

Edinburgh Presbytery Backs Proposals to Bless Gay Couples

The Edinburgh Presbytery of the Church of Scotland has become the first to vote in favour of new proposals that will give the go ahead to ministers to bless gay couples.

by Maria Mackay

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The Edinburgh Presbytery of the Church of Scotland has voted in favour of proposals that will allow member churches across Scotland to bless civil partnerships.

A vote to ban Church blessings for civil partnerships was narrowly defeated by the General Assembly earlier in the year, instead proposing a new Act to ensure no minister face censure for presiding over a religious ceremony marking a same-sex union.

Between now and December – when the final decision will be taken – Church of Scotland presbyteries will be discussing the proposed law and taking votes.

The Edinburgh Presbytery voted 126 to 76 to support the General Assembly decision, the only one so far to vote in favour of the measure.

The Rev Dr Iain Whyte, a former Edinburgh University chaplain who conducted a blessing for two gay men in Edinburgh's Phoenix bar two years ago, said it was essential ministers retained the freedom to act in a pastoral way as they judged best.

He also said that approving the measure would "send out a less negative signal to the public," which includes many gay people that Rev Whyte claimed feel completely alienated from the church.

He added: "If the church banned people from blessing a partnership, some of us would have to think seriously about our membership of the Church of Scotland."

The Rev Bob Fyall, warden of evangelical research centre Rutherford House, said in *The Scotsman*, however, that approving gay blessings would be flying in the face not only of the Bible, but also 2000 years of Christian tradition.

He added that if the proposals get the go ahead it would let down Christians who were homosexual by orientation but who had felt it was right to remain celibate.

Ian Watson, Secretary of Forward Together, an evangelical group within the Church of Scotland, remained "quietly optimistic" despite the Edinburgh vote.

"We expected Edinburgh to go that way," he told Christian Today. "We're actually gratified to presbyteries we thought we would lose – Orkney and Dunbarton. And also we are encouraged by the votes in Edinburgh that we did get."

Watson expects that the final vote, to be announced early January 2007, will not support the General Assembly proposal.

Article from Christian Today:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/edinburgh.presbytery.backs.proposals.to.bless.gay.couples/7885.htm>

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