

*A Memorandum from the Right Rev'd Dr.
Michael L. Vono*



Date: February 7, 2012

To: Lay Delegates and Clergy of the Deaneries of the Diocese of the Rio Grande

Subject: Bishop's Council of Advice, unanimously approved by Diocesan Council (January 31, 2012) and Standing Committee (February 1, 2012)

Dear Friends,

The Lord has blessed us richly in this diocese and in the interest of continuing good communications and even greater pastoral collegiality between the laity and clergy, I have asked for the Diocesan Council and the Standing Committee for their reflections and guidance in how we might address the probable action of General Convention regarding same gender blessings. I do not intend to step ahead of the General Convention or wider Episcopal Church, but I would prefer intentionally and with all transparency to educate and to prepare the people of our diocese so that they are not surprised if or when same-gender blessings are officially an option offered to the Episcopal Church.

As you are aware there are many dioceses that have done much work in keeping people informed of the complex and myriad issues that are related to this historic pastoral consideration of human sexuality now before us. The issues have been widely discussed in the Church, bringing joy to some and consternation to others. They are important issues with pastoral implications, so I would like to prepare the people of the diocese in a proper manner to receive the decisions of the Church when a decision has been made at the next General Convention. The Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music website has published many resources and materials gathered over the past 35 years in the Church's long discernment process on this topic. Presently in our country we are seeing changes and reconsideration in civil law in a growing number of states, which now legally permits same gender civil unions. I commend the information and resources of this website (<http://generalconvention.org/ccab/mandate/2>) to all our laity and clergy, and I recognize that there is much to consider.

My Goal: The draft policy guidelines for a counsel of advice composed of a broad spectrum of laity and clergy for same-gender blessings for the Diocese of the Rio Grande was approved by both Diocesan Council and Standing Committee. This policy guideline is intended pastorally and in the most sensitive ways to accommodate all the baptized in the family of God and to embrace

Blessings

Page 2

January 31, 2012

faithful people who may or may not approve the use of the Episcopal Church's "Guidelines for clergy and congregations wishing to perform blessings of same gender unions." I seek laity and clergy who are spiritually and emotionally able and willing to enter into godly discussions on how we implement the church's guidelines IF these are to be an option with the Bishop's consent. Again, I reaffirm my commitment to the diocese that no parish or clergy will be obligated to implement these same gender blessing guidelines if they choose not to.

May our Lord Jesus continue to bless us and by the grace of the Holy Spirit guide us in all our deliberations for the well being and love of all God's beloved redeemed people in Christ Jesus.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "+ Michael". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.