



News release

Love is patient: the oldest Anglican parish in Canada performs its first same-sex wedding

ST. JOHN'S, Nov. 19, 2019 – When Susan Green and Brenda Halley chose the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in St. John's, Nfld. as their church 12 years ago, they were destined to become part of history. On Nov. 2 this year, theirs was the first same-sex wedding to be performed in the oldest Anglican parish in Canada, the second Anglican parish in Newfoundland and Labrador to do so.

Green and Halley, both social workers, have been together for 18 years, and became parishioners at the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Baptist because they loved how worship feels in its beautiful space. They knew the church was friendly to gay people because one of the church leaders, a deacon, is openly gay and was accepted by the church community.

"The cathedral is an interesting blend of history and tradition, modernity and progression," said Susan Green. "It is vibrant and forward-facing while also respecting and celebrating its history and roots."

The couple had originally planned to marry when same-sex marriage became legal in Canada in 2004. However, they decided to wait until they could marry in the Anglican Church. From 2004 onwards, they served as vocal activists for equal marriage in the Anglican Church, writing letters, giving speeches, and engaging in debates.

Ven. Roger Whalen, Archdeacon and rector of the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, says the road to the momentous milestone of Nov. 2 was long and complicated, but clearly worth the wait.

"Our diocese decided not to move forward until same-sex marriage was approved by the Anglican Church of Canada," said Whalen. "Approval had to be given at two consecutive general synod meetings. These are meetings of representatives from each diocese in the Anglican Church of Canada, which take place every three years."

Same-sex marriage received a majority vote during the 2016 synod but, in July 2019 in Vancouver, it was narrowly defeated in the House of Bishops. As a result, instead of approval at the national level, permission was given for each diocese to make its own decision regarding same-sex marriage. On Sept.

28, the Anglican Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland & Labrador held a synod where an 88 per cent majority vote decided to allow same-sex marriage.

With that victory, Green and Halley started making wedding plans right away.

Their wedding day was a beautiful and heartfelt event, marked by a procession of clergy who had been the couple's allies from the start, and the waving of tall white streamers by friends in loving support of the occasion.

"The church was full of love and happiness," said Brenda Halley. "We especially loved when our archdeacon invited all of the children to come to the front and sit around Susan and I while we exchanged our vows."

Green was moved by the moment when her dad, a retired Anglican priest who waited a long time to see the acceptance of equal marriage in their church, read the prayers of the people.

"At the end of the service, the applause was endless. There was so much joy in the church!" added Green.

Green and Halley were thrilled to finally receive the sacrament of marriage and are proud of all the hard work that led to this celebration. They are humbled by the wonderful friends and allies who have been part of their journey.

"We recognize that many of the rights and privileges we enjoy today as a same-sex and now married couple are the result of many courageous advocates, leaders and feminists who came before us. This is something we want to remember and want our children to understand," said Halley.

The couple's three children have been baptized in the Anglican Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. The couple believes their job as parents is to introduce them to their beloved faith and encourage them to use their own minds and hearts in the development of their spirituality, including when it comes to dealing with people who are resistant to same-sex marriage.

"As people of faith, we try our best to recognize the good in all people and to understand the root causes of homophobia. We teach our children to understand the challenges that families like ours sometimes face," added Green. "Regarding those who continue to oppose it, I have found that hearts and minds are most often changed when we truly take the time to listen and get to know one another."

"I have been a priest for 16 years and I have been waiting that long to be allowed to preside at a same-sex wedding because I believe it is right," said Whalen. "Susan and Brenda's wedding was a spirit-filled and love-filled experience - it was an absolute joy!"

Both the couple and Whalen hope this renewed spirit of acceptance within the church will help inspire [donations](#) to fund repairs for the aging structure, the current building having been rebuilt in 1905 after the original church, completed in 1885, was damaged by the Great Fire of 1892. Established in 1699, the Parish of St. John the Baptist is the oldest Anglican Parish in Canada.