



Where The Episcopal Church Stands on LGBT Issues

With an estimated 2.3 million members, the Episcopal Church is open and welcoming of the LGBT community. Unlike parts of the worldwide Anglican Communion, of which it is a part, the Episcopal Church does not condemn same-sex relationships. The denomination welcomes LGBT people as members, and some Episcopal dioceses permit the blessing of same-sex unions and marriages. In 2003, the Episcopal Church ordained the first openly gay bishop of a major denomination in the USA. All orders of ministry are now open to include all baptized LGBT members of the church.

The 2012 General Convention, which is the church's national governing body, was historic in the breadth and depth of support for pro-LGBT resolutions. By wide margins in many cases, the church endorsed a rite for the blessing of same-gender unions, passed new rules forbidding discrimination against transgender persons (lay or clergy), and called for the end of anti-LGBT federal policies and legislation.

Openly Gay Clergy

The Episcopal Church ordained its first openly gay priest in 1977 and, in 1994, passed a resolution explicitly affirming that gay, lesbian and bisexual people could not be refused ordination in the Episcopal Church for that reason alone. It stated:

"No one shall be denied access to the selection process for ordination in this church because of race, color, ethnic origin, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities or age, except as otherwise specified by these canons."

In 2003, it made history — and no small amount of controversy — by electing the first openly gay bishop. The Rev. V. Gene Robinson (pictured), who lives with his husband, was consecrated as bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire. While a joyous moment, the ordination led to a rebuke from the worldwide Anglican Communion the following year.

Critics of Robinson's ordination argued that the church vio-

lated Anglican Communion guidelines that oppose the ordination of non-celibate gays and lesbians, as well as the blessing of same-sex unions, and predicted that a schism would result.

In fact, in October 2004, a special committee appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the spiritual head of the Anglican Communion, released a report that rebuked the Episcopal Church for Robinson's ordination and the Anglican Church of Canada for permitting the blessing of same-sex unions. Entitled the Windsor Report, it stated:

"The Commission regrets that without attaching sufficient importance to the interests of the wider Communion:

- *The Episcopal Church (USA) proceeded with the consecration of Gene Robinson*
- *The 74th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA) declared that 'local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.'*



Bishop V. Gene Robinson

The report asked the Episcopal Church to issue an "expression of regret" that its actions had caused division within the Anglican Communion and called for a halt on both blessing same-sex unions and ordaining openly gay clergy members "until some new consensus

in the Anglican Communion emerges." It did not call for Robinson's resignation or expel the Episcopal Church from the Anglican Communion, but it did note, "There remains a very real danger that we will not choose to walk together."

The Anglican Communion recommended that the Episcopal Church refuse to approve the ordination of bishops in same-sex relationships in the future. Instead, the 2006 General Convention called for restraint in consenting to the consecration of bishops whose "manner of life" — widely understood to mean homosexuality — would cause concern for other members of the Anglican Communion. *(continued...)*

However, at the 2009 General Convention, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies passed a measure that effectively opened all orders of ministry to baptized LGBT members of the church.

The Rev. Canon Mary Glasspool, of Baltimore (pictured), was ordained and consecrated in May 2010, making her the second openly gay bishop in church history and one of the first two female bishops in the Diocese of Los Angeles' 114-year history.



Bishop Mary Glasspool

The Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson retired as New Hampshire's bishop at the end of 2012. His ministry has been documented in the award-winning film *Love Free or Die* (Auburn Media, 2012).

Same-Sex Unions and Marriage Equality

Some dioceses and many individual parishes in the church have approved and/or conducted blessings of same-sex relationships since the 1970's. A survey conducted in the 1980s showed that some form of blessing of same-sex couples had occurred in every one of the one hundred domestic dioceses of the church, though in many cases these took the form of "house blessings." The national church has had a formal policy of supporting and ministering to same-sex couples since 2000. In 2003, the General Convention, recognizing that some churches bless same-sex unions and some don't, left that decision up to the individual dioceses, stating:

"In our understanding of homosexual persons, differences exist among us about how best to care pastorally for those who intend to live in monogamous, non-celibate unions; and what is, or should be, required, permitted, or prohibited by the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church concerning the blessing of the same. ... We recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions."

At the 2009 General Convention, the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies voted to approve a measure that allowed Episcopal bishops to bless same-sex marriages at their discretion. The 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church, which said that bishops, "particularly those in dioceses within civil jurisdictions where same-gender marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships are legal, may provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs of members of this Church." The Houses also voted to begin a process of writing official liturgy for the blessing of same-sex unions.

After a thorough process of consultation and collaboration, the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music presented a Rite for the Blessing of Same-Gender Relationships at the 2012 General Convention. With the support of over 70% of

diocesan deputies and bishops, the rite was approved for provisional use by churches in dioceses whose bishop has given permission for its use.

In addition, the 2012 Convention called for a Task Force on Marriage, which will explore the theological underpinnings of the church's marriage rites and its policies and practices. The resulting report may lead to further positive movement toward full marriage equality.

Opposition to Discrimination

The church has officially prohibited discrimination against gays and lesbians since 1976. In 1985, the General Convention spoke out against hate crimes based on sexual orientation and encouraged federal officials to take action against such violence. The same year, the church publicly denounced the then-popular belief that AIDS was "the punishment of God upon homosexual persons."

In 1997, the General Convention passed a resolution apologizing for past "sins" against gay and lesbian people. It stated:

"This 72nd General Convention apologizes on behalf of the Episcopal Church to its members who are gay or lesbian and to lesbians and gay men outside the Church for years of rejection and maltreatment by the Church. ... This Church repents of its sins committed against lesbian and gay people — physical, psychological and spiritual — through covert and overt action and inaction. We seek amendment of our life together and we ask for God's help in sharing the Good News with all people."

In 2008, the General Convention passed a resolution supporting the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), inclusive of gender identity. The 2012 Convention called for the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which would pave the way for civil marriage equality.

Resolutions on Gender Identity

The 2009 General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted four resolutions addressing gender identity and transgender individuals. Two of them supported enactment of civil sector anti-discrimination and hate crimes legislation protecting transgender people at local, state, and federal levels.

In 2012, the Convention adopted — by wide margins — new canons that prevent discrimination against transgender persons in the church. The canons cover both the work of laypeople as well as people entering the ordination process.



Integrity USA is a national not-for-profit group working for full inclusion of LGBT persons in The Episcopal Church. For more information, go to www.IntegrityUSA.org.

Resources for LGBT Episcopalians

- **Integrity** is a nonprofit social and advocacy group for LGBT Episcopalians and straight allies, with approximately 2,000 current individual members, 60 chapters, and 500 allied parishes around the nation.
www.IntegrityUSA.org
- **TransEpiscopal** is a group of transgender Episcopalians and their significant others, families, friends, and allies dedicated to enriching their spiritual lives and to making the Episcopal Church a welcoming and empowering place that all can truly call their spiritual home.
blog.transepiscopal.com
- **Claiming the Blessing** is a coalition of pro-equality Episcopal organizations that has a goal of “promoting wholeness in human relationships, abolishing prejudice and oppression, and healing the rift between sexuality and spirituality in the Church.”
www.claimingtheblessing.org
- **The Chicago Consultation**, a group of Episcopal and Anglican bishops, clergy and lay people, supports the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Christians in the Episcopal Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion.
www.chicagoconsultation.org

Other supportive groups within The Episcopal Church

Oasis California	www.oasiscalifornia.org
Oasis Newark	theoasis.dioceseofnewark.org
Oasis New Jersey	oasisdnj.org
Oasis Missouri	www.theoasissmissouri.org
Oasis Michigan	www.oasisministrymi.org
Oasis Rochester	oasis.episcopalrochester.org