

Episcopal bishop says yes (and no) to gay blessings

by [Greg Garrison](#) in the [August 22, 2012](#) issue

Episcopal Bishop Kee Sloan of Alabama voted in favor of his church's new ritual for blessing same-sex unions—but he won't allow priests in his diocese to perform it.

"For the time being, I will not give permission," Sloan said. The blessing of same-gender unions is still too divisive an issue for Alabama, he said. "It's not good at this time in this place. I'm trying to avoid any further division."

Episcopalians overwhelmingly approved the new rite for same-sex couples July 10 at the denomination's General Convention. Bishops do not have to allow such rituals, however, and about ten active bishops have said they will not. The Episcopal Church has 110 dioceses in all.

Frank Limehouse, dean of the 3,400-member Cathedral Church of the Advent, Birmingham's largest Episcopal church, said his church will not "bless any sexual activity outside of a marriage between one man and one woman."

"The Bible is clear about this," Limehouse wrote on his church's website. "If anyone who declares the Bible teaches otherwise, then I wouldn't doubt his or her sincerity, but I would have to question their training in biblical interpretation."

Advocates for same-sex blessings were puzzled that Sloan supported the rites but won't allow them in his diocese.

"All of us striving for full inclusion are disappointed that he's not allowing Alabama to move forward with the national church," said Brad LaMonte, former Southeast regional vice president of Integrity, which promotes gay rights in the Episcopal Church.

"He worked on the committee that developed the rite," LaMonte said. "It's bizarre that he's not allowing it in Alabama." Sloan said he serves both the national church and a local diocese.

"When you are ordained a bishop, you are ordained for the whole church," Sloan said. "I serve the church in Alabama. I am interested in what is good for the whole church, so I voted for the

resolution.”

While he feels that Alabama is not ready to practice same-sex blessings, he wants further conversation and study of the issue, Sloan said. “Theology is an ongoing revelation,” he said. “It’s influenced by context.” —RNS