

Thursday, June 5, 2008

Dear Friends,

Greetings to you of Grace and Joy! I write to let you know of my reflections as well as of new liturgical guidelines in light of the new opportunity for gay and lesbian persons to marry in the state of California. First of all, let me express my personal joy in the Supreme Court decision. While this victory is not yet complete, the Supreme Court's decision is a deep breath of freedom that has been long awaited and fought for. Take in its refreshing spirit and all that this means for gays and lesbians not only here in California but for those around the world who do not experience a fraction of the freedom we enjoy in our country.

After reflecting with our Standing Committee, other California bishops, the chair of the Massachusetts task force on same-gender marriage and Bishop Tom Shaw, also of Massachusetts, here are the guidelines – for now. You may have a same-gender civil marriage and blessing in your church provided an Episcopal priest does not officiate at the marriage itself or sign the marriage license and the Book of Common Prayer is not used. For example, you may have a civil ceremony conducted by someone other than an Episcopal clergyperson, followed by a blessing of that union (which could surely include a Eucharist) by an Episcopal priest. Various liturgies have been used around the diocese for blessings; a practice which was approved by the 2004 El Camino Real diocesan convention. These guidelines are not a tremendous change from our previous guidelines, but rather an addition that helps us live into a new reality. As the national church proceeds toward full sacramental inclusion, so shall our diocese. As with all couples, your discernment and discretion is integral to the process of determining the suitability of blessing the marriage. My consent, per the instruction of the 2004 resolution, is still required.

Please know that I have decided upon the new guidelines in light of the current climate in our diocese and the national church as a whole, and looking ahead to the upcoming Lambeth Conference. They will be too liberal for some and not permissive enough for others. I welcome your feedback as we move through these historic times. Also, as a means of encouraging ongoing conversation and exploration, I am appointing a Task Force on Marriage and Family in our diocese. As I understand it, it has been a long time since El Camino Real has had any structured conversation about what distinguishes a Christian marriage and what it means to live with “Christian family values” in our tradition and in our very diverse world. While I rejoice at the election and consecration of Bishop Gene Robinson, it would seem that the deeper conversation about covenant relationships – no matter the gender – has been of less importance in a very political conversation about human sexuality focused on the specificity of

gender. I would like to have a different conversation, one less focused on gender but which looks more carefully at the theology of Christian marriage and family life as we understand them in our tradition.

We are in the midst of a very long conversation prompted by our awareness of the complexities of human sexuality and our desire to live in relationships of integrity with God and with one another. May we continue prayerfully, loving each other. May we extend grace and understanding to one another in the various ways we are experiencing these times. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and grieve with those who grieve. Indeed, may we honor the covenant relationship we share together with Christ, "bearing each other in all things."

My prayers and blessings to you for fruitfulness in our common ministry for Christ's sake,

+Mary

Mary Gray-Reeves
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