

Catholic-Anglican dialogue hits snag

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — An ecumenical spokesman for the U.S. Catholic bishops said Aug. 11 that the U.S. Episcopal Church's recent decisions to confirm an openly gay bishop and recognize that some Episcopal communities bless same-sex unions present "new ecumenical challenges" to Catholic-Anglican relations.

Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the Catholic bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, said the Catholic Church remains committed "to prayerful and honest dialogue, however difficult," despite those challenges.

He said the Episcopal decisions "reflect a departure from the common understanding of the meaning and purpose of human sexuality and the morality of homosexual activity as found in sacred Scripture and the Christian tradition."

"As such, they have serious implications in the search for Christian unity and for the work of our bilateral Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue in the United States," he said.

The Episcopal Church is the U.S.



Reuters/CNS

Bishop-elect V. Gene Robinson is pictured in a June 2002 file photo.

branch of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The church's triennial convention, held in Minneapolis in early August, confirmed the election of Canon V. Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, who in June had been elected by New Hampshire Episcopalians as bishop of their diocese.

The convention also approved a

compromise resolution on same-sex unions that called on the church to continue study and discernment of its pastoral care of gay and lesbian persons.

An amendment introduced in the convention's House of Bishops dropped language in the resolution that would have called for the Standing Committee on Liturgy and Music to develop rites for the blessing of same-sex relationships.

However, the amended resolution that was adopted included the statement, "We recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions."

The confirmation of Bishop-elect Robinson has divided members and leaders of the U.S. church and of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The primate of the communion, Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, warned of a possible schism the day of the confirmation vote and urged church leaders to "consider this development before significant and irrevocable decisions are made."

The Aug. 10 edition of the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* reported that Bishop-elect Robinson nearly was elected bishop of Rochester's Episcopal diocese in June 1999. The *Democrat and Chronicle* story, which appeared in its "Q&A of the Week" section, stated that Bishop Jack McKelvey, who was elected bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester during the 1999 convention in Bath, received 36 out of 70 clergy votes and 83 out of 158 lay delegate votes. Bishop-elect Robinson garnered 34 clergy votes and 75 lay delegate votes.

In an Aug. 8 *Democrat and Chronicle* guest essay, Bishop McKelvey said he and the other members of the Rochester delegation to this year's convention cast their votes in favor of Bishop-elect Robinson's election.

In mid-July, shortly before the Episcopal Church's general convention, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission met in Florida to discuss devotion to Mary and the invocation of saints in the teaching and life of the Catholic and Anglican churches. It said it hopes to complete a statement on the topic in 2004.

Retrouvaille gives hope to troubled marriages

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Domenic and Rita Maiola had tried marriage counseling without success, and weren't sure where their next step would take them.

"We wanted to save our marriage and didn't know how," Domenic said.

In 1996 the Maiolas attended a Retrouvaille weekend. The program's emphasis on communication and feelings within a group setting "gave us a glimpse of hope," Domenic said.

The Maiolas have continued their involvement with Retrouvaille, and are now in their third year as the program's coordinators in the Diocese of Rochester. Retrouvaille weekends are held two to three times per year in the diocese, with the next weekend coming up Sept. 12-14 at the Ramada Inn, 800 Jefferson Road, Rochester.

Retrouvaille is French for "rediscovery." The program was founded by Catholics in Montreal in 1977 and came to the United States in 1982. Although founded by Catholics, Retrouvaille is open to non-Catholic couples as well. Couples who are already divorced from each other but wish to try again are also welcome.

"It has less to do with how broken

the marriage is and more to do with, are both spouses willing to try?" Domenic Maiola said.

Yet the Maiolas also said that Retrouvaille is not for everyone, noting that the program is for troubled marriages whereas Marriage Encounter, for example, focuses more on enriching marriages. They added that couples who have issues related to physical or substance abuse must get professional help before coming to Retrouvaille.

Length of marriage, and the problems that bring couples to Retrouvaille, can vary greatly. Among the more frequent issues are infidelity, workaholicism, neglect, children, money and physical intimacy. However, Domenic Maiola said, these topics all have a common root: "Communication is the foundation," he said.

The Maiolas said a drop-off in communication can occur almost unnoticed, when couples gradually drift into separate worlds before realizing they don't connect the way they used to. "You're just living your own life," Rita Maiola said. "I call it 'the married singles' lifestyle,'" her husband added.

A Retrouvaille weekend averages approximately 15 couples and is staffed by three couples and a priest

who serves as spiritual advisor. This team encourages couples to get beyond the hurt, leave the past behind and develop positive feelings through listening, forgiveness and dialogue. Couples meet as a group and also adjourn to their rooms frequently for private reflection. Couples are only identified on a first-name basis, and they don't have to share their feelings with the larger group unless they so choose. Whether couples open up or simply listen, the Maiolas said the most important factor is that they realize they're not alone in their problems.

"You are able to hear your story being told by another couple. You can just substitute the names," Domenic Maiola said. "The breakdown, the loss of hope and how they made it through — you know they made it through."

"They share their stories and you just get a lot of hope," Rita Maiola added.

Although religion is not heavily emphasized, the weekend "can be very spiritual if the individuals attending are open to that. Hope, trust, forgiveness — that person will begin to experience spirituality," said Domenic Maiola, whose family belongs to St. Lawrence Parish in

Greece. The Maiolas have children ages 6, 13 and 15.

Following the Sept. 12-14 weekend, couples are required to attend a series of six weekly follow-up meetings at Perinton's Church of the Resurrection, where they will explore specific subjects such as conflict, God and sexuality. Beyond that, couples can opt to be part of a CORE (Continuing Our Retrouvaille Experience) support group that meets monthly.

Domenic Maiola likens CORE to a guard rail, helping put a marriage back on course if it begins drifting off again. His wife added: "It's not a miracle, it's not a quick fix. There will still be ups and downs. But what helped us was staying involved with Retrouvaille."

EDITORS' NOTE: Retrouvaille is open to couples in and near the Rochester Diocese. Couples are asked to register for the Sept. 12-14 weekend by Aug. 29; registration after that date is subject to availability. Registration cost for the weekend is \$50; couples with financial difficulties can pay for hotel and meals according to ability. For details, call 585/586-1150 or 800/470-2230, or visit www.retrouvaille.org.