slavery; the role of women; divorce, remarriage, and contraception; and women's ordination.

What is demonstrated is that while we have always disagreed over many biblical and theological issues, our unity in Christ surpasses all of them. In regards to the earliest controversy about the inclusion of Gentiles, the SCLM's report notes that "The importance of this historical moment today lies not in the first-century differences between Jews and Gentiles but in the process of prayerful deliberation those early believers adopted." The significance is in the way the church went about trying to respect Scripture, attend to what God was doing in their midst, and remain one in Christ.

The hope of the SCLM in this document is that we, too, in our day, will recognize that what unites us – the saving love and grace of God in Jesus Christ – will make it possible for us to continue to live together in unity, even with our disagreements.

As Anglicans, we look to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason to be guided in our theology and practice of the Christian life. While the SCLM report does not specifically organize its theological material by these three categories, they are woven throughout.

Scripture, as noted above, is dealt with in two ways. The first way is the recognition that blessing relationships is a part of the scriptural expectation that we will acknowledge God's blessing where the fruits of the Spirit are evident to people of faith, even when it might contradict certain elements of scripture, as it did for the early church in the laying-aside of certain aspects of Jewish law. The second way is to recognize that, in Scripture, blessings are not given for personal benefit alone, but also for the ongoing redemptive work of God in the world.

Tradition is dealt with, not just in terms of what the church has traditionally said and done about this subject, but how the church deals with new things that come to light that might cause some of our assumptions to change. In addition, an important part of our tradition that is affirmed in this report, is that as Anglicans, we have traditionally looked at scripture not merely in a literal fashion, but with an attempt to understand broad themes and historical contexts. And we are reminded of our tradition for dealing with differing interpretations within our community of faith, described in the report as a "theologically informed and spiritually sustained patience."
Reason, finally, is what enables us to consider scripture and tradition together with contemporary human understanding (i.e., in this case, ways in which physical and behavioral sciences have addressed same-sex affection) and even our own experience as a community of faith. In this way, some of the less central parts of our faith are allowed to evolve as well, including some of our moral teaching and practice.

The complete section on theology in the SCLM report to the 2012 General Convention is, at the time of this writing, yet to be published. But what was presented to the Convention is available in the Blue Book, beginning on p.184. This can be found online at http://www.generalconvention.org/gc/prepare

Continuing Diversity of Theology and Practice within our Diocese

In addition to those who support the theology articulated by the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and approved by General Convention, there are those within our diocese who continue to hold other points of view. They are an important part of the theological diversity of our diocese, and they are encouraged to live by their convictions, which, for some, will include refraining from, or participating in, blessing same-sex relationships. They are committed to an apostolic vision of the Episcopal Church in which the living tradition of the faithful is handed on from one generation to the next, maintaining a consistent continuity with the Church of the saints who have gone before. The role of the Bishop, therefore, is to assure that this delicate and necessary permanence is maintained. Those who remain in the Episcopal Church do so with good reason. They are committed to:

1) the ongoing discernment of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church; however, they see this as a slow and collaborative effort with the whole of the Church catholic. Therefore, forty years of debate, which sounds like a long time and, for some, feels like a long time, may be a drop in the bucket when it comes to discerning weighty issues such as the church’s role in human sexuality and blessing of same sex unions.

2) the historic Anglican triad of authority: Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. A true balance, as articulated by Richard Hooker, traversed the Calvinist’s stress on “Scripture” and Rome’s supplication to “Tradition,” with “Reason” as the third voice of authority. Scripture is the foundation of authority in Anglicanism followed by Tradition, which aids Scriptural interpretation and gives important guidance to matters of liturgy and church structure. When there are difficulties in understanding Scripture and Tradition on any given theme, Reason can be a source of divine truth.

3) asking important hermeneutical questions such as, is there evidence of a consistent perspective in the Bible about homosexuality and marriage? Do the biblical writers see it as a serious moral and ethical issue? Do contemporary settings such as socio-scientific insights or cultural changes invalidate the biblical witness?

In summary they argue that the concerns surrounding human relationships and covenant are definitely not marginal issues in the Bible, nor is the movement in contemporary understanding of these themes frivolous. However, the witness of Scripture remains
primary and the prescriptions in the Old and the New Testament are indeed weighty. Therefore, creational norms from Genesis, Leviticus, Matthew, Romans, and First Corinthians cannot be reinterpreted or ignored to accommodate the blessing of same sex unions. The unwillingness to redefine who is blessed may challenge Christian unity between conservative clergy and laity and the Diocese of the Rio Grande. The Diocese’s commitment, however, to true diversity, through encouraging individuals and congregations to exercise their convictions, keeps the door of integrity open.
Statement of Clarification Regarding Marriage and Blessing Liturgies in The Episcopal Church*
July 2, 2015


1. “The Witnessing and Blessing of a life-long Covenant,” authorized for use under the direction and with the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority. This liturgy is only intended for use with same-sex couples in jurisdictions where same-sex marriage is not legal.
2. “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage,” authorized for trial use (per Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6.) under the direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop. This liturgy is intended for use by all couples asking to be married in this church.
3. “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” authorized for trial use (per Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6.) under the direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop. This liturgy is intended for use by all couples asking to be married in this church.

In addition, Resolution A054 states that “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.” How provision is made for this is left to the discretion of the Bishop. Suggestions mentioned for dioceses where the bishop does not grant permission for the trial use of these liturgies include making arrangements with a neighboring diocese for clergy to officiate using these liturgies in the neighboring diocese, and/or inviting clergy from another diocese to officiate in the diocese using these liturgies either in church buildings or other venues. Other ways in which provision is made might be shared among the bishops.

Prior to Advent I 2015, “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Life-long Covenant,” authorized for provisional use by the 77th General Convention (Resolution A049, 2012) under the direction and subject to the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority remains in force, along with the other provisions of A049, including that:

1. “Bishops, particularly those is dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this church.” The Supreme Court expanded the number of dioceses in which this is now the case.
2. “Bishops may authorize adaptation of these materials to meet the needs of this church.”

This is understood to mean that the liturgy authorized in 2012 for provisional use is still in effect until replaced by those authorized for use beginning Advent I, 2015, and that bishops may adapt that liturgy to meet the needs of this church, including adapting them for marriage, as many bishops have done during the past triennium. Some may wonder if the 2015 version “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage” can be considered an adaptation for marriage of the 2012 liturgy, and it would seem that the answer is yes. However, the 2015 liturgy “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2” would not be, since it is based on the 1979 Book of Common Prayer and not “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Life-long Covenant” as authorized in 2012.


*The House of Bishops received this document from Bishop Ely with appreciation and referred it to the members of the House of Bishops individually to be used by them in their respective dioceses with the provision that it may be used in its present form or modified as each determines is in the best pastoral interest of his or her diocese.
Resolution A036

Amend Canon I.18 Marriage

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That Canon I.18 is hereby amended to read as follows:

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 also 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, and be it further

Resolved that this canon shall become effective on the First Sunday of Advent, 2015.
Resolution A054

Adopt Resources and Rites from “Liturical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015”

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 78th General Convention commend “Liturical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” as found in the Blue Book, Liturgy Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (BBLSM), pp. 2-151 with the following revisions:

BBLSM p. 84: In The Commitment, change the rubric to read “Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the right hand of the other and says”

BBLSM p. 84: After “I, N., give myself to you, N.” add “, and take you to myself.”

BBLSM p. 85: At the Pronouncement, change the rubric to read “The Presider joins the right hands and says”

BBLSM p. 87: In Concerning the Service, change the second paragraph to read “At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian, and the marriage shall conform to the laws of the state and canons of this church.”

BBLSM p. 88: Under Gathering, change the rubric to read “The couple joins the assembly.”

BBLSM p. 89: Change “In marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “In marriage [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”

BBLSM p. 89: Change “Solemnize their marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “are married [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”
BBLSM p.94: After “I, N., give myself to you, N.” add “; and take you to myself.”

BBLSM p. 95: At the Pronouncement, change the rubric to read “The Presider joins the right hands of the couple and says”

BBLSM p. 95: Replace “I pronounce that they are married according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X” to “I pronounce that they are married [according to the laws of the state or civil jurisdiction of X]”

BBLSM p. 100: At The Marriage, change the rubric to read “Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the right hand of the other and says”

for study and use in congregations and dioceses of The Episcopal Church; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention authorize for use “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” (as found in Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, pp. 77-86, (as amended)),” beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2015; under the direction and with the permission of the bishop exercising ecclesiastical authority; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention authorize for trial use in accordance with Article X of the Constitution and Canon II.3.6 “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage,” and “The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2,” from “Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” (as found in Supplemental Materials: Appendices of the Report of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, pp. 87-105) beginning the First Sunday of Advent 2015. 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 direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops may continue to provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further
Resolved, That the provision of Canon I.18.4 applies by extension to “Liturical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” namely, “It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to” preside at any rite contained herein; and be it further

Resolved, That the provisions of Canon I.19.3 regarding marriage after divorce apply equally to all the rites of “Liturical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015,” in accordance with guidelines established by each diocese; and be it further

Resolved, That this convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and that no bishop, priest, deacon or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her theological objection to or support for the 78th General Convention’s action contained in this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music continue to monitor the use of this material and report to the 79th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the 78th General Convention direct the Secretary of General Convention, and the Custodian of the Standard Book of Common Prayer in consultation with the outgoing Chair of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and the Chairs of the Legislative Committees to whom this legislation is referred, to finalize and arrange for the publication with Church Publishing of the material (in English and Spanish) contained in “Liturical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015” as approved by the 78th General Convention, no later than the First Sunday of Advent 2015, these materials to be available electronically at no cost.
DECLARATION OF INTENT

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

We, N.N. and N.N., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold this union to be our lifelong commitment as provided by the Episcopal Church gathered in General Convention.

We believe that our union is intended by God for our mutual joy for the encouragement and support given one another in daily life and changing circumstances, for bringing God's grace to our community, for the deepening of faith as we experience God's love in our love for one another, and (if it may be) for the physical and spiritual nurture of children. This union shall be nurtured and characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which shall enable us to see in each other the image of God.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.

_________________________________  _____________________________________
Signature                        Signature

_________________________________
Date
2. The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage

Concerning the Service

This rite is appropriately celebrated in the context of the Holy Eucharist and may take place at the principal Sunday Liturgy. This rite then replaces the Ministry of the Word. A bishop or priest normally presides. Parallel texts from *Enriching Our Worship* 1 are included as options for elements of this rite.

At least one of the couple must be a baptized Christian.

Two or more presenters, who may be friends, parents, family members, or drawn from the local assembly, may present the couple to the presider and the assembly.

As indicated in the opening address, the consent, and the blessing of the rings, the rite may be modified for use with a couple who have previously made a lifelong commitment to one another.
The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage

The Word of God

Gathering

The couple to be blessed joins the assembly.

A hymn of praise, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

The Presider says the following, the People standing

Presider          Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People           Blessed be God, now and for ever. Amen.

In place of the above may be said

Presider          Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.
People           Glory to God for ever and ever.

From Easter Day through the Day of Pentecost

Presider          Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People            The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In place of the above may be said

Presider          Alleluia. Christ is risen.
People            Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Then may be said

Presider          Beloved, let us love one another,
People            For love is of God.
Presider          Whoever does not love does not know God,
People            For God is love.
Presider          Since God so loves us,
People            Let us love one another.

The Presider may address the assembly in these words

Dear friends in Christ, or Dearly beloved,
in the name of God and the Church
we have come together today with N. N. and N. N.,
to witness the vows they make, committing themselves to one another in marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of $X$. Forsaking all others, they will bind themselves to one another in a covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love, remaining true to one another in heart, body, and mind, as long as they both shall live.

The lifelong commitment of marriage is not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly, but responsibly and with reverence. Let us pray, then, that God will give them the strength to remain steadfast in what they vow this day. Let us also pray for the generosity to support them in the commitment they undertake and for the wisdom to see God at work in their life together.

Or this, for those who have previously made a lifelong commitment to one another

Dear friends in Christ, or Dearly beloved, in the name of God and the Church we have come together today with $N$, $N$, and $N$. to witness the sacred vows they make this day as they solemnize their marriage according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of $X$, and reaffirm their commitment to one another. Forsaking all others, they will renew their covenant of mutual fidelity and steadfast love, remaining true to one another in heart, body, and mind, as long as they both shall live.

Let us pray, then, that God will give them the strength to remain steadfast in what they vow this day. Let us also pray for the generosity to support them in the commitment they undertake, and for the wisdom to see God at work in their life together.

The Collect of the Day

Presider The Lord be with you. or God be with you.
People And also with you.
Presider Let us pray.

The Presider says one of the following Collects

God of abundance: assist by your grace $N$ and $N$, whose covenant of love and fidelity we witness this day. Grant them your protection, that with firm resolve they may honor and keep the vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
or this

Almighty and everliving God:
lkook tenderly upon N. and N.,
who stand before you in the company of your Church.
Let their life together bring them great joy.
Grant them so to love selflessly and live humbly,
that they may be to one another and to the world
a witness and a sign of your never-failing love and care;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, to the ages of ages. Amen.

or this

O God, faithful and true,
whose steadfast love endures for ever:
we give you thanks for sustaining N. and N. in the life they share
and for bringing them to this day.
Nurture them and fill them with joy in their life together,
continuing the good work you have begun in them;
and grant us, with them, a dwelling place eternal in the heavens
where all your people will share the joy of perfect love,
and where you, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, live and reign,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

or this, for those who bring children

Holy Trinity, one God,
three Persons perfect in unity and equal in majesty:
Draw together with bonds of love and affection
N. and N., who with their families
seek to live in harmony and forbearance all their days,
that their joining together will be to us
a reflection of that perfect communion
which is your very essence and life,
O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
who live and reign in glory everlasting. Amen.

The Lessons

The people sit. Then one or more of the following passages of Scripture is read. If the Holy Communion is to be celebrated, a
passage from the Gospels always concludes the Readings. When the blessing is celebrated in the context of the Sunday
Eucharist, the Readings of the Sunday are used, except with the permission of the Bishop.

Ruth 1:16–17
1 Samuel 18:1b, 3; 20:16–17; 42b; or 1 Samuel 18:1–4
Romans 12:9–18
1 Corinthians 12:3b–13:13
2 Corinthians 5:17–20
Galatians 5:14, 22–26
Ecclesiastes 4:9–12
Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7
Micah 4:1–4
Ephesians 3:14–21
Colossians 3:12–17
1 John 3:18–24
1 John 4:7–16, 21

When a biblical passage other than one from the Gospels is to be read, the Reader announces it with these words

Reader A Reading from __________________________. 

STANDING COMMISSION ON LITURGY AND MUSIC
After the Reading, the Reader may say
   The Word of the Lord.
or   Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.
or   Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

People   Thanks be to God.

Between the Readings, a psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are Psalm 65, Psalm 67, Psalm 85:7–13, Psalm 98, Psalm 100, Psalm 126, Psalm 127, Psalm 133, Psalm 148, and Psalm 149:1–5.

Appropriate passages from the Gospels are
   Matthew 5:1–16
   Mark 12:28–34
   John 15:9–17
   John 17:1–2, 18–26

All standing, the Deacon or Priest reads the Gospel, first saying
   The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to ____________.
or   The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to ____________.

People   Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says
   The Gospel of the Lord.

People   Praise to you, Lord Christ.

The Sermon

The Witnessing of the Vows and the Blessing of the Covenant

The couple comes before the assembly. If there is to be a presentation, the presenters stand with the couple, and the Presider says to them

Presider   Who presents N. and N., as they seek the blessing of God and the Church on their love and life together?
Presenters   We do.
Presider   Will you love, respect, and pray for N. and N., and do all in your power to stand with them in the life they will share?
Presenters   We will.

The Presider then addresses the couple, saying
   N. and N., you have come before God and the Church to exchange and renew solemn vows with one another and to ask God’s blessing.

The Presider addresses one member of the couple, saying

Presider   N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?
Answer   I do.
Presider   Will you continue to live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?
Answer   I will, with God’s help.
The Presider addresses the other member of the couple, saying

Presider: N., do you freely and unreservedly offer yourself to N.?
Answer: I do.

Presider: Will you continue to live together in faithfulness and holiness of life as long as you both shall live?
Answer: I will, with God’s help.

The assembly stands, the couple faces the People, and the Presider addresses them, saying

Presider: Will all of you gathered to witness these vows do all in your power to uphold and honor this couple in the covenant they make?
People: We will.
Presider: Will you pray for them, especially in times of trouble, and celebrate with them in times of joy?
People: We will.

The Prayers

The Presider then introduces the prayers

Presider: Then let us pray for N. and N. in their life together and for the concerns of this community.

A Deacon or another leader bids prayers for the couple.

Prayers for the Church and for the world, for the concerns of the local community, for those who suffer or face trouble, and for the departed are also appropriate. If the rite takes place in the principal Sunday worship of the congregation, the rubric concerning the Prayers of the People on page 359 of the Book of Common Prayer is followed.

Adaptations or insertions may be made to the form that follows.

A bar in the margin indicates a bidding that may be omitted.

Leader: For N. and N., seeking your blessing and the blessing of your holy people;
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For a spirit of loving-kindness to shelter them all their days;
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For friends to support them and communities to enfold them;
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For peace in their home and love in their family;
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For the grace and wisdom to care for the children you entrust to them [or may entrust to them];
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: For the honesty to acknowledge when they hurt each other, and the humility to seek each other’s forgiveness and yours;
       Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,
People: Hear our prayer.
Leader

For the outpouring of your love through their work and witness;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For the strength to keep the vows each of us has made;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

The leader may add one or more of the following biddings

Leader

For all who have been reborn and made new in the waters of Baptism;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For those who lead and serve in communities of faith;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For those who seek justice, peace, and concord among nations;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For those who are sick or suffering, homeless or poor;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For victims of violence and those who inflict it;
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

Leader

For communion with all who have died [especially those whom we remember this day: ____________];
Loving God, or Lord, in your mercy,

People

Hear our prayer.

The President concludes the Prayers with the following or another appropriate Collect

Giver of every gift, source of all goodness,
hear the prayers we bring before you for N. and N.,
who seek your blessing this day.
Strengthen them as they share in the saving work of Jesus,
and bring about for them and for all you have created
the fullness of life he promised,
who now lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

If the Eucharist is to follow, the Lord’s Prayer is omitted here.

Leader

As our Savior Christ has taught us,
we now pray,

People and Leader

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us,
we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.

thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Marriage

The People sit. The couple stands, facing the Presider.

Presider N. and N., I invite you now, illumined by the Word of God and strengthened by the prayer of this community, to make your covenant before God and the Church.

Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the hand of the other and says

In the name of God,  
I, N., give myself to you, N.  
I will support and care for you by the grace of God:  
in times of sickness, in times of health.  
I will hold and cherish you in the love of Christ:  
in times of plenty, in times of want.  
I will honor and love you with the Spirit’s help:  
in times of anguish, in times of joy,  
forsaking all others, as long as we both shall live.  
This is my solemn vow.

or this

In the name of God,  
I, N., give myself to you, N.  
I will support and care for you:  
in times of sickness, in times of health.  
I will hold and cherish you:  
in times of plenty, in times of want.  
I will honor and love you:  
in times of anguish, in times of joy,  
forsaking all others, as long as we both shall live.  
This is my solemn vow.

If rings are to be exchanged, they are brought before the Presider, who prays using the following words

Let us pray.

Bless, O God, these rings  
as signs of the enduring covenant  
N. and N. have made with each other,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
The two people place the rings on the fingers of one another, first the one, then the other, saying

N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow,
and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you,
in the name of God. or in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

If the two have previously given and worn rings as a symbol of their commitment, the rings may be blessed on the hands of the couple, the Presider saying

Let us pray.

By the rings which they have worn, faithful God,
N. and N. have shown to one another and the world
their love and faithfulness.
Bless now these rings,
that from this day forward
they may be signs of the vows N. and N. have exchanged
in your presence and in the communion of your Church,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement
The Presider says

Now that N. and N. have exchanged vows of love and fidelity
in the presence of God and the Church,
I pronounce that they are
married according to the laws of the state [or civil jurisdiction] of X.
and bound to one another
as long as they both shall live. Amen.

Blessing of the Couple
As the couple stands or kneels, the Presider invokes God’s blessing upon them, saying

Let us pray.

Most gracious God,
we praise you for the tender mercy and unfailing care
revealed to us in Jesus the Christ
and for the great joy and comfort bestowed upon us
in the gift of human love.
We give you thanks for N. and N.,
and the covenant of faithfulness they have made.
Pour out the abundance of your Holy Spirit upon them.
Keep them in your steadfast love;
protect them from all danger;
fill them with your wisdom and peace;
lead them in holy service to each other and the world.

The Presider continues with one of the following

God the Father,
God the Son,
God the Holy Spirit,
bless, preserve, and keep you,
and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace, 
that you may please God in body and soul. 
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity 
manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, 
and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet, 
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

or this

God, the holy and undivided Trinity, 
bless, preserve, and keep you, 
and mercifully grant you rich and boundless grace, 
that you may please God in body and soul. 
God make you a sign of the loving-kindness and steadfast fidelity 
manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior, 
and bring you at last to the delight of the heavenly banquet, 
where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

The Peace
The Presider bids the Peace.

Presider The peace of the Lord be always with you.
People And also with you.

In place of the above may be said

Presider The peace of Christ be always with you.
People And also with you.

The liturgy continues with the Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is not celebrated, the Presider blesses the people. The Deacon, or in the absence of a Deacon, the Priest, dismisses them.

At the Eucharist
The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

The following proper preface may be said

Because in the giving of two people to each other in faithful love 
you reveal the joy and abundant life you share 
with your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The following postcommunion prayer may be said

God our strength and joy, 
we thank you for the communion of our life together, 
for the example of holy love that you give us in N. and N., 
and for the Sacrament of the Body and Blood 
of our Savior Jesus Christ. 
Grant that it may renew our hope 
and nourish us for the work you set before us 
to witness to the presence of Christ in the world, 
through the power of your Spirit, 
and to the glory of your Name. Amen.
3. The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (2)

Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer 1979

Concerning the Service

At least one of the parties must be a baptized Christian; the ceremony must be attested by at least two witnesses; and the marriage must conform to the laws of the State.

A priest or a bishop normally presides at the Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing the nuptial blessing, and of celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the charge, ask for the Declaration of Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

Where it is permitted by civil law that deacons may perform marriages, and no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may use the service which follows, omitting the nuptial blessing which follows The Prayers.

It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay persons.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N. N.), the full names of the persons to be married are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

Additional Directions are on page 104.
The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (2)

At the time appointed, the persons to be married, with their witnesses, assemble in the church or some other appropriate place.

During their entrance, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

Then the Celebrant, facing the people and the persons to be married, addresses the congregation and says

Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of N. and N. in Holy Matrimony. The joining of two people in a life of mutual fidelity signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and so it is worthy of being honored among all people.

The union of two people in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the gift of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Therefore marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.

Into this holy union N. N. and N. N. now come to be joined.

If any of you can show just cause why they may not lawfully be married, speak now; or else for ever hold your peace.

Then the Celebrant says to the persons to be married

I require and charge you both, here in the presence of God, that if either of you knows any reason why you may not be united in marriage lawfully, and in accordance with God’s Word, you do now confess it.

The Declaration of Consent

The Celebrant says to one member of the couple, then to the other

N., will you have this woman/man/person to be your wife/husband/spouse; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Answer I will.

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?

People We will.
If there is to be a presentation or a giving in marriage, it takes place at this time.

See Additional Directions, p. 104.

A hymn, psalm, or anthem may follow.

The Ministry of the Word

The Celebrant then says to the people

People
The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Celebrant
Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have created humankind in your image: Look mercifully upon N. and N. who come to you seeking your blessing, and assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. Other readings from Scripture suitable for the occasion may be used. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the Readings.

- Genesis 1:26–28 (Male and female he created them)
- Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7 (Many waters cannot quench love)
- Tobit 8:5b–8 (New English Bible) (That she and I may grow old together)
- 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (Love is patient and kind)
- Ephesians 3:14–19 (The Father from whom every family is named)
- Ephesians 5:1–2 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)
- Colossians 3:12–17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)
- 1 John 4:7–16 (Let us love one another, for love is of God)

Between the Readings, a psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are Psalm 67, Psalm 127, and Psalm 128.

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says

People
The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to ____________.

Glory to you, Lord Christ.

- Matthew 5:1–10 (The Beatitudes)
- Matthew 5:13–16 (You are the light ... Let your light so shine)
- Matthew 7:21, 24–29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)
- John 15:9–12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

After the Gospel, the Reader says

The Gospel of the Lord.

People
Praise to you, Lord Christ.

A homily or other response to the Readings may follow.
The Marriage

Each member of the couple, in turn, takes the hand of the other and says

In the Name of God, I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband/spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.
This is my solemn vow.

The Priest may ask God's blessing on rings as follows

Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows by which N. and N. have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The giver places the ring on the ring finger of the other's hand and says

N., I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit [or in the Name of God].

Then the Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says

Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, with the joining of hands and the giving and receiving of rings, I pronounce that they are wed to one another, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People

Amen.

The Prayers

All standing, the Celebrant says

Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

People and Celebrant

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.
If Communion is to follow, the Lord’s Prayer may be omitted here.

The Deacon or other person appointed reads the following prayers, to which the People respond, saying, Amen.

If there is not to be a Communion, one or more of the prayers may be omitted.

Leader

Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation, and giver of all grace: Look with favor upon the world you have made, and for which your Son gave his life, and especially upon N. and N. whom you make one flesh in Holy Matrimony. Amen.

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy. Amen.

Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their life. Amen.

Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other’s forgiveness and yours. Amen.

Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this sinful and broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair. Amen.

Bestow on them, if it is your will, the gift and heritage of children, and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. Amen.

Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. Amen.

Grant that all married persons who have witnessed these vows may find their lives strengthened and their loyalties confirmed. Amen.

Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity, now and for ever. Amen.

The Blessing of the Marriage

The People remain standing. The couple kneel, and the Priest says one of the following prayers

Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of two people in his Name. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessing upon N. and N. Defend them from every enemy. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

or this

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in
wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The couple still kneeling, the Priest adds this blessing

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting. Amen.

The Peace
The Celebrant may say to the People

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

The newly married couple then greet each other, after which greetings may be exchanged throughout the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the wedding party leaves the church. A hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.

At the Eucharist
The liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the newly married couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Preface of the Season

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly married couple receive Communion first, after the ministers.

In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said

O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious:
We give you thanks for binding us together
in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood
of your Son Jesus Christ.
Grant that by your Holy Spirit,
N. and N., now joined in Holy Matrimony,
may become one in heart and soul,
live in fidelity and peace,
and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you;
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

As the wedding party leaves the church, a hymn, psalm, or anthem may be sung, or instrumental music may be played.
a. The Blessing of a Civil Marriage

The rite begins as prescribed for celebrations of the Holy Eucharist, using the Collect and Lessons appointed in the Marriage service.

After the Gospel (and homily), the couple stand before the Celebrant, who addresses them in these or similar words

N. and N., you have come here today to seek the blessing of God and of his Church upon your marriage. I require, therefore, that you promise, with the help of God, to fulfill the obligations which Christian Marriage demands.

The Celebrant then addresses one member of the couple, then the other, saying

N., you have taken N. to be your wife/husband/spouse. Do you promise to love her/him, comfort her/him, honor and keep her/him, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, to be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

Answer

I do.

The Celebrant then addresses the congregation, saying

Will you who have witnessed these promises do all in your power to uphold these two persons in their marriage?

People

We will.

If rings are to be blessed, the members of the couple extend their hands toward the Priest [or Bishop], who says

Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows by which N. and N. have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Celebrant joins the right hands of the couple and says

Those whom God has joined together let no one put asunder.

People

Amen.

The service continues with The Prayers on page 104.
b. An Order for Marriage

If it is desired to celebrate a marriage otherwise than as provided on pages 76-85 of “Liturgy Resources 1: The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant (revised and expanded),” this Order is used.

Normally, the celebrant is a priest or bishop. Where permitted by civil law, and when no priest or bishop is available, a deacon may function as celebrant, but does not pronounce a nuptial blessing.

The laws of the State having been complied with, the couple, together with their witnesses, families, and friends assemble in the church or in some other convenient place.

1. The teaching of the Church concerning Holy Matrimony, as it is declared in the formularies, is briefly stated.

2. The intention of the two to enter the state of matrimony, and their free consent, is publicly ascertained.

3. One or more Readings, one of which is always from Holy Scripture, may precede the exchange of vows. If there is to be a Communion, a Reading from the Gospel is always included.

4. The vows are exchanged, using the following form

   In the Name of God,
   I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband/spouse,
   to have and to hold from this day forward,
   for better for worse, for richer for poorer,
   in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
   until we are parted by death.
   This is my solemn vow.

   or this

   I, N., take thee N., to my wedded wife/husband/spouse,
   to have and to hold from this day forward,
   for better for worse, for richer for poorer,
   in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish,
   till death us do part, according to God’s holy ordinance;
   and thereto I plight [or give] thee my troth.

5. The Celebrant declares the union of the couple, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

6. Prayers are offered for the couple, for their life together, for the Christian community, and for the world.

7. A priest or bishop pronounces a solemn blessing upon the couple.

8. If there is no Communion, the service concludes with the Peace, the couple first greeting each other. The Peace may be exchanged throughout the assembly.

9. If there is to be a Communion, the service continues with the Peace and the Offertory. The Holy Eucharist may be celebrated either according to Rite One or Rite Two, or according to the Order on page 401 of the Book of Common Prayer 1979.
Additional Directions

If Banns are to be published, the following form is used

I publish the Banns of Marriage between N. N. of __________ and N. N. of ____________.
If any of you know just cause why they may not be joined together in Holy Matrimony, you are
bidden to declare it. This is the first [or second, or third] time of asking.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist.
This service then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

After the Declaration of Consent, if there is to be a giving in marriage, or presentation, the Celebrant asks,

Who presents [gives] these two people to be married to each other?
The appropriate answer is, “I do.” If more than one person responds, they do so together.

For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple to be married remain where they may conveniently
hear the reading of Scripture. They may approach the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the
Blessing of the Marriage.

It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may be provided for the
wedding party, so that all may be seated for the Lessons and the homily.

The Apostles’ Creed may be recited after the Lessons, or after the homily, if there is one.

When desired, some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of the ring.

At the Offertory, it is desirable that the bread and wine be presented to the ministers by the newly married
persons. They may then remain before the Lord’s Table and receive Holy Communion before other members
of the congregation.
4. The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony

Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer 1928

¶ At the day and time appointed for Solemnization of Matrimony, the Persons to be married shall come into the body of the Church, or shall be ready in some proper place, with their family, friends, and neighbors; and there standing together, the Minister shall say,

DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together N. N. and N. N. in holy Matrimony; which is an honorable estate, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

¶ And also speaking unto the Persons who are to be married, the Minister shall say,

I REQUIRE and charge you both, as ye will answer at the day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment, why ye may not be lawfully joined together in Matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that if any persons are joined together otherwise than as God's Word doth allow, their marriage is not lawful.

¶ The Minister shall say to one member of the Couple, then the other,

N., WILT thou have this Man/Woman/Person to thy wedded Husband/Wife/Spouse, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love him/her, comfort him/her, honor, and keep him/her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto him/her, so long as ye both shall live?

¶ The Person addressed shall answer,

I will.

¶ If there is to be a presentation or giving in marriage, the Minister shall ask,

Who presenteth [or giveth] these two Persons to be married to each other?

¶ The Person[s] addressed shall answer [together],

I do.
One or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture may be read.

- Genesis 1:26-28 (Male and female he created them)
- Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7 (Many waters cannot quench love)
- Tobit 8:5b–8 (New English Bible) (That she and I may grow old together)
- 1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (Love is patient and kind)
- Ephesians 3:14–19 (The Father from whom every family is named)
- Ephesians 5:1–2 (Walk in love, as Christ loved us)
- Colossians 3:12–17 (Love which binds everything together in harmony)
- 1 John 4:7–16 (Let us love one another, for love is of God)
- Matthew 5:1–10 (The Beatitudes)
- Matthew 5:13–16 (You are the light... Let your light so shine)
- Matthew 7:21, 24–29 (Like a wise man who built his house upon the rock)
- John 15:9–12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

Between the Readings, a psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are Psalm 67, Psalm 127, and Psalm 128.

¶ Then shall the couple give their troth to each other in this manner.

The Minister shall cause each one in turn to take the other by the right hand, and to repeat the following,

I, N., take thee, N., to my wedded Husband/Wife/Spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy ordinance; and thereto I plight [or give] thee my troth.

¶ Then shall they loose their hands; and they may each give to the other a Ring on this wise: the Minister taking the Rings shall deliver them unto each, first one, then the other, to put upon the fourth finger of the other’s left hand.

¶ Before delivering the Rings, or if the Couple have exchanged Rings already, the Minister may say a blessing as followeth.

BLESS, O Lord, these Rings, that in giving and wearing these tokens, this Couple may abide in thy peace, and continue in thy favor, unto their life’s end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¶ And they each, first one and then the other, holding the Ring there, and taught by the Minister, shall say,

WITH this ring I thee wed; and with my body I thee honor; and all my worldly goods with thee I share; In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¶ Then shall the Minister and the People, still standing, say the Lord’s Prayer, the Minister first saying.

Let us pray.

¶ Minister and People

OUR Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.
¶ Then the Minister shall say

O ETERNAL God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life: Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, whom we bless in thy Name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, [whereof these Rings given and received are tokens and pledges,] and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

¶ The Minister may add one or both of the following prayers.

O ALMIGHTY God, Creator of mankind, who only art the well-spring of life: Bestow upon these thy servants, if it be thy will, the gift and heritage of children; and grant that they may see their children brought up in thy faith and fear, to the honor and glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O GOD, who hast so consecrated the state of Matrimony that in it is represented the spiritual marriage and unity betwixt Christ and his Church: Look mercifully upon these thy servants, that they may love, honor, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace, and that they may bring forth, by thy grace and Spirit, abundant fruit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

¶ Then shall the Minister join their right hands together, and say,

Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.

¶ Then shall the Minister speak unto the company.

FORASMUCH as N. and N. have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and thereto have given and pledged their troth, each to the other, and have declared the same [by giving and receiving Rings, and] by joining hands; I pronounce that they are now and ever hereafter United in Matrimony; In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

¶ The Minister shall add this Blessing.

GOD the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep ye; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that ye may so live together in this life, that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting. Amen.

¶ It is convenient that the new-married Persons should receive the Holy Communion at the time of their Marriage.

¶ The laws respecting Matrimony being different in the several States, every Minister is left to the direction of those laws, in every thing that regards the civil contract between the parties.
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Guidelines for The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant Between Same-Sex Couples in The Diocese of the Rio Grande

1. Who the rite is for:
The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant is intended for same-sex couples, at least one of whom is a baptized Christian. Since a Christian covenant of life together is anchored in our faith in Jesus Christ, and in the church, of which we become a member by baptism, it is desirable that at least one of the couple be regular in Episcopal church attendance.

Rationale: The requirement for baptism of one partner parallels that of opposite sex couples desiring matrimony.

Church attendance mitigates the situation of having those who are fleeing their own denomination that will not perform such blessings come to an Episcopal Church for the rite, when they have no intention of further involvement with the Episcopal Church. Some clergy/bishops request this of opposite sex couples to be married in the church.

2. Who may officiate?
No member of the clergy shall be required to officiate at a rite of same sex blessing, or to consent to such a rite being held in the church under her or his jurisdiction. If clergy do not choose to officiate at a rite of same sex blessing it would be reasonable to refer the couple to another member of the clergy known to be comfortable performing the rite.

Any priest in charge of a congregation must receive the approval of the diocesan bishop to proceed with same-sex blessings in their congregations. Retired, nonparochial, or supply clergy may officiate only with the consent of the Rector of the parish in which the Blessing is to be registered. Clergy from outside the diocese may officiate at The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop.

Deacons may not officiate at The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant in the church, but may assist at such a service.

Clergy of other denominations may assist when invited by the officiant, according to the Diocesan Canons for participation in services of Holy Eucharist.

Rationale: The Bishop may then inquire in what parish the Blessing is to be registered, and the consent of any clergy with jurisdiction there.

Clergy resident in the DRG wishing to officiate at a Same Sex Blessing in the church in another diocese must follow the guidelines of that diocese.

3. May diocesan clergy/parish clergy bless same-sex couples if one or both persons have been in a previous marriage ended by divorce or annulment or a covenanted same-sex relationship that has been severed?

Appendix A
Yes, however, if either member of the couple has had a previous marriage ending in divorce or annulment, or had a covenanted same-sex relationship that has been severed, the priest to officiate shall determine by appropriate evidence such as a final judgment or decree of a civil court or competent jurisdiction in the case of divorce or annulment, or in a letter of stipulation from the member of the couple in the case of severing of a covenanted same-sex relationship, that the members of the couple are not currently the husband or wife, or covenanted life-partner of any person living. The diocesan bishop shall be notified of the intent to conduct the blessing in any of these cases.

If there has been more than one such termination for either member of the couple, the Bishop’s permission for the blessing rite must first be obtained, and for this purpose 60 days advance notice is required. In cases of extraordinary pastoral need, there may be a waiver of time requirements at the discretion of the bishop.

4. May the rite be used for same-sex couples who have entered into Civil Marriages, Domestic Partnerships or Civil Unions contracted in states where these are legal, in services of Blessing held in The DRG?

Yes, however, The Book of Common Prayer ‘Blessing of a Civil Marriage’ Rite shall not be used for the Blessing of Same Sex couples.

When blessing these couples, the words of pronouncement in the rite shall be used, and shall not be edited to reflect the couple’s marriage, domestic partnership, or civil union. (see below, #13)

Members of the Clergy in the Diocese shall neither offer The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant to heterosexual couples nor the solemnization of Holy Matrimony to homosexual couples.

Clergy who plan to officiate at a service of blessing will instruct the couple in any written publications for or about their ceremony, and in invitations to it, to refer to it using the term ‘The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant’.

5. What Rites are to be used?

Only the Rite authorized for provisional use by General Convention 2012, “The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant”, shall be used for same sex blessings, without alteration.

The BCP Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage or Order For Marriage shall not be used for Blessing Same Sex couples.

The terms marriage, matrimony, husband, wife, or wedding shall not be used in the rite of Blessing of a Same Sex Relationship.

Two witnesses are required to attest to the rite, and their names should be recorded in the parish register used for recording The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant.

6. Where does the rite take place?

As with Marriages, it is hoped that the church will be the site of The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, and that when appropriate, the Holy Eucharist will be celebrated. If the
Blessing takes place elsewhere, it is desirable that at the earliest opportunity, the couple will be prayed for and will receive the Eucharist in their home parish.

7. What will be required of the couple?
At least 30 days notice must be given to the member of the clergy who will officiate at a church celebration of The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant. In cases of extraordinary pastoral need, there may be a waiver of time requirements at the discretion of the officiating member of the clergy.

No less than 3 sessions of preparatory counseling shall be provided by a member of the clergy, or person with credentialed expertise in providing such preparation. The celebration of the rite will be planned in consultation with the officiant.

While many of the issues for same-sex couples will be the same as for different-sex couples, some are different; and so a suggested guide for this counseling has been prepared, and is included in the approved resources that accompany the blessing rite, entitled “Hearing, Seeing, and Declaring New Things: Preparing Same-Gender Couples for a Liturgy of Blessing.”

Whether or not this resource is used, both parties shall have been instructed as to the Church’s understanding of the nature, meaning and purpose of the commitments they will be making. This instruction may be provided by the Member of the Clergy or by persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible. No less than three sessions of preparatory counseling shall be provided by a member of the clergy, or a person with credentialed expertise in providing such preparation. Clergy are encouraged to use the materials prepared by the SCLM for this purpose. The celebration of the rite will be planned in consultation with the officiant.

The following Declaration of Intent shall be signed by both parties and archived in the church where the blessing is registered:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

We, N and N, desiring to receive the blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, do solemnly declare that we hold this Covenant to be our lifelong commitment as provided by the Episcopal Church gathered in General Convention.

We believe that our covenant is intended by God for our mutual joy, for the encouragement and support given one another in daily life and changing circumstances, for bringing God’s grace to our community, for the deepening of faith as we experience God’s love in our love for one another, and (if it may be) for the physical and spiritual nurture of children. This covenant shall be nurtured and characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which shall enable us to see each other in the image of God.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this covenant and to seek God’s help hereto.

_________________________  ________________________
Signature                  Signature

Dated: ___________ A.D.
Rationale: For opposite sex couples, there is a canonical requirement that a Declaration of Intent with similar wording, to assure the couple’s intent is congruent with the church’s.

8. When there has been a previous committed relationship:
In cases of extraordinary pastoral need, there may be a waiver of the time requirement at the discretion of the Bishop.

9. When dissention arises in a relationship blessed in the church, what should be done?
When a relationship blessed by the church is imperiled by dissension, it shall be the duty, if possible, of either or both parties, before taking action, to lay the matter before a Member of the Clergy; it shall be the duty of such Member of the Clergy to act first to protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of those involved and only then, if it be possible, to labor that the parties may be reconciled.

Rationale:
It is important to take seriously the reality of domestic violence. Domestic violence occurs in marriages and same-sex unions, and is perpetrated by both men and women.

10. Termination of a relationship blessed in The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant:
Any member of this Church who seeks the dissolution of such a relationship, or who seeks permission to enter into a subsequent relationship, may apply to the Bishop for a judgment. Such judgment may be a recognition of the nullity, or of the termination of the covenant; Provided, that no such judgment shall be construed as affecting in any way the legitimacy of children or the civil validity of the former relationship. Every judgment made under this provision shall be in writing and made a matter of permanent record in the archives of the diocese.

11. What preparation of the congregation should take place?
Because the blessing of same sex relationships using The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant is still new to the Episcopal Church, it is important that congregations where such blessings will take place are prepared, with teaching about the rationale, theological understandings, Scriptural interpretations, approaches to supporting couples and families in their life together within the church, the rite itself, and the canonical status of this rite.

A suggested resource for a congregational 5-session “Discussion Guide” is available in the resources that accompany the blessing rite, approved by General Convention 2012. Congregations that choose to use this may include those that are discerning whether to offer them; those that have decided already to offer them and want to become informed about them; or those who feel that they are not going to offer them, but want to understand what they are about.

It is the Rector or Vicar’s decision whether to proceed with use of The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, and whether the church building under their authority may be or should be used for the liturgy.

Clergy should honestly and sensitively address the culture of their congregations. While clergy have the canonical authority to perform rites of this church and other liturgies permitted by the Bishop, including the blessing of Same Sex couples, they are also called in their pastoral responsibility to love and serve all within their care. It is important that the first time such a rite
is celebrated in a congregation, the vestry be informed and have an opportunity for discussion; whether to proceed is, however, not a matter suitable for voting either by a Vestry or by a congregation.

A statement entitled “Model Congregational Guidelines” is available in the approved resources as Sample Handout 5 in the section “Hearing, Seeing, and Declaring New Things: Preparing Same-Gender Couples for a Liturgy of Blessing.” These guidelines offer an example of a policy statement, which a congregation might choose to adapt or write on their own.

12. Can a vestry prevent clergy from blessing a same sex couple using The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant?
No. Clergy are permitted to perform these rites and are entitled to the use and control of church buildings for worship. (Title III, Canon 9.5(a)(2)

13. How shall The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant rite be recorded?
Couples blessed using this rite shall be recorded in a separate parish register and service register of the congregation in which, or under whose auspices, the blessing takes place, and no blessing shall be performed without such record being made.

14. What are the States of New Mexico and Texas regulations and limitations?
People whose same sex relationships are blessed in the church need to understand that in New Mexico or Texas they are not legally married.
Clergy performing a “marriage” without a state license to perform it are committing a legal offense and are in violation of the canons 1.18.1 and 2.

Because the Pronouncement, as it stands in the rite approved by General Convention (printed below), does not purport to be “marriage” or “civil union,” there is no reason to believe that it would violate New Mexico or Texas law:

The Presider says
Inasmuch as N. and N. have exchanged vows of love and fidelity
in the presence of God and the Church,
I now pronounce that they are bound to one another
in a holy covenant,
as long as they both shall live. Amen.

§5. What are the constraints upon clergy in the Episcopal Church regarding same sex marriage?
At this time Episcopal Clergy may not preside at the marriage of Same Sex Couples, even in places where these are legal, because the Canons and Prayer Book define marriage in heterosexual terms. By her/his ordination vows those ordained in the Episcopal Church agree “...to conform to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church.” (BCP pp. 526 &538) The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage (BCP pp. 422-432) and Order for Marriage (BCP pp. 435-438) speak only in heterosexual terms. The Catechism defines Christian marriage as “...the woman and man enter(ing) into a life-long union,” (BCP p. 861) and ECUSA Title I, Canon 18 on the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony speaks only in heterosexual terms. Any changes to this will have to take place through actions of General Convention.
Clergy violating this canon could be liable to a Presentment and Trial in the Ecclesiastical Court pursuant to ECUSA Title IV, Canon 1 for holding and publicly teaching a doctrine contrary to that held by the Church (c), violating a rubric of the BCP (d), violating the Canons of the General Convention (e) or violating your Ordination vows (h). Also, your legal authority to officiate is contingent on the fact that you are "...a duly ordained minister of the gospel in good and regular standing with his (sic) church or denomination,..." (M.G.L. c. 207, Section 38) and if you performed a same-sex civil marriage you might lose your "good and regular standing" in the Episcopal Church.

16. What is the Bishop’s expectation for clergy living in same-sex relationships?
The Bishop expects that clergy, postulants and candidates for ordination, and ordinands living with a same sex partner should have their relationship blessed in the church using this rite.
DEFINITION OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP
IN THE DIOCESE OF THE RIO GRANDE

Texas

Taken from the Family Code:

TITLE 1. THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP
SUBTITLE A. MARRIAGE
CHAPTER 2. THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP
SUBCHAPTER A. APPLICATION FOR MARRIAGE LICENSE

Sec. 2.001. MARRIAGE LICENSE.
(a) A man and a woman desiring to enter into a ceremonial marriage must obtain a marriage license from the county clerk of any county in this state.

(b) A license may not be issued for the marriage of persons of the same sex.

Added by Acts 1997, 75th Leg., ch. 7, Sec. 1, eff. April 17, 1997.

New Mexico

New Mexico law is currently silent regarding the definition of marriage.

HJR 7, introduced during the 2011 Legislative Session, sought to amend Article 20 of the Constitution of New Mexico to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman. This bill died before being heard in committee. Had it passed, the resolution would have been submitted to the people for approval or rejection at an election.
PERTINENT SECTIONS OF THE CANONS OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

TITLE I: Organization and Administration
CANON 18: Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony
Sec. 1. Every Member of the Clergy of the Church shall conform to the laws of the State governing the creation of the civil status of marriage, and also the laws of this Church governing the solemnization of Holy Matrimony.

Sec. 2. Before solemnizing a marriage the Member of the Clergy shall have ascertained:
   (a) That both parties have the right to contract a marriage according to the laws of the State.
   (b) That both parties understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, and will, and with the intent that it be lifelong.
   (c) That both parties freely and knowingly consent to such marriage, without fraud, coercion, mistake as to identity of a partner, or mental reservation.
   (d) That at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism.
   (e) That both parties have been instructed as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony by the Member of the Clergy, or that they have both received such instruction from persons known by the Member of the Clergy to be competent and responsible.

TITLE III: Ministry
CANON 9: Of the Life and Work of Priests
Sec. 5. Rectors and Priests-in-Charge and Their Duties.
   (a)
      (1) The Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall have full authority and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and spiritual jurisdiction of the Parish, subject to the Rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer, the Constitution and Canons of this Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop.

      (2) For the purposes of the office and for the full and free discharge of all functions and duties pertaining thereto, the Rector or Priest-in-Charge shall at all times be entitled to the use and control of the Church and Parish buildings together with all appurtenances and furniture, and to access to all records and registers maintained by or on behalf of the congregation.

TITLE IV: Ecclesiastical Discipline
CANON 1: Of Accountability and Ecclesiastical Discipline
By virtue of Baptism, all members of the Church are called to holiness of life and accountability to one another. The Church and each Diocese shall support their members in their life in Christ and seek to resolve conflicts by promoting healing, repentance, forgiveness, restitution, justice, amendment of life and reconciliation among all involved or affected. This Title applies to Members of the Clergy, who have by their vows at ordination accepted additional responsibilities and accountabilities for doctrine, discipline, worship, and obedience.
PERTINENT SECTION OF THE DIOCESAN CANONS

Canon 15: Miscellaneous Regulations of Ministers

SECTION 8: All members of the clergy, having subscribed to the Declaration required by Article VIII of the Constitution of the Episcopal Church, and all postulants, candidates for ordination, and ordinands, shall be under the obligation to model in their own lives the received teaching of the Church that all its members are to abstain from sexual relations outside of Holy Matrimony.
WHEN AND HOW MAY EACH OF THE RITES OF BLESSING BE USED BY CLERGY IN THE DIOCESE OF THE RIO GRANDE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Blessing and Celebration of a Marriage</th>
<th>The Blessing of a Civil Marriage</th>
<th>The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For heterosexual couples</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For same-sex couples</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the words “matrimony”, “marriage”, “husband”, or “wife”</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>For blessing civil marriages</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES – BUT NOT FOR SAME-SEX COUPLES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For blessing domestic partnerships or civil unions contracted in states where these are legal</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
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DECLARATION OF INTENT FOR THE RITES OF BLESSING

The Witnessing and Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We, N.N. and N.N., desiring to receive the blessing of a Lifelong Covenant, do solemnly declare that we hold this covenant to be our lifelong commitment as provided by the Episcopal Church gathered in General Convention.

We believe that our covenant is intended by God for our mutual joy, for the encouragement and support given one another in daily life and changing circumstances, for bringing God’s grace to our community, for the deepening of faith as we experience God’s love in our love for one another, and (if it may be) for the physical and spiritual nurture of children. This covenant shall be nurtured and characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which shall enable us to see in each other the image of God.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this covenant and to seek God’s help thereto.

(signatures of couple)
(signatures of two witnesses)

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage

(Canon 1.18.3[d-g])

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We, A.B. and C.D., desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to a be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.

We believe that the union of husband and wife, in heart, body, and mind, is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity an adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in their knowledge and love of the Lord.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God’s help thereto.

(signatures of couple)
(signatures of two witnesses)