

**News Focus -  
Same sex civil  
marriage begins in  
England and Wales**



*Bishop Nick Holtam says gay marriage 'embodies virtues that the Church of England wants to see maximised in society'*

## **Irish welcome for same sex marriage in England and Wales**

**Dr Richard O'Leary, Chair of Changing Attitude Ireland issued a statement on behalf of CAI welcoming the extension of civil marriage to same-sex couples.**

**The statement reads -**

As Chair of the Church of Ireland group, Changing Attitude Ireland, I welcome on behalf of our members the extension of civil marriage to same sex couples in England and Wales from 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014. In particular we

extend our congratulations to our fellow Anglicans in England and Wales on their civil marriages, with Scotland to soon follow.

We hope that marriage equality will be extended to Northern Ireland and introduced in the Republic of Ireland without undue delay. We are concerned that the many gay and lesbian Anglicans who migrate between Britain and Ireland will find that the different marriage provisions from 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014 cause legal difficulties.

As a faith group which affirms LGBT persons Changing Attitude Ireland supports marriage equality not despite its faith background but because of it, believing marriage and stable relationships to be one of the bedrocks of society.

We understand that for couples of faith marriage is also a spiritual experience. Therefore, we are delighted that in Britain the Quakers, the Unitarians and liberal Jews are willing to and permitted by law to register civil marriages on their premises in conjunction with a religious service.

We are disappointed that the Church of England has for the present declined to affirm its gay and lesbian members by its refusal to permit its premises to be used in this way or its clergy to assist at civil marriage ceremonies. We hope that in time the Church of England and the Church of Ireland will allow those individual clergy and parishes who wish to practice inclusion to be permitted to do so.

In addition we hope that the Church of England and the Church of Ireland will develop an official liturgy for the blessing of the civil partnerships or marriages of same sex couples. We are encouraged by the accommodation that has been made by the Anglican Churches for divorcees who remarry and believe that a similar accommodation of same sex couples is to be encouraged.

## **Religious Leaders Support Marriage for Same-Sex Couples**

**A number of religious leaders signed a statement in support of the marriage of same-sex couples.**

The statement was released last Friday, the day before same-sex couples could marry in England & Wales.

**The statement reads :**

We rejoice that from tomorrow same-sex couples will be able to marry in England and Wales.

As persons of faith, we welcome this further development in our marriage law, which has evolved over the centuries in response to changes in society and in scientific knowledge.

We acknowledge that some (though not all) of the faith organisations to which we belong do not share our joy, and continue to express opposition in principle to such marriages. We look forward to the time, sooner rather than later, when all people of faith will feel able to welcome this development.

### **List of Signatories:**

Revd Steve Chalke, Rabbi Danny Rich, Chief Executive, Liberal Judaism  
Derek McAuley, Chief Officer, General Assembly of Unitarian and Free  
Christian Churches, Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain,  
Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, Senior Rabbi to the Movement for Reform  
Judaism, Revd Sharon Ferguson, Senior Pastor, MCC North London

Rt Revd Alan Wilson, Bishop of Buckingham  
Rt Revd Lord Harries of Pentregarth, former Bishop of Oxford  
Rt Revd Richard Lewis, former Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich  
Rt Revd Peter Selby, former Bishop of Worcester  
Rt Revd John Saxbee, former Bishop of Lincoln  
Rt Revd Michael Doe, Preacher to Gray's Inn, former Bishop of Swindon  
Rt Revd David Gillett, former Bishop of Bolton  
Rt Revd Stephen Lowe, former Bishop of Hulme  
Very Revd Jeffrey John, Dean of St Albans  
Very Revd Jonathan Draper, Dean of Exeter  
Very Revd Mark Bonney, Dean of Ely  
Very Revd Lister Tonge, Dean of Monmouth  
Very Revd Mark Beach, Dean of Rochester

## **Parliamentary questions on Priests in same sex marriages**

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Tony Baldry) answered questions in the House of Commons last week, including [this one](#) on Same-sex Marriage (Priests).**

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab) asked: What the Church of England's policy is on priests entering a same-sex marriage; and what guidance has been given on what would happen to a priest who did so.

Sir Tony Baldry replied: Clergy and ordinands remain free to enter into civil partnerships. The House of Bishops in its pastoral guidance distributed on 15 February said that it was not willing for those in same-sex marriages to be ordained to any of the three orders of ministry—deacon, clergy or bishops—and that

“it would not be appropriate conduct for someone in holy orders to enter into a same-sex marriage, given the need for clergy to model the Church's teaching in their lives”.

As with any alleged instance of misconduct, each case would have to be considered individually by the local diocesan bishop.

Mr Bradshaw: In light of the recent Pilling report, does the right hon. Gentleman believe it would be sensible if a hard-working, popular priest got married with the full support of his or her parish and congregation and was then disciplined, sacked or defrocked?

Sir Tony Baldry: The situation is clear. The Church of England's understanding of marriage remains unchanged: marriage is a lifelong union between one man and one woman, and under the canons of the Church of England marriage is defined as being between a man and a woman. The canons of the Church of England retain their legal status as part of the law of England and I would hope that no priest who has taken an oath of canonical obedience would wish to challenge canon law and the law of England.

## **Quakers celebrate first same-sex weddings this weekend**

**As the first same-sex marriages take place in England and Wales this weekend, (29 March) Quakers in Britain are rejoicing with one Quaker couple whose marriage in Canada is now legally recognised here.**

Ekklesia - “We're thrilled that marriage for same-sex couples is here at last,” say Rob and Owen Claxton-Ingham. They married in Canada because they couldn't marry in Britain. They met in 1992 at a gathering for young Quakers and ten years later they adopted two children, Mark and Rebecca. They

married in Canada in 2006 and live in Yorkshire. For them, marriage is a spiritual and emotional experience. "It was important for us to make that commitment within an act of worship," reflects Rob.

Paul Parker, Recording Clerk for Quakers in Britain said many Quakers have been longing for this day which marks a real step forward in equality. "Quakers see God in everyone and that leads us to say we're all born equal and our love is of equal worth too."

"Quakers have been discussing sexuality for fifty years," he said. "That led our Yearly Meeting in 2009 to seek a change in the law so that same-sex marriages can be prepared, celebrated, witnessed, reported to the state, and recognised as legally valid, without further process, in the same way as opposite-sex marriages are celebrated in Quaker meetings. We are delighted the law has caught up."

However, celebrations are on hold for some couples. "While looking forward to marrying same-sex couples in our meeting houses this summer, we keep in mind those couples who must wait for secondary legislation to come in before they can convert their civil partnerships to marriage," said Paul Parker.

Quakers in Britain have taken up their case with Government ministers, who say they hope legislation will be in place by the end of this year. At -

<http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/node/20326>

## **Bishop of Salisbury gives backing to same-sex weddings**

### **Bishop Nick Holtam says gay marriage 'embodies virtues that the Church of England wants to see maximised in society'**

Andrew Brown in The Guardian - The Church of England's divisions over [gay marriage](#) have been reopened by the bishop of Salisbury, who has issued a statement praising the couples who will get married and assuring them of his prayers and good wishes.

The Right Rev Nick Holtam's supportive remarks on the eve of the legalisation of [gay marriage](#) express the views of a significant body of dissent within the Church of England, unhappy with the formal position that prevents Anglican clergy from marrying partners of the same sex.

Gay marriage, the bishop said, "embodies a commitment to be faithful, loving, and lifelong. These are virtues which the Church of England wants to see maximised in society."

Although Holtam was one of the signatories to the recent letter from the house of bishops – one of the three sections of the General Synod of the Church of England – prohibiting clergy from marrying same-sex partners, his remarks show attitudes in the church hierarchy are softening in line with those of their congregations.

Polls suggest that support for gay marriage is widespread among younger churchgoers, but every expression of liberal or humane sentiment enrages some conservatives who maintain that the church is free from homophobia.

The bishop of Buckingham, Alan Wilson, lambasted the church for hypocrisy on Friday. "There are partnered gay bishops telling their partnered gay clergy 'you shouldn't marry your partner Fred'" he said. "The priest replies, 'Why shouldn't you marry [your partner] Tom?'"

Although Wilson declined to name any gay bishops with partners, he said he would discourage his heterosexual curates from living with partners to whom they were not married and he did not see why it should be different for gay people. More at -

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/28/gay-marriage-bishop-salisbury-backs-same-sex-weddings>

## First gay marriages marked by rainbow flag over Whitehall

**A rainbow flag will be flown over Whitehall this weekend in light of the first same-sex marriages taking place on Saturday, the Deputy Prime Minister has announced.**



Christian Institute - Nick Clegg said it is a symbol to celebrate a "massive achievement" and called the introduction of gay marriage a "momentous occasion".

This comes as Labour MP Ben Bradshaw, who is gay, challenged the Church of England on how it would discipline clergy who enter into a same-sex marriage. More at -

<http://www.christian.org.uk/news/first-gay-marriages-marked-by-rainbow-flag-over-whitehall/>

## **Notes**

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<http://www.changingattitudeireland.org/>

2. The Cutting Edge Consortium is an alliance of faith-based LGBTI-supporting organisations, trade unions, and others united in challenging faith-based groups to promote equality and human rights.

More information at <https://sites.google.com/site/cuttingedgeconsortium1/about-us>

3. The LGBTI Anglican Coalition provides UK-based Christian LGBTI organisations with opportunities to create resources for the Anglican community and to develop a shared voice for the full acceptance of LGBTI people.

More information at

<http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/>