

September 21, 2014

To: Clergy Serving in the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia
From: The Right Rev. Mark Bourlakas

**On the Use of the Same Sex Blessing Rite--
“I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing”**

In 2009, The General Convention of our Episcopal Church addressed the issue of same-sex blessings by allowing priests to perform a blessing of a couple’s commitment with the approval of their bishop. This allowed for a “generous pastoral response” to our gay and lesbian members living in committed relationships.

The 2012 General Convention affirmed this pastoral responsiveness by creating and approving the liturgical rite: “I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing” for provisional use until 2015. **This blessing rite is now authorized by me and is available for provisional use in this diocese with my permission.**

It is available online free of charge. The rite and a short theological summary, both excerpted from the report of the Church’s Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM) titled “I Will Bless You and You Will Be a Blessing,” are posted at <http://library.episcopalchurch.org/link/liturgical-resources-1-i-will-bless-you-and-you-will-be-blessing> .

Like all of the pastoral rites authorized for use in our Church, this blessing is a pastoral ministry within the life of the worshipping congregation. As such, **proceeding with this rite must involve conversation with me and within the leadership of the parish as it is considered for use with members of the particular parish.**

This means that as clergy and their respective parish vestries consider the use of this Rite, they **must initiate a conversation with me regarding their plans and preparations for application within their parish context.**