

Frank Griswold, who led Episcopal Church through LGBTQ debate, dies at 85

by [Episcopal News Service Staff](#)

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Frank T. Griswold III (Photo by Randy Greve used via Creative Commons license)

Frank Tracy Griswold III, who led the Episcopal Church through debates over the ordination of LGBTQ clergy, died on March 5 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was 85.

Known for his ecumenical and interreligious work, Griswold helped to shepherd the Episcopal Church's full-communication relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The relationship grew out of an agreement passed at the 1997

general convention during which Griswold was elected.

Griswold also served as co-chair of the [Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission](#) from 1999 to 2004. He co-chaired the [Anglican-Roman Catholic Theological Consultation](#) in the United States from 1992 to 1997.

While his term was marked by deepening ecumenical relationships, at the same time Episcopalians and Anglicans struggled with sharp disagreements amongst themselves. Some of the so-called “bonds of affection” that many believe hold together the worldwide Anglican Communion snapped in 2003 when the Diocese of New Hampshire became the first in the communion to elect an openly gay partnered priest, Gene Robinson, to be its bishop.

When members of the House of Bishops and the House of Deputies were asked to consent to Robinson’s election, a majority in both houses agreed. Griswold [said](#) that he voted for Robinson “because I see no impediment to assenting to the overwhelming choice of the people of New Hampshire.”

Griswold presided at Robinson’s ordination and consecration on November 2, 2003, amid intense [security](#) and a strong airing of objections when he asked the ritual question of whether anyone knew any reason the service should not proceed.

“We’re learning to live the mystery of communion at a deeper level,” Griswold said after hearing those objections. The consecration proceeded.

Jefferts Schori, in a written statement, praised Griswold as a “peaceable diplomat” who navigated the church through those tense years.

“That journey was not easy, but he led from the heart he knew. And sometimes that heart prompted surprising humor, slipped in slantwise,” Jefferts Schori said. “We give thanks for his steady and sacrificial leadership, his deep wisdom and lightheartedness, and his care not only for this chafing church, but for all God’s creatures.”

Griswold received honorary degrees from the General Theological Seminary, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Nashotah House, Sewanee, Berkeley Divinity School, Virginia Theological Seminary, Episcopal Divinity School, Seminary of the Southwest, and Rikkyo University in Tokyo.

His books include *Going Home: An Invitation to Jubilee*, *Praying our Days: A Guide and Companion*, and *Tracking Down the Holy Ghost: Reflections on Love and Longing*.

In retirement, Griswold continued a ministry of teaching, preaching, writing, lecturing and leading retreats, nationally and internationally, drawing on a broad range of spiritual traditions.

He served as a visiting professor in seminaries and universities in South Korea, Cuba and Japan, as well as at the Episcopal Divinity School, the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Virginia Theological Seminary, and Seabury-Western. He also served as bishop visitor to the Society of St. John the Evangelist. —Episcopal News Service