

OneKirk Press Release

OneKirk Working Group
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www.onekirk.org



Schism in the Church of Scotland?

OneKirk analysis disputes claims of schism

Within the press there has been increasing speculation about schism in the Church of Scotland. It has been reported in the media that one-third of Church of Scotland ministers have signed an online petition organised by 'The Fellowship of Confessing Churches' to support the Overture from the Presbytery of Lochcarron and Skye: 'That this Church shall not accept for training, ordain, admit, re-admit, induct or introduce to any ministry of the Church anyone involved in a sexual relationship outside of faithful marriage between a man and a woman.'

This overture and petition have been introduced in response to the call of Rev Scott Rennie from Brechin Cathedral, where he has ministered for nine years, to Queen's Cross Parish Church, Aberdeen. This call has been disputed on the grounds of life and doctrine by 12 members of Aberdeen Presbytery and will be resolved at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on Saturday 23 May, 2009. Rev Scott Rennie is gay, and lives with his partner.

Having analysed the petition, OneKirk has discovered that the data reveals a different picture to that previously reported. As of 9 May 2009, the figures showed that fewer than one-sixth of Church of Scotland ministers (both active and retired) had signed the petition. Of active ministers (in parishes and extra parochial positions), fewer than one-fifth had signed the petition.

OneKirk, which encourages an open dialogue amongst all members of the Kirk, and which supports an inclusive, affirming and progressive church, seeks to reassure church members that reports of the number of Church of Scotland ministers signing the petition have been overstated.

Rev Peter Johnston, Convenor of the OneKirk Working Group, says,

"I'm unsure how the organisers of this petition originally arrived at a figure of one-third of church ministers. We are glad to see that the organisers have revised their figures down from one-third to one-quarter, yet our own analysis finds that the numbers claimed are still overstated. As above, as of 9 May, fewer than one-fifth of active Church of Scotland ministers had signed the petition

"We recognise that the case of Rev Scott Rennie is one about which Church of Scotland ministers and members have sincerely and strongly held disagreements. However, despite our disagreements, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

"OneKirk urges continued thoughtful and respectful dialogue about our different understandings of Scripture in this instance. We further recognise that such dialogue can only take place in an atmosphere in which individuals, congregations and presbyteries are allowed to follow their own sincerely held religious convictions concerning this matter. We are all followers of Jesus, and seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit in our understanding of Scripture."

To facilitate ministers and congregations in engaging with Jesus' command "to love one another as I have loved you", OneKirk is providing resources to help church leaders plan worship for the Sunday prior to the General Assembly. These resources will be available at the OneKirk website.

Ends

Supporting Points:

1. **Number of active ministers having signed the petition** in parishes and extra parochial appointments is 224/1187 or 18.87% (as of 9 May).
2. **Number of total ministers having signed** (active and retired) is 363/2236 or 16.23%
3. **Petition does not have broad support across all congregations.** For instance it is heavily weighted to a few congregations, e.g., St George's Tron, Glasgow where the founder of the petition is the minister: St George's Tron: 129; Gilcomston South, Aberdeen: 79; Loudoun: 56; Holyrood Abbey: 54; High Hilton, Aberdeen: 50; Kirkmuirhill: 46; Sandyford-Henderson Memorial Church: 39.
4. The **Free Church of Scotland** comprise more 10% of signatories on the petition, having linked to the petition from their official website (General News section: www.freechurch.org). Unlike the Church of Scotland, the Free Church of Scotland does not ordain women as elders or ministers.
5. **Other notable denominations** in the 'International' section are the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), neither of whom ordain women.
6. The **weight of petition signatories** are from the West Coast Scottish Islands (Total: 29/67= 43.28%).
7. **Reliability of the petition is a concern:**
 - Evidence of people being added to the list without their knowledge.
 - Evidence of duplicate entries.
 - Evidence of fictitious entries.
8. Concern that some signatories are **Commissioners** at this year's General Assembly. Have they publicly declared their voting intention, before the case has been heard?

Analytical Methodology:

1. Every active Minister, Assistant, Associate, chaplain, teacher, and auxiliary from every Presbytery in the Church of Scotland was checked against the official list contained in the Church of Scotland's most recent 2008-2009 Directory (or 'Red Book').
2. The figures were adjusted for vacancies, to prevent distortion.
3. The formula used was as follows: signatories/charges (adjusted for vacancies). For example, in Moray Presbytery there was 1 signatory out of the 20 Charges in that Presbytery. In addition, there were also 3 Associates and 1 Auxiliary Minister. So, 20 charges plus 3 Associates plus 1 Auxiliary equals 24 potential votes. However, there were also 5 vacancies. As a vacant charge cannot produce a vote, an adjustment is required. So, 24 potential votes minus 5 vacancies equals **19 charges**, once adjusted for vacancies.
4. The calculation can now take place: 1 vote divided by 19 charges multiplied by 100 equals 5.26% signatories (or 94.74% whose names are not on the petition).

OneKirk

Recognising the important role of other groups within the church, such as Forward Together and Affirmation Scotland, OneKirk aims to provide a voice for those who seek to exercise an inclusive, affirming and progressive ministry within our church, while supporting the broad church tradition of the Church of Scotland.

A website has been developed to help facilitate this work (www.onekirk.org).

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