

July 3, 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you know, on May 20th a federal judge in Harrisburg struck down Pennsylvania law banning same-sex marriage and ruled that couples who seek to marry in the Commonwealth may do so.

For us in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the question then arose as to whether clergy choosing to use the Provisional Rite for the Blessing of a Lifelong Covenant between same-sex couples could also sign civil marriage certificates in order to help the couple establish a legally valid marriage in Pennsylvania. Following the court ruling, I asked our diocesan chancellor, Andy Roman, to ascertain if and how this might be done. Andy's research of civil and canon law, and his consultations with other diocesan chancellors, have been appropriately thorough, and in the past few days I have received his determination that the language of the Rite as it stands, without modification of the Pronouncement, indeed satisfies the requirements of the law of the Commonwealth.



Therefore, clergy may sign civil marriage certificates in conjunction with the Rite as an appropriate extension of their pastoral care, effective immediately, with the following stipulations:

- Since the laws of Pennsylvania now permit same-sex couples to enter into a civil marriage, it seems appropriate that the Rite only be celebrated for couples who make that civil commitment of permanence and fidelity. Therefore, the Rite may be used only a) when the certificate of civil marriage is being signed at the time of the Rite (by the priest or other validly licensed person) or b) when the couple has already entered into a civil marriage in Pennsylvania or elsewhere and has provided the certificate of that marriage to the priest. It shall be the responsibility of the priest to ensure that the conditions for civil marriage are being or have been met.
- The other provisions of my November 25, 2013, pastoral letter authorizing use of the Provisional Rite remain in effect in their entirety, including the limitation that the Rite may not be adapted beyond the provisions of its rubrics; no change to the language of the Rite is authorized, and no other liturgy may be used in its place.

I have appended for your convenience both [revised guidelines](#) for the use of the Rite, and the full text of our [chancellor's legal opinion](#).

I know and treasure the theological diversity of this diocese, and know that practice in this matter will vary from parish to parish. I support the need for our clergy to be faithful to their own consciences, in choosing to use or not use the Rite, and hope as always that we will continue to regard one another with affection and respect across our differences, as sisters and brothers in Christ and indispensable members of His Body.

While it is true that the provisional Rite does not confer sacramental marriage, the civil rights once denied same-sex couples and now bestowed under the law are monumental: access to health and pension benefits, rights to make medical decisions on one another's behalf, to bequeath and inherit property without penalty, and many others that serve to create significant social and human goods and help them establish secure and loving households for themselves and their families. This is not only a blessing for them but for our whole community.

Even as I am happy for these civil benefits, I reiterate the reservations I have previously expressed concerning both the sacramental intention and the theology of the Rite itself. I hope in the coming months to join with you in a deeper exploration of classical teaching on Christian marriage, particularly in light of the various challenges to it currently being raised in the culture and in the Church.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that my public reticence on this matter in the weeks since May 20th has been the cause of anxious speculation as to what my decision might be. I have heard both from couples pained by the delay and from clergy who have been on the front lines asking their parishioners for patience on my behalf. I pray never to add to the burdens of our pastors or their people, and to the extent that my deliberation or my silence has done so, I ask your pardon.

May God prosper in all our lives the fruit of the Gospel of His Son, and may He continue to use us as faithful witnesses and workers for the coming of His Kingdom.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dorsey McConnell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a double vertical line at the end.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey McConnell
Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh