

Parish of All Saints, Augusta

Blessing of same sex Marriage

Meeting and Discussion, May 22, 2018

St.John's Anglican Church

The congregations of the Parish of All Saints in Augusta met in St.John's Anglican Church Hall to listen to information and have a chance to discuss, present different views and share ideas, concerns and participate in the discernment of what would be God's will concerning the blessing, or not, of same sex marriages.

The meeting opened with prayer at 7:45 p.m. lead by Reverend Tracey Smith who also provided an introduction and a brief overview of how things are proceeding. Rev. Tracey also mentioned that this was a controversial issue that threatens to divide dioceses and churches in the Anglican Church world wide. This issue and its resulting change or no change to the Marriage Canon may result in a division among priests. Rev. Tracey also reminded us that even if we disagree, we still love one another and to be mindful of that.

Reverend Dr. David Smith started his presentation by providing us with background information. He emphasized the need for a respectful talk and that we need both sides at the table for a learning time and discussion. Rev. David is attempting to present both sides of the issue, so that we hear what the points for discussion on each side are.

The starting point was the question asked by Rev. David: "What really is the main issue regarding this discussion?" Comments and discussion followed:

- Rev. David started by saying that the issue is not necessarily our view on homosexuality or relationship and marriage, but what the Bible is telling us about it: it is about the place of the Bible and scripture authority concerning same sex marriage and it seems opposed to it
- Are we digressing from the Bible?
- Marg brought up that scriptural authority also speaks against divorce but it is being done, therefore, how do you reconcile Bible authority with divorce. It is evident that Jesus is main authority and that "God is love...". Jesus never said a word regarding same sex marriage.
- Dr. John Patrick mentioned that we know that homosexuality is not genetically determined based on the evidence of twins, not being identical in that way.
- Dr. John Patrick also brought up the author Lee Harris, and his book, a powerful argument against same sex marriage. He continued, explaining that there are many medical problems resulting from homosexual activity among men, especially men in

numerous homosexual relationships. John Patrick continued by saying that we are made for committed love and not the promiscuity associated with homosexuality.

- Joanne spoke up to say that maybe promiscuous homosexual men skewed the medical statistics and this is not necessarily representing the population that we are encountering wanting the blessing of a same sex marriage.
- Larry Smith also made a comment to say that “same” is not the same as “equal”.

Rev. David talked about the consequences of this divisive issue for the Church and how the African Anglican people are very much against same sex marriages, based on staying a scripturally based Church. This is threatening the unity of the Anglican Church and the result would be a severely divided Church.

- Marg Lindsey spoke up and said that Africans are against same sex marriage in accordance with the Bible but also still beat up their wives.

John Patrick asked if we could bring up the definition of marriage in the Anglican Church, and a short synopsis was given: mutual love and commitment, sexual relations, and children.

Rev. David continued the discussion by posing the question: “What does the scripture say about homosexuality?” and started answering by saying that there are only 5 to 7 texts in the Bible, old and new testament combined that refer to homosexuality and all of them are negative.

John Patrick said that science cannot have anything to say about love and justice.

Rev. David mentioned that we are still in the dark ages concerning homosexuality in the understanding of it. Science has not proved conclusively any one explanation.

Jenny Van Allen spoke up and reminded us that Jesus was friends with sinners and to love our neighbours as ourselves. She continued by saying that we’re stepping around sin, and that we can support and love homosexuals but not bless their marriage to which David Smith asked: “Is it sin though?”

Betty also had a comment regarding sin and homosexuality and that if people turn from their ways....

Rev. David continued: “What gives an answer if science doesn’t?” St Paul teaches the Natural Law, which the Roman Catholic Church also teaches. David explained more regarding this and how God creates according to purpose. David also mentioned that we need to consider all of this and include it in our discussion.

John Patrick talked about and reminded us that children have a sense of justice before they can speak a sentence. (Part of the discussion regarding Natural Law). There was discussion in the room regarding tolerance. John Patrick then said that Jesus says that He is the truth, not the tolerance.

Bob Larrett spoke up and said that we should take the time to all think about what was discussing tonight and that this meeting was not about a debate or a vote but about enlightenment and we wouldn't expect a conclusion tonight.

John Patrick gave us the name of two books to read regarding our topic:

*Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* by Jeffrey Satinover

*The Inevitability of Patriarchy* by Steven Goldberg

Rev. David also suggested we looked up the book written by James V. Brownson: *Bible, Gender and Sexuality*

The meeting was coming to an end and Margaret Lindsey talked about her daughter and how she knows within herself that she was born as a homosexual and why deny homosexual people that are committed to a loving relationship a life of marriage.

Rev. Tracey informed us that if anyone had comments concerning Same Sex Marriages, that they would forward them to the Bishop when they sent their own in.

Minutes taken by Lorraine Ashby

Vestry Clerk

### **Same-sex Marriage – Presentation of Background**

This is a difficult issue and a contentious issue.

Feelings are very strong on both sides.

Tracey and I feel strongly about this issue.

We have also been involved in this discussion for maybe 30 years

We have gotten used to the fact that if you want to talk about this, that anger will only take you so far.

If some are angry about this, on either side, I won't say that's wrong.

There may be things that people have to say, even if they will cause others to strongly disagree.

Some here will have family members and friends who are homosexual or lesbian and that will make them feel strongly – Tracey and I do.

We want people to be able to say their view and to have that respected.

We also want people to be respectful of the views of others.

We also need to talk, recognizing what this issue may mean to other people personally.

If we are to learn anything from this, we have to try to listen to what other people are saying.

This is difficult – on the one side you have people saying that to keep homosexual people from marriage is a form of discrimination, like discrimination against black people, and is a failure of Christian love

On the other hand you have people saying that going against the teaching of the Bible is unfaithfulness to God and his commandments

These are very powerful and emotional attitudes, so we have to keep them in check, if we are to talk meaningfully

There are also powerful political motivations here – some think that the Christian faith leads us politically to a progressive position

Some think it leads to a conservative position

Some think it leads to a mixture of both

This all makes the issue that much more contentious – and only a part of that has anything to do with homosexuality – I would say a smaller part.

We can't solve all of that tonight!

We should try to talk as if everyone here was a man or a woman that Christ died for

We should keep in mind that we could easily lose people from our churches over this issue.

That might have to happen but we want to try to keep it from happening as much as possible.

What I am going to do is try to put before us some of the main issues

I'm not going to try to be neutral but I am going to try to give both sides

That's not because I believe both sides are equal but because if we are going to learn anything and discuss meaningfully, we have to look at the various positions and think about them

This is meant to be more of a learning time than anything, although we will try to forward the thoughts of the group to the diocese

### **Background**

I want to start by saying one point that I think is accepted by all sides out of the discussion that has taken place so far.

When people started talking about this publicly it may have been thought by many people that same-sex attraction was a choice that people made.

I think most people accept now that same-sex attraction is mostly not a choice.

It may be from birth or it may not.

It may be changeable or it may not.

But it is certainly not changeable easily and many who experience that don't want it.

So we now mostly accept that there is such a thing as a same-sex orientation and that this is not in any simple sense a choice.

What you do about it is a choice, but the orientation itself is largely not a choice.

That has been a good general understanding that has come out of this.

### **What is the situation right now?**

A change to the marriage canon to make same-sex marriage possible is a change in doctrine.

It has to be passed by two General Synods – it has been passed by one.

The next one is next year.

Our diocese is asking for our input which they will forward to the General Synod as a memorial.

If the canon is passed in 2019, then some dioceses will go ahead.

Our diocese will not go ahead until our synod in 2020.

No clergy will have to perform same-sex marriages

Tracey and I will not perform them.

We may make reference to the report of the Anglican Church called This Holy Estate.

The report was commissioned to represent the case for same-sex marriages, so it is on one side of the question and deals with a number of issues, such as Scripture

You can get a copy of the national church website.

### **What is the main issue in this discussion?**

It is easy to forget in the heat of the discussion about same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage that for most conservatives the main issue is whether the church is under the authority of Scripture. Many regret that this issue has come to a head over this particular issue and believe that the church has not given due authority to Scripture in many more ways than this one.

It should be kept in mind that, according to Bishop Linda Nichols, speaking to the clergy of our diocese, not very many people actually want to be in a same-sex marriage. So why this highly contentious dispute about it? The real issue, as we have said, is the place of Scripture in the church. Also, the church is really being asked to pronounce same-sex relationships legitimate. Many homosexuals do not want a marriage but they do want people to agree that their practices are acceptable, including religious people.

### **What consequences are there for the church?**

There are already two Anglican churches in Canada and the United States because of this issue. These are not accepted yet within the Anglican Communion but they are accepted by some of the largest provinces within the Anglican Communion.

They see the North American position on this as arrogant and unfaithful to Scripture.

The Anglican Communion itself is in serious danger of splitting over this issue.

Already eight of the thirty-eight provinces of the Anglican communion have become partners in Gafcon – an Anglican body of Primates, Bishops and lay people dedicated to Scriptural and theological orthodoxy within the world-wide Anglican church. The member churches of Gafcon alone comprise over half of the Anglicans in the world, and they do not represent nearly all of the Anglican churches who are opposed to same-sex marriage. Through the influence of these churches, the American Episcopal church is already not allowed to take part in the decision.

making of the communion, and the Canadian church will join them if we go ahead with this. But that is just the first of the measures that the conservative part of the communion will probably take to “discipline” the Western churches that they think are departing from the faith. The probably result of the Western churches going ahead with this is the creation of two Anglican world-wide bodies, because the Western churches will not back down and neither will the global conservatives. Thus the Anglican Communion as we know it will no longer exist, even if the parts may claim to represent it.

### **What is the place of Scripture in the church?**

Richard Norris, American Anglican theologian:

“I will not concern myself with the question whether the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments ought to have authority in the churches of Christ. I assume that such a question is pointless. I assume that scripture and church are strictly correlative in the sense (a) that the Bible exists, as a set of scriptures called “sacred,” only in and for the church, and (b) that the church is recognizable as church only through its engagement with, and responsiveness to, the message that the scriptures definitively convey.” In other words, there is no church without the Bible.

### **What does Scripture say about homosexuality?**

On the face of it, it would seem that the scriptural case against the acceptance of homosexual practice is a strong one. All of the scripture texts that refer to this practice are uniformly negative. (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim 1:10; Romans 1:18-32). This is what leads Richard Hays, for instance, in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* to conclude that for the church to accept it would be unscriptural. Arguments for this acceptance must assert that there are qualifying reasons for not taking these texts to mean what they seem to mean. The texts must be reinterpreted in order to show that what Scripture seems to say on the face of it is not actually the message we are to take from Scripture. There are no convincing arguments that Scripture actually has an obvious positive attitude towards homosexual relationships in any of the texts that deal directly with it.

This admittedly does not settle the question. It seems to many that Scripture “obviously” teaches a seven day creation, but others whose relation to scriptural authority we would not challenge, don’t think this is the case. Hasn’t modern science taught us to read the Creation story differently and to separate the theological kernel of truth in the story from an ancient cosmology that we can no longer believe? Similarly, haven’t modern scientific and moral attitudes taught us to separate out ancient views about homosexuality that we can no longer believe from abiding theological truths?

Actually this parallel is misleading. The more we know about ancient Near Eastern cosmology, the more we realize that the message of the story of Creation in its ancient context has little to do with the empirical scientific categories that we read into it when we find a seven day creation in

it. But it is quite different with the texts that bear on homosexuality. These have to do with matters of psychology and the understanding of natural law that are able to be addressed much less definitively by modern thought than cosmological issues. Can anyone read the story of Creation without suspecting that in the Hebrew thought represented there, there is a necessary connection in God's creative purpose between sex and procreation? When this is linked to the texts which are negative about homosexual practice, does this not indicate that scriptural teaching is against it? In what sense can this teaching be said to be outdated? And yet is this scriptural doctrine of creation and the divine purpose for sex taken seriously in the debate about homosexuality in our church? Hardly at all, it seems, compared to the Roman Catholic church, whose catechism gives a penetrating examination of this question based on natural law.

### **What does science say about homosexuality?**

This one is especially difficult because most of us don't know much about the science involved. It seems clear that the question is a far more open one than many assume. Here's what Radner says about it:

The notion that "science shows us" x and y about same-sexuality, and in a way that can and ought to inform our ideas about same-sex marriage is, frankly, ludicrous at this point. This is not to say that there is nothing to learn from such scientific study; only that it is not of a form in our era yet to have provided useful knowledge. Furthermore, it is legitimate to raise the question, "how can we responsibly make sense of the scientific data we *do* have within a Christian framework?". That question has yet to be posed, let alone answered in this discussion.

In saying this he seems in line with the much more detailed discussions in works such as *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth* by Jeffrey Satinover, and *God, Gays and the Church: Human Sexuality and Experience in Christian Thinking*, edited by Lisa Nolland, Chris Sugden, and Sarah Finch.

This Holy Estate refers to a "widespread scientific consensus" that homosexuality is a "given" and, without referring to a single study, much less a theological engagement with the relevant science, mentions the delisting of homosexuality as a disorder by the American Psychological Association in 1973. However, that move was actually prior to most of the studies on the issue and was propelled by a militant gay lobby, as is described by Jeffrey Satinover in *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. It is arguable that the "widespread scientific consensus" is more a matter of public opinion than scientific knowledge.

### **Is this a matter of the common sense of Anglicans reaching a reasonable decision?**

Probably most educated Canadians can't see any reason against same-sex sexual relations or marriage. However most educated Canadians can't see any reason for the reality of God as the Bible describes him, or the uniqueness of Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life" either. Common sense is ultimately informed by the presuppositions of the culture it comes from and the presuppositions of our culture are pretty obviously not disposed towards the Christian faith. So that should be a warning about the role of "common sense" in this discussion.

### **What about the argument from natural law?**

The report mentions the argument from natural law, an approach to ethics which for many is taught by Scripture in Romans 1 and elsewhere. Paul is consistent with contemporary Jewish thought in interpreting the Old Testament law on this issue in terms of a philosophy of natural law and natural order.

However “This Holy Estate” does not address the issue, except to refer in a footnote to some of the submissions received by the Commission, most of which are irrelevant to the argument. It is no small matter that the report does not address the matter of natural law, since that is the ground on which the largest ecclesial body of Christians in the world, the Roman Catholic church, rejects homosexual activity and same-sex marriage.

This is what the Catholic Catechism says about natural law: “Application of the natural law varies greatly; it can demand reflection that takes account of the various conditions of life according to places, times and circumstances. Nevertheless, in the diversity of cultures, the natural law remains as a rule that binds men among themselves and imposes on them, beyond the inevitable differences, common principles. The natural law is immutable and permanent throughout the variations of history. It subsists under the flux of ideas and customs and supports their progress. The rules that express it remain substantially valid. Even when it is rejected in its very principles, it cannot be destroyed or removed from the heart of man. It always rises again in the life of individuals and societies.”

This is the basis on which the Roman Catholic church rejects same-sex sexual practice.

### **What comes next?**

We believe that there are a number of issues bound to come up in the future, issues where all members of the diocese would be united in their stand, where the same kind of arguments we are seeing here will be used again. To take a particularly inflammatory example (without meaning to be offensive or tar anyone in the present debate with the brush of an unjust association), will it not be claimed that our sense that adult-child sexual relations involve an unhealthy psychological or power dynamic is in the end, nothing but our saying that we don’t happen to like it? Actually, that is being claimed already. What kind of proof constitutes proof in such matters? Is the kind of secular science that we try to bring to bear on these questions simply inadequate to deal with them, in a way that perhaps the Biblical doctrine of Creation is not?