

A Statement by the Bishops Mark MacDonald, Lydia Mamakwa, and Adam Halkett

We are writing to the Church and our communities in light of the General Synod's decision to take the first steps towards the changing of the marriage canon. As we wrote to the commission and stated at the Synod, we do not agree with the decision and believe that it puts our communities in a difficult place in regards to our relation and community with the Anglican Church of Canada. This statement was requested by an Indigenous circle that gathered after the final vote on the marriage canon was revealed.

We write this, of ourselves, acknowledging that we do not speak for all Indigenous Peoples, though we have consulted broadly and deeply with many. Although we note some difference between urban and reserve contexts and, less so, by regions, we believe we speak to and from what we have witnessed as a broad consensus of Indigenous Peoples. It is our hope that what we say will ultimately serve all, even those who may disagree.

Our land has a Charter of Rights and our laws support these rights. These rights are recognized and endorsed by the Church in its teaching and practice. These rights that First Nations enjoy and use to reaffirm traditional and inherent rights are the same rights that same sex couples use to be granted marriage rights and privileges. In the case of the Church, these rights grant the freedom to complete its pastoral work in marriages. In regard to Indigenous Peoples, they specially guarantee that they are self-determining with regard to basic cultural and social matters. This is fundamental to the Nation-to-Nation relationship which is at the base of Indigenous Rights, reconciliation and a promising future for all of Canada.

Indigenous churches have these basic freedoms, under Law and under God. Supported by the courts and affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, our freedoms set the course for our churches and their pastoral leadership in our communities and, specifically, in regard to our pastoral and social ministry for marriage. We are deeply disturbed and disappointed that so little attention was paid to our pastoral and social self-determination and the right to free, prior, and informed consent.

Our elders need to be actively involved with the conversation regarding these changes. Earlier discussions of these matters have never been translated into Indigenous languages, neither has This Holy Estate. That our elders have not been a part of this conversation, it seems to us, is a flaw in the process.

We voted "no" to changes in the Marriage Canon. We do not take this stand as a statement against any person or persons. In this, we simply affirm our right to express our cultural and spiritual understanding of marriage in the context of our own community life and according to God's holy Word. Though some may see the "opt in" option in the proposed changes to the marriage canon as allowing all to have freedom in this matter, the change in language in the first part of the canon is a deeper problem for many of our communities.

It is our understanding that, while homosexual persons have always had a place in our societies, same-sex marriage, itself, has not. We find in both our reading of Creation and Scripture the unique relationship of Man and Woman. The difference between the two, coming together in the miracle of a unique spiritual communion, is essential to the way we understand marriage – but not only marriage, it is the way we understand the Land, the way we understand Creation.

Without commenting on Canadian Civil Marriage, we assert the unique right that Indigenous communities have to set their own way of life and their own way of speaking of marriage. Although the canon does not force anyone to do anything, the language of the revised canon changes the fundamental meaning of marriage to make it gender neutral. This is both a significant and unacceptable change to our communities, who still find male and female as essential to their understanding of the marriage ceremony.

We will discern what will be our way forward in the days ahead. We do know that we commit to the following:

- We will continue in our conversation with the Anglican Church of Canada in regards to self-determination and mutual cooperation in our Anglican Christian ministry.

We will proceed towards self-determination with urgency.

We will seek ways to continue our conversation with the LGBTQ communities and individuals, affirming our earlier statements of love and welcome.

- We call for the Church to seek ways in which to 1) further our self-determination and 2) to specifically address our self-determination in matters of cultural and social matters related to our communities. In this regard, we will seek ways for our communities to pursue and enact their own cultural understandings of when different from the rest of the Anglican Church of Canada. ·

We call for the Church to establish an inquiry into the process this decision was made. This was not the best for Indigenous Peoples, we can only believe it is not the best for others.

We believe that this entire incident calls for a review and rethinking of the ways that the Church conducts its business. We have resolved to work with you to see that we never have to be in this kind of situation again. For many of us, the silencing of our elder at the end of the Synod conversation – though understandable in Western process – was the most painful moment of all. We strongly feel that an apology to our Elder is in order.

We are deeply sad that, at a time in which the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples of the Anglican Church of Canada warmly embraced each other and a new future, that we came to such divisiveness. We are deeply sorry for any ways that our actions – words and acts of sin by doing and/or not-doing – contributed to this outcome and will seek to do our very best in the future to embody the reconciliation that we see in Jesus. We believe that Christ is present among us, by His own power and promise, and

we will look for Him to guide us into a better future. We, finally, pledge our very best attempts to remain brothers and sisters to all Anglicans, living out our baptismal covenant in the bonds of affection and mutual faithfulness.