



The Diocese of Huron

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

The Right Reverend Linda Nicholls
Bishop of Huron

July 18, 2019

Dear friends in Christ,

At the recent General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada members from across Canada gathered to worship, pray, listen, discern and decide how our life will proceed. The work of this Synod included many significant decisions. With joy, the first steps towards a self-determining Indigenous Church were passed, including the appointment of the National Indigenous Bishop as a metropolitan and official membership in General Synod by representatives of the Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples. We heard a deep and profound apology from Primate Fred Hiltz for spiritual harm to indigenous peoples. We approved liturgical revisions and additions to broaden our worship. We approved a new collect for reconciliation with the Jewish people. We affirmed our commitment to addressing issues around climate change. We set in motion a strategic review of the work of General Synod to meet our changing context and needs. And the Synod elected me as the next Primate for the Church - a humbling honour and challenge.

We also returned to the question of the proposed change to Canon XXI on Marriage to permit the marriage of same-sex partners which has been discussed extensively in the Church since 2013. It narrowly passed the required majorities at General Synod 2016 and was considered in each Provincial Synod and Diocese over the last three years. It has been clear for some time that the Church is divided on this issue with deeply held convictions for reasons of theology priorities; scriptural interpretation; or community needs. Knowing how deeply the pain would be felt by either decision in 2019 the Council of General Synod offered to General Synod 'A Word to the Church' of affirmations of how we can live together whatever the outcome (<https://gs2019.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/A-Word-to-the-Church-Considering-the-proposed-amendment-of-Marriage-Canon-XXI.pdf>). This statement was affirmed by General Synod with a very strong majority.

However, the amendment itself failed at its second reading. It reached the 2/3's majority required in the clergy and laity but not in the House of Bishops. If the vote had been assessed on the basis of the members of General Synod as a whole the overall majority was 75%.

I know that our diocese is not of one mind on this issue. However I am aware that the majority strongly supported the blessing of same-sex civil marriages (over 72% of clergy and laity) and have indicated to me their strong support for equal marriage in the church. The pain of the failure of the amendment has been deeply felt and heard. In 'A Word to the Church' the General Synod affirmed the possibility of 'local option' for those dioceses where affirming equal marriage has been discerned as consistent with the current Canon XXI. The House of Bishops issued a statement that affirmed, "We are walking together in a way that leaves room for individual dioceses and jurisdictions of our church to

proceed with same-sex marriage according to their contexts and convictions, sometimes described as 'local option'."

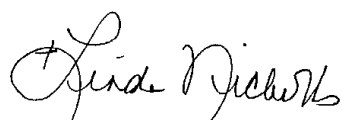
Given the strong support in Huron for this possibility, as of August 1, 2019, I am authorizing the availability of marriage to same-sex couples as a pastoral local option under the following guidelines:

1. Same-sex marriages will be permitted in parishes where the priest and the Parish Council have considered this matter and agreed that the parish will do so.
2. Any parish desiring to do so will write a letter to the Bishop requesting permission - signed by the priest (rector/incumbent) and the Wardens and including a description of the consideration taken by the Parish Council.
3. No parish is required to offer same-sex marriage in their location.
4. Clergy already have provision by canon to refuse to perform a marriage for reasons of conscience.

As this is a pastoral local option it is at the discretion of the diocesan bishop. It is an option that I believe is appropriate for the Diocese of Huron at this time and is supported by many, though not all, in the diocese. I am however aware that I will be the Bishop of Huron for only a short time longer. This may be a consideration in the discernment of the next Bishop of Huron. I pray that the diocese will recognize that the work of the bishop is much broader than this issue.

Our Church has a wonderful diversity in so many areas of its life. That diversity also leads to tensions but I can promise you that the bishops, clergy and laity of our church are committed to living together with love and grace as we continue to learn from one another and seek a path that honours God.

With deep gratitude for the Diocese of Huron and our witness to living together with differences in love and mutual support,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda Nicholls". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Rev. Linda Nicholls
Bishop of Huron