



**Scott Whitmont (left) and Christopher Whitmont-Stein.**

# First same-sex ceremony in shul

**JOCELYN ROBUCK**

THE first Australian couple to have a same-sex commitment ceremony in a synagogue will make history on September 21 at Emanuel Synagogue in Woollahra.

Scott Whitmont, 47, and Christopher Whitmont-Stein, 38, will have the shul's Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins officiate in a ceremony designed to recognise – in a Jewish framework – the relationship of the couple, who are strongly committed to Judaism.

Also co-officiating will be Emanuel Synagogue's Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio and Rabbi Paul Jacobson. The couple is expecting about 100 guests.

Scott and Christopher said, "We are delighted to now be able to have our union formally recognised by our kehillah and officiated by our own rabbi. We see ourselves the same as any heterosexual Jewish couple that wishes to have their relationship officially recognised ... we are thrilled that the Moetza's decision has enabled us to make ourselves 'kosher', as it were."

Jewish gay-lesbian group Dayenu hosted a Shabbat dinner last Friday in honour of the couple; they will be called to the Torah at Emanuel Synagogue the day before the ceremony.

The commitment ceremony will

include an amended version of the sheva brachot (seven blessings), with references to "bride and groom" and having children omitted.

Rabbi Kamins said, "While we cannot refer to it as a wedding and the liturgy is different, elements of a wedding have been adapted for the ceremony. The couple will stand under a chuppah, exchange rings, and read a ketubah [wedding contract]."

In May 2007, the Council of Progressive Rabbis of Asia, Australia and New Zealand (the Moetzah) passed a resolution to enable its rabbis to officiate at same-sex commitment ceremonies. While the organisation did not give the ceremonies the same status as weddings, it was its intention to provide meaningful recognition of same-sex relationships.

Following the UPJ decision, Rabbi Benzion Milecki of South Head Synagogue wrote in *The AJN*: "It is one thing to allow a mitzvah to lapse. It is quite another to call a serious transgression a mitzvah." Several Orthodox rabbis contacted by *The AJN* this week declined to comment.

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