

Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

To:

Commission on the Marriage Canon
Anglican Church of Canada
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From:

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Dear Members of the Commission on the Marriage Canon,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to converse with you regarding changes to Canon XXI and discern together the way forward. I would like to say that I am neither theologian nor Canonical lawyer, so these are my thoughts and interpretations only. Also, although I have identified myself as Archivist for the Diocese of New Westminster and Provincial Synod of BC & Yukon, these are my views only, and do not necessarily reflect those of my diocese or province.

Respectfully submitted,



Melanie Delva

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- How do you interpret what scripture says about marriage?

My understanding of what the Bible says about marriage is very much based on mutuality and journeying together. There is a continuous theme that the two leave their family of origin (Gen. 2:24) and commit to supporting one another (Eph. 5:22-23, 33).

That said, I think a more important question is how do you interpret what the scripture says about love. I believe that marriage – in whatever form it takes – is based on love, and that scripture has a lot to say about love – that it is kind, patient, does not hold on to anger (I Cor. 13), values the unique gifts of each (1 Cor. 7:7), allows for freedom through service to one another (Gal. 5:13), casts out fear (1 John 4:18), is the ultimate fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8) etc. Erotic love also allows us to experience all of our God-given senses and sensualities as portrayed in Song of Solomon. The definitions and examples of love in the Bible are boundless – which is a good clue for us as to how God sees love.

- How do you understand the theological significance of gender difference in marriage?

I am not a theologian. However, I am a Christian. I cannot speak to the “religious truth” of one thing or another, but I can say this: I believe that where there is Love, **God is unable to be absent**. If we believe that God is love, how can we assert otherwise. If love in all its facets (respect, fidelity, confidence, nurturance, respect, kindness, intimacy) is present in a marriage, I cannot believe that God is not there also – no matter what the gender of persons in the marriage. I have seen God and God’s love reflected in same-gender marriage in as much (and sometimes more) glory as that of different-gender. I have been, more than once, humbled and put to shame by my same-gender couples friends’ capacity for love and faithful witness to God’s glory.

- Is there a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage?

Again, I am neither a lawyer nor a theologian, but I believe yes. I believe that civil marriage is a legal contract. Christian marriage welcomes a “third entity” into the relationship, if you will – God’s glory, love, will and reflection. Christian marriage invites God in the form of Love to be the centre of the relationship – to be the One who will “win” the unwinnable argument, to be the strength that allows a spouse to support the other through unemployment, illness, the death of a child or family member. Christian marriage asserts that neither person is in it for his/herself, but for the unity. Christian marriage at the same time requests and claims that the relationship is holy, and set aside, in the same way that a child is set aside at baptism.

- The marriage canon describes “the purposes of marriage” as mutual fellowship, support, and comfort; 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. What is the theological significance of:
 - companionship in marriage?
 - When we are alone, we are prone not only to loneliness, but also to “going inward” to a degree that could be unhealthy. While one doesn’t have to be married to experience this, marriage welcomes a person to come out of one’s self – to see the world through the eyes of another, to see another perspective, to focus not only on oneself, but the needs of another. A good marriage has this built in. We don’t live only for ourselves anymore, but are forced into a more selfless space – looking out for the one we love. It also creates a nest of emotional intimacy – where the deepest fears and dreams have a safe place to hatch and grow.
 - bearing and raising children?
 - I believe that “children” can take many forms, but in all forms, marriage provides stability. If children is meant literally, the children have a soft place to land, an example of how to love and be in relationship in a way that balances building up of self or the other
 - However, I think “children” can mean many things. We “bear fruit” in many ways – through mentorship of others’ children, through volunteering at church or in the community, through caring for creation, through giving of our time to projects that better the earth and the life condition of those who are in it. I believe that any time our “deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Frederick Beuchner), we are bearing and raising “children” in the world – regardless of sex or gender.
 - the relationship between marriage and sexuality?
 - Sexuality is one of many facets of love and relationship (see first question). Where sex is consensual and manifests respect, love, caring, vulnerability and joy, I believe God is

there. I believe that marriage is not the only place where healthy sexuality can exist, but I believe that every marriage should strive for it.

- What is the difference between marriage and the blessing of a relationship?

The difference is sacrament. We bless fonts, books, crosses, linens, dogs, cats, pianos, organs, homes, trees, crosses and even people, but a sacrament is (once again) setting aside something as holy. It is entering into a relationship with God in a new way. I don't see blessing as a relationship, but a recognition. If I receive a blessing at the Eucharist, I am involved but not directly relating with God in the same way as when I ingest the sacramental body and blood. In the same way, the blessing of a marriage is a recognition that something is good, but marriage says it is HOLY.

- How do you understand the sacramentality of marriage?
 - Please see above