

DIOCESE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
AUTHORIZATION AND GUIDELINES BY THE BISHOP FOR THE BLESSING OF
SAME-SEX UNIONS

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In March of 2010, in a majority vote of about 95% of the Synod, the following resolution was carried:

“That the Synod of the Diocese of British Columbia request the Bishop, at a time he judges appropriate, to grant permission for clergy whose conscience permits to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized; and that he authorize an appropriate rite and guidelines for its use in supportive parishes.”

The Bishops of The Anglican Church of Canada in an April 2007 Statement recognized *“a common strong concern for the pastoral care of all members of our church. While not all bishops can conceive of condoning or blessing same-sex unions, we believe it is not only appropriate but a Gospel imperative to pray with the whole people of God, no matter their circumstances. In so doing we convey the long standing Gospel teaching that God in Christ loves each person and indeed loves him/her so much that Christ is calling each person to change and grow more fully into God’s image and likeness.”*

In July of 2007 I authorized prayers for use at a celebration of a Eucharist with persons of the same gender who wished recognition of their union and prayer for their life together.

General Synod 2010 acknowledged and *“affirmed the full inclusion of gay and lesbian members in our churches, aboriginal voices in our midst, and the wide range of perspectives on the issue of same gender blessings across all dioceses. . . . and, . . . “We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses.”*

The Anglican Church of Canada does not recognize as marriage civil contracts between persons of the same gender. Therefore, permission to bless same-sex unions between persons who have been participants in duly *“solemnized and registered civil marriages,”* is not at this time an ecclesiastical recognition of those civil marriages, nor is the blessing given to people in these circumstances a “nuptial” blessing.

1. AUTHORIZATION

Effective January 1, 2013, and subject to the *Guidelines* below, permission is granted to *“clergy whose conscience permits to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized.”*

I do not authorise a Diocesan rite for the purpose of blessing, but commend the Rite established for this purpose by the Diocese of New Westminster, and which is attached as Appendix 1. If Officiants wish to use liturgical materials other than those included in Appendix 1, permission of the Bishop must be obtained.

2. GUIDELINES

Permission to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized, will be granted only in Parishes where a majority decision of Vestry requests such a status from the Bishop. The request to the Bishop must be made in writing, and must be renewed through Vestry action each time a new Incumbent is appointed and takes office.

Only Incumbents of Parishes where this permission is granted will be granted permission to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized. The request to the Bishop by an Incumbent must be made in writing, and must be renewed each time the Incumbent moves within the Diocese.

Clergy who are not Incumbents, (deacons, retired bishops or archbishops, assistant priests, assistant curates, honorary assistants, clergy "on leave," retired clergy of the diocese or living in the diocese – in other words anyone who is not an Incumbent) will not be considered for or granted permission to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized.

No member of the diocese, lay or ordained, shall be required to act against their conscience in the blessing of duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where one party is baptized. While I am unable to commit my successors in this matter, no "sunset clause" is intended in this conscience clause.

APPENDIX 1

A RITE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF GAY AND LESBIAN COVENANTS

CONCERNING THE RITE

Blessing is a common feature of Christian worship. For centuries the church has blessed people, places and things. Every prayer of blessing is thanksgiving for creation and redemption offered in petition for the fulfilment of God's purpose in the world.

All human relationships have the potential to be agents of God's purpose. Regardless of the specific characteristics of the relationship, the act of blessing does not make the relationship more holy but rather, in giving thanks to God and invoking God's holy name, releases the relationship to realize its full potential as an expression of God's love and peace.

The act of blessing recognizes the pre-existent reality of the relationship; confers the community's authority upon the recipients to conduct themselves as formal and public participants in such a relationship; establishes a communal context of responsibility, accountability and privilege; and petitions God to endow the partners with all such grace and strength necessary to fulfill the vows and commitments being made.

This Rite of Blessing is a public service of the church and is celebrated before God in the body of the church and in the presence of friends, family and the congregation.

Friends and family members are encouraged to participate in the Rite where indicated.

All matters relating to the conduct of the Rite shall be in accordance with the liturgical policy and practice of the diocese.

It is desirable that the order of service be incorporated into the Eucharist wherever possible.

GUIDELINES FOR ADMISSION

In order to request this Rite of Blessing each member of the couple must:

- a) be free to enter into such a covenant. That is, they must not be in an existing covenantal relationship, including marriage.
- b) Enter the rite with an understanding that the relationship is to be exclusive of any other partners and have the expectation of permanence.

- c) Satisfy the requirements of any previous relationship. This involves appropriate support of dependants from any previous relationship and the appropriate dissolution and meeting of obligations that arise from the same.

THE CELEBRATION OF A COVENANT

GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

Greeting

As the community gathers, a hymn, anthem, or canticle may be sung. Instrumental music may also be played.

The presider welcomes the community.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

After the greeting the presider may continue as follows:

Holy and Eternal One, in the quiet night you have called us each by our own name.

In our very heart you have named us beloved.

You surprise us by your grace.

We are the fruit of your boundless love.

On our exodus way you nourish and free us.

You give us companions for our journey.

You set us apart, shaped by our love, yet call us into the midst of your people,

Where we will be your word of blessing.

Here follows one of the following collects.

Let us pray,

Blessed are you, O Holy One, for you are pleased to dwell among us and to fill our lives with your presence. May N. and N. who seek your blessing upon their covenant be filled with your love. May their life together be to us a sign of your promised reign of justice and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Or

Searching and saving God, whose unfailing love alone can satisfy our longing, in your mercy you befriend those who wander in loneliness and shame, those oppressed because of difference, those who do not know the value of their unique and sacred gift. By your Holy Spirit you awaken in them the dignity of human being and the responsibility of embodied love, as perfected by Jesus Christ, who loved and gave himself for us, showing us the way to intimacy with you and with one another. We offer praise and thanks to you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Life-giver, for your love endures for ever. Amen.

Or

Blessed are you, loving God, for you awaken our desire for companionship and our hope for community with you and with one another. In your mercy you call us out of solitary darkness and redeem us to love you with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Renew in us a sense of true belonging and call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. We pray that the covenant of faithfulness and love we celebrate today will reflect your unending faithfulness and great love for the world. May N. and N. so love one another that they may be a blessing to you and all whom they encounter. We ask these things in thanksgiving and praise to you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, one God now and forever. Amen.

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

The Readings

Two or three readings, including a Gospel reading, shall normally be read.

If the Holy Communion is celebrated, then a Gospel reading must be included. Members of the family and friends of the couple may read the lessons. It is appropriate to respond to a reading with a psalm, canticle, hymn, anthem, instrumental music, or silence.

The following readings are appropriate for the celebration of a covenant. Other readings may be chosen in consultation with the presider.

Ruth 1.16-18; Song of Solomon 2.1-13; Song of Solomon 3.1-4; Song of Solomon 8.6-7;
Ecclesiastes 4.9-12;

Psalm 100.1-5; Psalm 107.1-9; Psalm 108.1-5; Psalm 111; Psalm 112; Psalm 126.1-3;
Psalm 133; Psalm 139.1-18, 23-24; Psalm 145; Psalm 146;

Romans 12.9-21; 1 Corinthians 13.1-13; 2 Corinthians 5.16-20; Galatians 5.13-14, 22-26;
Ephesians 4.25-27, 29-32; Philippians 2.1-4; Colossians 3.12-17; 1 John 3.18-24; 1 John 4.7-21

Matthew 5.1-16; Luke 6.32-38; John 15.9-17; John 17.1, 18-26.

At the conclusion of readings from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament writings other than the Gospels, the reader says,

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

Thanks be to God.

All stand for the Gospel. The reader says,

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to . . .

Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel is read.

At the conclusion of the Reading, the reader says,

The Gospel of Christ.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Sermon

THE COVENANT

The presider invites the couple to stand in the full view of the gathered community and addresses the couple in these or similar words.

A covenant is an ancient form of promise, a public declaration of commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible tells the story of God's covenant with human beings.

God's covenant with Israel was the basis of the people's liberation from slavery and exile. God's covenant with the followers of Jesus brings us into a new community where there is no male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, but one people united in Christ.

All our covenants with family and friends are signs of God's faithfulness and love. They are living expressions of God's promises to us and sources of hope to others.

Today we gather to witness and to bless the public commitment of N. and N. to such a covenant.

The presider then addresses the couple as follows.

N. and N., do you believe God has called you into a life-long covenant of love and fidelity?

Couple: We do believe.

Will you live together in love?

Couple: We will, with God's help.

Will you be faithful to one another?

Couple: We will, with God's help.

Will you support one another in love so that you may both grow into maturity of faith in Jesus Christ?

Couple: We will, with God's help.

Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the love of God in the world?

Couple: We will, with God's help.

The presider invites the couple to stand in full view of the congregation and to face each other.

Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn.

N., I give myself to you. I love you, trust you, and delight in you. I will share your burdens and your joys. I will go with you wherever God calls us. This is my solemn promise.

THE BLESSING OF THE RINGS (OR OTHER SYMBOLS)

The rings or gifts may be blessed saying

Almighty God,

whose love is eternal and whose blessings are unending,

make these rings/gifts to be to N and N

a holy symbol of their unity and love, so that even when apart,

they will remember the covenant they have made this day

and rejoice in each other's love.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

THE BLESSING OF THE COVENANT

The presider then addresses the community as follows.

You, friends and members of the families of N. and N., are witnesses to this covenant. Will you support N. and N. in the promises they have made?

We will.

Will you celebrate the goodness of God's grace evident in their lives?

We will.

Will you stand by them, encourage, guide, and pray for them in times of trouble and distress?
We will.

Do you give them your blessing?
We do.

The presider then says the following blessing.

Let us pray.

We give thanks and praise to you, O gracious God, for your unfailing love and wonderful deeds among us: for the splendour of creation, the beauty of this world, the mystery of our lives and the surprises of human love. We give you thanks and praise for N. and N., because you create in them the desire for intimacy and companionship, calling them out of isolation and exile, strengthening them against prejudice and fear, and embracing them in a family of friends and loved ones.

Pour out your abundant blessing upon N. and N. May they grow in love for one another and for all your creation. Lead them into accomplishments that satisfy and delight. Grant that in the years ahead they may be faithful to the promises they make this day, and that in the strength of the Holy Spirit they may grow together in the love, joy, and peace of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Blessed are you, O gracious God, source of all love, now and forever.
Amen.

The Exchange of the Peace

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
 (or The peace of Christ be always with you.)
And also with you.

The couple greet each other and then greet their families and friends.

If there is no celebration of the Holy Communion, then the liturgy continues with the Lord's Prayer and the Commissioning of the Community.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Prayer over the Gifts

During the preparation of the bread and wine, a hymn, canticle, or psalm may be sung or instrumental music played. The following prayer may be used.

Faithful God, with these gifts you offer us communion in your Servant, Jesus Christ. May we who celebrate this sacrament be filled with the same self-offering love made manifest in him. This we ask in Christ's name.

Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving

Any of the Eucharistic prayers authorized by the Bishop for use in the Diocese of British Columbia are appropriate for this occasion.

If a Proper Preface is needed, then the following may be used.

Blessed are you, gracious God, creator of heaven and earth; you are the source of light and life for all your creation, you made us in your own image, and call us to new life in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

The Lord's Prayer

After the Great Thanksgiving, the presider says,

As our Saviour taught us, let us pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Or

And now, as our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

The presider breaks the consecrated bread for distribution.

The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

The bread which we break is communion in the body of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

The Communion

Hymns or anthems may be sung during the distribution of communion.

THE COMMISSIONING OF THE COMMUNITY

A Litany of Blessing

After communion has been distributed, the presider, a friend, or a member of the family leads the community in the following litany of blessing. Additional petitions may be included if so desired.

Dear friends, N. and N. have been drawn by God into a covenant of mind and body, heart and will. We have celebrated this covenant and pray that the life they share will reflect the love of God for the whole world. Let us join in prayer asking God's blessing upon us as we go forth with N. and N. to proclaim with our lives the reconciling and renewing love of God made known in Jesus Christ.

Abundant God, Lover of all creation, pour out your blessing on us and the covenant we have celebrated.

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our solitude and our companionship,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our acts of tenderness and intimacy,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our delight at knowing and being known,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our acts of self-sacrifice to build up one another,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our being comfort to each other,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our passion for justice,

May we be blessed by you for ever.

In our generosity and tenacity,
May we be blessed by you for ever.

In all our fruitfulness,
May we be blessed by you for ever.

The Dismissal

A hymn or anthem may be sung before the dismissal or instrumental music played.

The deacon, or other leader, dismisses the people.

Glory to God,
whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.
Glory to God from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus, for ever and ever. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.