



The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron The Anglican Church of Canada

*"Building up the body of Christ and preparing God's people to live their Mission."
Huron Mission Statement*

**The Right Reverend Linda Nicholls
Bishop of Huron**

PASTORAL LETTER TO THE DIOCESE OF HURON

May 7, 2017

Dear friends in Christ,

In July 2016 the General Synod did vote, after some initial confusion, to pass a first reading of changes to the marriage canon to allow for the marriage of 'all duly qualified persons', thus including same sex partnerships.

On the day of the vote when it looked as though the vote had been lost Bishop Bob Bennett and I issued the following statement:

We are also aware that a diocesan bishop may exercise episcopal authority in authorizing liturgies to respond to pastoral needs within their dioceses, in the absence of any actions by the General Synod. We intend to authorize such liturgies once guidelines are in place.

When this was reversed the next day we later issued a further statement:

With the passing of the amendment to the Marriage Canon, we, with the Church nationally, are committed to ongoing consultation as required by this resolution. We will consult across the diocese as we seek to be faithful to our commitment to all voices and a response consistent with our initial statement.

This first affirmative vote to change the marriage canon is an action of General Synod though it is only the first step which must be confirmed by a second vote at General Synod 2019 in order for the change to become fully legal within the Anglican Church of Canada under canon law. This is a slow process, deliberately so in order that the Church can give adequate time for discernment together. Parts of our church have been in that process of discernment for decades while other parts continue to struggle to begin the conversations necessary.

We are not a congregational church or even simply a regional church. We share our life with Anglicans across Canada, and by mutual commitment, across the globe. This change is a significant shift in the understanding of marriage and must be given due process as agreed in our constitution.

In my first months in the Diocese of Huron I consulted with clergy and laity and have heard about the desire to move forward now and permit the marriage of same-sex partners in our churches. I also heard from those for whom this is a very difficult decision and who urge that we walk slowly and carefully in this regard.

Huron Church House

190 Queen's Avenue, London, Ontario N6A 6H7

Phone: 519-434-6893 Ext. 223 or 1-800-919-1115 (ON) Fax: 519-673-4151 E-mail: BishopLinda@huron.anglican.ca

We do already have provision for a church blessing of civilly married same-sex partnerships. I am grateful that this is possible and provides a way for us to celebrate with those who desire to live in a committed relationship as Christians, with God's blessing.

A few Anglican dioceses in Canada have made decisions to permit the marriage of same-sex couples in the Church before General Synod 2019. Although I understand the pastoral latitude exercised in this regard by my colleagues this action must be held in tension with our Anglican polity and the deep pain this change brings to our relationships with others.

After careful consideration and prayer, and since General Synod has taken the first step to approve the change to the marriage canon, and in light of the processes of General Synod that are still ongoing, I commit our diocese to that process which will include consultation at our next Diocesan Synod in 2017. I will therefore not give permission for same sex marriages to occur in the Diocese of Huron at this time.

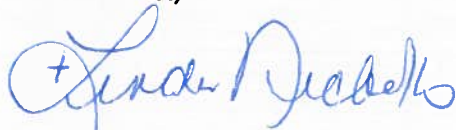
For some the discernment of the Church on this issue has been long and frustrating as many believe this to be the right and just step to take. I know there will be disappointment at waiting even longer. For others there will be relief that we are staying within the bounds of the process laid out in our national constitution and taking our time with such an important issue.

My commitment is that we will continue to respect and listen to one another as we prepare to enter into our 2017 Diocesan Synod which will include first steps in the consultation process required by the constitution. In addition, I have invited the Diocese of Brandon to enter into an 'indaba' time with us around and during our Synod. Bishop William Cliff and four members of his diocese will be with us to listen, share and learn. Four members of our diocese will go with me to the Diocese of Brandon in October to share in their Synod.

Please keep us all in your prayers as we discern together. We are one body in Christ - sisters and brothers for the sake of the Gospel. How we live together in this time is critically important to our witness to sacrificial love for one another and the world.

Thank you for your grace and patience.

Yours in Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls
Bishop of Huron