

Bishops adopt substitute resolution on rites of blessing for same gender unions

by David Skidmore

(Office of Communication, Diocese of Chicago) Late Wednesday afternoon the House of Bishops amended and adopted the first resolution coming before Convention dealing with rites of blessing for same gender unions. After over an hour of debate, and extensive amendments, the bishops adopted a substitute version of [resolution C056](#) by a vote of 104 in favor, 30 opposed, and two abstentions. Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori was among the bishops voting yes.

The vote followed the defeat of a motion to discharge the resolution by Northwestern Pennsylvania's Bishop Sean Rowe. In arguing for discharge, Bishop Rowe noted that "a spirit of discernment" is developing across the church on full participation by gays and lesbians in the sacraments and ministry of the church. "Let it emerge without legislation," he implored. Going forward with the resolution "will simply divide us," he said.

Bishop Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, arguing against discharge, said "I don't believe we need to demonize the legislative process," adding that the House of Bishops is a legislative body.

Robinson's point was echoed by Bishop John Chane of Washington D. C. who said "to discharge this dishonors the process that called us together."

The resolution adopted differs substantially from the original text, and from the version reported out by the legislative committee on prayer book, liturgy and music and introduced to the bishops Tuesday. Time constraints forced the measure to be held over to Wednesday. Substitute language crafted Tuesday by five bishops, following two private meetings of two dozen bishops after the session, emphasized the need for an open process for consideration of rites in light of legislation in the U.S. addressing marriage, civil unions and domestic partnerships.

The substitute text, offered by Bishop Tom Ely of Vermont, calls for the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music (SCLM), in consultation with the House of Bishops, to "collect and develop theological and liturgical resources," and report to the 77th General Convention in 2012. It also directs the SCLM, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to develop an open process for its work that includes input from dioceses, congregations, provinces, and persons doing theological work. It retains the prayer book, liturgy and music committee's resolve allowing bishops in jurisdictions where same gender unions and partnerships are legal to "provide generous pastoral response to meet the needs" of church members. But it substantially revises the committee's resolve stating that no bishop or cleric "shall be compelled to authorize or officiate at such liturgies." Instead it substitutes a more general statement calling for the convention to honor theological diversity in the church regarding human sexuality.

Unlike the substitute and the committee's version, the original text of C056, sponsored by the Diocese of Missouri, issued a clearer directive to the SCLM, charging it to develop "liturgies of blessing for same gender commitments" for inclusion in the Book of Occasional Services.

The resolution now goes to the House of Deputies for consideration.

contributing to this story was Jim Naughton of Episcopal Cafe