

## WHAT WE HEARD

---

Over 600 people participated in the process of consideration of the proposed changes to The Marriage Canon at the Regular Session of Synod for the Diocese of Toronto on November 9-10, 2018. While most Synod members participated in the process as invited, it was clear that many are fatigued with these conversations. There is a sense of inertia and frustration with being stuck in the discussions. Decisions need to be made so that we all, regardless of our commitments and beliefs, can move on.

The following outlines the major themes that emerged from the process of listening and sharing as described in the document titled *Outline of the Diocese of Toronto Process*.

### **In listening to each other we heard reflections that are familiar from previous processes:**

#### Living in Diversity

As Anglicans in the Diocese of Toronto we already live with a great diversity and have done so for a long time. It is a core part of our identity: past, present, and future. The gift of this diversity is that while we can be very different in our beliefs, convictions, languages, ethnicities, cultures, sexualities/genders, and ages, we all belong within a large tent where there is place for us all. Though we sometimes keenly feel the polarization inherent in living with diversity, we value the big tent and don't want to leave it.

We have a deep aversion to breaking relationships and feel real pain when people, from either end of the spectrum, choose to leave. The reflections that are shared in this document represent ways we can value and protect our big tent approach to diversity.

#### Scripture and Theology

We are all sincere our beliefs, including our reverence for Holy Scripture. No one must ever be made to feel less than worthy of God's love and grace. As with all else, our narrative around sexuality and marriage must always be rooted in Scripture. God is always at the centre of our conversations and deliberations.

We have important questions about how we read, interpret, and apply Scripture in changing times and in situations emerging in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. We must continue to work toward discerning a hermeneutic (or a range of interpretative principles) that will undergird growth in God's mission in times of change and diversity. When we draw closer to Jesus we begin to find the unity we long for. We need to continue to be open to finding ways to do this together.

#### Cultural and Ethnic Voices

It is deeply important that we continue to hear the voices of those from our Indigenous communities and from other multicultural and intercultural perspectives. In some ways the Diocese of Toronto is like a microcosm of the Anglican Communion. The importance of this was highlighted in some of our table groups, who pointed to the importance of seeing this as an

opportunity to work towards larger issues of cultural and racial inclusion; becoming a truly inclusive church within our big tent.

#### Relationships within the Communion

We value and want to continue to strengthen our relationships within our diocese, within the Canadian Anglican Church, and within the global Anglican Communion. Regardless of the outcome of the vote we affirm our commitment to listen and to continue in dialogue. We know that this can be difficult but avoiding pain is not an option if we are committed to building deeper understanding and stronger relationships for the sake of Christ's body which is the church.

#### **We also heard reflections that are new or have taken on a new sense of urgency:**

##### Pastoral Support and Resources After the Vote

We must work to minimize people's sense of being devalued or marginalized by the results of the vote and what follows. This could include a protocol for pastoral support and resources that could be prepared and made available after the vote. We must acknowledge and care for those who will feel hurt or disenfranchised and find ways to minimize a winner-loser binary outcome.

##### Clergy Anxiety

Clergy are worried that their career options could be limited especially if their beliefs fall outside the normative view of their dioceses. There are policies and systems to be developed to manage these situations.

For some there is trepidation in engaging the conversation within the parish for fear of raising up conflict. Clergy shared a concern about being able to be an effective pastoral presence within their congregations if their views are known. It is also noted that the leadership of many churches are blocking the discussions from taking place in their parishes.

##### Generational Concerns

People see that same-sex marriage is simply not an issue for young people. We worry that the longer we spend considering same-sex marriage the longer we appear irrelevant and exclusive and that this is an impediment to our ministries and missional invitations with younger adults and teens.

##### Interpretation of the Results of the Vote

The bishops of the Diocese of Toronto are and will remain committed to the *Pastoral Statement on Commitment to Diverse Theological Positions in the Diocese of Toronto*, September 29, 2017. This includes the pastoral offering of alternative liturgies for the marriage of same sex couples in some parishes where there is a consensus to do so.

“As Bishops we endorse unequivocally the principle that the Diocese of Toronto must honour and safeguard the diversity represented in its parishes and clergy, including those holding to an historic understanding of Christian marriage, so as to maintain the highest degree of communion possible, and together participate in the mission to make the crucified and risen Christ known in the world. We are personally committed to continue the face-to-face conversations that will foster this. This diversity will continue to be reflected in the selection, ordination and appointment of clergy, and in

the lay and clerical membership of committees and councils of the diocese. It will also include the honoring of clergy conscience in the celebration and blessing of marriage.”