

**News and Current Events :: N.C. Episcopal Bishop Oks Same-Sex `Blessing'**

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July 14--The spiritual leader of nearly 50,000 Episcopalians in North Carolina has given his formal OK to churches in his diocese blessing same-sex unions.

In a letter to clergy, Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina said "the blessing of the committed life long unions of persons of the same gender is one way our community can live the Gospel through faithful and loving pastoral care and spiritual support for each other."

Curry's diocese is one of at least six among the nation's 108 U.S. Episcopal dioceses to adopt official, written policies allowing the blessing of same-sex unions. The Raleigh-based diocese is home to 121 parishes in Mecklenburg and 38 other N.C. counties.

The U.S. Episcopal church, with 2.3 million members, does not officially have a liturgy for same-sex blessings. But the denomination acknowledges that an unknown number of bishops -- including Robert Johnson in Asheville -- allows their clergy to conduct them.

Kaye Lasater Culp, a spokesperson for Curry's Raleigh-based diocese, said no same-sex ceremonies have been held in the diocese with the bishop's approval. "If this was done before," she said, "it's been done on its own."