



A Word About
**Facilitated
Dialogue**



Diocese of Toronto
Anglican Church of Canada

A WORD ABOUT FACILITATED DIALOGUE

At our last Synod, members were asked what would be most helpful to them in preparing for our discussion at Synod 2018 on the proposed changes to the Marriage Canon. The majority of comments focused on the quality of process we hope to see unfolding over the next year.

In particular, there was a deep desire for prayerful, respectful and honest listening and dialogue across our differences. This was a call for kindness and charity, a willingness to listen to strongly held commitments and convictions, to share differing perspectives in good faith, and to build relationships and understanding within the diocese.

In particular, two things were raised up as having particular importance. First, that dialogues include the voices of LGBTQ people within the church; that we hear their ex-

periences and commitments. Second, that these dialogues happen in facilitated, small groups with clear and agreed norms.

Facilitation is a way of providing structure and process to dialogue without taking the reins. A facilitator's task is to support every participant to do their best thinking, sharing and listening. They do this by managing the group's process without being a participant in the discussion. They remain neutral.

Facilitators will help the group manage their discussion so that:

- » *there is a clear sense of purpose and process;*
- » *group norms are set and followed;*
- » *all participants can contribute and feel heard;*
- » *different opinions are expressed and heard respectfully;*
- » *no single individual dominates the conversation;*
- » *assumptions are sensitively surfaced, clarified and tested;*
- » *themes and synchronicities are identified;*
- » *mutual understanding is built;*
- » *there is a sense of transparency and authenticity in the dialogue;*
- » *the discussion moves along at a good pace, time is used well;*
- » *the group stays on topic and on track.*

CHOOSING A FACILITATOR

There are no hard and fast rules about the best facilitator for your situation, but there are a few things to consider as you make this decision.

Not everybody can comfortably or effectively function as a facilitator. For example, people with strong thoughts, feelings or biases on the topic will find it extremely challenging to lead the group without adding their input.

A good facilitator needs to be firm. Facilitation is not passive and it can take a level of assertiveness to keep people and topics on track. You are looking for someone who can be directive without dominating.

It can be difficult or inadvisable for your priest to facilitate - or they might not want to and this should be respected. On the other hand, it is important that the priest not dominate the conversation either by taking a strong leadership or authority role in the discussion or by being the final word on the topic.

FINDING A FACILITATOR

You may have skilled facilitators within the parish who would be willing to put their ideas aside for a few hours to help the group. It's a good idea to have a pair of facilitators (remember Jesus sent his followers out in pairs). Co-facilitators can bring different gifts and skills to bear.

There may be skilled facilitators within your community. People in education, social services or community development often have training and experience in this type of work. The Diocese's Congregational Development Department may also be able to link you with a facilitator. †

