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Views: My Church Builds Its Case for LGBT Justice

The editorial in the April 2005 issue of *OITM* understandably expressed both appreciation and trepidation in reaction to a recent statement by the Episcopal Church House of Bishops. In that statement, the House of Bishops announced a moratorium on the consecrations of all bishops – not just gay bishops – for at least a one-year period. Appreciation. The bishops also announced their decision not to bless same-sex unions for the same period of time. Trepidation.

As queer folk wait hopefully for the Episcopal Church to stand firm in its commitment to gbt justice, we in the United States need to bear in mind the global context in which this conversation is playing out. Part of what the American church is trying to do is maintain its ties with the other 37 national churches in the Anglican Communion. It may be tempting to write off those other churches. Why can't the Episcopal Church join forces with its Canadian sister and establish a church where lgbt justice is simply the rule?

There are many answers to this question, many reasons that Episcopalians who are committed to lgbt justice also see the urgent necessity that the American church remain in the Communion. For queer people, one of the most urgent reasons is this: the Anglican Communion has said that it will – finally – begin to listen to the Episcopal Church as we make the case explaining why we have acted as we have in consecrating an openly gay man and permitting same-sex blessings to continue. The Communion has asked the Episcopal Church to articulate the Christian basis for our actions, drawing on the recognized sources of Anglican authority: scripture, tradition, and human reason.

As in the United States, across the globe homophobia is most often justified by appeals to religious belief. To make headway in our fight for justice, we have to begin making headway in changing these entrenched systems of belief. The Episcopal Church has the opportunity to

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“witness” to church leadership in places where lgbt folks suffer far worse oppression than is the norm in the U.S. But we can take this opportunity only if we are still sitting at the table with the other churches in the Communion. This is creating a tough balancing act for the American church, which the House of Bishops' statement reflects.

our church to maintain its stand for justice. We pray that the church will shoulder this awesome opportunity to engage in global dialogue, making the strongest case we can for the inherently Christian call for justice. I join millions of Anglicans in praying that the church leaders in other Provinces will open their hearts to be moved by the witness of the churches in the U.S. and Canada. We are already joined by several other Provinces, including the church in Scotland and, as Vermonters recently heard for themselves from former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the church in South Africa.

The Episcopal Church is struggling not just to stay in communion with a handful of archbishops, but also with the gay and lesbian people who

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It is not a black and white issue – and lgbt people throughout the world need it *not to be* a black and white issue. The Episcopal Church needs to keep this discussion in the grey area in order to continue communicating with the rest of the Anglican Communion. That grey area is embodied in the Episcopal Church's voluntary withdrawal of formal representation at the Anglican Consultative Council: we will be in the room as observers and available to present testimony, to consult, to continue the conversation; we are not being locked out, we are not walking away.

I join thousands of Episcopalians who are pressing

themselves are Anglicans, or who live in countries where the Anglican church influences public policy about the treatment of queer people. Whether we are Episcopalians, members of the lgbt community, or both, Americans affected by today's church politics must bear this in mind. It ain't just about us. ▼

Liz Stedman is a candidate for the Episcopal priesthood and a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral in Burlington.

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