

October 11, 2017

To the Members of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am grateful to God for the faith planted in the hearts of so many, who, with commitment and love, continue to worship and serve God, and to serve God's people and the world for which Jesus died – guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit and following in the faith of the Church as we have received it in Christ.

As you know, the clergy and lay delegates of the Diocese will be gathering in Synod in a few days. I look forward to sharing this time in which we may focus our attention on the work and mission of the Church as we seek to live it out in the life of our Diocese. Of particular note is our theme "Toward Healing and Reconciliation" and our guest speaker, Bishop Lydia Mamakwa. There will also be a motion brought forward seeking to direct the next Diocesan Council to focus its attention on developing a mission plan over the next triennium of its work.

One item on our agenda will be a motion put forward by some members of the Diocese regarding the pastoral care of same sex couples and the potential for the blessing of the unions of same sex couples. I would like to acknowledge the significant level of anxiety that I have encountered from many quarters in our Diocese as we approach what has often been a very fraught topic in the life of the church. This letter is in response to the significant number of requests I have received to write a pastoral letter, in advance of the Synod, to address this.

Much of the anxiety arises from concerns that the conversations on the floor of Synod may become hurtful and divisive. It is true that any of the positions and views held by members of our Synod may be experienced as objectionable, and perhaps even hurtful, to members who hold differing convictions on this matter. It is therefore vital that we come prepared to speak in ways that are consciously and intentionally respectful, gentle, loving and grace-filled. In all that is said, we must each aim to reflect obedience to our Lord's command that we love one another.

I would also assert, that for all that there is disagreement, there is also a very large amount of agreement amongst us. From many conversations around the diocese I am very confident in saying that virtually all of us agree that gay and lesbian people, as with all people, are loved by God and worthy of our love and care. That in keeping with our baptismal vow to "strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being" – we are to seek their good, and respect their dignity as human beings. Further, I believe we together affirm gay and lesbian members of our church as valued and precious sisters and brothers in Christ – who have been baptized into Christ and who share with us "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:5, 6) As baptized members of our Church we all together, regardless of sexual orientation, share in the Holy Eucharist, are gifted for ministry, and receive the pastoral ministry of the Church, offered in the sacraments, in spiritual counsel, direction and teaching. Another way to say this, is that we all have open to us the various gifts of God, the means of grace, necessary and right for our particular circumstances in the journey we make through this world in following the way of Christ.

However, in these particular circumstances, discernment is required. Sacraments and pastoral care, for example, are offered to the whole of the Church for building it up and healing the brokenness of its members. They are administered by the Church in differing circumstances, dependent on who comes to receive and in what manner they come to receive. Baptism is not offered without profession of faith and stated commitment to the Christian faith by way of baptismal vows. Eucharist may be withheld in cases where someone is in a state of notorious and unrepentant sin. Ordination is only conferred upon those in whom the Church discerns a call, and who are willing to swear loyalty to the “doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this Church has received them.”

The issue of same sex blessings is subject to this same discernment. It is not a question of political or civil equality or rights, but of discerning within God’s revelation to us in and through Jesus Christ. It is a question of how we are to understand human sexuality as God’s gift to us, and what we can or ought to uphold as faithful Christians living into the transformation in Christ that God calls us to. Likewise, this discernment is not a matter of questioning the real goods that are present within same sex relationships. Commitment, faithfulness, and love are all marks of the same sex relationships that many of us have been witness to. That these relationships can and often do give a place for personal growth and a deepening of the fruit of God’s work in people’s lives is also evident, just as it is in many of the human relationships which make up the complex web of our personal lives. All of these things can be affirmed but in themselves do not decide the question of same sex blessings. Discernment is also, of course, done with an eye to what the allowable or liveable levels of disagreement can be in our common witness together in the Church. We do this always with humility, understanding that while all are gloriously created in God’s image and gifted in some measure with the Holy Spirit, we are also, always, beset by the brokenness of sin which clouds our judgments and mars our human efforts. The Anglican Way has been to do this discerning under the authority of scripture, as received in the great teaching tradition of the Church, with the exercise of our best human reasoning. This is what we have attempted to strive for in the Generous Listening Process.

It is also important that we keep in mind that the matter at hand in the motion is about the *pastoral care* of same sex couples. We are not talking, for example, about the civil right of same sex couples to be married – a civil right which within the context of a pluralistic, secular society has been duly granted. Similarly, we are not talking about same sex marriage; the marriage rites of the church fall under the jurisdiction of the General Synod and are currently being addressed through the canonical processes of the Anglican Church of Canada at the national level. Diocesan Synods do not, in our church, have the authority to make decisions on doctrinal matters. Further, it is not within the Diocesan Synod’s authority to grant permission to clergy to perform public liturgical acts. This permission is found within the canons of our church and reserved to General Synod authorization and/or the authority of the Bishop as chief liturgical officer. This is because the public liturgies of the Church are never the individual acts of particular clergy, but always, as services performed by those ordained by and for the church, an act of the whole church given expression in the ministry of the particular clergy person. That is, when clergy take on public acts of liturgy, they always do so as representatives of the whole Church.

In the context of the motion coming before Synod, I have been asked what things I would be willing to give permission for in praying with and for same sex relationships. I have suggested that it is possible that we could devise some intercessory prayers for use in the context of a Eucharistic celebration. These prayers would ask God’s grace for the couple as they seek to grow in their faith and in their partnership. The national House of Bishops in a pastoral letter provided in 2007 suggested a number of ways in which pastoral response to same sex couples

might be made. These guidelines provide some material from which to develop a pastoral response to same sex couples in the Diocese of Calgary. *(Some dioceses have proceeded with the blessing of same sex unions – and some have even proceeded to same sex marriages. The history of our church on this matter, however, is rather indefinite. The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) passed a motion in 2007 acknowledging that same sex blessings are a matter of doctrine (though not core doctrine in the sense of being creedal) placing it within General Synod’s jurisdiction. General Synod also declined to affirm the right of dioceses to make decisions on the matter and then has since declined to make any decision on the matter. So, it would seem that the pastoral letter of 2007, although not carrying any legislative weight, stands as the last document which spoke directly to the matter of same sex blessings with anything resembling a broad spectrum of support in the ACC.)*

A couple of years ago a small group met with me over the course of a number of months to work toward developing some materials for use on this. Re-gathering that group, or establishing another similar one, to work on this would be one potential way to proceed. Whatever process is followed on this, it is important to remember that any liturgical practices that are not explicitly in our prayer books must be approved by the Chief Liturgical Officer, who is the Diocesan Bishop, **prior** to their use.

As many of our members will be aware, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada is in the process of considering changes to the marriage canon to allow for the marriage of all “legally qualified” couples. The proposed changes will go to a final vote at General Synod 2019. What that may look like when completed is not yet clear, but will undoubtedly have an impact on our own diocesan deliberations in the future.

I know from the conversations I have had that some of you are quite worried that my suggestions go too far, while others have already stated they do not go far enough. What we have before us as a Diocese of Calgary is God’s call to work to live into the truth of the Gospel in a Spirit of love, while pursuing unity and peace amongst ourselves in the spirit of Phil.2:3-4 *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* As we continue seeking always that transformation of hearts and minds in Christ, I pray God’s grace, wisdom and humility to lead us forward in Christ.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Ken-Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Archbishop of Calgary and Metropolitan of Rupert’s Land*