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May 23, 2024

Dear Friends -

The Good Shepherd vestry has recently concluded a period of discernment regarding same-sex marriage. Over the last six months, several factors have converged to suggest that the vestry review the parish's marriage practices related to same-sex marriage:

- Several very active members of the parish contacted John Pitts, our senior warden. These parishioners expressed their concern and sadness that they and/or members of their family are precluded from participating fully in the life of Good Shepherd because they cannot be married at Good Shepherd.
- Our preparation for the rector search led to questions about what we profess and what we do. Our vision statement says that "All people will find joyful union with God and with one another, being fully known and fully loved."
- We have learned that most similarly situated Episcopal parishes have decided to permit same-sex marriages in the church after the Supreme Court decision. The fact that Good Shepherd has not updated its practice may create a challenge as we search for clergy.

The vestry embarked upon a period of discernment, including a lengthy meeting with Dr. Scott Bader-Saye, academic dean of the Seminary of the Southwest, to gain a theological perspective. The vestry reviewed Biblical passages and theology related to this question.

After prayerful discernment, the vestry of Good Shepherd unanimously agreed on May 15 that the marriage practices of the parish would be amended to allow same-sex marriages on our Good Shepherd campuses. We believe that God calls us to love one another, welcoming all into our parish family with full participation in all its life and sacraments, and we believe that this change is consistent with our theology as followers of Jesus.

As many parishioners may remember, in 2012 the Episcopal Church created an order of worship to be used in *blessing* a same-sex relationship. Each parish in the Diocese of Texas was asked to decide whether to affirm, denounce, or make no decision about offering this blessing. After prayerful consideration, the Good Shepherd vestry decided in 2012 to make no decision, leaving in place its practice not to bless same-sex relationships.

In 2015, as a result of the Supreme Court's decision, same-sex marriage was legalized in all 50 states and, accordingly, the Episcopal Church authorized supplemental marriage liturgies that could be used for any marriage ceremony, including same-sex marriages. However, Good Shepherd did not update its practice regarding same-sex marriage at that time. We believe that the time is now right to make this change.

We have a diverse parish and know that some in our congregation may be concerned by this change in practice. We value this diversity, and we are committed to being a place for everyone, including those who have concerns. Regardless of your opinion on this practice, we expect and hope that your experience of the parish will not change: that you will continue to find a parish community where you are valued and included.

Weddings at Good Shepherd are generally restricted to members of the parish and their families, and this part of our practice has not changed. We believe that all members of Good Shepherd should be able to participate fully in the life of Good Shepherd, including in the sacrament of marriage.

As always, please reach out to us or any other member of the vestry at any time to discuss this subject or any other area of interest.

John Pitts
Senior Warden

J. Pieratt
Junior Warden