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The Registration of Civil Partnerships in Religious Buildings (**Withdrawn**)

The Home Office has just published its report on the responses it received to the consultation document on the registration of Civil Partnerships. This document prepares the way for those religious bodies which wish to do so to allow Civil Partnerships to be registered in Churches and other places of Worship.

In the report the Government states:

“It would not be for Government to determine how individual faith groups operate, nor should it be the function of local authorities to be involved in the internal discussions within a particular faith group. Therefore the regulations are clear that it is for a ‘governing authority’ of a faith group to determine whether their consent is required for any applications for their premises to be approved.”

In the case of the United Reformed Church the ‘governing authority’ is deemed to be the General Assembly and it is that body which must, in July 2012 make the determinative decision.

Mission Council has the responsibility of deciding on the resolution or resolutions to be proposed and how the debate is to be conducted. As this is in part a legal question where the number of votes cast could become significant, the Parliamentary rather than the Consensus model for the conduct of the debate in the Assembly is recommended. (*Resolution 1*)

The Government Proposals currently require that before a church’s premises may be approved for the registration of Civil Partnerships the consent of all religious groups using the building must be obtained. These regulations not only require the consent of all parties sharing under the 1969 Sharing of Church Buildings Act, which is in itself a departure from the Act which generally requires the consent of only one of the parties, but appear to require the consent of other religious groups using the premises. The draft resolutions take note of the need to grant or obtain consent as appropriate but as we are still in discussion with the Government on the detail of the regulations it is not possible to say more at present.

There are three Resolutions which the General Assembly could adopt and two ways of proceeding.

The resolutions are:

- A. General Assembly grants its consent for Church Meetings within the United Reformed Church to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of Civil Partnerships.-(Resolution 4)**
- B. General Assembly does not grant its consent for Church Meetings within the United Reformed Church to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of civil partnerships. (Resolution 5)**
- C. General Assembly recognising that the polity of the United Reformed Church is such that such questions are more appropriately a question for Local Churches,**

resolves and declares that its consent is not required by Church Meetings which wish to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of Civil Partnerships. (Resolution 3)

If Mission Council decides to present Assembly with one of these three Resolutions, that Resolution will be accompanied with appropriate supporting documentation and moved on behalf of Mission Council. It will thereby be given an advantage in the debate.

Alternatively, Mission Council may determine that these three Resolutions should be presented to General Assembly as “Alternative Motions”. In this case all three would be accompanied with supporting documentation and all three would be moved on behalf of Mission Council. Those introducing the debate would be required to confine their remarks to why Assembly should adopt that particular resolution and the Moderator would rule out of order any negative comments about the other alternatives. By adopting this process no one resolution would be given an advantage over the others (*Resolution 2*).

Draft Resolutions

1. **Mission Council resolves that the debate on the Registration of Civil Partnerships in Religious Buildings be conducted in accordance with Standing Orders 3 to 13 of the Standing Orders of the General Assembly.**
2. **Mission Council resolves that draft Resolutions A, B and C be submitted to General Assembly to be debated under Standing Order 4k “Alternative Motions”.**
3. **Mission Council resolves that Resolution C. “General Assembly recognising that the polity of the United Reformed Church is such that such questions are more appropriately a question for Local Churches, resolves and declares that its consent is not required by Church Meetings which wish to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of Civil Partnerships.” shall be submitted as the Mission Council Resolution on the Registration of Civil Partnerships.**
4. **Mission Council resolves that Resolution A. “General Assembly grants its consent for Church Meetings within the United Reformed Church to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of Civil Partnerships” shall be submitted as the Mission Council Resolution on the Registration of Civil Partnerships.**
5. **Mission Council Resolves that Resolution B. “General Assembly does not grant its consent for Church Meetings within the United Reformed Church to direct the trustees of their church’s premises (or to request the trustees of other premises, the use of which their church shares) to apply for the approval of those premises for the registration of civil partnerships” shall be submitted as the Mission Council Resolution on the Registration of Civil Partnerships.**

Only one of resolutions 2-5 can be adopted, so once one is agreed the others will not be moved. The order in which they are presented to Mission Council was determined by a random number draw.

J.Breslin

Clerk to the General Assembly