

Methodist Conference Report on Marriage and Relationships 2019.

I have been asked to spell out the resolutions that we will be asked to vote on at our Synod on January 11th. You can find these at the end of the full report which is available at <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/marriage-and-relationships-2019/the-2019-marriage-and-relationships-report/>

I have set them out below. The five specific resolutions are set out in blue with further notes to each in black. If we accept 10/2, 10/3, 10/7 and 10/8 then the final one 10/9 simply enacts what we have decided by amending our standing orders. In the blurb following 10/9 where words are in bold they are an addition to the current standing order, where words are scored through they were in the original standing order but need to be deleted. All other wording is exactly as in our current standing orders.

When it comes to voting there will be a separate paper ballot for each resolution. It is possible for the Synod to accept, reject or amend each resolution.

I hope this brief commentary helps you work your way through this important business.



10/2. The Conference adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.2.5 that it affirm the following summary understanding of the principles or qualities of good relating:

- All significant relationships should be built on self-giving love, commitment, fidelity, loyalty, honesty, mutual respect, equality and the desire for the mutual flourishing of the people involved.
- It is through that self-giving, rather than through self-seeking, that the self flourishes and begins to experience life in all its fullness (though it needs to be recognised that the universal Church's historic emphasis on self-sacrifice has often been misunderstood and misused [eg by abusive partners] in a way that is destructive of the wellbeing of the ones abused [often women]).

10/3. The Conference adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.6.4 that it affirm the following summary understanding of cohabitation:

- The Church recognises that the love of God is present within the love of human beings who are drawn to each other, and who enter freely into some form of life-enhancing committed relationship with each other, whether that be through informal cohabitation or a more formal commitment entered into publicly.
- As a Church we wish to celebrate that the love of God is present in these circumstances, even if that grace is not responded to or even discerned by the people concerned.
- The Church has an important calling, therefore, to point to the presence of God's love within such relationships, and to encourage people to respond to it in the renewing and deepening (by whatever means) of their commitment.

10/7. The Conference adopts the *Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage* set out in paragraph 5.1.2 and directs that it be included in the Guidance section of CPD.

- G1 The Methodist Church welcomes everyone, whether or not a member, who enquires about an intended marriage in any of its places of worship. It looks for an openness to God in them, not necessarily a developed understanding of the Christian faith.
- G2 Legally, marriage is a contractual relationship entered into by two people who make solemn vows and commitments to each other, without either the nature of the marriage or the nature of the commitments being further defined under the law of the land. In the understanding of the Methodist Church, marriage encompasses that but is also deeper and richer. The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a covenant relationship between two people, within God's covenant of love with them. Through it, they may experience, explore and express God's gracious love.
- G3 The Methodist Church believes that marriage is an exclusive relationship, freely entered into with a life-long intention of uniting two people in body, heart, mind and soul in ways that are appropriate to each partner. In it, God's Spirit enables both partners to know the security of love and care, bringing to each other comfort and companionship, enrichment and encouragement, tenderness and trust. Through such marriage children may be nurtured, family life strengthened, and human society enriched.
- G4 The Methodist Church recognises that amongst its members different views are held about the interpretation of the Bible and Christian tradition as to whether those being married may be any two people, or may only be a woman and a man. The Methodist Church has decided to respect and make practical provisions for both positions.
- G5 A marriage service or a service of blessing of a marriage that has been previously solemnised may only be conducted in a Methodist place of worship when it can be shown that the requirements of the legislation in the appropriate jurisdiction have been met.
- G6 Where there is a desire to use places of worship for marriage services or for services of blessing for a marriage previously solemnised, the managing trustees of those premises should actively consider whether they wish to do so solely for marriages of mixed-sex couples, or for marriages of same-sex couples as well as mixed-sex couples. The managing trustees should re-consider the question of the use of the place of worship for such services every five years or sooner.
- G7 Where the managing trustees wish to use a place of worship for marriage services, and the legislation of the relevant jurisdiction requires church buildings or personnel to be registered or authorised for the solemnisation of marriages, the managing trustees should take the relevant steps to comply.

10/8. The Conference consents in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises throughout the Connexion and by Methodist ministers, probationers or members in so far as the law of the relevant jurisdiction permits or requires and subject to compliance with such further requirements, if any, as that law imposes.

10/9. The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:

011A Marriage

(1) The Methodist Church believes that marriage ~~is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be~~ *is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace, and that it is in accord with God's purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of ~~one man and one woman~~ two people who freely enter it. **Within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, that marriage can be between any two people. The Methodist Church affirms both understandings and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them.***

(2) The Methodist Church welcomes everyone, whether or not a member, who enquires about an intended marriage in any of its places of worship.

011B Divorce, Remarriage, Marriage of Same Sex Couples and Respect for Conscience

~~(2)~~ (1) Divorce **in a court of the land** does not of itself prevent a person being married in any Methodist place of worship.

~~(3)~~ (2) Under no circumstances does the Conference require any person authorised to conduct marriages who is subject to the discipline of the Church as a minister, probationer, **officer** or member to officiate at **or participate in** the marriage of a particular couple, should it be contrary to the dictates of his or her conscience to do so.

~~(4)~~ (3) **When:**

(i) A ~~a~~ minister **or**, probationer **is stationed in a new appointment;** or

(ii) it is proposed that a member ~~who is~~ **should become** authorised to conduct marriages

~~but who~~ **and he or she** for reasons of conscience will never officiate at the marriages of couples in particular circumstances, ~~shall refer such couples to an authorised colleague who is not so prevented~~ **the person concerned shall participate in a pastoral conversation on the matter with the District Chair and the Superintendent of the relevant Circuit (if he or she is not the Superintendent). Every effort shall be**

made to ensure that no individual is placed under any pressure to act against the dictates of conscience.

(4) Whether or not the law of the relevant jurisdiction requires that Methodist premises must be registered for same-sex marriages before such marriages can take place, no same-sex marriage may take place on Methodist premises unless the managing trustees or, if none, the trustees, have approved the use of the premises for that purpose and taken any steps which may be necessary under the applicable law.

(5) A minister, probationer or member who is asked to officiate at the marriage of a mixed-sex couple in Methodist premises which are appropriately registered for the purpose (where registration is required) but who is prevented from officiating for reasons of conscience shall refer the couple to an authorised colleague who is not so prevented.

(6) A minister, probationer or member who is asked to officiate at the marriage of a same-sex couple in Methodist premises which are appropriately registered for the purpose (where registration is required) but who is prevented from officiating for reasons of conscience shall notify the District Chair, who shall refer the couple to an authorised colleague who is not so prevented.

(7) A couple who seek to be married in Methodist premises which are not appropriately registered for the purpose shall be referred, if registration is required, to the persons responsible for the conduct of marriages at premises which are so registered, preferably in the same circuit. If the person receiving the request is not willing for reasons of conscience to make such a reference, he or she shall so inform the District Chair, who shall make the reference in that person's place.

(8) No minister, probationer or member may agree to conduct a same-sex wedding without first notifying the District Chair.

(9) The managing trustees or, if none, the trustees of any Methodist premises which are registered for the solemnisation of the marriage of same-sex couples shall ensure that the District Chair is notified of such registration.

*~~(5)~~ (10) The Methodist Church opposes discrimination on the basis of **sexuality**, gender or race. Accordingly, if a couple is seeking to be married in a Methodist place of worship no objection to the performance by a particular minister, probationer, **officer** or member of any duty in respect of their proposed marriage shall be entertained on such a ground. No minister, probationer, **officer** or member shall perform the relevant duty or duties in place of the other person concerned or otherwise assist the couple to make the objection effective.*