

Faith groups contribute to British gay marriage consultation

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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(ENInews)--The British government's 12-week consultation on gay marriage, which concluded on June 14, aroused strong opinions, with faith groups expressing views both "for" and "against."

Opposition came from the (Anglican) Church in Wales and the established Church of England, which foresaw a conflict between the church's and the state's definition of marriage.

However, during the consultation, a YouGov poll of more than 2,000 people found that 58 percent of people with a religious faith back same-sex marriage. The poll also showed that 70 percent of the public support the move, including 82 percent of those under the age of 50.

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of the gay rights group Stonewall, told *The Independent* on June 13: "Recently, we've heard senior clerics distressingly compare marriage for gay people to polygamy, bestiality and child abuse."

In *The Times* on June 13, Sir Diarmid MacCulloch, professor of church history at Oxford University, called on the Church of England to remember that last week the Danish parliament voted through a law on same sex marriage by a large majority, making it mandatory for all churches to conduct gay marriages. "Apparently," he said, "this doesn't affect church establishment in Denmark at all."

Quakers, Unitarians and Reform Jews are urging Prime Minister David Cameron to stand firm on his commitment to change marriage laws to enable same sex couples. Muslims and Orthodox Jews as well as Roman Catholics have expressed strong opposition.

On June 13 opponents of gay marriage gathered outside 10 Downing Street, the London residence of the prime minister, and presented a petition with more than 500,000 signatures. It was organized by the Coalition for Marriage which hopes to collect over one million names by the end of the year.

In comparison, the rival Coalition for Equal Marriage, set up by a gay couple in Newcastle, England, has collected only 52,000 signatures.

"I think there are a lot of people who support equal marriage but they perhaps don't believe in it as passionately as those opposed to it," Savi Hensman from the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement told *The Independent* newspaper.

The House of Commons has not yet set a date for debate. Cameron has said he wants to see same-sex marriage become legal by 2015.

The *Independent* newspaper said on June 13 that the House of Commons is set to vote in favour of legalizing gay marriage by a big majority, according to a survey of MPs. A survey conducted by Coalition for Equal Marriage

shows 233 MPs are in favor of gay marriage, 56 are against and 15 undecided. The views of the remaining 346 MPs are not known.

Liberal Democrats are expected to vote in favor of gay marriage and Cameron has agreed his Conservative Party supporters should have a free vote because it will involve a matter of conscience rather than party doctrine.

This article was corrected on June 21, 2012.