

[Global South Anglican - Archbishop faces clash over gay marriages of 50 priests - The Sunday Times \(UK\)](#)

Archbishop faces clash over gay marriages of 50 priests - The Sunday Times (UK)

03 January 2007 - [Print Version](#)

[News & Views](#)

Source: [Sunday Times](#)

by Christopher Morgan

THE Church of England is facing a new rift over homosexual clergy with the disclosure that more than 50 gay or lesbian priests have "married" in civil partnership ceremonies.

Traditionalists and evangelicals opposed to gay clerics said this weekend they would force open debate of the issue at February's meeting of the General Synod. Campaigners have criticised bishops for shying away from enforcing the church's policy of ensuring gay clergy are celibate before they are given authorisation to enter civil partnerships.

Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is also likely to face criticism from primates of the Anglican communion at a meeting in Tanzania in February. The summit was called to mend splits caused by the ordination of Gene Robinson, a gay bishop, in America in 2003.

The figures on clerical civil partnerships come from Changing Attitude, a gay campaigning organisation in the Church of England. The figures show that at least 51 priests, including four lesbians, are now in partnerships. Colin Coward, director of Changing Attitude, said: "Civil partnerships have helped to increase the stability of same-sex relationships and reduced the social exclusion to which lesbian and gay people are often subjected." George Curry, chairman of the Church Society, the oldest evangelical organisation in the Church of England, predicted a "crunch moment" at the General Synod.

"Many of these people have defied the guidance. These are men and women who are in active sexual relationships," he said. "These figures expose the bishops' failure of leadership."

Prominent civil partnerships include that of Canon Jeremy Davies, precentor of Salisbury Cathedral, with Simon McEnery, an opera singer; and Jeffrey John, dean of St Albans, with Grant Holmes, chaplain of Kingston hospital, Surrey. In 2003, John's appointment as Bishop of Reading precipitated a fierce dispute in the church which was quietened only when he withdrew from the post.

Paul Collier, a chaplain at Goldsmiths College, London, and a member of the Crown Nominations Commission, said he had had little questioning from Christopher Chessun, Bishop of Woolwich, when he entered into a civil partnership with his companion of seven years: "He wanted me to acknowledge the policy of the bishops. I told him that I understood their policy."

Asked if Chessun had inquired about the nature of his relationship, Collier said: "We didn't go into any great detail about that."