

**Notes from Archdeacon Karl McLean
Re: Discussion on Blessing of Same Sex Unions
General Synod 2007, Winnipeg, MB**

As a member of the Council of General Synod for the last three years, I have been asked to assist in leading a discussion on three motions related to the blessing of same-sex unions.

As a result of the resolution on same-sex unions presented at General Synod 2004 the members of the Council of General Synod have had to work on how to present this issue for General Synod 2007. What I hope to do is help you understand how the Council of General Synod arrived at the proposed resolutions the Council has brought to this General Synod. Resolutions 185, 186 & 187

The Council of General Synod has spent a great deal of time looking at the issue of same-sex blessings during the last three years.

As you know, the Primate's Theological Commission was asked to provide guidance on whether the blessing of same-sex unions was a matter of doctrine. The Commission addressed this issue and gave their conclusion that it is a matter of doctrine but not core doctrine in the sense of being credal. It is adiaphora. The St. Michael's Report says in para 8, quoting the Windsor Report that "Adiaphora have been defined as matters upon which disagreement can be tolerated with endangering unity" WR A. 36, p.21.

The Council has spent time discussing and trying to understand the implications of the Commission's findings on how we should proceed to address the issue of blessing of same-sex unions. The work has been challenging, due in no small part to the reality that Anglicans have very different ideas on how to bring this issue to a resolution.

One of the things I have appreciated very much has been the respectful way in which the members of the Council of General Synod have dealt with this issue. Our meetings and small group discussions were conducted in such a way that people were able to openly present their views and the Council members respectfully listened to everybody, even those with whom they disagreed. The approach of respect enabled the Council to make progress on this issue as we struggled with the way ahead. I will be honest with you and say that at different times we did not know which way to proceed. It was necessary to seek God's guidance and to rely on the Holy Spirit to open our eyes as to the way ahead.

At the last meeting of the Council, there was a significant majority who were ready to present the resolutions that are now before General Synod.

I would like to provide a little more detail of how we arrived at the different resolutions and give you the rationale, as I understand it. I recognize that for those who are not members of the Council of General Synod, it would not be obvious how we arrived at the present solutions.

The Council of General Synod felt that it was important to present clear and fair resolutions. It is my opinion that the Council has succeeded in presenting clear resolutions that can be accepted or rejected. There is no ambiguity about what is being presented. You are being asked to vote on whether you approve or disapprove of the blessing of same-sex unions.

The Council is presenting a resolution that would require sixty percent of the affirmative votes in order to pass the resolutions approving the blessing of same-sex unions. General Synod is different from diocesan synods in that the Primate does not have the right to withhold his or her assent to resolutions that have passed. Recognizing this difference, the Council thought it wise to require a higher majority before authorizing a new practice. We are aware that Anglicans differ on this issue and it is not wise to move forward on this issue unless there is a clear majority in favor.

The council struggled with whether or not the blessing of same-sex unions is a doctrinal issue that should be dealt with as a canon. As the St. Michael's Report acknowledges, we are not attempting to define new doctrine that is core in the sense of being credal. We are trying to apply doctrine to a pastoral situation that has been facing the Church for a long time.

We know that the development and application of doctrine takes place over long periods of time and through much struggle and debate. Key doctrinal issues such as our understanding of the person and work of Christ and the doctrine of the Eucharist took place over long periods of time. Other important issues such as slavery took much longer to resolve in history. The correct historical context is required to address and resolve particular issues. The Council thinks it is time for the Canadian Anglican Church to address the issue of the blessing of same-sex unions in a clear way at this General Synod.

As we are not defining a new doctrine, the majority of us felt that we should not require this to be part of a canon, but that we should deal with this in one synod in the same way we dealt with important issues in the past such as the introduction of a new alternate service book, the ordination of women, the elimination of the filioque clause from the creed (saying only that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father), etc. These issues all had important doctrinal implications but were dealt with in one synod.

We chose not to deal with the blessing of same-sex relationships as marriage, and have recommended that the Church look at this issue over the next triennium. I think most people view same-sex blessings as analogous to marriage, but we need to take time to address this issue. The recent government legislation that has been introduced allowing marriage of homosexual couples has added an additional element that we need to examine. The Church needs to take time to compare homosexual marriages and heterosexual marriages and determine their similarities and differences.

I encourage you during this time of discussion in the committee of the whole to be respectful of every member of General Synod. Please express your views honestly and respectfully seeking truth together in love.

As I conclude, I would like to tell you where I stand on this issue at the present time. My views have changed over time. I have come to accept that some people have a sexual orientation towards people of the same gender and that is the way they were made. Our understanding of human sexuality has changed significantly in recent history. It was only in 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association stopped calling homosexuality a psychological disorder. The Government of Canada did not allow homosexuals to serve in the Canadian Forces until recently. Homosexuals were sought out and removed from the military. Now in the light of a better understanding of homosexuality, homosexuals are accepted in the military and homosexual couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples.

Societal, scientific and medical understandings of homosexuality have changed and the Church needs to adjust its view on how to deal with homosexuals. We have excluded them far too long. The Church needs to provide guidance on how homosexuals should conduct themselves in the relationships in light of the Gospel and the new knowledge and insight we have acquired about homosexuality.

The heart of the Gospel and the center of the circle is the doctrine of God, and the Gospel tells us that God is love, and in Christ God revealed His love for all people, homosexual and heterosexual. Christ did not just die for a few, but he died for the sins of the whole world. Everyone is loved by God and called to a life of love.

How do we love our homosexual brothers and sisters as the Church of Jesus Christ? We love them by accepting them fully. We love them by asking them to abide by the same moral standards we require heterosexuals to live by in expressing their sexuality. We do this because we believe that loving life long relationships are the most rewarding and healthy.

I encourage you to follow the advice of our Primate Andrew who in his opening address to General Synod said that we should make ethical decisions by following our conscience. Follow your conscience. I would also encourage you to follow the Archbishop of Canterbury's advice on making an ethical decision. Archbishop Rowan Williams said in his Chapter in the Cambridge Guide to Ethics that the most important element in ethical decision-making is to ensure that the decision reflects the character of God. We need to consider and demonstrate the love and justice of God in making a decision on the blessing of same-sex unions.

I sincerely think that the Anglican Church of Canada should allow the blessing of committed, adult, monogamous, intended lifelong, same-sex relationships.

Col. The Ven. Karl McLean, June 2007