

## 51. 1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality

### Summary

The Conference in 2006 directed the Methodist Council to consult widely throughout the Connexion on whether and, if so, how the 1993 Conference Resolutions on Human Sexuality should be revised. The Council set up a Working Party to undertake the consultation and agreed a two stage process of initial soundings followed, if required, by further consultation on specific proposals for change. A preliminary report was received by the 2007 Conference, which agreed that if the second stage of consultation were required the Council's final report should be brought in 2009 rather than 2008, as originally directed by the Conference in 2006.

There was a large response (1155 individuals, 89 groups) to the first stage soundings taken between February and June 2007, the results of which led the Working Party unanimously to recommend to the Council that it should not seek to revise the Resolutions. Broadly speaking half the respondents did not want to revisit the Resolutions. Those who did favour reopening the issue were split in widely divergent directions.

The Council discussed the Working Party's report and its implications in October 2007 and again in April 2008. The Council was also aware of the report being prepared on Equalities and Diversity and further work envisaged as a result of it which may have an impact on the 1993 Resolutions. This report from the Council to the Conference therefore

- (a) recommends that, in the light of the findings of the soundings process, this is not the time to review the Resolutions;
- (b) recommends to the Conference that in future the Resolutions should be known as 'The 1993 Conference Resolutions on Human Sexuality';
- (c) notes that further work is being done on Equalities and Diversity and recommends the Conference to direct the Council to consider any implications of that work on the 1993 Resolutions and, if necessary, to report back to the Conference.

### Background

1. The Methodist Council was directed by the 2006 Conference to consult widely throughout the connexion and in the light of the consultation to report as to whether the 1993 Derby Conference resolutions on Human Sexuality should be revised and, if so, what changes should be made (Resolution 40/9).
2. A Working Party and process was set up by the October-November 2006 Council. The Working Party reported briefly to the January 2007 Council and the Council reported to the 2007 Conference, which accepted the suggested process and the recommendation that if changes were to be suggested to the Resolutions these should be brought to the 2009 Conference rather than in 2008.

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### Process

3. The Council established a two-stage process. The first stage involved taking 'soundings throughout the Church to determine whether there was a widespread wish to revise the Derby Resolutions'. The Working Party was asked to note the results of the soundings stage and to report and make recommendations to the October 2007 Council meeting. If there was a widespread wish, a second stage would commence involving a period of formal consultation on specific proposals for amending the Resolutions.
4. The first 'soundings' stage ran from February to June 2007. Responses were invited from all interested individuals and groups. The Methodist people were informed about the soundings process through general information and invitations to respond on the Methodist website, information in the Connexional Link mailing, in the General Secretary's quarterly letter to deacons and presbyters, and via articles in the *Methodist Recorder*. A number of individuals and special interest groups were written to personally, including District Chairs and relevant Connexional office holders, including Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Conferences in 1993, 2005, 2006 and 2007, and members of the Pilgrimage of Faith working party. British ecumenical partners and the Methodist Churches in Ireland and the USA were informed that the process was underway, but their views were not requested for the first stage.
5. People were invited to comment on two questions:
  1. Do you think the Derby Resolutions should be revised? Please give reasons for your answer.
  2. If the answer to the first question is 'yes', what changes would you suggest? Again, please give reasons.

### Response

6. The Working Party received responses from 1155 individuals and 96 groups. Of the groups, 89 gave clear responses to the questions, and 7 gave general comments.

The groups included:

- 3 Annual General Church Meetings
- 27 Church Councils
- 17 Circuit Meetings
- 2 Circuit Consultations
- 3 District Consultations
- 5 Church Leadership Teams
- 6 Circuit Leadership Teams
- 2 Circuit Local Preachers' Meetings
- 1 District Ministerial Synod
- 1 District Superintendents' Meeting
- 21 Small groups, such as house groups, classes and prayer fellowships
- 8 Other bodies: The Irish Methodist Church Council on Social Responsibility General Committee, the Faith and Order Committee,

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the Formation in Ministry Office, the Methodist Evangelicals Together Executive, the Outcome Co-ordinating Group, the Public Issues Team, the Racial Justice Committee and the Women's Network Committee.

Members of the Working Party held five face-to-face meetings with groups that had expressed a wish to talk to someone in person. These included people from two Methodist Churches, the Racial Justice Committee, the Formation in Ministry Office and the Methodist Evangelicals Together Executive.

### 7. Question 1 Do you think the Derby Resolutions should be revised?

Groups		Individuals	
Yes	41.6%	Yes	52.0%
No	58.4%	No	48.0%

### 8. Question 2 If the answer to the first question is 'yes', what changes would you suggest?

Approximately half the responses wished for change and this fell into three broad categories.

A Reflecting a view that included seeking to change the Resolutions to make it clear that people who actively express their homosexuality should not be allowed into positions of leadership within the church, removing the word 'celebrates' from Resolution 6 and removing Resolution 6 altogether.

	Groups	Individuals
Proportion of those voting 'yes':	56.8%	50.7%
Proportion of all responses:	23.6%	26.4%

B Reflecting a view that included seeking to change the Resolutions to accept, affirm or allow sex between any two people in a loving committed relationship, or to allow same-sex couples entering into Civil Partnerships to have their relationships blessed on Methodist Church premises by an official service.

	Groups	Individuals
Proportion of those voting 'yes':	29.7%	40.6%
Proportion of all responses:	12.4%	21.1%

C Reflecting a view that requested greater clarity about exactly what practices are prohibited, or about what disciplinary action might come about if a complaint is brought against a member or office holder following an allegation about behaviour in breach of the Resolutions.

	Groups	Individuals
Proportion of those voting 'yes':	13.5%	7%
Proportion of all responses:	6%	5%

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### Assessment of response

9. The Working Party's unanimous view was that this response did not represent a widespread wish to revise the Resolutions. Broadly half of the responses received wished for change but in radically different directions. The other half were content with the present position.
10. The consultation process revealed that the Methodist Church holds a great deal of respect and admiration for the Resolutions. Some respondents said that they have helped to express clearly and accurately what many Methodists feel and believe, and that they address the question of human sexuality sensibly, sensitively and with proper seriousness. Others called them a necessary fudge. The most common reason given for not wanting to revise the Resolutions was that they continue to be an appropriate and helpful framework to understand and work out issues relating to human sexuality. There were expressions of concern that opening a debate on this subject could cause division within the Church. There was approval and a sense of gratitude for what the Resolutions have helped the Church to do over the past 15 years.
11. Those seeking a revision of the Resolutions represented very different opinions. It was the view of the Working Party that no consensus could be reached on how the Resolutions might be revised, and therefore there was no clear hope that an "improved" position could be reached.
12. Many people mentioned the issue of Civil Partnerships in their responses. The Methodist stance on Civil Partnerships is set out in the Pilgrimage of Faith report to the 2006 Conference and remains unchanged. There is no reason *per se* to prevent anyone in the Church from being in a Civil Partnership. The 1993 Resolutions still apply to every Methodist, ordained or lay, married, single or in a Civil Partnership. The 2006 Conference stated that the 1993 Resolutions preclude the possibility of authorised liturgies being adopted for the blessing of same-sex relationships and that Methodist premises may not be used for such a purpose.
13. There are many Methodists who continue to struggle with the Resolutions. Some people see contradictions within the Resolutions themselves, whereas others disagree with part or all of the Resolutions. All people should be supported, and not be made to feel as though they are being asked to conform to a uniform view, nor should the recommendations of the Working Party be taken to mean that their views are not valued or worthwhile. The Resolutions are not easy for us to live with – this fact must be recognised by the Church. The 2006 Conference Faith and Order Committee report on *Living with Contradictory Convictions in the Church* is a welcome reflection on the diversity of opinion on the issue of human sexuality in particular.
14. The Working Party took note of a suggestion from the Nottingham and Derby District that the name 'Derby Resolutions' should no longer be used. The Working Party therefore recommended that henceforth the six resolutions be referred to as 'the 1993 Conference Resolutions on Human Sexuality', and consequently the title of this report refers to *the 1993 Resolutions* rather than

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the *Derby Resolutions*. The Council agreed with the Working Party's recommendation and Resolution 51/3 invites the Conference to do the same.

15. The Working Party welcomed the significant number of responses to the consultation, and recognised that for many people this issue remains deeply personal and difficult to deal with. The Working Party was grateful for the breadth and number of responses, and appreciates the time that so many people have given to contribute their views. With such a large number of responses the Working Party was confident that the views expressed in the soundings stage represent the range of opinions in the Methodist Church as a whole. The overwhelming majority of responses were marked by courtesy and solid reflection on the experience of the past 15 years, something that was also evident in all the face-to-face meetings. However, we still need to encourage one another to communicate in a considerate and kindly way.
16. The responses reveal that there are remaining tensions and issues that have not yet been worked out, not least relating to stationing. However, the 1993 Resolutions appear for many to be a way in which we can continue to walk together and be faithful to ourselves and each other and to God.

### **Recommendations**

17. The Working Party unanimously recommended to the Methodist Council:
  - that the Council should not seek to revise the 1993 Resolutions on Human Sexuality; and,
  - that the Resolutions should become known as "The 1993 Conference Resolutions on Human Sexuality".

### **Members of the Working Party:**

The Revd Dr Nigel T Collinson (Chair)  
The Revd Sylvester O Deigh  
The Revd Barbara S Duchars  
The Revd David Gamble  
The Revd Dr Brenda M Mosedale  
The Revd Lionel E Osborn  
Ms Hannah Reed  
Dr Richard Vautrey  
Mr David Bradwell (Connexional Team member servicing the Working Party)

## **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 51/1. The Conference receives the Report.
- 51/2. The Conference resolves that, in the light of the findings of the consultation, this is not the time to review the Resolutions on Human Sexuality

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- 51/3.** The Conference directs that in future the six Resolutions adopted by the Conference in 1993 should be known as ‘The 1993 Conference Resolutions on Human Sexuality’.
- 51/4.** The Conference notes that further work is being done on Equalities and Diversity and directs the Methodist Council to consider any implications of that work on the 1993 Resolutions and, if necessary, to report back to the Conference.

## 52. Ministers, Presbyters and Deacons: Signalling Vocation, Clarifying Identity

### Preamble

As the Church's understanding of its ministries develops, there is frequently an untidiness in the vocabulary used. There comes a point when corrective action may be desirable or necessary, to avoid misunderstanding or to prevent unnecessary hurts.

The language of 'ministers and deacons' is now to come under review. The formal background is in Memorial 8 (2004). The Memorial and Reply were as follows

### **M8 MINISTERS AND DEACONS**

*The Newcastle upon Tyne Synod (R) (Present: 184. Vote: 165 for, 10 against) requests the Conference to instruct the Methodist Council to review the use of the phrase 'ministers and deacons' throughout The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church (CPD), replacing it with other words appropriate to the context.*

### **Reply**

*The Conference thanks the Newcastle upon Tyne Synod for this Memorial. The Conference is aware that what would be involved in making such amendments to CPD is neither simple nor merely editorial.*

*The Conference refers the Memorial to the Methodist Council for consideration as to whether such changes are desirable, what form they should take and whether this is the right time to make them, and to report its findings to the Conference of 2006.*

The Methodist Council ascertained that the Methodist Diaconal Order had a particular concern about the issues raised in this Memorial and wished for there to be extensive consultations. The 2006 Conference therefore gave permission for the matter to be brought to the Conference in 2007.

A focus group was convened by the General Secretary on 27 June 2007, to bring together perspectives from lay people, deacons and presbyters. Those participating in the group had differing experiences of presbyters and deacons working together in circuits and of the ministry of deacons in any setting. The focus group discussion lay behind an informal discussion at the Diaconal Session of the 2007 Conference.

A draft report was subsequently discussed by the Methodist Council in October 2007 and edited in the light of comments received from the Council. It was made available for wider discussion in the Church. Extensive comments were received from deacons; a small number of individual and group responses were received from presbyters and lay people. Formal responses were received from the Diaconal Convocation and from the Faith and Order Committee.