

Abortion Statement Working Group

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Revd Ruth Gee, Chair of Darlington District and Chair of the Working Group on Human Embryology and Early Human Life – ruth.gee@methodist.org.uk Rachel Lampard, Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team – lampardr@methodistchurch.org.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	The Methodist Council agrees the Terms of Reference and membership of a working group to update the Methodist Conference Statement on Abortion
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper invites Council to set up a Working Group to update the Methodist Statement on Abortion
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2008 Conference Report, <i>Created in God's Image</i>, called for a revision of the 1976 Statement on Abortion • The Conference resolution as worded would require a new Statement under SO129 • The paper proposes that as this was not the intention behind the resolution, the Statement should be updated rather than revised • The paper proposes terms of reference and membership of the working group
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The Conference resolution arose from the report, <i>Created in God's Image</i> : http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=2366 The 1976 Methodist Conference statement on abortion can be found here: http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1540
Consultations	Ruth Gee, former Chair of the Human Embryology and Early Human Life (HEEHL) working group, author of <i>Created in God's Image</i> Rachel Lampard, member of the HEEHL and Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team Janet Morley, Cluster Head, CCEA Peter Phillips, Faith and Order Committee

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	No impact on Standing Orders.
Faith and Order	If the resolution is adopted, Faith and Order Committee will be involved in updating of the Statement
Financial	None
Personnel	None
Legal	None
Wider Connexional	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None
Risk	If the resolution is not adopted, Council will need to set in hand a more lengthy and expensive process, and one which may not have been Conference's intention

Paper to Methodist Council Abortion Statement Working Group

Summary

1. This paper proposes the Terms of Reference to update the Conference Statement on Abortion. The full list of members of the working group will be tabled at the Council meeting.

Background

2. The Report to the 2008 Methodist Conference, Created in God's Image, included the following recommendation:

That in the light of the changed social and political context and scientific and medical developments including the gestational age at which a premature infant may survive, there should be further work on the issues surrounding abortion, revision of the Methodist Statement on Abortion (1976), and a working group should be established for this purpose.

3. The Working Group which produced the report brought this resolution as it was concerned that the language of the 1976 Statement on Abortion was inappropriate for current pastoral needs and the legislation, statistics and science to which it referred were thirty years out of date. It did not consider that it was necessary to reopen the Methodist Church's position on abortion which is at the heart of the Statement.
4. However it has subsequently become clear that if a working group is established under the terms outlined in the Conference resolution it will demand a piece of work very different to that which the Group intended to propose to Conference.

Formal statements of Conference brought under SO129

5. Under SO 129 a Statement of Conference on "some major issue or issues of faith and practice" must be brought to Conference, and if it is adopted, is accorded the status of draft Conference Statement and commended to the Connexion for study, discussion and response. After a minimum of two years, the draft statement may then be presented to Conference in its original or a revised form. After a debate and potential further amendments, if it is then adopted by a two-thirds majority it becomes a formal Statement of Conference.
6. Since this Standing Order was introduced, only three Statements on political or social issues have been adopted as Conference Statements through this process:
 - A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage - 1992
 - Gambling – 1992
 - Political Responsibility – 1995Hope in God's Future was adopted as a draft Conference Statement in 2009 and has just begun a two year process of consultation
7. The original Conference statement on Abortion was adopted in 1976, before the current procedures demanded such lengthy consultation.

Updating or revising the Statement

8. The Working Group on Human Embryology and Early Human Life which wrote *Created in God's Image* did not intend to recommend that the Methodist position on abortion should be completely revisited, and it is unclear from the Conference debate that this is what was what Conference understood the resolution to mean.
9. If the Working Group is expected to revise the whole Statement on Abortion, this will have to be done under SO 129, and is a complex task unlikely to take less than four years. The work will clearly impact on the rest of the work which can be undertaken by the Joint Public Issues Team.
10. There is no evidence of any widespread appetite for the Methodist Church to change its position on abortion, beyond modernising the language to make it more inclusive and pastorally sensitive, and to update the references to the law, science and statistics.
11. The Methodist Church's official position is that abortion should not occur after the life is viable outside of the womb. It is unlikely that the Conference would wish to waver from this position. Developments in medical science have gradually decreased the gestation required to for viability outside the womb, and will continue to do so. Subsequent to the 1976 Statement, the law was amended in 1990 to reduce the time limit for abortions from 28 to 24 weeks, largely on these grounds. More recently the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee in 2007 concluded that scientific findings at the moment implied that the time-limit on abortion should remain as it is. This issue is both contentious and fluid, the Church is not best placed to make a determination on it, and the benefits of addressing it via the cumbersome process of a Methodist Statement are dubious while the costs of opening the issue are clear.
12. All of this suggests that the Statement on Abortion should be updated rather than revised, and Council is asked to approve the proposed Terms of Reference and working group membership on this basis.

Proposed Terms of Reference

13. The Working Group shall:
 1. Update the language and reference to the scientific and social/political context in the 1976 Conference Statement on Abortion, consulting with the Faith and Order Committee during the course of its work, and
 2. Bring recommendations to Conference 2010 as to whether a further piece of work revising the position of the Methodist Church should be undertaken

Membership

It is proposed that **Revd Ruth Gee – (Chair)** – Chair of the Darlington District and Chair of the Early Human Life working group – should chair the group. Names of the other members of the working group will be tabled at Council.

Authors:

Revd Ruth Gee, Chair of the Darlington District and Chair of the Human Embryology and Early Human Life Working Group
Rachel Lampard, Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team

