



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

315 East Pecan Street, San Antonio, TX 78205-1819

To: The People of St. Mark's Episcopal Parish
From: St. Mark's Episcopal Vestry
Re: Parish Conversations on Same-Sex Marriage Rites
Date: July 1, 2016

Dear People of St. Mark's,

The Vestry thanks you for your participation in the three sessions that the Parish held regarding whether St. Mark's should petition our Diocesan Bishops to authorize the celebration of same-sex marriage rites for our members. Over 190 parishioners participated in the three sessions held on one evening and two Saturdays during April and May, 2016. What is more remarkable than your participation as individuals, however, is how our community participated. Your participation and respect for each other during this process stands in stark contrast to what passes as "dialogue" in some other religious, social and political spheres of our society. While so many attempts to discuss difficult issues in other places result in anger, discord and disrespect, you who are St. Mark's engaged in real and frank conversation and listened to each other. The manner in which our members carried out this process serves as a witness to what it means to be members of a community in Christ.

This process started with the initial communication from the Bishops that was issued after the General Convention authorizing the Diocese to permit celebration of same-sex rites. After several parishioners requested access to these rites, the Rev. John Lewis and the Rev. Beth Knowlton, our Rector, spoke to the Bishops and the Vestry and set up a process for the Vestry to make an initial determination as to whether we would even begin these conversations. Once the Vestry developed a consensus in late 2015 about moving forward with these conversations, Beth and John prepared the materials and created the conversation format for the meetings. The Vestry is thankful to John and Beth for their leadership.

But the process that we just completed required far more effort. We thank our two Chairs of the committee that Beth established to lead this process, last year's Senior and Junior Wardens, Carl Leafstedt and Suzy Tackett. Carl and Suzy sought out members to act as coordinators for the tables at which our members carried out these conversations and along with John and Beth, prepared the committee members to act as moderators. Thanks to all who served as facilitators to be sure that all parishioners who participated could be heard. Together with Beth and John, Carl and Suzy's committee made the dialogue possible.

In order for Vestry members to know what was going on during these conversations, your Senior Warden, Cathy Dawson, requested that all Vestry members participate in at least one session of these conversations. We were sent to observe and hear directly what you were telling the facilitators and each other about this subject.

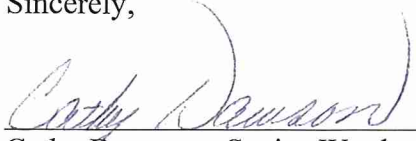
There was another part to this process. A number of parishioners met privately with members of our clergy to express their views on whether St. Mark's should offer access to this rite. While maintaining the confidentiality of such conversations, the clergy made sure that the Vestry was aware of the views that have been expressed to them by members of the Parish.

Since November when the Vestry took the first steps to explore whether St. Mark's should start these conversations, the process continued for another seven months. With all of the input from the three parish meetings, along with clergy input on their discussions, the Vestry met at its regular monthly meeting on June 21 to consider what our response should be to the issue of offering access to the rite of marriage to same sex couples. After hearing and considering the input from the Parish and after careful discernment, the Vestry has decided that we will petition our Diocesan Bishops to allow our clergy to provide access to the rite of marriage to qualified couples of the same gender. These couples like opposite sex couples, must meet the same qualifications and connections to our Parish and must participate in the same premarital counseling that is required of opposite sex couples. If the Bishops agree, the requirements to be married, both under canon law and parish practice, will not change. The rite would be opened up to same sex couples who are members of St. Mark's.


So the question arises, what is going to change if the Bishops grant their assent? The answer is that unless someone is an invited guest to a wedding or is voluntarily serving in the Altar Guild, as an acolyte, or other lay capacity at a wedding, there will be no observable change. Our worship and fellowship will be the same as before with our members, regardless of sexual orientation, all participating in the events of our community. No one will be required to participate in any marriage against his or her wishes. No clergy member will be required to participate in a same or opposite sex marriage or to give pastoral consent to any marriage. The rite will be opened up to qualified same sex couples.

In the current climate of discord in our greater society, attempts to address difficult issues are so often met with anger, derision and contempt. But thanks to you, the people of St. Mark's, our community was able to engage in conversation that was frank, open and constructive while creating a model to address other future parish-wide issues. We the Vestry are inspired by your example to us as your leaders and to the larger community. You are an example of how the wider world can address issues that seem to confound people. Again, on behalf of the Vestry, we thank you.

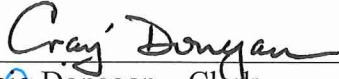
Sincerely,



Cathy Dawson – Senior Warden



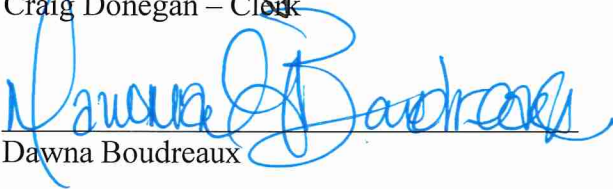
Craig Stokes – Junior Warden



Craig Donegan – Clerk



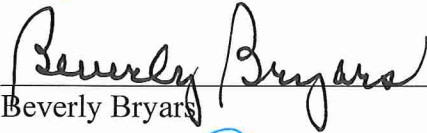
Paul Allen



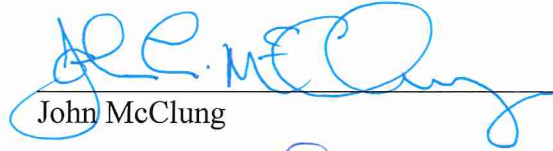
Dawna Boudreaux



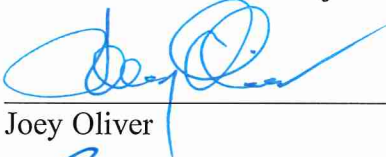
Jan Byley




Beverly Bryars



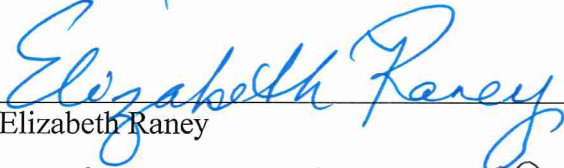
John McClung



Joey Oliver



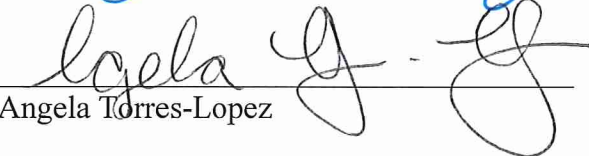
Robert Pollom



Elizabeth Raney



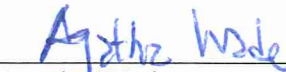
Anne Rochelle



Angela Torres-Lopez



Jill Vassar



Agatha Wade