

Bishops seek "pastoral generosity" in addressing same-sex marriage

Episcopal bishops in the six states that have legalized same-sex marriage are asking the Church's General Convention to "permit the adaptation of the Pastoral Offices for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage and The Blessing of a Civil Marriage for use with all couples who seek the church's support and God's blessing in their marriages."

The legislation is being proposed by Bishop Stephen T. Lane of Maine. Sponsors include: Bishops Andrew Smith, Laura Ahrens and James Curry of Connecticut; Bishop Alan Scarfe of Iowa; Bishops Thomas Shaw, Roy Cederholm and Gayle Harris of Massachusetts; Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire and Bishop Thomas Ely of Vermont.

The [full text of Resolution B012](#), Pastoral Generosity in Addressing Civil Marriage, follows:

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring, That this 76th General Convention of the Episcopal Church acknowledge the pastoral concerns facing those dioceses in states where the civil marriage of same gender couples is legal; and be it further

Resolved, That in those dioceses, under the direction of the bishop, generous discretion is extended to clergy in the exercise of their pastoral ministry in order to permit the adaptation of the Pastoral Offices for The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage and The Blessing of a Civil Marriage for use with all couples who seek the church's support and God's blessing in their marriages; and be it further

Resolved, That in order to build a body of experience for the benefit of the church, each bishop in those dioceses where this pastoral practice is exercised provide an annual written report on their experience to the House of Bishops each March and to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music for its report to the 77th General Convention.

EXPLANATION

There are now six states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont) where the civil marriage of same gender couples is legal, and other states may follow in the coming triennium. This has created unique pastoral challenges for The Episcopal Church because the definition of marriage held by these states and the language used in the Canons and the Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church is not the same. In all six states, faithful Episcopalians are asking that their church provide the pastoral support and blessing of the church for their marriages. Clergy in those same states are caught between the authority given them by the state and the discipline of The Episcopal Church as it's currently described. The rubrics of the BCP require that "marriage conform both to the laws of the state and the canons of the Church (BCP, 422)."

This situation requires a generous and flexible response that offers clergy the ability to make appropriate pastoral decisions in consultation with the bishop and their members. There may be many clergy and

congregations that have no desire to participate in the blessing of a civil marriage. But in those places where there is such a will, the freedom to explore that option is vital.

The Book of Common Prayer makes provision for special devotions that may be used when services in the Prayerbook do not address the needs of the congregation (BCP, 13). Such devotions are subject to the direction of the bishop.

There is also a need for the Church to hear the experience of those dioceses and congregations where good faith efforts are being made to respond to the pastoral needs of faithful same sex couples. This resolution would create annual reporting to the House of Bishops, with a summary report to be made to the 77th General Convention.

While this resolution addresses the special circumstances in states with full marriage equality, there is also a need to support other efforts to provide pastoral care (including blessings) to same sex couples in all dioceses of The Episcopal Church.

See yellow highlighted comment below.

Posted by Jim Naughton on June 24, 2009 7:25 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Dig this](#)

COMMENTS (6)

Oh, I don't know. There probably should be study or two or a hundred, delaying and obfuscating our missional Incarnational presence on earth. We wouldn't want the church to take the lead in justice. Just wouldn't be proper.

(Editor: Feel free to delete my comment; I apologize for the sarcasm. Few things in Episcopal circles have made me as cynical as the existence of a sub-committee with members hidden in anonymity providing foot-dragging "study" as we corporately sacrifice doing what is right upon the altar of pseudo-unanimity. I have to believe we have a higher calling, but apparently difficult lessons of history are lost upon us. I have apparently set my expectations too high.)

Posted by Kevin Johnson  | June 24, 2009 7:52 PM

Don't despair. It will all work out. Nobody said it would be easy or smooth, but it will work out. I believe that.

Posted by Peter Pearson  | June 24, 2009 9:01 PM


This resolution is so reasonable on its face I don't see how it can generate controversy (though of course it will). We have six states where the laws of civil marriage and the Canons and BCP don't agree. Surely this does create pastoral problems in those six states. How can General Convention oppose allowing the affected dioceses to make some adjustments?

The reporting requirement seems reasonable too: tell us what's happening and how it's working out.

Maybe we don't have to deal with the global issues of same-sex marriage; let's deal with the real pastoral issues in the affected states. Bishop Lane and colleagues have asked us for a reasonable response to changing laws, which affect their parishioners. How can we not give them one?

Posted by Josh Thomas  | June 25, 2009 12:12 AM

There is only one problem with this: it violates the Marriage Canons. Now, GC could change the marriage canons (as has been proposed at least once before) but using the marriage rite for same-sex unions would seem to violate the already existing canon. Not that we pay attention to canons we don't like anyway, witness the Communion of the Unbaptized....

Posted by Tom Sramek, Jr.  | June 25, 2009 1:29 AM

"Problem," Tom? That's the REASON for this Resolution!

This has created unique pastoral challenges for The Episcopal Church because the definition of marriage held by these states and the language used in the Canons and the Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church is not the same.

JC Fisher

Posted by tgflux  | June 25, 2009 3:06 AM

Posted for Richard Nolan:

In the meantime, in those states one may be married now in a Christian Service led by clergy of another Church or a secular officiant. Our wedding (at age 72, after being a couple for 53 years) in the Trinity College Chapel on June 4th was perfect - for us - during our Trinity Class's 50th reunion. A UCC minister officiated in an adaptation of the Book of Common Prayer rite, and two Episcopal priests assisted. Some of our reasons for marrying at this time and the order of Service are accessible via the wedding rings icon at www.nolan-pingpank.com . A wonderfully supportive interfaith congregation of about 70 gathered - without invitations, a formal reception, etc. Candid pictures will eventually be posted on our website. For reasons of health, this will be our final trip north. (We live in West Palm Beach.) Canon Richard T. Nolan and Robert C. Pingpank
P.S. The New York Times included our wedding among the many others on June 7th - after their inquisition re data and their "facts verification" process.

Posted by Jim Naughton  | June 25, 2009 9:38 AM