

I am a diocesan hospital Chaplain in Toronto. I spend my days midst the diversity of bodies and embodied spirits. All exhibiting different desires, ideas, hopes and fears and expressions of sexuality even within like cultures. Because we meet bodies and their spirits in times of vulnerability, life in a hospital dips deeply into the whole life of a person and the connections with everyone in their lives. The connections that protect the vulnerability are truly God's joy present, something marriage celebrates in a very intentional way. A Christian marriage is a model of that inner connection and the outward expression of God's call to us to be as Christ. To care and connect. We, all in the Anglican Church of Canada, know marriage as a union with the purposes of mutual friendship and accompaniment, support, and comfort. And for some, the nurturing of children. Marriage in the church is the expression of a lifelong vow of faithful and faith-filled love. All possible for same-gender couples.

As a chaplain working in an institution outside of parish life I meet many same-gender couples. I seek to be open and inclusive in all the care I give. When those who are Christian or those seeking to name how they encounter God discover I am an Anglican priest they ask me if they as a same-gender couple are welcome in the Anglican church. Yes, is my reply, because that is my first immediate belief. Could they be married there? And then I falter. And I look at them and feel heartbroken. In the hopeful question I see God with them. This is not about a good or beautiful wedding venue. This is about expressing love in the place they want to believe upholds and lives Christ's hope for the world, to live well together as Christ. But, I must tell them they are welcome, yet they cannot be offered a marriage celebration in church. And then I start to feel I am not making sense. If they are indeed welcome in a church that marries, in a church where many call marriage a sacrament I find it confusing and hurtful that a sacrament is refused to some of the baptized? God is all in all and does not show such exclusivity in creation. Our first sacrament of baptism is the one of beginning and welcome. Then how to understand or explain that we do not offer marriage to all who are baptized. And lastly this exclusivity is done in a country, where same gender marriage is legal. I have to tell these same-gender couples they are welcome to come and build up our community, to share themselves and their gifts with us, but we will not witness their love in marriage. And I can tell them rather weakly that I want to say yes to officiate at their marriage, for I know them and know

their faith, but I cannot. I do not feel well able to explain why I will not officiate at their marriage. Some may be able to explain, just as there are explanations, teachings and different understandings about marrying divorced persons and marrying people who do not attend a parish. But I cannot explain.

Perhaps this is about an understanding of marriage as something only between a man and a woman as Scripture tells us? Perhaps it is about the places Scripture speaks of the wrongness of two men being sexually intimate? Scripture is filled with cultural norms of a time and place of a people. And expresses prejudices and discrimination. And dislikes. All the while seeking God. Just as we do now in our own time and place. Scripture lives with us, it is words we digest and fill with love we give to God and receive from God. But cultural values in scripture and in our lives can be let go, as we learn and change. We have done this over and over, led by Christ's own modelling regarding the discernment of law and culture.

I believe that we are called as a church to open Canon XXI to include same-gender couples. I hope for this with my whole heart. I would have the same opening questions about choosing church as the place for a marriage for same-gender partners as I would for opposite-gender partners. And all following questions and possibilities and welcoming and planning would be based upon their responses to those questions, not upon the mix of gender. This is inclusivity. I have hopes for a church, where the phrase that marriage is a gift from God and a means of God's grace is not about gender but about inclusive faith expression. I hope for a church where we can say the words "delight and tenderness in acts of love" and mean it for all couples and their own sexual expression, not an approved version of it. I hope and ask for the Anglican Church of Canada to welcome same-gender couples to be married in our midst so we may be a witness of their love, to live the Good News and grow in Christ together.

~the Rev'd Joanne Davies, Diocese of Toronto