



DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

From the Archbishop

A pastoral letter to the faithful in Algoma on the place of same sex marriage in our church.

Ascensiontide
Tuesday 26th May, 2020

“I ask...that they all may be one. As you Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17.20-21)

My dear friends in Christ,

Same sex marriage now has a place in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada. The Bishops of our Canadian Church have the responsibility of making decisions about this for their dioceses. At our last Synod session in 2019, we considered same sex marriage as we prepared for the General Synod session in Vancouver. However, that General Synod session declined to make a decision in the matter, leaving it to the Bishops of each diocese to decide. I indicated that I did not intend to act quickly, and asked for your prayers and patience.

As part of continuing to listen attentively and carefully to the Spirit and one another in prayer and charity, it was our intention to hold a Special Synod this May to consider this matter and for that body to offer formal advice to me as your Archbishop. The present COVID-19 pandemic has meant the suspension, postponement, or cancellation of all public gatherings, including that Special Synod session. Once again, as I did at the beginning of my episcopacy, I invited you, the people of the Diocese, to send me your personal advice on this. I appreciate that many of you took the time and the trouble to respond to my request. I appreciate, too, the balanced and gracious responses I have received from so many of you, but, must also express my sadness at some of the harshness and rigidity expressed by those at both ends of the spectrum.

The reality is that in Algoma, as in every diocese and province in our church, there is a range of faithfully held convictions about marriage. This mirrors that most distinguishing feature of Anglicanism: the ability to embrace and accept a breadth of understanding and interpretation of scripture and theological views on difficult subjects.

Algoma has traditionally been one of the more conservative dioceses within the Anglican provinces in Canada, but, as we have discussed this matter and sought to truly hear and understand each other, so we have come to understand and respect that all of us are seeking to respond faithfully to the one God who leads us as a pilgrim people through the wilderness into a new and promised land. Over my years in this diocese, as a layperson, a deacon, a priest, and as your bishop, I have witnessed an enormous shift in understanding, including my own, and the willingness to embrace others in love, even when we might profoundly disagree.

In Algoma, as elsewhere, it is crucial that we acknowledge and, if possible, resolve our differences as Anglicans. However, those differences are never more important than who we are in Christ. There remains so much more which holds us together than anything that will ever keep us apart or seek to divide us. As your Archbishop, my ongoing commitment is to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3) and to continue encouraging us to walk together in a way that allows for diverse understandings of the existing Marriage Canon and marriage in the Anglican Church of Canada¹.

I have weighed the matter of same sex marriage in the church carefully and prayerfully, only too aware of the heavy burden that lies on me as the time arrives to make a decision for the Diocese of Algoma. I believe that the decision I have made is the result of my prayerful and attentive listening to Algoma's corporate discernment over many years and reflects the position and desire of the majority of people in this diocese.

I am, therefore, granting permission for duly qualified same sex couples who are part of ecclesial communities and who intend to live in faithful and committed relationships to celebrate the sacrament of marriage in our diocese.

In making my decision I commend the following to you:

- That the policies around marriage in Algoma² apply - including that couples be qualified to marry in our church, that at least one of the couple has been baptized, that due notice is given, that marriage preparation takes place, that an authorized rite is used, and that the marriage takes place in a church. If a marriage is to take place in another public place my permission is required.
- The conscience clause for clergy continues to apply. No cleric in the diocese has to officiate at any marriage service and may decline to do so without giving a reason. If Incumbents are approached by a couple and feel that they cannot proceed because of conscience, they may refer the couple to another cleric who does not object, but they are under no obligation to do so. You may inform me if you wish. While I believe it is reasonable for couples to have the hope and expectation of being married in their home parish, this may not be possible, and in this matter I ask for your understanding. If there are clergy and congregations who are comfortable in offering same sex marriage in their churches, I encourage you to inform me of this.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a disruption in our ability to gather publicly for worship, including marriages and funerals. It may be some time before clergy are able to proceed with marriage ceremonies. This time will enable us to prepare, and for me to authorize a rite for use in Algoma.
- A person's position on marriage will not in any way exclude one from pastoral life in Algoma, where the diversity in theology, interpretation of Scripture, and the way faith is lived out on a daily basis is something I have come to appreciate and value. I affirm my *'commitment to presume good faith among those who hold diverse understandings and teachings, and hold dear their continued presence in this church'* (Affirmation #4 General Synod 2019) and I invite you to do the same.

I ask that as followers of Jesus we strive to be reconciled to those with whom we have disagreed on the subject of same sex marriage over the years, and that we ask for God's forgiveness if any word or action of ours has caused another to leave our church. Let us continue to engage in open dialogue and attentive listening with one another, and with other denominations and communities on this and other difficult subjects in the life of our church so we may keep being formed and transformed as disciples of Christ.

Thank you for your patience and prayers as we have worked our way through this issue, particularly to members of the LGBTQ2S+ community and their allies who have been waiting for marriage to be possible within Algoma.

While I believe that this decision reflects the desire of the majority of people in our diocese, I am aware – and especially in the light of some of the submissions I have received – that not everyone will agree with, or welcome, this decision. I pray that we will, despite our differences, hold together in the bonds of love. Nearly a quarter of St. John's gospel is set in the context of Jesus' final meal with his disciples. I have often reflected on what I would say to my husband and children, or to you as my wider family in Christ, if I knew that the words I was about to speak would be the very last words I would ever speak. And what strikes me is the words of Jesus are all about unity and love, for God and for each other "Father, may they be one, even as we are one, I in them and you in me." (John 17.20) My prayer is that as the Father is glorified in the Son, so may God be glorified in us. May we as we move forward together, move in the love of God and the unity of the Holy Spirit. May we be one to the glory of God.

I remain yours in the love and peace of Christ,


 A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Anne: Algoma". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Most Rev. Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma

Appendix 1 – Five Affirmations of General Synod 2020

Appendix 2 – [Link to Marriage Policy in Algoma](#)

AFFIRMATIONS

Council of General Synod asks General Synod and the whole church to make the following affirmations.

Affirmation #1

Indigenous Spiritual Self-determination

Whatever the action of the church at this General Synod, we affirm the right of Indigenous persons and communities to spiritual self-determination in their discernment and decisions regarding same-sex marriage.

Affirmation #2

Diverse Understandings of the Existing Canon

We affirm that, while there are different understandings of the existing Marriage Canon, those bishops and synods who have authorized liturgies for the celebration and blessing of a marriage between two people of the same sex understand that the existing Canon does not prohibit same-sex marriage.

Affirmation #3

Diverse Understandings and Teachings

We acknowledge the ongoing reality that there is a diversity of understandings and teachings about marriage in the Anglican Church of Canada, and we affirm the prayerful integrity with which those understandings and teachings are held.

Affirmation #4

Our Commitment to Presume Good Faith

We affirm our commitment to presume good faith among those who hold diverse understandings and teachings, and hold dear their continued presence in this church.

Affirmation #5

Our Commitment to Stand Together

We affirm our commitment to walk together and to preserve communion, one with another, in Christ, within this church, within our Anglican Communion, and with our ecumenical partners.