

The Herald

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Kirk 'preparing way for civil partnerships for ministers'

RAYMOND DUNCAN

March 02 2006

A KIRK report on the implications of the civil partnership laws is preparing the way for openly homosexual ministers to enter into such a union and continue their calling, it has been claimed.

Forward Together, an evangelical group within the Church of Scotland, says the prospect of civil partners living in manses would dismay the majority of church members as well as many of its ecumenical partners.

The group, which has more than 300 members, is to challenge the report when it goes before the General Assembly in May.

The document, prepared by the legal questions committee, deals with pension and housing rights issues raised by the civil partnership legislation. It also seeks agreement that ministers and deacons should be allowed to conduct church services that mark civil partnerships without fear of punishment.

The document also requests backing for a call that no minister or deacon will be obliged to conduct such a service against their conscience.

Gordon Kennedy, a minister and chairman of Forward Together, said the report raised wider matters than the legal questions, pointing out that the law was careful not to confuse a civil partnership with marriage. He said: "The group maintains that the church should be equally careful not to confuse what the legislation has deliberately kept separate.

"Before addressing the legal points about pension rights for ministers' civil partners, the church must reach a clear view concerning such relationships in the ordained ministry.

"The proposals, if adopted, would open the way for a significant departure from the Bible's teaching and from historic Christian practice."

He added: "There is a huge question about the ordination of homosexuals which the Church of Scotland has never addressed and has never come to a decision on."

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