



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When the Episcopal Church authorized a rite for blessing same gender unions for trial use in resolution A049 from the 2012 General Convention, the resolution in question gave discretion to diocesan bishops to decide how best to respond to the resolution in their local context during the next three years. Accordingly, Bishop Ed convened a small group of lay and clergy leaders from around the diocese to help him craft policies and a liturgy appropriate for use in the Diocese of Oklahoma. A special concern of his was to articulate clearly the distinction between the Church's action in blessing unions and civil marriage in Oklahoma, where, as a matter of secular law, same sex marriage is contrary to the state's Constitution. He also expressed the desire to respect the various responses that congregations and clergy would make to the resolution in ways that would provide principled and pastoral leadership for all Episcopalians in Oklahoma.

As chair of the committee, I have been blessed to serve alongside Oklahoma Episcopalians who bring a variety of perspectives, gifts, and experiences to our work. What stood out for me most was our common love for Christ, his Church, and its mission. It should not be assumed that any one of us necessarily agrees with the decisions of General Convention, though some of us do. Nor should it be assumed that we all agree with every detail of the draft policy documents that we have produced and the Bishop has revised for consultation throughout the diocese. It is important to remember that we have served as advisors to the Bishop and the policies are ultimately his.

The time has come to share our proposals to the Bishop with the diocese as a whole. The Bishop has asked for input from clergy and lay members of the diocese before adopting the policies that will take effect on the Day of Pentecost this year. In the next few days, draft documents will be published on the diocesan website with an email address for electronic feedback. (Note: all feedback must come with a name and congregational affiliation. Anonymous feedback will not be considered.) In addition, three opportunities will be given for face-to-face interaction with the Bishop and members of the committee. The Bishop has asked that the times and places for these meetings be announced at Sunday worship in all congregations in the Diocese of Oklahoma on Sunday, February 21. They are as follows:

Tuesday, February 26 at 7 p.m. St. Patrick's, Broken Arrow
Saturday, March 2 at 11 a.m. at St. Paul's Cathedral, Oklahoma City
Monday, March 4 at 7 p.m. at St. Andrew's, Lawton

The committee's mandate from Bishop Ed has been clear. Our purpose is neither to debate moral theology nor to consider the wisdom of resolution A049. That was a matter for the discernment of the Bishops and Deputies gathered in Indianapolis last summer. Our task was an equally important one, however, namely helping to craft policies for implementation that would work here in Oklahoma. The Bishop needs your feedback so that his policies can provide clear pastoral direction to clergy and congregations about the norms governing same gendered unions in our diocese.

This comes with prayers for a Holy Lent for all of us. May our Lord Jesus Christ use this season of prayer, self-denial, and works of mercy to renew us in his love and prepare us for the joy of his resurrection.

In Christ,
Fr. Bill Carroll, TSSF, SCP
Rector, Emmanuel, Shawnee
Chair