

Sweden's homosexuals are allowed to wed in religious or civil ceremonies under a new law that takes effect Friday, but those who want a church wedding will have to wait until later this year.

Sweden's parliament in April approved by a wide majority a new marriage law that puts gays on an equal footing with heterosexuals.

But the Lutheran Church, which was the state church until 2000, has said that while it supports the new law, its synod will only formally decide in October whether to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies.

"The new law implies a change in the marriage ceremony, and the Church has to be given a chance to take a stand on that," the church's interim secretary general, Anders Lindberg, told AFP on Thursday.

"The marriage act reflects a certain view of marriage, and the liturgy needs to be altered to reflect that change," he added.

However, Lindberg said there had been no rush to the altar for same-sex couples.

"No, we've seen no indication of huge demand. We believe the message has gotten through to the public that same-sex couples can't get married in the Lutheran Church yet," he said.

Prior to the new law, homosexuals were only allowed to register their "partnerships" in a civil ceremony, whereas heterosexuals could choose to marry in either a civil or religious ceremony.

Civil unions granting gays and lesbians the same legal status as married couples have been allowed under Swedish law since 1995.

Since 2007, the Lutheran Church, which counts around 74 percent of Swedes as members, has

Despite new law, no church 'I do' for Swedish gays

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offered gays a religious blessing of their union.

A number of homosexual couples, including some who have already registered their "partnership," have indicated that they plan to hold civil marriage ceremonies on May 1.

Sweden, already a pioneer in giving same-sex couples the right to adopt children, would become one of the first countries in the world to allow gays to marry in a major Church.

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