

To: The Clergy and Lay Workers of the Diocese of Niagara

From: Bishop D. Ralph Spence

At our meeting in Grimsby earlier this week, I talked to you about the Pastoral Letter issued by our House of Bishops and later adopted by General Synod. The whole pastoral letter is found on our diocesan web site. As you recall, that pastoral was the most generous statement that all the bishops could agree on. Since that time, the Diocese of Toronto has made changes to the wording for their diocese and I have done the same for us. Below you will find part of that statement with the words I have changed underlined and in bold print. I have also underlined critically important instructions.

It has always been my practice as your bishop not to ask anyone to do anything against their conscience. I would expect a conversation and visit to discuss that matter. This pattern is similar to the protocol used when our church authorized the remarriage of divorced people. I ask your prayers for our church and communion at this time of challenge and change.

The Revised Pastoral

.....we believe it is not only appropriate but a Gospel imperative to pray with the whole people of God, no matter their circumstance. In so doing we convey the long-standing Gospel teaching that God in Christ loves each person and indeed loves him/her so much that Christ is calling each person to change and grow more fully into God's image and likeness. To refuse to pray with any person or people is to suggest God is not with them. All of us fall short of the glory of God but all are loved by God in Christ Jesus. We believe that in offering the sacraments we invite God's transformative action into people's lives.

No child is to be denied baptism solely on the basis of the sexual orientation, or the marital status, of the parents. It is inconsistent and unacceptable to deny baptism to children as a way of imposing discipline on the sexual behaviour of their parents.

No baptized Christian will be denied communion or confirmation because of being in a committed homosexual relationship or because of their marital status.

We are committed, as bishops in Canada, to develop the most generous pastoral response possible within the current teaching of the church. We offer the following examples of possible pastoral responses:

When a civilly married gay or lesbian couple seeks our church's reception of their civil marriage and asks their parish's recognition, it may be possible, with their bishop's knowledge and permission, to celebrate a Eucharist with the couple, including appropriate intercessory prayers, but not including a nuptial blessing. **I expect that you will notify my office before this takes place.**

When a gay or lesbian married or committed couple seeks to hold a reception or celebration in a church for their life in Christ, again intercessory prayers for their mutual fidelity, the deepening of their discipleship and for their baptismal ministry may be offered, not including the exchange of vows and/or a nuptial blessing. **I expect that you will notify my office before this takes place.**

To the gay and lesbian licensed clergy of our church, we again affirm your ministry as deeply valued and appreciated, and we acknowledge the pain and conflict that many of you live with daily in your ministry in Christ.

To those who experience these pastoral statements and possible pastoral provisions as inadequate or insufficient, we recognize that they are less than the blessing of same-sex unions or marriage. However it is the discernment of the majority of the House of Bishops that as of today the doctrine and discipline of our church does not clearly permit further action, although we acknowledge that General Synod 2007 will vote on several resolutions on the blessing of same-sex unions.

To those who fear that these pastoral provisions have gone too far, we assert that this discipline is entirely consistent with the doctrine of the Church and with our membership in the Anglican Communion, and fits within the pastoral guidelines of the Windsor Report (paragraph 143). We call upon every member of the Anglican Church of Canada to continue in their faithful discipleship and the work of theological and scriptural reflection and dialogue. We are each called to participate in God's mission in the world and we believe we will do this by the grace of the Risen Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.