

# What Anglican Leaders Are Saying About LGBT Rebuke

The Anglican Communion's worldwide leaders, finishing up four days of heated discussions, sought to project a sense of unity despite a move to exclude the Episcopal Church from key policy decisions as a result of the American province's acceptance of same-sex marriage.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, overall leader of the global body, stressed at a news conference on Friday (Jan. 15) that the church had chosen to remain together, albeit effectively as a house divided.

"The decision that we would walk together was unanimous," Welby said, adding that any meeting of leaders of a church of 85 million members in 165 countries and 38 provinces "is bound to give confused messages."

The Anglican Communion is the world's third-largest Christian denomination, after Catholics and Orthodox.

Welby played down the decision, leaked a day earlier, to suspend the Episcopal Church from decision-making on policy and governance for a period of three years. He said it had been "completely taken out of context, and then very heavily interpreted" as a sanction on the American province.

"We don't have the power to sanction anyone," he said. "We've said simply, that if any province on a major issue of how the church is run is out of line, there will be consequences in their full participation in the Anglican Communion."

"It's not a sanction; it's a consequence," he stressed.

Welby said he wanted to "take this opportunity personally to say how sorry I am for the pain the church has caused," to

people who have suffered because of their sexuality. But he stressed the primary fear for the majority of Anglicans around the world "is the violence that confronts them and their families daily" amid armed conflicts and militant extremism.

Welby was flanked by several clerics from member churches, including Bishop Josiah Idowu-Fearon, the secretary general of the Anglican Communion. Idowu-Fearon said Western churches should stay out of African moral debates.

"If the West would just leave Africans within our various cultures, we know how to live together with our differences," he said, adding that Anglican churches in Africa have "always made room for pastoral care and concern for those who have a different sexual orientation."

Details of the suspension were first reported by Anglican Ink, a Connecticut-based publication that said they came from a leaked communique. The vote passed by a two-thirds margin, the publication said, and included prominent voices among African bishops who have loudly condemned the American church for its liberal stance on gays.

The dramatic demotion follows a string of Episcopal Church decisions stretching back to 2003, when it elected Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as a bishop of New Hampshire. That decision led dozens of U.S. churches to break away from the Episcopal Church and declare their allegiance to a series of rival groups, including the Anglican Church in North America.

In July, the Episcopal Church voted to allow its clergy to perform same-sex marriages, a move not taken by the majority of churches in the Anglican Communion.

"Given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies," a statement issued by the

Anglican Communion reads. "They will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity."

The Episcopal Church, the predominant church of many of the 13 original colonies, has had a disproportionate influence on public life in the United States. Its influence still far surpasses its 1.8 million U.S. members, who now find themselves without a voice in Anglican Communion decisions.

The three-year term of the suspension is the amount of time until the next denominationwide meeting of the Episcopal Church, when it will vote on a response, though other church groups could respond sooner.

The suspension comes after four days of discussions among church leaders – "primates," in church parlance – over the Episcopal Church's position on gay marriage in relation to the position of the broader Anglican Communion.

The meetings apparently got testy; church media in Britain reported that the archbishop of Uganda, among the most conservative churches in Anglicanism, walked out amid disagreements.

Bishop Ian Douglas of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut wondered whether the Anglican primates wanted the Episcopal Church to repent for its position on same-sex marriage. "Or were they asking for an apology for how the (church's governing body) went about opening all the roles and rites of the church, including marriage, to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Episcopalians?"

Communion leaders also reportedly wanted to censure the Anglican Church of Canada, but because it has not yet adopted same-sex marriage rites, no action was taken.

Welby announced that the primates had agreed to hold the next Lambeth Conference in 2020. The last was held in 2008. Gay issues dominated that gathering when Rowan Williams was

Archbishop of Canterbury. {eo}

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