

Same-sex Marriage in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas

Our Diocesan Policy and Frequently Asked Questions

If a priest wants to officiate a same-sex marriage in an Episcopal sanctuary, he or she may do so if the church has already been through a formation/discernment process and has received the Bishop's approval. Churches that have received the Bishop's permission to bless same-sex unions are automatically approved. Once a church is "approved" priests at the approved congregation may perform same-sex marriages without further approval, unless it is a second marriage in which case they must petition the Bishop.

If a rector wants to officiate a same-sex marriage outside an Episcopal sanctuary, he or she may do so. He or she does not necessarily have to serve at an "approved" congregation. An associate should ask permission from their rector before performing a same-sex marriage.

A priest is no longer permitted to perform a "blessing of a same-gender union." Furthermore, the same remarriage petition process applies to same-sex marriages and traditional marriages. Any information needed on what liturgy to use or how to get approved as a church to perform same-sex marriages can be found at <http://www.epicenter.org/unity/> in Bishop Doyle's policy paper.

Why does the Bishop allow for clergy and congregations to choose whether or not they will marry same-sex couples?

Our chief value in navigating this particular issue is unity as we work together in God's mission of reconciliation. Reconciliation means living with difference, celebrating our diversity, and building a peaceful commons.

What does the Bishop expect of his clergy as they navigate the issue of same-sex marriage?

The Bishop expects his clergy to act in accordance with their conscience, to understand and respect the viewpoint of those who see this issue a bit differently, and to adopt a posture of humility. A posture of humility requires clergy to place their perspective and practice with respect to same-sex marriage behind our common commitment to God's mission of reconciliation.

Am I required to officiate at a same-sex marriage?

No. Episcopal polity provides that each clergy be given the discretion to decline or solemnize any marriage.

May I still perform a "blessing of a same-gender union," as opposed to performing an actual same-sex marriage?

No.

Why does the final decision on marriage belong in the parish? Isn't this congregationalism?

We are drawing on the Anglican principal of subsidiarity, which means that "non-essential" issues are made at the local level. At the heart of our Episcopal ethos is a willingness to walk the via media, or the

“middle way,” which means that we live with difference and celebrate our diversity. Our unity is found in common prayer, as opposed to a common perspective on non-essential issues.

If a congregation wants to change their bylaws to self-differentiate as having traditional values, what would that process look like?

They will need to request permission from the Bishop Diocesan prior to proceeding. The vestry will be asked to go through a brief formation process to make sure their decision is fully informed.

If a congregation wants to marry same-sex couples, what would that process look like?

They will need to request permission from the Bishop Diocesan, who will require that the rector and vestry work through a process of preparation. The rector and senior warden will write the Bishop to confirm that a sufficient time of discernment has been carefully undertaken before the marriage takes place.

What if I am a clergy person serving in a congregation that has not received permission to marry same-sex couples? May I officiate a same-sex marriage?

Yes. Episcopal polity provides that each clergy be given the discretion to solemnize any marriage. However, the marriage needs to take place outside the sanctuary of the Church and you will still need the permission of the Bishop.

Do I need permission each time I officiate the marriage of a same-sex couple?

No. Congregations that have gone through a formation process and who have been approved to marry same-sex couples do not need to get permission with each subsequent marriage. The same principle holds true for clergy who have received permission from their Bishop.

Does our congregation have to go through a process and “choose” a particular course of action?

No. Not every congregation wants to deal with same-sex marriage or even discuss it. That is an acceptable option. However, it may be preferable for a congregation to be proactive and to go through a discernment process so that they are ready to offer a prayerful response to gay couples seeking marriage.