

November 1, 2011
Source – Bishop’s Office

## **A Pastoral and Liturgical Guideline for Civilly Married Same Sex Couples**

General Synod 2010 did not make a decision on the topic of human sexuality, especially in relation to same sex relationships but rather issued a statement. (Appendix 1) The Synod of the Diocese of NS & PEI by motion (Appendix 2) requested the bishop to make the pastoral letter of October 2010 into a Bishops Guideline. This Guideline is the result of that Synod motion.

In the Diocese of NS & PEI the following pastoral statements are in effect as of November 1, 2011.

1. The General Synod Canon on Marriage (Canon XXI) governs marriage in the church in the Anglican Church of Canada. In accordance with Canon XXI, weddings of same sex couples by the clergy of this Diocese, or in the churches of this Diocese, are not permitted.
2. The 2010 General Synod statement says, “We are in a time of ongoing discernment which requires mutual accountability through continuing dialogue, diocese to diocese and across the wider church. It also requires continued theological and scriptural study on the wide range of matters relating to human sexuality.” Ongoing study, dialogue, discussion and discernment continue to be necessary. The most recent study guide is called “Created in the Image and Likeness of God”, <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/hs/hsconversations/index.htm>.
3. The 2010 General Synod statement recognizes the diversity of views and practices within the Anglican Church of Canada. We have the same diversity within our Diocese from parish to parish, from person to person. Although the Holy Spirit may prove us wrong, we do not believe that we will soon come to “one mind” on questions of sexuality particularly with respect to marriage and ordination.

In our parish and diocesan discussions, we will work to respect differences of opinion and value the diversity that has always been part of Anglicanism. That diversity challenges us to consider that God’s truth might not be the position you or I currently hold. We will not label or demonize one another. We are brothers and sisters in the family of God.

4. The General Synod statement says, “We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional context. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses.” It also says, “There can be no imposition of a decision or action, but rather we are challenged to live together

sharing in the mission of Christ entrusted to us, accepting that different local contexts call at times for different local discernment, decision and action.” In relation to human sexuality, each person must study and discern their understanding of what it means to “follow our Saviour Christ and to be made like unto him” (BCP P.530) and “to seek and serve Christ in all persons...and respect the dignity of every human being” (BAS p.159). That understanding must be set within the discipline of the Church. Likewise each parish must discern the pastoral response it wishes to make to gay and lesbian couples who come asking to have their civil marriage blessed.

5. Possible responses following a parish discernment process and Parish Council decision.
  - **The discernment process results in an understanding that marriage can be between 2 men, 2 women or one man and one woman.** The blessing of same sex civilly married couples is then an appropriate pastoral and liturgical response. The Parish Council will request permission for the parish to use the rite authorized by the Diocesan Bishop for the blessing of same sex civil marriages (Appendix 4). The Bishop’s permission for that parish will remain in place until the parish requests a change. As we begin to implement this Guideline, the Bishop will notify the Archdeacon of the area when permission is given to a parish to proceed with blessing same sex civil marriages.

It is expected that the incumbent of the parish will guide the couple in preparation prior to the Rite of Blessing by exploring the meaning of blessing, the responsibility of those participating and their understanding of God’s role in their marriage.

In writing about the Rite of Blessing used in the Diocese of New Westminster, Dr. Richard Leggett has said: “The proposed rite chooses to celebrate God’s gifts present in the whole Christian community, whether gay or straight. The rite gives thanks to God for fidelity in a world marked by promiscuity, for reconciliation in a society marked by social, economic and ethnic separation and for the diversity of gifts manifested in the Body of Christ in the midst of a culture tempted by the allure of homogeneity. Without losing sight of the reality of human sin, the rite celebrates the redemption offered freely in Jesus Christ who calls us into relationships of self-giving love.” (*Text in Context: The Blessing of Same-Gender Covenants in the Diocese of New Westminster* 2003, p.2)

- **The discernment process results in a decision that marriage can only be between one man and one woman.** The parish wishes to recognize committed same sex relationships but not as marriage.

With the permission of the Diocesan Bishop, the parish may use the agreed statement from Canadian House of Bishops (Appendix 3) which has been in place since 2007 as a pastoral and liturgical response.

*“When a civilly married gay or lesbian couple seeks our church's reception of their civil marriage and asks their parish's recognition, it may be possible, with their bishop's knowledge and permission, to celebrate a Eucharist with the couple, including appropriate intercessory prayers, but not including a nuptial blessing.*

*When a gay or lesbian married couple seeks to hold a reception or celebration in a church for their life in Christ, again intercessory prayers for their mutual fidelity, the deepening of their discipleship and for their baptismal ministry may be offered, not including the exchange of vows and/or a nuptial blessing.”*

A blessing such as is found on p. 86 in the Book of Common Prayer is appropriate.

“The peace of God, which passeth all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in the  
knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus  
Christ our Lord: And the blessing of God Almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,  
be amongst you and remain with you always. Amen”

- **The discernment process results in a decision that marriages between same sex couples are not acceptable.**

The blessing of a same sex civil marriage would not be considered.

6. In most cases, the parish discernment process will lead to the Parish Council coming to a common mind as to what best represents the mind of the parish in the local context. In cases where a parish discernment process does not result in a common mind, either between clergy and laity, or among the laity, the bishop may assign a facilitator to work with the parish, or may direct the parish to observe a moratorium with regard to further discernment. Notwithstanding, an incumbent in a parish where the discernment does not lead to a common mind, may petition the bishop for permission to conduct a blessing of a same sex civil marriage outside the church buildings.
7. As with permission for marriages outside the church building, permission for blessings of civil marriages outside the church building must be requested from the diocesan bishop.

It is the Bishops' expectation that people will listen respectfully and lovingly to one another while we remain in this time of trying to discern God's truth about the bounds of acceptable sexual behaviour for Anglican Christians. We will continue to ask what is God's will in this, and how do we bring ourselves as members of Christ's Body, the church, in line with God's will?

#### Appendices

1. General Synod 2010 Statement
2. Diocese of NS & PEI 2011 Motion
3. Canadian House of Bishops Statement 2007
4. Rite for Blessing of Same Sex Civil Marriage
5. Summary of steps

**Sexuality discernment statement, General Synod 2010**

**General Synod 2010**

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in June of 2010. Together we entered into intentional conversations in order to hear where our Church is at this time in its life in relation to the matter of blessing of same gender unions. Our conversations were marked by grace, honesty and generosity of spirit towards one another. There was robust participation in the conversations. In dialogue we shared our passion for the mission of God in the world and our thoughts, feelings and convictions. We were attentive to each others' perspectives, experiences and stories and we shared a commitment to continued theological reflection and scriptural study as a foundation to our ongoing dialogue and discernment.

We engaged these conversations within the particularity of our Canadian context – a country that is diverse and many cultured. Canadians have been learning how to dialogue across their diversities over the course of our national life. We do so with deeply held commitments to transparency and openness, an approach that is not without risk and that we affirm as a great gift. Often, in processes of discernment, the task is to see our way through a paradox.

Our conversations affirmed the full inclusion of gay and lesbian members in our churches, aboriginal voices in our midst, and the wide range of perspectives on the issue of same gender blessings across all dioceses. Our dialogue has been a positive and helpful step in our discernment. At this time, however, we are not prepared to make a legislative decision. Above, in and through all of this, and despite all our differences we are passionately committed to walking together, protecting our common life. We acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts. We accept the continuing commitment to develop generous pastoral responses. We recognize that these different approaches raise difficulties and challenges. When one acts there are implications for all. There can be no imposition of a decision or action, but rather we are challenged to live together sharing in the mission of Christ entrusted to us, accepting that different local contexts call at times for different local discernment, decision and action.

We are in a time of ongoing discernment which requires mutual accountability through continuing dialogue, diocese to diocese and across the wider church. It also requires continued theological and scriptural study and dialogue on the wide range of matters relating to human sexuality.

For many members of General Synod there is deep sadness that, at this time, there is no common mind. We acknowledge the pain that our diversity in this matter causes. We are deeply aware of the cost to people whose lives are implicated in the consequences of an ongoing discernment process. This is not just an 'issue' but is about people's daily lives

and deeply held faith commitments. For some, even this statement represents a risk. For some the statement does not go nearly far enough. In the transparency and openness we have experienced with one another, we have risked vulnerability but it is in such places that we grow closer in the body of Christ and behold each other as gift. Abiding with each other, and with God we are sustained through struggle, patient listening, and speaking from the mind and heart together. We have experienced these conversations as a gift for us here at Synod and hope that they will be a further gift to the Anglican Church of Canada and to the wider Church.

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## Appendix 2 (1.1.24)

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Motion as passed at Diocese of NS & PEI Synod May 2011

**MOVED**, that this Synod request the Bishop or bishops to adapt the Pastoral Letter of October 1, 2010 as a Bishop's or Bishops' Guideline. If a parish, after prayerful discernment, decides to move beyond the current level of pastoral response, to the blessing of same-sex couples, such a decision reflects the diversity of "local discernment, decision, and action," and will be accommodated within the diverse pastoral practices of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island as we respond in our missional context.

The Synod defeated a motion for blessing couples not married, so the couples referred to in the motion above are civilly married.

### Appendix 3 (1.1.24)

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#### Statement of the House of Bishops

May 01, 2007

#### *Statement from the House of Bishops*

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting from April 16-20, 2007, once again discussed the question of the blessing of same-sex unions. Once again a number of diverse opinions were expressed. Again questions were raised about theology, scripture, discipline, and our church's constitution. However we did find a common strong concern for the pastoral care of all members of our church. While not all bishops can conceive of condoning or blessing same-sex unions, we believe it is not only appropriate but a Gospel imperative to pray with the whole people of God, no matter their circumstance. In so doing we convey the long-standing Gospel teaching that God in Christ loves each person and indeed loves him/her so much that Christ is calling each person to change and grow more fully into God's image and likeness. To refuse to pray with any person or people is to suggest God is not with them. All of us fall short of the glory of God but all are loved by God in Christ Jesus. We believe that in offering the sacraments we invite God's transformative action in people's lives.

- We certainly hope no child is denied baptism solely on the basis of the sexual orientation, or the marital status, of the parents. It is inconsistent and unacceptable to deny baptism to children as a way of imposing discipline on the sexual behaviour of the parents.
- We hope no baptized Christian will be denied communion or confirmation because of being in a committed homosexual relationship or because of their marital status.

We are committed, as bishops in Canada, to develop the most generous pastoral response possible within the current teaching of the church. We offer the following examples of possible pastoral responses:

- When a civilly married gay or lesbian couple seeks our church's reception of their civil marriage and asks their parish's recognition, it may be possible, with their bishop's knowledge and permission, to celebrate a Eucharist with the couple, including appropriate intercessory prayers, but not including a nuptial blessing.
- When a gay or lesbian married or committed couple seeks to hold a reception or celebration in a church for their life in Christ, again intercessory prayers for their mutual fidelity, the deepening of their discipleship and for their baptismal

ministry may be offered, not including the exchange of vows and/or a nuptial blessing.

To the gay and lesbian licensed clergy of our church, we again affirm your ministry as deeply valued and appreciated, and we acknowledge the pain and conflict that many of you live with daily in your ministry in Christ.

To those who experience these pastoral statements and possible pastoral provisions as inadequate or insufficient, we recognize that they are less than the blessing of same-sex unions or marriage. However it is the discernment of the majority of the House of Bishops that as of today the doctrine and discipline of our church does not clearly permit further action, although we acknowledge that General Synod 2007 will vote on several resolutions on the blessing of same-sex unions.

To those who fear that these pastoral provisions have gone too far, we assert that this discipline is entirely consistent with the doctrine of the Church and with our membership in the Anglican Communion, and fits within the pastoral guidelines of the Windsor Report (paragraph 143). We call upon every member of the Anglican Church of Canada to continue in their faithful discipleship and the work of theological and scriptural reflection and dialogue. We are each called to participate in God's mission in the world and we believe we will do this by the grace of the Risen Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Looking ahead, we ask the Primate and General Synod for a report on:

1. The theological question whether the blessing of same-sex unions is a faithful, Spirit-led development of Christian doctrine (St. Michael Report)
2. The implications of the blessing of same-sex unions and /or marriage for our church and the Communion (The Windsor Report)
3. Scripture's witness to the integrity of every human person and the question of the sanctity of human relationships.

We ask that this report be available in advance of General Synod 2010.

We commit to taking this ongoing conversation to the Lambeth Conference 2008.

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The Right Reverend Donald Phillips  
Secretary to the House of Bishops

**Options for creating a  
Blessing of a Civil Marriage for a Same Sex Couple**

**Components:**

Gathering the community

Scripture reading

Sermon/homily

Statement of commitment by couple

Prayers for the couple

Possible blessing of rings

Blessing of the marriage

If there is no Celebration of the Eucharist the Lord's Prayer may follow here followed by the

Peace

(Service could end here if there is not a celebration of the Eucharist.)

Celebration of the Eucharist

**Sample Resources which may be consulted by the Parish in developing its proposed  
Blessing**

Book of Occasional Celebrations – Blessing of a Civil Marriage

Diocese of Niagara – Blessing of a Same Sex Civil Marriage

Book of Common Prayer

Book of Alternative Services

## **Appendix 5 (1.1.24)**

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### Summary of Steps

1. Study, discussion, discernment
2. Parish Council decision
3. Advise Diocesan Bishop of process and decision.
4. Request appropriate permissions depending on decision taken.
5. Preparation processes depending on the decisions taken.
6. Evaluation of decision and implementation on the parish.