

October 1, 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

Some of you were able to attend the adult forum last week. For those who were not there, this letter serves as a brief synopsis of that presentation.

The issue of whether or not to provide a blessing for people in lifelong, committed, same-gender relationships has been a point of contention within the Episcopal Church for decades. At the 2012 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Resolution A049 "I will bless you and you will be blessed" was passed, providing liturgical materials for and providing authorization for a rite of blessing of a same-sex couple if explicitly authorized by the local bishop.

In 2013, Bishop Miller publicly declined to authorize the use of A049, citing theological and liturgical considerations, but committed himself to further study of the issue. He then referred the issue to the Standing Committee of the diocese, which functions similarly to a parish vestry.

The Standing Committee asked for input from all of the vestries of the churches in the diocese. In November of 2013, the Christ Church vestry discussed a series of questions relating to the possibility of offering same gender blessings. Prior to that meeting, the vestry sought feedback from the congregation. The results of that discussion were forwarded to the Standing Committee.

On July 1, 2014, the Standing Committee released its report, which was circulated by diocesan and parish email lists. In this report, the Standing Committee noted the shift in attitudes to issues of same-sex affection and recommended that the bishop provide a rite for the blessing of same-sex relationships.

On August 29, 2014, the Bishop responded to the Standing Committee report, continuing to decline to authorize A049, but providing an alternate rite and a process by which a parish may apply to utilize it. To summarize, the rite is a blessing of a civil marriage, and so requires that the same-sex couple be legally married before the blessing can take place. The application process requires the congregation and the vestry to engage in study before the vestry votes on a policy for whether same gender couples may be blessed by the rector.

The reality is that there are members and family members of our congregation who are in same-gender relationships. Eventually, a request will be made of the rector to utilize this rite. Since it would be unfair for such a process to be a judgment on an individual couple rather than on principle, the vestry feels it is proper to move ahead with the process of discussion in order to avoid that happening.

There will be three open meetings for study and discussion, all from 7pm to 9pm:

Tuesday, October 28 - History, Theology and the Bible

Tuesday, November 4 - Liturgy, Civil and Canon Law

Tuesday November 11 - Mission and our own Diocesan Context

The vestry will vote at its meeting on Tuesday November 18, unless the vestry senses that more time and discussion is needed. As always, vestry meetings are open to the parish.

For a long time Christ Church has been a place with a healthy theological diversity. Intelligent, compassionate people have room to be curious and to be honest without worrying that friendships will be compromised or litmus tests will be applied. It is in this generous spirit that we move into this time of discernment together.

Yours in Christ,

Seth+