

(Presbyterian) Church of Scotland OK's gay ministers

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) The Church of Scotland's General Assembly on Monday (May 20) passed a historic vote to allow actively gay men and lesbians to become ordained ministers.

After more than six hours of debate, more than 700 commissioners attending the Presbyterian church's 2013 General Assembly in Edinburgh voted in favor of gay ministers, but in a mind toward compromise agreed to allow parishes that disagree to opt out of the new rules.

The decision will now need to be endorsed by the church's 48 regional presbyteries and, if it survives the regional ratification, will become official at next year's General Assembly.

Echoing similar controversies that consumed the life of the Presbyterian Church (USA) for more than a decade, the church's new moderator, the Rev. Lorna Hood, said: "This is a massive vote for the peace and unity of the Church."

The debate over gay ministers has been simmering in Scotland for years. It exploded in 2009 when the General Assembly voted to uphold the appointment of an openly gay minister, the Rev. Scott Rennie, to Queen's Cross Church in Aberdeen. That led two congregations and six ministers to leave the Church of Scotland.

In 2011, the General Assembly agreed to allow openly gay ministers appointed prior to 2009 to remain in their posts but placed a moratorium on further appointments of any gay clergy. Upwards of 60 congregations have already threatened to split from the Church of Scotland.

“This was a major breakthrough for the church but we are conscious that some people remain pained, anxious, worried and hurt,” Hood said. “We continue to pray for the peace and unity of the church.”