

Postlista



THE ARCHBISHOP
CHURCH OF SWEDEN
UPPSALA

Uppsala, March 2009.

Dear friends within the Porvoo Communion,

Within the Porvoo Communion we are committed to keep one another informed about major issues that are going on within our churches. As you know, Church of Sweden has, for a long time, been involved with questions pertaining to unions for homosexual partners. As of 1995 Church of Sweden blesses couples who are registered partners by a civil ceremony. The Porvoo Communion has discussed those issues for a long time and I think that we will have them on the agenda for a long time to come. The Swedish society is transforming rapidly and I want to let you know what is happening right now.

In many of our countries the situation and rights of same-sex couples are being discussed. Some churches have also worked with the theological perspectives. The Church of Sweden has, as you might know, decided to offer a ceremony of praying for and blessing same-sex couples who have registered partnership since 1995 and a liturgical order for it since 2007. Some material translated into English, has been shared with you before.

The decisions of Church of Sweden are based on intense and thorough theological discussions and are of course decisions relating to the Swedish context. Church of Sweden wants to stress and support faithful and lasting relationships. However we have no intention of propagating our position to others. Since the nineties the bishops have for theological reasons unanimously supported the right of homosexuals to live together and have also maintained that the church can support and pray for these couples.

The issue has been brought up at Porvoo meetings and consultations, and also led to discussions, committee work and decisions within the Lutheran World Federation.

The political majority in Sweden has for some years wanted to abolish the difference between the institution of registered partnership and that of marriage. The differences in actual legal consequences are minimal already but the terminology differs. In early 2008 the Central Board of the Church of Sweden took the stance to accept a law covering both forms of unions but wanting to uphold the terminological distinction. A minority wanted to use the same term. A majority of the board wanted the Church to continue to perform the legal part of weddings and also include registering same-sex unions.

The Swedish parliament is now in the process of deciding upon a new law that will include hetero- and homosexual couples. Only one party, the Christian Democratic Party with around 5% of the voters behind it, wants to uphold a difference between partnership and matrimony. We can foresee a decision on a new law this spring, which will go into effect already from 1st May. The law will include the right for churches to perform the legal office both for heterosexual and homosexual couples. There will be no obligation for any church, pastor or priest to act against their own convictions.



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This autumn the General Synod of the Church of Sweden will decide how to act. There will be no possibility to register partnership any longer and there would then be no way for the church to bless same-sex couples after 1st May. The church would then only have a rite for heterosexual couples. The Central Board, the Bishops' Conference and the Doctrinal Commission are therefore now preparing for the deliberations and decisions of the General Synod at the end of October this year.

There is a majority among the bishops, in the Doctrinal Commission and in the Central Board for expanding the concept of marriage to include same-sex couples. This probably also goes for the General Synod.

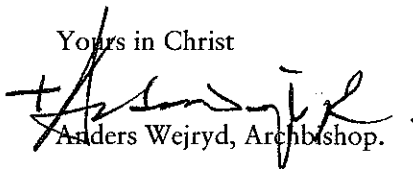
There has, however, been a discussion among the bishops about a compulsory civil marriage in Sweden, similar to that which is common in continental Europe. On that issue a majority of the bishops are for a compulsory civil marriage. Among the laity the opinion seems to be the opposite.

The most probable outcome is that the General Synod will decide that the church will continue to handle the legal part of the wedding, including same-sex couples, under the presupposition that no individual pastor/priest is forced to act against his or her conscience. Sweden also has a tradition of a civil ceremony to conduct a marriage ceremony that is handled by the legal community.

It is all the more probable as the church has a strict policy not to discriminate against homosexuals and the church has already taken the most important decision, that of accepting and blessing same-sex couples.

All our churches are self-governed. We cannot force decisions upon each other. However it is to me of utmost importance to keep you informed of what is going on and we are of course ready to inform you more if so wanted.

Yours in Christ


Anders Wejryd, Archbishop.

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