

Two Canada churches reject same-sex rites: Anglicans and Lutherans turn down proposals

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Canada's Anglican and Lutheran churches have each turned down proposals to approve ceremonies of blessing for same-sex unions.

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, meeting in Winnipeg, on June 24 narrowly defeated a resolution that would have allowed dioceses to decide for themselves whether or not to bless same-sex unions.

"There is disappointment—a lot of pain. Some people will be saying, 'How long, O Lord, how long?'" said Bishop Fred Hiltz of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, who was elected during the synod to be the denomination's new primate, or national archbishop.

Anglican lay delegates voted 78 to 59 in favor of the motion, which clergy also supported by a vote of 63 to 53. However, the denomination's House of Bishops voted 21-19 against the proposal. As a result the motion was defeated, since it required approval by each of the three groups.

"A majority of people voted in favor. I think everyone's a loser," said Bishop Michael Ingham, who in 2002 approved a same-sex blessing ceremony for his Vancouver-headquartered Diocese of New Westminster.

Meeting separately but simultaneously in Winnipeg, delegates to the convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada defeated a proposal to introduce same-gender blessings by a vote of 200 to 181. The Lutheran convention in 2005 had defeated a similar proposal.

Susan Johnson, elected June 22 as the first female national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, said she was "really disappointed" that her denomination defeated the motion on the next day.

The issue of same-gender blessings came before the churches in part as a result of Canada's Parliament making civil marriages for gay couples legal.

The two churches' highest governing bodies celebrated together the sixth anniversary of the 2001 Waterloo Declaration, which brought the two church bodies into full communion.

In advance of the Anglican vote on same-sex blessings, six retired Canadian archbishops said that a vote in favor of the rite would show "justice, compassion and hope for all God's people." At the same time, all were aware that approval of the step would put the Canadian church at odds with most of the 77-million-member Anglican Communion.

Nevertheless, the retired bishops wrote that continued discussion on the matter would detract from other issues facing the church, such as "child poverty, racism, global warming, economic injustice, concern for our aboriginal brothers and sisters, and the growing disparity between the rich and the poor." *-Ecumenical News International, Religion News Service*