

Church of Wales to bless same-sex marriages

The Anglican Church of Wales voted overwhelmingly this week in favour of blessing same-sex marriages.

The move follows the Church of Scotlandâ??s decision to allow for same-sex marriges to be conducted in 2017. This leaves the Church of England â??the only Anglican church in Britain that neither conducts nor blesses same-sex unions,â?• The Times reports.

The vote passed 40-10 among lay persons with similar margins amongst priests (28-12) and bishops (4-0).

Whilst the move stops short of allowing same-sex marriages to be performed in the Church of Wales, the Right Rev Andy John, Bishop of Bangor, said that the change was â??a step in a journey and one that I hope will eventually lead us to marrying people of the same sexâ?•.

Wales and Scotland also join the Episcopal Church in the United States in their softening position toward the issue of church recognition of same-sex civil marriage.

In 2015 after the landmark Obergefell v. Hodges case, the Episcopal church became the largest Christian denomination in the US to recognise and perform same-sex marriages.

It is unclear what action this might provoke from Canterbury. In both the cases of the Church of Scotland and the Episcopal Church, sanctions were laid.

The Times reports, â??English bishops are considering the churchâ??s teaching on sexuality and marriage and are set to report back next year, although it is not known whether they are likely to recommend any change to the churchâ??s doctrine.â?•

The Wales decision is also in line with the Appellate Tribunal of the Anglican Church of Australia, which ruled in November last year that a same-sex marriage blessed in Wangarrata was valid.

That did not clear he way for same sex marriages to be conducted in Australian Anglican Churches, although, the 2017 declaration from General Synod â??that marriage is an exclusive and lifelong union of a man and a womanâ?• is still the position of the Anglican Church of Australia.

In a statement following the Appellate Tribunalâ??s decision, Archbishop Geoff Smith, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, said it was an important contribution to the ongoing conversation within the Church about how to respond to issues of human sexuality while reflecting Godâ??s love for all people.

â??The people of the Church hold a wide variety of opinions on these issues, considering historical teaching of the church and changes in society, and some will welcome the Appellate Tribunalâ??s opinion, while it will cause significant concern to others,â?• Archbishop Smith said.

A meeting of the General Synod is due to be held in 2021 where the Tribunal opinion is likely to be considered as part of discussions concerning the response of the church to the 2017 amendment to the Marriage Act and changing community attitudes to human sexuality.

â??The Church is a broad community made up of a great variety of people, young and old all over the country. And, this is an issue in which thereâ??s a range of opinions,â?• said Archbishop Smith.

â??We believe God loves all people including those in the LGBTI+ community and those in same-sex relationships. We are committed to reflecting Godâ??s love for them,â?• he said.

A later statement by the Australian House of Bishops acknowledged that there was not a common voice on the blessing of same sex marriages. â??With pain we recognise that there is not a common mind on these issues within the House of Bishops. Yet we are of one heart and mind in love towards those with whom we disagree and in our desire to serve Christ and see Godâ??s kingdom grow,â?• the bishops said.

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