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Church of England to allow gay bishops -- sort of

Al Webb Religion News Service | Jun. 21, 2011

LONDON -- The Church of England has issued a set of ?legal guidelines? that pave the way for openly gay clergy to become bishops?so long as they are and promise to remain celibate.

Details of the internal report, entitled ?Choosing Bishops,? were carried by Christian Today, an independent London-based publication, on its website on Monday (June 20).

The new guidelines aim to bring church policy in line with Britain?s Equality Act, passed in 2010, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

The guidance says ?openly gay clergy can become bishops so long as they are celibate,? according to the Christian Today report. The Equality Act would not allow gay clergy to be prohibited solely because they are gay.

?A person?s sexual orientation is, in itself, irrelevant to their suitability for episcopal office,? the guidelines said, and ?it would be wrong if account were taken of the fact that a candidate had identified himself as of gay sexual orientation.?

The document continues that while the earlier guidelines ?make it clear that someone in a sexually active relationship outside marriage is not eligible? to become bishop, that does not necessarily apply to a celibate relationship.

The church makes a strong distinction between ?sexually active? and ?celibate.? As one observer put it, the new guidelines demand that gay clergy are being asked to ?make a promise that they are and will remain celibate.?

The legal advice in ?Choosing Bishops? is expected to go before the church?s General Synod when it convenes in York, England, in July.

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