

Parliament bars Church of England from hosting gay weddings

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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CANTERBURY, England (RNS) The British government unveiled a proposal on Tuesday (Dec. 11) that excludes the Church of England and the Church in Wales from planned legislation to allow same-sex couples to marry in churches.

Culture Secretary Maria Miller told Parliament the new plan would allow gay and lesbian couples to marry in some churches, synagogues, temples and mosques, but definitely not in the established church, where both the outgoing and incoming archbishops of Canterbury insist that marriage remain between a man and a woman.

"We will write on the face of the bill a declaration that no religious organization, or individual minister, can be forced to marry same-sex couples or to permit this to happen on their premises," Miller told the House of Commons.

Religious groups, including Quakers, Unitarians and some liberal Jewish groups, welcomed the news because they favor same-sex marriage. The Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Roman Catholic Church, most Muslims and Orthodox Jews oppose the move.

It is expected that a bill will be presented to the House of Commons next spring.

Members of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative party will be allowed a "free vote" on the bill; more than 100 members of Parliament have already signaled their opposition. But the controversial bill is expected to draw the support of the majority of Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs and is expected to pass with their support.

If the bill is passed, gay couples could start marrying in England and Wales in 2014.

"The government's commitment to allow most religious organizations to conduct same-sex marriages - but not the Church of England and the Church in Wales - is a disappointing fudge that perpetuates inequality," said gay rights activist Peter

Tatchell. "Denying these churches the right to opt in and host same-sex marriages undermines gay equality and religious freedom."