

A response to the decision at General Synod on the Marriage Canon from the board of AADC

The ordinal states: “as deacons in the Church, you are to make Christ and his redemptive love known, by your word and example, to those among whom you live and work and worship. You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. At all times, your lives and teaching are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ themselves.”

As Deacons our ministries situate us as navigators of the often stormy waters between church, community and the world. These waters are stirred up through mis-understandings or historic hurts. However, the defeat of resolution A052-R2, proposed changes to the marriage canon, challenges deeply our ministry in the “public square”.

For many of us personally, the process and the decision has been shocking, hurtful, frustrating and deeply disappointing. We are not alone.

It is deeply confusing that a failure to change a canon at the national level by a **small minority** of our church and thereby attempted to hold the church back from joyfully offering everyone, without restriction, the sacrament of marriage. This ‘no’ to same sex marriage seems devastating to our work as Deacons. Our vocation is to nurture those who are marginalized and work to bring them into a loving, accepting and nurturing church.

Sadly, the reality is that for some couples seeking marriage will be refused if they live within the jurisdictions of the few dissenting bishops. Our work is to find ways to help them and others who are being marginalized within our church. As one bishop said, “*that was just law, and we are called to live in grace*”. This comment is mirrored in the responses from many of our diocesan bishops, fellow clergy, laity and in the wider community. As deacons, how might we advocate for and support with grace these couples? The challenge is to be found in the question: “If deacons are to be the light of Christ as we travel the circle from street to sanctuary, how then can we be both authentic and effective if we appear to be mandated to marginalize a particular group in our communities? “

While there is no easy answer to this question, hope may be found in the various ways members of General Synod worked to create graceful space amidst intense feelings. Let us remember that when General Synod overwhelmingly approved ‘Word to the Church’ on Friday morning it affirmed what was once called ‘the local option’. This is part of the amendment to the marriage canon which was passed.

“Faithful members of the Anglican Church of Canada have different understandings and teachings about the nature of marriage. Some accept that the essence of marriage is between a man and a woman; others accept same sex marriage. Members are entitled to hold, teach and exercise either view provided they recognize and respect that others may with integrity hold, teach and exercise a different view. All Anglicans accept that marriage is a sign of God’s redeeming purpose to unite all things in Christ. We are committed to graceful walking together in a spirit of generosity as part of the same Christian community”

It is important to remember the work of the church continues after the vote. Ironically, after the vote more and more places are signing up for the “local option”.

As you know statements and apologies were made after the vote. After much intense and difficult work, the House of Bishops, in a ground breaking step send out a communication on Monday July 15th. The statement may be found on the General Synod website.

The Council of General Synod (COGS) which meets through the triennium between general synods will be examining governance. It is our understanding there will be particular focus on the House of Bishops. One question which could be part of the conversation: “What is the better way to discern the mind of the church as the body of Christ? “

We who walk across thresholds, and places where others would put up boundaries, we know the ways in which the Holy Spirit blows in and out, pumping the walls of our church like bellows. We know that lament and remorse are not a dead end, but the way of the cross that brings life. We know that joy can come in the morning (Psalm 30), and that the life-force of grace will continue to push up new growth as sturdy plants push through cracks in concrete. This is not ungrounded hope. We see true signs of hope in the church within the anger and lament, in the choices being made by so many of our leaders not to allow the foibles of restrictive law to trample on what is being born in our midst through the real presence of LGBTQ2S children of God. Grace does abound.