

# **Submission to the Anglican Church of Canada, Commission on Marriage Canon (XXI) regarding Marriage Equality**

**August 2014**

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## **A response from the congregation of Saint John's Anglican Church, West Toronto**

For several decades now, the congregation of St. John's Anglican Church, West Toronto, (Diocese of Toronto), has embraced an inclusive witness of faith. All are welcome at the altar of God in this parish. Through study, actions of social justice and liturgical innovation, the congregation has welcomed families of diverse expressions and experience. The old and the young, female and male, differently-abled, gay and straight worship together.

The congregation has believed for years that gay and lesbian people are deserving of full equality as regards the sacrament of marriage as they are already recognized as fully equal persons of faith within the Anglican Church.

Over the summer of 2014, the congregation reflected upon how best to respond to the invitation by the Marriage Commission of General Synod as regards the meaning of and interpretation of Canon XXI. Members of St. John's formed a Marriage Equality working group of which various members responded to the questions highlighted by the Marriage Commission. The congregation, as a whole, gathered on July 13<sup>th</sup> for worship and conversation regarding their understandings of what marriage equality means to them. This conversation was captured on video.

As we gave prayerful consideration to the six questions posed by the Commission, other observations emerged that stood outside of the questions posed. These additional observations captured what our experience has taught us about our understandings of God's desire that we be an inclusive, justice-seeking community of faith. We respectfully include them in our submission to the Commission.

The St. John's video can be viewed through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-hXk2Wgo3XY>. We suggest that the video be viewed first. The parish of Saint John's welcomes comments and support from other individuals, clergy or parishes. We are most eager to hear from you. Please visit our website at <http://www.sjwt.ca> or contact us directly at [marriage-equality@sjwt.ca](mailto:marriage-equality@sjwt.ca) so that we may continue to explore this important issue together.

Those involved in the development of this submission include the Rev. Samantha Caravan, Incumbent, the Rev. Canon Douglas Graydon, Associate Priest, the Congregation of St. John's as seen in the video recorded July 13<sup>th</sup>, and the members of the St. John's Marriage Equality Working Group: The Rev. Evelyn Butler, Brad Christakos, Stephanie Christakos, The Rev. Gary Cyr, Elizabeth Fairley, Bryan MacIntyre, Andrea Ruddy, Anthony Ruta, Frank Rinaldo, Barry Shimmons, John Spragge, and Debbie Wilkinson O'Connell.

## 1) How do you interpret what scripture says about marriage?

*Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?  
Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?* (Baptismal Covenant, *Book of Alternative Services*, p. 159)

Within a certain culture, time and place, scripture speaks to marriage as the principal frame within which committed relationships stand. Marriage is the principal vehicle for intimate human relationships. Dependent upon the time, place and cultural setting of scripture, definitions and interpretations of marriage vary. For example, Lamech had two wives (Genesis 4:19); Esau had three wives (Genesis 26:34 & 28:9); Jacob had four wives (Genesis 29:28 & 30:4-9); Gideon had many wives (Judges 8:30); and Abijah had 14 wives (II Chronicles 13:21). If a man died without having children, his brother was to marry his widow and produce children to continue the lineage of the deceased brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Therefore, scripture can be interpreted as the human record of an evolving understanding of God's desire for humanity to live within relationships that are authentic, life-giving and loyal. Such relationships are then seen and experienced as the fulfillment of God's desire that all persons experience the fullness of human relationships as made possible through marriage, and that such relationships be recognized as such by the community within which they occur.

As a Church, we believe God calls us into relationship through scripture. Jesus says specifically that all commandments in Torah law and all of scripture tell us to love God and love others (Deuteronomy 6; Leviticus 19:18). It follows that our understanding of scriptural law must express our love for God and serve God in our love for each other. Jesus also tells us, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), that the commandments and scripture call us to show love of neighbour not through ritual obedience but through practical compassion. Showing the love of neighbour to our gay brothers and lesbian sisters includes lifting up their relationships as the Church has lifted up opposite-gender relationships. As the Samaritan showed love by compassion for a neighbour in distress, we believe God calls us to show love also by joining with our neighbours in rejoicing over their love.

Our faithful witness was expressed so meaningfully in the video when one member of the congregation said: "Don't let our kids who are 16 and struggling with being gay leave our Church. They have a home here."

**Another question emerged from our prayerful consideration of the Commission's question about what scripture says about marriage, i.e., what does scripture say that informs our current understanding of marriage?**

As Christians, we are called at Baptism to participate fully in the body of Christ and the sacraments. We are called to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbours as ourselves and to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

As recounted by one long-standing member's experience of living out his Baptismal covenant: "Ever since I started attending St. John's, West Toronto 31 years ago, my experience of being an Anglican has been serving the community by loving our neighbours as ourselves and striving for justice and respecting the dignity of *every* human being. In those 31 years, the community at St. John's has welcomed at our communion table young people, people with disabilities, people of all races and means, and same-gender couples. We have welcomed families who had been asked to leave their previous Church because their children were "too disruptive". In short, we have lived our Baptismal covenant to love our neighbours as ourselves and respect the dignity of every human being."

St. John's welcomes the change in Canon XXI that would allow same-gender marriage, because it upholds Christ's teaching, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

## **2) How do you understand the theological significance of gender difference in marriage?**

Gender is at best difficult to describe. Its most basic definition limits gender expression to that range of physical, biological, mental and behavioural characteristics that differentiate between masculine and feminine identities. Therefore, gender identities within marriage may relate more to roles assumed by either or both partners than to simple biological sexual function or identity.

Human history and experience teach us that such gender roles within marriage are not exclusive to the sexuality of the partners. In his ground-breaking work, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, John Boswell reminds us that marriage was for many centuries understood to be more a legal framework for the recognition of a committed relationship between two adults regardless of gender. Robert Hanchett states in his article entitled "The Institution of Marriage", published in *Whosoever, An Online Magazine for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Christians* in 2009, that Christian doctrine regarding marriage as a sacrament was not recognized by the Church until the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and was only formalized by the Council of Trent in 1508. Even then, as Boswell reminds us, the Christian Church had recognized the reality of same-gender relationships with liturgies utilized for such same-gender marriages well into the 13<sup>th</sup> Century.

It is now understood that gender role definitions and sexual orientations are fluid human realities. As a result, society is increasingly challenged to understand, and acknowledge, the reality of authentic human relationships within such a diversity of human experience. Responding to this enhanced awareness of diversity, Anglican understandings of gender, sexual orientation and marriage have changed considerably over the past half-century.

As regards the role and place of women in the church:

- 1969 – Full recognition is given to the ordination of female deacons.
- 1973-75 – General Synod enacts legislation regarding the ordination of women to the office of priest.
- 1986 – General Synod passes Act 65 allowing the ordination of women to the Episcopacy.

Such action thereby shatters traditional understandings of gender role and biological sex limitations to the threefold offices of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.

As regards the sanctity of marriage and the place of divorce:

- 1965-67 - The Anglican Church permits remarriage of divorced persons.

This decision significantly reframes the theological and scriptural understanding of marriage.

As regards the understanding/recognition of sexual orientation:

- 1997 – General Synod determines that sexual orientation is not a barrier to ordination
- 2004 – Both General Synod and the Diocese of Toronto recognize the “sanctity and integrity” of same-gender relationships.
- 2007 – General Synod recognizes that in light of the 2007 *St. Michaels Report*, which concludes that the blessing of same-gender relationships is not “core doctrine” of the Anglican Church, individual Dioceses are free to authorize the blessing of same-gender relationships.

Such action acknowledges the shifts in theological understandings which now create the space for marriage to move away from traditional scriptural interpretations of gender role and biological sex towards the authenticity and integrity of relationships *regardless* of gender or sex.

**From our prayerful consideration of the Commission’s second question, a further question emerged, namely, how does our theological understanding of marriage support relationships, regardless of gender?**

Marriage is that sacrament within our faith tradition which embodies and upholds everything we believe love to be. It is the principal formalized social/faith contract which strives for the mutual comfort of one towards another. It is a container—a catalyst—like so many other relational agents, which is meant to inspire us to help one another through life and to know one another with delight and tenderness as we offer ourselves freely to another.

Such an understanding of marriage transcends the human definitions of gender or sex. We know this to be true, for we see such love lived out all around us. Such understandings of love and marriage can and do more truthfully capture the all-encompassing love of God made manifest within our perceived human reality.

### **3) Is there a distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage?**

*“...for their mutual comfort and help, that they may know each other with delight and tenderness in acts of love” (Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage with the Holy Eucharist, Book of Alternative Services, p. 528)*

*"He will answer them, 'I can guarantee this truth: Whatever you failed to do for one of my brothers or sisters, no matter how unimportant [they seemed], you failed to do for me.'" (Matthew 25:45)*

Civil marriage has been available to same-gender couples in Ontario since June 10, 2003, when the Court of Appeal for Ontario in *Halpern v. Canada (Attorney General)* upheld a lower court ruling that declared that defining marriage in heterosexual-only terms violated the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. It will be remembered that the *Charter* begins by recognizing the supremacy of God and the rule of law. The full text of the *Charter* may be found at <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html>.

With this 2003 Court of Appeal ruling, civil marriage for all, irrespective of sexual orientation, was woven into the fabric of life in Ontario. Same-gender couples were now afforded the same statutory and regulatory framework, the same Charter rights, and the same safety net and societal recognition as other Ontarian couples who wanted to give their relationship solidity and permanence that they believed it would not otherwise have. And this solidity and permanence are more than a feeling: common-law couples and married couples are treated differently under the law.

A Christian celebration of marriage is woven into the fabric of a Christian life. The celebration and blessing of a marriage may include, but do not necessarily include, the Holy Eucharist, a weekly rite so familiar to many of us that we know it by heart. A Christian marriage celebration is not an event apart. It is a seamless continuation of a faith professed and practised every day. It is a breathing-in-and-breathing-out of life as a Christian. The prayers, the readings, the beseeching of God to support the couple and the call-and-response of those present are God-filled and Spirit-filled. The candles, hymns, and prayers are as familiar and comforting as those of every Sunday morning. And God is at the centre of this celebration.

By excluding our non-heterosexual brothers and sisters from this sacrament—the same people with whom we exchange the peace and share in the bread and wine every Sunday—we are excluding them from the safety, the joy, the recognition, and the status that the Christian ceremony of marriage brings.

**From our prayerful consideration of the Commission’s third question, another question arose, namely, in what ways is the current Anglican marriage ceremony at odds with the teachings of our Christian faith?**

By its exclusion of non-heterosexual Anglicans, the current Anglican marriage ceremony is a jarring departure from our Baptismal Covenant in which we promise to continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

Our prayer for St. John’s and for the Anglican Church of Canada is that the Holy Spirit will open our hearts and minds and that we will learn from our courts; extend the right to marriage to all Anglicans; and return to our Baptismal vows. Our failure to fully embrace these vows is damaging for everyone.

**4) 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 fulfillment in a community of faithful love. What is the theological significance of:**

- \* companionship in marriage?**
- \* bearing and raising children?**
- \* the relationship between marriage and sexuality?**

*So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.”*  
(Acts 10:34)

### **Companionship in Marriage**

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)*

A marriage is a durable, sustaining relationship into which two people commit themselves as a basis for supportive, mutual interaction. A marriage is fundamentally about sharing the ups and downs of everyday work and social life, the joy, the heartbreak and the trials that we each endure and, where children or other dependent persons are part of the family unit, the delights and frustrations that are part of daily life in a nurturing or care-giving relationship. In the case of observant members of the same religious faith, marriage will often serve as the institutional embodiment and affirmation of a couple’s desire to share their spiritual life and journey together within and with the endorsement of their shared faith and worship community.

Marriage is also, and equally, a relationship within which two persons who feel mutual love and affection for one another may enjoy a safe, secure and mutually affirming interaction with one another. Listening, expressing one’s views honestly and without fear of recrimination or embarrassment, respectfully disagreeing and working through differences of opinion, these are all at the heart of the close and intense relationship that two adult persons hope to share within the bonds of marriage.

Nothing about the hopes, needs, and desires referred to above are specific to the relationship between a man and a woman, and all can be shared equally in a relationship between any two adult persons who share mutual love and a desire to support and sustain one another through whatever life may bring their way and within a life in their shared faith. These human aspirations transcend gender and sexual identity, and their centrality to the full flourishing of the human person is undeniable. Marriage, as the institution within which such aspirations can achieve their fullest expression within civil society and communities of shared faith should be accessible to all.

## **Bearing and raising children**

Today, marriage is but one of a variety of social arrangements within which the care and nurturing of children takes place. Non-marital unions within which children are born and raised have become commonplace in contemporary society, to say nothing of the proliferation of single-parent, grandparent and other adult family-member led family units.

In recognition of the imperative of social change, the historical centrality of procreation within marriage as the institutional mechanism for population replacement has long since given way to a more open-textured understanding of the reality of child-rearing in our contemporary Canadian society and Anglican community of worship.

Indeed, the express wording of the Anglican Church of Canada's Canon on Marriage recognizes that procreation *may* be a purpose of marriage within the Church. Marriage is no longer cast within the Canon as instrumental to procreation in a fundamental sense.

None of this is to negate or challenge the suitability and, indeed, desirability of two-parent led family units where the rearing of children is concerned. Sharing the burdens and joys of children significantly enhances the resources available and reduces the stresses and strains of family life on caregivers who, as is customarily the case, also work outside the home. This will, of course, be the case irrespective of whether the spousal parenting unit is heterosexual or homosexual. It is, rather simply, to say that favourable outcomes for children can be secured in a variety of loving, caring and attentive family arrangements, all of which must be cherished and blessed by and within our faith in Christ.

## **The relationship between marriage and sexuality**

The Anglican Church of Canada's Canon on Marriage in the Church states that one of the purposes of marriage is *the creation of a relationship in which sexuality may serve personal fulfilment in a community of faithful love.*

As in the case of procreation as a purpose of marriage, the wording of the Canon comprehends sexuality in marriage within the Church as a dimension of the life that two persons may share, but not as an imperative of the marital relationship. Beyond our shared expectation within both the Church and broader Canadian society alike that the sexual life of married persons is to be exclusive within the marriage (monogamous), there seems little to speak for further strictures, deriving from scripture or otherwise, relating to the nature or character of the sexual interaction that married persons enjoy on a mutual and loving basis. Accordingly, the role of sex within the marital life of two loving individuals united in faith within the Church can only be understood to be a matter of personal choice and intention, irrespective of the sexual orientation of the couple.

**In the course of responding to the Commission's fourth question, we were led by the Holy Spirit to ask how contemporary understandings of human sexuality, sexual orientation, and marriage support or complement faith-based understandings of the Marriage Canon as regards the "purposes of marriage".**

As with many other dimensions of our contemporary experience of living with faith, our understanding of the institution of marriage within the Church, though deeply and essentially rooted in Christian and our own Anglican sacramental tradition, has evolved over time to remain relevant to the lived experience of the people of God. The purposes of marriage as a fundamental experience within the lives and faith journeys of today's Anglican family, and as expressed within the Marriage Canon, are equally applicable irrespective of the sexual orientation or gender identity of the members of our community. All of us wish to have the love and devotion we share with a life partner, and around which family life revolves, respected and celebrated within our Church. It is unimaginable that God's will could be otherwise.

As was captured powerfully on video, one same-gender couple within our congregation remains frustrated and confused that while they may have their child baptized within our faith tradition, and while they may raise their new born child within the faith community of St. John's, and while they may value the contributions of a living faith within their relationship, they are denied this particular sacrament. Why are they, as fully participating members of their church, treated as "less than equal"?

## **5) What is the difference between marriage and the blessing of a relationship?**

In May 2004, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada passed a resolution on homosexuality, urging the Church to continue dialogue and to "[...] *affirm the crucial value of continued respectful dialogue and study of biblical, theological, liturgical, pastoral, scientific, psychological and social aspects of human sexuality; and call upon all bishops, clergy and lay leaders to be instrumental in seeing that dialogue and study continue, intentionally involving gay and lesbian persons [...] to prepare resources for the Church to use in addressing issues relating to human sexuality including the blessing of same-gender unions and the changing definition of marriage in society.*" The resolution concluded that the Synod "*Affirm the integrity and sanctity of committed adult same sex relationships.*" The full text of the resolution is available at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/appendix/p3.12.cfm>.

After the 2007 General Synod, a Questions and Answers document was prepared by Canon Linda Nicholls of the General Synod's Faith, Worship and Ministry Department. The full text of the Q & A document is available at <http://archive.anglican.ca/gs2007/media/mk-qa-bssu.htm>. Included in the Q&A was the following question:

### **What is the difference between a blessing and marriage?**

Marriage in the Church is the covenant (commitment) between a man and a woman in lifelong mutual fidelity that carries the potential for the procreation of children. Marriage is seen as a reflection of the love of God for the Church, mirrored in the love the couple have for each other.

A blessing is the act of thanking God for evidence in the life of the couple that God is present and active in their relationship – that their relationship reflects



the love, faithfulness, mutual self-giving of God - and a prayer that God will help the relationship to become all that God intends.

In the 2004 General Synod, a resolution was passed asking the Primate's Theological Commission to report on whether the blessing of same-gender unions is a matter of doctrine. The *Report of the Primate's Theological Commission of the Anglican Church of Canada on the Blessing of Same-gender Union* is known as the *St Michael's Report*. The full text of the *St. Michael's Report* is available at <http://www.anglican.ca/primate/ptc/smr/>. The following is taken from the Report:

#### **“Holy Matrimony**

38. In the Anglican Church of Canada, marriage is understood to be a matter of doctrine, both in the Preface to the Marriage Canon and in specific references within the Canon (*section iv.27.f*). Although Article XXV is unwilling to enshrine matrimony as a ‘sacrament ordained of Christ’, it does acknowledge that it is a state of life ‘allowed in the Scriptures’, and the Prayer Book liturgy goes so far as to see it as an institution ‘signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church’ (see also *BAS, p.534; cf. Eph 5:31f*). The ‘sacrament of marriage’ (*BAS, p. 535*) is understood in the Christian tradition as a good gift of God that is a means of grace (*BAS, p. 534*). As a human institution, Scripture indicates that in the scope of eternity it is a temporary one (*Mk 12:25; Mt 22:30; Lk 20:35*), but it has an eternal significance as a description of the occasion of the heavenly banquet and the marriage of the Lamb (*Rev 19:7-9*).

39. It is the view of the Commission that any proposed blessing of a same-gender relationship would be analogous to a marriage to such a degree as to require the Church to understand it coherently in relation to the doctrine of marriage. The Commission noted that the change in civil law in Canada to permit the civil marriage of same-gender couples requires a clarification of the validity and sustainability of the distinction between blessings and marriages in the Canadian context.

40. Also in our Church, a civilly married husband and wife who have committed to lifelong fidelity may seek the blessing of their marriage by our Church. This is significant because the Marriage Canon (*Canon XXI*) of the General Synod recognizes that ‘not all marriages in human society conform, or are intended to conform, to the standard here described’ (*Preface*). The blessing thus recognizes the civil marriage as Christian marriage or holy matrimony. Moreover the blessing recognizes that the couple have the intention, and the Church the expectation, of the godly behaviour outlined in the Preface to Canon XXI.

41. It is clear therefore that such blessings, offered by the Church, are extremely important. In addition to the grace conferred, they recognize a Christian commitment in the marriage that is not assumed by civil marriage.”

**As we prayerfully considered the Commission’s fifth question, the records of previous Synods, and the *St. Michael’s Report*, another question emerged, namely, why is a Blessing not “good enough”?**

In 2002, at their Diocesan Synod, the Diocese of New Westminster authorized a rite for the blessing of same-gender unions, the use of which was dependent on the individual parishes requesting permission after review and agreement by their annual vestry meeting or parish council. By May 2003, six parishes had received authorization to perform the rite. This pre-dated the legalization of same-gender marriages in Canada, which became legal in Ontario in June 2003 and in British Columbia in July 2003. Other provincial jurisdictions followed suit and on July 20, 2005, Canada became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-gender marriages nation-wide with the enactment of the *Civil Marriage Act*.

Blessings of same-gender couples were originally intended as a way for the Church to recognize that God is active and present in the union of same-gender couples. In fact, by creating this blessing, the Church took a leadership role in recognizing the legitimacy of same-gender relationships even before the governments of Canada and the provinces.

In the months following the adoption of the rite of blessings of same-gender unions, the various levels of governments modified the laws related to marriage to include same-gender couples. In the 10 years or so since, the Church has made the rite of blessings available in at least 11 Dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Blessings of same-gender couples currently performed in the Anglican Church of Canada, where permitted, are not part of the Marriage Canon and are therefore distinct from the marriage blessing that a man and woman married in a civil ceremony would receive, should they choose to have their marriage blessed in the Church.

In the Diocese of Toronto, 12 parishes have asked for and obtained permission to perform the blessing since it became available in November 2010. The pastoral guidelines on the blessings of same-gender commitments may be found at <http://www.toronto.anglican.ca/parish-life/same-gender-blessings/>. In fact, only a small number of same-gender couples have availed themselves of this blessing.

In some civil jurisdictions throughout the world, a compromise solution has allowed same-gender couples to enter into a “legal union” distinct from the civil marriage contract available to opposite-gender unions. In much the same way, a Blessing of a relationship outside of the Marriage Canon can be considered a compromise.

Same-gender couples are specifically excluded from the Marriage Canon and therefore cannot be considered equal to opposite-gender couples in the Church. Only with full access to the Marriage Canon can same-gender couples be truly considered equals in the eyes of the Church.

## 6) How do you understand the sacramentality of marriage?

Article XXV of the Thirty Nine Articles, available at [http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine\\_articles.html](http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html) states:

*“[...] There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.*

*“Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures; but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God...”*

Despite this, many Anglicans do consider matrimony, as one of the “states of life allowed in the Scriptures”, to be sacramental, that is, considerably more than a socially-recognized contract between two people.

What does this imply? A sacrament is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace”. Matrimony is understood by Christians as the forming of a unity (“the two will become one flesh” (Mark 10:8)) in the presence of God.

It is the love, support and commitment that two people pledge for each other during the marriage ceremony that we believe constitutes this unity that is the sign of a grace, and not their differing anatomies.

We at St. John’s do not believe that same-gender couples are any less capable of love and commitment to each other than opposite-gender ones, based on our acquaintance with couples within the Church and outside it. Refusing to extend the sacrament of marriage to same-gender couples who are accepted as members of the Church is, frankly, telling them that their relationships are not considered capable of holiness. This can hardly be seen as fully welcoming and will prove to be damaging to the ongoing life of the Church.

**In our prayerful consideration of the Commission’s sixth question, we were led by the Holy Spirit to ask, how can current understandings of the sacramentality of marriage include same-gender relationships?**

It is often stated that what Anglicans believe “is witnessed through how we worship”. Our liturgies are the embodiment, the bringing alive of our beliefs. Therefore, the intention and celebration of any sacrament speaks not only to how we view our relationship with God, but to how we understand our relationship with each other in the presence of God.

The Anglican Church already upholds the full equality of gay and lesbian people in our communities of faith. Such equality therefore surely ensures each person the grace available to

all through the sacraments of our faith. To deem one sector of our community as not deserving of full access to the sacrament of marriage is to deem them as less than equal. This is then a fundamentally flawed witness of faith.

As one member of our congregation so powerfully expressed in the video, the scandal of our current discriminatory practice of denying the sacrament of marriage to gay and lesbian couples is that, on one hand, we commercialize marriage by making it available to couples who are not members of our community and who have no interest in becoming members of our communities of faith. They simply wish to “rent the space and the sacrament”. On the other hand, we deny often long-standing and deeply committed members of our Church a sacrament which for them speaks to a witness of faith, grace and blessing as regards the fidelity, integrity and love of their relationship.

Surely, such a contradictory and conflicted witness corrupts the sacramentality of marriage for all of us.

### **Concluding thoughts:**

Without a doubt, those Hebrew and New Testament texts which form the most sacred of scripture for all Christians reveal to us a God who desires to be active in our world. The overwhelming dynamic of our sacred scripture is that God enters our world, revealing that which is divine to us continuously. We know more about God by the time we arrive at the Book of Revelation than we do when we begin to learn of God’s creative energies in Genesis. God is constantly revealing God’s self to us. We are constantly drawn into a deeper more revealing relationship with God through what we learn about God in scripture and how we experience God in our daily lives.

The parish of Saint John’s bears witness to our experienced truth that God creates and loves us all. We are who God intends us to be. Our challenge? To respond to such a divine love as best as we are able.

We believe that God creates a diversity of sexual orientations. We believe the ideals of the sacrament of marriage apply to all who choose to strive to live such ideals within the monogamous parameters of a selfless love given one towards another.

We believe the current Canon regarding marriage can accommodate and uphold the sanctity of same-gender relationships. It is the ongoing revelation of what God desires of the Church.