

A statement from the Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church, USA

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We find ourselves in a moment when the selection of a priest by the Diocese of New Hampshire as their next bishop has been assented to by the House of Deputies of the Episcopal Church and then by the bishops with jurisdiction. This clears the way for the Rev. Canon Gene Robinson to be ordained bishop. We are carrying out our process. We are doing the best we can as a church in a situation where we do not all agree. The particular attention given to this assent is because Canon Robinson is in a committed relationship with a person of the same sex, and because he has been honest with the community in acknowledging the reality of his own personhood as a gay man and the fact of his relationship.

Though this is a particular event and a decisive moment, it is only one moment of a lengthy process, and that is the process of discerning God's will for us, of learning from one another, and of growing up in Christ: into the fullness of Christ's calling to the whole people of God.

The assent to his consecration by bishops and deputies of the Episcopal Church will be interpreted in many ways over these next days, both because those within our household of faith are not of a common mind on issues of sexuality, and because these issues call forth a great deal of emotion. For some this is a moment of great joy and represents an affirmation of the place of gay and lesbian persons in this church. For others, the decision signals a crisis and reflects a departure from biblical teachings and traditional church practice. I hope that the inevitable passionate expressions of opinion from those with strongly held views do not drown out the quieter voices of those many persons who have not come to clarity about their own sense of what this means in the life of our church. As the overseer of this community, I would like to offer my own perspective. I will begin by quoting from remarks I made to the bishops and deputies at the outset of General Convention.

It is my own conviction that different points of view can be held in tension within the church without issues around sexuality becoming church dividing. Others may disagree but this is my firmly held opinion. This was also the view of the House of Bishops Theology Committee and of the International Anglican Conversation on Human Sexuality that I convened following the Lambeth Conference of 1998 at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This international group included twelve bishops and primates who represented a broad range of views and met over a three-year period. Their conclusion was that if matters of homosexuality were to divide the Communion, it would be, to quote from the report, "the ultimate sexualization of the Church, making sexuality more powerful, or more claiming of our attention, than God."

particular view is in accordance with Scripture, whereas the opposing view is not. There is no such thing as a neutral reading of Scripture. While we all accept the authority of Scripture, we interpret various passages in different ways. It is extremely dishonoring of the faith of another to dismiss them as not taking the Bible seriously. Let us be clear that we can all agree that, in the words of the ordination oath, "we believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation."

The confirmation of Canon Robinson honors the choice of the people of the Diocese of New Hampshire. They followed a careful and prayerful process and then elected someone who had served among them for 28 years because they believe he has the gifts and abilities necessary to offer leadership to them in the carrying out of their mission. I note here that the Episcopal Church has a long history of honoring the choices of the dioceses. I cast my own ballot in the affirmative because I see no impediment to assenting to the overwhelming choice of the people of New Hampshire.

This decision does not, in my view, resolve the issues about homosexuality in the life of the church. What it does do is place squarely before us the question of how a community can live in the tension of disagreement. So, it is now our challenge to take up the difficult and holy work of living with difference. We must live with the consequences of addressing conflict and facing squarely difficult decisions. The fact that we are willing to do this work in a public way that is honoring of one another says a great deal about who we are as a community of faith.

This is not a time for either triumph or desolation. And, our community has the particular task of reaching out to those who are unsettled by this decision. Here I would mention particularly the provinces of the Anglican Communion and my brother primates with whom I will be in conversation in the days ahead.

It is my hope and prayer that this conflict can be a gift from God, redeemed by God, and an invitation to reconciliation.

The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold
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