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# The Episcopal Church Diocese of Central Florida

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*The Right Reverend Gregory O. Brewer, Bishop*

July 18, 2012

To My Brothers and Sisters in the Household of Faith,

I must admit from the outset that I am saddened that I have to write my first pastoral letter to you around the recent actions of General Convention endorsing Same Sex Blessings. Two reasons:

1. Some wonderful things happened at General Convention where God was clearly at work (which I tried to communicate in my video spots), and I would much rather comment on these wonders. It was not just a challenge to be at General Convention, it was also a blessing.
2. I am quite tired of having issues of sexuality politicized into resolutions, forcing the church to handle them through a political process. There is a relentlessness about it that is almost without equal in the present life of our church. This very time consuming preoccupation says more damaging things about the life of our church than I would care to say in this letter. At the very least, our internal preoccupations have robbed us of what is preeminently important which is the time and energy needed for inspired missionary service.

You will know that while new to this vocation, I do not write this letter unaware of the diversity in our Diocese. I know there are parishioners who are in same sex relationships. I know there are parishioners who wrestle with their same sex attractions and in response have chosen a life of celibacy. I know there are parishioners who have gay friends and family members, some of whom are in active relationships and some are not. In other words, while there is a strong evangelical center we in the Diocese of Central Florida are not of one mind about these matters. No matter what I write today, there will be those whom I will not please. Politics always creates winners and losers. The fact that we are not of one mind is something that I do not want to pass over too quickly. I bear a responsibility to serve as chief pastor to the entire diocese, not merely to those who may agree with me on this or any other concern. So, the responsibility of writing a pastoral letter is that I speak as a pastor- a responsibility that is also at the heart of my vocation as a bishop.

As you are aware, both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops passed by wide margins a resolution that gives Episcopal clergy the opportunity to offer an authorized liturgy for the blessing of same-sex unions (A049). The liturgy is entitled, "The Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant." One can only preside using this liturgy with the permission of the Ecclesiastical Authority- in our case, the diocesan bishop. This liturgy also has the status of being only in "provisional" usage- meaning that it has no constitutional or canonical status. It is presently temporary.

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*"He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom,  
so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ." - Colossians 1:28*

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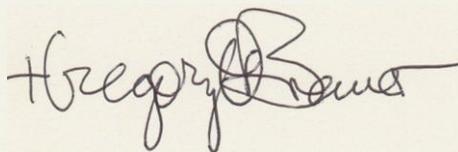
While the title of the liturgy might indicate that something is happening other than a marriage service, the rite itself contains the same structure and components of the marriage rite found in the Book of Common Prayer: Scripture readings, vows, rings, a pronouncement, prayers and a blessing. Consequently, it is clear that such a service is a step towards redefining Christian marriage as clearly expressed both in the Scriptures and in the Book of Common Prayer. As such, I cannot endorse or extend permission for the use of this rite by the clergy under my care in the Episcopal Diocese of Central Florida. As I wrote to the Diocese during the election process for bishop: I see nothing in the Scriptures or in our Anglican tradition that give me permission to expand or redefine the institution of marriage. The Scriptures and the Book of Common Prayer are clear that God established the bond and covenant of marriage; and it is my responsibility as a bishop to uphold and maintain what God has created.

I recognize that there are faithful Christians in this Diocese and beyond who deeply disagree with me and with my decision. While I expect our diocesan clergy to follow my directives, my affection for them will be no less for their disagreeing with my position on this matter. We all see through a glass darkly, and as a church, we are living in the midst of an unfolding story. The last chapter of that story is written in heaven, but is still being played out on earth.

Therefore, is it possible for us as the Diocese of Central Florida to be a community that vocally condemns violence and prejudice against anyone- including gay people? Is it possible for us to be a community that "respects the dignity of every human being?" Is it possible for us to commit ourselves to stand beside to all people who desire to follow Christ? In other words, is it possible for us to truly love one another in the name of Christ and, at the same time, not move towards the liturgical blessings of gay relationships? Can we be on mission together in a way that bridges the present liberal/conservative divide? That would certainly be my hope.

What binds us together are the bonds of our baptism, our creeds, and our mutual commitment to serve Jesus as Lord. It is in that service, that missionary service, embodied in what we describe as "the Great Commission" and "the Great Commandment" that we should frame our conversations, including those about sexual ethics. We have vows to keep. We have a witness to maintain. May God help us to love one another and serve the world together in the Name of Christ!

Given under my hand and seal in the  
City of Orlando, Florida  
On the 18<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2012, and  
in the first year of my Consecration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gregory O. Brewer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Gregory O. Brewer, Bishop