

PASTORAL STATEMENT

on Commitment to Diverse Theological Positions in the Diocese of Toronto
by the Most Reverend Colin R. Johnson
Archbishop of Toronto

and endorsed by the Bishops Suffragan of Toronto,
the Right Reverend Peter Fenty, the Right Reverend Riscylla Shaw, the Right Reverend Kevin
Robertson, and the Right Reverend Jenny Andison.

From the earliest expressions of an Anglican way of living out the Christian faith, there has been diversity. That diversity has historically taken many forms, from tension, conflict and violence, to coexistence, indifference, and eventual synthesis. Whatever the witness of the past, however, the Diocese of Toronto is committed to reflecting our own diversity in a way that avoids the conflictual examples with which we are, alas, too familiar.

We believe that there have been positive forms of difference that have allowed the church to flourish in many places and with many people, not only within Anglicanism, but elsewhere. It is this aspect of our heritage that we have valued in this Diocese, and as Bishops of this Diocese, it is a value we wish to affirm strongly and preserve faithfully. Unlike in some periods and places of Anglicanism, here at least our unity does not imply uniformity in all things.

My pastoral decision as Archbishop to make provision to permit the marriage of same-sex couples in prescribed conditions is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church. This is complex, multi-faceted, and unsettling. All churches are dealing with these matters, some more publicly as we are, some internally, but it is a discussion that is global. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, with whom we share the historic episcopate, although we are not in communion with each other, and most of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion, remain unchanged in their teaching of the historic Christian understanding of marriage as a sacramental covenant between one woman and one man. Some other churches, including Lutheran Churches and Old Catholic Churches with whom we share full communion and a number of Provinces of the Anglican Communion, have adopted changes to include couples of the same sex. There are also divergent views about how people and institutions can and should respond in a period of change when the parameters of those changes have not been fully agreed. The history of Anglicanism as well as of the wider Church has shown that matters of the faith, including those governing sexual morals, are not straightforwardly, consistently or unanimously divided into important and not-so-important. It will undoubtedly take a very long time to come to consensus and may not do so.

In the Diocese of Toronto, we have formally and informally discussed issues of sexuality for nearly 50 years. When our General Synod in 2007 received the St Michael report, it adopted a resolution that same sex commitments have significant doctrinal implications but not at the level of core doctrine, that is, something needing to be held by all as a matter of salvation. A second motion was passed affirming that this is not a communion breaking issue. Obviously, this last motion expresses a hope, not a prescription, since matters of conscience cannot be legislated or coerced. I take the St. Michael report to open the possibility of a newly expanded understanding of marriage but, as a corollary, I believe it implicitly affirms the continuing Christian authenticity and legitimacy of those

who hold a traditional understanding of marriage and the faithfulness of the theology and practice that support it.

In fact, the norm for the Church continues to be the marriage of couples of opposite sex. The Anglican Church of Canada is currently in a discernment process to include the marriage of same-sex couples. Until that decision has been finalised, and as an interim pastoral response, as Bishop of Toronto with canonical authority and responsibility for the pastoral care and oversight of this Diocese, I have permitted a small number of priests, licensed to the cure of souls in a community, to preside in their parish at the marriage of a same-sex couple in certain limited circumstances. Both priest and congregation must concur that this ministry will be offered. No one will be obligated to act against their conscience. Neither parishes nor individual clergy will be required to celebrate marriages contrary to their convictions.

Not all welcome this new development: some because it goes too far, some because it is not enough.

We recognize there are theological and cultural differences across our diocese and within parishes which are strained by both the limits and permission represented in blessing same sex relationships and more specifically marriage.

I wish to reiterate – and this is unanimously affirmed by the Area Bishops – that there is and will be a continued and honoured place in all aspects of diocesan life for those who do not agree to the provisional arrangements for same sex marriages. Theirs is an authentic, sustainable conviction that bears significant and historic weight. It remains a coherent theological and biblical position within our Anglican tradition.

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.

We have seen that there is diversity within parishes that are generally opposed to same-sex commitments, just as there is in parishes that are generally in favour. There is a rich breadth of life in our parishes, with parishioners who are theologically astute, prayerful and deeply committed Christians legitimately holding differing convictions. We are in very different places and have been formed in very diverse contexts, theologically, spiritually, scripturally, experientially. The diversity of our diocesan community is a precious gift, challenging as it might be. It is vital to maintain this as it enriches not diminishes our common witness to the faith in a variety of ways. Though such witness is rooted in differing interpretations and understanding of Holy Scripture and the tradition, these are now within the contemporary spectrum of Anglicanism. They need to be engaged if we are to learn and grow together in fuller maturity in Christ.

All of us need to extend to each the most generous Christian charity that Jesus our Redeemer calls us to exercise as we, together, seek to discern and live out God's will. Unfortunately, this has not

always been the case, and we cannot condone such lack of charity. The Gospel and our baptismal covenant call us to love one another with the love of Christ and treat each other with dignity, respect and forbearance. We need to be tender with one another, recognizing each other as a beloved child of God redeemed by our Saviour Jesus Christ, each one bearing the image of God, each one the desire of God's heart and will.

Feast of St. Michael and All Angels, September 29, 2017