

Church of Scotland May Stop Performing Weddings to Avoid Gay Marriage Battles

Members of the Scottish Parliament have heard concerns from the Church of Scotland that it may have to stop conducting wedding ceremonies if plans to **redefine marriage** go ahead.

A representative from the Church of Scotland told the Equal Opportunities Committee, which is considering the bill, that the prospect of “years of exhausting legal challenge” is “very concerning.”

The Rev. Alan Hamilton, of the Church of Scotland Legal Questions Committee, says the General Assembly had asked him to look into whether it is worth their continuing to offer marriages in Scotland.

Hamilton says they are “concerned that this is an invitation to take religious bodies in particular through the court system.”

He adds, “It gives us considerable problems internally, and we’re deeply concerned about the threat externally.”

Members of the Scottish Parliament were warned about churches being challenged through the Equality Act and the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Church of Scotland says it has no immediate plans to stop performing weddings. In a statement yesterday, it said the findings of the Legal Questions Committee about continuing to perform marriages will come before the General Assembly in 2015.

Hamilton says, “As politicians consider the bill, the Church of Scotland asks for space for itself and for its ministers to

decide whether to celebrate same-sex marriages. We are simply urging that any legislation, if approved, is robust enough to protect those who in conscience will not want to conduct such ceremonies.”

Representatives from the campaign group Scotland for Marriage, plus the Free Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities all gave evidence to the committee yesterday.

Scotland for Marriage has warned that safeguards are needed within the bill to protect the civil liberties of those who disagree with **gay marriage**, particularly public-sector employees.

The Faculty of Advocates raised concerns about the lack of freedom of conscience protections within the bill, particularly for public-sector chaplains facing pressure to perform same-sex ceremonies.