

# OneKirk Press Release

OneKirk Working Group  
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[www.onekirk.org](http://www.onekirk.org)



## Presbytery Votes Dismiss Overture Anent Civil Partnerships

While ground has been made by many ministers, elders and church members within the Church of Scotland to welcome and fully accept gay and lesbian people into its fellowship, the majority of Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland have failed to support the freedom of pastoral conscience of their own ministers with respect to the marking of civil partnerships. Because of this the current uncertain situation is maintained.

During the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, meeting in May 2006, extensive press coverage surrounded the "Declaratory Act anent Civil Partnerships" brought to the General Assembly by the Legal Questions Committee. This Declaratory Act sought to clarify the disciplinary situation with respect to a minister or deacon choosing either to mark a civil partnership with a religious ceremony or to decline to do so. The Act clarified that whatever decision was made by a minister or deacon, they would not be subject to discipline by their presbytery.

The General Assembly 2006 voted to approve the Declaratory Act (372 vs 240), but did so using a technical procedure called the "Barrier Act" which meant that each presbytery within the Church of Scotland would need to vote to either accept or reject the Declaratory Act before it could become part of church law. With voting completed, 9 presbyteries voted in favour of the Declaratory Act and 36 rejected the Act. The numbers voting were 1007 in favour and 1563 against.

This result means that at the General Assembly 2007, the Declaratory Act anent Civil Partnerships that was accepted by the General Assembly 2006 will not become one of the church's declaratory acts, and the current uncertainty will continue. Because this Act failed at presbytery level, ministers and deacons of the church may or may not be subject to discipline if they should give God's blessing to a gay or lesbian couple who have sought a civil partnership. Some presbyteries may choose to discipline a minister for conducting such a service, while other presbyteries would be highly unlikely to do so.

Rev Peter Johnston, Convenor of the OneKirk Working Group, said, "The failure of this Declaratory Act does not mean that ministers or deacons can not perform a religious ceremony to mark a Civil Partnership. They can still do so, should they wish to. However, their presbytery may choose to discipline them, or it may not. It leaves ministers in an uncertain situation."

OneKirk believes that the position maintained by its members, who seek an increasingly inclusive church where we try to live up to God's ideals as exemplified in the life of Christ, is a position held by many within the church. While the vote by presbyteries appears to show that this is a minority position, the actual number of votes show a 2:3 split. Rev Peter Johnston said, "With such a split on this undeniably divisive issue it

behoves us, as a church, to listen to one another, and to value the breadth of opinion and Scriptural interpretation that this vote indicates. While this was a decisive vote to reject the 'Declaratory Act anent Civil Partnerships', it does not represent a church speaking decisively against civil partnerships. Yet again, it indicates the mixture of views and understandings of God in the Church of Scotland.

"While on one hand this is a disappointing result for those ministers, elders and church members who seek an inclusive church, it is also encouraging in that two-fifths of presbyters voted in favour of this overture. Ten years ago I doubt that would have happened.

"We believe that God seeks to bless people who love one another. Jesus tells us that, next to loving God, this is our primary purpose in life. I believe that those individuals, whether they are straight, lesbian or gay who seek to confirm that love in a life-long commitment to another person are recipients of God's blessing - whether or not a minister or deacon performs a religious ceremony to mark such a commitment."

END

## OneKirk

OneKirk came into being following the 2006 General Assembly and the booklet, *Stepping Forward*, that supported the freedom of pastoral conscience of ministers. The encouragement and support received from ministers, deacons and members (131 of whom wanted to be associated by name with the booklet) prompted us to consider ways to resource and facilitate discussion within the Church of Scotland and to provide a network to encourage that process.

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](http://www.onekirk.org)).

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