

## CONSIDERING THE MARRIAGE OF SAME-SEX COUPLES IN CHURCH

Anglicans have had to face several difficult issues in recent years, none more difficult, so far, than [a] the marriage in church of divorced persons; and [b] the ordination of women as priests and bishops. In both these instances, people bolstered their reflections on those two questions with quotes from Scripture, references to church tradition, and pastoral considerations. Quickly, positions became entrenched, and we as a Church became divided: 'us' versus 'them'. Some people became embittered, and left the Church hurt and angry: others stayed, but were also hurt and angry.

All too easily we could come to another parting of ways and more divisive encounters when General Synod votes on the resolution to consider same-sex marriage having the same standing in Church law and practice as opposite-sex marriage.

I would like to offer a worthwhile suggestion to be used by persons on both sides of the issue in every diocese across Canada. If this suggestion is activated now, there will be time for some fruitful outcome before General Synod convenes in 2016.

In South Africa, as apartheid was crumbling, both blacks and whites were confronted by a truly frightening situation. One white lady told my wife and I that the only thing black and white Christians had in common was their faith in Jesus Christ. Some church groups instigated a practice of Koinonia that I believe could really help Canadian Anglicans in our present context. The format was for two black couples and two white couples to meet together once a month for supper, each couple taking turns at hosting the meal in their own home. Our informant told us that the anxiety and fear was palpable for participants: whites had never entered the home of a black family; blacks had never eaten a meal in the white family dining room. It was this simple yet initially frightening shared monthly meal that bridged the chasm between the two groups of Christians as apartheid was replaced by majority rule.

I suggest this Koinonia as one way to help keep people at the grass roots of our Church stay connected as Christian community. Regardless of how General Synod moves the Church, we need to have a way of sustaining us as community despite painful differences. Rather than having some task force debate this possibility of Koinonia up until the threshold of General Synod, I really hope that before the close of 2014, words can be augmented by this Koinonia: two gay couples with two couples who are not in favour of the marriage of same-sex couples in Church eating a meal once a month in the home of one of those couples. Eating at a restaurant or church hall will not be good enough! Each couple ['us?'] takes a turn at hosting the meal with ['them?'] in our home. All four couples have in common their faith in Jesus Christ: they are Anglicans who all care enough about our Church and their own spiritual health to take the risk of attempting to maintain community in this perhaps frightening way.

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