



# Same-Sex Unions

– A Brief Survey  
of the Conversations



Diocese of Toronto  
Anglican Church of Canada

1967

**Homosexual acts between consenting adults decriminalized in Canada.**

1976

**Human Sexuality Task Force report to Anglican Church**

1978

**House of Bishops Press Release:**

*‘We believe as Christians that homosexual persons as children of God, have a full and equal claim, with all other persons, upon the love, acceptance, concern and pastoral care of the Church. The gospel of Jesus Christ compels Christians to guard against all forms of human injustice and to affirm that all persons are brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. We affirm that homosexual persons are entitled to equal protection under the law with all other Canadian citizens.*

*‘It is clear from Holy Scripture that only the sexual union of male and female can find expression within the covenant of Holy Matrimony. In the heart of biblical teaching about creation we discover insights into the nature and purpose of sexuality. Rooted in God’s creative purpose is the fulfillment and completion of male and female in each other, together with the procreative function of sexuality. Thus the Church confines its nuptial blessing to heterosexual marriages, and we cannot authorize our clergy to bless homosexual unions. We are aware that some homosexuals develop for themselves relationships of mutual support, help and comfort, about which the Church must show an appropriate concern. Such relationships, though, must not be confused with Holy Matrimony, and the Church must do nothing which appears to support any such suggestion.’*

1979

**House of Bishops’ Resolution**

*“1. Our present and future considerations about homosexuality should be pursued within the larger study of human sexuality in its totality; 2. We accept all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, as equal before God; our acceptance of persons with homosexual orientation is not an acceptance of homosexual activity; 3. We do not accept the blessing of homosexual unions (see previous press release); 4. We will not call in question the ordination of a person who has shared with the bishop his/her homosexual orientation if there has been a commitment to the Bishop to abstain from sexual acts with persons of the same sex as part of the requirement for ordination.” (Pastoral Statement on Human Sexuality)*

**Various sexuality studies and processes,**

including 1985 study “Human Sexuality”. A number of Toronto clergy and laity were members of the task group.

1989

**General Synod (St. John’s, NF)**

– asked for increased study of human sexuality and dignity of all before God.

1990

**National Executive Council asked the House of Bishops to update its 1979 Statements on human sexuality and ordination of persons of homosexual orientation.**

1991

### **The Rev. Jim Ferry removed as incumbent of parish (June)**

- Bishop's Court February 1992
- Archdeacon Colin Johnson began as Executive Assistant to the Bishop March 1992
- Bishop Finlay's decision and sentence to inhibit the Rev. Jim Ferry, March 1992

1992

### **General Synod (Toronto)**

Toronto members moved a motion that was adopted; Toronto clergy and laity facilitated study groups.

Resolution: *"That this General Synod request the House of Bishops and the National Executive Council to commission an immediate study of homosexuality and homosexual relationships, including: modern scientific knowledge; the Church's understanding of Biblical teaching on homosexuality, human relationships, inclusiveness and justice; the experience of gays and lesbians who are committed Christians; and that the study be completed, and a report with specific recommendations submitted to General Synod 1995, in a form that would be available to the whole Church."*

1992

### **Report from the House of Bishops on the steps they were taking, including:**

*'We see the need for some further, more intensive study of the scriptures, particularly as they relate to sexuality, and we will undertake this in the Fall of 1993. Every age must struggle anew with the need to apply an unchanging gospel to a constantly changing environment. This is as true for us as it is for the church at large. All scripture is inspired by God, as Paul says, but not all receive the same understanding from it. We plan to spend a significant amount of time working with a number of respected theologians representing diverse approaches to scripture. From this we hope, in consultation with the rest of the church, to discern the mind of Christ for the body of Christ.'*

1995

### **General Synod (Ottawa)**

- *That this General Synod affirms the presence and contributions of gay men and lesbians in the life of the church and condemns bigotry, violence and hatred directed toward any due to their sexual orientation.*
- *That this General Synod:*
  - *encourage parishes and dioceses to continue, deepen, extend and adapt the learning, reflection and dialogue identified by the Task Force on Homosexuality and Homosexual Relationships (as reflected in Recommendations 1 through 4 of the Task Force Report).*
  - *encourage parishes and dioceses to give particular attention to the ongoing dialogue with respect to the issues identified in Recommendation 5 of the Task Force Report.*
  - *encourage parishes and dioceses to develop plans of action to further the dialogue as described in the Recommendations of the Task Force Report.*
  - *request the Faith, Worship and Ministry Committee to make provision for leadership to ensure that this process continues at the parish and diocesan levels and that a report be made at the next General Synod.*

- *That this General Synod request that the Primate continue to encourage dialogue on "homosexuality and homosexual relationships" throughout the church.*
- *The following resolution was tabled (and was not lifted from the table, so was not voted on): That the Doctrine and Worship Committee, or its successor, initiate broad-based consultations within the Anglican Church of Canada concerning the liturgical recognition of committed monogamous same-gender unions, and report to the next General Synod.*

## 1994-2004

### Toronto Dialogue Group

– a small mixed group to study and promote diocesan dialogue convened by Archbishop Finlay.

## 1997 October

### House of Bishops statement on Human Sexuality included the following:

*"The church affirms its traditional teaching that only the sexual union of male and female can find appropriate expression within the covenant of Holy Matrimony. However, we recognize that some homosexuals live in committed sexual relationships for mutual support, help and comfort. We wish to continue open and respectful dialogue with those who sincerely believe that sexuality expressed within a committed homosexual relationship is God's call to them, and we affirm our common desire to seek together the fullness of life revealed in Christ.*

#### **Blessing of Covenanted Relationships**

*We continue to believe that committed same sex relationships should not be confused with Holy Matrimony. The house will not authorize any act that appears to promote this confusion. There is, and needs to be, ongoing discussion about how to respond appropriately to faithful and committed same sex relationships. In the context of the ongoing debate this would necessitate respectful listening and learning about the nature of such relationships and their meaning for the persons involved in them. We recognize that relationships of mutual support, help and comfort between homosexual persons exist and are to be preferred to relationships that are anonymous and transient. We disagree among ourselves about whether such relationships can be expressions of God's will and purpose.*

*While consensus may be unlikely in the near future, we believe that study and dialogue continue to be fruitful. As we continue to listen together to scripture, tradition, and reasoned argument based on the experience of the Church, including and especially the experience of its gay and lesbian members, we grow in our recognition that our disagreements reflect our attempts to be faithful to the Gospel in our different personal and pastoral contexts.*

*As long as such dialogue continues to be fruitful we believe it should continue. We are not ready to authorize the blessing of relationships between persons of the same sex. However, in interpreting the Gospel, we must always reflect on the context to which it is addressed. We are, therefore, committed to ongoing study of human sexuality and of the nature and characteristics of human intimacy and family life as it exists in our society...*

*Among our clergy there are some who are gay or lesbian. Their ministries are often highly dedicated and greatly blessed. God has endowed them with many intellectual and spiritual gifts and we give thanks for their ministries. We reaffirm that*

*sexual orientation in and of itself is not a barrier to ordination or the practice of ministry within the church. Within the wider parameters of suitability, it is the manner in which sexuality is expressed that must be considered. Our intimate relationships are an expression of the most profound possibilities for human relationships, including our relationship with God (Eph.5:32). At ordination, candidates promise to live their lives and shape their relationships so as to provide a “wholesome example” to the people of God (BCP, 642). Exemplary behaviour for persons who are not married includes a commitment to remain chaste.”*

1998

### General Synod

*“That this General Synod commend the House of Bishops for its statement “Human Sexuality” issued on October 29, 1997, and acknowledges the need for continuing study and dialogue. “*

1998

### Lambeth Conference

The Lambeth Conference 1998 Section I produced a report on the subject of homosexuality outlining a variety of positions held by the bishops. It suggested that there not be a resolution. Nevertheless, a resolution was debated and eventually passed:

*“This Conference: a. commends to the Church the subsection report on human sexuality; b. in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage; c. recognises that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the Church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the Church, and God’s transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ; d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialisation and commercialisation of sex; e. cannot advise the legitimising or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions; f. requests the Primates and the ACC to establish a means of monitoring the work done on the subject of human sexuality in the Communion and to share statements and resources among us; g. notes the significance of the Kuala Lumpur Statement on Human Sexuality and the concerns expressed in resolutions IV.26, V.1, V.10, V.23 and V.35 on the authority of Scripture in matters of marriage and sexuality and asks the Primates and the ACC to include them in their monitoring process.”*

### 1999-2002 Report on Conversations on Human Sexuality in the Anglican Communion

Archbishop Finlay was one of eleven members. They reported that they lived by this covenant:

1. We will respect each other’s faith journey.
2. We will listen respectfully.
3. We will ask inviting questions.
4. We will have flexible understanding, attempting to understand from the point of view of others.
5. We will seek to learn from all perspectives.

6. We will keep the topic in mind when speaking.
7. We will not speak as individuals for the group apart from our common statement.
8. We will not repeat each other's comments after we leave. We are free to share learnings without attribution to individuals. Otherwise, we will respect the confidentiality of other's statements.
9. We will clarify the nature of our speaking. We will request clarification in good faith.

While they 'were not able to reach a common mind regarding a single pattern of holy living for homosexual people', they did, among other things, agree:

1. The Scriptures are foundational for all aspects of our work.
2. The questions at issue centre on homosexual behaviour, not on homosexual people. We are called to love homosexual people as we are called to love any other people.
3. Homosexuality is a much more varied phenomenon than the singular noun suggests; there are no "assured results" available to us from medical and other research into origins, causations, etc. Even if there were, Christians would not be relieved of the responsibility of making theological and ethical judgments.

● **2002** **First Anglican blessing of same sex couple in New Westminster.**

● **September 2003** **Lambeth Commission established**

Archbishop of Canterbury established the Lambeth Commission on Communion in the light of the anticipated consecration of a gay partnered bishop in The Episcopal Church and the blessing in New Westminster, and the intervention by Primates and bishops in Provinces other than their own; asked to find ways to continue to live in the highest degree of communion possible.

● **November 2003** **Gene Robinson consecrated Bishop of New Hampshire**

● **2003-2004 Toronto Diocesan Consultations**

– workshops on human sexuality throughout the diocese.

● **2004** **Same-Sex Consultation Group**

– in preparation for a special Synod.

● **May 2004 General Synod (St. Catharine's, Ont.)**

*1) Affirm that even in the face of deeply held convictions about whether the blessing of committed same sex unions is contrary to the doctrine and teaching of the Anglican Church of Canada, we recognize that through our baptism we are members one of another in Christ Jesus, and we commit ourselves to strive for that communion into which Christ continually calls us.*

*2) Affirm the crucial value of continued respectful dialogue and study of biblical, theological, liturgical, pastoral and social aspects of humans sexuality; and call*

*upon all bishops, clergy and lay leaders to be instrumental in seeing that dialogue and study continue, intentionally involving gay and lesbian persons;*

*3) Affirm the principle of respect for the way in which the dialogue and study may be taking place, or might take place, in indigenous and various other communities within our church in a manner consistent with their cultures and traditions;*

*4) Affirm that the Anglican Church is a church for all the baptized and is committed to taking such actions as are necessary to maintain and serve our fellowship and unity in Christ, and request the House of Bishops to continue its work on the provision of adequate episcopal oversight and pastoral care for all, regardless of the perspective from which they view the blessing of committed same sex relationships; and*

*5) Affirm the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same sex relationships.'*

The original resolution brought to General Synod contained a section 2 which read "That this General Synod affirm the authority and jurisdiction of any diocesan synod, with the concurrence of its bishop, to authorize the blessing of committed same sex unions." In the course of debate, a motion to defer this clause was moved and carried: *That Resolution A134 be amended by: • Deferring consideration of section 2 until the meeting of General Synod in 2007; and during the period of deferral: • Request that the Primate ask the Primate's Theological Commission to review, consider and report to the Council of General Synod, by its spring 2006 meeting, whether the blessing of committed same sex unions is a matter of doctrine; • That on receipt of such a report, the Council of General Synod distribute it to each province, diocese and the House of Bishops for consideration.*

- Bishop of Toronto's Task Force on the Windsor Report 2005 established

## October 2004

### **Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission**

Windsor Report of the Lambeth Commission on Communion requested, among other things, a moratorium on all the actions which had precipitated the report (ie the consecration of gay partnered bishops, the blessing of same sex unions, and interventions.)

## November 27 2004

### **Special Diocesan Synod**

Votes to defer decision on blessing same-sex unions by narrow vote.

Affirms the sanctity and integrity of adult, committed same sex relationships.

## May 2005

### **Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions issued its St. Michael Report**

*'It is the determination of the Primate's Theological Commission that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine. In reaching this conclusion, the Commission recognizes the range of interpretations given to the term 'doctrine'. We do agree that the blessing of committed same-sex unions is not a matter of what is often referred to as core doctrine in the sense of being credal. It is a matter of doctrine that does not hinder or impair our common affirmation of the three historic creeds. We have indicated what we believe to be the primary lines of connection*

to the doctrines of salvation, incarnation, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, theological anthropology, sanctification, and holy matrimony. In our conviction that the blessing of same-sex unions is doctrinal, we are mindful of the burning pastoral issues involved. Doctrinal and pastoral concerns are not mutually exclusive, but profoundly connected. It is precisely the pastoral importance of this issue that demands the dignity and integrity of a careful consideration of its doctrinal implications. The pastoral importance of this issue deserves a careful consideration of its doctrinal implications in a manner that is deeply respectful of the dignity and integrity of the gay and lesbian members of our church.'

● 2005

**Civil marriage laws, initially overturned in various provincial jurisdictions, come into force across Canada allowing marriage between two qualified persons.**

● June 2007

**General Synod House of Bishops Statement on Pastoral Care of Same Sex Couples**

● July 2007

**General Synod (Winnipeg)**

- *That this General Synod resolves that the blessing of same-sex unions is not in conflict with the core doctrine (in the sense of being creedal) of The Anglican Church of Canada.*
- *Request the Council of General Synod to consider a revision of Canon XXI (On Marriage) including theological rationale to allow marriage of all legally qualified persons and to report back to General Synod 2010.*
- *Welcome the Statement of the House of Bishops of October, 2006, urging the church to show pastoral understanding and sensitivity to all same-sex couples, including those civilly married, and committing the House to develop pastoral strategies to give effect to the acceptance of gays and lesbians to whom we are already committed by previous General Synod and COGS resolutions, House of Bishops guidelines and Lambeth Conference statements.*
- *Ask the Primate to request the Primate's Theological Commission to consult with the dioceses and parishes and to report in advance of General Synod 2010 on: 1. the theological question whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine; 2. Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships. 2. Ask the Primate to request the Anglican Communion Task Force to report in advance of General Synod 2010 on the implications of the blessing of same-sex unions and/or marriage for our church and the Anglican Communion. 3. Support and encourage dioceses to offer the most generous pastoral provision possible within the current teaching of the church to gays and lesbians and their families. 4. Request Faith, Worship and Ministry to develop a process to engage the dioceses and parishes of the Anglican Church of Canada in a study of the Christian perspective of human sexuality through the lens of scripture, reason, tradition and current scientific understanding.*

● 2009

**The Galilee Report of the Primate's Theological Commission**

Chaired by Bishop Linda Nicholls, this is a series of discussion papers outlining various theological positions on human sexuality and related issues in response to General Synod 2007 without reaching a consensus.

## January 2009

– Toronto College of Bishops propose that a limited number of parishes be given episcopal permission to offer prayers and blessing ‘but not the nuptial blessing’ to same-sex couples ‘in stable, long-term committed relationships.’

## May 2009 Diocesan Synod indaba process

Consensus – not unanimity – about about implementing College of Bishops’ January 2009 proposal.

## 2009-2010 Pastoral Response Advisory Group (PRAG) formed to formulate guidelines for the above decision

## 2010

### General Synod (Halifax) agreed statement:

*“The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met in Halifax, Nova Scotia in June of 2010. Together we entered into intentional conversations in order to hear where our Church is at this time in its life in relation to the matter of blessing of same gender unions. Our conversations were marked by grace, honesty and generosity of spirit towards one another. There was robust participation in the conversations. In dialogue we shared our passion for the mission of God in the world and our thoughts, feelings and convictions. We were attentive to each others’ perspectives, experiences and stories and we shared a commitment to continued theological reflection and scriptural study as a foundation to our ongoing dialogue and discernment.*

*“We engaged these conversations within the particularity of our Canadian context – a country that is diverse and many cultured. Canadians have been learning how to dialogue across their diversities over the course of our national life. We do so with deeply held commitments to transparency and openness, an approach that is not without risk and that we affirm as a great gift. Often, in processes of discernment, the task is to see our way through a paradox.*

*“Our conversations affirmed the full inclusion of gay and lesbian members in our churches, aboriginal voices in our midst, and the wide range of perspectives on the issue of same gender blessings across all dioceses. Our dialogue has been a positive and helpful step in our discernment. At this time, however, we are not prepared to make a legislative decision. Above, in and through all of this, and despite all our differences we are passionately committed to walking together, protecting our common life.*

*“We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses. We recognize that these different approaches raise difficulties and challenges. When one acts there are implications for all. There can be no imposition of a decision or action, but rather we are challenged to live together sharing in the mission of Christ entrusted to us, accepting that different local contexts call at times for different local discernment, decision and action.*

*“We are in a time of ongoing discernment which requires mutual accountability through continuing dialogue, diocese to diocese and across the wider church. It also requires continued theological and scriptural study and dialogue on the wide range of matters relating to human sexuality.*

*“For many members of General Synod there is deep sadness that, at this time, there is no common mind. We acknowledge the pain that our diversity in this matter*

*causes. We are deeply aware of the cost to people whose lives are implicated in the consequences of an ongoing discernment process. This is not just an 'issue' but is about people's daily lives and deeply held faith commitments. For some, even this statement represents a risk. For some the statement does not go nearly far enough.*

*"In the transparency and openness we have experienced with one another, we have risked vulnerability but it is in such places that we grow closer in the body of Christ and behold each other as gift. Abiding with each other, and with God we are sustained through struggle, patient listening, and speaking from the mind and heart together. We have experienced these conversations as a gift for us here at Synod and hope that they will be a further gift to the Anglican Church of Canada and to the wider Church."*

● **October 2010**

Pastoral Guidelines for the Blessing of Same Gender Commitments issued by the Diocese of Toronto College Bishops.

● **July 2011**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada authorizes same sex marriages where pastor's and congregation's conscience permits.

● **2012**

**Diocesan Synod 2012 memorial to General Synod to provide for marriage of same sex couples on an equal basis – passed by counted vote**

● **2013**

**General Synod (Ottawa)**

Resolution to prepare a revision of the Canon on Marriage for two legally qualified persons, by General Synod 2016. The original motion by 2 lay members was amended to include consideration of a number of principles.

● **September 2015**

**Marriage Canon Commission established**

The Commission chaired by Chancellor Bob Falby, then Bishop Linda Nicholls, issues "This Holy Estate" for study.

● **July 2016 General Synod (Toronto)**

First reading of the changes to the Marriage Canon approved by a 2/3 majority in each order.

● **November 2016**

**Pastoral Guidelines for Same-Sex Marriages (Diocese of Toronto)**