

October 27, 2010

The Rt. Rev. Shannon Sherwood Johnston
President, Executive Board
Diocese of Virginia
110 West Franklin Street
Richmond, VA 23220-5095

Dear Bishop Shannon:

On behalf of the Resolution 14s Task Group, I am sending to you by attachment 20 copies of our group's Report to the Executive Board of the Diocese of Virginia.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our Diocese. We stand ready to answer questions or to help in any other way we can in following up on our recommendations.

Yours in Christ,

Ed Jones
St. George's, Fredericksburg
Chair, Resolution 14s Task Group

**A GENEROUS PASTORAL RESPONSE:
REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF THE DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA
BY THE TASK GROUP ON
BLESSINGS
OF SAME-GENDER UNIONS**

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The 76th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, meeting in July 2009, recognized the “changing circumstances” surrounding marriage, civil unions and domestic partnerships “for gay and lesbian persons” among the members of our local churches. The 76th General Convention, through its legislative process, approved *Resolution C056* calling upon our Church to create an “open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships.” The General Convention *Resolution C056* also provided that bishops could “provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of this Church.” Finally, *Resolution C056* urged that “the members of this Church be encouraged to engage in this effort.”

That engagement has taken many forms in the Diocese of Virginia at the individual, congregational and diocesan levels. The engagement began before General Convention, including the Windsor Dialogue Commission, an extensive listening process stemming from the Anglican Communion Windsor Report. Much work and dialogue already have been done in our diocese.

Following General Convention, the 215th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia, through its legislative process, approved *Resolution 14s*, requesting that our Bishop empanel a group of clergy and lay people to make recommendations for “the effective and consistent pastoral ministry should same-gender blessings be authorized.” Bishop Shannon Johnston responded by appointing us to a Task Group for that purpose.

This is the report of our Task Group.

* * *

The diocesan *Resolution R14s* called for us to “recommend consistent standards to be written into diocesan canons so that, if services of blessing same-gender unions are authorized, our clergy and people have a clearly understood and enforceable set of rules to guide the application of clergy discretion in providing pastoral care to same-gender couples seeking such blessings.” The resolution further requested that we “report (including any proposed canonical language) to the Executive Board by All Saints Day, 2010, in time for careful and orderly consideration of its recommendations by the 216th Annual Council of the Diocese.” The resolution invited the Task Group to consider a broad range of issues and questions, many of which were enumerated in the resolution but not limited to those topics.

We came together, largely unknown to one another, with those tasks in mind. We have prayed together, listened and learned from one another, and striven for consensus. We have met seven times since our appointment, and each meeting took several hours. We also communicated frequently with each other between our meetings, primarily by e-mail and

telephone calls. Though our schedule was ambitious, we took considerable time for prayer, reflection and research.

We were keenly aware that the possibility of authorized same-gender blessings in our diocese would bring great joy and a feeling of wholeness to many. We were also keenly aware that same-gender blessings would bring considerable alarm and strenuous objection among many others. We were deeply aware of the divisiveness of this issue regardless of our personal opinions.

Our initial discussions led us to the decision that we needed to prepare for our work on a sound foundation of theological reflection and prayer. We further needed to bond spiritually with one another and to seek to understand one another's perspectives in ways that would promote listening, discernment and consensus. We chose to do this through a form of the *Indaba* process, modeled after the *Indaba* used by the worldwide Lambeth meeting of Anglican bishops in 2008 and repeated at General Convention in 2009. We found the *Indaba* process to be theologically powerful for us as individuals and as a task group. The *Indaba* process led us to three general principles to guide our work:

- 1- Providing for a “generous pastoral response” to those people in our diocese in a same-gender relationship who seek the blessing of the Church for their life-long committed union.
- 2- Paralleling the Episcopal Church requirements for Holy Matrimony as much as possible because those requirements offered the best possible guidelines for providing a “generous pastoral response” for those seeking the blessing of the Church.
- 3- Providing a “generous pastoral response” to those clergy and people who do not agree with the wisdom and theology of same-gender relationships, or the blessing of their unions; we sought to ensure that they will not be forced into participation in the blessing of such relationships, and will not be disciplined for declining to support such unions.

Resolution 14s admonished us “not to opine on whether the blessings of same-gender unions should be authorized,” and we did not do so. Yet, without rendering an opinion on whether to proceed with such blessings, we nonetheless believed it incumbent upon us to examine the possible scriptural, theological and pastoral foundations for same-gender blessings. We spent considerable time in our meetings, and between our meetings, reviewing a wide body of work from a number of sources. We examined and discussed biblical exegetical resources, theological statements, liturgical resources and pastoral guidelines from dioceses that have recently examined these issues from every region in the country. We found particularly helpful the *Report of the Task Force on Holiness in Relationships and the Blessing of Same-Sex Relationships*, issued in June 2009 by the Diocese of San Diego, which set forth the biblical and theological arguments both for and against same-gender blessings.

We recognized that the Diocese of Virginia has its own unique characteristics and needs, and thus we concluded that no single diocese had an approach perfectly suited for us. We borrowed from the approaches of many other dioceses and adapted our recommendations accordingly.

In our review, we compiled a comprehensive list of the issues and problems that should

be addressed. The list began with the topics that *Resolution 14s* invited us to consider, and we broadened that list still further. We have reviewed in depth all of the topics suggested in the resolution. We evaluated each of those points in the combined context of our national canons, including those on Holy Matrimony, our diocesan canons, and the civil laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. A matrix of our sources is attached.

For additional context, we compared our conclusion with the guidelines issued in several other dioceses, particularly Southern Ohio, Washington, D.C., Vermont and El Camino Real. We examined liturgical resources from each of those dioceses and, in addition, examined more theological statements, guidelines and liturgies from the dioceses of Maryland, Connecticut, Northern California and Los Angeles, and preparatory materials from Province One of the Episcopal Church. All of the resources we reviewed are readily available on-line.

We recognize that *Resolution 14s* called on us to recommend possible “proposed canonical language” that would be required before same-gender blessings could proceed. However, after a careful review of national and diocesan canons, and in consultation with canonical lawyers, we concluded that no diocesan canon needs to be amended, and that no new diocesan canons are required for such blessings. It is our conclusion that same-gender blessings could proceed in this diocese solely through the pastoral authority of the bishop. Our conclusion is also consistent with the practice that we found in other dioceses that have proceeded with same-gender blessings.

Our review brought us to the determination that the best way to discharge our duties as a task group was to develop a set of proposed guidelines for the Diocese of Virginia should the bishop authorize same-gender blessings. We have therefore drafted proposed guidelines for the bishop’s adoption, modification or rejection. We believe that these proposed guidelines could provide an orderly and pastoral response to proceeding with same-gender unions while ensuring the right of clergy to refrain from participation without fear of discipline.

Our recommended guidelines, we believe, are consistent with all existing national and diocesan canons. We were careful to ensure that our proposed guidelines do not exceed the canonical authority of the bishop, or violate the canonical prerogatives and limits upon clergy and vestries. They fall within the scope of the bishop’s existing authority to provide pastoral direction to his clergy, and within the meanings of the General Convention *Resolution C056* that “bishops...may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this church...” [emphasis added].

We have forwarded our proposed guidelines to Bishop Shannon, and we believe it is within his discretion whether to disseminate them.

While we firmly believe that the decision whether to proceed with same-gender unions falls within the authority of the bishop, we also recommend that the bishop should provide a “generous pastoral response” to those people and clergy of our diocese who believe that same-gender unions are ill advised, or theologically and biblically unsound. We are grateful that Bishop Shannon embarked this fall on an ambitious series of “listening” meetings throughout the diocese, and that he has repeatedly offered assurances that clergy who do not wish to participate in same-gender unions will not have to.

We further recommend that the people in congregations where same-gender blessings might occur should carefully prepare themselves through theological education.

We believe the people and clergy are in the position to know how that should look in their local context, in consultation with their bishop and following his guidelines. We recommend that congregations and their leaders avail themselves of the rich array of resources from many dioceses, especially from the dioceses of Washington, D.C., San Diego and Southern Ohio, and the Episcopal Church Province One.

Finally, we are mindful that Bishop Shannon has said that if such blessings proceed there would not be a single authorized liturgy. We have therefore offered examples of such liturgies currently in use from the dioceses of Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Northern California. We believe these liturgies have been carefully developed and are consistent with our proposed guidelines. We also have included copies of two “Declarations of Intent” that are being used in conjunction with such liturgies. We have included all of these resources, along with copies of *Resolutions C056* and *R14s*, as an appendix to this report as our gift to those who might find them helpful.

We have felt ourselves guided by the Holy Spirit in all of our work, and buoyed by the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus throughout our diocese and the Church. We close by thanking Bishop Shannon for his confidence in entrusting this task to us.

Your faithful servants in Christ,

Resolution 14s Task Group:

Ed Jones, Chair, St. George’s, Fredericksburg
Frank Baxter, Calvary, Front Royal
The Rev. Lynn Holland, St. Mary’s, Fleeton
The Rev. Laura Inscoe, St. John’s, Richmond
Rawles Jones, Christ Church, Alexandria
Alisha King, St. Paul’s-on-the-Hill, Winchester
The Rev. Ryan Kuratko, Immanuel Old Church, Mechanicsville
Ellen D. Marcus, St. Paul’s, Alexandria
The Rev. Gay Rahn, St. George’s, Fredericksburg
The Rev. James Richardson, St. Paul’s Memorial, Charlottesville

Report to the Executive Board

Appendices

Resolution 14s, Council of the 215th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia

Resolution C056 of the 76th General Convention

Diocese-by-Diocese Comparison on Resolution 14s Topics

Blessing Liturgies from Dioceses of Maryland, Washington and Northern California

Declarations of Intent, Diocese of Vermont and adapted from National Canons

R-14s: Substitute for R-3 (Inclusiveness in Ordained Ministry), R-4 (Authorizing Rites of Blessing) and R-11 (Defining Sacramental and Civil Definitions of Marriage)
Adopted as substituted.

Whereas, the Rt. Rev. Shannon S. Johnston stated in his pastoral address to the 215th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia:

"I do regret that, in this address, some important matters in our common life will seem to be slighted while others are omitted, such as the several topics arising from the debate on sexuality. But I look for us to address these issues thoroughly in regional forums in 2010. It is unfortunate that some of the weightiest deliberations that come before us cannot be adequately and justly dealt with in the very short time allowed by Annual Council," [verbatim transcript of the bishop's pastoral address], and

Whereas, the necessary process will involve both the bishop's regional forums, which will allow for broad individual contributions on these issues, and the drafting of proposed canons for the effective and consistent exercise of pastoral ministry should same-gender blessings be authorized; be it therefore

Resolved, the 215th Annual Council of the Diocese of Virginia recognizes that:

1. Our clergy and people remain divided over the wisdom and theology of blessing same gender relationships, as well as how much weight to give to the views of others in the Anglican Communion about these issues, particularly to views from those with whom we are in mission partnership;
2. The growing differences between Christian and Civil understanding of marriage and relationships create immediate pastoral issues for our clergy and congregations;
3. There are numerous same-gender couples in our diocese engaged in long-term monogamous relationships who have engaged in productive and vital ministries for the proclamation of the Gospel. Many of these couples strongly desire the church's blessing of their relationships;
4. These issues deserve to be collectively addressed in an orderly, careful, and deliberate way assisted by appropriate legal and canonical experts; and

Recommends that:

1. Our Bishop is asked to empanel a group of clergy and lay people, including attorneys admitted to practice in Virginia and recognized experts on canon law, as well as knowledgeable clergy and lay representatives of a variety of theological perspectives on the issue of blessing same-gender relationships.
2. Such panel shall recommend consistent standards to be written into diocesan canons so that, if services of blessing same-gender unions are authorized, our clergy and people have a clearly understood and enforceable set of rules to guide the application of clergy discretion in providing pastoral care to same-gender couples seeking such blessings.
3. In formulating these recommendations, the following issues may be addressed (based in part on General Convention Canon I.1.18 and I.1.19):
 - (a) Whether individual members of the clergy have the right, as a matter of theological principle, to decline to conduct any such service, without adverse disciplinary consequences or personnel action;
 - (b) Whether individual members of the clergy have the right to decline to conduct such a service for a particular same gender couple, without adverse disciplinary consequences or personnel action, similar to the current rule for clergy asked to conduct weddings;
 - (c) The age, capacity and degree of kinship, if any, of the parties;

- (d) The effect of prior marriages or unions blessed by a licensed clergy person or registered with civil authorities, the responsibility to any former spouse or partner in such union, and responsibility to minor children of any prior marriage or union;
- (e) The appropriateness of advance medical screening, if any;
- (f) The effect of any legal union or marriage entered into between the parties in another jurisdiction;
- (g) The appropriate role of the Bishop for advanced review of any proposed blessing of a specific same-gender couple;
- (h) Review of financial arrangements to protect the parties in the absence of state law presumptions governing married couples, presumptions intended to protect the weaker party from potential exploitation, oppression, or improvident action by the other party in the relationship;
- (i) Other factors listed in the General Convention canons for marriage, Canons I.1.18 and I.1.19, including the baptismal status of the parties, the commitment to life-long union, the voluntariness of consent, the absence of coercion, fraud, mistake of identity of the other party;
- (j) The minimum time line between notification of the clergy of a desire to obtain such a blessing and the performance of the ceremony;
- (k) The number of witnesses and the record-keeping requirements for the clergy and any congregation involved;
- (l) Any requirement for written affirmation by the couple that the commitment is to a life-long union;
- (m) Any statement of the theological basis for the union to which the partners are to subscribe;
- (n) Provision to address possible dissolution of a blessed same-gender relationship, including the considerations of factors enumerated in Canon I.1.19 to address marriages which are in distress or which have been terminated by a civil court, as well as the circumstances, if any, under which another same-gender relationship may be blessed where both partners to an earlier such relationship remain living;
- (o) The restriction in the General Convention canon on marriage in the church to heterosexual couples;
- (p) Whether any blessing service for same-gender union may be used in lieu of marriage for heterosexual couples under any circumstances, and if so, what those circumstances are;
- (q) How these might apply to all members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans-gendered community;
- (r) Any other factor deemed important by the panel.

3. If the Bishop appoints such a panel, the panel shall strive to deliver its report (including proposed canonical language) to the Executive Board by All Saints Day, 2010, in time for careful and orderly consideration of its recommendations by the 216th Annual Council of the Diocese. The panel is not to opine on whether the blessings of same-gender unions should be authorized, but it is to set forth its canonical recommendations to govern blessing such relationships if such services of blessing are authorized.

4. The consideration of any authorization for Virginia clergy to enter same gender unions should be deferred until after consideration of the preceding process.

* FINAL VERSION - Concurred

Resolution: **C056**
Title: **Liturgies for Blessings**
Topic: **Liturgy**
Committee: **13 - Prayer Book, Liturgy and Church Music**
House of Initial Action: **Bishops**
Proposer: **Diocese of Missouri**

Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, That the 76th General Convention acknowledge the changing circumstances in the United States and in other nations, as legislation authorizing or forbidding marriage, civil unions or domestic partnerships for gay and lesbian persons is passed in various civil jurisdictions that call forth a renewed pastoral response from this Church, and for an open process for the consideration of theological and liturgical resources for the blessing of same gender relationships; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, collect and develop theological and liturgical resources, and report to the 77th General Convention; and be it further

Resolved, That the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in consultation with the House of Bishops, devise an open process for the conduct of its work inviting participation from provinces, dioceses, congregations, and individuals who are engaged in such theological work, and inviting theological reflection from throughout the Anglican Communion; and be it further

Resolved, That bishops, particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church; and be it further

Resolved, That this Convention honor the theological diversity of this Church in regard to matters of human sexuality; and be it further

Resolved, That the members of this Church be encouraged to engage in this effort.

Comparison of National Canon's Provisions on Holy Matrimony, Marriage Guidelines of Virginia Diocese and Virginia Law on Marriage to Provisions of Four Dioceses Pertaining to Same-Gender Blessings

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre- Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
Title/Description	I.18: Of the Solemnization of Holy Matrimony (2009). I.19: Of Regulations Respecting Holy Matrimony Concerning Preservation of Marriage, Dissolution of Marriage, and Remarriage.	Marriage Guidelines Guidelines for Petitioning for Consent to Solemnize Marriage after Divorce or Annulment	The Virginia Constitution bans marriage between persons of the same gender. Prerequisites and conditions for marriage under Virginia law are below.	Policies and Procedures for the Blessings of Same-Gender Unions. (2010) ¹	Guidelines for the Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant Relationship. (Authorized for a trial period of five months, through November 1, 2004.) ²	Memorandum to the Clergy of the Diocese of Washington regarding the Implementation of the Marriage Equality Act in DC, at 5-6: Bishop's Pastoral Direction Regarding DC's Marriage Equality Act. (March 10, 2010)	A Pastoral Letter to Clergy in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont. (August 24, 2009) ³	Resolution for Pastoral Care for Gay and Lesbian Persons. (2004) ⁴
Prerequisites								
State Law	Clergy must ascertain that both parties have	Member of Clergy must be authorized by			No priest of diocese is required to act as		Noting that new law in Vermont providing for	

¹ Ohio has both a constitutional amendment and statute prohibiting same-sex marriage.

² Washington, D.C. legalized same-sex marriage in March 2010.

³ Vermont legalized same-sex marriage in April 2009.

⁴ After the passage of Proposition 8 in November 2008, the California Constitution now provides that California will only recognize marriages between a man and a woman. The California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 8 prospectively, but also held that same-sex marriages entered into in California prior to November 2008 remained valid. (There was a period in 2008, before the November 2008 election, when same-sex marriages were permitted under another California Supreme Court ruling). In addition, under a recently passed law, California recognizes same-sex married couples married in any state or nation before the passage of Proposition 8.

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre- Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
	<p>right to contract a marriage under state law. I.18.2(a).</p> <p>(See also I.18.1: Clergy shall conform to state law governing creation of civil status of marriage.)</p>	<p>Commonwealth of Virginia in order to perform marriages.</p> <p>Marriage Guidelines, Civil Requirements ¶ 1.</p> <p>Local clerk's office will see that the couple meets the Commonwealth's laws before issuing the license. <i>Id.</i> ¶ 2.</p> <p>Clergy is to fill in marriage certificate and to give it to the couple. <i>Id.</i> ¶ 3.</p> <p>Clergy is to complete the marriage license, to sign it and to return it to the clerk's office within 5 days of the marriage. <i>Id.</i> ¶ 4.</p>				<p>the licensed agent of D.C. in marrying same-gender couples, nor shall he or she be required to bless such a civil marriage. ¶ 1.</p> <p>Priest must have valid license from D.C. government. ¶ 2(a).</p> <p>See also ¶¶ 3-8 on issues relating to non-D.C. residents, priests from other dioceses, priests from Washington diocese wishing to bless a same-gender marriage outside of the diocese (written permission from the Bishop of that diocese is required, and Washington Bishop must be notified)</p>	<p>marriage equality identifies clergy as among those eligible to solemnize marriages in Vermont. (at 2)</p>	
Understanding Union	Clergy must ascertain that "both parties	Study Title I, Canons 18 and 19 of the general				All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect		

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
R-14 ¶ 3(o) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the restriction in the Canon on marriage in the church to heterosexual couples. ¶ 13(p) provides that the recommendations may address whether any blessing service may be used in lieu of marriage for heterosexual couples and, if so, under what circumstances.	understand that Holy Matrimony is a physical and spiritual union of a man and a woman, entered into within the community of faith, by mutual consent of heart, mind, will, and with intent that it be lifelong.” I.18.2(b).	Church. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 1.				in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		
Consent to Marriage R-14 ¶ 3(i) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the other factors in Canons I.18 and I.19, including the voluntariness of consent, the absence of	Clergy must ascertain that both parties freely and knowingly consent to marriage. I.18.2(c).		Prohibits marriages where either of the parties lacks capacity to consent because of mental incapacity or infirmity			All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre- Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
coercion, fraud, mistake of identity.								
Baptism R-14 ¶ 3(i) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the other factors in Canons I.18 and I.19, including the baptismal status of the parties.	Clergy must ascertain that at least one party has been baptized. I.18.2(d).	At least one of the parties is to have been baptized. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 3.			At least one member of the couple must be baptized and a member of the diocese. ¶ 2.	All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		
Instruction for Couple	Clergy must ascertain that both parties have been instructed as to nature, meaning and purpose of Holy Matrimony by Clergy or someone known by Clergy to be competent and responsible. I.18.2(e).	Instruction and preparation must be in full compliance with Section 2 of Title I, Canon 18. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 5.		Couple must receive adequate counseling as determined by the priest. ¶ 3.	Preparation and instruction prior to the ceremony is required. ¶ 3.	All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).	Clergy should conduct meaningful premarital preparation with all couples. (at 8)	
Advanced Notice to Clergy R-14 ¶ 3(j) provides that	Clergy must have 30 days notice of parties' intention to marry. (This requirement can	30 days notice to the member of the clergy is required by Section 3(a) of Title I, Canon 18.				All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to		

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre- Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
Task Force recommendations may address the minimum time line between notification of the clergy of the desire for a blessing and the performance of the ceremony.	be waived under certain narrow circumstances.) I. 18.3(a).	Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 4.				those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		
Clergy's Discretion R-14 ¶¶ 3(a) and (b) provide that Task Force recommendations may address "Whether any individual members of the clergy have the right . . . to decline to conduct" blessing of same-gender union or to decline to conduct service for particular same-gender couple.	It is within the discretion of any member of the Clergy to decline to solemnize any marriage. I.18.4.			Priest-in-charge retains the right and responsibility to determine whether any union shall be blessed on Church property or under the auspices of the congregation. ¶ 5. It is within the discretion of any priest to decline to bless any union. ¶ 10.	Any member of the clergy may decline to preside at the Celebration of a Covenant Relationship.	All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).	Each member of the Clergy residing in the diocese must determine for himself or herself an appropriate pastoral response to same gender couples seeking to marry. (at 7) If Clergy member is not willing or able to bless or officiate at same-gender marriage, Bishop hopes he or she will seek colleague who can minister to couple. (at 7) Clergy has full authority to	As in marriage, Clergy is not obligated to conduct same-gender ceremonies if anything about the relationship violates his or her conscience.

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
Role of Bishop R-14 ¶ 3(d) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the appropriate role of the Bishop for advanced review of any proposed blessing of a specific same-gender couple.		If the bishop has authorized a deacon to perform a marriage, arrangements should be made to have the marriage blessed as soon as possible. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 9.		At least 60 days before the proposed date for the blessing, clergy member who is resident in diocese or licensed to officiate in the diocese must seek in writing permission from the Bishop and must obtain written permission of Bishop. ¶ 1.	Clergy not licensed in the diocese must obtain the permission of his or her bishop or the bishop of the Washington diocese. ¶ 4.a.	At least 30 days before the marriage, priest must notify bishop as to when and where marriage will take place. ¶ 2(c).	decline to solemnize any marriage. (at 8)	Permission of bishop required.
Role of Vestry				A member of the clergy asked to officiate is to seek the advice and counsel of the vestry before offering the rite. ¶ 5.	Priest must have the support of the vestry, and, if priest is of another congregation in the diocese, must have the permission of the rector and vestry where marriage is to occur. ¶ 2(b).			
Role of Congregation				Priest must inform the congregation. ¶ 3.	Matters pertaining to the use of facilities, ceremonial			Consciences of individual parishioners will be respected.

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
					<p>planning and local arrangements must be made with the approval of the rector of the parish in which the celebration is to take place. ¶ 4.b.</p>			
Couple's Membership in Church/ Residence in Diocese				<p>At least one of the two persons must be member in good standing of the Episcopal Church and resident within the diocese. ¶ 2.</p>	<p>At least one member of the couple must be baptized and a member of the diocese. ¶ 2.</p>			
Couple's Age, Capacity, Degree of Kinship R-14 ¶ 3(c) provides that Task Force recommendations may address age, capacity and degree of kinship, if any, of the parties.			<p>Both bride and groom must be at least 16 years old. If either party is under 18, consent to the marriage must be given by his or her parent or legal guardian.</p> <p>Prohibits marriages where either of the parties lacks capacity to consent because of mental incapacity or</p>					

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			<p>infirmity</p> <p>Prohibits marriage between an ancestor and/or descendent; between brother and sister; between uncle and niece; between aunt and nephew; whether the relationship is by half or whole blood or adoption.</p>					
<p>Medical Screening</p> <p>R-14 ¶ 3(e) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the appropriateness of medical screening, if any.</p>			<p>No blood test requirement.</p>					
<p>Financial Screening</p> <p>R-14 ¶ 3(h) provides that Task Force recommendations may address</p>								

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
review of financial arrangements to protect the parties in the absence of state law presumptions intended to protect the weaker party from exploitation or oppression.								
Conditions								
Witnesses to Ceremony	Two witnesses must be present for the solemnization of marriage. I.18.3(b).	At least two witnesses shall be present. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 6.	No witnesses need be present at marriage ceremony.					
R-14 ¶ 3(k) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the number of witnesses..						All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		
Record-Keeping	Clergy records the following in "proper register" and signs it: date and place of marriage, parties' names, parties' parents' names, parties' ages, parties' residences, parties' Church	A parish register must be filled in with the data from the marriage license. Marriage Guidelines, Canonical Requirements ¶ 8.	Minister or other person officiating at the marriage complete and sign the Marriage Register and Marriage Return and forward them to the clerk of court who issued the marriage license. The	Blessings of unions must be recorded in congregation where blessing takes place. ¶ 6.				
R-14 ¶ 3(k) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the record-keeping requirements for the clergy and any congregation involved.								

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
	status. I.18.3(c).		officiate may also prepare a certificate to be given to the couple.					
Declaration of Intention R-14 ¶ 3(i) provides that Task Force recommendations may address the other factors in Canons I.18 and I. 19, including the parties' consent to lifelong union. R-14 ¶ 3(l) provides that the recommendations may address any requirement for written affirmation by the couple that the commitment is to a life-long union.	Clergy must require parties to sign declaration set forth in I.18.3(e)-(g). I.18.3(d).				All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		Same-gender couple is not going to sign this declaration, so use the one provided by task force report. May also use alternative declaration with opposite-gender couples who take exception to signing the Declaration of Intention. (at 9)	
Other								
Imperiled Marriage	When marriage is imperiled, either or both parties must lay the matter before the			Where union is imperiled, priest must act first to protect the safety of the couple, and		All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to		

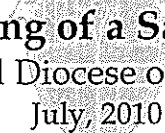
Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
	Clergy before taking legal action, and the Clergy must act to protect the safety of those involved and, if possible, to work on reconciling the parties. I.19.1.			then to promote reconciliation. ¶ 7.		those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).		

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
<p>Changing Marital Status R-14 ¶ 3(d) provides that Task Force recommendations may address possible dissolution of blessed same-gender relationship.</p>	<p>Where civil court has annulled or dissolved marriage, member of Church can apply to Bishop for Church's recognition of nullity or termination of marriage, although no such judgment should be construed as affecting the legitimacy of children or civil validity of former relationship. I.19.2(a). Judgments under this section are to be in writing and made part of diocese's archives. I.19.2(b).</p>			<p>Any member of the Church who seeks dissolution of a union or who seeks to enter into a subsequent union may apply to the Bishop for a judgment, although no such judgment shall be construed as affecting the legitimacy of children or the validity of the former relationship. Judgments under this provision are to be in writing and made a part of the diocese's archives. ¶ 8.</p>		<p>All guidelines for Holy Matrimony currently in effect in the diocese are applicable to those contemplating civil same-gender marriage in D.C. ¶ 2(d).</p>	<p>Clergy will file full and complete petitions for remarriage after divorce or dissolution of civil union. (at 8)</p>	

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
<p>Conditions for Remarriage</p> <p>R-14 ¶ 3(d) provides that Task Force recommendations may address effect of prior marriages, civil unions or unions blessed by clergy, and responsibility to minor children of any prior marriage or union. ¶ 3(f) provides that the recommendations may address the effect of any legal union or marriage entered into between the parties in another jurisdiction.</p>	<p>Clergy shall not solemnize marriage of person who has been married to a person still living, nor shall member of Church who has been married to a person still living enter into marriage, unless:</p> <p>(a) Clergy is satisfied that prior marriage has been dissolved or annulled by a final judgment of a civil court with jurisdiction; (b) Clergy has instructed parties that continuing concern must be shown for well-being of former spouse and any children of prior marriage; and (c) Clergy obtains consent from parties' Bishop or Clergy's bishop and reports solemnization of marriage under</p>	<p>Guidelines for Petitioning for Consent to Solemnize Marriages after Divorce or Annulment:</p> <p>1. In addition to requirements of the Canons, clergy member must petition the Bishop using the Diocesan Petition. No marriage date should be firmly set until Bishops consent is received. Non petitions will be considered until final divorce decrees have issued.</p> <p>2. Where one or both parties have been divorced (or marriages annulled) more than once, clergy is expected to refer couple to licensed</p>	<p>Prohibits marriages entered into before the dissolution of an earlier marriage by either or both parties.</p>	<p>No priest shall bless union unless: (a) priest is satisfied that prior marriage or union (evidenced by a civil proceeding) has been annulled or dissolved by final judgment of civil court with jurisdiction; (b) priest has instructed parties that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of former spouse or partner and any children of prior marriage or union; (c) priest has Bishop's prior consent to officiate and reports blessing to Bishop; and (d) if blessing is given in diocese other than where consent was given, Bishop of that jurisdiction must affirm the</p>				

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)	
	<p>this Section to that Bishop. I.19.3.</p>	<p>counselor. Counselor should issue report to attach to Diocesan Petition.</p> <p>3. It is a reasonable expectation that the couple, or at least one party with the support of the other, intends to live out their marriage as members of some congregation.</p> <p>4. When answers to all of the questions in the Diocesan Petition are "yes," consent will be routinely granted. Clergy should explain circumstances where there are any "no"s.</p> <p>5. Guidelines and those on Diocesan Petition are in addition to BCP rubrics and</p>		<p>consent. ¶ 9.</p>					

Jurisdiction	National Canon	Diocese of Virginia	Virginia Law	Diocese of Southern Ohio	Diocese of Washington (pre-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Washington (post-Marriage Equality Act)	Diocese of Vermont	Diocese of El Camino Real (California)
		<p>Title I, Canons 18 and 19.</p> <p>6. May be circumstances where sound pastoral judgment requires adjustment to the guidelines.</p> <p>7. Member of clergy or parish may maintain additional standards consistent with guidelines and canons.</p>						
<p>Liturgy</p> <p>R-14 ¶ 3(m) provides that Task Force recommendations may address any statement of theological basis for the union to which the partners are to ascribe.</p>							<p>Clergy should not use marriage liturgy in Book of Common Prayer for same-gender couples but should use the liturgical resources provided by 2004 task force. (at 8)</p>	



The Blessing of a Sacred Union
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
July, 2010

The Presider faces the people and the two persons to be joined in sacred union, who stand before him/her.

Presider: Dear people of God: We have come together in the presence of God to acknowledge and bless the union of *N.N and N.N.*, who seek to make public profession of their offering of themselves to each other in heart, body and mind, for their mutual joy and comfort, and for their growth together in Christ. The life-long covenant of two persons in faithful union is to be honored as a means of sanctification, a witness to God's love, and a shared commitment to service in God's Name. Therefore it should be entered into deliberately, freely, and with full knowledge of the solemn obligations it entails.

THE DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The Presider addresses the two persons in turn

N, will you join your life with *N*, sharing your love and life with *N*, your wholeness and your brokenness, your joys and your sorrows, your health and your sickness, your riches and your poverty, your success and your failure, and be faithful to him/her so long as you both shall live?

Each answers

I will.

The Presider then addresses the congregation, saying

Will all of you witnessing these promises do all in your power to honor and uphold this union?

People: **We will.**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Presider: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Presider: Let us pray.

O gracious and ever living God, You have created us in your image and called us to love you and one another. Hear our prayers for *N and N*, who now celebrate before you their covenant of sacred union and ask for your blessing. Give them grace to keep the promises and vows they make here today, that their life together may be a witness to

your love; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

People: **Amen.**

One or more Readings from Holy Scripture precede the exchange of vows. The following passages are suggested. If there is to be a Communion, a Reading from the Gospel is always included.

Ruth 1: 6-17
Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12
Song of Songs 2: 10-13, 8: 6-7
Zephaniah 3: 14-20
Romans 12: 9-18; 21
1 Corinthians 12:31 - 13:13
2 Corinthians 5: 17-20
Colossians 3: 12-16a.

Between the readings a psalm, hymn or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are 65, 67, 85:1-3, (4-6) 7-13, 111, 127, 133, 149.

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says

 The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to _____
People: **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

John 15:9-12 Mark 12: 38-34
John 2:1-11 Luke 6:32-38
Matthew 5:14-16 Luke 10:21-2
Matthew 7:24-27

After the Gospel, the Reader says

 The Gospel of the Lord.
People: **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

A Homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

THE EXCHANGE OF VOWS

The couple stands facing one another.

One says to the other (taking the other's hand)

N, I join my life with yours, faithfully and without reservation, from this day forward. I will love and cherish you in prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

Then they loose hands, and the other, taking the first one's hand, says

N, I join my life with yours, faithfully and without reservation, from this day forward. I will love and cherish you in prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

They loose their hands.

The Presider may ask God's blessing on a ring or rings as follows:

Bless, O Lord, these rings to be signs of the vows by which these two persons have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: **Amen.**

Each places the ring on the ring-finger of the other's hand, saying

N, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (*or in the Name of God*).

Presider: In exchanging vows of love, support and fidelity, *N and N* are now joined in sacred union. May the grace of God be with them for ever.

People: **Amen.**

THE PRAYERS

All standing, the Presider says.

Presider Let us pray together in the words our Savior taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,

but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen

And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

If communion is to follow, the Lord's Prayer may be omitted here.

The prayers may be led by the Presider, a deacon, one of the sponsors, or a family member chosen by the couple. At the end of each petition all respond: Hear our prayer.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation and giver of grace: look with favor on the world you have made, and for which your son Jesus gave his life; and especially on these two persons whose covenant you bless. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their lives. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Give them grace, when they hurt each other, to recognize and acknowledge their fault, and to seek each other's forgiveness and yours. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt and joy conquer despair. God, of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. God of love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Bless them according to your will, with the gift and heritage of children and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Bless N. [and N.], the *child/children* of N. and N., that this household may be a place of nurture and strength for *them*. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Grant that we who have witnessed these vows may find our lives strengthened and our loyalties confirmed. God of love,

People: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: Grant that the bonds of our common humanity, by which all your children are united one to another, and the living to the dead, may be so transformed by your grace, that your will may be done on earth as it is in heaven; where, O Father, with your Son and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign in perfect unity now and for ever.

People: **Hear our prayer.**

The Presider continues

Presider: Bless the union of N. and N; walk with them in joy and in sorrow, sustain them in prosperity and in adversity, guide them in light and in darkness, and fill them with the fullness of your love.

People: **Amen.**

THE BLESSING OF THE UNION

The blessing is pronounced by the Presider. The couple may stand facing the Presider or may kneel. The Presider may place his/her hands on the heads of the couple or hold their joined hands.

Most gracious God, you have put into the hearts of your people a yearning for community with you and one another. You call us into covenant and endow us with heart and will that we may keep faith with you and with one another. Pour out your blessing upon N. and N. Deepen their joy, guide and console them in difficult times; sustain them in the knowledge of your loving care; and bring them in the end to know you face to face; through Jesus Christ our Savior.

People: **Amen.**

May the God of peace bless, preserve, and keep you; may God be gracious to you, guide you in truth and peace, and make you strong in love and faith; so that you may grow

together in this life, and the love that you share be taken up beyond death itself, to dwell in God's eternal glory.

People: **Amen.**

THE PEACE

Presider: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People: **And also with you.**

+ *The couple greet each other and the congregation.*

+ *When Communion is not to follow, the congregation withdraws. A hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.*

At the Eucharist

The Liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine.

Preface

Because in the holy covenant of love between two people you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem where we will at last be united with your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who loves us and gave himself for us to make the whole creation new. Therefore we praise you, joining our voices...

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly united couple receive the Communion first, after the ministers.

In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said.

Presider O God, the giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious: We give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, *N.* and *N.*, now joined in sacred union, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you: for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

People: **Amen.**

As the congregation withdraws, a hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.

Concerning the Service

A priest or a bishop shall preside. When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist.

A deacon, or an assisting priest, may, ask for the Declaration of Consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

It is desirable that the Lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles be read by lay persons.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N.N.), the full names of the persons to be blessed are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Diocese of Southern Ohio from whom this liturgy was taken.

Diocese of Washington

The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant Relationship

A hymn or anthem may be sung as the liturgical ministers enter, either here or after the opening acclamation, in place of the opening dialogue.

The following acclamation, or another acclamation from the Book of Common Prayer or Enriching Our Worship, begins the rite.

Presider Blessed be the One, Holy, and Living God:
People Glory to God for ever and ever.

The following dialogue may be added

Presider Beloved, let us love one another,
People For love is of God.
Presider Whoever does not love does not know God;
People For God is love.
Presider Since God loved us so much;
People We ought also to love one another.

The Collect of the Day

Presider God be with you. *or* The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.
Presider Let us pray.

Holy and loving God, in our baptism you call us into relationship with you and the whole creation: We thank you for giving us signs of your steadfast love in the covenant of fidelity two people make with one another, and we pray that, in your mercy, you will give your blessing to *N.N.* and *N.N.* who come before you, and strengthen them day by day with the love of your Holy Spirit that they may be a blessing to one another and to the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

The Word of God

Then at least two of the following passages from Holy Scripture are read, the final reading being chosen from the Gospel passages. Between the readings a Psalm, hymn, or anthem may be sung or said.

At the end of the readings is said

	The Word of the Lord.	<i>Or</i>	Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's People [to the Churches].
<i>People</i>	Thanks be to God.		

When the Gospel is read, all stand, and the reading is introduced by the Deacon or a Priest, saying

	The Holy Gospel of Our Savior Jesus Christ according to <i>N</i> .		
<i>People</i>	Glory to you, O Christ.	<i>or</i>	Glory to you, Lord Christ.

After the Gospel, the Reader says

	The Gospel of Christ.	<i>or</i>	The Gospel of the Lord.
<i>People</i>	Praise to you, O Christ.	<i>or</i>	Praise to you, Lord Christ.

From the Hebrew Scripture:

I Samuel 18:1b, 3, 20:16-17, 42a. *or* I Samuel 18:1-4
Ruth 1:16-17
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (*New English Bible*)

Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7
Micah 4:1-4
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 17:1-3, 6-13

Psalms: 65, 67, 85:7-13, 11, 127, 133, 149, 8, 148

From the New Testament:

Romans 12:9-21
I Corinthians 12:31-13:13
II Corinthians 5:17-20
Galatians 5:13-14, 22-26
Philippians 2:1-4

Ephesians 3:14-19
Ephesians 4:25-32
Colossians 3:12-17
I John 4:7-16, 21
I John 3:18-24

From the Gospels:

Matthew 5:1-16
Mark 12:28-34
Luke 6:32-38
Luke 10:21-24

John 2:1-11
John 15:9-17
John 17:1, 18-26

The Sermon

The Prayers of the People

It is recommended that either of these forms of the Prayers of the People be used, or any of the forms found in the Book of Common Prayer, or any conforming to the outline for the Prayers of the People found in the Holy Eucharist.

Form I

Leader

Dear Friends, *N.* and *N.* have been called by God into a covenant of grace and mutual care. Let us join in prayer, asking God's blessing upon them and upon us as we proclaim with our lives the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Abundant God, Lover of all creation, pour out your blessing upon us and upon the covenant we celebrate.

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In solitude and companionship,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In tenderness and intimacy,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In knowing and in being known,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In self-sacrifice and self-offering,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In comfort and consolation,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In doing justice and making peace,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

In generosity and hospitality,

Be among us, Spirit of God.

Presider

Gracious and everliving God, look joyfully upon *N.* and *N.*, and upon this assembled community: Grant us your blessing and assist us with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love we may honor and keep the covenants we make with you and one another; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Form II

Leader

Let us remember before God *N.* and *N.*, this community of faith and the whole world, saying,
“Receive our prayer.”

For *N.* and *N.*, that they may be filled with God’s blessing and grow in love and faithfulness throughout their life together. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For God’s creation. May we have the wisdom and will to honor and protect all God’s creatures. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For our nation and the world and for all in authority. May justice and wisdom, peace and respect flourish among men and woman everywhere. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For this community, for the people of (this town or city) and for the welfare of all. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For those who suffer any need or trouble. We pray for the sick and the poor, the lonely and the bereaved, those who perpetrate hatred and intolerance and for their victims. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For Christ’s Church throughout the world. For our bishop(s) *N. and N.*, and for all Christians everywhere in their life and ministry. May we be the living presence of Christ in the world. O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

For all those who have gone before us in the faith. [We remember and celebrate especially, *N.*] O God, source of all life,
Receive our prayer.

Presider

O God, Ruler of all, you make us in your image and likeness and bestow upon us life and blessing. You command your followers to be united by the new commandment of love. Receive the prayers of your people and grant to *N.* and *N.* grace to love each other all the days of their lives; for you are a compassionate God and a lover to all creatures, and we glorify you now and forever. **Amen.**

A hymn or anthem may be sung.

The Making of the Covenant

The Presider invites the couple and their sponsors to stand in view of all and addresses them and the congregation with these words

Today we gather to witness and to bless the public commitment of *N.* and *N.* to a lifelong covenant of fidelity and mutuality.

A covenant is a public declaration of commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible is the story of God's covenant with humankind which God has declared shall not be broken. In Baptism, God calls us into a covenant which is sealed eternally by the power of the Holy Spirit. By it we are bound not only to God but to one another in a new community we call the Church, a community in which God shows no partiality.

Each one of us is called to live out the Covenant of Baptism in our daily life and work. For some this includes a special relationship of fidelity and mutuality with another person that becomes a sign of God's steadfast love. These relationships, a source of comfort and joy, are gifts given by God that the whole world might be blessed through them.

The Presider then addresses the sponsors directly.

Do you who present this couple believe they are called to live in such a covenant?

Sponsors We do. We believe their life together to be a blessing from God for themselves and for the world.

Presider Will you [continue to] support them as companions on their journey?

Sponsors We will, with God's help.

The Presider then addresses the couple

N. and *N.*, do you enter freely into this relationship, and do you believe it to be the relationship to which God has called you?

Couple We do.

Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn

N., I make this covenant with you before God and the Church that I will love you in all the circumstances of our lives. With God's help, I will be faithful to you as long as we both shall live, as a companion in faith, hope, and love for the glory of God and the life of the world.

The Presider then says to the congregation

Will you who have witnessed these vows support *N.* and *N.* in their covenant, standing by them in encouragement and prayer in times of joy and in times of sorrow?

People We will.

The Blessing of the Rings or Other Symbols

The Presider may ask God's blessing on rings or other symbols of the covenant the couple have made as follows. If the rings have been previously given, the couple may extend their hands toward the Presider.

Bless, O God, these rings as enduring signs of the covenant *N.* and *N.* have made, and keep them in the bond of love, through Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The giver presents the ring or other symbols with these words. This action maybe omitted if rings or other symbols have been previously given.

N., I give you *this ring* as a symbol of the covenant we have made with God and with one another. **Amen.**

The Blessing of the Covenant

Presider God be with you. *or* The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Presider Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to give you thanks, most gracious God, and to praise you for the unfailing love and care and for the great joy and comfort you have bestowed upon us in the gift of human love. We give you praise and thanks for *N.* and *N.*, and the covenant of love and faithfulness they have made. Pour out the abundance of your grace upon them. Keep them in your steadfast love; protect them from all danger; fill them with your wisdom and peace; lead them in holy service to each other and the world; and, finally, bring them to that table where all your saints feast for ever.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit . . .

Or

God the Source of Life, God the Word of Love and God the Spirit of Truth . . .

. . . bless, preserve, and keep you; God mercifully look upon you with favor and fill you with all blessing and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life and be a light to the world until you come into the age of life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Peace

Presider The peace of Christ be always with you.
People And also with you.

The Holy Communion

If for special reason the Holy Communion is not to follow, the Service concludes with the Peace, the Lord's Prayer being first said together by the People following the blessing of the couple.

Otherwise, the liturgy continues with the Offertory. Any of the Great Thanksgivings from the Book of Common Prayer or Enriching Our Worship may be used. If a Proper Preface is required, it is that of Baptism or of the Season

In place of the usual post-communion prayer, one of the following may be used.

Gracious God, we thank you for the love made known to us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May this sacrament be to us a reminder of the love through which we are called; may it continue to sustain us on the journey and strengthen us in ministry; in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift you have given us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ: for love and companionship; forgiveness and reconciliation; mercy and joy. Grant that *N.* and *N.*, having professed their love and commitment one to the other, may grow together, secure in your love, nurtured by your church and sustained by your sacrament; in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Concerning the Service

Two rites are provided for trial use in the Diocese of Northern California for the Blessing of a Holy Union/Covenant Relationship. The priest/pastor has the responsibility for the liturgy and for the selection of the rite; this is best done in consultation with the couple.

A priest or bishop presides at the service because such ministers alone have the function of pronouncing blessing and of celebrating the Holy Eucharist.

When both a bishop and a priest are present and officiating, the bishop should pronounce the blessing and preside at the Eucharist. A deacon, or an assisting priest, may deliver the opening exhortation, ask for the declaration of consent, read the Gospel, and perform other assisting functions at the Eucharist.

It is desirable that the lessons from the Old Testament and the Epistles (or readings from non-biblical sources) be read by lay persons.

In the opening exhortation (at the symbol of N. and N.), the full names of the persons to be blessed are declared. Subsequently, only their Christian names are used.

Both rites provide the option of a presentation by sponsors. Although this is an option, the question asking the support of the witnessing congregation is not optional.

These rites may be used with any authorized liturgy for the Holy Eucharist. The rite then replaces the Ministry of the Word, and the Eucharist begins with the Offertory.

For the Ministry of the Word it is fitting that the couple remain where they may conveniently hear the reading of the lessons. They may approach the Altar, either for the exchange of vows, or for the Blessing.

It is appropriate that all remain standing until the conclusion of the Collect. Seating may be provided for the altar party, so that all may be seated for the readings and the homily.

When desired some other suitable symbol of the vows may be used in place of a ring.

Suitable hymns and music may be included in the service.

At the end of the service, it is appropriate that the couple and the altar party leave the church first, followed by the presider and the congregation.

A Rite for the Celebration and Blessing of a Holy Union Option 1*

Provided for trial use in the Diocese of Northern California
beginning March 1, 2010

The Celebrant faces the people and the two persons to be joined in holy union, who stand before him/her.

Presider Dear people of God:
we have come together
to witness and bless the covenant of love and fidelity
which NN. and NN. will make with each other.

Such a covenant shows us the mystery of the union between God and God's people and between Christ and the Church, and the Holy Scriptures point to the offering and receiving of love as the principal sign of God's presence.

Behold now the mystery of the union between N. and N., called by God to embody in their covenant that union between Christ and the Church. The union of two people in heart, body and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and as a source of grace and blessing to all whom they encounter. This solemn covenant is therefore not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and with the commitment to seek God's will for their lives.

THE DECLARATION OF CONSENT

The Celebrant addresses each member of the couple in turn:

Celebrant N., will you give yourself wholly to N., to live together in the covenant of holy union?
Will you love him/her, comfort her/him, honor and keep him/her in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, be faithful to her/him as long as you both shall live?

N I will.

If there is to be a presentation by sponsors it takes place at this time.

Celebrant(To sponsors)

You have been chosen to accompany N. and N. as they journey towards the fulfillment of their commitment, growing in love and faithfulness. Will you support them in their life together?

Sponsors We will.

In the following question to the witnessing congregation, the words "family in God" or "spiritual family" may be substituted if appropriate. The couple may also ask this question directly of the people, e.g., "As our family in Christ, will you share our joy..."

Celebrant (to the people)

As N. and N.'s family in Christ, will you share their joys, help them to bear their burdens, and do all in your power to uphold them in their life together?

People **We will.**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People **And also with you.**

Celebrant Let us pray.

O gracious and everliving God, you have taught us to love one another as Christ loved us: look with favor on N. and N. who come to you seeking your blessing. Assist them with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make. Protect them from all trouble and danger, and bring them, with us, to the heavenly feast of your eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

People **Amen.**

Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the readings.

Ruth 1:16-17

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (*New English Bible*)

Micah 4:1-3, 6-8

Zephaniah 3; 14-20

Song of Songs 2:10-13, 8:6-7

I Samuel 18:16, 3, 20:16-17, 42a

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

I Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Ephesians 3:14-19

Romans 12: 9-19

I John 4:7-16, 21

II Corinthians 5:17-20

Colossians 3:12b-16a

Between the readings, a psalm, hymn or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are 67, 65 85, 111, 127, 133: 1-3, 149, 8:10-11

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____.

People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

John 15:9-12

John 2:1-11

Matthew 5:14-16

Matthew 7:24-27

Mark 12: 38-34

Luke 6:32-38

Luke 10:21-2

A Homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

THE MAKING OF VOWS

The couple stands facing one another.

N1 (taking N2's hands in hers/his)

N., I join my life with yours, from this day forward.

In prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow,

I will love and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This I vow before God.

N2 (taking N1's hands in his/hers)

N., I join my life with yours, from this day forward.

In prosperity and in hardship, in health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow,

I will love and cherish you as long as we both shall live. This I vow before God.

or

N1 (taking N2's hands in hers/his)

In the name of God, I N. bind myself to you N. in holy covenant; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

N2 (taking N1's hands in hers/his)

In the name of God, I N., bind myself to you N. in holy covenant; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death. This is my solemn vow.

THE BLESSING AND GIVING OF RINGS

Celebrant Bless, O Lord, these rings, to be signs of the vows by which these two people have bound themselves to each other; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People **Amen.**

N1 places the ring on the hand of N2, saying

N, I give you this ring in token of my vow, in witness of my faithfulness and love and as a sign that all I have I share with you.

N2 places the ring on the hand of N1, saying

N, I give you this ring in token of my vow, in witness of my faithfulness and love and as a sign that all I have I share with you.

or

N1 places the ring on the hand of N2, saying

N2, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you; in the name of God.

N2 places the ring on the hand of N1, saying

N1, I give you this ring as a symbol of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have I honor you; in the name of God.

Celebrant Now that N. and N. have given themselves to each other by solemn vows and the giving and receiving of rings, may the holy God who indwells heaven and earth bless this union. May God be seen in their life together; may the love between them grow and flourish; and may they be in unity and peace with themselves and with all of creation. Let us honor those whom God has joined and blessed.

People **Amen.**

THE PRAYERS

The prayers may be led by the Celebrant, a deacon, one of the sponsors, or a family member chosen by the couple. At the end of each petition all respond: Hear our prayer.

Leader Let us pray.

Eternal God, creator and preserver of all life, author of salvation and giver of grace: Look with favor on the world you have made, and for which your son Jesus gave his life; and especially on these two persons whose covenant you bless. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their lives. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Make their life together a sign of Christ's love to this broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt and joy conquer despair. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Bless them according to your will, with the gift and heritage of children and the grace to bring them up to know you, to love you, and to serve you. God, in your love

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Bless N. [and N.], the child/children of N. and N., that this household may be a place of nurture and strength for him/them. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

Leader Grant that we who have witnessed these vows may find our lives strengthened and our loyalties confirmed. God, in your love,

People **Hear our prayer.**

THE BLESSING OF THE UNION

The blessing is pronounced by the Celebrant. The couple may stand facing the Celebrant or may kneel. The Celebrant may place his/her hands on the heads of the couple or hold their joined hands.

Celebrant O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of holy union that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send therefore your blessing upon these your servants, that they may so love, honor, and cherish one another in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People **Amen.**

or the following

Celebrant Most gracious God, we give you thanks for your tender love in sending Jesus Christ to come among us, to be born of a human mother, and to make the way of the cross to be the way of life. By the power of your Holy Spirit, pour out the abundance of your blessings upon these two people. Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace. Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads. Bless them in their work and in their companionship; in their sleeping and in their waking; in their joys and in their sorrows; in their life and in their death. Finally, in your mercy, bring them to that table where your saints feast for ever in your heavenly home; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever.

People Amen.

Celebrant God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, bless, preserve and keep you; the Lord look upon you with mercy and favor, and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting.

People Amen.

THE PEACE

Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

The couple greet each other and the congregation.

When Communion is not to follow, the couple leaves the church followed by the ministers and the congregation. A hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.

At the Eucharist

The Liturgy continues with the Offertory, at which the couple may present the offerings of bread and wine. Preface

Because in the holy covenant of love between two people you have given us an image of the heavenly Jerusalem where we will at last be united with your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who loves us and gave himself for us to make the whole creation new.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices...

At the Communion, it is appropriate that the newly united couple receive the Communion first, after the ministers.

In place of the usual postcommunion prayer, the following is said.

Celebrant O God, giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious:

We give you thanks for binding us together in these holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that by your Holy Spirit, N. and N., now joined in holy union, may become one in heart and soul, live in fidelity and peace, and obtain those eternal joys prepared for all who love you: for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

People Amen.

As the couple and congregation leave the church, a hymn, psalm or anthem may be sung; or instrumental music may be played.

The Celebration and Blessing of a Covenant Relationship Option 2*

Celebrant

We have come together in the presence of God to witness this covenant between N. and N., to celebrate their love for each other, and to ask God's blessing upon them.

A covenant is a public declaration of commitment that binds people in an enduring relationship. The Bible is the story of God's unbroken covenant with humankind. In Baptism, God calls us into a covenant which is sealed eternally by the power of the Holy Spirit. By it we are bound not only to God, but to one another in a new community we call the Church, a community in which God shows no partiality.

Each one of us is called to live out the Covenant of Baptism in our daily life and work. For some this includes a special relationship of fidelity and mutuality with another person that becomes a sign of God's steadfast love. This relationship, a source of comfort and joy, is a gift given by God through which the whole world may be blessed through them.

N. and N.'s relationship is a great gift and a journey that, in different ways, we have travelled and will continue to travel with them. Today we gather at this decisive and important moment in the journey of N. and N., to share in the blessing of this covenant relationship.

The Celebrant may then address the sponsors:

Do you who present this couple believe that they are called to live in such a covenant?

Sponsors: We do. We believe their life together is a gift from God for themselves and for the world.

Celebrant: Will you (continue to) support them as companions on their journey?

Sponsors: We will, with God's help.

Celebrant: N. and N., do you enter freely into this relationship, and do you believe it to be the relationship to which God has called you?

Couple: We do.

Celebrant says to each in turn:

N., now that you enter into this covenant with N., will you love him/her, respect him/her, and be forever faithful to him/her?

I will.

The Celebrant addresses the families

Will you, the families of N. and N., uphold and care for them in their life together?

We will.

The Celebrant addresses the congregation

Will all of you support and encourage N. and N. in this covenant relationship?

We will.

Celebrant: May God, who gives you the will to declare these intentions, give you also the grace to fulfill them.

People: Amen.

The Word of God

The Collect

Celebrant: God be with you.

Or

The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Holy and loving God, in our baptism you call us into relationship with you and the whole creation. We thank you for giving us signs of your steadfast love in the covenant of fidelity two people make with one another, and we pray that, in your mercy, you will give your blessing to N and N who come before you. Strengthen them day by day with the love of your Holy Spirit that they may be a blessing to one another and to the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Then one or more of the following passages from Holy Scripture is read. If there is to be a Communion, a passage from the Gospel always concludes the readings.

Gen 1:1-8

Ruth 1:16-17

Exodus 2:1-10

Isaiah 11:1-9

Isaiah 12:2-6

Isaiah 41: 17-20

Isaiah 43:16-21

Micah 6:6-8

Joel 2: 23-24; 26-29

Romans 12:9-21

Galatians 5:13-14, 22-26

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

Colossians 3:12-17

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

1 John 4:7-16

Philippians 2:1-4

Between the readings, a psalm, hymn or anthem may be sung or said. Appropriate psalms are 8, 65, 67, 85:7-13, 127, 149

When a passage from the Gospel is to be read, all stand, and the Deacon or Minister appointed says

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to _____.

People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

Matthew 5:1-16

Mark 12:28-34

Luke 6:32-38

A Homily or other response to the Readings may follow.

The Binding of the Covenant

Taking each other by the hand(s), each says to the other in turn

N., I make this covenant with you before God and the Church that I will love you in all the circumstances of our lives. With God's help, I will be faithful to you as long as we both shall live, a companion in faith, hope, and love for the glory of God and the life of the world.

The Blessing of the Rings and/or other symbols

The Celebrant may ask God's blessing on rings or other symbols of the covenant the couple have made as follows. If the rings have been previously given, the couple may extend their hands toward the Celebrant.

Bless, O God, these rings as enduring signs of the covenant N. and N. have made, and keep them in the bond of love, through Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The giver presents the ring or other symbols with these words. This action may be omitted if rings or other symbols have been previously given.

N., I give you *this ring* as a symbol of the covenant we have made with God and with one another. **Amen.**

The Prayers

Celebrant:

Dear Friends, N. and N. have been called by God into a covenant of grace and mutual care. Let us join in prayer, asking God's blessing upon them and upon us as we proclaim with our lives the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Gracious God we pray for *N. and N.* and give thanks that you have brought them together in love. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

We thank you for the love and care which [through their parents] has guided *N. and N.* to maturity, and prepared them for this commitment. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

Help them [to be wise and loving parents and] to grow together in faithfulness and honesty, in mutual support and patience. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

We pray the covenant of faithfulness and love we celebrate with *N. and N.* today will reflect your unending faithfulness and great love for the world. **Spirit of God, bless this Union.**

Make their life together be a sign of your love in this broken world; may forgiveness heal injury and joy triumph over sorrow.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

Be with them in their work and renew them in their leisure.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

May *N.* and *N.* so love one another that they may be a blessing to you and all whom they encounter.

Spirit of God, bless this Union.

In all their future together may they enjoy each other's lives and grow through the love they share. **Amen.**

Celebrant:

Gracious and everliving God, look joyfully upon *N* and *N* and upon this assembled community; grant us your blessing and assist us with your grace, that with true fidelity and steadfast love we may honor and keep the covenants we make with you and one another; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

The Blessing of the Covenant

Celebrant: God be with you. Or The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to give you thanks, most gracious God, and to praise you for the unfailing love and care and for the great joy and comfort you have bestowed upon us in the gift of human love. We give you praise and thanks for *N.* and *N.*, and the covenant of love and faithfulness they have made. Pour out the abundance of your grace upon them. Keep them in your steadfast love; protect them from all danger; fill them with your wisdom and peace; lead them in holy service to each other and the world; and, finally, bring them to that table where all your saints feast for ever.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit

or

God the Source of Life, God the Word of Love and God the Spirit of Truth

...bless, preserve, and keep you; God mercifully look upon you with favor and fill you with all blessing and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life and be a light to the world until you come into the age of life everlasting. **Amen.**

The Peace

The Holy Communion

If for special reason the Holy Communion is not to follow, the Service concludes with the Peace, the Lord's Prayer being first said by the People following the blessing of the couple.

Otherwise, the liturgy continues with the Offertory. Any of the Great Thanksgivings from the Book of Common Prayer or Enriching Our Worship may be used. If a Proper Preface is required, it is that of Baptism or of the Season.

In place of the usual post-communion prayer, one of the following may be used.

Gracious God, we thank you for the love made known to us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May this sacrament be to us a reminder of the love through which we are called; may it continue to sustain us on the journey and strengthen us in ministry; in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Or

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift you have given us in the Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ: for love and companionship; forgiveness and reconciliation; mercy and joy. Grant that N and N, having professed their love and commitment one to the other, may grow together, secure in your love, nurtured by your church and sustained by your sacrament; in the Name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**These two rites were adapted from the Diocese of Vermont Rites, the St. Thomas Washington D.C. Rite, the Diocese of Washington D.C. Rite and the Scottish Marriage Liturgy.*

Vermont Declaration of Intention for Holy Union

We, _____ and _____, desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Union in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold this partnership to be a lifelong union of persons. We believe that the union of two partners is intended by God for their mutual joy, for the encouragement and support given one another in daily life and changing circumstances, for the deepening of faith as they experience God's love in their love for one another, and (if it may be) the physical and spiritual nurture of children. Such relationships are nurtured and characterized by fidelity, monogamy, mutual affection and respect, careful, honest communication, and the holy love which enables those in such relationships to see in each other the image of God. And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help hereto.

Declaration of Intention based on National Canon

We, _____ and _____, desiring to receive the blessing of our union in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold our union to be a lifelong union. We believe that our union, in heart, body and mind, is intended by God for our mutual joy, for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity, and when it is God's will for the conception and nurturing of children in the knowledge and love of the Lord. And we do engage ourselves so far as in us lies to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.