

Progress of the debate on God In Love Unites Us

On Saturday 24 April 2021 the East Anglia District Synod debated and voted on the ‘God in love unites us’ report. The Synod had begun with helpful devotions from the President and Vice President of the Methodist Church.

Eight people, representative of the different theological strands of Methodism, had been appointed as the Task Group to produce this report over three years. At the start they were strangers to each other, but through their commitment to Jesus Christ and to loving one another, they discovered they could trust each other, and friendships were forged between people of very different viewpoints.

Synod members had copies of District report summarizing the results of the Circuit consultations from early 2020 and it was evident that like the Task Group, there were people holding significantly different viewpoints.

Synod members had been urged to re-read the Report and particularly to be aware of the 5 resolutions that required a vote. Marilyn Watsham, as Assistant Synod Secretary, introduced each of the resolutions and there were contributions to the discussion from both those in favour and those against. All speakers were limited to a maximum of three minutes. All speakers spoke with respect for those who had different opinions and there was a tangible sense of the presence of God, and of listening graciously to one another. I believe this was a consequence of the prayer specifically offered for Synod but also underlying the whole process.

Each resolution was presented. After contributions to the debate, there was a secret electronic vote on each resolution. These were all passed with a sizeable majority (see summary table at the end). The key resolution that forms the basis of change was Resolution 10/8 – permitting churches to conduct same sex marriage as well as mixed sex marriages. This was approved by 117 votes to 34 votes. The guidance, written into our standing orders allows for individual Church Councils to make the decision on whether they allow just mixed sex marriages as at present or extend it to same sex couples. This was approved by 126 votes to 24 votes.

These votes, together with the other 29 Districts, will be presented to Conference in July 2021, who will make the decision on how they invite churches to respond to any change in legislation passed by Conference.

We expect they will invite Church Councils to consider their own response to the legislation over the coming year – either at the October 2021 or February 2022 Church Councils, but we await specific instructions after conference.

If Conference approves the resolutions without amendment, a Church Council can decide whether their church would allow same sex, as well as mixed sex marriages to be conducted in their church, or whether to simply continue with the conduct of mixed sex marriages. Also, each minister will make their own decision as to whether they conduct same sex marriage or just mixed sex marriage.

Whichever way Conference ultimately decides, there will be people who disagree. Jesus never said we will all agree about everything, but everyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ is my brother or sister and I am called to love them even if I disagree.

We await the decision of Conference and then will come our opportunity to make local decisions.

Circuit Leadership Team April 2021

No	Summary of the Resolutions Full text in “God in Love Unites us”	For	Against
10/2	The Conference adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.2.5 that it affirm the following summary understanding of the principles or qualities of good relating	145	6
10/3	The Conference adopts the recommendation in paragraph 2.6.4 that it affirm the following summary understanding of cohabitation	134	17
10/7	The Conference adopts the <i>Guidance on the Understanding of Marriage</i> set out in paragraph 5.1.2 and directs that it be included in the Guidance section of CPD.	126	24
10/8	The Conference consents in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises throughout the Connexion and by Methodist ministers, probationers or members in so far as the law of the relevant jurisdiction permits or requires and subject to compliance with such further requirements, if any, as that law imposes.	117	34
10/9	The Conference amends Standing Orders as follows:	131	22