

Gay minister saddened by new delay in row over post Decision on appointment will now be made by Kirk's highest court

By Stephen Christie - Published: 26/03/2009

A gay minister at the centre of a bitter row over his move to preach in Aberdeen last night spoke of his disappointment after it emerged a decision on his future will be passed to the Kirk's highest court.

Church of Scotland minister the Rev Scott Rennie has been waiting since January to find out if he can fill the vacant post at Queen's Cross Church in the city's west end.

His application hit another hurdle yesterday when a powerful committee voted to refer the final decision to the General Assembly - the Kirk's annual supreme court meeting held in May.

Mr Rennie, 36, an Aberdeen FC fan and a member of the Liberal Democrats, is currently minister at Brechin Cathedral in Angus. The divorced father of one shares the manse there with his partner, David.

Commenting after yesterday's meeting of the Commission of Assembly in Edinburgh, Mr Rennie said: "I am disappointed at the continuing distress the complaint will cause to the congregation of Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen, Brechin Cathedral, as well as to me and my family.

"I am very grateful, however, for the very many supportive voices inside and outside the Kirk, whose kindness and encouragement gives us all strength, and reminds us what Christianity is all about."

Mr Rennie, who was born and raised in Aberdeen, said the General Assembly decision will be a "seminal moment" for the Kirk and the "many gay people" in its membership.

"We will discover whether the Church's own anti-discrimination legislation, passed as recently as 2007, means anything, or whether it is worthless," he added.

The commission, partly made up of ministers and elders, voted 42-41 in favour of referring the final decision to the assembly, which opens on May 21.

A spokeswoman for the Church of Scotland yesterday confirmed the commission had met in Edinburgh, where members decided the issue needed further scrutiny, and it had been passed to the assembly.

Evangelical organisation Forward Together has expressed concern over the rift, saying "enormous tremors" had been felt throughout the Kirk.

Last night, the group's chairman, Douglas Cranstone, said the commission was "wise" to refer the case to the assembly.

"While the commission has the power to deal with the case, its outcome carries such wide implications for the whole Church that as representative a constituency as possible should make the final decision," he added.

The row erupted in January when 12 members of Aberdeen Presbytery objected to Mr Rennie's appointment at Queen's Cross because they did not approve of his lifestyle.

One of the complainers, the Rev Ian Aitken, of New Stockethill, said yesterday: "This is not a witch hunt. It's just that we should not be making ad hoc decisions without considerate reflection."