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A Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Fredericton Concerning Proposed Amendments to Canon XXI of the Anglican Church of Canada (The Marriage Canon). First Reading Carried at the Meeting of the General Synod Held in Toronto, July 7th – 12th 2016.

July 13, 2016

Dear Friends,

I have taken a day to reflect upon the events of the last two days of the General Synod before writing this letter to you. As you may have heard there was a good deal of confusion about the vote caused by an error with the voting coding. My first task is to explain that to you before I go to the implications of the passing of the motion.

Members of Synod discussed the amendments to Canon XXI on three separate occasions. On Friday evening there was an introduction to the Canon by various people which was followed by discussion in small groups. Then on both Saturday and Monday there were similar discussions in larger groups. Later on Monday the Synod began the formal debate and that evening a vote was taken.

In order for the motion to pass, a two thirds majority was required in each separate house of the Synod. This is the case because it is the changing of a Canon. As with our Diocesan Synod there are three houses: Laity, Clergy and Bishops. When the result was published on the floor of Synod it was found that the motion had passed by the required majority in the Houses of Laity and Bishops, but failed by less than 1% in the House of Clergy. There was then a motion brought to the floor to have the result “reconsidered” - that was denied after some discussion. Consequently, we left the floor of Synod on Monday evening thinking the motion had failed. You may have seen the media coverage.

The Synod voted using electronic means. During Tuesday's business various questions were raised about the accuracy of the computer system. A motion was moved and carried for the printed record of who voted and how to be given to the Synod. Seven paper copies were provided and an electronic version was published on the Synod app for all members to access.

Two issues emerged from this process. Some votes in favour of the resolution in the House of Clergy had not been recorded. In the end it was another issue which caused the decision of the evening before to be overturned. Each member of Synod was given an electronic "clicker" to vote with. What was discovered was that a mistake had been made with the information given to the computer company for the coding of the "clicker" belonging to the Venerable Michael Thompson, the General Secretary of Synod. His code registered him as a non-voting member of clergy, rather than a voting member of the House of Clergy. His vote was then placed in the House of Clergy. This resulted in the two thirds threshold being reached in each house. As a result, the Amendments to Canon XXI were passed on first reading.

I am sorry for this long explanation, but I wanted to be sure that you understand what happened. My comment on this is that this was extremely difficult for all concerned. Those in favour of the change were deeply upset on Monday evening, as were many opposed when the change happened on Tuesday.

What are the implications for the Diocese of Fredericton? Firstly, I want to acknowledge that no matter which way the vote had gone there would have been hurt and there is now hurt for many who are opposed to the changes. I also fully understand that we are not united as a Diocese on this matter and we need to listen to each other. I am the Bishop to everyone in the Diocese and will make myself available to you as I am able. That being said, I will be on Vacation from Wednesday July 20th until August 13th.

What we all need to appreciate is that the changes to Canon XXI have not finally been approved by the General Synod - that cannot happen until its second reading in 2019, the next scheduled meeting. Until then all Dioceses have been asked to enter into a study of same sex marriage in preparation for 2019. It is my intent to enable this to happen. As it is, the Marriage Canon of our Church remains unchanged.

It is my plan that there will be a meeting of the members of our Synod in the Fall (probably September) and details of this will be made known as soon as they are available. As your Bishop I will not authorize same sex marriages in this Diocese during the next 3 years in line with the requirements of the General Synod resolution.

As those of you who watched the “live stream” of the debate will know, I spoke against the motion and you should know I voted against it. I wish you all to understand that I voted as I did for two reasons: my understanding of the nature of Marriage; and my concerns for some of our indigenous peoples and allied to this, issues around the Anglican Communion.

As a pastor it is my belief that everyone should be included in the life of our Church and I have to say that at a personal level I am still coming to terms with the implications of all that has happened this week. I will be better able to comment when I have had more time for further reflection.

As you are aware during my short episcopacy I have tried to help us all to concentrate on matters of mission. I still believe we have to do this and it is my intention to redouble our efforts. I would ask those who feel uncomfortable (there are people both in favour and opposed to the changes) to bear with us. We do not know what the future holds and I ask that we stay together for the sake of the Gospel.

I want to thank our General Synod delegates for their diligence both before and during Synod. We spent a good deal of time together and were very supportive of each other in sometimes trying circumstances.

I ask that we now turn to prayer as we discern ways forward. It is the only place where I think we can go. Jesus is Lord!

In His Name,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Frederickson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name "David".

David