

WRITING FAITHFULLY



January 2020

We encourage you to take every opportunity to contribute to the current consultations on the provisional resolutions arising out of the 2019 Conference report, ***God in Love Unites Us***. Please attend the consultation events in your church, circuit and district, speaking out so that your voice is heard.

In addition, we urge you to write to your minister, superintendent, chair of district, circuit representatives to synod and district representatives to conference. This briefing sheet offers suggestions of areas you might wish to cover in such letters.

As you write, please seek to hold grace and truth together, remembering that God is love, and he loves everyone equally. Whatever our race, age, social standing, lifestyle, God loves us dearly and deeply.

Please don't feel you must cover every point below. Focus on those which are most concerning, relevant and meaningful to you and, of course, feel free to add your own comments:

- The Report is unbalanced. Although it acknowledges that there is a breadth of biblical interpretation within Methodism today, it highlights interpretations which support changing the church's teaching and largely ignores the large body of biblical scholarship which supports the traditional teaching of the Christian church. It recognises that theologians differ on the interpretation of biblical references to sexuality, particularly homosexuality, yet focusses upon the work of liberal scholars, and mainly ignores the work of more conservative ones.
- The Report seems to give greater authority to human experience than to the teaching of the Bible. Although the Methodist Church holds the divine revelation recorded in the holy scriptures to be the supreme rule of faith and practice, the Report seems to interpret scripture to fit in with twenty-first century experiences of those with same-sex attraction.
- The Report ignores the experiences of those with same-sex attraction who believe that biblically faithful living requires celibacy of all outside the marriage of one man and one woman. This is in contrast to the significant weight the Report places on the experiences of those in same-sex relationships.
- The Report does not sufficiently engage with the traditional understanding of marriage within Judaism and Christianity.
- The Report seemingly seeks to adjust the ways of the church to the ways of the world. Jesus calls us to be in the world, but not of the world and throughout history God has called the church to be 'counter cultural'.

- Provisional Resolution 10/9 affirms two, contradictory definitions of marriage. Those who affirm same-sex marriage also affirm heterosexual marriage, so they may be content with this twin definition. Many who cannot agree with same-sex marriage cannot affirm both definitions, and for them the mixed economy is not acceptable.
- The Report changes the Methodist Church's definition of marriage to such an extent that it is no longer recognisably Christian. For thousands of years, marriage has been understood to be the lifelong union of one man and one woman, consummated by sexual intercourse. To redefine marriage as a union of 'any two people' changes the whole understanding of what marriage is.
- The Report should have gone to every church council for discussion and voting. With such a significant change to our understanding of marriage and relationships, it is unreasonable for local church councils not to have been able to communicate their position to the Conference through an indicative vote.
- Provisional Resolution 10/3 affirms cohabitation, in contradiction to the teaching of the Bible and the traditional teaching of the church. This reduces the importance of marriage and encourages people to live in ways which contradict God's design for human flourishing.
- The Report appears to place greater emphasis on sexual identity over every other aspect of human life, including identity in Christ. Although our sexuality is part of who we are, our identity is primarily rooted in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through repenting of our sin and surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ, we can know glorious forgiveness, wonderful freedom, and enjoy our identity as God's children.
- A number of evangelicals have expressed concern that the consultations being held around the Connexion are not truly consultative. They have felt that their views have not been welcomed, engaged with or listened to. Living with contradictory practice is very different from living with contradictory convictions and, for some, is prevented by conscience.
- The style and length of the Report means that it is not easily accessible to the thousands of people within the Methodist Church who do not have high levels of academic ability or who struggle with the English language, and this is not adequately redressed by the accompanying study material.
- The mixed economy will bring further tensions into the life of the church, between ministers and congregations and between circuit staff. Those who cannot affirm same-sex marriage will feel that their ministry is undermined by the new Standing Orders. Furthermore, those who hold to the traditional teaching of the church will be vulnerable to the aggressive attacks of an increasingly secular society and will no longer be protected by the church's official teaching.
- Clearly, there will be ministers and churches who will not be able to remain in Full Connexion with a Conference which has adopted what they believe to be unbiblical teaching within its official policy and practice. It is fitting within the body of Christ that generous and gracious provision should be made for them, and that such provisions should be agreed at the same time as the Conference votes on ratifying the provisional resolutions.