

Bishop
The Right Reverend Robert Hardwick

E-mail: rob.hardwick@sasktel.net
Website: <http://quappelle.anglican.ca>



ST. CUTHBERT'S HOUSE
1501 College Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 1B8 CANADA

Telephone: (306) 522-1608
Fax: (306) 352-6808

THE DIOCESE OF QU'APPELLE *Anglican Church of Canada*

PASTORAL LETTER MARCH 2016

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

As I begin my fourth year as a bishop I must admit that these past few weeks have been amongst the most taxing, stretching, demanding, challenging, and yet, spiritually uplifting. But then, that is what Lent should be about as we seek an ever deepening relationship with God and one another, in preparation, not only for Holy Week and Easter, but for the rest of our lives.

Prior to the Primates meeting, making final preparations to travel to Canterbury to attend a course for new bishops, not knowing whether there would be one Anglican Communion, or two, certainly raised the tension level for me.

However, Canterbury was a marvelous experience and I hope you will read my reflections in the next edition of the *Saskatchewan Anglican*. We had ample opportunity to meet, hear, and question, both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. They shared incredible stories from across the Communion as well as their own personal experiences of the Primates gathering. There was also much talk amongst the 28 new(ish) bishops, from around the world, about matters of grave concern: climate change, war, poverty, radicalization, disease, human trafficking, gender inequality and yes, same sex marriage. Regarding the latter, it is clear, most provinces in the Anglican Communion would prefer Canada not to proceed with a motion to change Canon 21, our canon on Marriage. A call we have also heard from local and international ecumenical bodies. Notwithstanding, there was evidence that a number of other Provinces in the Communion were in the process of considering same sex marriage as well.

Clearly many issues face the worldwide Anglican Church; issues too difficult for a single province of the Anglican Communion, or denomination, to face on their own. 'We need to walk together' was a constant refrain.

You will have probably read this week that there was no consensus at the February meeting of the House of Bishops regarding the proposed resolution to change the marriage canon of the Anglican Church of Canada. This impasse was not solely due to the disagreements between conservative and liberal wings of the Church. It was clear that for a number of reasons, some of them noted above, that the proposed motion to change the doctrine on marriage, in its present form, would not likely achieve the required 2/3rds majority in the order of bishops at General Synod.

If I have a fear, it is that either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ vote on the proposed motion would inflict irreparable damage to the unity within the Anglican Church of Canada and lead to further fracture.

A ‘yes’ would hinder the major steps forward we have made recently with ecumenical partners around the world and will likely have consequences for us in our relationship with the Anglican Communion. A ‘no’ would upset and cause great pain to many Anglicans across Canada. It may lead to feelings of abandonment by the Church, for our LGBTI brothers and sisters in the Lord. Furthermore, it will do little to affirm the sanctity and dignity of same sex relationships if even one – let alone more than one or all three – orders of Laity, Clergy and Bishops failed to reach the 2/3^{rds} majority required to change the Marriage Canon. In my opinion the proposed motion is a no win solution.

Many of the bishops, myself included, desire that we continue to work through the pastoral, scriptural, theological, and procedural ways to bring about consensus on this matter, whilst also being faithful to the faith, unity and discipline that we are called to uphold as bishops. There has to be another way in which we can walk together!

Some of us wondered if another way could be explored, similar to that mentioned in the Commission on the Marriage Canon report¹ to the Council of General Synod in section 5.3.3 (pages 52 – 55, and in particular footnote 76).

Therefore, in a spirit of openness and transparency, I want to share with you that myself, and one other bishop, will put forward a proposal to the next House of Bishops (April 4-8). It is a proposal that comes from an extended period of prayer and personal discernment on this matter. A proposal that in a spirit of pastoral generosity pushes me way beyond my comfort zone but one I am willing to initiate in order to bring a more wholesome and unifying result.

On the Clergy Day, March 18, I will invite the clergy and parish administrators of the diocese to make available to all congregations and interested parties:

- the Commission on the Marriage Canon report (*web link provided in footnote ¹ below*)
- the Council of General Synod’s motion (*web link provided in footnote²*)
- my and my colleague’s proposal.

These papers will hopefully enable our prayerful engagement and study of the issue after Easter.

I will produce a website or email version of the proposal after the next House of Bishops meeting. If the proposal garners widespread support, I will then produce a motion to be discussed at the diocesan council meeting April 16 before it is distributed across the diocese and sent to General Synod for consideration.

Notwithstanding, we should note that the Council of General Synod were tasked to produce a motion to change Canon 21 and to present it at July’s Synod. That motion will have to come to the floor, irrespective of what the House of Bishops have shared recently or whether my proposal receives support from the bishops and our diocese. The COGS motion will take priority.

¹ Commission on the Marriage Canon report: <http://www.anglican.ca/about/ccc/cogs/cmc/submissions/>

² House of Bishops communique: <http://www.anglican.ca/news/statement-from-the-house-of-bishops-from-its-special-meeting/30015170/>

Civil marriage is now a recognized and celebrated union across Canada. Can we, a National Church, like a railway track, hold both a traditional view of marriage and, at the same time, make provision for a growing understanding of same sex couples, in ways which affirm the distinct and differentiated nature of both kinds of desired matrimonial relationships? Your prayers and reflections on the above would be truly appreciated as will the continued offering of pastoral generosity to all in Christ's beloved Church.

I have made it clear in my recent letter to the national house of bishops that this new proposal, in no way, reflects the desire or expressed opinion of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle or the other bishop's diocese. Not everyone in the diocese will agree with my proposal, indeed some of you might be offended but I will offer the proposal in love, to you and to the Lord, as a proposal to sift, to test and to discern if this really is a move of the Holy Spirit, for such a time as this.

The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, at the recent gathering of new bishops, suggested that our language across the communion, indeed across and within dioceses, has to move beyond fear of compromise to that of accommodation, accommodating the notion that we will not all agree on all matters of doctrine, but we are called to be one (John 17) and to walk together. Will my proposal go far enough for some? Probably not. Will it go too far for others? Most likely. Nevertheless, I will be offering it in the hope that we not only accommodate one another's views but in the hope that we all, in the distinct and differentiated relationships we share, walk together with, and in, the love of Christ.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Qu'Appelle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Revd. Rob Hardwick
Diocese of Qu'Appelle