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Bishop of Ottawa

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*With God's grace, the mission of our ministries  
is to enable people to know Jesus Christ,  
to live and share the good news,  
to grow in faith and to serve God's world.*

**A note to the clergy of the diocese regarding the actions taken by me at General Synod 2016, specifically regarding the same-sex marriage debate and motion:**

This note is not to be treated as a formal pastoral letter to the clergy of the diocese. It is for your information only and while it is addressed to you, please feel free to circulate as you see fit using your best judgment.

It is most important for you to realize that decisions made by me were not spontaneous and “of the moment,” and, I did not act alone.

While I have been working with the gay and lesbian community since 1979 (a very long time), I do believe that the debate at our recent General Synod was not in fact just about same-sex marriage. Same-sex marriage was certainly the presenting issue, but what I believe was really happening was that the Church was, and is, deciding how it will behave and act over the next couple of decades. Are we going to be an open, welcoming and transparent church, or are we going to batten down our practice, build walls, and try to preserve what some believe to be the purity of the Anglican Church? Needless to say, I acted in a manner that opted for the former. We cannot define ourselves by who it is we exclude. I do not believe in my heart that this is what Jesus would want from us. As an individual in the church, my opinion is just one of many. As a bishop it is different. My role as defined by our liturgies and theology, is to function as the primary teacher and guardian of the faith for all those entrusted to my care – people like you and hundreds of others. It is indeed my learned opinion, supported in theology and practice, that all people should have access to the sacraments of the Church.

All this being said, it is also important to know that clergy are not obligated to officiate at a same-sex marriage. Clergy in the Diocese of Ottawa may choose not to participate if that is what their conscience dictates.

On the matter of my letters to the diocese, may I offer you this? The Anglican structure is created in such a way that every bishop is given sole responsibility for their diocese. I have the right and the responsibility to make those decisions that I believe will benefit the spiritual well-being of the diocese. And, just to be sure about our governance, on behalf of all the bishops, our Primate asked the National Church Chancellor to provide for him, and thereby all of us, a legal opinion on this matter. The Chancellor did so and concluded that each bishop has the authority to function, in pastoral matters such as the current question of marriage, as they believe to be right and correct. Some have noted that the motion identified a canonical matter and thereby subject to more careful attention by the whole church. Here it is important to realize the following. The motion to revise the marriage canon, placed before us at GS 2013, was presented in the very last minutes of the Synod. Unfortunately, it was not scrutinized as carefully as one would hope. Had it been examined carefully, it would have been realized that the wording of the present marriage canon contains no prohibition to perform same-sex marriage. Additionally, The Chancellor noted the following,

The concept of *jus liturgicum*.

*Jus liturgicum* is the historical ability of a bishop to “fill in the gaps” — to provide an authorized liturgical usage in the diocese where no authorized liturgy already exists.

In other words, the matter ceased to be a canonical concern but rather a pastoral concern.

While canonically I was making a pastoral decision that I have the right to make, any decision that I make must rest well within the theological teaching of our church. *This Holy Estate*, the published document that was prepared by a number of scholars and pastors for our Primate and the whole church, as well as other theological work over the years, recognizes the struggle that is before the church regarding same-sex marriage but also recognizes that a way forward is not an impossibility. In fact, a way forward is defensible and some might suggest proper. Our church often engages in “experiential discernment.” We have engaged this method of discerning the Spirit of the living Jesus often throughout our history; this matter of same-sex marriage is yet another example.

Now, even though I have the right, and I would suggest the responsibility, to act in the manner in which I did, it is also important to know that I did *not* act alone. That would be foolish and irresponsible. You will soon realize that many of the so-called “urban dioceses” have made a similar decision to what I outlined in my letters, both when the motion was defeated, and when the motion passed. While I could wait three years for the second and affirming vote at General Synod 2019, I decided, in concert with most other urban dioceses that I would proceed and offer the sacrament of marriage to all people immediately. It is important in my mind not to wait any longer. Bolstered by a strong two-thirds vote in each House, sound theological inquiry, deep personal prayer and study, and canonical support, all who seek the sacraments of the church must be accommodated and accommodated now. After all, this is a right that I have been striving to achieve for our LGBTQ brothers and sisters in Christ since 1979. No one could ever accuse me or the Church of rushing.

I also realize that in the minds of some, the actions taken by our National Church, and more specifically the Diocese of Ottawa, might threaten our bonds of affection with the International Communion. It is important to note that a significant *majority* of our international sister dioceses do not support the consecration of women bishops. As well, a significant *majority* of our sister international dioceses do not support the ordination of women priests or the remarriage of divorced persons. The Canadian Church has often been a leader in how we evolve as an inclusive Church. I believe the matter of same-sex marriage is similar and the Communion will survive as it always has; this is yet another very significant divisive issue and we will, as a Communion, work through it as we always do. Be assured that I do not take this matter lightly. After all, I have been intimately involved in the Canadian-African Dialogue for seven consecutive years. These are the matters we discuss as we struggle to understand each other and find a way forward - very hard but necessary work. In any event, I will maintain and support the fact that the Anglican Church of Canada, and indeed the Diocese of Ottawa, have both made the right decision.

You already know but I will say it again, our delegates were extremely conscientious, articulate, attentive, and contributed to the discourse in a manner that would make you proud. They spoke and acted sensitively to all of the issues presented at General Synod 2016. I am deeply grateful.

*The Rt. Rev. John H Chapman*  
*9<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Ottawa*  
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