



GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Seeking and serving Christ in all persons,
striving for justice and peace among all people,
respecting the dignity of every human being*

November 4, 2011
20 Pentecost

Dear fellow parishioners,

With gladness and thanksgiving, Vern and I, as your clergy, want to let you know that the Episcopal Diocese of San Joaquin has approved same-gender blessings:

Effective on Pentecost, June 12, 2011, clergy in the Diocese of San Joaquin may perform blessings of same gender civil marriages, domestic partnerships, and relationships which are lifelong committed relationships 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.” Said relationships shall be called “Sacred Unions” for purposes of the blessing and recognition of these relationships. A liturgy authorized for use within the Diocese will be published separately.

It must also be recognized that the Canons of the Church currently limit marriages to opposite sex couples, as does California law. Accordingly, until such time as both the Canons and state law permit the solemnization of the marriage of a same gender couple, and specific authorization of the bishop is given, no priest of this Diocese shall attempt to solemnize a marriage between two persons of the same gender.

The Diocese speaks of the “Authorization for the Blessing of Sacred Unions.” Note—this is important—that with this title the Church does not speak of “LGBT Unions” or “same-sex” or “same-gender” unions. The point is that such a blessing is a sacred union, and the gender(s) of the couple doesn’t matter. All unions can be sacred.

That said, as the second inset paragraph above makes clear, both the Church and California currently limit marriage to opposite-sex couples. Let us pray for both of those to change and let us work towards making that change.

The Book of Common Prayer (http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/formatted_1979.htm) contains both a “Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage” (p. 423) and “The Blessing of a Civil Marriage” (p. 433). Practice in this country has long allowed clergy to function as civil servants and marry couples civilly, that is, legally. The religious solemnization of the marriage takes place within this marriage service: “The Blessing of the Marriage.”

Sacred unions are not only a covenant between two persons but also within both the Body of Christ and within our local community of faith. As the Service for the Blessing of a Sacred Union, approved for use in the Diocese of San Joaquin affirms:

The priest says to the congregation.

We have gathered to celebrate the joining of N. and N. in a Sacred Union. This covenant is the promise of hope between two people who love each other, who understand their love as a gift of God, who trust that love, and who wish to share the future together....

Here in the presence of God we recognize and bless their relationship as they begin/continue their life together in the community.

The Episcopal Church requires that at least one of the parties for a sacred union must be a baptized Christian. The canon about one person being baptized is not intended to be exclusive but rather to acknowledge that in the Episcopal Church, as part of "one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," couples within a sacred union are both individuals and couples within the Church of Christ.

Therefore, Vern and I agree that for couples who wish to have the Blessing of a Sacred Union at Grace, one person needs to be a baptized Christian and at least one person need to be member of Grace's community. It is also the practice of our Church, one with which we agree, that couples wishing to have their union solemnized meet with one of the clergy to discuss living in Christian union, and take part in outside counseling by a licensed person.

The diocesan documents may be found at

- Authorization of Blessing of Sacred Unions
http://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/1100773/AuthorizationOfBlessingOfSacredUnionsFinal.pdf
- Concerning the Service of Sacred Union and Blessing
http://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/1100771/ConcerningTheServiceOfSacredUnionAndBlessing.pdf
- Service for the Blessing of a Sacred Union
http://s3.amazonaws.com/dfc_attachments/public/documents/1100772/SanJoaquinRiteSacredUnion.pdf

If you wish to discuss this or get more information, please speak to Tim or Vern. If you are a parishioner and wish to schedule The Blessing of a Sacred Union, please see Tim.

Grace and Peace,

Tim

The Rev. Dr. Tim Vivian
Vicar

Vern

The Rev. Dr. Vernon Hill
Associate Vicar



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respectful diversity and generous orthodoxy