



DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

From the Archbishop

May 21, 2019

Diocese of Algoma Synod 2019 – Friday 10th, May 2019

“Heaven and Earth Have Been Gathered”

Dear friends in Algoma,

Thank you for the feedback I received from the table groups at our recent Synod gathering as we prepare for the second reading of the proposed amendment to the Marriage Canon and the proposal about a self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church. Decisions about both of these will take place at General Synod in Vancouver in July of this year. Please pray for the Algoma delegates attending General Synod – Archdeacon Deborah Kraft, Rev. Aidan Armstrong, Mr. Gilles Tessier, Canon Hugh Mackenzie, Mr. Jakob DeVries (youth delegate) and me.

In the weeks and months leading up to Algoma’s Synod I had numerous discussions with individuals and groups of people about the best way to approach the subject of same-sex marriage in our time together. We wanted to give delegates as much useful information about the motion itself, which was why we asked Archdeacon Huskins to explain the motion and the process to us. Questions had been raised about the Anglican Communion (what it is; how it functions; and what a decision to allow same-sex marriage would mean in the wider Communion). I am grateful to the Rev. Dr. Chris Brittain for sharing his insights. I addressed some of the issues related to General Synod in my Charge, affirming that there is ‘room at the table for everyone’ in the Diocese of Algoma. The general feedback from Synod on all of the presentations was very positive which indicates that we attained a good balance between preparing for General Synod and other topics (homelessness, human trafficking, healthy congregations, good liturgy, safe church) which are also very important in our life together. I hope that you have already shared some of what you learned at Synod with your congregations back home.

Following 2017 Synod we received feedback about the way we handled the subject of same-sex marriage. We began by having a lengthy discussion about how to have a difficult conversation which left many delegates frustrated because there was insufficient time left to have meaningful discussion on the topic of same-sex marriage. Some table groups did not appreciate having an unbiased facilitator join them for these sessions as it gave them the impression that they were unable to 'figure it out' on their own. In addition, we heard that there were some tables where one or two people dominated the conversation, not allowing others to give their views and essentially shutting down discussion. I heard the same complaints following some of the 'Holy Listening Exercise' that we developed for use across the diocese.

With these comments in mind, we decided to provide questions in the hope that they would elicit good conversations at your table groups and that you would leave Synod with a better sense of the complexities involved in regard to the proposed amendment of the Marriage Canon. Because I found the feedback from the table groups to be so helpful for me in listening carefully to voices from around Algoma, I have decided to share all the comments with you. My reading of them is that the discussions were respectful and that everyone in the group was given the opportunity to speak if they wished. Although I was not part of a group at Synod I watched closely and noticed how engaged the table groups were in the conversation, with some groups even asking for extra time to continue. In the feedback I hear the diverse voices of our faithful people actively engaged in a very difficult conversation, seeking to understand others who might not share their convictions.

I am cognizant of the fact that a number of retired clergy who are active in ministry were not present for these discussions, and that there are hundreds of men and women in Algoma who were not at Synod and whose views are not represented in these comments. There were only eight youth at Synod and their voice needs to be heard too. I will be engaging with the youth on this topic at their Synod in early July. Be assured that following General Synod I will be visiting each deanery to listen to diverse voices from across the diocese before making any decision.

With respect to Question 1 (should same-sex marriage be allowed to take place in the Diocese of Algoma), I anticipated that groups would spend most of the hour on this question, but the responses indicated that people answered that question and moved on to the others. I heard through the responses that the majority of people at our Synod would accept a decision to allow same-sex marriage to take place in Algoma.

But there are concerns, and feedback from Question 2 (how a decision to allow or disallow same-sex marriage would affect your congregation) demonstrated that. This question elicited the most conversation and feedback with many indicating that they would lose parishioners regardless of the way the vote goes, and that there would be increased tension within parishes, resulting in division and dissension.

I have long suspected that there are many congregations in Algoma which have chosen not to engage in conversations around same-sex marriage, with the result that there is significant anxiety now that a decision is imminent. It is a pity that some people still say they had no idea about the proposed change to the marriage canon, even though discussions have been taking place for decades in the Anglican Church of Canada. My sense is that it is easier to have these difficult conversations with members of different congregations or even strangers, than with people you sit next to and break bread with every week in church.

My best advice would be for all congregations to engage in frank discussion about same-sex marriage, just as we did at Synod, without allowing it to detract from all the other important ministries that are occurring. I will be praying for you in this time of worry. I believe that there is more to our lives as faithful Anglicans and members of the body of Christ than our convictions on same-sex marriage. We live with tension on any number of issues, and this does not need to break parishes apart. We need to trust that the relationships we have forged over many years will not end because of our differences.

The other concern raised in Question 2 has to do with clerics who might have a view contrary to their congregations'. There is concern about how this will affect pastoral relationships. Our clergy are faithful men and women who hold their convictions on marriage from years of prayerful study and understanding of the Scriptures and the nature of the Anglican Church of Canada more broadly, and they are not of one mind about same-sex marriage. Like our laity, some clergy are not ready to accept a new teaching on marriage which would allow for same-sex marriage. I would not want this one aspect of their ministry to become a source of division in any of our parishes and hope this can be worked through at the parish level without people feeling judged for their convictions.

When I read through the comments from Question 4 (what work do we still have to do in Algoma), I was very pleased that the majority of people do not consider that the topic of human sexuality and marriage will be complete once General Synod is over and a decision in Algoma has been reached. People are eager to keep talking about what a Christian understanding of marriage is and one person suggested that I prepare material which could be used by the congregations. The questions we have used here would be a good starting point for a conversation at a parish meeting.

There was some very helpful feedback from the House of Bishops Statement and on the self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church which I will pass along on your behalf. There is still much to learn about the self-determining Indigenous Church and what we learn will all be reported during and after General Synod.

With this excellent discussion held at our Synod I am confident that we in the Diocese of Algoma will be able to meet the challenges that face us as a church in a grace-filled and hopeful way. I am committed to walking alongside you as we discern the way forward in

this time in the life of the church, and I “am eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4.3) In the remaining weeks before General Synod let us offer our prayers as one body for the Anglican Church of Canada, our Primate Archbishop Fred Hiltz and for each other in the Diocese of Algoma as we commit to walking together in the love of Christ.

With gratitude for your faithful responses offered in hope, faith, and love.

I remain yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Anne: Algoma". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma

The following are the responses from the table group discussions with respect to General Synod 2019 – the question of same-sex marriage and the self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church.

18 of the table groups sent in responses following the discussion period.

Question 1.

With respect to the proposed amendment to the Marriage Canon which is coming to General Synod in July 2019 for its second reading, should same-sex marriage be allowed to take place in the Diocese of Algoma? Is there consensus on this at your table.

Results – 17 groups responded to this question

- After discussion, 6 Table groups reached unanimous consensus that same-sex marriage should be allowed in Algoma – there were no additional comments.
- 5 table groups did not reach unanimous consensus, but in their comments indicated that the majority of delegates were in favour. In each of these instances there was one definite ‘no’ whilst others were still undecided or thinking about it.
- 2 table groups reached unanimous consensus that same-sex marriage should not be allowed in Algoma. See comments below.
- 4 table groups indicated that they did not reach consensus and they did not indicate whether the group was more in favour or against.

These are the comments from table groups where there wasn't unanimous agreement:

1. *No consensus but we had ‘respectful, insightful conversations that brought new learning.’*
2. *Are we letting the culture/country tell us what we do?; Objection to how the church is making decisions; We don't withhold communion, so why would we withhold marriage; Wording problem with ‘civil law’ – what does that say of what's next?; If ‘yes’ this will tear us apart, but so will a ‘no’.*
3. *Allowing same-sex marriage may be the ‘decline of the Anglican Church in Canada’. Love the sinner but not the sin. Our foundation is the Bible. We have love for homosexual people but we do not condone their lifestyle. Loving one another does not mean condoning same-sex marriage. How long before we tear up the Ten Commandments? We feel the church needs to be a steadfast, upright and holy place that is a testimony to a Holy God who created man and woman for each other. We are concerned for future generations – our young people are in trouble, suicides, drug and alcohol addictions. They are confused and live in a troubled and confused world. The churches that are growing stand on God's Word. The Anglican Church has been failing young people. The Anglican Church has gotten caught up in the homosexual revolution – a political movement and has lost its focus to spread the good news of God's saving grace for future generations. We will all die if we go the way of the world.*

We need to offer love to those who need it and let the church focus on its calling to go and 'make disciples of all the world'.

4. *Either way there will be hurt; the church should stay out of this; people have already left the Anglican church because they don't feel welcomed; we are called to love everyone unconditionally and God loves us unconditionally finding ways to keep us separated is hurtful; OT reading of Scripture is harsh – Jesus in the NT is the new model for living.*
5. *Opt in, Opt out for congregations would be helpful.*
6. *No consensus in our group but we do agree (consensus) that we need to walk together regardless of the decision.*
7. *Pastoral concerns expressed for people on both sides of the question.*
8. *All spoke with great confidence in the Archbishop's pastoral sensitivity and wisdom, and willing to support her whatever her decision.*

Question 2.

How would a decision to permit same-sex marriage/ or to disallow it in Algoma affect your congregation?

Results - 18 tables responded to this question with this question eliciting the most comments. From the comments you will notice that many congregations have not discussed the same-sex marriage issue and is where a lot of the tension will arise – particularly if the majority of the congregation hold one view and the cleric another. The following are all the comments for Question 2 by table group. Semi colon followed by a capital letter represents a change in speaker.

1. *2/3 of our congregation are in favor, only a few will leave regardless of the way the vote goes.*
2. *For the vast majority of our congregation this is a non-issue; We are focused on other things; In terms of our day to day life this decision doesn't make a difference.*
3. *We see this as affecting a few people; Most would accept whatever decision is made (5 comments)*
4. *We expect that there will be disagreements within the parishes because of the decision, but not to the point that any of the parishes will split.*
5. *Minister may have one opinion and congregation a different one. This might cause controversy or division; There will be some sense of division; There will need to be a listening process within congregations and an openness of conversations; In our congregation we don't know how individuals think or what their position is on the subject; It will not change how we function on a day to day basis. Our congregation wants the vote to take place so they can get on with mission, outreach and ministry. As a Christian family this person's opinion is that their congregation will stay intact – there will be discussions but they will stay as a family;. One family may return if the matrimonial change to the Commission takes place. Some families have already left as they believe the change will*

take place. Others will leave if the change passes. There may not be a lot of changes in the life of the church. Those who would leave have already gone.

6. There is some uncertainty as this 'hasn't been put to the test'; We will lose some but we suspect many will remain; Concern not just about those opposed leaving, but those who might be hurt or feel there is no place for them if it does not pass – and for their families and those who care about them.
7. LGBTQ2 children of congregants will feel welcomed back; This will divide our congregations; Hopefully we will be able to continue discussions. 3 out of 8 members of the group – this will have no change or effect whatsoever.
8. It would split the congregation.
9. Some may leave but the church won't fold; the topic hasn't come up yet – the congregation accepts everyone where they are; Few will leave if it is a 'yes' – more if it is a 'no'; There is a perception that this isn't for or against the issue, but 'for' or 'against' you personally; This forces the pastor to come down on one side or another – up to now the answer was 'no' – pastor can no longer be neutral; Is there a duty to refer??; This is pastorally divisive not politically; I am horrible in conflict resolution and I would rather just ignore this issue. We need teaching on conflict resolution; How do we make decisions as disciples of Jesus?? We can be different with different opinions but we are disciples of Christ first!
10. Not a great effect on the congregation but a larger effect on the community of parishes in our city – tensions will intensify; This would open up conversations; Positive decision to allow wouldn't affect – decision to disallow would create negativity. "We don't give the people sitting in the pews enough credit." If the decision is a 'no' – how can we support gay, lesbian, LGBTQ2+ members of our church in this diocese? A decision not to proceed in Algoma will cause much hurt and many members (not just LGBTQ2+) will question their ability to remain in the Diocese of Algoma and ACC.
11. If the church goes ahead with this it will tear our congregation apart – I hope my church will survive; This will give my brother great peace in his personal circumstances; It's time to make a decision and move on; I started with a strongly negative attitude but over the years have come to a different place through thought and prayer come to a different place. We need to provide equal opportunities. Priests won't be forced into everything – I would like to see this approved and everyone to have their own choice, guided by their own conscience. The church has marginalized divorced people in the past. And women. We have made changes – so why do we continue to marginalize gays?; I don't feel I have the right to say to someone that they don't have a right to be part of my congregation. I can't be judgmental. Our congregation embraces all ages and some live a different lifestyle but no one makes a big deal about it. Our sexuality is part of our basic needs along with food, shelter, air, water; Jesus told us to love one another and there are no exceptions; If we close the doors we are rejecting a group of people; With an 'opt out' clause one would still be able to marry at another church from a different cleric; Scripture says we can't be a stumbling block to another's faith; I say YES – my son is not an abomination; It will split my congregation if the Canon changes. I think some people may leave but I'm not sure. I

think if we do not change there will be some who leave – just as around women’s ordination. Some went to other churches, while some didn’t go at all. This is the way it is with every change the church has made; Our congregation doesn’t know the Canon change as proposed and as we learned about today. We need to take this information back; If we vote ‘no’ we may lose young people who don’t understand why we don’t.

- 12. In Algoma there will be small splinter groups. “Welcome Out” “Must Welcome In” Changes in leadership in parishes has losses and gains; Parishioners will help mend.*
- 13. If it is allowed - We feel that most of our churches will be accepting of the changes and may encourage growth in the Church. Hopefully anyone opposed will remain and grow with the changes.*
- 14. With either decision we feel our congregations will be accepting and 7 out of 8 didn’t feel that individuals would ‘walk’ or leave the church.*
- 15. There is some angst, some fear, but mostly feeling of peace and closure to the conversation;#ready for change although there are some who still struggle and may leave; Do not anticipate an effect (X3); Uncertain of what effect this will have as we have not discussed it in our congregation.*
- 16. This won’t make a difference in my congregation; We don’t discuss it; I find this personally difficult; Love will come to be the defining lens through which this is viewed.*
- 17. This table recommends that if same-sex marriage is approved and that if the Archbishop allows it in the Diocese of Algoma that you consider giving congregations that option to opt in or opt out of following the practice.*
- 18. This would be difficult for the congregation to live with; There would be dissension; There would be problems; There would be unity; No member has expressed views one way or the other; This would not divide the church – we should be upholding the seven Grandfather teachings which are more important in the community than LGBTQ2+; May take a long time to find full resolution; Trust in our Archbishop to make the best decision for the Diocese of Algoma.*

Question 3.

How does the Statement from the House of Bishops (March 2019) ‘land’ with you? What in it did you find helpful, or not? If you had a conviction about same-sex marriage before reading the Statement, did it change your mind or not?

Only 4 table groups discussed this question. These comments are all the responses received and are not grouped by table group.

- 1. Respect is highlighted and this ‘lands well’*
- 2. Good to be giving Indigenous people their own time and way to make decisions. Again highlights respect.*
- 3. Protection of clergy.*
- 4. Walking together - good.*
- 5. Not provided enough tools to be equipped to go back to our parishes.*

6. *Landed well – did not change my view.*
7. *None of this is done in our own power, but under the Holy Spirit.*
8. *Very powerful to know that there was unity in the House of Bishops.*
9. *Statement of commitment to walk together is helpful – respectful disagreement is appreciated.*
10. *Need to help those opposed to the change to reconcile opposition to the concept with personal experiences of same-sex couples within congregations.*
11. *“New” is always difficult for Anglicans.*
12. *The 4th comment speaks to me and is a call for respect and makes me think about changing the way I approach this topic.*
13. *It is a very hopeful Statement which is also offering us a way forward following the vote.*
14. *Bishops are committed to remain in communion with one another for reconciliation.*
15. *Reflects present reality; Is an accurate snapshot of present reality; 4th Statement is very important; This Statement is inclusive and doesn't ‘shove anyone out’.*
16. *I would question is there are only two views of marriage (many more).*
17. *This Statement protects people on both sides of the issue.*
18. *Need to unpack #1 more as this is something we've barely touched.*
19. *Family is family – we belong together in Christ and we are meant to reflect the love of Christ.*
20. *This Statement is non-committal – was this done on purpose?*
21. *This is a ‘motherhood’ Statement and there is nothing objectionable or helpful in it.*
22. *Our leaders need to be open about where they stand on issues.*

Question 4

Regardless of how the vote goes at General Synod – what in your opinion does Algoma still have to do as a Diocese in terms of matters and conversations around marriage and human sexuality?

12 table groups responded to this question. Numbers distinguish responses from different tables but without identifying a particular table :

1. *Discussions need to continue; We need to re-examine marriage and what it really means?*
2. *We need to talk and listen and share with +Anne; We need to ensure that conversations about marriage actually extend into human sexuality – this conversation needs to happen so we can love; I think more concretely and fearlessly about sexuality; A bigger conversation about what it means to be a church and why I think I can leave a body?; Conversations at the parish level about sexuality; Laity need to be very much involved – congregational conversations are important; Personally hope +Anne opts in – working with congregations is essential – creatively and in the church.*
3. *Algoma has to provide tools to clergy and lay to facilitate discussions; Encourage congregational discussions; Discourage fear of the discussion – ‘productive conflict’; Continue to talk; Message from Archbishop to start a conversation at the parish level; We have had too*

little time to discuss this matter – this is frustrating as this is our first and only time to discuss the change to the Marriage Canon. We should have had extra time to discuss.

4. *Education is required on both sides; Those who are opposed need time and pastoral support and respect from everyone.*
5. *We need education on the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality. We haven't discussed heterosexuality very well in the church.*
6. *We need good definitions of what 'marriage' now is! Conversations need to happen at the grassroots level regarding defining 'marriage'.*
7. *Education; Listening to people; Promoting acceptance through visual cues.*
8. *Understanding about what the repercussions are for the congregations?*
9. *Further conversation/education to enhance understanding.*
10. *Clarity of understanding just what the vote outcomes for our parish; A study package for use in parishes may be helpful in fostering understanding of Scripture and issues of the whole process.*
11. *Some of what we need will become clear after we see what happens at General Synod and the subsequent response in our diocese; We need to better develop the capacity to see through the lens of our faith - to develop the language and think and speak theologically (not academic theology per se) – right now we look to secular language and categories, or the particular understanding of Scripture.*
12. *Archbishop to lead further discussion: Keep conversation going – don't ostracise people; Our understanding of marriage has changed over the years – we have to keep studying and let our understanding grow and be accepting; Prepare congregations well before any change – give them a better understanding of what has been decided; Keep educating people; Keep loving people regardless of the decision -discussion may help; Keep talking; Clarify what the Bible says about this; Keep loving. Our group feels inevitability in this – sooner or later the answer will be 'Yes'.*

Question 5

What are your thoughts on the self-determining Indigenous Anglican Church?

9 Table groups responded to this question.

1. *We all agree that the Indigenous Anglican Church should be able to self govern on issues relating to their culture and spirituality.*
2. *There were no strong reservations against this but hope that there will be discussions and steps taken to ensure that we don't become separate churches – that we will still walk together.*
3. *Our table agrees with this whole heartedly: We need more information on how responsibilities and growth of this church structure will come about.*
4. *Wish that 'self determining' was part of the larger church; It is racist that we separate and exclude them; A lot more education is required to understand.*
5. *Concerns that the self-determining Indigenous church would be largely conservative on the same-sex issue; two courses same river – we steer our own boats; Concern*

about grouping all Indigenous people together as having one mind; There are many first nations people who are open o same-sex marriage; What does this mean to governance? Which other constituencies will want to get their own sub-church? How does this not lead to more exclusion? How can we work on being more inclusive? This won't affect us negatively if the Indigenous church is self determining – it is more uniting in Thunder Bay; As we run parallel courses we need to build and maintain bridges of full community.

- 6. We need to support this – also need to realize that there will be costs involved; Continue to discuss how we move forward on this.*
- 7. In favour of self determining Indigenous Church; I am unsure about the limits of self-determination – is the self-determining church bound by Canons? We need more education on this. The church needs to set the definition of self-determining in consultation with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Anglicans in Canada; What is an Anglican?*
- 8. There is a great deal of support and excitement for this at our table; Caution not to just get understanding of this by what the secular press reports on this – this is not a lack of trust in the press but recognition that they don't always understand the workings of the church; This will lead to the Indigenous rediscovery of their cultures vital to the enculturation of gospel in their midst that is free of imposition of another culture; This will allow non Indigenous Anglicans to discover much of the breadth and depth of the gospel we have not yet.*
- 9. We are in favour but recognise that a lot more work needs to be done.*

These comments were faithfully shared and recorded by the delegates at Algoma's Synod on Friday May 10th, 2019.