



**ST. MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH – SAN ANTONIO, TX
FROM THE RECTOR**

July 2, 2015

TO: The People of St. Mark's

FROM: The Rev. Beth Knowlton

RE: Report on Marriage Resolutions from General Convention

Dear People of St. Mark's,

Below is a letter from Bishop Lillibridge, which I received this morning, summarizing the actions of both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. I encourage you to read his thoughtful and very cogent explanation of the resolutions and the actions that were taken. As of yesterday, liturgies for marriage of same gendered couples have been approved for trial use as of Advent of 2015 in the Episcopal Church. How this is to be enacted in individual diocese is still to be developed.

There are interpretive questions to be determined as to how this resolution is carried out, what direction each Bishop has in the process in each diocese, and what the full ramifications will be. You will see that our delegation and our Bishops voted as they felt called to do so, and they were not of a single mind on the issue. I suspect they very much reflect the spectrum of opinion that exists in the diocese and in our parish. I am grateful for the faithful and intentional way they have stayed in communication with us.

In terms of next steps for St. Mark's I expect the passage of these resolutions will probably change the process that was laid out by the Bishop in his April letter, which had granted permission to three parishes and only three parishes to use the trial rites in the diocese in the coming year. None of us know as of today what will be the next steps in our diocese, and I am grateful for the Bishop's leadership and clarity. I have no doubt that he will be in contact in the coming weeks about what the Diocese of West Texas can expect.

There will be a desire by some in our parish to explore usage of these liturgies that have received approval and I have already had conversations with people expressing that desire. There are also those who are not exactly sure how they feel and what might be the impact on our common life. There are those who are concerned about moving forward. Wherever you may find yourself, please know that I am available and willing to hear from you. I am happy to answer questions and hear your thoughts. We will also engage in an intentional community process once we hear from the Bishop.

In the coming weeks, I will discern with the leadership of our vestry, clergy, and all of you how to best commence a conversation at St. Mark's. We have yet to do this in an intentional way, and it will be a vital step as we move forward.

As faithful Christians, I am asking you to do what you already do so well, which is to be a presence of calm steady love that is only possible through the love we have received from Jesus Christ. We are in a strong and positive place as a parish, and we have a tradition of respecting and supporting one another in Christ-like love. Patience will be important as we await guidance and have a chance to discern how to best proceed in our community. There is not a deadline upon us and it will be important for us to do this with care and deliberation. I have every confidence that we will do this with faith and grace. As always, I am grateful for this calling to be amongst you as priest and companion as we answer God's calling.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beth +". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

TO: The Clergy of West Texas

FROM: Bishop Lillibridge

I am writing to you from the 78th General Convention of The Episcopal Church in Salt Lake City.

As previously reported, resolutions about the nature and definition of marriage have been front and center at this Convention. Last week, the Supreme Court ruled that same gender marriage is now legal across the country.

The two resolutions dealing with marriage, which have now passed both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops in the same form, are entitled A054 and A036. They are finalized and approved.

Bishop Reed and I realize that people of West Texas are experiencing a wide range of emotions. There are those who are happy, and there are those who are distressed. Your deputation is committed to honoring all, including each other. Some of us voted in favor of the Trial Use liturgies for same gender marriage, others voted against (A054). All voted against what we consider pre-mature canonical changes (A036) while this period of Trial Use is underway. We are encouraging each other to be clear about one's convictions while staying connected. It is a blessing to serve with such people.

Let's look at the main points of A054 first, since A054 was considered first in both Houses. This resolution has authorized the use of "Trial Liturgies" for same gender "marriage." These liturgies are authorized beginning the First Sunday of Advent in 2015. The resolution notes that, ***"Bishops exercising ecclesiastical authority...will make provision for all couples asking to be married in this Church to have access to these liturgies. Trial use is only to be available under the direction and with the permission of the Diocesan Bishop."***

Therefore, the Bishop has some amount of latitude in the authorization of these "Trial Liturgies", and at the same time must make some provision for their use. Bishop Reed and I will be sorting through the various interpretations of this when we return from General Convention, especially in light of the next paragraph.

The resolution also reiterates the wording of the last General Convention (in 2012) with regard to same gender blessings, namely: "It shall be within the discretion of any Member of the Clergy of this Church to decline to preside" and "that no bishop, priest, deacon, or lay person should be coerced or penalized in any manner, nor suffer any canonical disabilities, as a result of his or her theological objection to or support for (this Convention's) action..."

Finally, the resolution calls on the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to continue to monitor the use of this material and report to the next General Convention (2018 in Austin). This is what is meant by "trial use."

In the matter of A054, some in the deputation voted in favor, some against. This mirrors the variety of theological opinions present in our diocesan family. While there is much, much more to say on the matter by way of explanation on votes both in favor and votes against, let me say here that I voted in favor of the Trial Use Liturgies of A054, and Bishop Reed voted against. Likewise, our clergy deputation voted 4-0 in favor of A054, our lay deputation was 3-1 against.

There are understandable, faithful reasons for each vote, and both sides come at their perspective from their faith in Jesus and their care and concern for God's people. Both perspectives are held by committed disciples of Christ. We discussed all of this in great detail before we voted, and we have been praying for one another and this Church that we love throughout our time here. People who voted in favor are not God-less secularists, and people who voted against are not homophobic bigots. We are all trying to follow God and care for each other in this rapidly changing church and world.

Now let's look at A036 for a moment. A036 is a canonical change of the definition of marriage.

In essence, the change is this - although the entire Canon on Marriage (1.18) has been revised - the phrase "man and woman" has been replaced with "the couple" and "both parties." While there are a variety of opinions about whether or not this puts our Canon in conflict with our Episcopal Church's Constitution and the Prayer Book, we believe (as do others) that we should not change the Canons unless it is done in concert with Constitutional changes.

Furthermore, we do not believe the governing, legal documents of the Church should be changed until "Trial Use Liturgies" have actually been tried (see above comments on A054). Approving or rejecting resolution A036 has no effect on whether or not these Trial Use Liturgies could be implemented, so why create this confusion when the Trial Use Liturgies for same gender marriage can move forward? An "ordered" Church is better served by changing the Canons in concert with the Constitution. We also do not believe that we should change our guiding and legal documents without more thorough consultation with our Ecumenical and Anglican partners. Your West Texas deputation of clergy and lay persons, along with your bishops, all voted against the canonical changes of A036 for these and other reasons.

There are no quick and easy answers to the next steps, and all dioceses have some time to prayerfully consider their care for all of God's people. As I indicated earlier, these liturgies do not go into effect until Advent, so we want to carefully consider the path ahead. There is no reason to react in haste, but rather the greater good is to respond in a care-filled and well reasoned approach.

We are counting on you to help us take the long view, to continue to be people of goodwill toward your neighbors, and work together for the strength and health of Christ's Body in the vineyard we know as the Diocese of West Texas.