

A Submission to the General Synod Commission on the Marriage Canon

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I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to tell you my thoughts, feelings and experience with same-gender marriage. I am a lesbian who has been fortunate enough to fall in love with a woman who has been with me for 30 years, and married to me for 11 of those years. This love cost us our careers in the Church, although by the grace of God and the courage of the Bishops of the Diocese of Toronto, I have been allowed to return to parish ministry for 4 years now.

As a parish priest, I have officiated at only one same gender blessing. In my experience, we as a church have already alienated so many people in the gay and lesbian community and not a few of their heterosexual allies, that we have a missiological crisis. The blessings that are allowed in this Diocese, feel like a second-rate ceremony. We bend over backwards to make sure that it doesn't look too much like a wedding. I was outlining the guidelines to the LGBT in the church group at Church of the Holy Trinity and made one man so angry that he may never be back. The part that infuriated him most was that even if he had a blessing, it could not be recorded in the marriage register. "I can't even be in your & %* book?!?"

I am therefore delighted that we are looking at changing the marriage canon to allow gays and lesbians to be married in our churches. My wife and I have been part of two important legal cases that changed civil law in Canada. The first challenge was to the law regarding step-parent adoption. It is a truly dreadful moment when you are cradling your son at the Hospital for Sick Children while he is bleeding, and then you realize that you are the "wrong" mother, not the "real" mother. I was facing the possibility that my child might not receive the appropriate care. We won that battle and as a couple were able to adopt each others biological children. They won the right to be able to have two parents who were responsible for all their needs.

Some years later we were asked to join the court case for same gender marriage because we had children. That case went all the way to the Supreme Court. Later, when Roy McMurtry had retired, he was asked why he had made up his mind in favour of equal marriage. "I did it for the children", he said.

We were the first lesbian couple in Canada to receive a marriage licence in June 2003. Although I wanted very much to be married in our parish church, among the people who had loved and supported

us through all the years of struggle, we did get married at City Hall, because there was a fear that Paul Martin would change his mind. But lovely as it was, it was not a sacrament. We had a service blessing our civil marriage at Holy Trinity that September and we were honoured to have the former Primate, the Rt. Rev. Edward Scott offer to pronounce the nuptial blessing. It was a glorious day, the Spirit was alive among us and as we danced, I felt a bit like David before the altar of the Lord.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is leading us in this change in society and in the church. Other churches have raced ahead of us in throwing their doors open, recognizing the full humanity of gays and lesbians, and the integrity and sanctity that is possible in our relationships. I am painfully aware that the Anglican Church has particular struggles with this issue due to the international scope of our Communion. But here, in our context, we are driving people away from our church and from the love of God, rather than inviting them in. A lovely and spiritual young man at a former parish of mine, told me how devastated he had been to discover that his beloved church would not be open to marrying him should his relationship with his boyfriend mature in that direction. I will never forget his white face as he said to me, "I thought this church was my safe space."

Let us make our church what we want it to be; safe, welcoming, missional, and open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.