

EXPLORING THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON CHANGING THE MARRIAGE CANON

Introduction:

In preparing its report the Marriage Commission created questions for each section to assist readers to reflect on the material in preparation for General Synod. These questions would be helpful for those wishing to explore the report, either individuals or groups (pre-Synod delegate meetings, congregational study groups, parish leadership teams).

Suggestions for Study:

1. Begin your discussion/reflection with prayer. This is a topic that touches important personal, community and social commitments and beliefs. We invite you to explore the report with care and respect for the voices heard through it.
 - i) **For personal reflection:** Read each section through. Then consider the proposed question(s). Journal your thoughts and/or further questions.
 - ii) **For pre-Synod discussion with delegates and/or congregational study groups:** As the document is substantial this may take two sessions – a practical division might be:
 - a. Session One: Sections 2 – 4
 - b. Session Two: Section 5.

In each session: Read each section aloud to the group. Allow a brief silence for participants to absorb the material. Then read the question(s) aloud and invite exploration and discussion. Encourage further questions. This is a time to explore and understand the report rather than a debate.

2. Conclude your discussion/reflection with prayer, including prayer for General Synod 2016.

Prayers:

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who by thy Holy Spirit didst preside in the Council of the blessed Apostles, and hast promised, through thy Son Jesus Christ, to be with thy Church to the end of the world: We beseech thee to be present with the General Synod about to be assembled in thy Name. Save its members from all error, ignorance, pride, and prejudice; and of thy great mercy vouchsafe so to direct, govern, and sanctify them in their deliberations by thy Holy Spirit, that through thy blessing the Gospel of Christ may be faithfully preached and obeyed, the order and discipline of thy Church maintained, and the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour enlarged and extended. Grant this, we beseech thee, through the merits and mediation of the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP)

GUIDE, we beseech thee, Almighty God, by the light of thy Holy Spirit, the counsels of the Bishop[s], Clergy, and Laity about to be assembled in General Synod; that thy Church may dwell



in peace, and fulfil all the mind of him who loved it and gave himself for it, thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP)

Almighty and everliving God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with those who take counsel in General Synod 2016 for the renewal and mission of your Church. Teach us in all things to seek first your honour and glory. Guide us to perceive what is right, and grant us both the courage to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BAS)

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

2.1 Broad Consultation

How important was the consultation process in our Church?

Do you think we received a fair representation of voices within our church?

What struck you about the responses?

2.2 Full communion and ecumenical partners

Our partners have made different responses to our proposal for canonical change. How do you weigh these responses?

How might a decision (to proceed or not to proceed) at General Synod affect our relationship with other churches? How important is this to you and to our Church?

2.3 The Anglican Communion

How do you respond to the request of representatives of the Anglican Communion “not to move beyond our present policy of ‘local option’”?

How do you think a decision (to proceed or not to proceed) at General Synod might affect our relationship with other parts of the Anglican Communion?

How important is this to you and to our Church?

2.4 and 2.5 Other voices

We heard the voices of indigenous Anglican Bishops and gay and lesbian Anglicans. What is your response to their contributions?

From what other voices do we need to hear?

3.3 Solemn Declaration

Why do you think the founders of the Anglican Church of Canada included the Solemn Declaration in our documents?

In the light of previous canonical changes in the Anglican Church of Canada, do you find the proposed canon “in harmony with” the Solemn Declaration?

4 Conscience Clause

Do you feel that the proposed conscience clause offers sufficient protection for clergy and dioceses?

Do you think a conscience clause is important or necessary?

5 Biblical and theological rationale



5.1 The authority of Scripture

This section offers an Anglican approach to Scripture – that Scripture must also be interpreted by tradition and reason in every present historical and cultural context, and that scripture is best understood as a text read primarily in community, rather than in personal devotion or scholarly study.

How does this fit with your understanding of the role/authority of Scripture in the life of the Anglican Church?

What challenges does that present for us as we prepare for General Synod?

5.1.3 Definition of marriage

Canon XXI concisely summarizes our Church’s current statement on marriage in the opening paragraph –

- what can you affirm in the present Canon?
- what would you want to know more about?
- what would you question?

The 2004 decision of General Synod to affirm “the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships” and the legality of civil marriage of same-sex couples in Canada are starting points for this discussion.

How do these decisions inform our discussion?

5.2 Aspects of a theology of marriage

How does “the fact that we use the same word (“marriage”) for both the legal institution and the particular Christian way of life” burden and confuse the debate?

In what ways do you think Christian marriage differs from civil marriage?

5.2.2 Gender duality

The current predominant scientific understanding describes homosexuality as a “natural” phenomenon and an anthropological given.

How does this understanding inform your thinking?

5.2.3 Marriage and the Creation accounts

What questions are raised for you by this section on the biblical material?

What new insights have you discovered?

5.2.4 Marriage as a Christian way of life

How would you define Christian marriage?

Does the definition of Christian marriage as “a commitment to a life-long, exclusive, faithful relationship with one person” agree with your own understanding of Christian marriage?

5.2.5 Marriage as covenant

What does the covenant image add to your understanding of Christian marriage?

In what ways does God’s relationship with humanity impact our understanding of Christian marriage?



Our culture strongly emphasizes Romantic Love as the basis for a marriage. How does a Christian understanding challenge or change this view?

How is Christian marriage a sign of the relationship of Christ and the Church?

5.2.6 The marriage vows

Do you think marriage vows should be the same for all couples?

5.2.7 The purposes of marriage

Do you think that the statement on the purposes of marriage would need to be changed in the marriage of two persons of the same sex?

5.2.8 Marriage as sacrament

Do you believe that same-sex relationships are capable of “sacramentality,” of reflecting the love of Christ for his body the church?

5.3 Options for proceeding

This section presents three ways of looking at same-sex marriage. What are your thoughts and questions on reading this section?

5.4 Conclusion

The commission report says that it believes it is theologically possible to make this canonical change, but leaves it to the church, meeting in synod, to determine if the change is theologically desirable. What thoughts and questions remain for you as we approach the meeting of General Synod 2016?

