

Presbytery OKs gay church leader for ordination: John Knox Presbytery in Wisconsin

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A former Presbyterian pastor and nationally known ecumenical leader has been approved for ordained ministry in Wisconsin by a presbytery which noted his declared conscientious objection to denominational standards that rule out ordaining an openly gay candidate.

The John Knox Presbytery voted 81 to 25 on February 20 to ordain Scott D. Anderson in his current position as executive director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, a post he has held since 2003. He previously held a similar job for the California Council of Churches and served on the executive committee of the National Council of Churches.

Anderson was a pastor in Sacramento in 1990, but he set aside his ordination after two congregants revealed publicly that he was gay. Anderson says he has been in a committed relationship with the same man for nearly 20 years and told the presbytery in Wisconsin that he and his life partner would be the “first in line” if Wisconsin were to allow same-sex civil marriages.

A news release from the John Knox Presbytery said that it may proceed with his ordination in light of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assembly votes in 2006 and 2008 that allow local church bodies to permit departures from the PCUSA’s so-called chastity-fidelity standard for ordaining clergy.

“The presbytery’s decision does not overturn denomination-wide policy, nor does it establish any binding precedents for the future,” the presbytery said. The statement continued, “Mr. Anderson’s departures from official teaching were not serious enough to overshadow his many other gifts.”

Anderson argued before the presbytery that the Bible's message is misapplied when it is used to exclude gay people who are in covenanted, lifelong partnerships.

Anderson, 54, told a *Presbyterian Outlook* interviewer that his ordination service has been scheduled for mid-May but a legal challenge will likely force a delay as the issue goes through church courts.

"The legal process could take a year, and possibly a bit longer," he told the Century. Anderson admitted he was surprised by the large measure of support at the presbytery meeting. "It was a remarkable, grace-filled moment, even in the midst of disagreement. It was the church at its very best."

He said he would welcome the chance to fill his church council position as an ordained minister. "But my long-term hope is to return to parish ministry, which I have always felt provides the fullest expression of my gifts."