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## **Bishop's Authorizations and Guidelines concerning Marriage Equality in the Diocese of Central Newfoundland.**

Brothers and Sisters,

Peace to you in Christ Jesus.

In 2007 the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada accepted and affirmed the conclusion of the St. Michael Report that the blessing of same-sex unions is a matter of doctrine, but is not core doctrine in the sense of being credal and should not be communion breaking.

Following discussion and debate the Synod did not affirm the authority of dioceses to authorize the blessing of same-sex unions.

At the 2016 General Synod the question of proposed change to Canon XXI on Marriage to permit the marriage of same-sex partners was brought before the Church. It passed the required majorities at General Synod and was to be considered in each Provincial Synod and Diocese between 2016 and 2019.

We know that the 2019 Synod did not pass the amendment, but that there is a sense through the Church that the Synod did not respond fully to the voice of the Holy Spirit through the House of Bishops.

It is clear that there has been deep division in the Church on this issue. There are deeply held convictions rooted in theological priorities, scriptural interpretations, local contexts, community needs and leadership influences.

As our Church leadership prepared for Synod 2019, the Council of General Synod offered ***A Word to the Church***. This Document contained affirmations of how we can live together whatever the outcome of the vote on the marriage canon second reading would be.

It is for that reason that throughout all discussion and decision-making processes of the National Church and our Local Diocesan councils and Synod, I unequivocally declared that our diocese would follow the path of canonical approval.

I affirm as Bishop, that Canonical paths have been determined:

- The document and content of ***A Word to the Church*** was affirmed by General Synod with an 85% majority.
- The amendment to the Marriage Canon itself failed at its second reading. It reached the 2/3's majority required in the orders of clergy and laity, but not in the House of Bishops. The House of Bishops provided a response to this.
- To summarize, the members of General Synod as a whole voted an overall approval of 75%. Following the defeat of the amendment to Canon XXI, at Synod, the House of Bishops issued a statement that affirmed, ***We are walking together in a way which leaves room for individual dioceses and jurisdictions of our church to proceed with same-sex marriage according to their contexts and convictions, sometimes described as "local option."***
- The majority, 87% of our Synod, strongly supported marriage equality by affirming the work of the General Synod. That includes our own discernment processes, the affirmation of the document ***A Word to The Church***, and the Bishop's authority and responsibility to provide authorization for same gender marriage and appropriate rites for same-sex marriages.

Given the strong support in our diocese, as of Sunday October 27<sup>th</sup> 2019, I am authorizing the availability of marriage to same-sex couples as a pastoral local option under the following parameters:

## Guidelines

1. Every parish in our Diocese is to enable a generous pastoral response to those within committed same-sex relationships who are seeking marriage in the Church, committing to live in mutual love and faithfulness in a stable, life-long, committed monogamous relationship.
2. Same-sex marriages will be permitted in parishes where the priest and the Parish Council have considered this matter and agreed that the parish will do so.
3. Any parish desiring to provide for same sex marriage will write a letter to the Bishop requesting permission, signed by the priest (rector/incumbent) and the Wardens and including a description of the process taken by the Parish Council.
4. No parish is required to offer same-sex marriage in their location. Clergy have provision by canon to refuse to perform a marriage for reasons of conscience.
5. Once a parish has completed this process, it will no longer have to make application to the Bishop. Individual concerns that clergy hold is to be addressed with the diocesan Bishop
6. The blessing or marriage of any same-sex couple is expected to be part of an existing pastoral relationship with an Incumbent or Cleric in Charge and the local congregation.
7. At least one of the couples must be baptized.
8. All requirements of civil law must be followed, including proper legal documentation.
9. The marriage must be registered with the government and recorded in the proper parochial register.

10. The same theological and moral principles, pastoral care, liturgical and other parish policies and practices apply equally to both heterosexual and homosexual couples. This includes, expectations and provisions for:
  - Who may be married in the church
  - Premarital preparation
  - Requirements regarding remarriage after divorce
  - Signing of the marriage licenses by the officiating minister
  - Entry of the marriage in the parish register
  - Parish policies with regard to use and availability of facilities.
  
11. Clergy whose conscience will not allow them to preside at these Celebrations may decline to do so and any decision to perform or not perform the liturgy authorized for a same sex marriage will not be used as the basis for any personnel discrimination.

#### **Same-Sex Couples in Parishes not Designated**

1. It is expected that no one will be excluded from receiving sacramental ministry in any parish on the basis of their sexual orientation or their views on the issue of same-sex blessings or marriage.
  
2. Same-sex couples in a parish or congregation not designated to perform marriages may approach the Bishop to seek an alternative.
  
3. A cleric who serves in a parish or congregation not designated but who wishes to assist in a same- sex marriage in a designated parish must consult with the diocesan bishop.

## Authorized Liturgy

The only liturgy authorized for the marriage of same-sex couples until the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada authorizes a liturgy for use within the dioceses of the province is available on the Diocesan Website.

It is adapted from the Book of Alternative Services © 1985 The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada.

It is expected that the guidance and rubrics provided under ***Concerning Marriage in the Church*** on pages 526 and 527 will be followed.

Permission has been given for our clergy to perform weddings outside of Church Buildings with the understanding that the guidelines for creating sacred space, liturgical respect, and the focus on Christian Marriage as a public and community gathering, must be upheld.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John: Central Newfoundland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

John Watton  
Central Newfoundland