

**From the Bishop's Charge delivered on October 23, 2008 as part of the Eucharist service that opened Synod 2008**

The Synod Agenda provides me with time, later on, to speak of the **Bishop's Lambeth Conference 2008**. However, I would like to say here how much I appreciate your prayers and support which allowed Catherine and me to attend the conference. It was indeed a very profound experience for both of us. My faith was nourished, my resolve to find the means to encourage diversity in our communion was bolstered and my confidence in the doctrine, discipline, teaching and practice of our Anglican Communion was encouraged. The Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera, Bishop of Columbo, the preacher at the opening Eucharist at Lambeth stated, "Unity in diversity is a cherished Anglican tradition – a spirituality if you like, which we must reinforce in all humility for the sake of Christ and Christ's gospel." I am committed to this teaching and practice.

This past year, the Diocese saw the departure of a number of parishioners from the parishes of St. Alban's and St. George's both located in the Deanery of Ottawa Centre. I need to remind this Synod that parishes do not leave the Diocese. Sadly, some individuals elect to move on while parishes remain within the Diocese subject to all rights and privileges of the Diocese living under the Constitution, Canons and Regulations of the Diocese. Many of you, I know, are wondering what is to come of these communities. I assure you that everything will be done to provide pastoral care for those members wishing to continue their faith journey as members of the Diocese and under the pastoral oversight of the Bishop of Ottawa. As well, it is my fiduciary responsibility and consistent with my oaths of office to guard and care for all property held in the name of the Diocese. Ownership of the properties of St. Alban's and St. George's has not nor will they ever be transferred to the Province of the Southern Cone! You also need to know that hours have been devoted to dialogue with these parishes. I assure you that I will take every step necessary to guard the history, heritage and memories attached to these wonderful parish communities - it is my responsibility.

Synod 2007 adopted a motion *requesting the Bishop grant permission for clergy, whose conscience permits, to bless duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where at least one party is baptized; and that he authorize an appropriate rite and guidelines for its use in supportive parishes.*

For a year now I have reflected on how I should respond to the mind of Synod. I have prayed for God's guidance, sought the counsel of fellow Bishops, and listened carefully to all who have spoken from various perspectives. In forming my response to this motion I have been strengthened in my conviction that God remains faithful in guiding His Church to the truth, that our chief call on this matter is a pastoral one, and that we are challenged to proclaim a prophetic voice to the Church and the world.

When we gather at Synod, we pray that our church will be guided by the Spirit of God. I believe God is faithful to us in this and as we discern how to proceed, the decisions we make, informed and shaped by healthy debate and conversation, are the result of the leading of that same Spirit for which we have prayed.

With the benefit of scientific and medical knowledge we know sexual orientation is a given and a gift from God in the lives of all people. Our challenge is to determine how all persons may rejoice in and celebrate this God given gift so it honours our creator and gives dignity to the creatures of God. I believe our dealing with the issues of human sexuality is fundamentally a pastoral matter. How is God calling us to proclaim the gospel, the good news of Jesus, to those whose sexual givenness has resulted in their marginalization and has often made them victims in their communities, families, and churches?

I am mindful that we do not normally act in isolation. The question of blessing same-sex civil marriages is before our sister and brother Christians in many Dioceses and provinces of the Church. My observation of how various parts of the church deal with the question leads me to believe we will not go forward at the same pace nor in uniformity. At the Lambeth Conference this summer the Bishops of the communion articulated a strong desire that we remain together as a communion. Equally strong were convictions held on all sides of human sexuality issues. Moratoria emerging from Lambeth, while reflecting a majority view, hold neither the command of consensus nor the proscriptive authority of legislation. In other words, it appears that a majority of Bishops desire a moratorium but a legislative motion or decision has yet to be taken. As well, majority support for a moratorium was not evident among the Bishops from Canada, the United States, South Africa, Brazil, Scotland, Ireland and the Congo to name just a few provinces. At this juncture I believe some are being called to speak with a prophetic voice, challenging long held assumptions, unseating prejudices, and advocating on behalf of those whose circumstances do not permit them to advocate for themselves. Others are being called to speak with a voice of caution calling the Church to evaluate and test all positions with the long-standing, three-fold reliance on tradition, reason, and scripture. While the prophetic voice and the voice of caution may not find a common place within the Church from which to speak they can both be embraced within the breadth of the body of Christ. For reasons, perhaps known only to God, I believe we, in the Diocese of Ottawa, are among those who have been called by God, to speak with the voice of a prophet. Synod 2007 reflects this communal desire. It is our voice that is called to affirm that all people are loved, valued and precious before God and the Church. It is our voice that is called to affirm that all unions of faithful love and life-long commitment are worthy of God's blessing.

It is my intention to place before the Canadian House of Bishops, next week, my prayerful hope regarding the issue of "blessings." It is important that I honour the collegiality of the Canadian House; we are, after all, an episcopally led and Synodically governed church. It is my intention at this meeting to discuss my hope which includes my desire to make the following statement: *That, we, in Ottawa, begin to explore experientially, the blessing of duly solemnized and registered civil marriages between same-sex couples, where at least one party is baptized; to charge the Doctrine and Worship Committee with the responsibility to develop an appropriate rite for this blessing. Upon the authorization of a rite, I will give my permission for one parish within the Diocese to offer the blessing of civil marriages between same-sex couples.*

*Discernment continues!* This hope is not and must not be understood as a conclusive statement affirming that the church must and ought to proceed with the blessings of same-sex civilly married couples. As the church was not able to come to a clear mind regarding the benefits of the ordination of women to the priesthood until the church experienced the priestly ministry of women, so we must take the process of discernment to a place beyond discussion. We have talked about this issue since I was a seminary student in the mid seventies. In order to further the discernment process, we must “experience” the issue as church before clarity of heart and mind might be attained. For this reason, I hope to proceed, but slowly and cautiously. This would be an initial step from which we can observe and learn. If we are to interpret our scriptures using prayerful reason in interpretation and application as generations before us; most especially on matters that reflect a historical context and appear inconsistent with a scriptural mandate e.g. divorce, slavery, usury or the role of women, then, we must engage discernment fully and completely. What I propose will allow for a continuation of our discernment process without obligation or a non-negotiable commitment. Our process will allow ourselves to be better informed as we go forward to General Synod 2010 where this issue will be discussed again.

Within one month following the completion of the House of Bishop’s meeting next week, I will make a conclusive statement to the Diocese regarding next steps.