

## Submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon

Stephen Koning – Diocese of Calgary

I write this submission to the Commission on the Marriage Canon as someone who has been a member of the Anglican Church of Canada for over 60 years and has been involved in all aspects of its life and organization for much of that time. I know I'm not alone in having travelled along a path over my adult life that started with complete opposition to same-sex relationships (largely due to my own naivety and ignorance) and eventually came to a position of complete support, acceptance, and encouragement for same-sex relationships. As a result of that journey, I am now able to say that I hope the result of the Commission's work will be to see the first steps taken in 2016 to change the marriage canon to permit those who would like to do so to solemnize same-sex marriages within the church.

I have read most of the submissions that have been posted on the website and it is clear that there is a very broad range of opinion on this subject. For me, I do not find submissions that view the Bible as something to be worshipped rather than as something that contains "all things necessary for salvation" (in addition to many things that are not necessary for salvation) as being very helpful in my understanding of this issue. I find it more helpful to remember that it is the triune God that we worship (not a book!) and it was Jesus, as one of the three persons in the one God, who called his disciples to "follow" him, not "obey" him (Matt 4:18-19). It was that same Jesus who then opened up the scriptures to overturn the teaching of his tradition (Matt 5:43-44) and to include the previously excluded (Matt 15:21-28), both things that have happened many times throughout history since the time of Jesus. It is now our turn to follow Jesus' example of expanding our understanding of Scripture and including the previously excluded in the family of the Anglican Church of Canada.

In looking through the submissions on the website, some that I found helpful were the following:

- June 2: Ronald Stevenson, Diocese of Fredericton – a submission that examines the same sex marriage question from a legal perspective and ends with the observation that “for the Canons of the Church to continue to deny same sex couples the opportunity to be married in the Church is a failure to respect the dignity we promise them in the baptismal covenant.”
- August 20: Alan Perry, Diocese of Edmonton – a submission that contains very complete and helpful responses to the specific questions asked by the Commission from an historical and theological perspective and ends with the following: “The fundamental question before us, I suggest, is whether we are prepared to recognize in same-sex couples the fulfillment of, or potential to fulfil the high purpose of marriage as an effectual ‘sign of the redeeming purpose of God to unite all things in Christ.’ If so, then I suggest that there is no particular shift in the theology of marriage at stake, but rather the extension of the application of the high purpose of marriage to include same-sex couples.”
- September 5: Michelle Bull, Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island – a submission that includes a number of very practical “arguments” in favour of permitting same sex marriage and concludes with this: “When I introduced the motion at General Synod (2013) I said we had included a conscience clause, because we do not want to force anyone to perform or otherwise participate in a same sex marriage against their conscience. Right now, however, those of us whose consciences tell us we should perform same sex marriages are being forced to act against our conscience, because we cannot do this and we must turn people away. This is a grievous burden for us. I am asking the church to relieve us of this burden, to allow us to act according to our consciences on this matter.
- August 27: St. John, West Toronto, Diocese of Toronto – a submission that includes an exhaustive consideration of and response to the questions asked by the Commission by a whole congregation and includes the following observation: “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.”

- July 18: Alan Perry, Comment on the Solemn Declaration – a submission that examines the historical and legal context for the Solemn Declaration and comes to the conclusion that “the General Synod is competent to determine whether to amend Canon XXI to provide for the solemnization of marriage between persons of the same sex, pursuant to Resolution C003 as adopted by the General Synod in 2013. Nothing in the Solemn Declaration prohibits such a decision, and thus a motion so to amend the canon would not ‘contravene the Solemn Declaration’ (Resolution C003 (b)).”
- August 25: Queen’s College, St. John’s NL – a very scholarly historical and theological submission that ends with seven points tending to favour same sex marriage and includes the following statements: “Thus, a free, loving, and respectful relationship between two persons of the same sex may therefore be just as ethical and just as holy as such a relationship between a man and a woman.” And “In summary, a sound theological case can be made for the blessing of same-sex relationships and for the marriage of same-sex couples ...”

For me, the comments highlighted above and others in the various submissions I read are persuasive. I cannot go back on a life-long journey and re-trace my steps to a position of rejecting same-sex relationships. I believe that, for the sake of its integrity and faithful witness in the world, we must extend all the sacraments and pastoral responses of the Church to all its baptised members.

I also noted several submissions pointing out that making this change to the marriage canon will result in many members leaving our church. That brought to mind conversations at my own parish church (St. Laurence Calgary) this past spring when the Parish completed a discernment process that led to the adoption of a motion enabling the Parish to provide same-sex blessings (with a 92% vote in favour). One of the points made at the time was that the church should really be talking about same sex marriage – not same sex blessings – and there were some comments about leaving the church if the church is not able to move to same sex marriage in the near future. Thus, I fear that there will be a loss of members no matter which way the voting goes in 2016. At least with a positive move towards same sex marriage there is the possibility of attracting new members to the church. I doubt that there will be any new members who decide to join if the church decides to do nothing in 2016!

Finally, I want to say a word about conscience. It is clear that with the extent of the range of opinion on this issue there is no solution available to the commission to satisfy everyone in the church. The only way forward that will allow everyone in the church to act according to their conscience is to change the marriage canon to permit (not *require*) the possibility of performing same-sex marriages within the church. Then, those whose consciences require them to offer all the sacraments and all the pastoral responses of the church to all the baptised will be able to do so and those whose consciences will not permit them to perform same-sex marriages can refrain from doing so.

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