

National Cathedral to Marry Same-Sex Couples

Washington National Cathedral announced it will allow gay and lesbian weddings inside the storied church that has been the site of presidential funerals, inaugural prayer services and other services to mark national milestones.

“Matters of human sexual identity and questions about the Church’s role in blessing lifelong, committed relationships between its members are serious issues around which feelings run high and people of good will can often disagree,” said the cathedral’s new dean, the Very Rev. Gary Hall, in a press release. “It is my hope and prayer that, if all of us open ourselves to the fullness and diversity of our nation’s many voices, we will learn to walk together in a new way as we listen for God’s call to us to be faithful to each other and to God.”

Why now? Two reasons. One, the national Episcopal Church has approved formal rites for blessing same-sex unions; clergy will no longer have to adapt the traditional liturgy used for straight couples. Second, the Diocese of Washington includes four suburban counties in Maryland, where voters last November approved gay marriage. There was a sense in the diocese that its mother church shouldn’t do weddings for gay couples from D.C. if gay couples from Maryland couldn’t also join in.

(It’s also worth noting that at least one gay wedding has been held inside the cathedral in recent years; now they’re just making it official.)

It’s not a huge surprise—the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Washington have been vocally supportive of gay rights. But the cathedral isn’t just any church. As Michelle Boorstein points out in today’s *Washington Post*, “The cathedral’s

stature and the image of same-sex couples exchanging vows in the soaring Gothic structure visited by a half-million tourists each year is symbolically powerful.”

One caveat: “As a general rule, only couples directly affiliated with the life of the Cathedral—as active, contributing members of the congregation; as alumni or alumnae of the Cathedral schools; as individuals who have made significant volunteer or donor contributions over a period of time; or those judged by the dean to have played an exceptional role in the life of the nation—are eligible to be married at the Cathedral.”

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