

Policies and Procedures for the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions in the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania

General Provisions

1. Authorization for a clergy person in charge of a congregation to preside at the blessings of Same-Sex Unions (hereafter referred to as a 'union') in a particular congregation requires written permission of the Bishop. The Bishop will grant permission to clergy in charge of congregations with the following as minimum guidelines.

(a) The clergy person in charge will lead or make provision for a conversation with the members of the congregation on the theological and other relevant issues related to the blessing of a union.

(b) The clergy person in charge will consult with the vestry or bishop's committee about whether the blessing of a union will be part of the ministry of a particular congregation and will send a letter to the bishop that describes the nature of the conversation. The letter should be signed by the clergy person in charge and the secretary of the bishop's committee or vestry.

(c) A member of the clergy who is canonically resident in the diocese and who is not in charge of a congregation may preside at the blessing of a union provided that he/she has the written permission of the bishop and the clergy person in charge of the congregation where the blessing is to take place and provided that the clergy person in charge of that congregation has been authorized by the bishop to bless unions in that congregation. If such a clergy person is the member of the staff of a congregation, he/she needs only the permission of the clergy person in charge.

2. In every case, at least one of the two persons requesting the blessing must be a communicant in good standing of a congregation of the Diocese.

3. Prior to the blessing of a union, the couple must receive adequate counseling. The minimum level counseling will follow the guidelines in the document *I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing* (available on the diocesan website).

4. The blessing will take place only in the context of the local congregation. Alternate locations for the blessing such as homes, parks, beaches, or other such venues are not authorized.

5. The priest shall only use the rite authorized by the 2012 General Convention. No alterations to the rite are permitted except those allowed by the rubrics.

6. Each couple will sign the declaration of intention of a lifelong covenant provided on the diocesan website.

7. The clergy person presiding at the blessing of a union shall report the blessing to the bishop using the form provided by the diocese.

8. The blessing of unions shall be recorded in a separate register using the form provided by the Diocese to be kept in the congregation in which the blessing takes place, and no blessing shall be performed without such record.

9. Clergy must obtain written permission from the bishop of this diocese to preside at the blessing of any union outside of this diocese.

10. The clergy person in charge retains the right and responsibility to determine

whether any union shall be blessed [pursuant to Canon III.9.5].

11. It shall be within the discretion of any priest to decline to bless any union.

Concerning the Blessing of a Union When a Previous Marriage or Union has been Dissolved

12. When presented with a union that is imperiled, a priest must act first to protect and promote the physical and emotional safety of the couple, and then to promote reconciliation.

13. Any member of this Church who seeks the dissolution of a union, or who seeks permission to enter into a subsequent union, may apply to the Bishop for a judgment. Such judgment may be a recognition of the nullity, or of the termination of the union; 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.

14. No priest of this Diocese shall bless the union of any person, except as hereinafter provided:

(a) The priest shall be satisfied by appropriate evidence that any prior marriage or union evidenced by a formal civil proceeding has been dissolved by a final judgment or decree of a civil court of competent jurisdiction.

(b) The priest shall have instructed the parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse or partner, and of any children of the prior marriage or union;

(c) The priest shall have received consent from the bishop using the form available on the website.

(d) The priest shall have received authorization by the Bishop to officiate according to the section 1 of this document.