

# Kirk faces defiance on gay ministers

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DIVISIONS within the Church of Scotland over the appointment of openly gay ministers have resurfaced after it emerged that a presbytery has voted to nominate a man who is in a civil partnership for training to become a minister.

The decision was taken by the Presbytery of Hamilton – Scotland's third largest – in spite of a two-year moratorium placed on any "ordinations or inductions" of any openly gay ministers by the General Assembly in May.

The moratorium was imposed after the controversial appointment of the openly gay Rev Scott Rennie to Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen and was intended to give a special commission time to compile a report on the implications on the appointment of openly gay ministers.

Before making the decision, Hamilton Presbytery had taken advice from the Kirk's ministries council, which oversees admission and training.

The council replied in a letter that its assessment processes prior to the report's findings, "have not been affected by the assembly's decisions, and no-one should suffer any prejudice in any direction as a result".

It said this was on the grounds that nobody could predict what the implications of the report will be for candidates when it is received in 2011.

It added: "It is important to emphasise that acceptance into the training process of the church is never a guarantee of employment."

This sentiment was echoed by a Kirk source who said anyone taken in for training would "be subject to the decision of the General Assembly in 2011".

However, Kirk members claim that allowing openly gay people to take up training makes a nonsense of the moratorium.

Writing in his blog, the Rev Ian Wilson, former head of the evangelical Forward Together group, said: "They are, in effect, saying that being a practising homosexual is not a bar to training for the ministry. One must ask the question: what kind of decisions relating to human sexuality are prohibited if nominating is not?"

He added that allowing openly gay people to take up training rendered the

consultation effectively redundant.

"If practising homosexuals are being accepted to train for the ministry, with all the investment of time and money that this entails for the Church as well as for the candidate, then it seems to me that those responsible for training are quite certain that the ordination of practising gays is just around the corner."

Though prevented from discussing the issue of openly gay ministers by instruction of May's General Assembly – which has effectively silenced any public statement or debate on the issue by members of Kirk committees and councils until the report is completed – a spokesman for the Church of Scotland said that human rights legislation meant openly gay people had a legal entitlement to undertake training for the ministry.

"For those who are otherwise qualified, the Church of Scotland's own discrimination legislation protects them as far as orientation is concerned," he said.

"This is a question about lifestyle going beyond orientation, and that is what the special commission will be looking at."