

Diocese of Toronto Synod Strategy Process Report Back

November 25, 2017

This is a very brief summary of what you said would be most helpful to you and the diocese in preparing for our discussion next year on the proposed changes to the Marriage Canon. Thank you all very much for your engagement in the process and your thoughtful responses.

There were 380 sheets handed in and these shared approximately 530 specific suggestions. All submissions will be collated and used to shape the development of processes and resources over the next year.

The largest number of comments -164 of them, are about **the process** you hope to see unfolding over the next year. In particular you express a deep desire for prayerful, respectful and honest listening and dialogue across our differences. You call for kindness and charity with each other, a willingness to listen to strongly held commitments and convictions – sharing our differing perspectives in good faith, and a hope that this will build relationships and understanding within the diocese.

You note the importance of including the voices of LGBTQ people, indigenous peoples, and of youth.

You ask that these dialogues happen in facilitated, small groups with clear and agreed norms. Talking Circles, Indaba, and Conversations over Coffee processes are named as helpful examples.

60 comments speak directly to the need for **parish engagement** in this discussion. You acknowledge that not many are considering the upcoming vote to change the Marriage Canon and what this might mean to them and suggest that processes and resources for including parishes in this dialogue would be helpful and timely. You see this could happen in individual congregations or regionally.

Again, in considering parish engagement you request that the processes be carefully designed and facilitated.

54 comments remind us of the importance of including **LGBTQ voices** and experiences. You note that a change to the Marriage Canon is a decision that will affect people's lives very personally and as such, you feel it is important to hear from LGBTQ people in our presentations. In particular you would like to listen to those who are married, and those who are seeking marriage in the Church. You ask to hear their stories of wanting a church marriage, their experience with the church, and what difference marriage has made – or they believe will make - to their lives and their faith.

You feel it would be helpful to hear the experiences of parishes and clergy who perform blessings and marriages; what has this been like in the life of their congregation?

There are also requests to hear from LGBTQ people who feel called to celibacy, and those who don't agree with same sex marriage.

In inviting the voices of LGBTQ people there are cautions and hopes expressed regarding our capacity to create a respectful environment through care for language, and norms for listening and conversation.

94 comments focus our attention on the importance of continuing to engage in learning and dialogue regarding disciplined **scriptural interpretation** and critical **theological reflection**. You are clear in your commitment to the value of working together to deepen your understanding of each other across difference.

The call for this work comes from people across the spectrum. You are requesting the opportunity to hear and discuss more fully the arguments and commitments that each holds; and you are asking for learning and discussion on how we appeal to scripture with authenticity and integrity when discerning something that arises from our current 21st century context for our ministry - like same-gender marriage.

Thanks to 64 comments, we now have a list of **resources and information** you believe will be helpful in preparing for further discernment. These include:

- an expanded history of the dialogues, decisions, and key moments in the Church's discernment process (National and International);
- a history of same-gender unions in the church and society
- a precis of the key arguments for and against allowing same-gender marriages;
- clarity about how the Anglican Church internationally is structured especially regarding issues of authority
- information about the processes and decisions in different denominations;
- information on attitudes towards homosexuality in the Anglican church internationally;
- a bibliography of key resources
- a glossary of words that are experienced as sensitive or unhelpful by people from both ends of the spectrum

55 comments suggested that it would be helpful to have a better sense of the **definition of marriage** and the history of marriage, and in particular Christian marriage.

There are also requests for a more thorough description of exactly what the Change to the Marriage Canon implies, and how some dioceses/bishops could allow for marriage and/or partnered LGBTQ clergy before the Canon has been changed.

47 comments raise significant concerns about what might happen **after the General Synod 2019 vote**. You focus our attention on the need for compassionate care and understanding for people who are disappointed or even devastated by the results. Others ask how they, themselves, will find compassionate care from the rest of the church should they be the ones who are hurt.

You care deeply that we can continue to live together as a diocese, and within the worldwide communion. You are very concerned about the ways this vote can impact our relationships and our ministries together.

Concerns are expressed for the ongoing respect and protections for clergy who cannot agree with the outcome of the vote. Concerns are raised from people at both ends of the spectrum regarding protection for clergy from being required to act against their conscience, or from being ostracized because of their commitments.

Finally, and not unexpectedly, 29 comments urge the diocese to simply **move on**. These come from people who hold diverse commitments on the subject of same sex marriage. There are expressions of weariness with the discussions. Some feel that there has already been enough consideration and it's now time to make a decision. Others note that the "train has already left the station" in that marriages are being performed both in some of our churches and civilly. These comments urge us to refocus the time and energy spent on this discussion towards ministry and towards learning to live with our difference.