



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada

March 3, 2016

Pastoral Letter to the Clergy of the Diocese of Toronto

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you as a cleric of the Diocese of Toronto to comment on the proposed change in the Canon on Marriage coming before our General Synod in July, the statement from the gathering of the Anglican Primates in Canterbury in January and the recent statement from the Canadian House of Bishops earlier this week.

*Primates' Gathering*

Our Primate, Archbishop Fred Hiltz has given a fulsome report of the gathering of Primates which he attended, in addition to the communique from that meeting and the press conference given by the Archbishop of Canterbury and some other Primates. These are available at <http://www.primates2016.org/articles/2016/01/15/communique-primates/> and <http://www.anglican.ca/news/a-reflection-on-the-meeting-of-the-primates/30014029/> There is an enormous amount of comment on this on-line, some perceptive, most uninformed.

Many have found these distressing, either because they think the Primates have gone too far in their authority and their conclusions on one hand or not far enough on the other. The Primates of the Anglican Communion are official representatives of their Churches. They hold a moral authority but not jurisdiction. We are autonomous Churches within a Communion of Churches that are both independent, inter-dependent and mutually accountable. That means, I think, we need to take the Primates' opinions into consideration as we make decisions in our own Province, and how it affects relationships within the Communion and ecumenically. This is but one factor and not definitive in coming to our own conclusions. How we weigh that will vary both personally and situationally.

The Instruments of Communion (Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' gathering) are just that: "instruments" in maintaining and nurturing relationship and communion, not binding legislative bodies. Note the names: consultative, conference, gathering.

There is no easily defined magisterium in Anglican polity. The teaching authority is diverse and diffused. This is confusing, frustrating, delighting, challenging but it is distinctively



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Anglican. And it means that there is considerable room for nuance and ambiguity within Anglicanism, even on important issues. That does not mean that anything goes, but it does mean that the boundaries are generous, and particularly so in pastoral matters.

The Diocese of Toronto shares in that diversity. The full range of theological, liturgical and political opinion is expressed in this Diocese including on the subject of same-sex unions and marriages. The recent Primates' statement does not change this.

The majority of General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in 2004 approved a resolution affirming the integrity and sanctity of monogamous adult same sex unions. The overwhelming majority of Synod of the Diocese of Toronto agreed later that same year, even as it did narrowly rejected formally blessing those unions. In 2011, by consensus Toronto's Synod supported a pastoral approach to allow such blessings in some circumstances. Our process was adopted by General Synod in 2012 which determined that while there was no consensus across the church about blessings, it asked for the most generous pastoral responses realising that there would be a variety of pastoral responses in dioceses across the country. The debate was about blessing of same-sex unions but not marriage of same-sex couples.

### *Changing the Canon on Marriage*

The Canadian House of Bishops met last week to continue its study of the proposed change to the Marriage Canon to include same-sex couples. The Canon on Marriage is a canon of the national church and does not come under the purview of a diocesan Synod. General Synod 2013 required that a motion to change the Canon on Marriage to accommodate same-sex marriage be brought to the next General Synod in 2016. That resolution also asked that the Council of General Synod respond to a number of questions to support this.

The Commission on the Marriage Canon, established by CoGS, produced a fine and succinct report that is a significant contribution to the debate both in Canada and more broadly. It also suggested some intriguing possibilities. It is worth study.

As required, a proposed motion was drafted. The Constitution of General Synod requires that this motion be approved by a two-thirds majority in each of the three Orders. If there is approval at First Reading, the resolution is then sent for consideration by the Synods of each of the four Ecclesiastical Provinces and the Synods of each of the 30 Diocese over the next three years. Then in General Synod 2019 the Second Reading of the motion with any amendments requires a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> affirmative vote in each of the three Orders in order to become effective in January 2020.



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*House of Bishops' Statement*

The bishops did not vote for or against the motion last week. While expressing our concern that a legislative process may not be the most helpful way of dealing with this, we did not ask that the Council of General Synod withdraw the motion.

The bishops were not exercising a legislative function - that takes place in General Synod - but our pastoral and teaching responsibilities.

We spent time at our meeting considering the theology of marriage and more specifically the theology of episcopacy. As bishops, our ordination vows compel us to guard the doctrine, discipline and unity of the Church, both within the diocese, and in the national and international Church. We have "the care of all the churches" before, during and after Synod.

The bishops' communication to the Council of General Synod and to the Church is not a direction to any of the Orders of General Synod to vote in a particular way, including the Order of Bishops. Each Order has a particular and necessary role in the process, and each brings its particular interests and concerns. At General Synod, the Order of Bishops will not vote as a block but individually like all the other members of Synod as they feel led by the debate and the Spirit. There is considerable diversity of opinion in the House and there is no unity of discernment or a common mind theologically that we can achieve at this time.

The document states implicitly that bishops will vote in different ways on the proposed motion but we observed that we **did not think it likely** that this draft motion would succeed in achieving a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in the Order of Bishops when the vote takes place. We believe that this is a fact, regrettable for many, including myself, but one that needs to be reported to CoGS and taken into consideration when the process for the discussion at General Synod is being developed. I think that communicating this was the right thing to do in the interests of being honest, transparent and realistic.

This does not take the issue off the table - in fact even those most opposed to same-sex marriage recognise that. It does suggest that we need to be realistic about expectations and that we all need to think of some creative alternatives rather than put all our "eggs in one basket." It could be that some bishops might change their minds and pass this motion by the required 2/3<sup>rd</sup> but unlikely, I think. That does not mean that there might be different results with amendments or alternative motions.

One of the important, and perhaps undervalued, statements in the communication is that, in spite of these differences, all of the bishops pledged to participate in ongoing discussions with members of the Church and all continued daily to share in Holy Communion together, a powerful sacramental sign of community. This has not always been the case in the past and is



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not the situation internationally. Unity does not require uniformity, nor is it the only goal but it is one of the charisms of episcopal ministry and a good for which Jesus prayed, and must be a factor in any decision.

*Where does this leave the Diocese of Toronto?*

The current practice of the Diocese of Toronto has not changed with the recent statements:

- Clergy and parishes where there has been full discussion and by consensus agreement, may apply to me for authorisation to offer blessings of committed same-sex unions. The guidelines for that are found at <http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/parish-life/same-gender-blessings/> Fifteen parishes and two schools have received my formal permission.
- We recognise that some of our clergy and postulants are openly partnered or in civil same-sex marriages. They are a valuable part of our clerical family. They are, or will be available for placement, in parishes that will affirm this.
- There is, and will continue to be, a significant place for both clergy and laity, who do not support these decisions. This includes placement in parishes large and small, membership on decision making bodies like Diocesan Council, representation on policy and administrative groups like Postulancy Committee, Doctrine and Worship Committee and Regional Deans.

Times of discernment are always difficult. There are those who know with total certainty which direction the Holy Spirit is leading - unfortunately not all of them agree on which direction that is! Most of us will continue to pray and ponder, study, and listen to each other and to the Spirit as we seek to determine in our time, the mind and wisdom of Christ, who continues to as head of the Church, his body.

Blessings for a holy Lent and in the hope of the Resurrection,

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