

Conference confirms resolutions on marriage and relationships

Following prayerful consideration by the whole Church, the Methodist Conference has voted to confirm provisional resolutions on the principles or qualities of good relating, understanding of cohabitation and same sex marriages conducted on Methodist premises or by Methodist office-holders.



A report on marriage and relationships, 'God in Love Unites Us', was received by the Conference in 2019 and the local District Synods were asked to consider the provisional resolutions and report back to this year's Conference which is being held this week in Birmingham. The Conference received a report on the results of the local conferring which showed that 29 out of the 30 Synods confirmed support for the provisional resolutions.

The Revd Sonia Hicks, President of the Conference, prayed ahead of the main debate on Wednesday morning in Birmingham, asking that the Conference's "words may be imbibed with your grace, with tenderness from on high."

A range of views were expressed on the resolutions, in particular on cohabitation and same sex marriages. The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, spoke to the Conference acknowledging the "depth of feeling, pain and anxiety that there is" with a commitment to work across the Connexion with District Chairs to heal divisions.

Speakers called for unity going ahead irrespective of the decision. Other speakers spoke of the acceptance of diversity that younger Church members have for each other with younger speakers relating their own lived experience as Christians from the LGBTQI+ community. Another representative asked that the Church does not ostracise those who oppose the introduction of same-sex marriages in the Church, saying the great majority of these people are trying to be faithful to Scripture as they see it.

The Methodist Church included other denominations and Methodist Churches across the world in the process of listening and consultation, with written submissions from ecumenical partners to the 'God In Love Unites Us' report and workshops with global Methodist partners.

Following the vote on the provisional resolutions the Revd Sonia Hicks said: "The debate today and our wider conversation has been conducted with grace and mutual respect. As we move forward together after this historic day for our Church, we must remember to continue to hold each other in prayer, and to support each other respecting our differences."

Frequently Asked Questions following the 2021 Conference votes

On 30 June and following prayerful consideration by the whole Church, the Methodist Conference voted to confirm provisional resolutions on same sex marriages conducted on Methodist premises or by Methodist office-holders.

God in Love Unites Us (GiLUU) – Frequently asked questions

1. How soon will the Methodist Church notify the General Register Office (GRO) of its decision to accept the principle of same-sex marriage?

Under the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, the Conference as the Methodist Church's governing body must consent to local churches registering their buildings for the solemnisation (conduct) of same-sex marriages.

The Conference Office has been in contact with the GRO, which has confirmed that the Secretary of the Conference must write to the Registrar General on behalf of the Conference to relay the Conference's consent under Resolution 59/8 (which confirms the provisional resolution 10/8 of the Conference of 2019) before Church Councils can apply to register their buildings for same-sex marriage.

Under the legislation, there is no timeline for informing the GRO. The Secretary of the Conference will do so once the 2021 Conference has concluded.

2. What do local churches need to do to register their church premises for same-sex marriage?

The Conference Office is in contact with the GRO about the exact requirements. Once confirmed, step-by-step guidance will be produced.

3. When can churches apply to register their premises for same-sex marriage?

As stated above, the Secretary of the Conference must first notify the GRO of the Church's in-principle consent to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises.

There are also various legal details to be clarified with the GRO before local churches can apply. The Conference has therefore passed Resolution 59/14C delaying the authorisation date for managing trustees to make their applications to a 'date no earlier than 1 September 2021'.

Confirmation of the actual dates will be announced as soon as the legalities have been agreed with the GRO.

Please note: the dates may differ depending on the jurisdiction in which the applicants' building lies.

4. How long will the registration process take?

The GRO aims to process applications for registration within 20 days, although this is not guaranteed and applications may take longer if they are complex or there are delays in the GRO's internal processes. It may be possible to expedite applications in some circumstances – we await clarification from the GRO.

The timescale may be different in Scotland and other jurisdictions.

5. Do we have to submit a copy of the liturgy for The Marriage of any two persons with every application to register?

The Faith and Order Committee has prepared a new draft liturgy for The Marriage of any two persons, which the Conference has commended for a period of experimental use until 2023.

The Conference Office is in conversation with the GRO about whether the full text of the liturgy, or only the parts which make a marriage legally valid, must be submitted with each application.

6. Our Church Council does not want to register its building for same-sex marriage. Does it have to?

No. The Conference recognises the differing views across the Connexion on the issue of same-sex marriage. The fact that the Conference has consented in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises does not change this, and it is vital that local churches understand that they are under no obligation to register. They are entitled to decide against doing so if they wish, or to decline to consider the issue altogether.

Further guidance on how to conduct pastoral conversations about the decision will be made available in due course.

7. Can we register our Methodist church building if we share it with another denomination under a Sharing Agreement?

Yes, provided all denominations who are party to the Sharing Agreement agree and their respective governing authorities have given consent to the principle of same-sex marriage. This applies regardless of which denomination owns the building.

It should be noted that any denomination who is a party to a Sharing Agreement under the Shared Building Act 1969 has the power to veto a registration of the building for same-sex marriage.

8. I am the authorised person for conducting marriages in my local church. I do not wish to solemnise same-sex marriages. Can I be compelled to do so?

No. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 amended the Equality Act 2010 to state that people will not be breaking the law if they refuse to conduct, participate in or attend a same-sex marriage.

9. How can I become authorised to solemnise same-sex marriages?

Persons authorised to solemnise opposite-sex marriages are not automatically authorised to solemnise same-sex marriages. To do so, they must re-register using Form AP1. Persons who are not yet authorised to solemnise either type of marriage can register to solemnise both at the same time using this form.