

Marriage and Relationships Task Group: Second Progress Report

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Status of Paper	Final
Resolution	18/1. The Council receives the report.

1. This report is the further update promised in the Task Group's first progress report presented to the meeting of the Council in October 2017.
2. As noted in that previous report, in 2016 the Conference adopted Resolutions 29/7, 29/8 and 29/9 in the following form (*Daily Record 6/14/1 and 6/14/2*):
 - 29/7 *The Conference directed that a new Statement of the judgment of the Conference on marriage and relationships shall be prepared and that, as part of the process, the definition of marriage should be revisited.*
 - 29/8 *The Conference appointed a new task group, which shall include people with expert knowledge of matters of Faith and Order and marriage and relationships, to update the Statement and to oversee the process of consulting with the Methodist people on the definition of marriage.*
 - 29/9. *The Conference directed that the new task group shall report to the 2018 Conference with a draft text of a new statement which shall include:*
 - a) *consideration of all relevant Reports produced and Resolutions passed by the Conference... (sc. as set out in paragraph 3.5.1 of the 2016 report);*
 - b) *consideration of the definition of marriage, including the matters raised throughout section 3 of ... (sc. the 2016) report.*
3. The previous report also noted that the draft Statement that the task group is charged to prepare will be a successor to the one adopted by the 1992 Conference entitled *A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage*. That Statement predated the discussions of Human Sexuality which led to the resolutions of the 1993 Conference on that subject. It also predated other issues reviewed in the report made to the 2016 Conference by the previous Marriage and Relationships Task Group.
4. The current task group continues to be conscious that God, whose gracious love creates, shapes and orders the world, is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. At the same time, the social, legal, scientific and other circumstances and understandings of the current age, in which the principles of that love have to be embodied, are changing rapidly.
5. The group continues to believe that a draft Statement of the judgement of the Conference under Standing Order 129 must be clearly based on rigorous thinking and prayerful discernment, the evidence for which is in the public domain. Yet if the group is to fulfil its remit and deal with all the issues required of it both rigorously and prayerfully in a single document, any draft Statement it presents to the Conference is likely to be too long to be useful.
6. The meeting of the Council in October 2017 therefore received and approved a proposal from the task group that it seek to prepare a shorter draft Statement (including a formal definition of marriage) that, if possible, should last the ten years expected of a formal Statement of the Conference under Standing Order 129; and that it would also produce a range of other

documents to support the Statement, showing the detailed thinking behind it or addressing its implications as we seek “to serve the present age, our calling to fulfil”.

7. The task group now envisages producing the following.
 - a) A draft Statement on marriage and relationships, including a formal definition of marriage.
 - b) A longer report providing the detailed thinking behind the Statement and Definition.
 - c) Additional documents providing either further background information or materials to support the connexional process of consultation about the draft Statement (a process that is required under Standing Order 129).
8. The October meeting of the Council also approved the task group’s proposal of two alternative processes and timetables for its presenting of a draft Statement and Definition to the Conference, depending on how much material the group might be able to produce in time for the 2018 Conference.
9. The group now envisages that it will be able to bring to the 2018 Conference the material outlined in 7a) and 7b) above, namely a draft Statement and Definition, plus a longer report providing the thinking behind them. Any remaining supporting documents would be produced in the early stages of the consultation period following that Conference.
10. The task group also envisages that the process will be along the lines of the following.
 - a) The Representative Session of that Conference will be asked to meet in *Hearings* to ensure that the issues in the material are explored and understood, questions clarified and points of information dealt with.
 - b) The *Hearings* will be followed by a plenary debate on the floor of the Conference.
 - c) The main focus of the plenary debate will be resolutions to receive the *report* and commend it to the Methodist people for study and discussion; and to adopt the statement (including the definition) under Standing Order 129 as a draft Statement of the judgement of the Conference, and commend it to the Connexion for study, discussion and response.
 - d) The process of consultation will be with specified bodies (eg Districts and Circuits) as directed by the Conference.
 - e) The consultation period will be between August 2018 and the end of October 2019, allowing time for any revisions to the draft Statement to be made and checked with the Faith and Order Committee and, if necessary, the Council before final submission of it to the Conference in 2020.
11. The task group will report further to the April 2018 meeting of the Methodist Council concerning the other resolutions of the 2016 Conference concerning marriage and relationships which were not remitted to the task group; and, in particular, will make recommendations in the light of the group’s ongoing work concerning Resolutions 25/5 and 25/6 which were remitted to the Council.

n.b. Nothing should be inferred from this progress report about the specific content of any material that the task group might bring to the Conference.

*****RESOLUTION**

18/1. The Council receives the report.