

## CHURCHMAN CONDEMNS MOVE TO BAN GAY BLESSINGS

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A North-east minister is calling on the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to reject a call for ministers to be barred from conducting services to mark gay civil partnerships.

The Rev Bob Brown of Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen is unhappy with a motion being proposed by evangelical organisation, Forward Together, which wants ministers and deacons banned from leading ceremonies because it goes against what is said in the Bible.

The group, part of the Church, is challenging another motion, due to be put forward to the legal questions committee at the General Assembly which starts on Saturday, which would enable ministers to conduct blessings if they wish to do so.

Spokesman the Rev Ian Watson said last night: "Sex is a good thing but it is for men and women in the context of marriage. This (civil partnership) goes against what it says in the Bible.

"This is trying to condone something that God actually condemns and it is inconsistent with 4,000 years of Jewish Christian beliefs."

However, Mr Brown, who was recently a guest at a civil partnership celebratory lunch involving Monica Stewart and Paula McDonald who both attend his church, said Forward Together's motion was based on flawed theological argument - a misunderstanding of the Church's doctrine of creation and the nature of God.

He described a statement published in a pamphlet distributed by the group which read "it is only within scripture that the word of God is located", as being utterly and completely wrong.

"The Church has never identified the word of God with the Bible - the Church's position is and has been that scripture is to be interpreted by the guidance of the spirit in the light of Jesus Christ," he said.

"He is the word of God and that far from being located only within scripture, the word of God is encountered in the world as well as the Church."

Mr Brown, who has been the minister at Queen's Cross Church for 21 years, pointed out that King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines therefore the Bible should not always be taken literally and at face value in this day and age.

"If this was the case we would not have women priests or ministers and slavery would still be acceptable," he added.

"This (slavery) was something presented as something God approved of until the 19th century but in this day and age it is acknowledged by Christians as morally wrong."

Referring to creation, he said: "We all know that a significant number of people in society are gay. If this is their God-given orientation are we to say that God wishes them to be gay but not to express their sexuality in a gay relationship? What kind of God would that be?"

Mr Brown said God was a God of loving faithfulness whose concern is justice and right in human relationships.

He added: "Where two gay people enter into a loving, committed, faithful relationship as they do a civil partnership, is it unreasonable to believe that they enjoy the blessing of the God of loving faithfulness in the same way heterosexuals making a similar commitment do?"

Mr Watson, the minister at Kirkmuirhill Church in South Lanarkshire, said the debate would be a "defining moment" for the Church as breaking from convention would isolate it from Churches across the world.

Ms Stewart, 36, an elder at Queen's Cross Church, who "married" her 33-year-old partner two weeks ago, said people in the congregation who knew about her situation had reacted favourably.

She said she knew of other churchgoers who had entered into civil partnerships and had no problem reconciling her faith and sexuality.

"What I and others are seeking is a inclusive church dedicated to the gospel and characterised by grace and not by prejudice," she added.