

5.0 HOLY MATRIMONY

The ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States¹ has profoundly altered the landscape of the mission field in which we labor daily. The role we serve as leaders in the body of Christ is to serve the purposes of God in the world, and in Jesus, the Kingdom of God is present. The church's historical association with the state to further marriage was seen by the wider society as a blessing because Christians committed themselves to building strong Christ-centered marriages and families, which furthered the purposes of the state. However, the process of re-defining family has been underway in our country for many decades now as we have wilted under the pressure of a virulent secular humanism that is paired with a trenchant religious pluralism. The values base of our culture has become so broad, that the institutions upon which we have relied are being re-defined around values that as Christians we may abhor. The public debate is proving that the core values of humanism are replacing the values of Christianity in the structures of society. We find ourselves in much the same environment as those in the Apostolic and Pre-Nicene period faced in their interactions with Rome. We can take heart in this, because this period in church history saw rapid expansion of the gospel as those with a heart for Jesus braved the many challenges they faced and the Lord wrought in them, through the crucible of biblical faithfulness, a witness that drew others to Him.

The position of this Diocese on Marriage, the Family, and Single Life, is stated in the ACNA Canon VII, and is foundational for the policies and procedures to be followed in solemnizing a marriage. Please also review Title I (Certain Governing Principals) of the Diocese of Western Anglican Constitution and Canons.

A Prayer in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer well captures the *enormity* of the commitment that is to be solemnized, and reminds us of the Church's important responsibility when solemnizing a marriage:

O ETERNAL God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, Author of ever-lasting life; Send thy blessings upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy Name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to thy laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. 1928 BCP, page 303

Two Approaches: One Decision

In the light of the high court's ruling, the church is now at risk for litigation due to discrimination laws that will increasingly come before the state courts. This ruling is far-reaching, affecting Christian schools, Christian non-profit ministries and local congregations. Religious freedom is being impacted negatively and Christian individuals and groups are being required to make decisions about how we will interface with the wider community and government in order to further God's purposes and thereby advance His Kingdom.

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For us as pastors, we have a personal decision to make regarding our involvement in the legal actions associated with marriage. We have a responsibility to address both the short and long-term discipleship issues through our teaching and pastoral office, addressing our position on these matters and pouring ourselves into the work of strengthening marriages and families. We will undoubtedly be drawn into conversations with seekers and we must be skilled in leading them to Christ while also explaining a more gracious love that we have only in Christ, a love for which there is no substitute, and one that restricts our involvement in solemnizing any union of people other than that defined as Christian Marriage (See Provincial Canons “On Christian Marriage”). This is not a time to use the pulpit to harangue the political process, but to allow the Lord to shed light on His people through the careful and compassionate preaching of God’s Word, proclaiming His Lordship and compassion for those who hold a different view.

At this early stage, the ACNA is working to develop an approach that will allow the church to utilize every resource available to share good news with those who seek Him and to do all that can be done to minimize litigation. In my effort to secure feedback from the clergy, one deanery requested that this be a diocesan decision. Consequently, until we have the benefit of legal advice from the province’s legal team, every pastor who wishes to continue to officiate at weddings may do so. However, if you agree to officiate at a wedding, please be scrupulous in your efforts to comply with recommendations proffered by *Protecting Your Church* (adlegal.org, click Pastors. Click Resources.) and the guidelines outlined below. If you are uncomfortable with maintaining this position at this time, please simply communicate with me and alert me as to your decision.

Every clergy person canonically resident in the Diocese of Western Anglicans should have thoroughly reviewed the Constitution and Canons that guide us, both for our Province and for our diocese. As a reminder to all of us, we are servants of the Lord Jesus and our canons will allow us to officiate only at a marriage of one man and one woman. A violation of this canon (ACNA Canons Title II, Canon 7, Section 1) will trigger swift response by the bishop in accordance with the canons on clergy discipline. This is a boundary that is not to be crossed.

Congregation Preparation:

1. Prepare written documentation that is readily available to anyone and the policies appropriate for general usage should be available to everyone.
2. Prepare a communication vehicle to include:
 - a. Membership criteria
 - b. Facility use policy
 - c. Marriage and Life policy
3. Prepare and communicate your congregation membership policy, remembering to develop a coherent membership process, clearly stating norms, values and expectations of your congregation members.

4. Prepare and distribute your 'facility use policy', stating specifically that you use the property for 'religious purposes' and that any approved use will not conflict with the belief, doctrine, values and mission of your congregation. Make sure that this policy is included in any property usage documents and distributed to community-based groups that may inquire about usage.
5. Print your theology of marriage; feel free to use the theological statement printed in the ACNA canons Title II, Canon 7. Every couple who wishes to be married by you or your clergy must sign a Declaration of Intention to signify their agreement. (See Appendix P)

Procedures for Holy Matrimony and Solemnizing a Legal Union of a Man and a Woman

1. To Solemnize or Bless a legal union bears the same spiritual and canonical responsibility as does a legal marriage, so the preparation process and requirements shall remain the same whether you sign legal Marriage Certificates/Licenses from the State or only solemnize legal unions of a man and a woman.
2. Establish a season of pre-marital instruction that gives you 6 to 8 sessions with a couple. In this season, address:
 - a. What is a disciple of Jesus and how does one live out their discipleship in the local Christian community of which you are a part? The Biblical foundation for marriage should be made clear to the couple, as is well set forth in the 1979 BCP beginning at page 421. Attention should be given to Genesis 2:18-24; John 2:1-11; Ephesians 5 and Hebrews 13:4, so that the couple well understands the reason for marriage and the necessity of remaining married, despite the temptations and frustrations that come in any marriage.

People contemplating marriage need to be made aware that mutual romantic love is not enough to weather the storms and endure and persevere through long years of marriage, and that this is the very reason that wedding vows are necessary. The couple must confront both the purpose and the meaning of their vows in the wedding service, the text of which should be carefully reviewed with them and elucidated.

Premarital instruction must include an amount of Christian Catechesis appropriate to the couple's spiritual formation.

In sum, the purpose of premarital instruction is to ensure that the couple has carefully considered, and well understands, what Christian marriage is all about, in specific terms of God's plan for his people and their lives; also, why it is God's will for them to stay married (unless very weighty Biblically-

related causes should separate them). A helpful book on Christian marriage is *"The Meaning of Marriage"* by Tim Keller.

- b. Address the church membership requirements and enroll them in the church membership process you utilize to equip your people to live among and serve the people of God (if you don't have a formal process, then you will need to develop one).
 - c. Involve the couple in a pre-marital reflection process by using a researched 'couples analysis', such as the Prepare/Enrich Inventory, which is available online for them to take.
 - d. Of the 6 to 8 sessions, use a minimum of two sessions on the subject of Christian marriage and how it is distinct, referring to the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments.
3. If the couple is cohabiting, insist that they separate their use of common bedroom and bathroom facilities, including dressing areas. It is generally possible for one member of the couple to move into a separate bedroom during the season of preparation. In all cases, the couple must promise to live as celibates and to do so with integrity until the wedding date. Our society has so diminished the sacramental union of a man and a woman that many, if not most, of the couples you see who are seeking to be married will have developed a sexual relationship and many will have also begun to cohabit by sharing a residence. This makes everything more complex and sensitive for the couple, but it also provides you with an opportunity to teach the Christian doctrine of God's blessing on those who are in right relationship with Him. In light of the Scriptures, sexual sin by heterosexual couples is still sin and it cannot be blessed by God or by His pastors. Your understanding of this issue should also be included in your Marriage Statement so that it is clear and easily understandable to anyone who might read it.
 4. If there has been a divorce, please allow the couple time to reflect on the fact that you are required to seek the bishop's permission for re-marriage (**please complete the Petition for Re-marriage After Divorce**). Every proposed remarriage must meet the normative standards for Christian marriage. Considering timing, a person who has been previously married should not re-marry until at least one (1) year following the final dissolution of the previous marriage, allowing for an appropriate hiatus to allow for stress relief, reflection, healing, and spiritual regeneration. In the case of a surviving spouse, it is highly recommended that a person whose spouse has died should not be re-married before at least one year has passed.

Important to the decision for re-marriage are the following:

- i. Is there a legal document that you have reviewed and photocopied that establishes the divorce?
 - ii. In the case of one divorce, have you interviewed the couple on the circumstances for this divorce and are you satisfied that there are real grounds for considering this re-marriage (unrepentant adultery, abandonment, physical or emotional abuse, danger in the home, or life-altering circumstances, etc.)
 - iii. Please ask the divorced member of this couple to write a single page single-spaced description of the circumstances surrounding the divorce; include a reflection on what this person has learned from this experience and a reflection on how this person will walk with Jesus in the context of this new marriage
 - iv. The pastor will write a one-page description of their interaction with this couple and address his or her view of the spiritual life of the individuals, as well as, the spiritual life they hold together as they prepare for a stronger Christian witness through this marriage. Pay attention to the requirements as set forth in ACNA Canons, Title II, Canon 7, Sections 3-5, which deal with the Pastor's Responsibility. Send the couple's document and this document to the diocesan office. The bishop will require 4-6 weeks to spend time in prayer and reflection on this request. Expect a phone consultation with the bishop regarding this couple's life and any other pertinent details related to your process of preparing them for Christian Marriage.
 - v. In the case of multiple divorces, the person or persons must prepare written statements of sufficient depth to explain the reasons for dissolution of the marriages, including written police reports, testimony from other family members or knowledgeable friends, doctors or counselor affidavits that lend credence and proper justification for such action. The rector must also write extensively on the couple's involvement in the life of the local church describing their growth in Christ as disciples of Jesus. In the rector correspondence, the rector must communicate specific reasons why this re-marriage is justified. It should be noted that multiple divorces and re-marriages are very difficult to overcome.
5. Invite them to a couples retreat within 6 months so that their reflections on Christian Marriage may be deepened; Engaged Encounter is often available in your community, but if there isn't one, then find a Marriage Weekend and adapt it for married couples in your congregation and invite them to that (see Alpha Marriage, Sacred Marriage, Family Life Marriage Weekend, Love and Respect Seminars, etc.).
6. Ask them to review the "Bearing Witness to Holy Matrimony" document (See Appendix O) and also affirm, sign and date the Declaration of Intention (see Appendix H) for your records. Ask them to sign a Declaration of Intention (see

ACNA Constitution and Canons, Title II, Canon 7, Section 6), also, which clearly states the nature and purpose of Holy Matrimony.

7. Your property usage policy, which includes appropriate use of your 'sacred space' must be applied evenly and published for your church members to understand its purpose.
8. Prepare a pre-marital packet for distribution to couples and include:
 - a. Your Marriage Statement and/or Bearing Witness to Holy Matrimony from the ACNA and your language associated with cohabitation
 - b. Declaration of Intention
 - c. Your pre-marital preparation process outline with Scripture references and reflection questions
 - d. Information on the Prepare/Enrich Inventory or another one that you may use to assist your couples
 - e. A Statement of fees (honoraria, fees for musicians, tech support, etc.) and any Suggested Donations associated with property usage
 - f. Membership Process Introduction
 - g. Your Vision, Values, Mission document with doctrines and beliefs associated with the Anglican tradition and how they are applied among your people
 - h. Schedule and Enrollment form (if you use it) for New Members Classes and record the date of membership in the Canonical Register
 - i. Information on the Engaged or Marriage Retreat that you require
 - j. Your policy on Sacred Space and how you apply it to Christian Marriage
 - k. Requirements for divorced persons seeking re-marriage
 - l. Complete the Marriage Information Sheet prior to the marriage and record pertinent details in the Canonical Register following completion of the marriage service
 - m. Please keep a file on each couple with all documents that are pertinent to this couple
9. Please ACNA Rite for Holy Matrimony.

In as much as our worship calendar provides for penitential and semi-penitential seasons, please do all in your power to avoid solemnizing marriages during Lent, Holy Week and Advent.

10. Under no circumstances should you consider officiating at a wedding of two homosexual partners or solemnizing their union, as this is against the canons of our church and the words of Jesus:

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his

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wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”
(Matthew 19:4-6)

