



## The Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Huron The Anglican Church of Canada

*"Building up the body of Christ and preparing God's people to live their Mission."  
Huron Mission Statement*



**The Right Reverend Linda Nicholls**  
**Coadjutor Bishop**

July 15, 2016

To the Clergy of the Diocese of Huron

From July 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met in Richmond Hill to consider the life of our church and, in particular, to consider the resolution to amend the marriage canon to allow for the marriage of same-sex partners. As you are aware, the debate and voting on this resolution led to a roller coaster of emotions over several days.

We first spent time in mixed table groups and larger neighbourhood groups listening to one another. It was clear before we reached the legislative session that there were deep divisions within our church on our understanding of scripture and the nature of marriage. At the legislative session, sixty people, young and old, spoke at the microphones to share their perspective, concerns and desires for the resolution. We heard heart wrenching stories of exclusion and pain from LGBTQ2S people as well as strong defenses of a traditional understanding of marriage. The vote on the resolution required a 2/3's majority in all three orders (laity, clergy, bishops) in order to pass. On Monday night, the vote received 2/3's in the orders of laity and bishops but not in the clergy. Stunned silence greeted the result followed by weeping and sorrow from many.

Later Monday evening, Bishop Bob Bennett and I met to discuss what we ought to say to our Diocese in light of that vote. It is clear that the majority in this diocese were strongly in favour of the resolution. With the failure of the resolution there was nothing to offer pastorally to gay and lesbian couples in our Church. We, therefore, decided to join our neighbouring dioceses in considering a liturgical option for same-sex marriage following the advice of the Chancellor that such an option could be possible if General Synod did not take any action. We issued a statement late on July 11<sup>th</sup> to that effect.

On Tuesday afternoon, in the last hour of the Synod, a request to see the recorded vote before the session ended led to the record of every vote being sent to each member of General Synod on our tablets. This led to the discovery that several votes were not recorded at all and the General Secretary, the Rev. Michael Thompson, had been incorrectly coded as a non-voting clergy. When a recalculation was completed, this meant that the resolution had received the needed 2/3's majority. Stunned silence again fell on the plenary hall. The pain of the night before was now experienced by those who had previously thought the motion was defeated. Some were unable to participate in the closing eucharist and banquet.

This result now places before the Church a further three years of consultation in each diocese and each ecclesiastical Province before a second reading of the resolution at General Synod 2019 in Vancouver. The discernment on this issue continues. In a second statement to the diocese on July 12<sup>th</sup>, Bishop Bob and I have committed ourselves and the diocese to full participation in that process. We are also aware

that our commitment to explore a liturgical option has raised hopes for a pastoral response to same sex marriage sooner. We want to consult across the diocese before taking any further actions, seeking to balance the tensions of our commitment to the processes of our national church and the pastoral needs of our diocese. We ask for your patience and participation in this consultation. During this time same-sex marriages are not authorized in our diocese.

Although there is strong support for this change in our diocese, we are deeply aware that not all clergy and parishioners agree. In whatever steps are ahead for the diocese and/or the national Church, we will work to protect the conscience of those who need space to disagree and not to share in the celebration of same-sex marriages. We value all voices in our diocese and need to listen to the cautions and concerns raised to ensure we make the best decisions possible.

Please be in touch with our office and let us know how you and your parish are responding to the proposed change in the canon and to meeting the needs of your parishioners – wherever they find themselves on this issue.

Please pray for our Church. The debate and vote have left deep fractures in our fellowship with one another and may potentially affect our relationships with ecumenical partners and/or some in the Anglican Communion. The next three years will require deliberate and focused work on reconciliation. Especially pray for our Primate. +Fred offered gracious, compassionate leadership with a touch of humour throughout a gruelling General Synod. A hallmark of his leadership is his constant effort to hold people with differences together at the table of Christ at a very high personal cost.

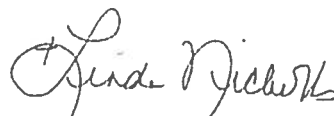
Thank you for all you are doing to share the love of God in Jesus Christ through your parish and community. When we are struggling in the midst of many pressures and differences remember what is essential -

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength*

*– and love your neighbour as yourself”.*

That will be enough.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Linda Nicholls". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Linda" being more prominent than the last name "Nicholls".

The Rt. Rev. Linda Nicholls  
Bishop Coadjutor & Commissary  
Diocese of Huron