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19 May, 2006

To Ministers, Chaplains and Deacons and
Commissioners to the 2006 General Assembly
of the Church of Scotland

Dear friends,

STEPPING FORWARD: AN APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS



This year at the General Assembly there will be a proposal brought forward by the Legal Questions Committee in the form of a Declaratory Act that clarifies the current position for ministers with respect to civil partnerships. Specifically, the proposed Act states that it is for each minister to decide for him or herself whether they bless a civil partnership, or decline to do so. Either way, no disciplinary action will be taken. This proposed Act has been brought to the General Assembly both in response to the new Civil Partnership legislation and to make clear what the position is should a minister be approached by two people who desire a symbol of God's blessing on a relationship that has already been recognised by the State.

You may have received a booklet from the group *Forward Together*. 'A Step Too Far' clearly states the position of a number of ministers and members within our Kirk. Nonetheless, the position outlined therein is not the only one held by ministers and church members.

The enclosed booklet, 'Stepping Forward', was produced following the distribution of 'A Step Too Far' in order to promote a full, open and balanced discussion of the proposed Declaratory Act anent Civil Partnerships within the General Assembly.

On a personal note, Bryan Kerr, Scott Rennie and I would like to thank the many people who offered their assistance and support in the preparation and distribution of this booklet. Many of them are named at the booklet's end.

Following the extraordinary support received over the past week, a new group, *OneKirk*, is currently being organised to provide Church of Scotland ministers and members with encouragement, challenge, and opportunities for discussing and developing Christian understanding in a contemporary setting. Please take a look at the website to find out more: www.onekirk.org.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I pray that you will find the contents of the accompanying booklet helpful.

Yours, in the unity of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Johnston', written over a white background.

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