

GOD IN LOVE UNITES US

Results of voting in respect of the Provisional Resolutions by the Cumbria District Synod on 24th April 2021

In response to the Report 'God in love unites us', the 2019 Methodist Conference passed **provisional resolutions for consideration by the district synods** on the subject of marriage and relationships. Standing Order 122(3) of the Methodist Church's Constitutional Practice and Discipline provides that:

Provisional resolutions shall be submitted to each of the home Districts and to the Law and Polity Committee, each of which may approve, disapprove or approve with amendments. Provisional resolutions shall be submitted for confirmation to the next annual meeting of the Conference with a report of the opinions of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee, and shall take effect only if then confirmed. *[Because of the pandemic, there was a delay of a year in the middle of the process, with the expectation that the final decision will now be taken at the 2021 Conference.]*

The results of the votes in the Cumbria District Synod are summarised in the following table. The results will be reported to the Conference who will consider the resolutions of all the district synods. It will be seen that the provisional resolutions were carried, and that three proposed amending resolutions were lost, with more details set out after the table. However, we hope that no person or viewpoint will be considered to have 'won' or 'lost', but rather that we continue to seek to respect the sincerity of the different opinions expressed, as the Church as a whole seeks to find a path in which the God of love can unite us, enabling us to live well together, even with our at times contradictory convictions.

Resolution	Votes for	Votes against	Result	Total no. voting
10/2 – Qualities of relating	81	1	Carried	84
10/3 – Understanding of cohabitation	76	6	Carried	83
Amending resolution on 10/7	26	59	Not Carried	85
10/7 – Guidance on understanding of marriage	62	23	Carried	85
10/8 – Consent in principle	58	26	Carried	84
Amending resolution on 10/9 (KSAT)	28	57	Not Carried	85
Amending resolution on 10/9 (NOM)	29	55	Not Carried	84
10/9 – Changes to Standing Orders	59	24	Carried	84

The provisional resolutions are set out below (references to numbered paragraphs are to paragraphs in the Conference Report), preceded where applicable with the proposed amending resolutions. Under the applicable rules of debate, any amending proposals were considered prior to consideration of the substantive resolution (if the amendments had been approved, they would have amended the substantive resolution; since they were not approved, in each case the substantive resolution was voted upon in the original form).

The Synod approved the following resolution by 81 votes to 1:

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]).

The Synod approved the following resolution by 76 votes to 6:

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.

The Synod rejected the following amending resolution by 59 votes to 26:

Proposed Amendment to Provisional Resolution 10/7 via a Memorial from the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby & Tebay Circuit – Part 1

The Memorial set out below was proposed by members of Orton Methodist Church and agreed by the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby & Tebay Circuit Meeting on 5th March 2020 (Present 47; For 35, Against 12). The Memorial was submitted to the Conference (for consideration alongside any other submissions received together with the results of the voting by synods). It was therefore reported as information for the Cumbria District Synod, as required under Standing Order 516(4).

Additionally, under SO 516(6), the KSAT Circuit Meeting agreed to submit the Memorial to the Synod as a proposal to amend the provisional resolutions, as referred to and set out below (Present 47; For 36, Against 11). Accordingly, the Cumbria Synod also voted on the proposed amendments.

Proposed 10/7 to read:

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 is a covenant**

relationship between a man and a woman, within God's covenant of love with them.

G3 The Methodist Church believes that marriage is an exclusive relationship, freely entered into with a life-long intention of uniting **a man and a woman** in body, heart, mind and soul. 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. **Such marriage is the foundation for family life and when blessed with children, it is God's chosen way for the continuance of mankind and the bringing up of children in security and trust. The union of husband and wife is in Scripture compared to the union of Christ and His Church.**

Delete: G4, G5, G6 and G7

The Synod approved the following resolution by 62 votes to 23:

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 reconsider 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.*

The Synod approved the following resolution by 58 votes to 26:

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.

The Synod rejected the following amending resolution by 57 votes to 28:

First Proposed Amendment to Provisional Resolution 10/9 via a Memorial from the Kirkby Stephen, Appleby & Tebay Circuit – Part 2

In its second part, the Memorial sought to amend Resolution 10/9 as follows:

Proposed 10/9 to read:

The Conference amends standing orders as follows:

011A Marriage (1) The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit between one man and one woman who freely enter it and is in accordance with God's purposes. The Methodist Church welcomes everyone, whether or not a member, who enquires about an intended marriage in any of its places of worship.

Delete remainder of the other Standing Order Amendments proposed under Provisional Resolution 10/9 (*with the current SO 011A (2) to (5) to remain*).

The Synod rejected the following amending resolution by 55 votes to 29:

Second Proposed Amendment to Provisional Resolution 10/9 via a Notice of Motion

The following Notice of Motion ('NOM') was been submitted for consideration by the Synod in accordance with Standing Order 413(4). Its effect was to propose amendments to provisional resolution 10/9 as set out below.

Notice of Motion:

The two sentences in heavy type in proposed standing order 0111A Marriage (1) constitute a logically incoherent statement since no one can affirm two mutually contradictory statements. The Cumbria Synod therefore asks the Conference to amend these sentences to:-

**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 a man and a woman or two men or two women.**

The Methodist Church affirms those who hold to either understanding and makes provision in its standing orders for them.

In order to make this last phrase accurate, the Cumbria Synod requests Conference to remove sections (3) and (6) altogether and replace with a new section (3):-

Those who adhere to the first understanding shall not be required to participate in any way with the conducting or facilitating marriages between two men or two women.

Ministers and other authorised persons who adhere to the second understanding, and church councils of churches which decide to register for same sex marriage ceremonies shall make all the necessary arrangements. This will include, but not be limited to, making known those churches where such ceremonies are legally permitted, and the name and contact details of a person who will direct the parties to a suitable venue and a willing minister or authorised person.

The Synod approved the following resolution by 59 votes to 24:

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.