

Canada's Anglican Church provisionally approves same-sex marriage ceremonies

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TORONTO (RNS) Canada's Anglican Church has provisionally voted to amend its rules to allow clergy to celebrate same-sex marriages, a day after it narrowly defeated the measure.

The General Synod will hold a second reading on the measure in 2019. If it passes, the Canadian church will join the Episcopal Church, which formally approved marriage ceremonies regardless of gender in 2015. As a consequence, the Anglican Communion placed temporary restrictions on the Episcopal Church.

On July 11, more than 200 delegates attending the Canadian church's General Synod north of Toronto voted to reject same-sex marriage by a single vote after an emotional and divisive debate.

Some bishops, including Toronto Archbishop Colin Johnson, declared they would perform same-sex marriages despite the outcome.

"We cannot leave this synod with this kind of confusion," Archbishop Fred Hiltz, primate of the Canadian church, told stunned delegates and clergy attending the six-day synod, held every three years to establish church policy.

To pass, a resolution requires two-thirds support from each of the three orders, or bodies, within the Canadian church: laity, clergy and bishops.

On Tuesday, Michael Thompson, the church's general secretary, said the electronic voting system had miscoded his file, listing him as a lay person instead of a priest, causing the initial resolution to fail. The error was discovered after delegates requested a hard copy of the record.

The motion then passed — by one vote.

“This vote has been difficult for many, and no outcome can address all of our church’s need to live and work together,” Thompson said in a statement. “We have a long road ahead to restore our common life.”

In 2004, the church affirmed the “integrity and sanctity of committed adult same-sex relationships.” A year later, the Canadian government legalized same-sex marriage.

But the church’s work “is not done,” Hiltz told delegates. It now returns to provincial and diocesan synods for consideration and comment before the next General Synod in 2019 undertakes a second reading or vote.

Some bishops have said they will go ahead and approve same-sex marriages, citing a ruling that the church’s marriage canon does not explicitly prohibit them, said Matt Gardner, a church communications officer.

The head of the global Anglican Communion, Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, had no immediate reaction to the Canadian development, said his spokesman, Ed Thornton.

Anglican national churches in Brazil, South Africa, New Zealand, and Scotland have taken steps toward approving and celebrating same-sex relationships.