



Scottish Episcopal Church votes to allow equal marriage

The General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church has voted in favour of allowing gay couples to marry in church. The vote means that the Church's canon law will be changed - to remove the definition that marriage is between a man and a woman. It means that gay Christians

from any Anglican Church can now ask to be married in a Scottish Anglican Church.

A new section will be added to canon law, acknowledging that there are different understandings of marriage which now allow clergy to solemnise marriage between same sex couples as well as couples of the opposite sex. The revised canon will stipulate that no member of clergy will be required to solemnise a marriage against their conscience.

Following the vote, the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon issued the following statement:

“The churches of the Anglican Communion are autonomous and free to make their own decisions on canon law. The Scottish Episcopal Church is one of 38, soon to be 39, provinces covering more than 165 countries around the world.

“Today’s decision by the SEC to approve changes to canon law on marriage is not a surprise, given the outcome of the vote at its Synod a year ago. There are differing views about same-sex marriage within the Anglican Communion but this puts the Scottish Episcopal Church at odds with the majority stance that marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a

woman. This is a departure from the faith and teaching upheld by the overwhelming majority of Anglican provinces on the doctrine of marriage. The Anglican Communion's position on human sexuality is set out very clearly in [Resolution 1.10](#) agreed at the Lambeth conference of 1998 and will remain so unless it is revoked.

“As Secretary General, I want the churches within the Anglican Communion to remain committed to walking together in the love of Christ and to working out how we can maintain our unity and uphold the value of every individual in spite of deeply-held differences. It is important to stress the Communion's strong opposition to the criminalisation of LGBTIQ+ people.

“The primates of the Communion will be meeting in Canterbury in October. I am sure today's decision will be among the topics which will be prayerfully discussed. There will be no formal response to the SEC's vote until the primates have met.”

The three “houses” of the Scottish Episcopal Church's General Synod - Bishops, Clergy and Laity – had to vote in favour with a two thirds majority. The narrowest margin was in the House of Clergy. The results were as follows:

For Bishops (4) - 80% Against Bishops(1) – 20%

For Clergy (42) - 67.7% Against Clergy (20) – 32.3%

For Laity (50) - 80.6% Against Laity (12) – 19.4%

Responding to the vote, the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Most Revd David Chillingworth, said:

“This is a momentous step. By removing gender from our marriage canon, our church now affirms that a same sex couple are not just married but are married in the sight of God.....

“But this same decision is difficult and hurtful for others whose integrity in faith tells them that this decision is unscriptural and profoundly wrong. For them this new chapter will feel like an exclusion - as if their church has moved away from them.

“So the journey which we now begin must also be a journey of reconciliation.

“Every faith community must face the issues which are bound up with human sexuality - in their own way and in their own time. Others will arrive at answers different from ours. And the



A team from The Hub, the Church of Ireland and Methodist Chaplaincy at Queen’s University, travelled to Kampala for a two week visit to Uganda to support the work of local charities Abaana and Waakisa.

Anglican Communion, which is embedded in our history and to which we are passionately committed - the Anglican Communion will have to explore whether its historic commitment to unity in diversity can embrace this change.”

Bishop David called on the Scottish Episcopal Church to address the change with truth, graciousness and acceptance of one another:

“We shall carry forward in our life two honourable and historic understandings of marriage - one which sees the marriage of same sex couples as an expression of Christ-like acceptance and welcome - and another which says that the traditional view of marriage is God-ordained and scripturally defined. That is the journey. That is now the calling of this church.”

The vote followed a debate at Synod. Ian Ferguson of the Diocese of Orkney said introducing the change: “would be like saying Jesus got it wrong. It is beyond belief to say that Jesus was only talking to the times that he lived in. We will be disobeying Jesus; changing the doctrine of marriage is a schismatic move that will damage our relations with our sisters and brothers throughout the AC. “

Stephen Townsend of the Diocese of Aberdeen argued: “We are all agreed that this church has but one head – Jesus Christ. Are we saying that we, the body of Christ, have a different view on marriage to Christ our head? If we don’t adhere to his teaching we are not the church of Jesus Christ at all.”

However those in favour argued it was about acceptance and love. Victoria Stock of the Diocese of Edinburgh expressed the pain of exclusion she has felt in the past: “I do believe Jesus would be telling us just to get on with it. This vote isn’t about one side winning or triumphing against another. It’s about reaching out to one another.....unity is about stepping outside ourselves and seeing the other; we the Scottish Episcopal Church have something special to offer the world. We can offer generosity of heart.”

Today at the General Assembly

After 19 sessions and over 100 resolutions discussed and debated, this year’s General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), which has been meeting in Belfast this week, draws to a close today , June 9.

In discussing a number of substantial proposals that could affect the dynamic of future Assemblies, members will be asked today to consider a resolution that it is hoped will widen accessibility to future meetings from next year, by including a number of additional evenings for business throughout the week.

Members will also consider a proposal that will enable each of the denomination's 539 congregations to send an additional member, or elder, who will be aged 30 or under. This new member of Assembly will be able sit and deliberate in a move to enable younger voices to be heard at the General Assembly.

On the last day of the 2017 annual gathering of the Church's decision-making body, two Memorials will come before the House. Memorials are petitions to the Assembly, usually from some person, or body, who is not a member of the General Assembly. It is a long time since significant issues have come before the Assembly in this way.

One of the memorials concerns breaking the link between being a communicant member of the Church, recorded giving and voting within congregations. The second Memorial concerns the annual election of the Moderator and asks that more information be given on nominees to assist members of Presbytery when making their decision.

The amalgamation of two congregations: Berry Street and Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church in Belfast, and the congregation of Cloughey with Greyabbey Presbyterian on the Ards Peninsular will come before the Assembly and a revised expenses scheme for ministers will be discussed.

The Assembly's final decision will be to agree to meet in Belfast on Monday, June 4, 2018.

Details of all resolutions and reports to this year's General Assembly can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/GA2017.

Cashel inter-church pilgrims in annual St Willibrord Hopping Procession in Luxembourg

The Annual St Willibrord Hopping Procession attracts visitors from far and wide, not unlike the festive atmosphere of St Patrick's Day in Ireland. There is a consensus that Dean Tom Gordon won the hopping competition!

Pilgrims from the C of I Diocese gathered on Tuesday last with about 12,000 other Christians from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Old Catholic and Orthodox traditions to remember the life of



The Irish church leaders at Messines earlier this week when they urged elected representatives in Northern Ireland to build bridges, overcome differences, and find constructive ways forward to build on peace. They also asked that representatives “continue through the devolved Assembly to provide leadership for the good of all the people of Northern Ireland, irrespective of political or religious background, in the days, months and years ahead.”

St Willibrord and celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Firstly, the Anglicans joined the Old Catholic pilgrims to Echternach for a Service of Holy Communion. Bishop Michael Burrows played the organ to accompany the Dutch, German, Irish and local worshippers singing 'Alleluia, sing to Jesus'.

Back on the streets everyone gathered outside the Basilica of St Willibrord along with 38 other groups, each with their own bands, some brass, some not, like our our traditional Presentation Band from Carlow. Carrying white neckerchiefs between us, we hopped from one foot to the other dancing to a catchy polka through the streets of what is the oldest city in Luxembourg.

In spite of heavy rain, Irish spirits were undampened as pilgrims lined up behind the Carlow Presentation Band. RTL, the national TV broadcaster, interviewed them for the evening news.

The rain stopped just as the band struck up and the Cashel turn to process came – hopping along in formation, 5 abreast! Crowds lined the streets and residents took advantage of upstairs windows to watch the long Procession – it could have been a St Patrick's Day Parade, minus floats and vintage tractors!

Local members of the St Willibrord Foundation generously provided a fine three course lunch to the throngs of pilgrims who finished the Hopping Procession back at the secondary school refectory beside the Basilica.

“The symbolism of the Procession was powerful in the context of Pentecost. In our worship earlier, we had, like the disciples in the upper room, been emboldened by the Holiday Spirit. Like St Willibrord, we heard the words of Jesus, ‘you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth’. (Acts1:8)

Derry bishops joint visit to Iona

The Bishop of Derry, Dr Donal McKeown, and the Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, Rt Rev Ken Good, visited the Scottish island of Iona on Wednesday as part of this year’s series of joint pilgrimages highlighting their shared Christian witness and celebrating their common Columban heritage.

The bishops led a nine-strong group who travelled by aircraft, car and ferry to the island where Derry–Londonderry’s patron, Saint

Columba, died in 597. The pilgrims took part in joint worship on the island and visited Iona



Abbey – on the site of the monastery founded by St Columba after he left Ireland in the mid–sixth century. Members of the group also visited Iona’s Scottish Episcopal and Roman Catholic churches.

Saint Columba’s last recorded words – spoken to members of his community on Iona – were “Preserve with each other sincere charity and peace”. The phrase ‘charity and peace’ has been chosen by the two bishops as the theme of their joint pilgrimages during 2017 and were emblazoned on tee–shirts they wore during their trip to Iona.

The two church leaders say they are eager to heighten the profile of faith traditions in their dioceses and hope their shared witness to the Gospel will encourage reconciliation in their community. “We want to raise awareness of the long ecclesiastical history of our community,” they said, “its shared Columban narrative and rich Columban heritage.”

In a joint statement, Bishop Good and Bishop McKeown said that in undertaking this initiative and these pilgrimages, they were inspired by the example of their predecessors and building on their shared Christian identity. “Saint Columba is one of the great figures in Christian history and someone of whom Christians in the North West can be proud,” they said.

In April the bishops completed a three-day walk from St Columba’s birthplace in Gartan, in Donegal, to St Augustine’s Church in Derry–Londonderry (a distance of 34 miles) and, in September, they will undertake joint walks from Claudy to Strabane (on Thursday 14th) and Limavady to Garvagh (on Saturday 16th).

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Bishop of Kilmore dismayed by 'persecution' of Church in Ireland

Hostility to the Church in Ireland is now so ingrained in Irish culture it is contributing to the decline in vocations, Bishop Leo O'Reilly has warned.

In a strongly worded homily at a ceremony to honour the relics of St Oliver Plunkett, the Bishop of Kilmore likened the antagonism to the church to persecution and said, "people from abroad are often astonished at the level of antipathy to the Church displayed in our country".

Dr O'Reilly said on Tuesday that "The Church here is not subject to the kind of persecution that it experienced in the 17th century during St Oliver's ministry, nor as it is in many other parts of the world today. But I don't think you have to be paranoid to believe that there is a kind of persecution of the Church taking place here all the same."

Though there is no physical persecution, "it is no less real for that. It is more subtle," he warned and explained that it takes the form of gradual exclusion of Church people or activities from the public space.



“There is denigration of religious beliefs, practices and institutions on radio, television and on social and other media. There is often a focus on bad news about the Church to the almost total exclusion of any good news,” he criticised.

In tandem with this denigration, the Bishop said the Irish Church was facing “a crisis of vocations to the priesthood and religious life which is rooted in a deeper crisis of faith”

He acknowledged that part of the reason for this is the sins and failures of Church people that have caused “great scandal and undermined the faith of many”.

Another reason is the challenge of life-long priestly celibacy in “a culture that is

unsympathetic to chastity and short on long-term commitments”.

He admitted that in this kind of situation it would almost be a surprise that anyone would want to consider devoting their lives to being a priest or religious.



The funeral of Queen's University Vice-Chancellor Professor Patrick Johnston took place at St Brigid's Parish Church, in Belfast yesterday. Patrick will be laid to rest in Desertegney Cemetery in Buncrana. "Final Tribute" to the Vice-Chancellor as the cortege drives through Queen's passing the front of the Lanyon Building at the University. Photo by Arthur Allison, Pacemaker.

Today in Christian History, June 9

June 9, 68: Nero Claudius Caesar, the ruler to whom the Apostle Paul appealed for justice (Acts 25:10) and who ordered the first imperial persecution of Christians, commits suicide .

June 9, 597: Columba, Irish missionary to Scotland and founder of a monastery on the island of Iona, dies at age 76. Though more monk than missionary, he established churches that went on, in time, to evangelize the Picts and the English.

June 9, 1549: England's Act of Uniformity, passed by Parliament in January, takes effect. The act ordered that religious services be consistent throughout the country, using Thomas Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer.

June 9, 1784: Pope Pius VI names John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States, as superior of the American mission.

June 9, 1834: William Carey, often called "the father of modern Protestant missions" dies, having spent 41 years in India without a furlough. His mission could count only about 700 converts, but he had laid a foundation of Bible translations, education, and social reform. He

also inspired the missionary movement of the nineteenth century, especially with his cry, "Expect great things; attempt great things".

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