

MEDIA RELEASE

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Gay Anglicans rebuff Bishops' proposal for "pastoral care" and more study

Gay Anglicans offer mixed reviews of a [statement](#) by the Canadian House of Bishops in which the bishops claim to support "the most generous pastoral response possible" toward gay and lesbian couples while they also signal they will veto attempts to clarify the church's teaching.

Members of Integrity Canada are at turns offended, disappointed, and confused by the bishops' "possible pastoral responses" and demands for prolonged dialogue and study.

The proposed pastoral provisions are a "slap in the face of committed gay and lesbian couples," says Michelle Crawford-Bewley of Integrity Toronto. "We are relegated to second-class status in our own church."

The bishops' proposal states that because God is active in people's lives through the church's sacraments, they hope – but only hope – that same-sex couples and their children are not being denied baptism, communion, or confirmation in Anglican parishes. The bishops also repeat their 1997 affirmation of the ministry of gay and lesbian people who are ordained.

"As limited as the proposal is," observes Chris Ambidge of Integrity Toronto, "in some jurisdictions this would be an improvement. In some places children of gay parents are denied baptism, gay people are turned away from the communion rail, and the bishops know that. We'd expect them to implement their earlier policy that it is unacceptable to deny baptism to children to discipline their parents, but until then any tentative statement in that direction is welcome."

But while other church sacraments are open to gay church members, the bishops draw the line at marriage, even disallowing prayers for God's blessing on civilly married same-sex couples. Without promising any particular action, the bishops suggest that "intercessory prayers" may be allowed for gay couples who make their covenant promises elsewhere, but not a "nuptial prayer." Although official church teaching affirms the sanctity of committed same-sex relationships, the bishops insist "the doctrine and discipline of our church does not clearly permit further action."

It is unclear, however, whether the proposal offering special prayers for married same-sex couples can be taken seriously, whether this is a pastoral or a political gesture. Which bishops would actually implement this suggestion? For the conservatives it goes too far, and in most urban centres it is far too little, far too late, and only further alienates gay and lesbian people.

Integrity also notes that the bishops' statement comes just seven weeks before the triennial meeting of General Synod. The Synod has studied same-sex issues for 15 years and is prepared

to discuss resolutions allowing local dioceses to bless same-sex unions while the national church prepares for a discussion of equal marriage rites. We urge Synod delegates to support those resolutions.

Integrity Canada asks, however, if the bishops' last-minute pastoral proposal is intended to pre-empt those discussions.

“What is being presented as pastoral response seems more an attempt to derail and subvert timely and necessary discernment by the whole Church at its General Synod,” said Dr. Donald Meen, a clinical psychologist who advised the House of Bishops on issues of sexual orientation and pastoral care for gay and lesbian people in 1992.

Commenting on the bishops' request for three more years of theological study before the church again takes up the blessings discussion, Dr. Meen adds, “The statement of the House of Bishops reflects precisely what is not required at this time in the Anglican Church of Canada. Those who are genuinely interested in study of the issues around the place of gay and lesbian members of this Church have done the work over the past 30 years since the bishops first encouraged us to study this. We had a national study program over a decade ago and numerous diocesan taskforces and discussions. It is disingenuous to suggest that more study is needed.”

Ironically, during their [October 2006 meeting](#) the House of Bishops called on General Synod for “one or more significant decisions” about same-sex relationships, saying, “further inaction, or the perception of stalling, may result in widespread disobedience in many parts of our Province and possibly further impair our relationship with the Anglican Communion.”

Integrity applauded the bishops at the time for recognizing that the moratorium they imposed on same-sex blessings two years earlier in response to international pressure has diminished the church's public credibility and created a crisis of conscience for many clergy at home. Many Anglicans are finding it increasingly difficult to justify the church's continued discrimination against same-sex couples. Many have left the church, and some clergy have resigned.

Now the bishops have announced their intention to stall Synod decisions and subject the Church to at least three more years of reports and study, not about equal marriage rites but simple blessings. The validity of their prediction of widespread disobedience may now be proven, starting with the Synod meeting next month in Winnipeg.

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[Integrity Canada](#) is national network of chapters, members, and friends working toward the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life and ministry of the Anglican Church of Canada.

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