

Model Congregational Guidelines

NOTE: Most congregations adopt some form of marriage policy expressing norms and guidelines for different-sex/gender couples preparing for marriage. All congregations may engage in a helpful and fruitful exercise to develop guidelines that reflect the Christian community in which they worship; the guidelines that are developed should apply to both different-sex/gender couples and gender and sexual minority couples. Obviously, such a policy is optional at the discretion of the clergy in consultation with the vestry or bishop's committee. As always with liturgical matters, final decisions are the responsibility of the clergy. Following is a model of a guideline that applies for all couples preparing for marriage or a blessing. It may be modified to meet specific situations and needs.

Information for All Couples Seeking the Church's Blessing at *N.* Episcopal Church

A. Introduction

The Christian community at *N.* Episcopal Church understands that relationships are complex and that making a lifelong commitment to a relationship through a marriage or blessing is a significant, exciting, and wonder filled event in people's lives. We also believe that a Christian community that agrees to bless such a relationship needs to be intentional about supporting the couple as they prepare for the blessing and as they live out their lives.

We understand that committed, lifelong relationships, whether for gender and sexual minority couples or different-sex/gender couples, are to be outward and visible signs of an inward, spiritual, and God-given love.

In this context, *N.* Episcopal Church seeks to support all couples in their commitment to one another and to help make the love of God more visible for the whole community.

B. Guidelines

The following guidelines have been adopted by the lay and ordained leaders of *N.* Episcopal Church:

1. As required for different-sex/gender couples seeking marriage according to the Book of Common Prayer, at least one member of a gender and sexual minority couple must be baptized.
2. It is desirable that at least one member of the couple be an active member of this, or some other, Christian community. We hope this membership might include giving serious, prayerful consideration to supporting the congregation through time, talent, and/or treasure.

3. Approximately six months' notice should be given to allow for planning and pastoral preparation.
4. If the couple has no connection with *N. Episcopal Church* but wishes to have the blessing at *N. Episcopal Church* or to use the services of *N. Episcopal Church's* priest:
 - They should be able to show that at least one of the couple has active membership in another Episcopal or Christian congregation.
 - They need to complete marriage or blessing preparation with their own or other clergy person or a qualified lay preparer.
 - They might consider making a financial contribution to *N. Episcopal Church* in thanksgiving for their marriage or blessing and for the ongoing support of the Church, its ministry and mission. A creative formula to calculate this contribution might be to consider a tithe (10 percent) of the budget for the entire celebration. (Clergy have discretion here, as resources vary greatly from couple to couple. Also, if a couple is returning to Church for the first time, an unconditional welcome may be the best pastoral response.)

In all cases, it is important that all concerned comply with the laws of the State, the Canons of the Episcopal Church, and the canons and policies of the Episcopal Diocese of *Georgia*, as well as the directives of the diocesan bishop, including compliance with diocesan policies for cases in which the relationship is not the first marriage or committed relationship for one or both people.

The text of these Model Congregation Guidelines is taken from pages 74-75 of the Supplemental Materials provided to the 78th General Convention of the Episcopal Church by the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music.