

German church allows gay pastors to live with partners

by [Niels Sorrells](#)

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BERLIN (RNS) Gay and lesbian Lutheran ministers in the conservative German state of Bavaria may live with their partners in parish parsonages, but only if they enter into a state-sanctioned civil union.

Although the move may seem bold for what is generally considered one of Germany's most traditional states, Bishop Johannes Friedrich of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria said it was no great departure from existing policies.

He noted that the church had already welcomed openly gay ministers and same-sex unions. "We had only left out that a couple could live in a civil union in the parsonage," he said.

To abide by the ruling, gay or lesbian ministers must receive a church blessing for their union and enter into a civil union officially recognized by government officials.

According to church officials, six Bavarian ministers already live in same-sex civil unions.

The new ruling, announced Monday (Nov. 15), follows a series of new operating principles, known as the Magnus Consensus, that were adopted by the Bavarian church council in July.

Friedrich conceded that the new policy could cause dissent among some of the church's more conservative members.

"Over the course of time, society has become ever more liberal and open on this question, indeed much more liberal than church circles," he said. "In the meantime, I expect homosexual ministers to make their first focus on harmony in their community and church, putting it before considerations of their lifestyle."

A church group calling itself the Working Group of Avowed Christians in Bavaria (ABC) has already expressed opposition, and says it plans to seek a formal review during a state-level church synod scheduled for Nov. 21-25.

Friedrich said the authority to make the ruling lies with the state organization, and said it was important to cement this policy before synod members engage in a wider discussion on homosexuality and the church.