

MARRIAGE

THE TOPIC

There were three basic issues. First, would same-sex couples be able to be married in their home church with no provisions different from heterosexual couples? Second, what liturgies would be available to all couples, and would they be part of the Prayer Book, which would mean a revision? Finally, would a blessing service be made available for use by couples who, for whatever reason, could not use the marriage ceremonies of the church?

WHAT HAPPENED AT GENERAL CONVENTION

Essentially, a compromise resolution was drafted by a small group of bishops and deputies to move forward the position that the sacrament of marriage should be available to all couples who legally can be married. The resolution assumes bishops have not normally been involved in who gets married in local congregations unless one of the parties has been divorced. Thus the decision was returned to the congregational level. However, the resolution also recognizes that the decision by a local priest and congregation might put them at odds with their bishop. A provision was included that, if necessary, an outside bishop might be brought in to serve the pastoral and oversight needs of the couple and congregation. The resolution begins with the wishes of the couple to be married in their home congregation and spells out how that can happen

In terms of which liturgies may be used, General Convention approved the two marriage liturgies in *I Will Bless You and You Will be a Blessing* for trial use until the next comprehensive revision of the Prayer Book. Also approved were the Blessing of a Civil Marriage and Order for Marriage 2 in that book. Provision was made (but no money allocated) for the materials to be translated and made available electronically.

Finally, a service for the blessing of same-sex couples was approved for those countries where same-sex marriage is not legal.

FAQS

Does a couple need the bishop's approval to be married?

Not normally. While the intent of the legislation was that the answer be no, a few bishops have argued that, since they are the rector of mission congregations, they have the authority to decide whether same-sex marriages can take place in the missions. The language is sufficiently muddy that there is likely to be challenges in several dioceses.

Who can use which marriage service?

Any couple may use any service, Prayer Book or trial liturgy. Some liturgies may seem more appropriate for a couple than others.

Can an elderly couple concerned about financial repercussions opt to use the blessing service instead?

No. Several lawyers were convincing that this was a dodge of the law that would likely not hold up in court anyway.

Does a priest have to perform a same-sex marriage if asked?

No. The canons already make clear that no clergy can be compelled to perform any wedding, and the resolution reinforces that.

When can the new liturgies be used?

Advent I (December 2), 2018.

NEXT STEPS IN OUR DIOCESE

This is, of course, Bishop Rodman's call. In the past, the provision has been made for clergy to use the liturgies approved by General Convention and to allow same-sex marriage.

QUESTIONS?

Contact Kevin Matthews (chaplain@stmaryshouse.org) or Athena Hahn (athenahahn@hotmail.com) for questions related to what the resolutions say or mean. Contact Bishop Sam Rodman (sam.rodman@episdionc.org) for questions related to diocesan policy.