

## **The Episcopal Church's Endorsement of Same-Sex Marriage, and the Diocese of Central Florida**

*A Pastoral Letter from the Rt. Rev. Gregory O. Brewer,  
Diocese of Central Florida, July 18, 2015*

The Episcopal Church has never been very good at being “in the world, but not of the world.” Our tendency is to be in the world at the expense of Biblical faithfulness. I believe that The Episcopal Church's recent decision to change its canons to reflect a gender-neutral understanding of who may be married in our churches and by our clergy is a reflection of that kind of worldliness; and I believe those actions have been taken at the expense of Biblical faithfulness. While our motivation is our desire to care for people, we put ourselves in a spiritually dangerous position when our actions, however well meaning, put us in conflict with the teaching of Scripture. I am not saying that this is an easy or simple issue – it is not. And so, like the writer of Proverbs, I am “crying out for wisdom.”

I feel no need to change my stance regarding my lack of support for the Church approving same-sex marriages, and I plan to uphold the teaching on Holy Matrimony that is reflected both in the Scriptures and in the Book of Common Prayer. That is why I signed the Salt Lake City Statement of the Communion Partner Bishops. [see <http://www.livingchurch.org/salt-lake-city-statement>] I also want to uphold a call to compassion and care, and for the Church to extend grace, love and mercy to those who are in such relationships.

Both the Holy Scripture and the Book of Common Prayer teach that Holy Matrimony was “established by God in creation,” meaning that our created bodies matter. We are never disengaged from the fact that God made us male and female. Although there are friendships and companionships that we all enjoy, all of those friendships and companionships are distinct from the marital union of husband and wife, which is foundational for continuing the created order of humanity. In other words, Holy Matrimony is God's idea. God created and established it; and it is a way that God chooses to care for and provide for the continuation of the human family.

But while the union of husband and wife is foundational to the temporal and created order, it does not continue into the realm of eternity. Jesus is clear that in Heaven, there is “no marriage or giving in marriage” (Matthew 22:30). Human marriage is not foundational to the Kingdom of Heaven. Instead, through baptism we as Christians, regardless of our marital status, are all eternally united as the Bride of Christ to the one Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. All human relationships, both now and in heaven, are subservient to that one and eternal marriage between Christians and Christ. This means that all human relationships are to be seen in the light of, and in response to, our primary relationship, which is with Jesus Christ whom we call “Lord.”

It is this distinction between marriage as a part of the temporal and created order, and not part of Heaven – where all Christians (single and married) are united to Christ – that

informs my comments about how Christians respond to the Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriage. In that document, I wrote that:

1. Christians, all of whom are eternally bound in the Body of Christ, are called to work together, whether they are for or against same-sex marriage.
2. In the Body of Christ, we are called to make marital status secondary to the call of developing missionary disciples. All Christians, regardless of marital status, are called to serve together for the extension of the Kingdom of God.
3. Children, regardless of who their parents are, should be welcomed, nurtured and, when the appropriate vows are made, baptized into the life of the Church.
4. Holy Matrimony is to be taught and upheld as "the union of husband and wife in heart, body and mind" (BCP, p. 423).

Therefore, in response to actions of General Convention, I am upholding the teaching on marriage found in the Salt Lake City Statement of the Communion Partner Bishops, which coheres with both the Book of Common Prayer and Holy Scripture.

As a matter of diocesan policy, I offer the following:

1. As chief liturgical officer of the Diocese of Central Florida, I am allowing only the services prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer to be used in the celebration and blessing of a marriage. I do not believe the newly authorized rites for trial use uphold the Scripture's teaching on marriage and, therefore, are not appropriate for use in this Diocese.
2. No member of the clergy who is canonically resident in the Diocese (whether living in or outside the Diocese) is permitted to use the trial use liturgies on marriage in or outside of the Diocese. Choosing to use one of these liturgies would be an act of disobedience to one's bishop and against our diocesan canons.
3. No church building within the Diocese, or any building affiliated with the Diocese (such as, but not limited to, Camp Wingmann, Canterbury Retreat and Conference Center, Diocesan schools) may be the location for these trial use liturgies on marriage. This applies to clergy and lay leaders resident both within and outside the Diocese of Central Florida.

While I hope these policies are clear, they do not answer all of the questions that are in front of us. For example, it remains to be seen (and I am in conversation with our diocesan chancellor on this matter) whether our diocesan canons on marriage (though consistent with my policies as bishop) can legally remain intact if they be in conflict with the canonical changes recently passed by General Convention.

There are also pastoral considerations yet unanswered. I give only one example: should legally married same sex parishioners come forward for a blessing at their anniversary when it is the parish's custom to publicly offer these blessings? My answer would be to welcome them and pray for them – so long as the prayers used do not come from the BCP marriage service.

One prayer for such occasions could be, “O God, we ask that you pour your grace and mercies on N. and N. Guide them with your wisdom, protect them with your love and fill their home with your presence all the days of their life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. “

There are plenty of other pastoral and canonical questions. These require prayer, ongoing conversation and discernment. To call Jesus “Lord” means that He, who is Wisdom personified, is the One to whom we turn, asking the Holy Spirit guide to us into all truth (John 16:13). As I do not believe in episcopal infallibility, I acknowledge that I could be wrong about what I have just written. I am as sinful and fallible as anyone I know. I admit that this and other matters are sending me to prayer like no other time in my life. I would welcome prayerful conversation with my fellow Christians in the Diocese and beyond, as we seek to discern together the mind of Christ.

As I have written in other places, all of our pastoral and moral dilemmas are to be seen in the context of the ongoing missionary purpose of the Church: “that the world may believe in the One whom you have sent, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (BCP, p. 255). The Christian life does not call us to withdraw from the world, but engage it as a people who are learning to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-38). May God grant us all that we need to be His faithful and missionary people!

Given under my hand on July 18, 2015 in the fourth year of my consecration.

+Gregory O. Brewer

*14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15 and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*

*4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2 proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5 As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.*

– 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5