

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

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### PART 1 GENERAL REPORT

#### A. Introduction

1. In 2019, the Conference received the report *God in Love Unites Us* ('the 2019 report'), produced by the Marriage and Relationships Task Group set up by the Conference in 2016 (<https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2019-10-amended-marriage-and-relationships-report.pdf>). Originally the intention was that the Task Group would consider the definition of marriage and prepare a draft Statement of the judgement of the Conference on marriage and relationships (which would have the status of a 'Conference Statement' under Standing Order (SO) 129, explained further below). However, in 2018 the Conference directed that, instead of such a statement, the Task Group should bring a report on these matters, including any proposed changes to Standing Orders, and the 2019 report was therefore brought in that form to the Conference.
2. The 2019 Conference, having received the report, commended it to the Connexion for study and prayerful discussion. The Conference also adopted certain resolutions, 10/4, 10/5 and 10/6, to have immediate effect; these are to be found in Appendix 1 below. As to resolutions 10/2, 10/3, 10/7, 10/8 and 10/9, the Conference adopted them but directed that they be treated as provisional resolutions under SO 122.
3. The Conference (by resolution 10/10) further conditionally adopted resolutions 10/8A and 10/8B, also to be found in Appendix 1, enabling ministers, probationers and members and managing trustees to act under the Marriage Act in England and ministers, probationers and members to act under the Marriage Act in Scotland in response to the Conference's decision upon resolution 10/8. These resolutions are dealt with further below, at paragraph 90.
4. The process under SO 122 is used where the Conference has judged that any resolution it has adopted is of such significance that it ought to be considered by the Synods and confirmed before coming into effect. Provisional resolutions are to be submitted to the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee, each of which may approve, disapprove or approve with amendments. Under SO 122(3) '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 then only if confirmed.' When the

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provisional resolutions return to the Conference for confirmation (as they now do), the Conference can confirm, decline to confirm or confirm with amendments.

5. By resolution 10/11 the 2019 Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a group of persons representing the Law and Polity Committee, the Faith and Order Committee and the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, to receive the reports of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee and to report to the Conference of 2020 with appropriate resolutions, including a statement of ecumenical implications as required under SO 121(2) (for any report which potentially represents a major change in the policy of the Church).
6. The group originally appointed by the Conference (2019 Daily Record 8/52) consisted of: The Secretary of the Conference, Mrs Susan Howdle, Miss Elizabeth Ovey, Mrs Louise Wilkins, the Revds Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt, Kenneth Howcroft and Dr Roberta Topham. Upon Mrs Wilkins' resignation as the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, the Methodist Council appointed the Revd Keith Reed as a representative of the Law and Polity Committee in her place, but in the event the group did not need to meet until after Mrs Wilkins' replacement, Mrs Joanne Anderton, was in post, and the Council appointed her in place of the Revd Keith Reed.
7. As members of the Conference are well aware, after the 2019 Conference the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the Synods were not all able to vote on the provisional resolutions as required before the 2020 Conference. The 2020 Conference (meeting remotely) resolved to suspend SO 122(3) until the close of the Conference of 2021 and directed that 'any provisional resolutions adopted by the Conference of 2019 which would under that clause have been submitted to the Synods before this current meeting of the Conference, reported on by them and submitted for confirmation to this meeting of the Conference shall instead, except in any District in which they have already been submitted to and dealt with by the Synod, be submitted to the Synods before the Conference of 2021, and shall in every case be reported on by the Synods and by the Law and Polity Committee to that Conference and submitted to it for confirmation'.
8. As the group appointed under Resolution 20/11 of 2019 (which for ease of reference we shall refer to as 'the reporting group') we therefore now present this report to the Conference.

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### **B. The way the reporting group has worked**

#### **The material it has considered**

9. All the Synods submitted the results of their voting on each of the resolutions. In some instances, the Synods adopted a resolution in amended form, and the report below deals with those at the appropriate places.
10. Those reporting upon the Synod debates were invited also to offer any significant points raised in the debates (in the spirit of SO 122(3) which refers to the 'opinions' of the Synods). There was a variety of responses to this, some giving a much fuller account of points made than others. However, given the number and richness of the 'opinions' offered, it was possible for the reporting group to have a good sense of the range of views and concerns as they were expressed in the Synods, and so it has sought to summarise the main themes in Part 1.D below.
11. Besides those results, and those from the Law and Polity Committee, the group has also taken into consideration the three District Resolutions arising from this business submitted under SO 419(2), and makes suggestions below as to how they should be dealt with.
12. The group also had sight of the range of relevant circuit and district memorials and draws attention to several of them at the relevant point below, but it is the function of the Memorials Committee to propose, and the Conference then to consider, the appropriate Replies to adopt.
13. As directed, the report offers in Part 1.E below reflections upon the ecumenical implications of any decisions which are made. The group is very grateful to the Revd Ruth Gee (Assistant Secretary of the Conference and connexional Ecumenical Officer) for her assistance with this.
14. The group was grateful to have an indication of what the Faith and Order Committee (in fulfilling its responsibilities under SO 330(4)) would be wishing to say in its own separate report on these issues to be found elsewhere in this volume of the Agenda (Agenda item 60). The group has sought to give careful consideration to the committee's views, as explained at the relevant points in this report. In particular, the question of the relationship between the provisional resolutions and matters of doctrine is referred to further below. With regard to the committee's indication that it will produce some resources to help support further biblical study and reflection, the group notes that the committee has not said that such work needed to be undertaken before the provisional resolutions can be confirmed.

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15. Finally, whilst the Conference will also need to deal with any Notices of Motion, the contents of these are obviously not known at the stage of writing this report.

### **The reporting group's general approach**

16. It is important to stress that the group's task is essentially one of reporting. Its report is based upon what appears in the various materials mentioned above, which has in turn led the group to suggest what it believes the Conference needs to consider and vote upon. It has sought to distinguish between the **form** in which each of the provisional resolutions should be moved (by the Secretary of the Conference, as explained below at paragraph 59), and the **content** of the text for which approval is sought. Where (in a few instances below) the group recommends that the form of the resolution to be put to the Conference should include minor amendments to the wording which the Synods have voted upon, this is where, although the meaning of the wording in the context of the 2019 Report was clear, minimal alterations are needed now that these will be, for the future, 'stand-alone' resolutions.
17. With regard to the content of the text itself, at various points in this report the group has noted and commented on some of the questions and concerns either raised in particular Synods or arising from its own observations. Concerning these, the group has not itself proposed an amended form of text, but offers in each such instance some suggestions as to ways in which the mind of the Conference might be tested on them, indicating in some cases that it supports an amendment being made because it is helpful for the purposes of clarification or legal accuracy.
18. Finally, the reporting group emphasises that, although the 2019 Report formed the background for the conversations throughout the Connexion, what the Conference is considering and voting upon now is not the content of that report but the series of resolutions which were provisionally adopted and are now presented below.

### **C. The voting**

19. In accordance with the usual procedure required by SO 122(3) to be followed when the Conference resolves that resolutions are to be treated as provisional (as explained above), the provisional resolutions were submitted to the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee, for them to approve, disapprove or approve with amendments.

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20. The full results of the Synods' votes are set out in the tables below. Some further specific detail in diagrammatic form is provided as to each resolution later in the report.
21. The reporting group draws the Conference's attention to the following points:
- all the Synods but one approved all the resolutions
  - the Shetland Synod approved resolution 10/2 in amended form, but did not approve the other resolutions
  - in four other instances, a Synod approved a particular resolution in amended form, and these are reported on below under the relevant resolution.
22. The Law and Polity Committee voted unanimously (in each case 11-0) in favour of each of the resolutions, whilst making one or two drafting comments of which note has been taken in what appears below.

**Note:** for ease of reference in the reports of the voting the Districts are listed in alphabetical order, rather than in the arrangement which appears in the Stations. The instances where a Synod voted for an amended form of the resolutions are denoted by grey shading in the tables below.

Districts	Resolution 10/2					Resolution 10/3			
	Present	F	A	%F	%A	F	A	%F	%A
<b>Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire</b>	133	108	10	91.5%	8.5%	98	21	82.4%	17.6%
<b>Birmingham</b>	144	138	1	99.3%	0.7%	125	7	94.7%	5.3%
<b>Bolton and Rochdale</b>	78	67	8	89.3%	10.7%	60	16	78.9%	21.1%
<b>Bristol</b>	126	95	28	77.2%	22.8%	97	22	81.5%	18.5%
<b>Channel Islands</b>	32	32	0	100.0%	0.0%	30	1	96.8%	3.2%
<b>Chester &amp; Stoke</b>	123	118	3	97.5%	2.5%	109	12	90.1%	9.9%
<b>Cornwall and Isles of Scilly</b>	130	115	10	92.0%	8.0%	92	33	73.6%	26.4%
<b>Cumbria</b>	85	81	1	98.8%	1.2%	76	6	92.7%	7.3%
<b>Darlington</b>	89	84	3	96.6%	3.4%	81	7	92.0%	8.0%
<b>East Anglia</b>	153	146	6	96.1%	3.9%	134	17	88.7%	11.3%

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<b>Isle of Man</b>	74	65	7	90.3%	9.7%	60	14	81.1%	18.9%
<b>Lancashire</b>	104	100	3	97.1%	2.9%	84	19	81.6%	18.4%
<b>Lincolnshire</b>	92	90	0	100.0%	0.0%	76	14	84.4%	15.6%
<b>Liverpool</b>	84	74	7	91.4%	8.6%	68	12	85.0%	15.0%
<b>London</b>	208	189	6	96.9%	3.1%	160	35	82.1%	17.9%
<b>Manchester and Stockport</b>	127	119	1	99.2%	0.8%	110	13	89.4%	10.6%
<b>Newcastle</b>	145	135	9	93.8%	6.3%	121	23	84.0%	16.0%
<b>Northampton</b>	170	162	7	95.9%	4.1%	151	18	89.3%	10.7%
<b>Nottingham and Derby</b>	145	133	7	95.0%	5.0%	133	2	98.5%	1.5%
<b>Plymouth and Exeter</b>	105	100	1	99.0%	1.0%	90	11	89.1%	10.9%
<b>Scotland</b>	63	63	0	100.0%	0.0%	61	1	98.4%	1.6%
<b>Sheffield</b>	118	91	24	79.1%	20.9%	84	33	71.8%	28.2%
<b>Shetland</b>	40	35	5	87.5%	12.5%	16	22	42.1%	57.9%
<b>South East</b>	125	86	33	72.3%	27.7%	88	34	72.1%	27.9%
<b>Southampton</b>	169	159	5	97.0%	3.0%	142	24	85.5%	14.5%
<b>Synod Cymru</b>	22	22	0	100.0%	0.0%	19	3	86.4%	13.6%
<b>Wales</b>	131	122	2	98.4%	1.6%	110	14	88.7%	11.3%
<b>Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury</b>	143	136	5	96.5%	3.5%	117	16	88.0%	12.0%
<b>Yorkshire North and East</b>	164	157	4	97.5%	2.5%	135	27	83.3%	16.7%
<b>Yorkshire West</b>	215	196	5	97.5%	2.5%	175	25	87.5%	12.5%

“Present” means the maximum number of people eligible to vote who were present at some point in the Synod.

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Districts	Resolution 10/7			Resolution 10/8			Resolution 10/9						
	Present	F	A	%F	%A	F	A	%F	%A	F	A	%F	%A
Bedfordshire, Essex, Hertfordshire	133	93	24	79.5%	20.5%	92	28	76.7%	23.3%	93	24	79.5%	20.5%
Birmingham	144	122	13	90.4%	9.6%	117	19	86.0%	14.0%	125	15	89.3%	10.7%
Bolton and Rochdale	78	52	21	71.2%	28.8%	53	23	69.7%	30.3%	53	22	70.7%	29.3%
Bristol	126	94	26	78.3%	21.7%	88	32	73.3%	26.7%	95	28	77.2%	22.8%
Channel Islands	32	28	4	87.5%	12.5%	27	5	84.4%	15.6%	29	2	93.5%	6.5%
Chester & Stoke	123	107	15	87.7%	12.3%	105	18	85.4%	14.6%	104	17	86.0%	14.0%
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	130	73	58	55.7%	44.3%	82	48	63.1%	36.9%	82	48	63.1%	36.9%
Cumbria	85	62	23	72.9%	27.1%	58	26	69.0%	31.0%	59	24	71.1%	28.9%
Darlington	89	74	13	85.1%	14.9%	75	14	84.3%	15.7%	79	10	88.8%	11.2%
East Anglia	153	126	24	84.0%	16.0%	117	34	77.5%	22.5%	131	22	85.6%	14.4%
Isle of Man	74	58	15	79.5%	20.5%	54	20	73.0%	27.0%	62	12	83.8%	16.2%
Lancashire	104	86	18	82.7%	17.3%	82	20	80.4%	19.6%	87	13	87.0%	13.0%
Lincolnshire	92	65	21	75.6%	24.4%	67	21	76.1%	23.9%	73	16	82.0%	18.0%
Liverpool	84	67	13	83.8%	16.3%	61	14	81.3%	18.7%	65	13	83.3%	16.7%
London	208	131	60	68.6%	31.4%	134	59	69.4%	30.6%	142	47	75.1%	24.9%

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Districts	Resolution 10/7				Resolution 10/8				Resolution 10/9				
	Present	F	A	%A	%F	A	F	%A	%F	A	F	%A	%F
<b>Manchester and Stockport</b>	127	108	16	87.1%	12.9%	103	18	85.1%	14.9%	104	20	83.9%	16.1%
<b>Newcastle</b>	145	111	32	77.6%	22.4%	107	38	73.8%	26.2%	110	33	76.9%	23.1%
<b>Northampton</b>	170	145	25	85.3%	14.7%	136	33	80.5%	19.5%	149	20	88.2%	11.8%
<b>Nottingham and Derby</b>	145	109	32	77.3%	22.7%	105	34	75.5%	24.5%	109	30	78.4%	21.6%
<b>Plymouth and Exeter</b>	105	57	40	58.8%	41.2%	56	41	57.7%	42.3%	57	40	58.8%	41.2%
<b>Scotland</b>	63	55	3	94.8%	5.2%	55	5	91.7%	8.3%	57	2	96.6%	3.4%
<b>Sheffield</b>	118	81	34	70.4%	29.6%	82	31	72.6%	27.4%	84	23	78.5%	21.5%
<b>Shetland</b>	40	17	19	47.2%	52.8%	15	22	40.5%	59.5%	16	21	43.2%	56.8%
<b>South East</b>	125	90	35	72.0%	28.0%	89	35	71.8%	28.2%	88	30	74.6%	25.4%
<b>Southampton</b>	169	130	35	78.8%	21.2%	124	42	74.7%	25.3%	130	36	78.3%	21.7%
<b>Synod Cymru</b>	22	19	3	86.4%	13.6%	18	4	81.8%	18.2%	20	2	90.9%	9.1%
<b>Wales</b>	131	108	19	85.0%	15.0%	104	24	81.3%	18.8%	105	21	83.3%	16.7%
<b>Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury</b>	143	109	24	82.0%	18.0%	108	29	78.8%	21.2%	115	20	85.2%	14.8%
<b>Yorkshire North and East</b>	164	128	36	78.0%	22.0%	110	53	67.5%	32.5%	111	49	69.4%	30.6%
<b>Yorkshire West</b>	215	169	26	86.7%	13.3%	169	33	83.7%	16.3%	156	45	77.6%	22.4%



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23. The reporting group recognises the overall strength of the voting approving the resolutions. As the tables and diagrams in this report show, in every Synod except one there was a majority in favour of approving each resolution, and in many a very large majority. That said, it is clear that in most Synods for almost all of the resolutions there were some who did not approve the resolutions. In a few Synods this was more than a third of those voting. The range of percentages appears in the table below.

### % Average\* and Range (all Synods)

	% FOR		% AGAINST	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
<b>R10/2</b>	94.1%	72.3–100.0%	5.9%	0.0–27.7%
<b>R10/3</b>	84.7%	42.1–98.5%	15.3%	1.5–57.9%
<b>R10/7</b>	78.3%	47.2–94.8%	21.7%	5.2–52.8%
<b>R10/8</b>	75.6%	40.5–91.7%	24.4%	8.3–59.5%
<b>R10/9</b>	79.3%	43.2–96.6%	20.7%	3.4–56.8%

\*The average is the mean, calculated by adding the percentage votes for each synod and dividing by the total number of synods.

### % Average\* and Range (all Synods voting in favour of the resolution)

	% FOR		% AGAINST	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
<b>R10/2</b>	94.3%	72.3–100.0%	5.7%	0.0–27.7%
<b>R10/3</b>	86.1%	71.8–98.5%	13.9%	1.5–28.2%
<b>R10/7</b>	79.4%	55.7–94.8%	20.6%	5.2–44.3%
<b>R10/8</b>	76.8%	57.7–91.7%	23.2%	8.3–42.3%
<b>R10/9</b>	80.6%	58.8–96.6%	19.4%	3.4–41.2%

\*The average is the mean, calculated by adding the percentage votes for each synod and dividing by the total number of synods.

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### % Average\* and Range (all Synods voting on the resolution without amendment)

	% FOR		% AGAINST	
	Average	Range	Average	Range
<b>R10/2</b>	94.3%	72.3–100.0%	5.7%	0.0–27.7%
<b>R10/3</b>	84.5%	42.1–98.5%	15.5%	1.5–57.9%
<b>R10/7</b>	78.3%	47.2–94.8%	21.7%	5.2–52.8%
<b>R10/8</b>	75.6%	40.5–91.7%	24.4%	8.3–59.5%
<b>R10/9</b>	78.5%	43.2–96.6%	21.5%	3.4–56.8%

\*The average is the mean, calculated by adding the percentage votes for each synod and dividing by the total number of synods.

24. The reporting group recognises that the concerns being raised need to be listened to carefully. To that end the group has sought to offer in Part 1.D below a summary of the themes which emerged in the various Synods as reported. It is important to remember, however, that these articulated views, especially of the Synod members opposed to the resolutions, have to be seen in the context of the reported number of votes in favour of the resolutions.
25. The reporting group is aware that the Synod votes were preceded by conversations in many places; the numbers of those requesting resources from the Connexional Team<sup>1</sup> reflect the levels of interest in the report and concern to have properly informed deliberations. The reporting group is sure that the Conference will wish to acknowledge its gratitude to many people throughout the Connexion: all those who have engaged in this process of discernment over a number of years; those who have provided resources and support for this to happen; the Circuits, Local Churches and other groups and individuals who have enabled and encouraged careful and sensitive consideration of the issues raised; and the Synod officers who have enabled the consultation and decision-making process to move forward in these challenging times. The reporting group **recommends** that the Conference adopt a resolution expressing its thanks.

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1 Publishing resources sent out totalled 69,092, as follows: copies of the Report: 37,107; copies of the Study Guide: 28,501; GILUU film on USB: 3,484. Visits to the website resources totalled 27,568, as follows: accessing the report, study guide etc: 23,969; downloading the GILUU film: 3,599.

n.b. these statistics for downloads exclude people who visited the site on more than one occasion on the same day, but do not exclude multiple visits by the same person on different days.

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### D. Summary of some of the main themes emerging from the Synod reports

26. The reporting group is very grateful to the Revd Keith Reed who has carefully read through the points contained in the Synod reports, to offer independent assurance to the Conference that this report has faithfully reflected the tenor of the responses. The points raised that refer directly to a particular resolution are dealt with in the relevant section of this report. There were many more which, although made in a debate in the context of one of the resolutions or another, are more general in theme and apply to several or all of them. They are summarised in what follows. Several of the themes raised in the Synods are also covered in the Faith and Order Committee report and the reporting group draws attention to those reflections.
27. A major theme in the comments was that of **Doctrine and Discipline**. Questions were asked about whether the changes proposed in the resolutions constituted a fundamental doctrinal change which would require a change to Clause 4 of the Deed of Union and mean that some presbyters would not be able to make the annual affirmation that they "... continue to believe and preach our doctrines and observe and administer our discipline".
28. A large number of comments were on the theme of the **Authority and Interpretation of Scripture**. Some argued for or against interpretations of particular biblical texts. Some argued that the report should have started with scripture and carefully and systematically worked to a conclusion, because scripture should have pre-eminence over reason, tradition and experience, and should be the basis of both our thinking and our doing. Others argued that we should look at scripture through the paradigm of God's love and, where there are debates over the interpretation of scripture, we should ask what leads to the most loving outcome. Overall, there were nearly as many comments recorded which supported the report in these matters as there were against it.
29. Another theme was that of **History, Tradition and the World-wide Church**. Questions were asked about whether the Methodist Church in Britain would put a strain on relationships with some of its ecumenical partners globally or locally if it confirmed the resolutions. Others argued that other churches were on a similar journey, and that in the past the Methodist Church has prophetically changed its general understanding and its interpretation of scripture regarding what were at the time seen as equally important and transformative issues, such as women in leadership, divorce, and the marriage of divorcees.
30. Several comments were made about how the **Kingdom, Church and "Secular" Society** relate to one another. Some argued that marriage has changed legally, religiously and socially throughout history, and that people in a same

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sex relationship who were Christians have found it hard that a civil ceremony of partnership or marriage does not allow for any religious content. Others expressed a concern that the church was following, not leading, society, and argued that the trends in today's society should not all be blessed by the Church.

31. There were a few contributions recorded from or about **Young People**. They asked why the Methodist Church is still talking about these things, and why they have not already been done.
32. There were also comments about issues relating to people who identified themselves as **LGBTQI+** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex + others) persons. Some stated that the LGBTQI+ community had been wrestling with the interpretation and application of the scriptures for a long time, and had served the church for many years, but had also experienced rejection and hurt over the issues raised in the report. Others commented that the report had implications not just for those involved in same-sex relationships, but also those who identify themselves in other ways.
33. A good number of comments concerned issues of **Sexuality, Celibacy and Holiness**. Some argued that our identity is in Christ not in our sexuality, and that many people are on a journey that is challenging and involves wrestling with their faith and how it relates to sexuality. Others argued, in effect, that if more emphasis were given to the “scriptural” in John Wesley's understanding of scriptural holiness, different conclusions would be reached, and that more recognition should be given to those who chose to live celibate lives out of their sense of obedience to God.
34. A larger number of comments were concerned with **Love and Inclusion**. It was argued that it is important to keep the whole conversation within the context of our affirmation of God's love. Similarly, because Jesus said 'love one another as I have loved you', our gospel is one of unconditional love, leading to welcome and inclusion. Yet although we welcome legally married same-sex couples, including presbyters and deacons, in the life of the church and are prepared to baptise their children, we are not at present prepared to offer them our own marriage service by which to affirm their relationships.
35. There were some general comments on **Relationships and Marriage** (for comments specific to the particular resolutions on these topics, see under those resolutions later in this report). It was stated that the church should be encouraging people to be open to the presence of God in whatever situation they find themselves. Some expressed a desire to offer blessing and affirmation to same-sex covenant relationships, but some disquiet that those unions should

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be defined as marriage. Others argued that marriage is the best expression of a committed relationship, and that if the Church is willing to give a blessing then it should be willing to allow marriage.

36. The reporting group recognises that this report is primarily about the substance of the provisional resolutions, but also that there was a number of comments that related more to the **Process** that the Conference had set out for dealing with them. Some expressed regret that the 'lockdowns' during the COVID pandemic meant that it was difficult to care pastorally for people and help them listen carefully to one another across the divides of differing theology and differing experience. Some in effect argued for delay, arguing that Church Council and Circuit Meeting views and votes should also be considered. Yet others asked for a vote of all Methodist members.
37. Others, however, stated that we should not wait before making a decision. It was argued that this process has been going on for many years, and had not been rushed, and that the allowing of two definitions of marriage would help to keep the Church together.
38. By far the largest number of comments concerned **Unity and Division**. Some expressed the concern that changing the definition of marriage would result in some members, ministers and local churches wanting to leave the Methodist Church. Others argued that the report permits those with different views to retain their position, and allows us all to follow our consciences. We need to continue, as a church, to work out what it means to live with contradictory convictions in the life of the church. Furthermore some argued that allowing for a difference of opinion does not mean a compromise of an individual's own faith and beliefs. There was a call for the recognition of the diversity of cultures, interpretations and experiences across the Methodist Church.
39. The strength of feeling with which people spoke is often clear from the language used and the personal nature of the stories shared. The importance of understanding each other was stressed alongside a call to respect one another and be supported in doing so going forward, whatever the outcome.
40. **In conclusion**, some of the points recorded in the synod debates tell against confirming the resolutions, whilst others support it. It is not possible to tell how many supported the various views expressed. As Conference representatives are *ex officio* members of their respective Synods, they will have had opportunity to assess the tone and context of the debate in those Synods, and the response to the various comments of synod members. Overall, however, the voting tabulated in this report shows that there were significant levels of approval of the resolutions in almost all the Synods.

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

### **E. Ecumenical implications**

41. In March 2020 ecumenical partners were invited to respond to *God in Love Unites Us*. Written responses were received from the following partners:

Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (A personal perspective)  
Church in Wales  
Church of England  
Free Methodist Church  
Methodist Church in Ireland  
Presbyterian Church of Wales  
Unification Council of Cherubim and Seraphim Churches  
United Reformed Church

42. Many responses began with appreciation of the breadth and depth of the report and of the work that had been done. As would be expected, a number of the responses contained helpful critique of the content of the report. In a minority of responses there was a strong rejection of the possibility of differing interpretations of the biblical text.
43. Responses were received on the understanding that they would not be shared beyond our reporting group and would be reported in summary to the Conference.
44. The majority of those who responded, including those with whom we are in formal or well-established partnerships, have found the work done to be helpful and expect continuing dialogue. Many other churches both within Britain and globally are considering these issues and recognise that we will continue to be living and working in the context of diverse opinions in this as in other matters. Some have no issue with the resolutions before the Conference, having already made decisions allowing the marriage of any two people. Where there is disagreement either now or continuing into the future most anticipate a continuing and developing relationship. With some churches this is another point on which we will not currently agree and there is a long journey ahead, but the journey will continue.
45. Whatever the decisions of the Conference, there will be practical consequences for single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP) but these are already being worked with in Methodist LEPs with the United Reformed Church and Baptist churches, where ministers may conduct marriages between any two people and these may take place on their premises.

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

46. Guidance as to the appropriate authority in another church to make decisions about the registration of properties and conducting marriage services where a Methodist church has entered into a sharing agreement will be available on the Methodist Church website. It is suggested that this guidance will meet the concerns raised by Memorial M12 of 2018<sup>2</sup>, and a resolution is offered below for the Conference to adopt as its further Reply to that Memorial.
47. One church requested clarification of the position of ministers who hold the status of Recognised and Regarded, Authorised or Associate where the practice relating to marriage differs in the two churches. The Methodist Church has for some time acted in accordance with ecumenical principles in which Methodists do not do in other churches what is contrary to the discipline of their own, and do not require people whose ultimate allegiance is to other churches to act contrary to the discipline of those churches when serving the Methodist Church. This view was expressed clearly by the Conference in 2019 when it adopted part b of Notice of Motion 213:

*The Conference, recognising the challenges presented by 'God in Love Unites Us' to some of those who serve as Ministers of other Conferences and Churches in our Connexion,*

- a. *directs that the Global Relationships Committee engage in conversation with those partner churches who have permitted ministers to serve as recognised and regarded as being in Full Connexion with the Conference about the expectations on ministers and the provisions made for ministers to act only within their conscience contained in the report;*
- b. *makes clear that reasons of conscience permit a minister of another Conference or Church to decline to act in a way that means that she or he can no longer be in good standing with her or his own church. [Daily Record 7/14/1]*

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2 M12 (2018) The registration of shared premises for same-sex marriage:

The Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 115; Voting: 100 for, 8 against) requests that the Conference direct that the necessary legal steps be taken to enable the Methodist Church to give its "consent to use" in order that any application may be made, by another party, for registration of a building shared with a consenting denomination for the purpose of the solemnisation, by the rites of that denomination, of a same-sex marriage.

The Conference of 2018 adopted a detailed interim Reply to the Synod, setting out the various contexts in which Methodists are involved in the sharing of premises with other denominations and referring the Memorial for further exploration of the issues in the context of the task group's work which eventually resulted in the 2019 *God in Love Unites Us* report.

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

48. The Global Relationships Committee asked the partnership coordinators in the Connexional Team to have conversations with partner churches. Those conversations took place and indicated that further clarification and continued dialogue with our partners would be appreciated. The Global Relationships Committee therefore suggests that the Secretary of the Conference arrange for the production of a short video to be shared with partner churches explaining whatever decisions the Conference may make. That work will now be taken forward after the Conference. Meanwhile, the associate members will have the opportunity to discuss the proposed resolutions in their pre-Conference consultation and to participate in the Conference debate itself.
49. Whatever decision is taken by the Conference there will be some partner churches that will rejoice and others that will find it difficult or unacceptable. Good relationships with our partners are not based on uniformity of opinion but on continuing dialogue and relationship with one another grounded in our relationship with God and our recognition of one another as followers of Christ.

### **F. Suggestions as to procedure at the Conference**

50. Before proceeding to make recommendations as to each of the provisional resolutions, some suggestions are offered here as to the procedure the Conference might wish to follow.
51. There are three ways in which a Synod may have expressed its mind upon the particular wording of a resolution by means of a vote.
52. Where a separate District Resolution has been adopted under SO 419(2) proposing an amendment to the wording of the provisional resolution, the reporting group has recommended to the Business Committee that it could be dealt with as if it were a duly submitted Notice of Motion for an amendment, to be moved and seconded by District representatives as the Standing Order would require it to be. This would enable it to be moved after the substantive resolution has been formally moved, and it would more easily therefore be able to be considered within the context of the general debate. It is anticipated that the Business Committee will bring that proposal to the Conference.
53. Where the provisional resolution has been adopted by a Synod in an amended form (but without a separate free-standing District resolution on the subject), it will be for those who wish it to be adopted to bring it via Notice of Motion in the usual way. We draw attention to the cases in which a Synod has adopted a resolution in an amended form in the discussion of individual resolutions below. Since by far the greater number of Synods have not done so, the group has



## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

concluded that its best course is not to recommend adoption of any particular amendment but to leave the mind of the Conference to be tested by its ordinary processes.

54. Where the Synod has adopted a memorial, then that will be dealt with under the normal Conference processes for dealing with memorials. It will be for the Business Committee to advise the Conference about the point at which any relevant memorials from Synods (and Circuit Meetings) and Notices of Motion should be considered.
55. We offer two final comments about voting upon the provisional resolutions. First, whilst it is understood that there were particular reasons for the order in which the provisional resolutions were moved at the Conference in 2019, and therefore also in the Synods, the reporting group recommends that, after dealing with 10/2 and 10/3, the Conference should then consider 10/8 as that concerns the question of general principle, followed, but only if 10/8 is adopted in substantially the form proposed, by 10/9 dealing with the relevant Standing Orders, and then 10/7 as to the guidance which would flow from those two resolutions.
56. Secondly, we note that in 2019 the relevant resolutions were voted upon by ballot. We understand that the Business Committee will report upon the arrangements for voting at the Conference this year.
57. The reporting group therefore offers this general report to the Conference. Resolution 59/1 below would, we suggest, enable the Conference to have conversation, if thought appropriate at this point, about how the process of consultation and voting has been taken forward since the 2019 Conference, before moving on to debate the substance of the provisional resolutions in Part 2 of this report.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 59/1. The Conference receives the general report of the reporting group.**
- 59/2. The Conference expresses thanks to all those who have engaged in this process of discernment over a number of years, and to the many people who have provided resources, encouragement and support for careful and sensitive consideration of the issues raised, so enabling the consultation and decision-making process to move forward in these challenging times.**
- 59/3. As its further Reply to Memorial M12 of 2018, the Conference refers the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent Synod to the relevant guidance to be found on the Methodist Church website.**

### **PART 2 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE PROVISIONAL RESOLUTIONS**

58. The reporting group offers this guidance to the Conference as to the process involved in dealing with each of the various resolutions.
59. The Secretary of the Conference (in accordance with the usual procedure when provisional or special resolutions are moved for confirmation) will move the substantive resolution in the form recommended by the reporting group.
60. Any amendments will then be dealt with in the order determined by the Business Committee as indicated in the Order Paper. These amendments will arise in the following ways:
  - amendments which are brought on behalf of the Law and Polity Committee, or the Faith and Order Committee, as indicated below, in the discharge of their respective constitutional functions;
  - amendments presented in the form of a District Resolution;
  - amendments moved by Notice of Motion.
61. The vote on the substantive resolution with any amendments duly adopted will then be taken.
62. The Conference will then need to deal, in each instance, with any consequential resolutions eg those recommended by the reporting group as to publication.
63. It will of course be for the Business Committee to indicate in the Order Paper the point at which any related memorials are to be dealt with.

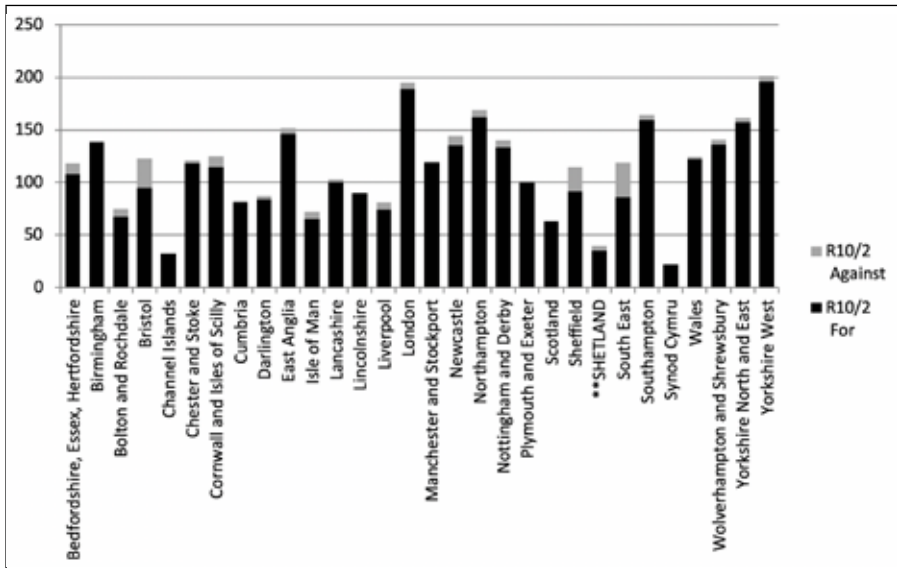
### **Provisional Resolution 10/2**

64. This resolution deals with the proposed summary of the principles or qualities of good relating.

### **The Synods' votes**

65. All Synods voted in favour of adopting this resolution, with one Synod adopting it with an amendment which then formed the basis of the District Resolution referred to below.
66. The diagram below (and subsequent diagrams for the other provisional resolutions) illustrates the range of voting, with the Districts arranged alphabetically, the numbers voting shown on the vertical axis and asterisks and capitals denoting approval in an amended form.

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions



### Synod comments

67. Whilst there were some points reported from the Synod debates, this resolution seems to have generated less conversation than the others. The comments received ranged over a number of areas, mainly focused on the wide variety of experience, positive and negative, of relationships and the appropriate response and support which the church should be offering. For some this was in terms of modelling values of openness, welcome, equality and respect. A specific point made strongly in one Synod was to question the inclusion of the words '[often women]' at the end. For others, they would wish to see a greater focus on explicitly speaking of God's love and grace at work here.

### Recommendations

68. The reporting group **recommends** that the resolution should initially be moved in the Conference with one small amendment as to the form of words, reflecting the fact that this is now being considered in 2021, rather than in the context of the recommendations made in the 2019 report. Thus it would read [here, and in the following resolutions, the group's proposed amendment is indicated by underlining]:

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

The Conference ~~adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.2.5 that it affirm~~ **affirms** 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]).

Possible amendments to the content of the text

69. A District Resolution from the Shetland Synod (the text of which appears in Appendix 2) is intended to make explicit that Christ is the source and model for our understanding of self-giving love. Here, as for the other District Resolutions, it will be for the Conference to decide whether to adopt the proposed wording set out in the Appendix.
70. As indicated above, it is suggested that this District Resolution should be dealt with as if it were a Notice of Motion amending 10/2 once the substantive resolution has been moved.
71. In relation to both resolutions 10/2 and 10/3, if they are adopted (in whatever form), the reporting group **recommends** that the Conference direct that they be printed in Part C of Book VII (Guidance) of *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

#### **59/4. The Conference confirms resolution 10/2 of the Conference of 2019, amended to read as follows:**

The Conference affirms 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

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

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]).

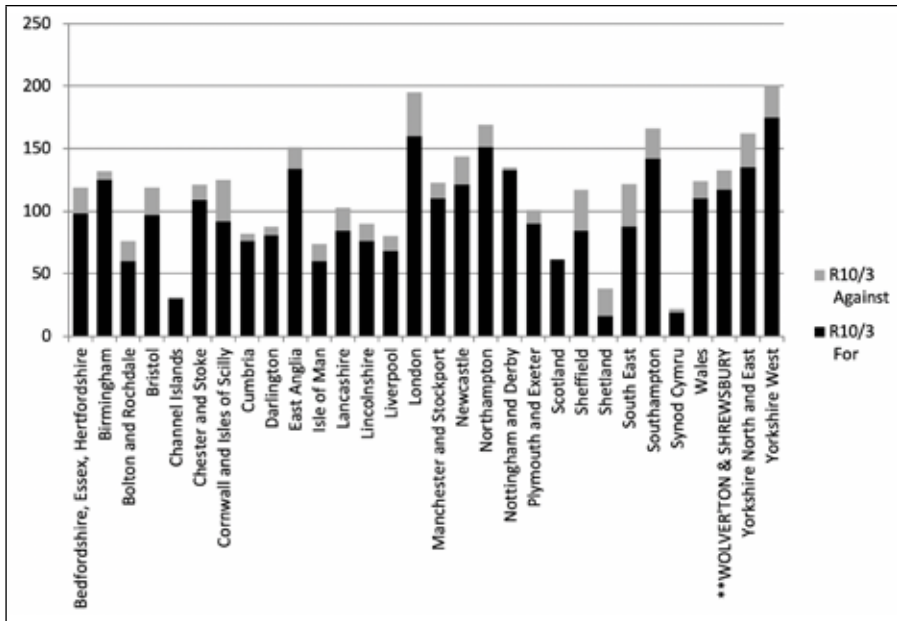
**59/5. The Conference directs that the summary understanding affirmed in resolution 59/4 be printed in Part C of Book VII (Guidance) of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.**

### Provisional Resolution 10/3

72. This resolution deals with the proposed summary understanding of cohabitation.

#### The Synods' votes

73. All Synods except one voted in favour of adopting this resolution, with one Synod (again identified by asterisks and capitals in the diagram below) adopting it with an amendment which is reported below.



## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

### Synod comments

74. In many Synods, there were comments about the wide variety of people who are cohabiting and the many different reasons for doing so (both in sexual and non-sexual relationships). There was a general view that the church cannot close its eyes to what is happening in society. Several ministers made the comment that in the circuits and communities which they had served almost all couples who came to be married in our churches were already cohabiting. How the church should respond to this was a matter which led people to different conclusions.
75. For some people, whilst they recognised the lived realities, that did not mean that they considered them to be an appropriate form of Christian living, reflecting our calling to spread scriptural holiness. It was said that the summary statement did not give real consideration to the outworking of holy living given consistently in the New Testament and that we should be providing resources to help particularly our young people to understand the tenets of Biblical Christian practice and support them in living distinctive Christian lives.
76. For others, there was an affirmation of prevenient grace with God's presence at work in stable, loving relationships and family life before the church could see it and that this was indeed a gospel for all. It was pointed out that this resolution came in the context of resolution 10/2 – that all significant relationships should be built on self-giving love. The quality of good relationships was what is recognised, celebrated and affirmed – taking into account far more than sexual attraction.
77. There was considerable discussion about the relationship between this and marriage with many perspectives offered. As to whether there should be the encouragement to move towards marriage, the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Synod adopted the resolution in an amended form to address this point. Some other Synods noted this to be an important question, although not adopting an amendment as such.

### Recommendations

78. The reporting group **recommends** that, as for 10/2, the resolution be moved with a slight amendment as to the form of words in the opening line, thus:

**The Conference adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.6.4 that it affirm affirms 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**

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**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.**

Possible amendments to the content of the text

79. It has been suggested that, whilst the context of the 2019 report made this clear, if the text above is to stand alone as a summary understanding, it would be sensible, for the avoidance of doubt, to make a clarifying insertion in the first line of the first bullet point so that it reads: " ...within the love of **two** human beings ..." The reporting group supports this addition and it is anticipated that a proposal for such an amendment will be brought on the Order Paper on behalf of the Law and Polity Committee.
80. The reporting group then draws to the attention of the Conference that the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Synod adopted the resolution in amended form. The effect of this would be to include the words indicated below in the final bullet point above:
  - 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 **but preferably marriage**) of their commitment.
81. The reporting group notes that this amendment changes the substantive meaning of the resolution and is not strongly reflected in the responses of other Synods. As indicated above, it will be open to the Conference to consider this point if this amendment or one in some similar form of words is moved by means of an ordinary Notice of Motion.
82. The reporting group is aware that the Faith and Order Committee's report contains further reflection upon this general area and indicates further work to be undertaken in the longer term, but is not opposing or seeking to amend this summary statement at this stage.
83. The group also draws attention to the proposed Reply to Memorial M43 dealt with below in paragraph 106 as the context in which such work could be taken forward.

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84. If the Conference adopts this resolution in whatever form, the reporting group **recommends** as suggested above that the Conference direct that it be printed in Part C of Book VII (Guidance) of *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

- 59/6. The Conference confirms resolution 10/3 of the Conference of 2019, amended to read as follows:**

The Conference affirms 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.

- 59/7. The Conference directs that the summary understanding affirmed in resolution 59/6 be printed in Part C of Book VII (Guidance) of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.**

### **Provisional Resolution 10/8**

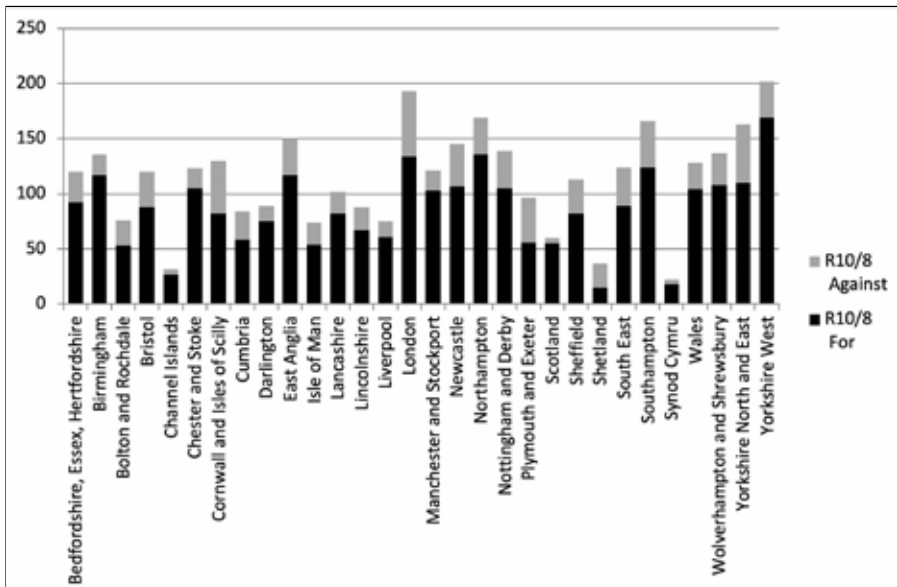
85. This resolution is the one which would signify the Conference's decision on the principle involved as to same sex marriages conducted on Methodist premises or by relevant Methodist office-holders. It is also the one which would be required in law in order for the next stage to happen, ie for the Conference legally to take the steps to consent to the relevant marriage legislation in England and Wales or to take the appropriate steps to enable same sex marriages to be celebrated by relevant Methodist office holders and, where applicable, on Methodist premises in the other jurisdictions within which the British Methodist Church operates.



## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

### The Synods' votes

86. All Synods except one voted in favour of adopting this resolution.



### Comments from the Synods

87. As resolutions 10/7, 10/8 and 10/9 all relate to the same area for decision the Synods' comments on them overlap. So, whilst there were very few recorded comments which related to the specific wording of this resolution, **members of the Conference are invited to refer here to the range of general themes in Part 1.D above**. The Conference will no doubt wish to note these points, in conferring together about whether to confirm this resolution in the light of the record of the actual votes in the Synods approving this resolution.

### Recommendations

88. The reporting group **recommends** that this resolution be moved in the form in which it was adopted in 2019, as set out below. However, it may be that a proposal will be made to amend this in one respect, as outlined in what immediately follows.

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Possible amendments to the content of the text

89. No proposals were made by the Synods for specific amendments to the text of this resolution. However, arising from one comment in the Law and Polity Committee's report upon the provisional resolutions, and taking into account the helpful points made in the District Resolution from the Scotland Synod to be dealt with below under resolution 10/9, it may be found to be helpful to make an insertion to take fully into account the legal provisions applying outside England and Wales. If such an amendment is moved on behalf of the Law and Polity Committee, the reporting group would support it.
90. It should be noted that if the Conference confirms the adoption of this resolution, attention will then need to be given to the possible replacement of Resolutions 10/8A and 10/8B mentioned above at paragraph 3, which were expressed by the 2019 Conference to be conditional on the confirmation by the 2020 Conference of resolution 10/8. This is dealt with under Part 3 of our report below.
91. Further information and resolutions may need to be brought on the Order Paper to deal with the legal situation in relation to the various jurisdictions in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

#### **59/8. The Conference confirms resolution 10/8 of the Conference of 2019, as originally adopted:**

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.

#### **Provisional Resolution 10/9**

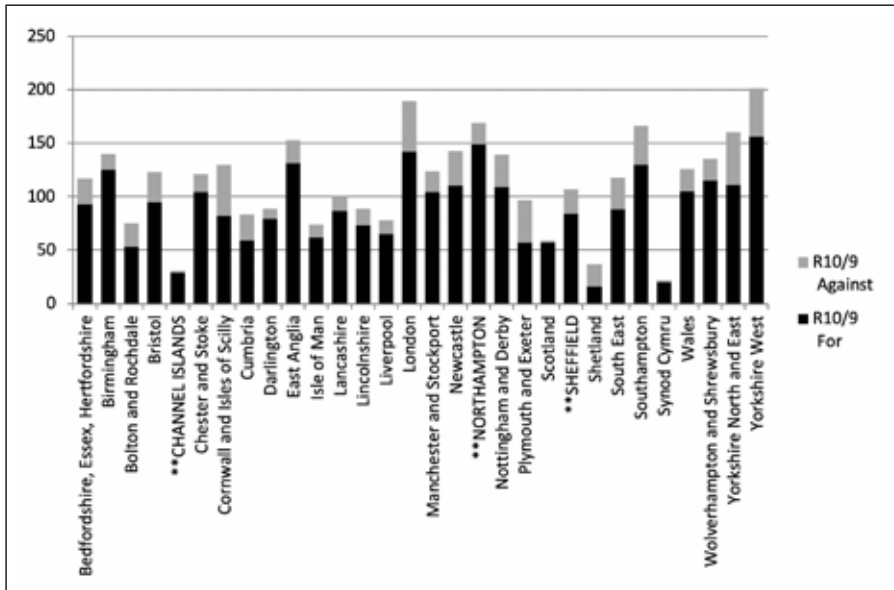
92. This is the resolution enacting the Standing Order provisions which are intended to apply if the Conference adopts resolution 10/8. It is set out in full below, and it will be noted that it includes the various provisions designed to protect the freedom of conscience of all who may be involved.

#### **The Synods' Votes**

93. All Synods except one voted in favour of adopting this resolution. In three

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instances, again identified by asterisks and capitals, the Synods adopted in an amended form (in one instance going on to adopt a District Resolution to the same effect); these three amendments are dealt with below.



### Comments from the Synods

94. The question of freedom of conscience was very widely raised. The range of concerns included questions about how securely this could be protected in law, so that ministers or managing trustees were not exposed to discrimination claims; concerns about how more subtle pressure might be put upon people to act contrary to their conscience; how this new situation would work out in stationing processes; how the conscience of District Chairs should be respected. It may be helpful to indicate here that the concerns about possible discrimination claims have been expressed in Memorial M41 from the Mid-Glamorgan Circuit and M42 from the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Synod, and the Conference will wish to note the reassurance given in the draft reply to those memorials. Although the reply is expressed by reference to the law of England and Wales, the group is aware that there are provisions in the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, as amended, to protect freedom of conscience in relation to mixed sex marriages, same sex marriages and civil partnerships.

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95. Another strand of the Synod conversations was about the question of discrimination between different types of marriage – that opposite sex marriages and same sex marriages were not being treated as equivalent in these provisions. The concern was expressed across a number of Synods. This is amplified further below in relation to suggestions for amendments.

### Recommendations

96. The resolution in the form in which it was adopted in 2019 is set out below. The reporting group **recommends** that the resolution be moved in the 2019 form of words, and then we offer a list of the various suggestions which have been made for amendment with our comments where appropriate.

#### **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 **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**

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

(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.

#### **(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

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~~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**

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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.

Possible amendments to the content of the text

- 97a) There are three minor textual amendments which have been identified through the Law and Polity Committee and which the reporting group supports: in SO 011B(1), to delete the proposed insertion of the words 'in a court of the land'. The original purpose of the text was to make clear that divorce is not in itself a bar to marriage in a Methodist place of worship. The courts of England and Wales and, it is thought, the other jurisdictions, will recognise a divorce which validly determines the legal status of an individual as 'divorced' according to the applicable law of the individual; it is not necessary for the divorce to have taken place in a court of one of the United Kingdom jurisdictions and in appropriate circumstances it is not necessary for the divorce to have taken place through what the United Kingdom would recognise as a judicial process. (Of course, it remains the case that where a party to a proposed marriage claims to be divorced he or she will need to show that that is the case, so that the marriage can legally take place.)

in 011B(7) in the phrase 'if registration is required, to the persons responsible' to substitute 'person' for 'persons'

in 011B(8) for 'wedding' to substitute 'marriage' (the word which is used consistently elsewhere) (Note: although this is a small textual amendment, it would be better considered after the Northampton District Resolution about SO 011B(8) referred to in c) immediately below.)

- b) Moving to other points, first, the reporting group is aware that the Faith and Order Committee would wish to propose an amendment to SO 011A(1) by replacing the word 'believes' with 'understands'. This would, the reporting group agrees, more helpfully express what the Methodist Church is now saying about our different understandings of marriage and would be consonant with the committee's expressed views about what constitutes 'doctrine', and therefore it supports such an amendment. In the group's opinion, this amendment if adopted would not substantively affect what the Synods have approved in voting on the 2019 resolutions.
- c) As mentioned above, there has been a measure of concern about the differential treatment of opposite sex marriage and same sex marriage, which has focused particularly on SO 011B(8). It is noted that this clause was inserted into the draft

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Standing Order in 2019 as a result of a Notice of Motion moved from the floor of the Conference.

The reporting group would draw to the Conference's attention in Appendix 2 the District Resolution from the Northampton District which would delete clause O11B(8) entirely, principally on the basis (according to the comments reported from that debate) that 'the clause is unnecessary and contravenes our Equality and Inclusivity objectives'. This resolution will therefore offer the opportunity, if, as with the Scotland resolution mentioned below, it is treated as being a Notice of Motion for an amendment to 10/9, for the Conference to consider and vote upon this matter. It is suggested that it is dealt with before other amendments which might seek to amend clause O11B(8) in other ways; if the Conference were to adopt this amendment, any other proposals to amend the wording of clause (8) would no longer require to be dealt with.

If this Northampton District resolution were not carried, the reporting group would then draw to the Conference's attention the amended form in which the Sheffield Synod adopted 10/9: it voted to replace the proposed wording of clause (8) by the following: ***"A minister, probationer or member who has conducted a same-sex marriage shall ensure that the District Chair is notified of that marriage."*** In other words, the District Chair should be notified, but that need not be in advance. Amongst the arguments noted in the Synod report were that: it was thought that would then accord more closely with the requirement in clause (9) for notification that premises have been registered for such marriages; it would remove occasions both for uncertainty as to when and in what form such advance notice should be given and for difficulties if the Chair and minister had differing views about whether this particular marriage should take place.

As explained above, it would be for members of the Conference (not necessarily from the Sheffield District) to decide whether to move a Notice of Motion for amending 10/9 with this – or indeed any other – wording.

Further in relation to clause (8), the Channel Islands Synod also shared the concern about the differential treatment of the two types of marriage ceremonies. However, it took the opposite approach, and adopted the resolution with the deletion of 'same-sex' in clause (8). The effect of that would be to require the District Chair to be notified of all marriages beforehand. Again, it would be for members of the Conference to decide whether to test the mind of the Conference on this approach by a Notice of Motion.

- d) Finally, in relation to this resolution and 10/7 the Scotland Synod adopted a District Resolution, the text of which appears in Appendix 2. The amendments proposed to various clauses are helpfully intended to ensure that the Standing Order

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more appropriately addresses the legal situation in Scotland and the reporting group would support it. As explained above, it is thought appropriate if District Resolutions are dealt with as if they were Notices of Motion to amend the wording of the resolution, and so it is anticipated that the amendments here will be moved and seconded on behalf of the Scotland Synod. That will mean that any points or questions arising from the District Resolution can best be dealt with by those who have the experience and expertise to do so.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTION

**59/9. The Conference confirms resolution 10/9 of the Conference of 2019, as originally adopted:**

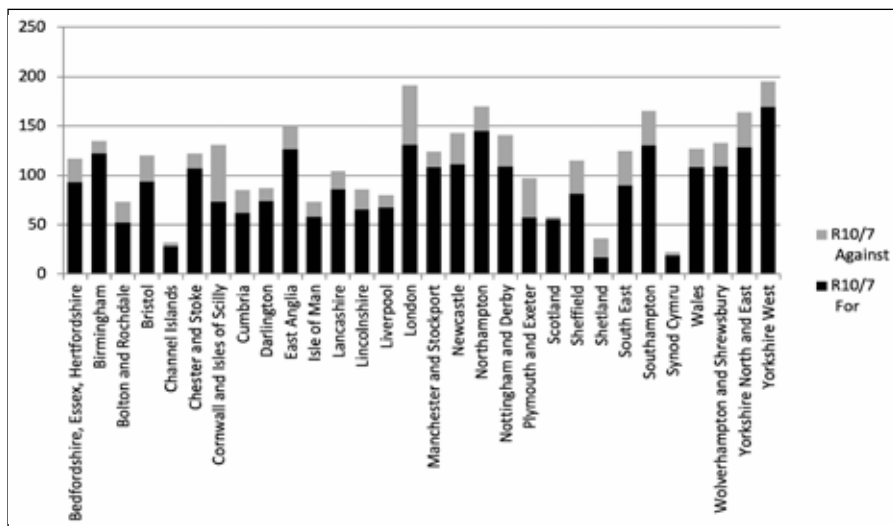
**The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out in para 96 above.**

#### Provisional Resolution 10/7

98. This resolution deals with the Guidance to be adopted by the Conference if Resolution 10/8 and 10/9 are adopted substantially in the form proposed.

#### The Synods' votes

99. All Synods except one voted in favour of adopting this resolution.





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### Comments from the Synods

100. In the reports of the comments received from the Synods which relate more specifically to this resolution, the principal themes which emerged included: the value of each church having the autonomy to decide its approach whatever the over-arching decision, over against what was perceived as a move away from connexionalism to a congregational model; the potential for tension, between minister and church council, and within the church council - relationships would need careful handling; the need for pastoral care for all concerned along with the provision of specific connexional guidance specific concerns about paragraph G6 and the proposals for church councils to review their decisions – these are dealt with below.

### Recommendations

101. The reporting group **recommends** that the resolution be moved with a slight amendment to the form of words in the opening line, thus:

**The Conference adopts the Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage set out in paragraph 5.1-2 below 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.*

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- 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.*

Possible amendments to the content of the text

- 102.a) First, a general point: the reporting group is aware that a small working group formed of members of the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee has considered this draft guidance in detail. The purpose of that group was principally to look at it within the context of the whole area of Guidance contained in Parts 8 to 10 of Book VII.C in *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, so as to be able to make suggestions about how the material could be best ordered, and where necessary clarified, to form a consistent whole. This will be a valuable contribution and we acknowledge the work which has already been done. It was in the light of the clear results of the Synods' voting on the current wording, as being a workable piece of guidance at this stage, that we have, as the reporting group, recommended that the Guidance in G1 to G7 above be moved for adoption by the Conference substantially in the above form, whilst recognising that further work of the nature described above will need to continue, if the earlier resolutions are adopted, and a resolution is offered in the Faith and Order Committee's report to that effect.

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- b) Turning to specific possible amendments, the reporting group draws attention first to the District Resolution from the Scotland Synod, in Appendix 2. As with resolution 10/9 it offers small amendments to paragraphs **G1** and **G5**, to provide clearer guidance in relation to the different legal background in Scotland, and the reporting group supports its adoption.
- c) One particular suggestion, arising from the working group mentioned in paragraph a) above, which should be addressed now rather than later, was that in paragraph **G2** the second half of the first sentence should be deleted, so that the sentence would end with 'to each other'. The reason for this is that the words proposed to be deleted may not accurately reflect the legal position, and therefore, as this part of the sentence is not fundamental to what has been voted upon by the Synods, it would be better omitted. The reporting group supports an amendment to that effect being brought by the Law and Polity Committee.
- d) If, in dealing with the previous resolution about changes to Standing Orders an amendment to replace the word 'believes' by 'understands' in SO 011A(1) is moved and carried, then for much the same reason, it would be appropriate similarly to replace the word 'believes' in paragraphs **G2** and **G3** and the Faith and Order Committee will seek to move such an amendment.
- e) On paragraph **G5** it has been noted on behalf of the Law and Polity Committee that it would be advisable to distinguish more clearly what is required in the two different situations, of a marriage service and a service of blessing of a marriage already solemnised. Amendments, which the reporting group would support, will be offered, to this or similar effect:
- G5 ~~A marriage service or a service of blessing of marriage~~ may only be conducted in a Methodist place of worship when it can be shown that the requirements of the relevant legislation in the appropriate jurisdiction **regarding the registration of buildings or personnel** have been met **and that the couple have complied with the requirements of such legislation which are their responsibility. Where a service of blessing of a marriage previously solemnised is requested, the person conducting the service must satisfy himself or herself that the couple are legally married.**
- f) On paragraph **G6** the reporting group has identified that there is a minor drafting matter which requires attention, whatever view the Conference takes about the points raised below. The final sentence refers to 'such services', and that phrase needs to be clarified. It is proposed that 'such services' be replaced by '**marriage services or services of blessing**' and – subject to the point to be addressed below - a Law and Polity Committee amendment will be brought to that effect, with the group's support

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- g) There is as mentioned above, a body of comments from the Synods about the whole of the **final sentence of G6** – whether the requirement for a re-consideration ‘every five years or sooner’ is appropriate. Views expressed included the following:
- questions as to whether it was helpful to go over the same ground if there had been no change in thinking – there was the potential for endless conflict; the sense that there was the need, however, for some mechanism for review of decisions and this provided some clear guidance on how and when it should take place;
  - a concern whether, for same-sex couples, it would seem that their relationship was repeatedly under the scrutiny of the church leadership as trustees could reverse any decision they had made about registering for same-sex marriages;
  - a concern about the effect on the local church’s relationship with the community where a decision was reversed;
  - questions about the meaning of ‘actively consider’ – how this would be interpreted differently in different places.

The Conference may therefore need to take a view as to whether, and if so in what form, to retain the final sentence of paragraph G6. (It may be helpful to remind the Conference that this will be a provision of general application, both as to opposite sex and same sex marriages.) It will be for members of the Conference to decide whether to submit Notices of Motion to amend or remove the final sentence of **G6**.

103. Finally, whilst the more major piece of work in reviewing and bringing together a consistent body of guidance around these matters may be appropriate, there is one Part of the current Guidance in Book VII.C which would need to be removed if the Conference adopts resolutions 10/8, 10/9 and 10/7 in substantially the same form as appears in this report. Part 10: ‘Responding to Requests by Same Sex Couples for Prayers or Services’ will have been superseded in its effect and the reporting group **recommends** that the Conference deletes it.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

#### **59/10. The Conference confirms resolution 10/7 of the Conference of 2019, amended to read as follows:**

The Conference adopts the *Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage* set out in paragraph 103 above and directs that it be included in the Guidance section of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

**59/11. The Conference deletes Part 10 'Responding to Requests by Same Sex Couples for Prayers or Services' from the Guidance in Book VII.C of The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church.**

### **PART 3 NEXT STEPS**

104. Part 2 dealt with the reporting group's recommendations to the Conference upon the Provisional Resolutions. We offer some final guidance and thoughts to the Conference.
105. Depending upon what the Conference decides about the various resolutions, there may be further work to be done:
106. The reporting group was aware of Memorial M43 from the Aire and Calder Circuit requesting that consideration be given to 'the important roles of families, social groups and communities, which form the overlapping contexts within which marriages will either succeed or suffer stress.' The 1992 Conference adopted the Statement, 'A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage' which addresses some of these issues but which could not and does not reflect the situation of the Church in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whether or not the Conference confirms the provisional resolutions in this report, the reporting group recognises that the 1992 Statement now deserves re-examination and consideration as to whether it has now served its purpose under SO 129 (of being 'a considered statement of the judgment of the Conference with a view to standing as such for some years'). Rather than bring a resolution to this effect on its own behalf, the reporting group concurs with the draft reply to the memorial.
107. Guidance and resources of various kinds are in the process of being prepared to support the Methodist people after the debate in the Conference, whatever may be the outcome. Specific guidance is also being prepared about the next steps to be taken if resolutions 10/7, 10/8 and 10/9 are adopted. This guidance, if it is required, will be particularly helpful for managing trustees and presbyters in pastoral charge in providing both legal and pastoral guidance for them as they reflect and make decisions upon questions affecting the life of the local church. As noted earlier in this report, in its response, the Faith and Order Committee indicates that it will produce some resources to help support further biblical study and reflection.
108. As mentioned above in paragraphs 3 and 90, the Conference in 2019 adopted conditional resolutions 10/8A and 10/8B which were intended to come into effect if the Conference of 2020 substantially confirmed the 'in principle' resolution

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10/8. The text of those resolutions appears in Appendix 1. As in the event the provisional resolution 10/8 was not brought to the 2020 Conference, those two resolutions did not come into effect. However, the intention of them was to put into legal effect the machinery which would enable the marriage of same sex couples to happen. If Resolution 10/8 is confirmed this year, then similar resolutions will be needed, and they are set out below. However, if resolution 10/8 is adopted, there will still be legal steps to be completed at the connexional level in dealing with the relevant civil authorities before it will be possible for such marriages to take place. Therefore, the reporting group **recommends** that it would be clearer and more helpful, for all concerned in forward planning, if the Conference were to resolve that the potential starting date for this should be 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. It will be noted that the resolution is framed in terms of 'no earlier than' that date, because delays might arise which are not of the church's making, but which would mean that the machinery was not yet fully in place for the necessary steps to be taken.

109. The reporting group is very much aware that, if the Conference adopts some or all of the provisional resolutions substantially as they are proposed, there will be people who will feel the need to reflect upon their own continuing life and ministry within the Methodist Church. The group would first point to the part of the Faith and Order Committee's report which deals with the question of whether any such adoption is to be regarded as a change of doctrine or require an amendment of clause 4 of the Deed of Union (Doctrinal Standards) and which expresses the clear view that this is not the case. The reporting group therefore sees no need to recommend any change in the Deed of Union or in the understanding of 'our doctrines' in *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*.
110. The reporting group is also aware that there are those ministers and local preachers who would, if the provisional resolutions are adopted, feel that they are no longer able to observe, administer or abide by the discipline of the Methodist Church. M32 from the Upper Thames Circuit raises such questions, and the reply proposed by the Memorials Committee (with which the reporting group concurs) sets out the interpretation of 'our discipline' which, in declining the memorial, the Conference is invited to affirm.
111. However, for those ministers who would not feel able to accept this interpretation and the pastoral concerns which that would bring, the Conference will be assisted in thinking about this by the memorials from the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (M33) and Plymouth and Exeter (M34) District Synods which point very clearly to these matters. The reporting group believes that all those who feel a deep concern about this can have confidence that (as reflected in what is proposed to be the Conference's replies to these memorials) all our sisters and brothers in this

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situation would be treated with respect and care. It would expect that the same pastoral concern would be expressed if there are those among our number who would not feel able to remain if the resolutions are not adopted.

112. So far as members, or groups of members, in Local Churches are concerned, if they feel that, as result of the voting, their ongoing life in Christian community is not to be within the Methodist Church, guidance on the legal aspects will need to be provided. Property held on the model trusts will continue to be held by managing trustees upon those model trusts. The key issue will therefore be what if any agreements would be both legally possible and appropriate to enable continued use of the property by those members if they wished so to do. Memorial M31 from the Gornal and Sedgley Circuit raises this question, and the proposed Reply enables the Conference to understand the legal background against which responses to any such request would have to be made and further steps that might be taken should any group of managing trustees wish to enable those who were previously members of the Methodist Church to continue to use the building in which they had worshipped. The reporting group recognises the pain that is felt in some quarters on this issue but notes the limited options that are available under charity law.
113. Finally, the reporting group reiterates its gratitude to all who have participated in this process and for the care, grace and efficiency with which Synods have engaged in this debate. If, occasionally, it has seemed that care and grace have been lacking, it is an indication of the deeply held convictions that guide each of us in responding to these questions. Whether the provisional resolutions are adopted or not, there will be those for whom this is a time of rejoicing, feeling that clarity has been provided and the Methodist Church has been true to its calling. All those people are asked to be aware, as the reporting group is, of the anxiety, hurt and distress which will be felt by those for whom the Conference's decisions are not what they would have hoped and indeed prayed for. The adoption or not of these resolutions will not mark the end of our conversations on these matters and differences, sincerely held, will remain. The reporting group therefore **recommends** that the Conference commends its decisions to the Methodist people asking them earnestly to pray for healing where there has been hurt, for unity where there has been division, and for wisdom where difficult discussions lie ahead.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**59/12. The Conference receives Part 3 of the report of the reporting group.**

**59/13. The Conference directs that, where not already available, the Methodist**

## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

**Council oversees the production of (i) resources to inform the Methodist people about the Conference's decisions concerning the provisional resolutions of the 2019 Conference, and (ii) legal and pastoral guidance for managing trustees and presbyters in pastoral charge about how to proceed in making any decisions affecting the life of the local church consequent to those decisions; and that those resources and guidance be made available on the Methodist Church website and in other suitable ways, and commended to the Methodist people.**

- 59/14A. For the purposes of section 26A of the Marriage Act 1949 (as inserted by section 4(1) of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013) the Conference consents to the marriage of same sex couples and accordingly, with effect from a date to be notified, authorises the managing trustees or, if none, the trustees, of any Methodist building in England and Wales capable of registration under section 43A of the Marriage Act 1949 (as amended by paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013) to register that building under that section.**
- 59/14B. For the purposes of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 as amended by the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014, the Conference resolves that Methodist ministers, probationers or members may be nominated by the Methodist Church in Scotland to the Registrar General in Scotland as persons recognised as authorised and entitled to solemnise same sex marriage and that, with effect from a date to be notified, same-sex marriages may be solemnised on Methodist premises in Scotland if the managing trustees so permit and all other relevant legal requirements have been satisfied.**
- 59/14C. The Conference further resolves that:**
- (a) the date to be notified for the purposes of Resolution 59/14A and Resolution 59/14B shall be such date no earlier than 1 September 2021 as the Secretary of the Conference on the advice of the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice shall determine to be appropriate having regard to the regulatory requirements which must be satisfied in England and Wales and in Scotland before a same sex marriage may lawfully be solemnised on Methodist premises;**
  - (b) the date notified for the purposes of Resolution 59/14A may be different from the date notified for the purposes of Resolution 59/14B.**

*Further resolutions will appear as necessary on the Order Paper to deal with any legal requirements for the Isle of Man and Channel Islands*



## 59. Marriage and Relationships: Provisional Resolutions

**59/15. The Conference commends its decisions to the Methodist people asking them earnestly to pray for healing where there has been hurt, for unity where there has been division, and for wisdom where difficult discussions lie ahead.**

### Appendix 1

#### Other (ie non-provisional) resolutions adopted by the Conference in 2019

- 10/1.** The Conference received the Report and commended it to the Connexion for study and prayerful discussion.
- 10/4.** The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to review the provision of liturgical resources in the light of this report, including the question of whether there should be one marriage service or two in the Methodist Worship Book, the preparation of a draft service of celebration for civil partnerships, and the preparation of any other draft liturgical resources that may be required. The Conference further directed the Faith and Order Committee to report to the 2020 Conference, on the understanding that the bringing of any draft liturgies and proposed amendments to the Methodist Worship Book for approval by the Conference would depend upon the results of consultation on the resolutions of the 2019 Conference and any resolutions of the 2020 Conference that result from it.
- 10/5.** The Conference adopted the recommendation in paragraphs 3.2.6 and 5.4.2, and directed the Faith and Order Committee to explore producing liturgical resources and relevant guidance for use at the ending of a marriage.
- 10/6.** The Conference adopted the recommendation in paragraph 3.4 that the Methodist Church offer more support for marriage, alongside other committed relationships; and directed that the Methodist Council ensure resources be produced to help provide this support drawing on the theological insights of the purposes, qualities and patterns for good relating set out in the report.
- 10/10.** The Conference directed that Resolutions 10/2, 10/3, 10/7, 10/8 and 10/9 be treated as Provisional Resolutions under Standing Order 122.
- 10/10A.** Resolutions 10/8A and 10/8B shall have effect conditionally upon the confirmation of resolution 10/8 by the Conference of 2020 in the same or substantially similar form and from the date upon which the confirmed resolution takes effect.
- 10/8A** For the purposes of section 26A of the Marriage Act 1949 (as inserted by section 4(1) of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013) the Conference consents to the marriage of same sex couples and accordingly authorises the managing trustees or, if none, the trustees, of any Methodist building in England and Wales capable of registration under section 43A of the Marriage Act 1949 (as amended by paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013) to register that building under that section.

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- 10/8B.** For the purposes of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 as amended by the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014, the Conference resolves that Methodist ministers, probationers or members may be nominated by the Methodist Church in Scotland to the Registrar General in Scotland to be registered to solemnise same sex marriage and that same-sex marriages may be solemnised on Methodist premises in Scotland if the managing trustees so permit and all other relevant legal requirements have been satisfied.
- 10/11.** The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to convene a group of persons representing the Law and Polity Committee, the Faith and Order Committee and the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, to receive the reports of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee and to report to the Conference of 2020 with appropriate resolutions, including a statement of the ecumenical implications as required under Standing Order 121

### Appendix 2 District Resolutions

#### Shetland District Resolution Resolution 10/2

- 10/2.** The Conference adopts and affirms the following summary understanding of the principles or qualities of good relating:
- All significant relationships should be built on **the example of Christ, in whom we see** 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, **which can only be found in Christ** (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]).

Voting figures:

For: **35**; Against: **5**; Present: **40**

### **Northampton District Resolution Resolution 10/9**

[The Synod first adopted the above resolution in an amended form, ie with the deletion of the proposed SO 011B(8).]

Having debated and voted on the Provisional Resolutions put forward by Conference (including amendments), the Synod voted on the following District Resolution.

**The Northampton District Synod in its Representative Session believes that no minister, probationer or member need refer any intention to conduct a wedding (either mixed sex or same sex) to the District Chair.**

Reasoned statement: The proposed SO 011B (8) within Provisional Resolution 10/9 is unnecessary and contravenes our Equality and Inclusivity objectives. As there is no requirement to contact the Chair of District prior to a mixed-sex marriage, neither should it be necessary for a same-sex marriage. Either all weddings would need to be notified or none.

Voting figures:

For **145**; Against **12**; Present **170**

### **Scotland Synod Resolution Resolutions 10/7 and 10/9**

The Scotland Synod wholeheartedly approved the report *God in Love Unites Us* and the provisional resolutions that came before us. In Scotland we operate under a different legal system to England and Wales, and the way marriages are conducted is organised differently. In Scotland it is only the person who is authorised to conduct a marriage ceremony through the faith group/denomination; premises are not registered. Weddings can occur anywhere (inside and out), and Methodists in Scotland regularly conduct them in a variety of contexts, including on occasion in the premises of our ecumenical partners. We are concerned that the resolutions as they stand at the time of writing focus on premises, and if passed might inadvertently limit the welcome Methodists in Scotland are able to offer, and our ability to operate as we currently do for mixed-sex and going forward for same-sex marriages.

We therefore propose the following amendments to Resolution 10/7 in paragraphs G1 and G5 and to Resolution 10/9 in the proposed Standing Orders 011A(2) and 011B(1),(5),(6) and (10):

**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.**

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G1 *The Methodist Church welcomes everyone, whether or not a member, who enquires about an intended marriage in any of its places of worship **or elsewhere**. It looks for an openness to God in them, not necessarily a developed understanding of the Christian faith.*

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 **or elsewhere** when it can be shown that the requirements of the legislation in the appropriate jurisdiction have been met.*

**10/9. The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:** [*Scotland Synod's proposed amendments underlined below*]

### **011A Marriage**

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

### **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 **or by Methodist ministers, probationers or members**.

**(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) or elsewhere 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) or elsewhere 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.**

~~(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 **or elsewhere**, 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.

Voting figures:

For: **51**; against: **0**; present **52**