

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF EAST TENNESSEE

The Rt. Rev. George D. Young, III

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Dear members of the Episcopal Church in East Tennessee,

Greetings in the name of Jesus.

Following feedback and further conversation, I have re-examined the second condition outlined in my November 17, 2015 letter on Same Sex Marriage – that at least one of the members of the couple shall be a baptized member of a parish in the Diocese of East Tennessee.

The primary reason for reconsidering this is that several parishes want to have a unified policy about weddings in their parish. That is, the guidelines for weddings in the parish will be the same for all couples. This seems to me an excellent idea.

It also leads me to encourage the leadership of parishes to carefully consider their wedding policies. Many parishes are very limited in who is allowed to have weddings there. This likely rises out of practical concerns, as it does require time and effort on the part of many people. But there is a larger issue – that of hospitality. I had the experience in a parish I was serving where we stopped to consider the message we were communicating as we regularly turned people away from hosting their weddings. It was clearly not a message of hospitality and community embrace. We then very much opened up who could celebrate a wedding at the parish, keeping the guidelines about premarital preparation, using the Book of Common Prayer, and having a tasteful liturgy. We found that people were very willing and eager to follow our guidelines, and it was a helpful and graceful embrace of our local community. This move gave the clergy and people of the parish unique opportunities to build relationships – at a very intimate level – with people not previously closely engaged with the parish. A great thing!

In light of these points:

- I am removing the condition that one of the members of a couple to be married shall be a baptized member of that particular parish. Continuing with the canonical guideline long in place, at least one member of the couple shall be a baptized person;
- I am encouraging parishes to seek to have a unified wedding policy, so that the same rules and guidelines apply to every couple; and
- I am strongly encouraging the leadership of parishes to carefully examine their overall wedding policies, seeking to proactively welcome those who are not presently closely in relationship with the parish community.

Thank you, God bless you, and happy Advent!

Peace in the coming Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George".

The Rt. Rev. George D. Young, III