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## Rebel bishops reconsider same-sex blessings

By RUTH GLEDHILL, TIMES RELIGION CORRESPONDENT, WRITING FOR TIMES ONLINE

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, today welcomed a decision by bishops of the Anglican Church in Canada not to encourage the use of same-sex blessing rites.

The bishops, meeting in Windsor, Ontario, agreed "neither to encourage nor to initiate the use of such rites" until the General Synod in Canada next meets in 2007, although they stopped short of pledging a moratorium on the ceremonies. They also refused to commit themselves to voluntary withdrawal from a central decision-making body, the Anglican Consultative Council, as requested by the primates of the Anglican church at their meeting in Ireland earlier this year.

The worldwide Anglican communion has been brought to the brink of schism by the decision of the New Westminster diocese in Canada to authorise a same-sex blessings rite, along with the ordination of an openly homosexual bishop in America. Orthodox Anglicans in Africa and Latin America have demanded the suspension of Anglican churches that continue to flout biblical norms on issues such as homosexuality.

Same-sex blessings will continue to take place in New Westminster, although the New Westminster synod will consider the request for a moratorium when it next meets.

In their statement, agreed on April 27, the Canadian bishops say: "We recognise that synodical decisions in some parts of the Canadian church, and the response to these, have caused distress in some parts of the Communion. We are sorry for the pain that this has caused and we regret that together we have not achieved a level of consultation deemed sufficient to the magnitude of the issues under consideration."

Regarding the request that the Canadian church voluntarily withdraw its members from the Anglican Consultative Council, which meets next in Nottingham in June, the bishops say they can see the value of the opportunity for "reflection" that this would provide, but they also see "risks" inherent in honouring the request.

The Bishops continue: "We affirm the place of gay and lesbian persons in our church and give thanks for their contribution to its life and witness. We agree with the words of paragraph six of the



**Zebedee, 26**

Looking for Tigger for Spring. Must like the highs of life and be ready to jump at opportunity.



Primates' Communiqué which reads 'the victimization or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us'."

American bishops have already agreed to withdraw their members from the Anglican Consultative Council but to send representatives to the council's meeting in Nottingham to listen and "be available for conversation and consultation". They have also agreed a temporary moratorium on all episcopal consecrations, not just homosexual ones.

Dr Williams said: "I welcome this considered and courteous response from the Canadian House of Bishops. Their constructive approach provides a positive basis for further engagement with the questions facing our Communion. "

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