

Brief to the Anglican Church of Canada Commission on Marriage

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1. **Scripture and marriage**

In the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, the Q version and the Gospel for the Jewish community, the marriage teaching is clearly heterosexual, Jesus emphasizing in his teaching taking away the power of men to demand divorce, uniting a woman and a man. In Luke, Jesus only disallows divorce.

In the time of Jesus, marriage provided protection for women who had no rights, including no ability to own property. Marriage then, as it is in most of Africa today, provided and provides women with security and protection, as well as increasing the husband and wife's social status, including wealth transfers, with the desired eventual production of children to create an economic unit, consisting of the nuclear and extended family members.

In today's Canada, divorce is common. The Anglican Church does not prevent access to the Lord's Table because of divorce. Women and men have achieved some level of equality, including equal access to government benefits. Scripture, at least through the teaching of Jesus in the Canonic Gospels, teaches us little about marriage in modern Canadian individualized culture.

2. **Civil Marriage and Christian marriage**

In 2014, in all heterosexual marriages in the Church in Canada, the priest is an agent of the State in certifying that the couple is married before the Law.

Usually, in heterosexual marriages, the signing of the marriage register occurs at the end of the liturgy, or before the Eucharist, the priest then announcing that the couple is man and wife.

There is NO reason why the signing of the register, for heterosexual and same-sex couples, cannot occur prior to the formal blessing of a marriage liturgy. In fact, by moving the administrative act of signing the register to the beginning of the ceremony, the actual blessing of the priest and the community of the Church on the couple is the final and most important act of the Church, as it should be!

Prior to a church marriage, the priest in the Anglican Church of Canada is required to provide appropriate education on how the couple can give effect to the vows they will express during the marriage ceremony. There would seem to be no reason that such preparatory counselling cannot be provided to a couple who are members of a parish prior to the blessing of their civil marriage.

3. **The purposes of marriage**

All heterosexual and same-sex marriages are meant to enable and support "companionship" or the commitment of one to the other in sickness and health, in richness or in poverty, or other conditions of life. In fact, one of the reasons why the State has extended marriage to same-sex couples is to encourage more people to have a legal commitment to support another person in whatever situation s/he may be found, the State being interested in decreasing the financial demands on its services.

An increasing number of married couples no longer want to have children. Nowhere in Jesus' teaching is there a reference to the requirement that a married couple have children, although there are underlying assumptions that children will be the results of a marriage.

Much of the opposition from many Anglican churches in Africa to same-sex marriage is the fact that children cannot be produced by the latter; only a moot point since bringing children into this world should always be a careful choice, rather than a cultural requirement.

Marriage and blessing

As indicated above, marriage, whether heterosexual or same-sex, is a civil act, with significant legal and financial consequences for the married couple. In the marriage ceremony itself, the priest only acts as an agent of the state.

Part of the background thinking to this brief, is the need for the Anglican Church of Canada to be part of the global church, especially in Africa where the Church will continue to be opposed to the marriage of same-sex couples. Marriage in Africa has a far deeper meaning than in our post-modern, individualized Canada and in the Canadian Church. The church must continue to be a Global expression of God's incarnation in Jesus for all cultures. The evolution of Canadian culture should not impede our communion with African brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Anglican Church also has no involvement in the process of divorce, the end of a civil marriage, now very common for many couples within and outside the Church.

For the above reasons, the blessing of the married couple and not a marriage should be the only liturgy available in the Anglican Church of Canada. If the church is not involved in divorce, and since marriage is a civil act with significant cultural, economic effects, the Church should only be involved in the blessings of civilly married couples.

The sacramentality of marriage

The church does not recognize marriage as a sacrament, but rather as a "pastoral office". (BAS) Marriage is not a sacrament, but a blessing from God through an appointed servant and the community of believers on two people beginning a life journey together, both heterosexual and same-sex.