

Pastoral Rites of Blessing at St. Paul's

...homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church.

65th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Resolution A069, 1976

...we recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.

74th General Convention, Resolution C051, 2003

...we expect such relationships will be 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

73rd General Convention, Resolution D039

The Vestry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church expresses its support for our church's offering of a rite of blessing as a resource for pastoral care for our gay and lesbian members who wish to make a lifelong, loving commitment of mutual fidelity as a couple.

Vestry Resolution, September 19, 2005

...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law.

Galatians 5:22-23

As part of our parish's work to offer full pastoral care to all our members, we invite our members who are of a same-sex orientation and who wish to commit themselves as a couple to a life-long covenant of love and faithfulness to enter into a process of discernment and preparation that may lead to a service of pastoral blessing for their relationship. Such a blessing is part of the church's non-sacramental offering of pastoral care.

When the church chooses to bless it is doing several things.

- Whenever we bless anything we begin with thanksgiving.
- We are saying this person or object is a gift and blessing from God.
- We are saying that blessing assists us in our living in a covenant relationship with God and all creation; our living in covenant is to bless God in return.
- To pronounce God's blessing is to say that something is to function for the good.
- To bless is to make something "holy," which means "set apart" / devoted to God.
- Blessing asks God's protection and favor.

In the blessing of a covenant of life-long union we ask God to make their relationship an experience of Christ's love, both for the couple and also for all who are touched by their life together. To bless such a union is to wish good for the couple and to give thanks for their union. Most especially, it is to set aside their union for a holy use, to see it to be grace-bearing, and to expect God to use it.

We expect that any couple seeking the church's blessing will undertake a period of preparation with our clergy. In general, the same policies required of couples getting married at St. Paul's will be expected of couples who are seeking a pastoral blessing (*see the booklet "Guidelines for Marriage at St. Paul's Episcopal Church"*). A pastoral blessing has no legal standing in the state of Arkansas.