

The Diocese of Toronto Message to Council of General Synod November 2018

OUTLINE OF THE DIOCESE OF TORONTO PROCESS

The Diocese of Toronto met the General Synod's Declaration of Principles (section 11(c)i requirement that alterations proposed to Canon XXI (The Marriage Canon) be referred for consideration to Diocesan and Provincial synods in a number of ways over the course of two years.

SYNOD 2017

In 2017, Archbishop Colin Johnson called together the Canon XXI Task Group. Their mandate was to assist the synod in its consideration of the proposed changes. The group was made up of representatives from a diversity of perspectives and was chaired by Ms Marge Watters Knebel.

Over the course of two successive Regular Sessions of Synod, members spent time engaged in conversations and listening. First, in 2017 members were asked to submit what they believed would be most helpful to them in preparation for their consideration. The 530 responses that were collected informed the work that followed in 2018. (Appendix 2)

Requests included the availability of facilitated discussion processes for parishes, which were made available, and a set of resources which were prepared and published on the diocesan website. They include:

- Same-Sex Unions - A Brief Survey of the Conversations (appendix 3)
A history of the dialogues, decisions and key moments in the Church's discernment process.
- Authority in the Anglican Communion (appendix 4)
An explanation about how the churches of the Anglican Communion try to come to a common mind.
- National and International Views (appendix 5)
A summary of National and International views concerning same-sex marriage.
- Annotated Bibliography (appendix 6)
An updated bibliography of key resources using the Annotated Bibliography from the Marriage Commission Report.
- A Word About Facilitated Dialogue (appendix 7)
A resource to help Anglicans have facilitated conversations.
- Pastoral Statement on Commitment to Diverse Theological Positions in the Diocese of Toronto (appendix 8) 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.

The greatest response by far was a deep desire for prayerful, respectful and honest listening and dialogue, across our difference, in ways that would build understanding and relationships. It was this request for gracious listening that shaped our work at Synod in November 2018 and the pre-synod meetings beforehand.

SYNOD 2018

A process of speaking in triads was designed to help people engage in deeper sharing of that they think and feel about the proposed changes to The Marriage Canon. This process had a test-run at the four pre-synod meetings (one in each Episcopal Area). The over 600 members had two more triad conversations at Synod itself.

Triad Process

People were invited to form groups of 3 with people they did not know and share their responses to the following questions.

1. What would you like to say to the group about the proposed changes to the Marriage Canon? What are your hopes and fears?
2. No matter the results of General Synod's vote in summer 2019, it will be met by both joy and hurt. How can we face this? What does it mean to be a diverse people of God?

Sharing was done without interruption. Each speaker had up to 7 minutes. Once finished, others in the group could ask questions for clarification. At the close of the session the triads summarized what they had heard from each other. There was no feedback from this session directly.

Norms

The purpose of our triad conversations was to invite a deeper understanding of what people feel and think about the potential changes to the Marriage Canon and how we can value and sustain relationships in a time of disagreement. It was acknowledged that these conversations can trigger deep emotions for many, so members were asked to be attentive to both the feeling and the factual substance of our conversations, and to follow these norms.

1. We grant that as people of faith we are all sincere our beliefs, including our reverence for Holy Scripture.
2. We are neighbours now and we will continue to be neighbours after General Synod's decision is made.
3. We know that people of diverse sexuality and gender identities are present.
4. We value inclusion and will strive for greater understanding of each other.
5. We will speak in the first person. We will use "I" statements rather than "they" or "everyone".
6. We will not use language known to be offensive to others.
7. We respect the right of people to speak of their own experiences.
8. We respect the privacy of others. What others say is their story to tell, not yours.
9. We will ask no questions that we are not prepared to answer ourselves.

Feedback

After members had an opportunity to participate in 3 triad conversations their feedback was collected by scribe/facilitators in a plenary session at their tables. The feedback question was *What have you heard?* Particular attention was paid to reflections shared in response to question #2 – looking into the future after the vote in 2019. Feedback was collected from 68 table groups.

What we learned from the process

- Participants in the hundreds of triad groups and over 60 table groups were, for the most part, highly respectful of each other. There were only 2 complaints of disrespectful conduct. All people involved were offered pastoral support. Even given the likelihood that some others struggled but chose not to report, this represents a much lower incidence of situations needing care or management than in past processes.
- The norms were acknowledged as very helpful. They were clear and concise, and people invoked them in their triads. Having an LGBTQ person introduce the norms to the group was particularly pastorally effective.
- The focus was on listening. This was upheld by the facilitators during the feedback and Synod members were able to share what they had heard from others in their triad groups. This was helped by an acknowledgement, both in the introduction and by the table facilitators, that some would be sharing commitments and convictions that are very different from their own.