



PRESS RELEASE

Kirk group's concern on civil partnership plans

Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland have signalled that the Kirk's proposed response to the civil partnerships legislation will be fully and vigorously debated at the General Assembly in May.

Last week the Kirk announced that proposals will be put to the Assembly by its Legal Questions Committee concerning the church's response to civil partnerships. As well as discussing pensions, the proposals seek to ensure that ministers who might conduct religious services marking a civil partnership are not disciplined by the church, while affirming that no minister shall be compelled to conduct such a service against his or her conscience.

The evangelical group Forward Together considers that this raises wider matters for the church than the strictly legal questions arising from the law passed last year by the Scottish Parliament. They point out that the new law is careful not to confuse a civil partnership with marriage. The group maintains that the Church should be equally careful not to confuse what the legislation has deliberately kept separate.

FT Chairman Rev Gordon Kennedy said: "There is a danger of putting the cart before the horse here. Before addressing the legal points about pension rights for ministers' civil partners, the Church must first reach a clear view concerning such relationships in the ordained ministry."

"The biblical and theological questions about human sexuality have been well aired in the past, but the General Assembly has never passed a 'deliverance' [i.e. a motion] affirming homosexual practice as a valid option for the Christian, or for the ordained ministry."

"Many church members have significant and genuine concerns at ministers being allowed to conduct religious ceremonies to mark a civil partnership. There is likely to be particular concern at the prospect of civil partners living in manses in the future."

"We welcome the opportunity at the coming Assembly to debate these issues calmly and sensitively, and with due respect for the strength of views held on both sides of the debate. But the Church should be in no doubt that the proposals, if adopted, would open the way for a significant departure from the Bible's teaching and from historic Christian practice. We believe that such a move would cause dismay to the great majority of church members, and also to many of our ecumenical partner churches."

Notes for Editors:

An evangelical can be described as a Christian who holds that the basis of faith and practice should be the Bible, with a particular emphasis on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Evangelicals are within the mainstream of historical and orthodox Christianity, as described in the ancient creeds of the church and in the Reformation confessions.

'Mainstream Evangelical' was the only wing of the church to show growth in the last church census, both in the Kirk and in most other Scottish churches. This was also the pattern in England.

(Source: 'Turning the Tide': Report of the 2002 Scottish Church Census, by P. Brierley).

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