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**Yesterday at the General Assembly –  
Thursday June 6 -  
Vote to loosen Scottish Church ties**



**The Moderator the Rt Reverend Dr Charles McMullen -  
whose theme for his year of office is 'building  
relationships'.**

## **Presbyterian leader 'heartbroken' at vote to loosen Scottish Church ties**

The leader of Ireland's Presbyterians has said he is "heartbroken" after his Church voted to stop inviting the Moderator of its sister Church in Scotland to the annual general assembly, Alf McCreary writes in the Belfast Telegraph.

As divisions over same-sex marriage deepen, Presbyterians in Belfast will continue to refuse to send the Irish Moderator to the assembly in Edinburgh.

The decision was taken late yesterday afternoon at the Belfast General Assembly when delegates voted by the decisive margin of 255-171 to discontinue the long-established practice of inviting their respective Moderators to each other's annual Assembly.

The decision was also a snub, perhaps unintentional but nevertheless symbolic, to the recently-elected Irish Moderator - the Rt Reverend Dr Charles McMullen - whose theme for his year of office is 'building relationships'.

Immediately after the vote, Dr McMullen said: "As someone to whom building relationships has been key in my life, I stand before you know heavily burdened and heartbroken."

The dispute centres on the Scottish Church's more liberal view on same-sex relationships and its decision to allow people in same-sex relationships to serve as ministers and deacons in congregations which approve of them doing so.

### **Recommendations as to the way forward**

- 13 The Task Group recommends to the General Assembly that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland [one option to be selected]
- (a) should no longer accept invitations to the Moderator of the General Assembly, or any other formal delegation, to attend the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church and no longer issue invitations to those two denominations to attend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
  - (b) should resume accepting invitations for the Moderator of the General Assembly to attend the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and should continue to accept such invitations from the United Reformed Church.

### **The Presbyterian Church of Ireland voted in favour of option A by 255 votes to 171 votes.**

Earlier, the Scottish Moderator, the Rt Reverend Dr Susan Brown, made an impassioned plea for unity of visitations and friendship.

She said: "The truth is that in Christ we remain a family whether or not you put in an appearance in Scotland. But how can we be effective in working closely with one another if we do not talk to each other?"

The principal clerk of the Church of Scotland, Rev Dr George Whyte, told the assembly after the vote: "We have no choice but to leave.

"We will continue to pray for you, and if at some time in the future you change your mind, our door is always open to you."

The Scottish delegates left Church House immediately after the vote, and some bystanders claimed that the Scottish Moderator seemed visibly upset.

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The Irish Church has refused to send its Moderator to Scotland for the last three years, while continuing to extend an invitation to the Scottish Moderator to come to Belfast.

Yesterday's vote was partly intended to clear up this situation. Delegates were asked to choose between continuing Moderatorial visits, or to abandon that link. They decisively chose the latter.

There were impassioned speeches on both sides of the debate, with several former Moderators lining up on both sides.

The Rt Reverend Trevor Morrow, who has spent most of his ministry in the Irish Republic said: "This decision is a defining moment for our Church.

"It will determine whether we embrace or not a separatist ecclesiology.

"The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has never been separatist in its ecclesiology.

"The Scottish Kirk needs to hear where we believe that they are in serious moral error, but they too need to challenge us as to how over the years, in the context of Ulster and its sectarian divisions, we have not pursued justice, or practised grace to the detriment of our Gospel witness.

"This requires relationships, which is our own Moderator's theme during his year in office."

Another former Moderator - the Very Rev Dr Stafford Carson, principal of Union Theological College - said: "The Church of Scotland Theological Forum Report of 2017 fails

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to give an adequate and solid foundation for the approval of same-sex marriage.

"The conclusion of the report that same-sex marriage may be supported and commended by the Church lacks a robust biblical and theological rationale, and it advocates a view of Scripture which is at odds with our confessional commitment.

"In offering our critique of what we believe to be an inadequate report, we do so with the prayer that our brothers and sisters in the Church of Scotland would flourish and grow by returning to the clear teaching of Holy Scriptures, and the great tradition of the Reformed Churches."

Belfast Telegraph, June 7 2018

## **Regret over Presbyterian Church of Ireland's decision to break ties with the Church of Scotland**

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland has expressed her sadness at the decision from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) to sever formal ties with its sister church in Scotland.

The decision came after their General Assembly in Belfast voted 255 by 171 to accept the recommendation of the Doctrine Committee's 'Relationships with other denominations' Task Group to '...no longer accept invitations to the Moderator of the General Assembly, or any other formal delegation, to attend the General



**Speaking on the decision of the PCI's General Assembly Susan Brown said agreeing on everything was not what was required of us as Christians**

Assemblies of the Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church and no longer issue invitations to those two denominations to attend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.'

The Right Rev Susan Brown said she recognised that there were significant differences between the two denominations over matters relating to human sexuality but expressed concern that:

'To a world which doesn't understand the nuances of particular theological stances, today's decision will be yet another reason to stay away from religion and from Christianity in particular.'

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Susan Brown was a guest at the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's General Assembly in Belfast this week.

At the start of the Assembly week, the Moderator had conveyed the greetings of the Scottish Assembly to its sister church in Ireland and shared a message of peace from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

She recognised that the differences which might exist between the two churches on the matter of same sex relationships posed a challenge for how we communicate the Gospel in a way that the people around us in 2018 and beyond, who really are in need of hearing its call, can feel God's touch upon their lives.

Speaking on the decision of the PCI's General Assembly Susan Brown said agreeing on everything was *not* what was required of us as Christians:

“Jesus called his followers to follow.

“He didn't call us to *agree* about absolutely everything – but to be his sisters and brothers on the journey of faith, loving one another and letting that love be the outward sign of our belonging to him.

“Just as members of a family, hold differing views and will from time to time, debate and argue, so the Christian family does the same – sadly today, the PCI has allowed those differences of opinion to drive a wedge between us.”

Acknowledging the decision of the Irish Church she said:

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“None of us can claim the moral high ground, because none of us is perfect. Therefore all I can do is ask for God’s blessing on his Presbyterian Church in Ireland as they and we in the Church of Scotland, continue to seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ who came for a much loved world and to show by example, how to live and love eternally.”

## **Presbyterian Church Press release**

### **Church of Scotland and URC**

Statement from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) concerning its relationship with the Church of Scotland and United Reformed Church (URC).

At the annual weeklong meeting of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland’s General Assembly today (6 June), meeting in Belfast, members took the significant decision to no longer accept invitations for the Moderator to attend the Church of Scotland’s General Assembly, and the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, and no longer invite the Scottish Moderator and URC Moderator to the Irish General Assembly.

In separate resolutions, the General Assembly agreed however that where there were areas in which the Presbyterian Church in Ireland could collaborate with the Church of Scotland or URC for mutual benefit, then such collaboration should continue or could be considered. Speaking after the debate, the Clerk of the General Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian



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Church in Ireland, Rev. Trevor Gribben said, “For many on both sides of our debate this afternoon, this will be a sad day.

“It is also fair to say that the decision that has been taken not to receive the Scottish and URC Moderators, or to attend their respective General Assemblies, was indeed a significant moment given our historic relationship with the Church of Scotland in particular.

“It was also significant because it demonstrated that a majority of Assembly members felt that both denominations have drifted far from biblical truth in relation to marriage, and were in fact ignoring the authority of Scripture. Both are now moving towards a position where so called same sex marriage can be performed in the context of their worship services. Our Church is very clear that marriage, as defined in God’s Word, is between one man and one woman and significantly it is God’s Word that is authoritative

“The decision today was taken by a clear majority after a full and respectful debate, but it is also fair to say that a significant minority of ministers and elders felt that the formal issuing and receiving of invitations should continue, and no doubt they will be greatly disappointed by the decision taken by the General Assembly.

“While the General Assembly was divided on issue, the House also decided, almost unanimously, that where there were areas in which PCI could collaborate for mutual benefit - then such collaboration should continue or could be considered.”

## On social media

### TWEETED BY PCI DURING DEBATE

**Rev Newell** "You can't build bridges in the community and build walls in the Church that keep us from people."

**Rev John Dunlop** says our relationship with the Church of Scotland is grounded in our mutual life in Jesus Christ. They are part of the bride of Christ and we don't get to choose who is the bride.

'It's always good to talk.'" **Rev Brown presents the Moderator with a tartan tie** symbolic of our relationship with the different threads woven together. "One colour alone can never make a tartan."

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**Duncan Morrow** - Today the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, of which every member of my family until this generation was a member, voted to sever relations with the Church of Scotland, because the Scots tolerate gay people, and are moving towards allowing gay marriage - and they make this exclusion in the name of Christianity.

At its core, this is a deep theological dispute about what the nature of Christianity is, and for me it comes back to the witness of Jesus on the cross and the triumph of love over violence through suffering and forgiveness as the last and saving word of human reality.

All of scripture and human life makes sense to me only in the light of this revelation, and it is the only light in darkness.

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And this nonsense of excluding, persecuting and crucifying LGBT people and those around them because they want to declare their love for one another is a profound and deep blasphemy. I have reached this position having examined the scriptures in conscience, which is what I am obliged to do as a Presbyterian, and it is my duty to speak the truth I find there. Today I am sad, angry, bereft, ashamed and disgusted at the loveless, bitter, nasty cold-heartedness of what was once my church. Please pray for me that I do not go down this spiral of returning evil for evil.

## **Duncan Morrow on Facebook**

**Robert Semple** Well said Duncan, the problem with having 'Steadfast and Sure' beliefs, based on Bible principles, is fine as long as you don't 'Cherry Pick' which parts take your fancy or that you find easy to comply with. Maybe we should go back to 'Stoning' people to death for adultery! That's a Biblical command isn't it? And one Jesus himself commented on as just!

+++A sad day for PCI. As an active Presbyterian I would like to have seen the church adopt a 'one in Christ' approach.

+++Disgraceful decision by PCI. Tonight I am ashamed to be a member

+++Correct decision

+++These churches are all signatories to the leuenberg accord ? Members of [@Reformedcomunio](#) ?

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+++ I think [@PCIAssembly](#) should spend more time pondering the decline of the church and less time obsessing over gay sex. Feel sorry for the moderates, it's hard to know when to stay and fight and when to move on for your own sake

