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## Fighting to permit gay marriages within churches



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**A prominent gay rights activist is challenging Amherst's churches to open their doors to gay marriages.**

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A prominent gay rights activist is challenging Amherst's churches to open their doors to gay marriages.

Gerard Veldhoven, whose marriage to Norman Carter in 2004 is believed to be the first legal same-sex union in Nova Scotia, feels churches must open their doors to same-sex couples wishing to tie the knot in a religious venue.

"The fact civil marriage ceremonies have now been legal in the whole of Canada for some time now, I believe it to be fair and justified that same-sex couples are afforded the opportunity to marry in their churches," Veldhoven said.

Presently, Amherst churches do not permit same-sex marriages to take place on their premises, but they are allowed across the border at both Sackville United and the chapel at Mount Allison University.

"It's not something that's within our control," Rev. Byron Corkum with Amherst First Baptist said. "It's a convention policy and we have to follow it to remain as part of the convention."

Corkum said the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches voted on the matter last year, rejecting the notion of allowing same-sex marriages within their churches.

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Veldhoven said the fact same-sex marriages are allowed in some places demonstrates the willingness those congregations to allow marriages regardless of sexual orientation.

"With this in mind, I wish to bring forth a challenge to the Amherst and area churches to do likewise. If our neighbors in Sackville see fit to accommodate same-sex marriages, then I see no reason whatsoever, for Amherst and area churches not to embrace these couples," Veldhoven said.

Veldhoven said it's ironic that the United Church of Canada has been instrumental in allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally married, but Trinity-St. Stephen's United in Amherst does not allow it.

Rev. Susan Estabrooks said it was left up to individual churches to determine whether to permit same-sex marriages.

"Several years prior to our arrival here they had a vote and it was against allowing it," Estabrooks said. "Some churches have opted to allow it, but this one said no and I think it was by a narrow margin."

Estabrooks is unsure if another vote will be held anytime soon.

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