

DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

From the Archbishop

July 21, 2019

Dear friends in Christ,

“I have called you by name; you are mine.” (Isaiah 43.1)

Thank you for your patience in waiting for this letter from me regarding the recent events of our General Synod in Vancouver. I needed time to exit the emotional roller coaster and the ‘bubble’ of that gathering, as well as space to prayerfully consider what I might say to you, my beloved people of God in Algoma. I also wanted to be sure that whatever public statement I made was heard first by you, the people in our pews, before it was released more widely through the Diocesan website, enews, and social media.

Thank you for the messages of prayerful support the Algoma delegates and I received whilst we were in Vancouver; they meant more than you will ever know. You were in our daily prayers, especially as we were conscious many of you were watching the proceedings ‘live’ with us.

You would have experienced the many high moments of General Synod as the 14th Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Linda Nicholls, was elected, as Archbishop Fred made an apology to the Indigenous Peoples for spiritual harm, and as the National Anglican Indigenous Bishop, Mark MacDonald, was made an Archbishop. There was great joy as **The Word to the Church** passed with a resounding 85% of delegates voting in favour of this document and the five affirmations. This is attached as Appendix #1.

Then you would have witnessed the low and challenging moments, experiencing the full impact of the debate and vote on the proposed amendment to Canon 21 on July 12th. No one could have anticipated the result, which received the required majority of votes in the House of Clergy and Laity, but which failed to pass in the House of Bishops, thus defeating the motion.

In that moment there were no winners. The shock, pain, and deep hurt was palpable in the room as the results of the vote came up on the screen and many members could be heard sobbing. Those who felt it most keenly were members of the LGBTQ2S++ community, as well as their families and allies. Emotions were raw. While members of General Synod had Chaplains available to comfort and care for distraught members, many of you were in anguish on your own. I pray you reached out to loved ones and they offered you support.

Last weekend the House of Bishops met frequently and for long hours to find a way forward for our church. We recognized that many people felt we had let them down. We worked together on a Statement of apology to members of the LGBTQ2S++ community, General Synod, the wider Anglican Church and onlookers from around the world. On Monday, the Primate offered that apology and statement on our behalf and it is attached to this letter as Appendix #2. In essence what this statement has done is to open the door to allow for 'local option' with respect to same sex marriage in the Anglican Church of Canada. Without the protections of the proposed amendment, it means that clergy and jurisdictions who wish to move ahead with same sex marriage are able to do so, once a liturgy is in place and authorized by the Diocesan Bishop.

In the coming days, months, and years each of the 30 dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada, as well as the Indigenous Peoples and communities in our church, will be dealing with this matter in its own way, depending on its culture and context. Some may choose to move forward on same sex marriage while others will remain the way they are now.

In the diocese of Algoma we are already on a journey with respect to same sex marriage, and that journey of discernment will continue. I have been on my own journey of deeper understanding and have reached a place where I am personally in favour of same sex marriage in our church. I know we are not all of one mind in Algoma and that this has been a source of division in some of our parishes.

There are a few things I wish to say in this moment in time as we move forward in faith, hope, and love as siblings in Christ.

1. As the fallout from General Synod continues, I ask that you reach out to those who have been deeply hurt by the events of General Synod and care for one another. Please extend radical hospitality to members of the LGBTQ2S++ community, their families, and allies in your churches, ensuring you find a way to make known that everyone is truly welcome.
2. As your Bishop I will not bear the weight of this decision alone. We will make a decision about same sex marriage in Algoma *together*, as Anglican Christians, and as members of the body of Christ. It may be that a special Synod is called next spring to deal with this one matter, or that we will wait until the next regular Synod of our Diocese. How we determine this will be based on consultations I will be having with you over the next few months. I will do this in the way the Indigenous elders of South Africa make decisions – “Indaba” – which are consultative gatherings. Up for discussion, also, will be the way in which we hold that Synod and make a decision that is right for Algoma. Having just witnessed the failure of the legislative way of decision making at General Synod and the way members of Synod tried to figure out how people had voted, as well as terrible shaming of those who voted their conscience (as they were asked to do), we need to find a different way of making this particular decision. The Anglican way is often about the 'third' way.

3. I affirm that there are diverse and differing views of marriage in our church as described in the **Word to the Church**. The conscience of clergy will always be honoured in these matters; clergy in Algoma may hold their view without shame or fear. I also believe that in this, as in all matters, the bishop and clergy alike must be diligent in the reading and study of the holy scriptures, and in seeking the knowledge of such things as may make us stronger and more able ministers of Christ; endeavour so to minister the word of God and the sacraments of the new covenant, that the reconciling love of Christ may be known and received; undertake to be faithful pastors to all whom we are called to serve; and persevere in prayer, asking God's grace, both for ourselves and for others.
4. If parishes have not yet engaged in the *Holy listening* exercises or other conversations about same sex marriage, you need to do that as soon as possible, however uncomfortable it makes you feel. The Anglican way is not a black and white world but one in which we accept diversity and learn to live well and bend together in our differences. If, as clergy and lay leaders you do not feel you can lead them yourself, I will arrange a facilitator to be your guide. Having those difficult conversations will only result in a deeper understanding and love for your fellow Anglican Christians. You will find, as I have done, that there is so much more that unites us than divides us. During General Synod we sang a beautiful hymn which says:

*"Though walls divide the friend from foe,
a deeper truth we then must show;
Our witness clear, love can be found
When common ground is holy ground."*

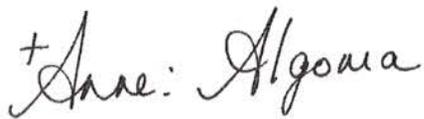
5. As we wait for the outcome of a synodical decision in Algoma, I ask those of you who support same sex marriage, especially those clergy who are already prepared to move ahead in performing a same sex marriage, to be patient a while longer making every effort to maintain the bond of unity in the spirit of peace (Ephesians 4.3). We do not have authorized liturgies yet, and we need to reach a decision as a synodical body. Our context in Algoma is different from other dioceses in the church and there are some who will not have been disappointed by the results of the vote.

"I have called you by name, you are mine." (Isaiah 43.1)

Finally, it is my deepest hope that we refrain from naming or labeling each other in our church as 'progressive' or 'traditional', 'liberal' or 'conservative', 'gay' or 'straight', us' and 'them'. Let us call each other by our God given names and see one another as beloved children of God, honoured, precious - for that is who we are in God's eyes. Growing up my father always called me his 'treasure chest', and this now becomes my name for you in Algoma - a diocese filled with precious gems of colour, diverse in their extraordinary beauty.

There is much more to be said about the 42nd General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in which many important decisions were made about how we will continue to live faithfully as Anglican Christians in this new time in the life and witness of our church in the world. We welcomed members of the ecumenical community and passed resolutions on Climate Change and Human Trafficking. I have asked the Algoma delegates to work together to prepare a report by the end of August and this will be distributed widely. Thank you to Deborah, Aidan, Hugh, Gilles and Jakob for representing Algoma so well at General Synod. As we continue walking together on our journey let us pray for one another and for our beloved church that the love of Christ will be made known in and through us.

With my abiding affection for you all, I remain yours in the love of Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Anne: Algoma". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed text of the letter.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma