

A Special Session of Synod for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador

“...and the Greatest of these is Love...” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NRSV)

*St. Thomas' Church and the Sheraton Hotel Newfoundland
St. John's, September 27-28, 2019*



The Bishop's Charge

It is a privilege for me to speak to you today on the occasion of this Special Synod for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador. Last night's Opening Eucharist at St. Thomas' Church was a stirring celebration as we gathered from across Newfoundland and Labrador to discuss Marriage Equality in our diocese and take counsel for the wellbeing of our church. The theme of this special synod is derived from the 13th Chapter of St. Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians, *“...and the Greatest of these is Love...”* I acknowledge once more our visitors: The Rt. Rev. John Watton of the Diocese of Central Newfoundland, and Archdeacon David Taylor of the Diocese of Western Newfoundland. I thank you for granting them the privileges of the house.

As I have told you previously, the word “synod” comes from a Greek word meaning “assembly” or “meeting.” I also remind you of your responsibility as delegates to consider the whole of our church in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador. Although we all come from various places and our decisions are informed by where we come from, now that synod is convened, I ask that your focus be our church as a whole. A diocesan synod of this nature only gathers every year or so and this is the only body of this nature and size that considers the entire church in its deliberations. Delegates vote on behalf of their parish but not necessarily as directed by their parish. You are now the Diocesan Synod of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador.

I thank the members of the Synod Agenda Committee who worked over the summer to bring us together: Archdeacon Charlene Taylor who chaired the group, Archdeacon Samuel Rose, the Reverend Derrick Bishop, the Reverend Christopher Fowler, Ms. Debbie Pantin, Canon and Chancellor Brad Wicks, and Ms. Elizabeth Crisby. I also thank Archdeacon Charlene for organizing our worship last night. I thank the Archdeaconries of Avalon; Trinity, Conception, Placentia; and Labrador for organizing our liturgies today.

A Ride on the Newfoundland Railway

I grew up in a railroad station. My father spent 44 years working first for the Newfoundland Railway and then for Canadian National Railway after 1949. In the 1940's and 1950's before I was born he served in various locations across Newfoundland that included Port aux Basques, St. Andrew's, Stephenville Crossing and Stephenville, Grand Falls, Buchans, Bishop's Falls, and Alexander Bay. By the time I came along he was Station Agent in Trinity and then Lethbridge. He would retire from Whitbourne when the station there was closed in 1984. From its beginnings in the 1880's until its closure in the 1980's, the Newfoundland Railway served the people of this province. To work for the railway and to belong to a railway family was to join a distinct culture within Newfoundland and Labrador.

I admit that I am biased regarding the railway because I, along with my siblings, grew up around trains and those who ran them. I know there was an economic argument to be made in the 1980's when the federal government brought in the "Roads for Rails" scheme whereby the province received hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade its highways as compensation for the end of the railway. But when I drive this province today and see the condition of some of our roads I have to wonder about it all. I am deeply nostalgic for what we lost and I find myself pondering what might have been if a different decision was taken. If, instead of the old narrow-gauge railway, our railway had been upgraded to standard-gauge with modern rollingstock from Port aux Basques to St. John's eliminating the branch lines I wonder what it would mean for us today. In this age of environmental concerns there is a case to be made for railways instead of highways and who knows what the economics might have been had we chosen a modernized high-speed railway? But that's a question for another time. What's gone is gone, and today we face a different reality in this province.

My father's years on the railroad saw many changes, not the least of which were the introduction of diesel locomotives in the 1950's, replacing the old coal-fired steam engines. In the 1960's the telegraph sets used in every station were replaced by telephone lines as that technology became reliable and I still have his old telegraph set. In the 1970's the CN bus – the Roadcruiser – came along, a development immortalized by the singer Joan Morrissey.

Dad remembers the years of the Second World War as a time of great activity with up to three trains some days crossing the island filled with troops and material for the war effort. A medical condition from childhood prevented his enlistment but he did his part in the war effort, working extensively with the Americans as they constructed their base in Stephenville and he was on duty as a telegraph operator the night the Caribou was torpedoed. He remembers another long night during the war with the bodies of some young American servicemen who died tragically laid out in the Waiting Room of the train station until their countrymen took them to their place of final rest. He also recalls a train pulling into his station one evening carrying a very special passenger, the Hollywood actress, Joan Blondell. She was here to entertain the American servicemen in several of their Newfoundland bases and spent time with this young 20-year-old and his colleagues while her train was prepared for the rest of the journey.

After the war, in the late 1940's before roads connected most communities in central Newfoundland and the only way between many places was the railway, my father remembers a curious gentleman, a traveling salesman really, who would go from station to station with a couple of suitcases and sell his wares from place to place. Philip Riteman, the Jewish Survivor of the Holocaust became a friend and visited with my parents many times. On the west coast in the 1950's around Wreckhouse in the Codroy Valley my father worked with Lockie MacDougall, that "human wind gauge," who was the person best able to tell if the train could safely pass in extreme wind conditions.

The railway gave my father his livelihood and enabled him to raise his family in dignity and security. He will be 98 soon and should you ever drop by to visit him you will find an old railroader still eager to share his memories of a bygone age. Those memories are beginning to fade for him now, finally, as he approaches a hundred years of age, but that seems appropriate for one of the last of his generation. *Old railroaders never die, they just fade away.*

My strongest memories of the Newfoundland Railway come from Lethbridge in Bonavista Bay where I lived for nine years of my childhood. With all of Mom and Dad's moves, a stay of nine years was exceptional. The office of the Station Agent and the Waiting Room were attached to our house. Next-door was the Freight Shed and just beyond that was a place for the railway maintenance workers known as Sectionmen to stay. As a young child those Sectionmen were my heroes. They were big, burly men who sped along the rails on their little speeders repairing and maintaining the tracks in all kinds of weather and I loved hanging around with them. They were always kind to me.

My home in those years was a very public kind of place, for the Railway Station was really at the heart of the community with people coming and going all the time. Three days a week the train ran along the Bonavista Branch from Clarenville to Bonavista – Monday, Wednesday and Friday – dropping off and picking up passengers, dropping off and picking up freight. The Train Engineer and Conductor often said hello to my father, and I remember all sorts and conditions of people passing through my home, the Railway Station. People waiting for trains would have cups of tea at our table, use our bathroom, share meals, and sometimes even stay overnight. My home, the Railway Station, was a place of safety for all kinds of travelers where they could find rest and shelter and protection on their journey. Aside from my family, nobody else lived in the station; everybody was coming or going, even the dead. Sometimes human bodies were kept in the Freight Shed and I could tell when a body was there because my father would leave the light on all night. The Railway Station was never the final destination for anybody, but a milestone along the way, a place of expectation, a place of meeting, as someone waited to leave or someone arrived home. Nobody was ever turned away.

Our Church Today

In a great many ways, I see my church, *our* church, like that Railway Station in which I grew up. Many different kinds of people passed through my home seeking shelter and rest along the way. Even the dead and those who loved them were cared for. It was my home but my father did not own it for it belonged to the people it served. Our church, like my Railway Station Home is also a meeting place along the way. I think of the church as a signpost pointing the way to somewhere else. It contains within itself the promise of another place but the signpost is not that place.

The signpost simply points the way. Our church is not the final destination for any of us; we have a promise in Christ of another home one day where all things will be brought to their natural perfection in him. We take counsel this morning for our church but we do well to consider what the church really is. I like the words of Pope Francis who referred to the Christian Church as a Field Hospital. A Field Hospital during wartime is really a temporary station for protection, care, comfort and healing and nobody remains there forever.



Our work in the synod today, I believe, is really about what kind of church we will belong to. I know that we have a laser focus on Marriage Equality right now but I want you to frame that question and that discussion within the wider framework and wider question of “What is the Church?” Is our church big enough and generous enough so that all who come its way can find shelter and comfort? Or is our church to be a restricted place for only those who meet certain criteria? I see the church as a station along life's journey and I believe that station should be a pretty big and welcoming place where there is room for all.

We may not be talking about a large number of people requesting marriage in the church but even one couple makes this synod vital. Tomorrow morning, I leave for Labrador. On Thursday, I will be Norman Bay on the coast of Labrador. You can't drive to Norman Bay so I'll get in by helicopter or boat. Why? Because there is one young person seeking to be Confirmed. Next Thursday, just one young person seeking the ministry of our church in Confirmation will be equal in importance to all of the others I have Confirmed this year.

You have already received the proposed motion to be considered later this morning. We will debate only the following motion:

This Synod of the Diocese accept and endorse affirmation #2 of “A Word to the Church” and the “local option” as set out in the declaration of the House of Bishops, and on that basis affirm the authority of the Bishop of the Diocese to allow parishes and congregations which formally request permission of him or her to perform same sex marriages to do so.

That motion affirms the authority of this bishop and future bishops to act pastorally and appropriately on a parish-by-parish basis on the matter of Marriage Equality. I already have that authority but because I believe that this matter is too important for just a bishop to decide I asked you to gather with me as a synod as soon as possible after the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in July so that together we may decide what kind of church we are to be. As you know, despite tremendous support for Marriage Equality overall at General Synod, a change to the Marriage Canon failed to reach the required majority in the House of Bishops. I have just come from the House of Bishops and can tell you that the outcome of General Synod continues to be difficult for all the bishops. The complete statement of the bishops to the Church at General Synod is as follows:

We, members of the House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada, see the pain and anguish inflicted on LGBTQ2S+ people, on members of the General Synod, across the Church, and in the world, as a result of the work and the vote on the matter of Canon 21, concerning marriage. We see your tears, we hear your cries, and we weep with you. We have caused deep hurt. We are profoundly sorry.

Although the bishops are not of one mind, we look with hope to the “Word to the Church” and its affirmations which General Synod 2019 overwhelmingly approved on Friday, July 12.

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.”

Together, we affirm the inherent right of Indigenous peoples and communities to spiritual self-determination in their discernment and decisions in all matters.

Although we as bishops are not able to agree, in the name of Jesus Christ, we commit to conduct ourselves “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Because of the urgency of this conversation, many of us have concluded that the final decision will now be a local one whereby each diocese will decide in a way appropriate to its life. Affirmation #2 of *A Word to the Church* (Diverse Understandings of the Existing Canon) which was affirmed at General Synod reads as follows:

We affirm that, while there are different understandings of the existing Marriage Canon, those bishops and synods who have authorized liturgies for the celebration and blessing of a marriage between two people of the same sex understand that the existing Canon does not prohibit same-sex marriage.

You all know that the Diocese of Western Newfoundland at its synod in early September voted strongly in favor of Marriage Equality. That diocese, like this diocese, contains within it a range of viewpoints even as it makes room for all who wish to belong. The Diocese of Central Newfoundland will meet in October to make its own decision.

In the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador nobody will be compelled to do anything that is against their conscience and their faith. Let us be generous toward each other because we are not all of a single mind. I thank the many hundreds of people over the past while who wrote, telephoned, e-mailed and met with me to tell me what they thought. I believe there is room in this great big church for all of us, even if we might disagree on this matter. I have to be bishop for the entire diocese and not for a part of the diocese and so I will continue to welcome all who want to belong to our church. This is a time for us to show grace and understanding to each other and be reminded of the mystery of God's love. Perhaps we should also ask ourselves how big our church really is?



In a remarkable online paper called, [Living with Disagreement](#),* Father Jonathan Rowe writes of his own journey toward Marriage Equality. He states that he was finally able to arrive where he is today because of his church's "gentleness and generosity" that gave him space to grow. Jonathan writes:

I was not always an advocate for marriage equality; quite the opposite. Over the past fifteen years, I have gone from considering myself *slightly vocally* opposed, to *quietly* opposed, to a voice of cautious restraint, to *quietly* supportive. Then came a breaking point, when I realized that it was not enough to be in favour, if my silence was actively contributing to the problem. Since then, I have made no secret of my support for change, and for LGBTQ2S+ Anglicans in general ...

I could not have come to the position that I'm in now if the Church had not been prepared to be gentle and generous with me. I shudder to think what might have happened if colleagues, parishioners, or my diocese had insisted that I needed to get with the program or get out. Since I have been on the receiving end of Church's gentleness and generosity at a time when I would have disagreed with my present position, I can hardly withhold the same gentleness and generosity from those who disagree with me now.

Eight parishes of our diocese have now formally requested permission to affirm Marriage Equality and I need to respond to those parishes today. Your decision will inform my decision. I thank the Reverends Mark Nichols and Jonathan Rowe for their fine work on a proposed alternate liturgy for marriage and can tell you that it is almost identical to what we are familiar with in the *Book of Alternative Services* and changes only a few words so that it not be gender-specific and is inclusive for all. It also brings our marriage liturgy into line with civil law that

* <https://www.facebook.com/notes/jonathan-rowe/living-with-disagreement/10156758800840669/>

recognizes that people of the same sex may be married. Final approval on all services in our diocese rests with the bishop as Chief Liturgical Officer and I shall be pleased to approve this new liturgy.

Before we formally introduce our motion for debate and voting I want to reflect together on what happened at General Synod in Vancouver this summer. To do that I have invited the seven delegates who went there with me to share with you their thoughts and perceptions. I asked them to prepare a statement for you and I invite them onto stage with me at this time. This is a decision for the whole of the church and for that reason even the Bishop's Charge today includes the voices of others.

Reflections from the Delegates to General Synod 2019

It was an honor and a privilege to attend General Synod 2019 in Vancouver. It was a privilege to be in the company of fellow Anglicans from across Canada. The worship was soul enriching. The music was inspiring. The days were long, and the evenings longer. Sessions began at 8:30 am and the evening sessions invariably lasted until 9:30 at night which made for long days that were exhilarating, challenging, and exhausting all at the same time.

The focus for the first two days was Aboriginal issues. The purpose of this statement from the delegates to General Synod, however, is to address the next order of business of General Synod: the second reading of the Marriage Canon. It is important to note at this point that each morning delegates met in assigned table groups for Bible Study. It was obvious that the discussion in these groups was designed to make us more conciliatory and respectful towards each other in order to dispel the rancor and animosity that had been present at General Synod in Toronto in 2016 regarding the Marriage Canon.

Everyone knows how the vote went. Votes held with respect to changes in Canon Law or Doctrine require a two-thirds majority in each of the three Houses of Synod: Laity, Clergy, and Bishops. As you know, the proposal failed in the House of Bishops. This vote revealed to many members of Synod the archaic structure of our decision-making process, which may have served us well in the past, but in the present day may need to be re-examined. From that realization came a resolution empowering the Council of General Synod (COGS) to review the voting structure, but that came later.

It is difficult to adequately describe the mayhem, the highly charged emotional reaction to the defeat of the Marriage Canon which happened on the Friday night of General Synod. Initially, the reaction was silence; people were dumbfounded. Then there was heard a single person weeping. This sound ignited an overpowering, widespread emotional reaction. Many of the Youth delegates who had been encouraged to attend General Synod, feeling betrayed, ran crying from the room, followed by one of the Indigenous Bishops. Incredible as it sounds, one person at this point tried to talk about policy change. An indigenous man rose and very powerfully exclaimed, "Our children are crying. How long are we going to make our children cry?"

Chaplains, who had maintained a highly visible presence throughout proceedings, were circulating on the floor of Synod ministering to so many visibly distressed people. There was widespread anger that the House of Bishops seemed to be out of touch with many people, although the fact is that 2 more votes would have produced the desired positive effect.

The Primate wisely called a recess. Some people carried their feelings away; others lingered on the Synod floor to talk. It is no exaggeration to say that the hearts of most people bottomed out. And we had to put away all of this because on Saturday the order of business was to elect a new Primate.

Some of the emotions of Friday night carried over into the Saturday evening worship which followed the election of the new Primate. A group of youth delegates sang outside on the Cathedral steps as people entered, and they brought their songs to the Cathedral floor. That moment was captured in a picture which appeared in the latest Anglican Journal.

The headlines that followed did the Church a great deal of harm at a time when we are trying to be more missional in our outlook. The first mark of mission is to proclaim the Gospel. The fourth mark of mission is to promote social justice. Combine these two and we believe we are being told to remember a God of mercy and his Son Jesus who reached out to include every type of marginalized person in society: lepers, women, tax collectors. Extrapolate a little and recognize that gay people comprise one group who have historically been marginalized in our society. Often, the Bible is used to deny LGBTQ+ people full inclusion in the Church. History reminds us that the Bible was also used to support slavery as well as the exclusion of women from full participation in the church. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit has revealed to us the error of such interpretations.

The House of Bishops on the Monday returned with a statement to the Church which supported giving local Dioceses the right to determine how they will apply the Marriage Canon. Large majorities in all Houses of Synod ratified the Word to the Church from COGS. This ratification is what really gives legs to the local option on which we are now going to vote at this special Synod which Bishop Peddle called to examine the marriage Canon in the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador. We are three years away from another General Synod. These three years will undoubtedly be ones of change, but also of opportunity and hope if we remain faithful to the two great commandments of Jesus: Love God and love your neighbour.

(The Rev. Derrick Bishop, Ms. Trudy Hutchings, Ms. Debbie Pantin, Canon Amanda Taylor, Ms. Joanne Minnett, Ms. Nicolle Critch, Archdeacon Greg Mercer)

In Conclusion

I thank our Members of General Synod for their thoughtful and considerate words. My final words will be brief but I wish to state clearly once more that whatever our outcome today, nobody will be compelled to act against their conscience on this matter. If you pass the motion before you this morning, eight parishes will be given permission to marry same-sex couples. Nothing will change in the other 30 parishes. Change will come only when a parish requests a change through its Parish Council or Annual General Meeting. This morning's motion simply opens the door to the possibility of such change. As long as I am bishop I will respect that there is a diversity of viewpoints in our church.

If you pass the motion, all bishops to follow me will be duty-bound to remember the will of the people of the diocese as expressed in this synod. I have asked that the vote be taken by secret ballot and not by show of hands so that each and every person may vote according to their conscience without any pressure one way or another. Because this is not a change to the Marriage Canon, it will require only a simple majority of voting members to pass – 50% + 1 – and not a super-majority of two-thirds. It is my request that the entire body of synod vote

together and not by houses. As I stated earlier: this is a decision of the whole church – Laity, Clergy, Bishops – and let us make it together.

As your bishop I support this motion. I ask you to do the same.

We will now recess for 15 minutes.

The Right Reverend Doctor Geoffrey Peddle