

60. The response of the Faith and Order Committee to the God in Love Unites Us report

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Resolutions	The Resolutions are contained within the Report

Summary of content

Subject and aims	This report is the response of the Faith and Order Committee to the <i>God in Love Unites Us</i> report.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● General response to the <i>God in Love Unites Us Report</i> including comment on the nature of the report, the nature and authority of the Bible, and theologically reflecting on experience ● Cohabitation ● Methodist doctrine ● Methodist discipline ● Guidance on marriage and relationships ● Liturgical resources ● Marriage liturgies
Background documents	<i>God in Love Unites Us</i> , 2019 Clause 4 of the <i>Deed of Union</i> <i>A Lamp to my feet and a light to my path</i> , 2008 <i>Living with Contradictory Convictions</i> , 2006 <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i>

PART A: GENERAL COMMENT

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Faith and Order Committee has a responsibility under Standing Order 330(10) to scrutinise matters presented to the Conference which directly concern the faith and order of the Church. As noted in its second report to the 2019 Conference, the Faith and Order Committee did not have the opportunity to discuss the contents of *God in Love Unites Us* before it was presented to that Conference. It is recognised that the Methodist people live together with contradictory convictions about marriage and relationships, and that this results in some challenges in how the Methodist Church orders its life and relates to the Methodist Church's understanding of what it means to be church. It therefore brings this report to the 2021 Conference as its contribution to the connexional conversation and process of discernment.

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- 1.2. Part A contains the Committee's general response to the *God in Love Unites Us* report including comment on what kind of report it is, the nature and authority of scripture, and theologically reflecting on experience. Part B comments on the report's exploration of cohabitation. Parts C and D look at Methodist doctrine and discipline and whether some amendment to Resolution 10/9 might be helpful in order to make the position clear. The proposed Guidance for marriage and relationships is considered in Part E.
- 1.3. As a result of these reflections the Faith and Order Committee recommends some revision to the provisional resolutions 10/7 and 10/9 which deal with the *Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage* and the changes to Standing Order O11A (Marriage) respectively. The recommended changes do not alter the main principles in these resolutions but seek to enable there to be one comprehensive set of guidance regarding marriage and relationships and to clarify the nature of Standing Order O11A. The full details of these recommendations (particularly the suggested new guidance) are not set out in this report but were sent in the first instance for consideration by the group appointed under Resolution 10/11 of the 2019 Conference to "receive the reports of the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee and to report to the Conference of 2020 with appropriate resolutions". This report does, however, outline the main suggested changes and provide the reasoning for them.
- 1.4. The Faith and Order Committee understands that its role is to help the Conference in making its decisions. The Committee has therefore carefully considered whether to bring resolutions to the Conference in the light of its recommendations, conscious that the particular wording of the Provisional Resolutions has been discussed in Local Churches and Circuits and voted on by Synods. It has also taken into consideration the report of the group appointed by the Conference (see 1.3 above) and the number of other suggested amendments for the Conference to consider (from memorials, District Resolutions and, potentially, Notices of Motion). It has therefore decided to bring three resolutions in relation to the Provisional Resolutions: two in the light of its reflections on doctrine and for the sake of clarity (see parts D and E below), and one to request further work on the guidance on marriage in CPD (see part E below).
- 1.5. The 2019 Conference also directed the Faith and Order Committee to review the provision of liturgical resources in the light of the *God in Love Unites Us* report (Resolution 10/4) and explore producing liturgical resources and relevant guidance for use at the ending of a marriage (Resolution 10/5). Part F of the report contains the Committee's response to these resolutions including (in section 10) draft new liturgies for *The Marriage of any two persons* and *The Blessing of a Marriage of any two persons previously solemnized*.

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2. The *God in Love Unites Us* report

2.1. The Nature of the Report

2.1.1. The Methodist Church has been on a pilgrimage of faith since 1993 and the *God in Love Unites Us* report emerges from this context. Methodists have been repeatedly encouraged to engage in this pilgrimage and to reflect on how we live together as people who have contradictory convictions¹. The *God in Love Unites Us* report is also a response to directions of the Conference asking for the definition of marriage to be revisited,² and for recommendations to include options for “a way forward that is consistent with the existing commitment to live with contradictory convictions” and enable, amongst other things, “those who feel called by God to solemnise same sex marriages to do so” and “protection for ministers, probationers, members and churches prevented by conscience from participation in such services”.³

2.1.2. The 2018 Conference decided that matters relating to the Church’s understanding of relationships and marriage “could be dealt with by a report to the Conference that sets out a number of theological arguments. A report would not be as detailed as a Conference Statement, but would enable the Conference to reach a view on how the church defines marriage and for that view to be the subject of connexion wide consultation”⁴ (Resolution 27A/2). *God in Love Unites Us* is not, therefore, intended to be a formal Statement of the judgement of the Conference on marriage and relationships. It offers the considered theological reflection of the Methodist Church, but does not purport to represent a comprehensive and agreed theological position. There are a variety of theological matters which could be given further attention. These include the biblical work described in section 2.2 below and, for example:

- Further reflection on the extent to which the particular cultural perspective shaping *God in Love Unites Us* (ie Western, individualistic, with a romantic/companionate model of marriage) might be relativised by the cultures, past and present, that have a very different take on being human and forming relationships;

1 The Methodist Conference, 2006, Faith and Order Committee Report, Section B: *Living with contradictory convictions*

2 Resolution 29/7, 2016

3 Notice of Motion 203 [Daily Record 7/17/8 as amended at 8/53/1-2]

4 The text quoted is from paragraph 5 of the Additional Report [Daily Record 7/17/4] which sets out the way of proceeding adopted by the Conference in Resolution 27A/2.

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- Consideration of whether there is an over emphasis on creation and goodness at the expense of sin and redemption, which offers a potentially distorted picture of human behaviour;
- Consideration of how the Methodist Church reflects on doctrines such as the Trinity, for example: does it really set the pattern for human partnerships? Or does the doctrine of the incarnation lead inevitably to the church presiding over marriage ceremonies on behalf of the state?
- Further reflection on how marriage sits within a wider concept of the family, of society and of the church;
- Further theological work on the understandings of marriage affirmed by the Methodist Conference.

2.1.3. The Faith and Order Committee therefore notes that there is further theological work to be done with regards to marriage and relationships. It will keep this on its agenda and consider it further in due course.

2.2. The Nature and Authority of the Bible

2.2.1. One of the main theological issues arising from the *God in Love Unites Us* report is that of the authority of the Bible in the Methodist Church and the place of the Bible in Methodist decision-making.

2.2.2. The Methodist Church's fundamental principles in relation to these questions are set out in the *Deed of Union*⁵ which says that our doctrines "are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice."⁶ Further reflection on this⁷ has noted that although this statement does say that "divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures" is the supreme rule of faith and practice for the Methodist Church, it does not say that the Bible is the supreme authority nor define what it means by "the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures". It also says that our doctrines are based upon God's revelation which is recorded in the Bible, but not that our Methodist doctrines are taken straight from the Bible.

2.2.3. The Methodist Church affirms a broad range of theological interpretation. The

5 Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union, The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (pages 213-214 of the 2020 edition)

6 Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union, The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (pages 213-214 of the 2020 edition)

7 The Methodist Conference, 1998, *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*

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report, *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*,⁸ on the nature and authority of the Bible in the Methodist Church, identified seven different perspectives on biblical authority held within the Methodist Church. None were ever intended to be precise definitions but they illustrate the different positions on biblical authority and reasons for holding them amongst members of the Methodist Church. The report noted that many people are likely to feel that their position is a mixture of several different perspectives. Identifying a range of positions does not imply that any opinion about the Bible is as valid as any other opinion, but rather indicates that the Methodist Church has never adopted one particular view of biblical authority. Instead Methodists have sought to discern the will of God through the variety of ways in which biblical texts are approached and interpreted.

2.2.4. *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path* was a discussion document and not adopted as the Methodist position on use of the Bible, but in its subsequent report the Faith and Order Committee was of the opinion that there was insufficient evidence from the responses to those discussions “to suggest the wisdom of promoting any particular Model or Models from the seven ways of understanding the Bible presented” and it recommended that “these seven simply be acknowledged as different ways in which Methodists do in fact use the Bible today”.⁹ The Committee acknowledged that “it is not clear that all Models are to be viewed as equally compatible with the Deed of Union” and stated that “to opt for a narrower range would seem to be more in keeping with the Deed of Union,”¹⁰ but it did not recommend this course of action, nor did it comment on which of the models might be less compatible with the *Deed of Union*.

2.2.5. The Faith and Order Committee further noted that the Methodist ‘Quadrilateral’ (of Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience) “should be understood dynamically, noting the way in which Scripture is always being interpreted within the context of a vibrant faith and a living community”.¹¹ It also drew attention to how the Methodist understanding of the Church, summed up in ‘The Connexional Principle’ promotes an interrelatedness in debates about use of the Bible in the Church: “Those who support one Model of biblical authority need those who support other Models. However difficult that process of living with diversity may be, Methodist understanding of the Church supports that discomfort as part of what it means to live within the Body of Christ, in the service of the Kingdom of God in the world.”¹² In all its reflections on the nature and authority of the Bible, what has

8 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-a-lamp-to-my-feet-1998.pdf>

9 Faith and Order Committee, 2001, Responses to *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*, 4.1

10 Faith and Order Committee, 2001, Responses to *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*, 3.5

11 Faith and Order Committee, 2001, Responses to *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*, 3.3

12 Faith and Order Committee, 2001, Responses to *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path*, 3.8

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been repeatedly affirmed is the importance and place of the Bible in the life of the Methodist Church.

- 2.2.6. The *God in Love Unites Us* report does not take the approach of adopting a particular model of biblical interpretation. It builds on the assumption that there is already a wealth of biblical work and reflection on the matters discussed in the report that are available. Some members of the Committee felt the use of biblical material in the report was at best partial and at worst defective. Whilst thorough, scholarly and rigorous theological and scriptural arguments can be made for the different understandings of marriage and relationships that the report acknowledges exist within the Methodist Church, much of this work is not explicitly incorporated or referenced in the report itself. The process of conferring on the provisional resolutions has revealed that the report on its own, therefore, does not resource the biblical study and reflection that some have been keen to engage in. The Committee recommends that there needs to be further work in this area and will produce a list of resources to assist ongoing reflection.
- 2.3. Theologically Reflecting on Experience.
 - 2.3.1. *God in Love Unites Us* draws significantly on experience as part of its theological method. The report begins with the experience of the Task Group who also invite readers to bring their “lived experience to what we say,”¹³ and it goes on to draw on experience throughout (both of Methodists and within wider society). Paying attention to experience has always been a part of Methodist theological method, although what ‘experience’ has referred to and how it has been used has changed across the years.
 - 2.3.2. ‘Experience,’ however, is not a neutral category and it requires interrogation as part of any theological reflection. Within *God in Love Unites Us* it is not made explicit how ‘experience’ is used, nor is there evidence of it being interrogated. For example, it is not clear that there has been consultation and engagement with those who might disagree with, or have alternative perspectives on, the matters covered and so the question of ‘whose experience is given priority’ is relevant. As the Methodist Church continues to develop its theological thinking about marriage and relationships, some further reflection on how ‘experience’ is used within this would be helpful.
 - 2.3.3. Noting that the use of ‘experience’ in theological reflection is a matter that is more broadly relevant within the Methodist Church, the Faith and Order Committee

13 *God in Love Unites Us*, 2019, Preface: A personal invitation to journey on in love, faith and joy.

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will give this some further consideration and report to a future Conference.

***RESOLUTION

60/1. The Conference receives Part A of the Report.

PART B: COHABITATION

3. Cohabitation

3.1. The Committee expressed various concerns about Resolution 10/3 and the summary understanding of cohabitation (which the Conference is being asked to adopt). These concerns included:

- The imprecise and vague language (for example “drawn to each other”, “some form of life-enhancing committed relationship” and “informal cohabitation”). It is uncertain exactly what is being talked about, for it is not named and a matter of implication.
- The potential ways in which some of this language may be interpreted, and particularly whether there could be any safeguarding concerns.
- It is unclear whether “freely entering” and “life-enhancing” are judgements that can be made by the participants in all cases.
- It does not refer to two people.
- It does not make any reference to sexual relationship. Cohabitation is not about where people are living, and many people share accommodation with others.

3.2. It is acknowledged that further reflection on cohabitation has been requested for a long time. Part of the challenge, previously, was that it was difficult to reflect on cohabitation without reflecting on questions around same sex relationships and on marriage. The Methodist Church is now in a different place. In the light of the *God in Love Unites Us* report, and developments in civil partnerships, further reflection on cohabitation is possible, but the understanding of cohabitation proposed is insufficient, imprecise and requires further work.

3.3. It is therefore suggested that the Faith and Order Committee undertake some further work on cohabitation and report to a future Conference.

3.4. It is suggested that the direction of travel might be:

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- for reflection on cohabitation in terms of a sexual relationship between two people;
- that the church comments on life-long committed sexual relationships between two people as something that develops and cohabitation is one stage of the journey;
- an affirmation of marriage as a key point, but recognition that this is not how many people's relationships develop, and cohabitation often precedes marriage;
- recognition that many of the virtues associated with marriage (faithfulness, self sacrifice, mutual support and so on) are also present in a variety of other relationships so that these too can reflect something of the love for which God creates us.

***RESOLUTION

60/2. The Conference receives Part B of the Report.

PART C: METHODIST DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE

4. Methodist Doctrine

- 4.1. One question arising from the *God in Love Unites Us* report is whether affirmation of the provisional resolutions by the 2021 Conference would mean that there is a change in doctrine. The question has particularly arisen in relation to the annual inquiry where presbyters are asked to affirm that they “continue to believe and preach our doctrines and observe and administer our discipline”.¹⁴ Similarly, deacons are asked during the Convocation to renew the promise they made at ordination¹⁵ to ‘believe the doctrines of the Christian faith as this Church has received them’ and one of the duties of a Local Preacher is “to preach nothing at variance with our doctrines”¹⁶ It will be helpful, first, to look at the meaning of doctrine as the Methodist Church has understood it.
- 4.2. ‘Doctrine’ is a term which can be interpreted in different ways. Some churches, for example, set out their doctrines in a clear and systematic way, sometimes through a creedal document or a statement of faith. The Methodist Conference has stated that the doctrinal standards are not articulated in a “finite and comprehensive

14 CPD, 2019, SO 488, p.454

15 SO 753(5)

16 CPD, 2019, SO 563(2)(ii), p.499

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statement”¹⁷ but are set out in Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union*, and this is the understanding reflected in other documents. For example, the Standing Order which states that one of the duties of a local preacher is “to preach nothing at variance with our doctrines” also offers some definition, noting that “the term ‘our doctrines’ refers to those truths of salvation which are set forth in the Methodist doctrinal standards.”¹⁸

- 4.3. The doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church, as set out in Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union* are as follows:

“The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation. It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice. These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church are pledged are contained in Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.

The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.”¹⁹

- 4.4. The interpretation of doctrine is dealt with in the following clause (clause 5) of the *Deed of Union* which declares that the Conference “shall be the final authority within the Methodist Church with regard to all questions concerning the interpretation of its doctrines.”
- 4.5. Reflecting on the doctrinal standards, the Faith and Order Committee has previously said that:

17 The Methodist Conference, 1985, British Methodist Response to the Lima Text, paragraph 3.0

18 CPD, 2019, SO 563(2)(ii), p.499

19 Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union*

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“... while there is no doubt about where some of the source material for the formation of it is to be found, Methodist doctrine is not so easily determined. It is not clear what is meant by “the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation.” The creeds consist of precise clauses intended to define doctrines or exclude heresy but the clauses themselves are not specified in the doctrinal standards. The Protestant Reformation had several strands which sometimes, especially in the area of eschatology, were not compatible. The Deed of Union does not define the exact nature of the Methodist commitment to Protestantism. Again, our doctrines are based upon the “Divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures” but the revelation is not identical with the Scriptures and the teaching of Scripture is diverse within a broad unity. Further, while our doctrines are said to be contained within Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament and his 44 Sermons, it is expressly stated that these do not impose any theological system upon us.

Added to this, there is the insistence that the last word on the interpretation of doctrine rests with the Conference which leaves room for the continuing teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit and acknowledges the dynamic nature of Christian doctrine.

Methodist doctrine cannot, therefore, be determined by simple reference to any proof texts or documents. The Bible and Christian tradition set limits to the development of doctrine but their variety of thought and language allows considerable divergence of belief within those limits. The teaching of John Wesley and the past deliberations of Conference must have authority for Methodists today but that authority cannot be treated as infallible without calling in question the present work of the Spirit.”²⁰

- 4.6. If, as the Faith and Order Committee would wish to affirm, “our doctrines” are “those truths of salvation which are set forth in the doctrinal standards” then the Methodist Church’s understanding of marriage does not constitute doctrine. Rather, various doctrines underpin its theological reflection and position with regard to marriage and relationships. This position is consistent with the Methodist Catechism which “sets out to provide as clear a statement as possible of the Christian faith”²¹ and does not mention marriage, and is also reflected in the Marriage and Relationships Task Group’s understanding of the purpose and nature of the *God in Love Unites Us* report:

20 *Methodist Doctrine and the Preaching of Universalism*, 1992, paragraphs 4-6.

21 The Methodist Church, 2018, *What we believe: A Catechism for the use of the people called Methodists*, p.6. The Catechism was adopted by the 1986 Conference and revised on the authority of the Conference in 2000.

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“The task group is aware that many people are looking, as a matter of urgency, for the Conference to decide one way or another how the Methodist Church should respond in its life and worship to the changes in the legal definition of marriage, which now include the possibility of same-sex marriage as well as heterosexual marriage. If such questions are primarily seen in practical terms, decisions about them are often dealt with by a report containing recommendations. As with all matters of policy, such recommendations should be based on prayerful discernment; careful reading, interpretation and application of the Scriptures; and rigorous thinking. At the same time, they are grounded in an agreed framework of the Methodist Church’s theological understanding and teaching (“our doctrines”). ... Changes to that framework, however, are not dealt with through a report with recommendations, but through a Statement of the Conference under Standing Order 129 ...”²²

- 4.7. *God in Love Unites Us* is therefore grounded in “an agreed framework of the Methodist Church’s theological understanding and teaching (“our doctrines”)” but is not intended to change that framework. It is not a Statement of the judgement of the Conference on marriage and relationships, nor does it require any changes to Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union*, the doctrinal standards.
- 4.8. In consequence, when presbyters are asked if they “continue to believe and preach our doctrines,” and when deacons are asked to renew “the promises made at ordination”²³, it is the view of the Faith and Order Committee that the decisions as a consequence of *God in Love Unites Us* do not change what the Methodist Church understands to be “our doctrines”.

5. Methodist Discipline

- 5.1. If the provisional resolutions are affirmed by the Conference then the Methodist Church makes provision for different views on marriage to be upheld. There have therefore been further questions about whether all presbyters will be able to affirm that they will “observe and administer” our discipline. For some the ‘conscience clause’ is not enough and they have concerns about belonging to a Church which is willing to hold marriages of same-sex couples.
- 5.2. It is important to note that Methodist discipline already contains practices with which some might theologially disagree, for example the provisions for

22 The Methodist Church, 2018, *Marriage and Relationships Task Group: Interim Report*, 9, 10
23 S0753(5)

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authorisations to preside at Holy Communion. The proposed practices around marriage do not require anyone to act against their conscience with regards to presiding at a marriage service or in referring anybody to a colleague. Methodist discipline therefore makes provision for different views and different practices. The discipline itself does not oblige anyone to act against their conscience in this matter so an affirmation to “observe and administer” our discipline does not mean that someone is assenting to practice with which they theologically disagree.

***RESOLUTION

60/3. The Conference receives Part C of the Report.

PART D: PROVISIONAL RESOLUTION 10/9

6. Provisional Resolution 10/9

- 6.1. The Faith and Order Committee’s conclusion regarding doctrine in Part B of this report raises the question of how Standing Order O11A on marriage is to be understood and the nature of the changes proposed through the provisional resolution 10/9. The first sub-clause as proposed in the provisional resolution is especially relevant:

011A Marriage (1) The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God’s intention that a marriage should be ***is given by God to be a particular channel of God’s grace, and that it is in accord with God’s purposes when a marriage*** is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman ***two people who freely enter it. Within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman; that marriage can be between any two people. The Methodist Church affirms both understandings and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them.***

- 6.2. This looks like a doctrinal statement because it uses the language of belief but the Standing Orders are not normally a place where statements about doctrine are made, nor where theological reflection on doctrine is offered. *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (CPD) is about how we live together and function as a Church. The language of ‘belief’ (“The Methodist Church believes that marriage is ...”) is potentially misleading. The word ‘believes’ is used in different ways in the Standing Orders. It is used sparingly, but most often used in the sense of “believes someone incapable”, “believes

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something is relevant” and “believes someone is suitable. In SO 013 the phrase “The Methodist Church believes...” is used twice: “The Methodist Church believes that racism is a denial of the gospel” (SO 013B) and “The Methodist Church believes that it has a particular responsibility to children, young people and vulnerable adults to take all reasonable steps to protect them from the risk of harm” (SO 013C). In both cases ‘believes’ is used to mean ‘understanding’. The term is also used in the Standing Orders referred to in 3.1 above which are about preaching and believing “our doctrines”, but these relate back to Clause 4 of the *Deed of Union* which carries a different kind of authority from the Standing Orders.

- 6.3. It is something of an anomaly that the first part of SO 011(A) is in the existing Standing Orders, and it is useful to note the parallels with baptism which is not similarly referred to in this way in the Standing Orders. Including a definition of marriage in the Standing Orders is relatively recent. It was adopted by the Conference in 1998, as part of the report *Christian Preparation for Marriage*²⁴ (which was largely about divorce and about better preparation for marriage to reduce the incidence of divorce). There had been a previous provision in SO 830 about the appropriate procedure to follow in relation to marriage of divorced persons, but it did not contain any general statement about marriage. It was proposed that this Standing Order be adopted in order to guarantee the rights of conscience of ministers in respect of requests for marriage and to summarise the fundamental convictions of the 1992 Statement on *A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage* and the *Christian Preparation for Marriage* report.
- 6.4. The Standing Orders are primarily about practice, and the purpose of any revisions to the Standing Orders would be to put into effect any decisions made by the Conference in relation to marriage. It is not the purpose of Standing Orders to define marriage and they are not authoritative in this respect. Instead they offer clarity about what is possible and set out how this is achieved. In this case, the proposed changes would make provision for the different understandings of marriage to be upheld and reflected in practice. If the Methodist Church wishes to define more clearly its theological understanding of marriage then that is work still to be done.
- 6.5. The Faith and Order Committee recommends, for the sake of clarity and consistency, that the sentence saying what the Methodist Church ‘believes’ about marriage is omitted from the Standing Order, but that the explicit acknowledgement that there are different understandings of marriage held in the

24 The Methodist Church, 1998, *Christian Preparation for Marriage*

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Methodist Church remains. The Faith and Order Committee does not think this affects the fundamental principle on which the Synod have voted (ie that there are two understandings of marriage in the Methodist Church). A revised SO 011A would potentially, therefore, look like this:

011A Marriage (1) The Methodist Church believes that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be *is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace, and that it is in accord with God's purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman two people who freely enter it.* **~~Within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman; that marriage can be between any two people. The Methodist Church affirms both understandings and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them.~~**

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

This recommendation was submitted for consideration by the group appointed under resolution 10/11 of the 2019 Conference.

- 6.6. In making this recommendation the Faith and Order Committee further noted that the revision proposed changing the declaration that marriage “is a gift of God” to “marriage is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace”. If the Faith and Order Committee's recommendation is taken forward then this change is lost. The Committee notes, however, that similar changes were not proposed regarding the marriage service in the *Methodist Worship Book* and, given what has been said about the nature of the Standing Orders above, the change therefore carries comparatively little theological weight. The *Methodist Worship Book* is a text that carries some authority regarding Methodist theology and the Methodist Church therefore still affirms that marriage is a gift of God.
- 6.7. In the light of this recommendation and taking into consideration the factors noted in 1.4 above, it is the view of the Committee that the word ‘believes’ in the Provisional Resolution is potentially misleading and it brings a Resolution to amend this word for the sake of clarity.

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***RESOLUTIONS

60/4. The Conference receives Part D of the Report.

60/5. The Conference amends the first sentence of resolution 10/9 of the Conference of 2019 as follows:

011A Marriage (1) The Methodist Church ~~believes~~ **understands** that marriage is a gift of God and that it is God's intention that a marriage should be **is given by God to be a particular channel of God's grace, and that it is in accord with God's purposes when a marriage** is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of one man and one woman **two people who freely enter it.**

PART E: Provisional Resolution 10/7

7. Guidance on marriage and relationships

- 7.1. The 2019 Conference adopted as a provisional resolution 10/7 which contains seven paragraphs of Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage for inclusion in the Guidance section of CPD. In the light of the previous reflection on the use of the word 'believes', the Committee brings a Resolution to amend this language for the sake of clarity and also consistency. In considering Resolution 10/7, the Faith and Order Committee identified some points where further clarity would be helpful and also noted that what is proposed does not take account of the existing guidance in CPD, some of which may become redundant, need revision or need reaffirming.
- 7.2. The Committee further noted that the proposed SO 011B provides guidance for ensuring that no member of the Methodist Church who is asked to officiate at or participate in the marriage of a particular couple should be required to do so if it is contrary to the dictates of their conscience. The guidance also seeks to ensure that the managing trustees of any Methodist premises explicitly approve their use for same-sex marriages. The Committee noted the following points:
- the Guidance section of CPD already contains a policy and process for when someone is prevented by conscience from officiating at a marriage of a couple in particular circumstances and it would be helpful to have a comprehensive set of guidance in one place, rather than it being split between the Guidance section and Standing Orders;
 - the detailed guidance, particularly that for pastoral conversations, more properly belongs in the Guidance section of CPD, although the Standing Order could identify the main principles in order to signal its importance;

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- that the proposed SO 011B(3)(ii) does not reflect the even-handedness of the other provisional resolutions because it is only those who feel unable to marry same-sex couples who are required to have a pastoral conversation with the Chair. The purpose and nature of the conversation is not clear (especially given the principle no one will be placed under any pressure) and this may require further thought.
- 7.3. The Committee therefore recommends that the content of the proposed new SO 011B which pertain to questions of conscience and set out parts of the policy and process for responding to requests for marriage (paragraphs 3, and 5-7) be incorporated into the existing guidance on these matters so that there is one clear and comprehensive policy set out in the Guidance section of CPD.
- 7.4. The Committee has begun to draft guidance which addresses these points and seeks to bring together:
- The guidance proposed under Resolution 10/7;
 - Christian Preparation for Marriage: Methodist Church Policy and Guidelines (CPD part 8, pp.795-798);
 - Guidelines for Inter-Faith Marriages (CPD part 9, pp.800-802); and
 - The recommended amendments from SO011A and SO011B.
- 7.5. It is recommended that part 10 of Book 7 of CPD, *Responding to Requests by Same Sex Couples for Prayers or Services* is deleted.
- 7.6. In seeking to consolidate the guidance into one section it is clear that some of the existing guidance in relation to inter-faith marriages and Christian preparation for marriage needs reviewing and updating. The Committee is therefore recommending that the revised guidance is further reviewed and updated and the results of this are reported to the 2022 Conference.
- 7.7. These recommendations and fuller guidance were submitted for consideration by the group appointed under resolution 10/11 of the 2019 Conference. It is clear, however, that further work is needed not least because some other aspects of the existing guidance listed in 7.4 above may need some updating. The Committee therefore brings a resolution for this work to happen.

***RESOLUTIONS

60/6. The Conference receives Part E of the Report.

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60/7. The Conference amends the first sentence of resolution 10/9 of the Conference of 2019 as follows:

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 **understands** 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 **understands** 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.

60/8. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee to bring revised Guidance for Marriage to the 2022 Conference, taking into account the matters identified in this section of the report.

PART F: LITURGICAL RESOURCES

8. Liturgical Resources

- 8.1. The 2019 Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to review the provision of liturgical resources in the light of *God in Love Unites Us*, "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... 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 ... Conference that result from it" (Resolution 10/4). It further directed the Faith and Order Committee to "explore producing liturgical resources and relevant guidance for use at the ending of a marriage" (Resolution 10/5). This section provides an update on the Faith and Order Committee's response to these directions, with its work regarding the marriage service reported separately in sections 8 and 9 below.

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- 8.2. In response to Resolution 10/5, the Committee notes the complexity and variety of pastoral situations that arise at the breakdown of a relationship, and that people may need different kinds of liturgical resources at different times. It therefore feels it appropriate for there to be a variety of liturgical resources for such times and is working towards this (see 8.6 below). It further feels that some further theological reflection on the ending of relationships is timely and will keep this on its agenda.
- 8.3. Resolution 10/4 directed the Committee to review the preparation of a draft service of celebration for civil partnerships and any other draft liturgical resources that may be required. Civil partnerships as an institution are developing and, in England, Wales, Scotland and the Isle of Man, are now open to mixed-sex couples as well as to same-sex couples. The Committee notes that the legislation prevents the registration of a civil partnership itself from having any religious content so such a service would take place separately after the legal ceremony had been completed.
- 8.4. The liturgical principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* declares that the law of prayer is the law of belief. In other words, our liturgy forms our doctrine which in turn forms our liturgy. The creation of a liturgy for the celebration of civil partnerships will inevitably begin to create a Methodist theology of civil partnerships.
- 8.5. The Faith and Order Committee considered what a Methodist theological understanding of civil partnerships might be. It noted that people might enter into a civil partnership for a variety of reasons and that civil partnerships may therefore be understood in quite different ways. It thus affirmed that our primary understanding of civil partnerships is as a legal status. Those who understand their civil partnership in theological terms are likely to bring diverse perspectives rather than have a common understanding. It therefore concluded that it would be theologically and pastorally inappropriate to produce one liturgy for the celebration of civil partnerships and instead recommends producing some broad guidance and resources for celebrating civil partnerships. The parameters for such work would be dependent on the decisions relating to *God in Love Unites Us*.
- 8.6. The Committee draws the attention of the Conference to the publication *Vows and Partings*²⁵ which is a book of prayers and services by the Methodist Church for people at every stage of marriage and other relationships – as a relationship starts, during joyful and difficult times and when a relationship ends. The resource is currently out of print, although still available to buy second hand. The Faith

25 The Methodist Church, 2001, *Vows and Partings*. Methodist Publishing House

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and Order Committee feels that it would be helpful to produce a similar resource containing the work outlined above and this work has begun with the hope that the new resource will be available by the summer of 2022.

9. Marriage Liturgies

9.1. Resolution 10/4 of the Conference of 2019 directed the Faith and Order Committee, *inter alia*, to review the provision of liturgical resources in the light of *God in Love Unites Us*, including the question of whether there should be one marriage service or two in the *Methodist Worship Book*. This direction was on the understanding that the bringing of draft liturgies would depend upon the results of the consultation initiated by that Conference. This section sets out that review as it affects liturgies for marriage.

9.2. *One liturgy or two?*

9.2.1. The Committee considered the cases both of the resolutions of *God in Love Unites Us* being confirmed and not being confirmed. If the resolutions of *God in Love Unites Us* are not confirmed, then the Faith and Order Committee recommends that one marriage service in the *Methodist Worship Book* will continue to be the appropriate provision and that no amendments are required at this stage. In this situation, the remainder of this section can be disregarded.

9.2.2. If the resolutions of *God in Love Unites Us* (or substantially similar ones) are confirmed, then the Committee recognises that within the Methodist Church marriage will be understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman; that marriage can be between any two people. Both understandings would be affirmed and provision made for them. The Committee believes that this should include liturgical provision and therefore recommends that two liturgies should be provided, one for the marriage of a man and a woman and another for the marriage of any two persons.

9.2.3. In addition, in its review the Committee identified that it would also be appropriate for the provision for the Blessing of a Marriage previously solemnized to mirror that of Marriage itself. The Committee therefore also recommends that there should be two liturgies for the Blessing of a Marriage, according to the two understandings that would be recognised in the Methodist Church.

9.3. *Amendments to the Methodist Worship Book*

9.3.1. The provision of two liturgies for marriage will necessitate some amendments to the existing text of the *Methodist Worship Book* to embody an affirmation of the

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two understandings.

- 9.3.2. The Committee recommends that the introduction on page 367 of the *Methodist Worship Book* be amended as follows:

A marriage ceremony is a formal occasion when a solemn, legal contract is made between a man and a woman **two persons. Since the decisions of the Conference of 2021, within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways, namely that marriage can only be between a man and a woman and that marriage can be between any two persons. Accordingly, liturgies for marriage and the blessing of a marriage according to both understandings are provided. Whatever our understanding, in a Christian context, the service is always** an act of worship in which marriage is celebrated as a gift of God and the joy of the couple is shared and their commitment to each other is witnessed by family and friends. *The Marriage Service's* themes of love, hope, faithfulness, sacrifice and trust are at the heart of the Christian gospel.

- 9.3.3. The Committee recommends that the existing *Marriage Service* (p367 ff.) be retained without alteration but that its title be amended to “The Marriage of a Man and a Woman.”
- 9.3.4. The Committee recommends that the existing service of *The Blessing of a Marriage previously solemnized* (p385 ff.) be retained without alteration but that its title be amended to “The Blessing of a Marriage of a Man and a Woman previously solemnized.”
- 9.3.5. The Committee recommends that the heading on page 398 be amended to “Additional Scripture Readings for the Marriage of a Man and a Woman.”

9.4. *New liturgies*

- 9.4.1. The Committee has prepared draft new liturgies for *The Marriage of any two persons* and *The Blessing of a Marriage of any two persons previously solemnized*. In accordance with SO 330(9), the Committee recommends that the Conference commend these for a period of experimental use. Feedback on the draft liturgies may be sent to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee at marriageservicefeedback@methodistchurch.org.uk by 3 January 2023 to enable the 2023 Conference to make a decision about their formal authorisation.
- 9.4.2. In both new liturgies, the principle in drafting was that as far as possible all the options presented should be potentially suitable for all couples and therefore gender neutral. Attention is drawn to the fact that the liturgies can and should

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be personalised according to the situation and needs of each couple. Nothing presented here changes that or the ability of a minister (or other person conducting the service) to do that.

10. The Liturgies

THE MARRIAGE OF ANY TWO PERSONS

NOTES

1. At the time of publication, it is required by law in England and Wales that the words of declaration at no. 5 and the words of contract at no. 13 (or the permitted alternative forms, set out in the Appendix) should be said in the presence of the Authorized Person (or the Registrar) and two witnesses. The full names of the parties should be used.
2. When this service is used in Scotland, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, or any other jurisdiction whose marriage legislation is different from that of England and Wales, the minister or other person conducting the service should ensure that the service complies with the legal requirements of that jurisdiction. Appropriate substitutions should be made at nos. 5 and 13 if necessary.
3. In the case of same-sex marriages, there may be legal requirements additional to those for mixed-sex marriages. In England and Wales these include that the registration of the building and the appointment of the Authorized Person need to be extended to cover same-sex marriages. The minister, Authorized Person, or (in some jurisdictions) other person conducting the service, should ensure compliance with all relevant requirements.
4. This service includes the suggestions of pronouns her/him/them for those being married. Some being married may prefer the use of other pronouns and the preference of the person should always be followed. However, at the time of writing, in England and Wales the use of the word husband or wife (according to the legally recognized gender of the person) is required by law at number 13.

THE PREPARATION

- 1 The people may stand as the marriage party enters the church. The persons to be married stand together before the minister.

The minister may welcome the congregation.

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The minister says:

We meet together in the presence of God
to witness the marriage of A and C,
to ask God's blessing upon them,
to support them with our prayers
and to share their joy.

2 Hymn

3 The people remain standing. The minister says:

Let us pray.

Gracious God, your generous love surrounds us,
and everything we enjoy comes from you.
We confess our ingratitude for your goodness
and our selfishness in using your gifts.
Forgive and renew us,
and fill us with your Spirit
that in true thankfulness
we may bear witness to your love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

4 The minister says:

A and *C*, with your families and friends,
we thank God on this day
for the gift of marriage.

It is the will of God that, in marriage,
a couple should experience
a life-long unity of heart, body and mind;
comfort and companionship;
enrichment and encouragement;
tenderness and trust.

It is the will of God that marriage
should be honoured as a way of life,
in which we may know the security of love and care,
and grow towards maturity.
Through such marriage,
human society may be enriched,

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family life strengthened,
and children nurtured.

No one should enter into this lightly or selfishly,
for marriage involves the giving
of two persons
wholeheartedly to each other.
Christ in his self-giving comes to our help,
for he loves us and gave himself for us.

A and *C*, you are now to share this way of life
which God has created
and, in Christ, has blessed.
Today we pray that the Holy Spirit
will guide and strengthen you
that you may fulfil God's purposes
for the rest of your lives.

5 The Legal Declarations

The minister says to the people:

A and *C* are now to make the declarations which the law requires.

The minister says to *AB*:

Are you, *AB*, free lawfully to marry *CD*?

AB answers: I am.

The minister says to *CD*:

Are you, *CD*, free lawfully to marry *AB*?

CD answers: I am.

6 The minister says to *AB* and *CD*:

You have made the declarations required by law. I ask you now to affirm, in the presence of us all, your intention to marry each other.

The minister says to *AB*:

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A, are you willing to give yourself in marriage to *C*?

AB answers: I am.

The minister says to *AB*:

Will you love *her/him/them*, comfort and honour *her/him/them*, be *her/his/their* companion through all the joys and sorrows of life, and be faithful to *her/him/them* as long as you both shall live?

AB answers: With God's help, I will.

The minister says to *CD*:

C, are you willing to give yourself in marriage to *A*?

CD answers: I am.

The minister says to *CD*:

Will you love *her/him/them*, comfort and honour *her/him/them*, be *her/his/their* companion through all the joys and sorrows of life, and be faithful to *her/him/them* as long as you both shall live?

CD answers: With God's help, I will.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The whole of the Ministry of the Word may occur here or at no. 18, or the scripture readings may be read here and the sermon may be preached at no. 18.

- 7 All sit. At least one passage of scripture is read. If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the readings.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:7

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

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And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14-19

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1-11

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Jesus said: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

John 15:9-12

Additional scripture readings are listed below.

8 Sermon

9 Hymn

THE MARRIAGE

10 All stand. The minister may say to the people:

I ask you, the families and friends of *A* and *C*:

Will you do all in your power to support and encourage them in their marriage?

The people answer:

With God's help, we will.

11 If *AB* has a relative or friend presenting *her/him/them* for marriage, the minister says:

Who presents *A* to be married to *C*?

AB's relative or friend answers: I do.

If *CD* has a relative or friend presenting *her/him/them* for marriage, the minister says:

Who presents *C* to be married to *A*?

CD's relative or friend answers: I do.

12 The minister says:

Gracious God,
as you have brought *A* and *C* together in love and trust,
enable them through the power of your Holy Spirit
to make and keep their vows;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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13 The Vows

AB takes *CD*'s right hand and says:

I, *AB*, take you, *CD*, to be my wedded wife/husband,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
from this day forward,
until we are parted by death;
and this is my solemn vow.

They loose hands.

CD takes *AB*'s right hand and says:

I, *CD*, take you, *AB*, to be my wedded wife/husband,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
from this day forward,
until we are parted by death;
and this is my solemn vow.

They loose hands.

14 The Giving of the Rings

The minister receives the rings on the book, and says:

Eternal God,
bless these rings
that they may be
symbols of the love and trust
between *A* and *C*. **Amen.**

EITHER

AB places a ring on *CD*'s ring finger, and says:

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I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

CD places a ring on *AB*'s ring finger, and says:

I give you this ring
as a sign of our marriage.
With my body I honour you,
all that I am I give to you,
and all that I have I share with you,
within the love of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

OR

After the rings have been given and received, the couple say together:

With these rings we pledge ourselves to each other,
in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

- 15 The minister joins the right hands of the couple. The minister may wrap *her/his/their* stole around, and/or place *her/his/their hand* on the joined hands.

The minister says to the couple:

A and *C*, God so join you together
that none shall ever part you.

The minister says to the people:

Before God and in the presence of us all,
A and *C* have exchanged vows,
joined their hands,
and given and received rings.
I therefore proclaim that they are now
united in the covenant of marriage.

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16 A hymn may be sung here or after no. 17.

17 The people remain standing. The couple may kneel and the minister may lay hands upon their heads.

The minister says:

A and *C*,
the blessing of God the Father,
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
May God be your protection and your wisdom,
your guide and your peace,
your joy, your comfort, and your eternal rest. Amen.

18 The whole of the Ministry of the Word follows, if it has not occurred earlier. If the sermon has been deferred, it is preached here.

THE PRAYERS

19 These or some other prayers of intercession:

Let us pray.

God of grace, source of all love,
we pray for *A* and *C*
that they may live together in love and faithfulness
to the end of their lives.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Enrich their friendship,
that each may be for the other
a companion in joy and a comforter in sorrow.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Help *A* and *C* to be patient, gentle and forgiving,
that their marriage may reflect Christ's love for all people.

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Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Enable them to make their home
a place of welcome and friendship,
that their life together
may be a source of strength to others.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Other intercessions may be included.

May we, who have witnessed these vows today,
be signs of your love in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

20 The Lord's Prayer

EITHER

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

OR

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy
Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

21 If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, the service continues from no. 25.

If Holy Communion is not celebrated, the service continues as follows:

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22 All stand.

The minister says this prayer, or gives thanks in her/his own words:

Praise God,
who is the source of joy and celebration,
pleasure and delight, love and friendship.

Praise God,
who, in the life and victory of Jesus Christ,
reveals to us the glory of self-giving love.

Praise God,
who sends the Holy Spirit to be our helper
and to guide us into the way of perfect love.

Praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

23 Hymn

24 The minister says to all present:

God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Holy Spirit,
make *you/us* strong in faith
and guide *you/us* in truth and love.

EITHER

OR

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to
shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
and give you peace. Amen.

May God be gracious to us
and bless us,
and make his face to shine
upon us. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION

25 The Peace

All stand.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

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And also with you.

The people may greet one another in the name of Christ.

THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

- 26 Bread and wine are brought to the table by the couple or other members of the congregation (or if already on the table are uncovered). The presiding minister takes the bread and wine and prepares them for use.

THE THANKSGIVING

- 27 All stand.

The presiding minister leads the great prayer of thanksgiving:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We praise you, gracious God,
creator and sustainer of all things.

From the beginning
you made us for yourself
and for each other,
and you call us to reflect your faithfulness
in lives of love and service.
You gave yourself to us in your Son, Jesus Christ,
the Lord of heaven and earth,
and entrusted him to the care of a human family.
In his life, death and resurrection,
you revealed the power of self-giving love,
rescued us from sin and selfishness,
and made us a new family through your grace.

You give yourself to us today,
and by your Holy Spirit

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you promise to be with us always
as our companion and our guide.
And so, with all your people on earth and in heaven,
we give you thanks and praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy God, we praise you
that on the night in which he was betrayed
our Saviour Christ took bread
and gave you thanks.
He broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

After supper, he took the cup of wine,
gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,
'Drink this, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for all people for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

And so, gracious God, we remember and celebrate
all that Christ has done for us.
We offer ourselves to you in humble thanksgiving.

Send your Holy Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood of Christ.
Together with all your people,
may we have life in all its fullness,
live in the power of love,
and fill creation with a song of endless praise.

**Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy,**

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now and for ever. Amen.

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

28 The presiding minister breaks the bread in the sight of the people in silence, or saying:

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The presiding minister may lift the cup in silence, or saying:

The cup we bless is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

29 Silence, all seated or kneeling

THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

30 The presiding minister receives, then, beginning with the couple and their families, the people, according to local custom.

31 Words such as the following are said during the distribution:

The body of Christ. **Amen.**

The blood of Christ. **Amen.**

32 During the distribution there may be appropriate music.

33 The elements that remain are covered with a white cloth.

PRAYERS AND DISMISSAL

34 Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all people. **Amen.**

35 Hymn

36 The presiding minister says to all present:

God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Holy Spirit,

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make *you/us* strong in faith
and guide *you/us* in truth and love.

EITHER

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to
shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
and give you peace. Amen.

OR

May God be gracious to us
and bless us,
and make his face to shine
upon us. Amen.

APPENDIX

- 1 As an alternative to the questions and answers in no. 5, the persons contracting the marriage may make the declaration required by law by saying:

EITHER

A I do solemnly declare

**that I know not
of any lawful impediment
why I, *AB/CD*,*
may not be joined in matrimony
to *CD/AB*.***

OR

B I declare that I know of no legal reason why I,

AB/CD*,* may not be joined in marriage to *CD/AB*.

- 2 As an alternative to the words of contract set out in no. 13,

EITHER

A the persons to be married may say:

**I call upon these persons here present
to witness that I, *AB/CD*,*
do take thee, *CD/AB*,*
to be my lawful wedded wife/husband,**

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for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
from this day forward,
until we are parted by death;
and this is my solemn vow.

OR

B the persons to be married may say to each other:

**I, *AB/CD*,* take thee, *CD/AB*,*
to be my wedded wife/husband,**
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
from this day forward,
until we are parted by death;
and this is my solemn vow.

(* The full names of the parties must be used.)

THE BLESSING OF A MARRIAGE OF ANY TWO PERSONS PREVIOUSLY SOLEMNIZED

NOTES

- 1 This form of service must not be used for the solemnization of a marriage.
- 2 This form of service is not suitable for those who wish to reaffirm or renew marriage vows.
- 3 This service should normally be conducted by the minister with pastoral charge of the church in which it takes place. It can be used either as a private ceremony or with a congregation of family and friends.
- 4 This service includes the suggestions of pronouns her/him/them for those whose marriage is being blessed. Some may prefer the use of other pronouns and the

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preference of the person should always be followed.

THE PREPARATION

- 1 The persons whose marriage is to be blessed stand together before the minister.

The minister may welcome the congregation.

The minister says:

We meet together in the presence of God
to join with *A* and *C*,
in asking God's blessing upon their marriage.

- 2 Hymn

- 3 The minister says:

A and *C*, with your families and friends,
we thank God on this day
for the gift of marriage.

It is the will of God that, in marriage,
a couple should experience
a life-long unity of heart, body and mind;
comfort and companionship;
enrichment and encouragement;
tenderness and trust.

It is the will of God that marriage
should be honoured as a way of life,
in which we may know the security of love and care,
and grow towards maturity.
Through such marriage,
human society may be enriched,
family life strengthened,
and children nurtured.

No one should enter into this lightly or selfishly,
for marriage involves the giving

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of two persons
wholeheartedly to each other.
Christ in his self-giving comes to our help,
for he loves us and gave himself for us.
A and C,
you have already entered this way of life
which God has created
and, in Christ, has blessed.
Today we pray that the Holy Spirit
will guide and strengthen you
that you may fulfil God's purposes
for the rest of your lives.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The whole of the Ministry of the Word may occur here or at no. 13, or the scripture readings may be read here and the sermon may be preached at no. 13.

- 4 All sit. At least one passage of scripture is read. If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, a passage from the Gospels always concludes the readings.

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one's house, it would be utterly scorned.

Song of Solomon 8:7

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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Ephesians 3:14-19

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

John 2:1-11

Jesus said: 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'

John 15:9-12

Additional scripture readings are listed below.

5 Sermon

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6 Hymn

THE BLESSING OF THE MARRIAGE

7 All stand. The minister says:

Gracious God,
you have brought *A* and *C* together in love and trust.
By the power of your Holy Spirit,
may they receive your blessing upon their marriage;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

8 The minister says to *AB*:

A, you have come here as *C*'s *husband/wife/spouse*
seeking God's blessing upon your marriage,
and desiring to live according to God's will.
I ask you, therefore:
will you love *her/him/them*, comfort and honour *her/him/them*,
be *her/his/their* companion
through all the joys and sorrows of life,
and be faithful to *her/him/them*
as long as you both shall live?

AB answers:

With God's help, I will.

The minister says to *CD*:

C, you have come here as *A*'s *husband/wife/spouse*
seeking God's blessing upon your marriage,
and desiring to live according to God's will.
I ask you, therefore:
will you love *her/him/them*, comfort and honour *her/him/them*,
be *her/his/their* companion
through all the joys and sorrows of life,
and be faithful to *her/him/them*
as long as you both shall live?

CD answers:

With God's help, I will.

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- 9 The couple join their ring hands. The minister places a hand on their joined hands, and says:

Eternal God,
bless *these rings/this ring*,
symbols/a symbol of the love and trust
between *A* and *C*. Amen.

- 10 The minister may wrap *her/his/their* stole around the joined hands. The couple say together:

Within the love of God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
I am bound to you in marriage
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish,
until we are parted by death.

- 11 The people remain standing. The couple may kneel, and the minister may lay hands upon their heads.

The minister says:

A and *C*,
the blessing of God the Father,
God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
May God be your protection and your wisdom,
your guide and your peace,
your joy, your comfort, and your eternal rest. **Amen.**

- 12 Hymn

- 13 The whole of the Ministry of the Word follows, if it has not occurred earlier. If the sermon has been deferred, it is preached here.

THE PRAYERS

- 14 All sit.

These or some other prayers of intercession:

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Let us pray.

God of grace, source of all love,
we pray for *A* and *C*
that they may live together in love and faithfulness
to the end of their lives.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Enrich their friendship,
that each may be for the other
a companion in joy and a comforter in sorrow.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Help *A* and *C* to be patient, gentle, and forgiving,
that their marriage may reflect Christ's love for all people.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Enable them to make their home
a place of welcome and friendship,
that their life together
may be a source of strength to others.

Lord of life,
hear us in your love.

Other intercessions may be included.

May we, who have witnessed their promises today,
be signs of your love in the world;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

15 The Lord's Prayer

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EITHER

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who
sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

OR

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be
thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the
glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

16 If Holy Communion is to be celebrated, the service continues from no. 20.

If Holy Communion is not celebrated, the service continues as follows:

17 All stand.

The minister says this prayer, or gives thanks in her/his own words:

Praise God,
who is the source of joy and celebration,
pleasure and delight, love and friendship.

Praise God,
who, in the life and victory of Jesus Christ,
reveals to us the glory of self-giving love.

Praise God,
who sends the Holy Spirit to be our helper
and to guide us into the way of perfect love.

Praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

18 Hymn

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19 The minister says to all present:

God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Holy Spirit,
make you/us strong in faith
and guide you/us in truth and love.

EITHER

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to
shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
and give you peace. Amen.

OR

May God be gracious to us
and bless us,
and make his face to shine
upon us. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION

20 The Peace

All stand.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

The people may greet one another in the name of Christ.

THE PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

21 Bread and wine are brought to the table by the couple or other members of the congregation (or if already on the table are uncovered). The presiding minister takes the bread and wine and prepares them for use.

THE THANKSGIVING

22 All stand.

The presiding minister leads the great prayer of thanksgiving:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
We lift them to the Lord.

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Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

We praise you, gracious God,
creator and sustainer of all things.

From the beginning
you made us for yourself
and for each other,
and you call us to reflect your faithfulness
in lives of love and service.

You gave yourself to us in your Son, Jesus Christ,
the Lord of heaven and earth,
and entrusted him to the care of a human family.
In his life, death and resurrection,
you revealed the power of self-giving love,
rescued us from sin and selfishness
and made us a new family through your grace.

You give yourself to us today,
and by your Holy Spirit
you promise to be with us always
as our companion and our guide.
And so with all your people on earth and in heaven
we give you thanks and praise:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessèd is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy God, we praise you
that on the night in which he was betrayed
our Saviour Christ took bread
and gave you thanks.
He broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying,
'Take, eat. This is my body, given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

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After supper, he took the cup of wine,
gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying,
'Drink this, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for all people for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in remembrance of me.'

And so, gracious God, we remember and celebrate
all that Christ has done for us.
We offer ourselves to you in humble thanksgiving.

Send your Holy Spirit
that these gifts of bread and wine
may be for us the body and blood of Christ.
Together with all your people,
may we have life in all its fullness,
live in the power of love,
and fill creation with a song of endless praise.

**Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory is yours, God most holy,
now and for ever. Amen.**

THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

- 23 The presiding minister breaks the bread in the sight of the people in silence, or saying:

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The presiding minister may lift the cup in silence, or saying:

The cup we bless is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

- 24 Silence, all seated or kneeling

THE SHARING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

- 25 The presiding minister receives, then, beginning with the couple and their families, the people, according to local custom.

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26 Words such as the following are said during the distribution:

The body of Christ. **Amen.**
The blood of Christ. **Amen.**

27 During the distribution there may be appropriate music.

28 The elements that remain are covered with a white cloth.

PRAYERS AND DISMISSAL

29 Let us pray.

We thank you, Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all people. **Amen.**

30 Hymn

31 The presiding minister says to all present:

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and God the Holy Spirit,
make you/us strong in faith
and guide you/us in truth and love.

EITHER

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to
shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
and give you peace. Amen.

OR

May God be gracious to us
and bless us,
and make his face to shine
upon us. Amen.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR THE MARRIAGE OF ANY TWO PEOPLE

Old Testament

Ruth 1:16-17
Ecclesiastes 4:7-12
Song of Songs 2:10-15

Do not press me to leave you
Two support each other
A love song

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Psalms

Psalm 23	The Lord our shepherd
Psalm 121	The Lord's blessing and protection
Psalm 138	Thanks and praise to the Lord

Epistle

Romans 12:1-2, 9-13	Love in practice
Galatians 3:25-29	Heirs of the promise
Philippians 1:9-11	Growing into a rich love
Philippians 2:1-11	The example of Jesus
1 John 3:18-24	Love in practice
1 John 4:7-12, 15-17	Love one another

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-10	The Beatitudes
Matthew 7:21, 24-27	Hearing and doing
Matthew 22:35-40	The greatest commandment

*****RESOLUTIONS**

60/9. The Conference receives Part F of the Report.

The following resolutions would only be put in the event that the resolutions of God in Love Unites Us (or substantially similar ones) were confirmed.

60/10. The Conference adopts the recommendation that there should be two services of marriage in the *Methodist Worship Book*, reflecting the two understandings of marriage in the Methodist Church.

60/11. The Conference directs that the *Methodist Worship Book* is amended as set out in section 3 of this report.

60/12. The Conference receives the liturgy for the *Marriage of any two persons* and commends it to Local Churches and Circuits for experimental use.

60/13. The Conference receives the liturgy for the *Blessing of a Marriage of any two persons previously solemnized* and commends it to Local Churches and Circuits for experimental use.