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Breaking News XML

Posted on Sun, Jul. 03, 2005

United Church of Christ committee passes gay marriage resolution



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CHARLES ODUM
 Associated Press

ATLANTA - A committee of about 50 United Church of Christ representatives gave nearly unanimous approval Sunday to a resolution that moved the church one step closer to becoming the largest Christian denomination to endorse same-sex marriage.

After debate that began early Sunday morning and ended late in the afternoon, the resolution supported by the UCC's president, John H. Thomas, drew overwhelming support and was recommended to be approved when voted on Monday by the General Synod.

The committee also voted against adopting a resolution declaring marriage to be between one man and one woman.

On the voice vote, only two or three said "no" to the same-sex marriage resolution. There were only a few dissenting votes as the committee did not declare marriage to be designed for one man and one woman, according to "the clear teachings of Jesus and the rest of Scripture" and UCC doctrine.

If the General Synod approves the same-sex resolution without making major changes, committee members acknowledged Sunday that individual church members and even entire congregations may pull out of the church.

"There are churches and individuals who will be deeply, deeply wounded by this decision," said committee member Emily Jean Gilbert of Allentown, Pa. "I ask you to treat these people with respect and honor their feelings."

The annual meeting ends Tuesday.

Sunday's debate and votes continued the church's tradition of support for gays and lesbians. In the early 1970s, the UCC became the first major Christian church to ordain an openly gay minister. The church declared itself to be "open and affirming" of gays and lesbians 20 years ago.

More than 40 years later, other churches continue to wrestle with the issue. Gilbert said her husband, a retired United Methodist Church minister, was moving his membership to the UCC because the Methodist

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church recently revoked the ordination of a woman in Philadelphia when she announced she is a lesbian.

Some argued the same-sex resolution contradicts Biblical instructions.

"The issue is not who wins or who gets his way," said Bill Boylan of Massachusetts in his remarks in support of marriage for one man and one woman.

"If we have in our hands the word of God, the only loving thing is to speak it," said Boylan, who said his resolution was "clearly intended to focus our attention on the Scriptures."

The Rev. Brett Becker, pastor of St. Paul United Church of Christ in Cibolo, Texas, said "Throughout the Scriptures marriage is always defined as being between one man and one woman."

Proponents for a third resolution for study and prayer on the same-sex issue supported a successful vote for the resolution to be incorporated as a section of the same-sex measure.

The same-sex resolution was submitted by the Southern California and Nevada Conference. The resolution specified that bisexual and transgender persons merit the same support and protections as gays and lesbians.

UCC churches are autonomous, meaning the General Synod does not create policy for its more than 5,700 congregations.

A late revision of part of the same-sex proposal included the "recognition that this resolution may not reflect the views or current understanding of all bodies within the gathered church."

Despite threats that some may pull out of the church if it endorses same-sex marriage, the Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer of Cleveland, Ohio, said "I really don't think this is going to be a devastatingly divisive issue for the church."

Added Schuenemeyer: "I hope people will just take a deep breath if this is passed by the General Synod."



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