

# Guidelines for the Blessing of Same Sex Unions in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

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After extensive consultation with clergy and laity in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, the following guidelines have been established to enable the use of the rite approved by the 77<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania for the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions.

1. The Blessing of Same Sex Unions may occur in the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania only after permission for use of the rite approved by the 77<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church has been obtained from the diocesan bishop.
2. Permission for the use of the approved rite will be granted by the diocesan bishop on a parish-by-parish basis.
  - a. The Rector (or Priest-in-Charge) may request permission of the bishop only after consultation with the Vestry of the parish, having obtained an affirmative consensus.
  - b. The required consensus should be the result of informed deliberation and prayerful discernment on the part of members of the Vestry. The Vestry should not be asked to “vote” on the use of the rite within the parish.
  - c. If there is a difference between the Rector or Priest-in-Charge and the Vestry, the bishop’s permission will not be given for the parish to use the rite until such difference is resolved and a request for permission made as in “a”, above.
  - d. No parish or member of the clergy will be compelled to celebrate the rite.
3. If a parish does not seek permission for the rite to be used within the parish, the matter may be revisited at such time when such a request may seem more amenable to the Vestry and Rector/Priest-in-Charge.
4. Upon the granting of permission, *only* the rite approved by the 77<sup>th</sup> General Convention of the Episcopal Church may be used. (The *Celebration and Blessing of Marriage* contained in the Book of Common Prayer may *not* be used to bless the union of same-sex couples.)
5. Before the celebration of the rite in a parish where permission has been granted, the parish clergy must make provision for appropriate counsel and spiritual guidance for the couple seeking the Church’s blessing in a manner similar to that provided for couples seeking Christian marriage.
6. Rectors/Priests-in-Charge are to exercise the same pastoral discretion in providing the rite that they provide for those seeking Christian marriage.
7. Parishioners in parishes where no permission has been granted may seek the rite in a parish where permission has been granted, provided all other conditions for celebration of the rite have been met (e.g., pastoral counsel).

As in all things, all parties involved must be treated with the godly respect called for when Christ commanded us to love one another as he has loved us. No person should be denigrated or held in less esteem for holding conscientious convictions that differ from others in their parish on this matter.