

Recent Actions by Other Protestant Denominations

The Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church voted to affirm the possibility of more gay bishops and blessing same-sex unions at its General Convention July 8-17, 2009, in Anaheim, Calif. The votes were a direct challenge to the Anglican Communion which had asked American Episcopalians not to take these actions. The votes were seen by Anglican leaders around the world as signaling a break with the rest of the Anglican Communion.

Anglican Communion head, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, issued a response which included the following statements:

“A blessing for a same-sex union cannot have the authority of the Church Catholic, or even of the Communion as a whole. And if this is the case, a person living in such a union is in the same case as a heterosexual person living in a sexual relationship outside the marriage bond; whatever the human respect and pastoral sensitivity such persons must be given, their chosen lifestyle is not one that the Church’s teaching sanctions, and thus it is hard to see how they can act in the necessarily representative role that the ordained ministry, especially the episcopate, requires.

“In other words, the question is not a simple one of human rights or human dignity. It is that a certain choice of lifestyle has certain consequences. So long as the Church Catholic, or even the Communion as a whole does not bless same-sex unions, a person living in such a union cannot without serious incongruity have a representative function in a Church whose public teaching is at odds with their lifestyle.”

The ELCA has been in a full-communication relationship with The Episcopal Church since 1999.

United Methodist Church

The 2008 General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted to retain its traditional teaching on marriage and on homosexual behavior. The United Methodist Church is an international church body. The votes of delegates from international churches, especially those in Africa, were credited with the decision to maintain traditional Christian teaching.

The *Book of Discipline* of the United Methodist Church states:

“We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. . . . We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.”

“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”

“While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church.”

The ELCA will consider a full-communion proposal with the United Methodist Church at this Churchwide Assembly. The proposal was approved by the UMC General Conference in 2008.

Presbyterian Church (USA)

The 2008 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to retain the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. However, the 2008 General Assembly also approved an amendment to the church’s “Book of Order” which would have deleted a requirement that its pastors and church officers live in “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.” The amendment was seen as a way to make it possible for pastors and other church leaders to be in committed same-sex relationships. The amendment failed to receive the required majority vote for ratification by local presbyteries (similar to ELCA synods) and was defeated 89-69 in 2009.

The 2008 General Assembly also appointed A Special Committee on Civil Unions and Christian Marriage to study “the history of the laws governing marriage and civil union, including current policy debates; how the theology and practice of marriage have developed in the Reformed and broader Christian tradition; the relationship between civil union and Christian marriage; the effects of current laws on same-gender partners and their children, and the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community.” The committee is currently seeking input from PCUSA members.

The ELCA has been in a full-communion relationship with the Presbyterian Church (USA) since 1997.