

I am Don Meen, a parishioner at St. Margaret's (Cedar Cottage) in the Diocese of New Westminster. My life partner of 37 years is Kevin Simpson. We were married in a civil ceremony in 2006 and our covenant relationship was blessed at our parish later that year. Over many years Kevin and I have made presentations to Human Rights Commissions in Alberta where we were born and raised, and in B.C. We have spoken to Members of Parliament, including the traveling committee which sought the perspectives of Canadians prior to changes to human rights legislation and finally to the Marriage Act concerning gay and lesbian individuals and couples. We have supported one another for many years in our advocacy work within our respective denominations, Kevin's Roman Catholic and my Anglican. I have spoken to General Synod, bishops and their spouses, and I have been a member of human sexuality commissions diocesan and national. I contributed to the Hearing Diverse Voices Seeking Common Ground study documentation and subsequently to the book *Living Together in the Church. Including our Differences*. I was part of a committee in our diocese which developed the Blessing of Gay/Lesbian Covenants rite. Through this work we have witnessed what people now call a "sea change" with respect to acceptance and affirmation of gay and lesbian individuals and couples – which I am firmly convinced is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's movement in our time. Many in our Church now want to have available not only a rite of blessing for same-sex covenant relationships but the recognition and honouring of these as Christian marriages. My reflections emerging from my lived experience as a gay man in a covenant relationship of many years and my extensive reading, conversation and observation follow:

1. At a gay/lesbian film festival a few years back a couple of hundred of us watched the documentary "Trembling Before G-d", about gay and lesbian Jews working to live their faith and their sexual orientation responsibly and fully. After the film a local rabbi engaged in midrash on the passage from Genesis, in which God observes his child working in the garden and says: "It is not right that the human be alone." (Gen.2:18) "You see", the rabbi said, "God saw that Adam was lonely. As it would be with any loving father, God's heart was touched by the sadness of his child." So, God sets out rather awkwardly to remedy the situation by bringing by various animals for Adam to consider as companions. God comes to recognize that Adam wanted, needed, someone of his own kind to ease his loneliness, to know and to love.

The first principle: Sexually intimate love between persons is intrinsically ordered toward the good of human communion.

2. What does our lived experience of such love tell us about its nature and effects? Gay/lesbian or straight, in some way or another, it is life-giving. Canadian theologian Andre Guindon (1986) says that in our sexually intimate relationships, our sexuality "speaks of who we are" (p.26). ("Knowing" and being "known" aren't just biblical euphemisms for sexual activity! We communicate who we are and who we are becoming, while receiving how we are known by, and coming to know, the beloved other.) "Human sexuality is fecund when it promotes humanly tender/sensuous life, self identity, personal worth and community." (p. 78). Nelson (1979) describes what it means for sexual love to be "life-serving": "always this means the transmission of the power of

newness of life from one lover to the other; sometimes it also means the procreation of children” (p. 118). In our day, this newness of life finds expression when same-sex couples, too, become loving parents. For all the ways sexually intimate love can be life-giving, we echo St. Irenaeus in exclaiming that “the glory of God is humankind fully alive!”

The second principle: It is the nature and effect of sexually intimate love to be life-giving.

3. *Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?* (Matt.7:9) If “good theology is good psychology and good psychology is good theology” (McNeil, 1988) we might expect social science would find evidence that marriage, valued as it is in our Church, is good for people. It does! The general pattern is that marriage has numerous human, social benefits which Myers and Mollencott (2005) summarized across the realms of family life, economics, physical health and longevity, mental health and emotional well-being, social and community life.

The third principle: Generally, marriage is good for people! (And a loving Father would not give a stone to His child who asks for bread.)

4. In truth, our concept of marriage has evolved over many hundreds of years. The Church in the West didn’t recognize formally the sacramentality of marriage for over a thousand years after the life of the earthly Jesus. For a fascinating look at the history of marriage, read E.J. Graff’s (1999) book: *What Is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution*. Now, our nation and many others recognize the benefits for the human community of marriage between two persons, regardless of their sex. Though Yale historian John Boswell (1994) described his discovery of ancient Church rites of blessing of same sex couples in his book *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, our Anglican Church still ponders.

The fourth principle: Our understanding of marriage has evolved such that it may be defined by its inherent qualities and effects rather than its external form.

5. Same-sex couples in our Church who may enter civil marriage are asking for marriage in their faith community. Why? Could it be as Guindon (1986) contends that in sharing sexually intimate love “we learn to recognize the face of a God who is relational” (p. 30)? Could it be that we and those who know us regard our covenant relationships as sacramental – outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace? Christian couples know that this life-giving cannot be for the sole benefit of the two principals. It urges its members to turn outward to the world in an ever widening circle of kinship from friends and family to community of affinity and locale, to society and nation, to Church, to that ultimate extension, the family of humankind in the full context of God’s creation.

The Christian marriage of same- or other-sex couples should support each member in her/his discipleship, his/her giving of life to others. It should be that challenging,

encouraging environment where its members grow, develop, become kinder, wiser, braver – not just for the sake of self or one another but for the sake of the world.

We gay and lesbian Christians say to our God:

*You set us apart, shaped by our love, yet call us into the midst of your people
Where we will be your word of blessing.*

(M.R. Ritley)

The fifth principle: Christian marriage of same- or other-sex couples extends its life-giving to God's world.

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