

Swedish Lutherans warned by Anglicans on gay issue: A challenge for ecumenism

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Leaders of the (Anglican) Church of England have warned the (Lutheran) Church of Sweden that if it agrees to expand the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples, it risks creating “immediate and negative” consequences for ecumenical relations.

“Although there is a continuing debate among Anglicans about human sexuality, the teaching and discipline of the Church of England, like that of the Anglican Communion as a whole . . . is that it is not right either to bless same-sex sexual relationships or to ordain those who are involved in them,” wrote Church of England bishops Christopher Hill and John Hind in a June 26 letter to Swedish Lutheran archbishop Anders Wejryd, it was recently learned.

The comments from the English bishops followed a letter from Wejryd saying that the Swedish parliament is in the process of deciding on a new marriage law that will include heterosexual and homosexual couples.

“There is a majority among the bishops, in the doctrinal commission and in the central board, for expanding the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples,” stated Wejryd. “This probably also goes for the general synod.” A decision is likely to be made by the church in October.

The Church of Sweden has stated, however, that it believes the term *marriage* should be used only for heterosexual unions.

Bishop Wejryd’s letter was sent in March to churches that belong to the Porvoo Communion, an agreement between British and Irish Anglican churches and Lutheran churches in the Nordic and Baltic countries. The agreement provides for full communion between the churches, including the acceptance of each other’s

bishops, priests and deacons without reordination.

The letter was made available to Ecumenical News International during the July 15-21 assembly in Lyon, France, of the Conference of European Churches.

It stated that since 1995—and with a liturgical order since 2007—the Swedish church has offered blessings for same-sex couples in registered partnerships. However, the revision of the marriage law means that there will no longer be registered partnerships, and that there will be no way for the church to bless same-sex couples, the Swedish archbishop stated.

“The church would then only have a rite for heterosexual couples,” wrote Wejryd. In 2008 the central board of the Swedish church agreed to accept that a new law would cover both heterosexual and homosexual unions. He noted that his church “has a strict policy not to discriminate against homosexuals, and the church has already taken the most important decision, that of accepting and blessing same-sex couples.”

In response to the Swedish letter, the English bishops described as “problematic” the existing practice in the Church of Sweden of blessing same-sex relationships. They also noted that what is now being proposed “appears to be a fundamental redefinition of the Christian doctrine of marriage and of basic Christian anthropology.” *-Ecumenical News International*