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To: The Clergy and Parishes of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

Date: September 6th, 2019

A Pastoral Letter With Respect to Same Sex Marriage

I am writing to you in light of the vote at the recent meeting of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada which failed to give second reading to a canonical amendment which would have widened the church's understanding of marriage to include same sex couples. This letter lays out a course of action which I believe is a faithful development in our theology of marriage in our time and context and a response to the desire for the full inclusion of same sex couples in the sacramental life of the church by the majority of members of our church.

Section 1 of the preface to General Synod Canon XXI, referring to marriage, states that "This union is established by God's grace when two duly qualified persons enter into a covenant of marriage in which they declare their intention of fulfilling its purposes and exchange vows to be faithful to one another until they are separated by death." Therefore Canon XXI defines marriage as meaning the union of two duly qualified persons. In both the provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the legislatures have passed laws confirming that a same sex couple is qualified to be married.

The preface also gives a purpose for marriage: "marriage is a lifelong union in faithful love, and that marriage vows are a commitment to this union, for better or for worse, to the exclusion of all others on either side... The purposes of marriage are mutual fellowship, support, and comfort, and the procreation (if it may be) and nurture of children, and the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfilment in a community of faithful love. This covenant is made in the sight of God and in the presence of witnesses and of an authorized minister." It seems to me that same sex couples are equally able to fulfil this purpose for marriage.

Our Diocesan synods in 2011 and 2017 clearly showed that a majority of the members of our Synod were in favour of the blessing of civilly married same sex couples and for extending the solemnizing of marriage for same sex couples to our churches. These discussions were just a small portion of the decades of discussion and discernment that our diocese has engaged in with respect to human sexuality.

The recent adoption by the General Synod of the document entitled "A Word to the Church" by an 85% majority of delegates provided five affirmations. 1) The rights of Indigenous persons and communities for self-determination, 2) That diverse understandings of the existing Canon on Marriage exist, 3) That there are diverse understandings and teachings about marriage, held with integrity in our church, 4) That we commit to presume good faith among those who hold differing views regarding marriage, 5) Our commitment to walk together and preserve communion. The statement issued by the House of Bishops at this same General Synod "made room" for dioceses to exercise a "local option" to authorize same sex marriage where such a decision is in keeping with their sense of witness and mission.

In exercising the pastoral dimension of the office of bishop I perceive a "gap" in the authorized liturgies of the church in that the current rites for the solemnizing and blessing of a marriage do not apply to a same sex couple. Therefore I am authorizing a rite for use within this diocese for the solemnizing and blessing of marriage for same sex couples.

As of today's date, same sex marriage will be permitted in the parishes of the diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

I will require a letter from the parish council and clergy of any parish which wishes to begin to provide a rite for the solemnization and blessing of marriage for all "duly qualified" couples, indicating that the parish is supportive and the priest is prepared to preside at this rite. Many parishes have already completed a time of education, prayer, consultation and discernment following the creation of Policy 1.1.24 in 2011. Some of those

discernment processes were restricted to being prepared to offer a blessing of a civil marriage. Parishes where the conversation was limited and parishes that have not had a conversation and wish to offer marriage for same sex couples, are required to do this consultation and discernment before proceeding. Our diocesan website will provide a list of suggested resources for this work.

Care should be taken to ensure the provision of pastoral care for the couple. I expect clergy who at this time cannot in conscience preside at the wedding of a same sex couple, to provide the couple with a referral to a priest and parish who is prepared to do so. If the priest of a same sex couple cannot make a referral to another parish, I expect that priest to refer the couple to the bishop's office.

I will require clergy to consult with me whenever agreeing to preside at the marriage of a same sex couple. This is not for giving approval, but for gaining information in this interim period.

The usual requirements under General Synod Canon XXI apply:

- The couple must meet civil requirements as to age and obtain a marriage license from the appropriate province.
- The couple must undertake preparation for marriage.
- The wedding shall take place in a church building or other public place.
- The required notice must be given.
- At least one of the persons being married must be baptized

The provisions in Canon XXI regarding the right of any priest to use their discretion to decline to solemnize any particular marriage, continue to apply.

I recognize that we are not of one mind with respect to this change. The document "A Word to the Church" notes the diversity of teachings in the Anglican Church of Canada with respect to marriage. The document also notes that it is possible to hold and act on divergent views in good faith, and that missional context would necessarily inform pastoral practice. As members of the body of Christ we need to care for one another in the midst of our sincerely held differences. To quote from our Diocesan Guideline 1.1.24, "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 ... we will work to respect differences of opinion and value the diversity that has always been a part of Anglicanism. That diversity challenges us to consider that God's truth might not be in the position you or I currently hold. We will not label or demonize one another."

The authorized rite for the marriage of same sex couples is "The Witnessing and Blessing of a Marriage" authorized by the Episcopal Church (USA). Clergy wishing to use any other rite must request my approval.

Before the end of this year I will begin a process of reviewing the Guideline on Marriage (1.1.6) and its appendix, A Pastoral and Liturgical Guideline for Civilly Married Same Sex Couples (1.1.24), along with this pastoral letter with the intent of providing one consolidated Guideline on Marriage. In the meantime the second part of section 1 of Guideline 1.1.24 is rescinded.

*God, the author of love,
We pray for all who are married.
Through their love for each other
May they know the reality of your love
For the whole world;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
(A New Zealand Prayer Book)*

Yours faithfully,



The Most Rev. Ron Cutler
Archbishop of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island