

Same Sex Blessings

Frequently Asked Questions -- DRAFT 2016/05/04

1. Why might same sex couples want to be blessed in a church when they can already be married by a marriage commissioner?

Christian men and women in same sex relationships desire to have a church service for the same reasons as Christian straight or heterosexual couples. A public ceremony in a sanctuary before God, friends and family is powerful and moving ritual. Not all couples, gay or straight, desire to have a church service to celebrate their commitment, but for those who desire it, the ceremony (or lack thereof) is significant.

2. Who might be part of a same sex couple a.k.a. What is meant by LGBTQ?

A same sex couple might be composed of men or women who self identify as any of the following:

Lesbian - a woman sexually attracted to other women;

Gay - a man sexually attracted to other men;

Bisexual - a person sexually attracted to both men and women;

Transgendered - a person whose self-identity does not conform to male / female gender;

Questioning - a person who is in the process of discovering their own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
Regardless of how they describe themselves, the adults who might come to us for a blessing are same sex couples that desire to publicly profess and celebrate their commitment to each other before God, friends and family.

3. What is the Anglican Church of Canada's position on Same Sex Relationships?

In 2004 General Synod "affirm[med] the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same sex relationships". In 2007, General Synod declared that the blessings of same sex unions was a matter of doctrine, though not creedal or core doctrine. During General Synod in 2013, it was agreed to vote whether or not to change the church's canon on marriage and "to allow the marriage of same-sex couples in the same way as opposite sex couples." Although some dioceses have been performing same sex blessings since 2002, to date there have neither been sanctions imposed by the General Synod, nor a formal statement regarding blessings or unions

4. What is the Difference between Same Sex Blessings and Marriage?

When a man and a woman are married in a church, both a civil ceremony and liturgical rite are typically part of the service. To perform such a service, Clergy must be licensed by the government for the civil marriage component and by the Church for the liturgical rite.

A same-sex blessing service does not use the same liturgical form as a marriage service, does not include signing a marriage register or license, and excludes the following elements that are part of the civil marriage service:

- Declaration of consent (“I do”)
- Opportunity for objections (“speak now or hold your peace...”)
- Statement that persons are “married” or “wedded”

5. Are Same Sex Blessings being performed in other churches in the Anglican Church of Canada?

Since 2002 congregations in some Dioceses have been performing same sex blessings by resolution of Diocesan Synod. To date, twelve Dioceses have established and followed a process for member congregations to individually seek leave from their bishop to perform same sex blessings. This includes three of five Dioceses in BC (British Columbia, Central Interior, and New Westminster), one of three Dioceses in Alberta (Edmonton), one of three Dioceses in Manitoba (Rupert’s Land), four of seven Dioceses in Ontario (Huron, Niagara, Toronto, Ottawa), both Dioceses in Quebec (Quebec and Montreal), and one of five Dioceses in Atlantic Canada (Nova Scotia and PEI); but none of the five Dioceses in the Territories or Saskatchewan. This is more than a third of the Dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada and these Dioceses include 14 of the 15 largest metropolitan areas in the country. Calgary, the fifth largest city is not among them.



6. What is the position of the Diocese of Calgary on Same Sex Blessings?

To date, the Bishop has not issued a formal statement on same sex blessings.

In February 2014, three congregations brought a proposed protocol for congregational choice regarding same sex blessings to the Bishop. Since then, these congregations have held congregational meetings, which, following the steps of the proposed protocol, have affirmed the choice the congregations to desire to offer same sex blessings. The Bishop has not given permission for parishes to perform same sex blessings and advocates further discussion and study within the Diocese. Diocesan sessions for Clergy and Laity were held in January and February of 2016.

7. What is the nature of the motion regarding the Marriage Canon at General Synod this year?

The motion proposes the following the changes to the Canon:

- Declare that the marriage canon applies to all person who are duly qualified by civil law enter into marriage
- Replace references to “man” and “woman” with the following gender neutral references: “partners” and “parties to the marriage”

The motion must pass with $\frac{2}{3}$ majority in each of the Houses of Laity, Clergy and Bishops, at two successive Synods in order for the canon to be amended. That is, if the motion were to pass in all three houses in 2016, it would also have to pass at the next Synod (~2019) before the Canon would be amended.

8. Didn't St. Andrew's already pass a motion in support of same sex blessings?

In 2007 the congregation held study sessions to consider scripture and church practice and raise awareness and understanding of Gays, Lesbians and the Transgendered within the church. St. Andrew's did not vote on same sex blessings at that time. The congregation was listed and remains on proudanglicans.ca as a “welcoming parish” for Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgendered. Five other Calgary parishes, and four others in the Diocese are also listed.

8. What motion will be presented at the June meeting?

“In response to General Synod's 2004 affirmation of the integrity and sanctity of same sex relationships, and b) our Diocese's call to embrace diversity, develop a ‘public voice’ and support parish level decision making, this Anglican Parish of St. Andrew's, Calgary, hereby declares

- i) that it is a community that welcomes and affirms persons living in committed adult same-sex relationships, and
- ii) wished to offer a pastoral response to such persons in the form of a Service of Blessing, using an appropriate liturgical rite”

And

That should at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the members at the special meeting be in favour of the motion, that St. Andrew's will request leave from the Bishop to perform blessings for committed parishioners in same sex relationships."

9. Who can vote at the June special meeting?

Every parishioner of the minimum age of sixteen years who is baptized and regularly attending worship services. Parishioners must be present to vote. Advanced polling is not permitted, since the motion may be amended from the floor.

10. What will happen if the motion passes at the June special meeting?

If the motion passes with $\frac{2}{3}$ majority, Parish Council will request that the Bishop grant us leave to perform same-sex blessings. If the Bishop says yes, and if our priest is approached, we would be able to perform same sex blessings for committed adults in a same sex relationship.