



The Diocese of Rupert's Land

The Right Reverend Donald Phillips,
Bishop of Rupert's Land

Discipleship: *Discovery, Development, Deployment*

Feast of All Saints

Nov. 1, 2012

To: The members of Synod and all members of the Diocese of Rupert's Land
From: Bishop Donald Phillips
Re: Concurrence of Resolution B-3 of the 111th Diocesan Synod, Oct. 18-20, 2012

Dear Members,

On Saturday October 20, 2012, the meeting of Diocesan Synod passed the following resolution (B-3) as an amended Resolution B-9 from our 2008 meeting of Synod. I withheld concurrence at that time.

Resolved that this Synod request the Bishop to allow clergy, whose conscience permits, to bless the relationship between same-sex couples whose union has been duly solemnized and civilly registered, where at least one party is baptized, in parish churches whose members have, by resolution, authorized such ceremonies to take place; and to authorize rites for such blessings.

Please accept this Memorandum as my concurrence with this resolution of Synod. While further work will need to be done on how this can be implemented in our Diocese, based on this motion my understanding is:

1. Only clergy "whose conscience permits" will be expected to offer such blessings.
2. This "blessing" is a pastoral act, not a wedding rite.
3. Same-sex couples who desire this blessing must have had their union "duly solemnized and civilly registered" to avoid offering a blessing that would not be given to hetero-sexual couples. (i.e. common-law relationships)
4. Parishes must first have determined, by a formal resolution, the desire of the parish to have such blessings take place in the parish.
5. The requirements to be met and the form by which such blessings occur needs to be determined and authorized by the bishop.

Commentary

Judging by the response of some at our Synod and since that time, it is apparent that the bishop's decision to withhold concurrence came as a surprise. In fact, across the Dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada, this has not been an uncommon practice (at least initially) – particularly on this issue. In the Diocese of New Westminster, which first initiated this development in our Church, the bishop withheld consent (in spite of the resolution passing with a majority) on two successive meetings of Synod (1998 and 2000) before finally giving his consent in 2002. These past twelve days have given me the opportunity to consult with members of both the National and Provincial Houses of Bishops, as well as with leaders within our Diocese. I am now settled that it is pastorally appropriate to proceed with concurring with this resolution of our past Diocesan Synod. Thank you for your patience during this time. I ask for intentional care and sensitivity for all of the disciples of this Diocese as we work at faithfully living and ministering together with this diversity of understanding and practice.

Yours in Christ,

Donald Phillips, Bishop

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