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National Cathedral to allow gay marriage

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The Washington National Cathedral announced Jan. 9 it will allow gay and lesbian weddings inside the storied church that has been the site of presidential funerals, inaugural prayer services and other services to mark national milestones.

"The Cathedral is called to serve as a gathering place for the nation in times of significance, but it is also rooted in its role as the most visible faith community within the Episcopal Church," the Very Rev. Gary Hall, dean of the national cathedral, said in a press release. "For more than 30 years, the Episcopal Church has prayed and studied to discern the evidence of God's blessing in the lives of same-sex couples. It is now only fitting that the National Cathedral follow suit. We enthusiastically affirm each person as a beloved child of God -- and doing so means including the full participation of gays and lesbians in the life of this spiritual home for the nation."

In celebrating same-sex marriages, the cathedral will use a formal rite adapted from an existing ceremony approved in August at the general convention of the Episcopal church, long connected with marriage equality and gay rights.

The Episcopal bishop of the Washington diocese, which includes the District of Columbia and four Maryland counties (all areas where gay marriage is legal), decided in December to allow for the expansion of marriage. Each priest then could choose whether to perform same-sex unions.

Hall called it "a great honor" to lead the cathedral's march toward greater equality.

"Matters of human sexual identity and questions about the Church's role in blessing lifelong, committed relationships between its members are serious issues around which feelings run high and people of good will can often disagree," he said.

"It is my hope and prayer that, if all of us open ourselves to the fullness and diversity of our nation's many voices, we will learn to walk together in a new way as we listen for God's call to us to be faithful to each other and to God," he said.

While many might seek to marry in the National Cathedral, its requirements limit those eligible. Because the ceremony is a Christian marriage, at least one person in the couple must be baptized. In addition, couples must be directly affiliated with its community, as active members of the congregation, alumni of its schools, a significant volunteer or donor, or a prominent person in the nation.

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