

October 25, 2007

Dear Friends,

As your Rector and Sr. Warden, we write to tell you about a small but important step in the pastoral care of the Chapel of the Cross. As you know, the Rector and the Vestry, in consultation with the parish, have been engaged in a discernment process according to Bishop Curry's guidelines about whether to extend our pastoral care to include the blessing of gay unions. Although no official rites of blessing have yet been approved in the Episcopal Church, our bishop has acknowledged for several years now that "clear and specific needs within the parish community" might lead a parish to "the possible exercise of this pastoral ministry." "My expectation," Bishop Curry wrote, is "that a decision to exercise this ministry will be arrived at by the rector after wide and extended prayer, conversation and education in the parish and in consultation with the vestry."

At its October 18 meeting, the Vestry of the Chapel of the Cross concluded our discernment process by passing this motion: "That the Vestry fully support the Rector's proposal to widen our pastoral care by offering the blessing of same-gender unions, following Bishop Curry's pastoral guidelines and adopting the parish's Guidelines for Blessing Same-Gender Unions of October 2007." The vote was 9 in favor, 1 opposed, with one abstention (and one member out of town). All of the Vestry were unanimous in their profound gratitude and respect for the discernment process and how it was engaged in by all who participated. Each member spoke of experiencing growth through the process in the fruits of the Spirit, e.g. in faith, in courage, in love for others. Speaking personally, both of us found this process and especially this final meeting one of the deepest experiences of grace in our long association with this parish.

The Rector has now informed the bishop of the Vestry's action and of his decision to make a pastoral blessing available to same-gender couples in the parish, according to the adopted guidelines (found at the end of this letter). He has also agreed with Bishop Curry's recent request, with respect to the September House of Bishops' statement in response to the Primates of the Anglican Communion, that any services of blessing be private, i.e. within the parish. Every effort will be made to keep this a pastoral ministry within the parish and out of the media; no media coverage or public statements will be involved. While we will certainly not act in secret, we desire to show respect and consideration for those in the Anglican Communion for whom this is a divisive issue.

To all in the parish who participated in the discernment process through prayer, through conversation, through written communication, we are profoundly grateful. If you find yourself in disagreement with this decision, we want to stress that in this parish, as in the whole Episcopal Church, there is no need for all to adhere to any "party line" (as reflected in the Vestry vote). With great humility, we all "see in a mirror dimly" in this life, and together we continue to seek God's will and the directions of God's renewing Spirit. Each of us contributes to the building up of the Body of Christ as together we participate at the Eucharistic table and are sent forth "to love and serve the Lord."

Faithfully in God's service,

Stephen Elkins-Williams
Rector

Name
Sr. Warden

GUIDELINES FOR BLESSING SAME GENDER UNIONS
Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill, NC
October 2007

This parish's guidelines for the blessing of a same gender union are as follows:

- At least one person in the couple is a confirmed communicant in good standing of the Chapel of the Cross who has contributed to and participated in the life of the parish for at least one year before beginning discernment and preparation with a member of the parish clergy.
- Both members of the couple understand that the expectation of this congregation is that they are pursuing a life-long committed relationship characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, and a holy love that enables the partners to see in each other the image of God and offer to the community the gifts of that love.
- The discretion of the clergy will determine which relationships will have rites celebrated in the parish.
- The clergy of the Chapel of the Cross will provide the specific liturgy used in the rite of blessing.