

The following is a response to the St. Michael's Report. They represent the views of the people of the "Double "A" Parish, a two point parish in Medicine Hat and Redcliff. Although the comments are submitted as one separate document, the two congregations met independently for discussion and discernment and came to the following conclusions.

1. We are in agreement with the conclusion of the St. Michael's report that the blessing of same sex unions is a matter of doctrine. We uphold and recognize committed, same sex unions to be of the nature and character of marriage.
2. We are in agreement that this falls within the scope of adiaphora doctrine, and that it **should not** be a Communion breaking issue. However, we also understand that if the Canadian Church makes provision for the blessing of same sex unions in its liturgies, that **it will** in fact be a Communion-breaking issue. We also feel that those churches that understand themselves as "Confessional" will separate.

We do not want to see this, and sympathize with those churches throughout the Worldwide Anglican Communion that must deal with volatile political, social and religious factions as a result of such a decision. We also sympathize with our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters in those countries (including our own) who are subject to discrimination, bigotry, hate crimes and human rights violations as a result of their sexual orientation. We do not feel this should stop the Canadian Church from moving ahead on this decision, if that is in fact where the Spirit is calling us.

3. On the issue of paragraph 16: We uphold Anglican unity as precious, noble and meaningful to our history and traditions. We value it highly. However, we also recognize Anglican unity to be a human construct and an expression of a particular religious, political and cultural experience. We believe that where the question of unity is concerned, that it is more important to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world, with its message of love, hope and healing, than it is to proclaim historic agreements. We trust that despite our differences, we continue to be united in Christ through the mystery of our baptism in ways which transcend human boundaries of understanding.

We hope and pray that our church leaders throughout the world will refrain from accusations that some are "walking apart" and that those who stand accused will not relinquish our heritage or role in the global community. It is the opinion of this worshipping community, that in affirming same sex blessings, we are walking "not apart, but with" Christ, who welcomed all into his presence.

We recognize that it is a frightening prospect to consider the conflict and possible break with the Worldwide Communion that might happen, but we encourage our leaders to remember that the Christian journey often takes us into wilderness places that are desolate, frightening and dangerous. It is not unreasonable to assume that this might be paralleled in the wider Church.

4. We recognize with concern, that within churches locally and further a-field, there is a disconnect between usage of the terms: "*heterosexual lifestyle*" and "*homosexual or gay lifestyle*." That is: the former does not exist and is not subject to defense, whilst

the latter is used almost exclusively in a “*love the sinner, not the sin*” dialogue. The real life consequences, which we are not prepared to accept are that it justifies the need to differentiate, cure, change or otherwise stop/repress or ignore that aspect of a person’s identity as though it were a separate reality from that person’s sense of being. Recognizing that sexuality is a profound experience of personhood, we do not believe attitudes which reflect or support this approach are consistent with the wholeness to which God would call us.

In all cases, we observe the human cost is devastating: People who feel pressured to enter into marriage for the wrong reasons are inevitably harmed. Youth feeling drawn to seek acceptance, who leave the support of home and community are at higher risk of exposure to a transient lifestyle, including homelessness, hunger, drugs, STDs and victimization by sexual predators. Values which are sanctioned in the Church or wider culture, can and do contribute to generally accepted distinctions which are often experienced as cruel and hurtful by the recipients.

We cannot hold the Church solely responsible for the ills of the world or even of our own little communities of Medicine Hat & Redcliff, but neither do we feel it acceptable that the Church couch even unintentional bigotry and human rights violations under the guise of religious certainty – here or anywhere else. We make this statement not to judge the hearts of fellow Christians whom we believe to be sincere, but to call the church to responsible action and internal examination, begging forgiveness for any religious certainty we ourselves might have as to how this is understood.

Upholding a certain truth: “*the opposite of love is not hate but apathy,*” we feel the church needs to embrace its mission and reflect that to the culture by boldly valuing the worth of all persons, without prejudice, in the life and sacraments of the Church. This is the greatest love statement we can make.

In simple terms for the purposes of this paper, we recall and celebrate that Jesus ate, drank and was crucified with outcasts and sinners for having challenged the religious and political authorities of his day. We recognize that Jesus died for our sins, but also that his crucifixion shines a light onto our own communal sin and shame – amongst them the human assumption of the right to crucify the son of God or any child of God. We celebrate the truth of the risen Christ in the wholeness, healing and indeed restoration of both the body and the spirit. As Anglican Christians, we do not feel called to be the religious authority that condemns the one who is different, but rather we feel we are called upon to step out of the crowd to help carry that cross so that having journeyed to death, the truth of the living God can be revealed.

We believe that the Holy God, who pours his spirit out upon the earth is best understood, not simply by creeds, doctrines, and agreements but by a life lived in the fullness of the mystery of God and the risen Christ. This includes the work and people of the “secular” world where lives are dedicated to healing, wholeness, understanding and education which leads to a more compassionate and merciful world. This is not a blanket statement in support of secularism, but one that calls us to recognize that the will of God may be discerned and revealed beyond the boundaries of the church, and especially in those institutions and ethics which evolved from Christendom.

We trust that God's grace abounds in lives lived authentically.

5 We are thankful that the church has taken seriously the question of the blessing of same sex unions. We believe that it is unlikely that there will be a unified response in any foreseeable future. In agreement with the assessment of the St. Michael's Report authors, we do not believe the matter can be resolved through scriptural interpretation. Alternatively, we trust that the voices calling out for a pastoral response will not be silenced in the name of unity or if there is no resolution. We feel that the church, while working on this issue with integrity and pastoral concern, has also in some ways diminished and further marginalized the experiences of our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters.

We prayerfully submit that General Synod approve the blessing of same sex unions as a Local Option and allow individual communities to respond as called, trusting not only that God works in God's time, but that God also gives us the time we need to work through what we need to.

We feel that while the Local Option would create difficulties, this cannot be avoided. We would welcome it as a chance for the church to move on to what we feel are more important things, such as child hunger and homelessness. Theologically, there can be no discernment without action and history.

We believe that it is imperative that the corporate life of the church needs to be consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not believe that Jesus would have the difficulty with this that his many disciples in the Anglican Church today do. We believe that where there is affirming mutual love and lives lived in wholeness, authenticity and integrity, that God is already present in that relationship.

Respectfully Submitted.

The Vestry and People of the Double A Parish

All Saints Anglican Church, Medicine Hat, AB

Bill Wahl (Rector's Warden)

Judy Howe (People's Warden)

St. Ambrose Anglican Church, Redcliff, AB

Eldean Parnell (Rector's Warden)

Eldon Fischer (People's Warden)

Rev. Ronda Ploughman, BA., M.Div.
Priest-in-Charge
Double "A" Parish
All Saints Church, Medicine Hat
St. Ambrose Church, Redcliff
Anglican Diocese of Calgary

April 19, 2007