October 5, 2015

TO: Clergy serving in West Texas

FROM: Bishops Lillbridge and Reed

RE: Same-Sex Marriage Policy, Procedures, and Provision

Dear Colleagues,

As we have previously reported, General Convention Resolution A054 requires bishops to develop a process for access to the Trial Use Liturgies for same-sex marriage. We indicated to you that we would be working on such a process, and this mailing addresses these requirements.

In developing the attached policies and provisions, we believe that we have addressed both the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of A054. The resolution states that "bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority... will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies" ('letter'); and "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" ('spirit').

These policies do not assume the rightness or the wrongness of these decisions, nor do they seek to convince anyone that their views should be otherwise. The churches, laity, and clergy of the diocese are not of one mind on these issues. No cleric or church is required to initiate a process for same-sex marriage in their congregation. What the clergy of the diocese are asked to do is to minister pastorally with their gay and lesbian members in helping to make provision/referrals for couples who desire to have access to these liturgies. The attached policies explain how that is to occur.
Therefore, enclosed with this cover letter are the diocesan policies, procedures, and provisions regarding same-sex marriage in accordance with General Convention 2015 Resolutions A054 and A036 (copies attached). A054 authorized trial use liturgies, and A036 amended the Church's Canon on Marriage (I.18), removing references to "man" and "woman." These resolutions become effective on the First Sunday of Advent, 2015. Until then, all current policies regarding marriage and same-sex blessing remain in effect.

In our life together and in our common mission, we have worked hard to maintain the unity that we have received in Christ for the sake of proclaiming and working for his Kingdom. Honoring God above all else, we gather at the foot of the cross as we seek to follow Jesus in loving and serving all of our brothers and sisters in Christ, including those with whom we disagree.

The authorized trial use liturgies, *The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage* and *The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage 2* (found in Liturgical Resources I: I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing, Revised and Expanded 2015) will be in final form from the General Convention office in November; and we will provide them to you at that time.

We have tried to anticipate the many questions about how clergy and congregations can make decisions about these matters, but we also realize that you may have questions after reviewing the policies. Please do not hesitate to contact us if that is the case.

Faithfully,

Bishop Lillibrige

Bishop Reed
Policies for Use of Trial Rites for Same-Sex Marriage
in the Diocese of West Texas

Section I: General Policies

Prior to the bishop's permission being granted to a congregation to perform same-sex marriages, the clergy and the Vestry/Bishop's Committee are required to conduct congregational conversations on the topics of homosexuality and same-sex marriage. The decision as to when or if a process for these conversations is to be initiated shall be at the sole discretion of the rector, vicar, or priest-in-charge in consultation with the wardens and vestry.

I. "It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to solemnize or bless any marriage." (Canon I.18, section 7) No priest canonically resident or licensed in this diocese shall be expected or required to officiate at any marriage, within or outside his or her congregation.

II. No parish or mission will be required to make provision for the solemnization of same-sex marriages within their congregational life, or on their premises. Vestries and clergy may choose to dissent from these actions or support these actions. Resolution A054 states that the General 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." Faithful Christians do disagree on these matters, even as we all come to foot of the cross in humility.

III. Clergy who serve congregations that do not allow such solemnizations and who wish to officiate at a same-sex marriage in another location may do so, only with the advice and consent of the Bishop, and with the permission of his/her Vestry or Bishop's Committee.

IV. No parish or mission will be permitted to be a place where same-sex marriages are solemnized, without the mutual agreement of the rector and Vestry, or vicar and Bishop's Committee.

V. Congregations being served by an interim rector will not be permitted to engage the process by which the solemnization of same-sex marriages might be allowed.

VI. Unless otherwise noted, all current policies regarding marriage and remarriage within the Diocese of West Texas remain in place.
Section II: Guidelines by Which Permission to Solemnize Same-Sex Marriages may be Granted

Resolution A054 states that diocesan bishops "will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies." And further, "Trial use is only to be available under the direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop." In order for a congregation in this diocese to gain permission from the Bishop to solemnize same-sex marriages using the trial rites, the congregation must willingly enter a time of serious study, teaching and conversation, following the guidelines provided. Communication within the congregation and with the Bishop will be deemed essential throughout this process. No congregation is required to undertake this process.

In all that follows, "rector" and "Vestry" should be understood to mean "vicar" and "Bishop's Committee" as well.

I. The rector shall notify the Bishop of pending formal discussion of same-sex marriage at an upcoming Vestry meeting. If the Vestry votes in favor of entering the process of parish-wide study, prayer, teaching and conversation, such vote will be taken in open session. While consensus is not needed to proceed, a supermajority should be the aim. A closely divided Vestry should prompt the members to consider carefully if this is the right time to enter into such a process. Whether the Vestry votes to proceed or not, the rector shall notify the Bishop.

II. If the Vestry and rector formally agree to enter into this process, that decision will be communicated to the entire congregation, along with the proposed timeline for this parish-wide study, teaching and conversation. All members shall be invited and encouraged to participate. It will be the Vestry and rector's decision as to whether or not non-members and/or Episcopalians from other congregations may participate.

III. Should the Vestry vote to enter into this process, the rector shall notify the other clergy within the convocation.

IV. More than one congregation may join together for all or part of this process, by mutual consent of their rectors and Vestries. However, reports to the Bishop and requests for permission to solemnize same-sex marriages (if such a request is made) must be made by each rector and Vestry.

V. The rector and Vestry shall develop a process for considering communally the solemnization of same-sex marriages that is reasonable and suited for their congregation. A timeline of at least 120 days shall be established, during which a series of teachings, study and conversation will be offered in such manner and settings that a great majority of members of the parish are able to participate.

VI. The rector and Vestry will do all in their power to ensure that these conversations are respectful, and that the variety of views on same-sex marriage are articulated and honored.
VII. While rectors and Vestries have leeway in the amount of information and the manner in which it is presented, it is expected that the process will include, at a minimum, consideration of the following:

+ Resolutions A036 and A054, passed by General Convention 2015.
+ A thoughtful and prayerful engagement with questions about creation and God’s purposes for creation; what it means to be made in God’s image; biblical considerations of human sexuality; covenantal relationships; the place of sin, grace, and mercy in these considerations; and genetic and environmental factors which are involved in sexual identity and behavior.
+ The Church’s historical teaching about Christian marriage.
+ Biblical passages relating to marriage and same-sex relationships.
+ Teaching on the nature of Christian marriage that emphasizes monogamy, fidelity, sacrifice, unity and reconciliation in a culture of sexual excess and sin.
+ Ways that contemporary biblical scholars and theologians have sought to conscientiously interpret Scripture and tradition in regard to same-sex marriage.
+ Possible impact, positive and negative, of same-sex marriage on The Episcopal Church’s mission and ministries, domestically and abroad.
+ Possible impact, positive and negative, of same-sex marriage on the life and ministries of their own congregation.

VIII. The diocesan office will work with congregations upon request to assist in planning, gathering resources and arranging for facilitators, if desired.

IX. The Vestry will ensure that the gatherings to consider these matters are well-publicized and accessible to the largest possible number of parishioners, and that the entire congregation is kept informed as the process unfolds.

X. At the conclusion of the process, the Vestry will communicate to the congregation whether or not they intend to request the Bishop’s permission to offer the solemnization of same-sex marriages. The Vestry is encouraged to seek responses from all parishioners, whether for or against, and allow sufficient time for those responses to be received and considered. This polling is for information purposes, to assist the rector and Vestry in reaching a prayerful decision, and is non-binding upon the Vestry.

XI. After receiving participants’ input, the Vestry may choose to deliberate and vote, or to not vote, in regular session. Should the Vestry’s decision be to request the Bishop’s permission, it shall be recorded in the minutes and communicated in writing to the Bishop, along with a description of the process that was followed by the congregation. If the Vestry votes to not request the Bishop’s permission, or refrains from voting, that should be communicated to the Bishop in writing, as well.
Section III: Making Provision for Same-sex Couples who Desire to be Married

Resolution A054 states, "Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority...will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to (the Trial Rites)."

I. The Bishop will make provision primarily by means of the process outlined above.

II. Clergy and congregations within the Diocese of West Texas which are given permission to use the Trial Rites should consider whether or not they are willing to be a means by which the bishop may make provision for same-sex couples from congregations within the diocese which do not wish to be a place where same-sex marriages are solemnized.

III. Given the Church's requirements for marriage and remarriage, it is expected that at least one of the parties be baptized. In addition, the same standard from the diocese's long standing policy for remarriage of heterosexual couples also applies here, namely: Clergy who forward a petition for remarriage after divorce must certify to the Bishop that at least one of the parties seeking marriage is, or intends to become, a member of the parish served by the clergy petitioning.

IV. In all cases, it is expected that the priest shall ascertain that both parties are legally able to be married, and that appropriate pre-marital counseling be provided by the priest or another person competent to do so.

V. Priests who decline to solemnize same-sex marriages shall assist same-sex couples in their congregations who desire to be married to find a place and a priest where the Trial Rites may be used, consulting first with fellow clergy in congregations where such marriages are solemnized, and then, as needed, with the Bishop's office.

VI. If for whatever reason, a same-sex couple, otherwise qualified to be married, is not able to find a location within the diocese where their marriage can be solemnized, or is not able to secure a priest who can offer pre-marital counseling and officiate, the Bishop's office will work with the couple to find a location and a priest in a neighboring diocese.

VII. Priests who serve in congregations that do not allow the solemnization of same-sex marriages, but who themselves desire to officiate at such a solemnization, using the Trial Rites, may do so, only with the advice and consent of the Bishop and the permission of their Vestry.
Section IV: Use of the Trial Rites

I. Clergy granted permission to officiate at same-sex marriages are permitted to use only those liturgies approved in Resolution A054.

II. Clergy and couples are not permitted to alter, shorten or add to these liturgies, except as allowed in the rubrics.

III. The Marriage Rites in the Book of Common Prayer may not be adapted for same-sex marriages.

Reporting

Because the liturgies for same-sex marriage are Trial Rites, reporting by clergy using them to the Bishop's office is required. This reporting will include a description of pre-marital preparation and an evaluation of the liturgy used.
Resolution A054

Adopt Resources and Rites from "Liturgical 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 "Liturgical 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 1: 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.
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.