NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Episcopalians take historic vote for gays, lesbians

Maureen Fiedler | Jul. 16, 2009 NCR Today

I think of Episcopalians as our ecclesial "kissin' cousins," so I keep abreast of what they're doing. And this week, it's historic.

As recently as a few weeks ago, most Episcopalians were saying this vote was impossible. And then it happened. The Episcopal General Convention, meeting in Anaheim, Calif., voted overwhelmingly this week to allow openly gay men or lesbians to become priests and bishops. Today, the House of Bishops and House of Deputies take up the question of official blessing ceremonies for same sex unions.

What made this possible was the exodus of the most conservative wing of that church earlier this year. Led by conservative bishops, a few traditional congregations founded the Anglican Church in North America. With the strongest opposition gone, the Episcopal church felt free to move forward on an issue that divides practically every denomination in mainstream Protestantism and, in different ways, the Catholic church.

What is unknown now is the future status of the Episcopal church in the worldwide Anglican Communion. Bishops in many other parts of the world, especially in the southern hemisphere, are vehemently opposed to these moves, and will probably push to expel -- or at least marginalize -- the U.S. church in the Anglican Communion.

This may cause difficulty for the Episcopal church now, but within 20 to 30 years, people will wonder what all the fuss was about. The younger generation today looks at same sex-couples, and then at the troubled faces of some of their elders, and asks, "What's your problem?" This includes the majority of young Catholics.

Of course, there are hundreds of gay priests and several gay bishops in the Catholic church. Not many admit to it publicly, but everyone knows it. However, as long as there is a mandatory celibacy requirement for priesthood, it does not pose the same issue as exists in the Episcopal church, where a priest's or bishop's same-sex partner sits in the front pew, goes to church suppers and moves into the rectory.

But mandatory priestly celibacy is not likely to be with us forever (let's hope not), and so the Catholic church will ultimately face the same issue. And even now, blessing same sex unions *is* an issue for the Catholic church, and one that needs re-thinking as more and more states legalize such unions.

Source URL (retrieved on *10/21/2014 - 14:08*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/episcopalians-take-historic-vote-gays-lesbians