

Canadian Lutherans ordain gay man in same-sex marriage: Despite stern warnings

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Despite stern warnings and threats of discipline, a Lutheran church north of Toronto has ordained an openly gay man who is legally married to another man under Canadian law.

Lionel Ketola, 45, will now serve as associate pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Newmarket, Ontario, and will also assume the nonofficial title of “ambassador of reconciliation.”

It was the first Lutheran ordination of a noncelibate gay pastor in Canada, following at least 14 such ordinations in the United States.

“It’s a privilege, but it’s about so much more than one individual,” a beaming Ketola said just before the ordination ceremony, held May 16 before a packed church. “It’s about claiming justice within the church.”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, to which Holy Cross Lutheran belongs, narrowly defeated an attempt last summer to allow churches to bless same-sex unions. It does not allow the ordination of noncelibate gay or lesbian clergy.

In the lead-up to the ordination, the bishop for the church’s eastern synod, Michael Pryse, warned that Holy Cross would face disciplinary action if the ordination and hiring of Ketola went ahead.

“I am fearful that your actions have the potential to do irreparable damage to the already fragile connecting fabric of our church,” Pryse wrote in a letter posted on the denomination’s Web site. *–Religion News Service*