

Rev Tim Perkins
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“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if one of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” Colossians 3: 12 - 14

Dear Friends,

You may be aware that the Methodist Conference is meeting this week in Birmingham and on screens all around the country as representatives gather either in person or online to confer together and to seek God’s guidance on a range of topics and issues before them. There will be a number of significant decisions taken, or reports received, which we will need to give further time and thought to in our own Circuit and local churches. Just a few of the key issues before the conference are: “Oversight and Trusteeship,” “Ministry in the Methodist Church,” “Changing Patterns of Ministry,” “Local Lay Pastors,” and “Justice, Dignity and Solidarity.”

The Conference has also been debating and voting on the resolutions contained in the “God in love unites us” report about our understanding of marriage and relationships. If you have not already done so, you may become aware of this through media outlets as the Conference has voted in favour of the resolutions. I copy below the text of a news report from the Methodist Church website:

“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 the Secretary of Conference, 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."

My understanding is that local Methodist Church Councils will now need to decide whether they wish to seek authorisation from the General Registrar's Office to hold same-sex wedding ceremonies on their premises. Further guidance will be provided in the coming weeks and months.

Across the Methodist Connexion there is a wide range of views and theological perspectives on these issues and it will be the same in every local congregation. I ask that as we continue to have conversation within our congregations and in our church councils, that we show the same love and respect to one another that our President noted in the Conference debate. I also ask that you pray for our Conference representatives as they continue the work before them, and for our churches as we seek to implement the decisions of the Conference.

Every blessing,

Rev Tim