

Working Party on Civil Partnership and the Legal Definition of Marriage

Contact Name and Details	Susan Howdle – Chair of the Working Party SRHowdle@ukgateway.net
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1. The Methodist Council recommended to the 2013 Conference that a working party should be established “to consider whether the Methodist Church’s position on marriage needs revising in light of changes in society, undertaking this consideration with reference to scripture, tradition, reason and experience. The terms of reference would be:
 - a. To consider the implications for the Methodist Church of a change in legislation covering same-sex marriage;
 - b. To consider whether the Methodist Church’s position on marriage needs revising in the light of changes in society;
 - c. To undertake the work directed by the reply to Memorial 29(2012) [a Memorial from the Birmingham Synod seeking for a review of the Conference’s ruling that blessing of civil partnerships should not take place on Methodist premises]
 - d. To make recommendations for any changes in practice or polity.”

2. The Conference, dealing on two occasions with the business because of issues as to the process for appointing the working party’s membership, eventually appointed a list of names with the terms of reference as above and directed the working party to operate in ways that are open and inclusive so as to ensure that all voices are heard. The working party was directed to make an initial report to the 2014 Conference. Three further memorials from the 2013 Conference were also referred to the working party.

The members are:

Mrs Susan R Howdle (chair)
 Dr Joselyn M Bryan
 Mr Gerry Davis
 The Revd Dr Samuel E McBratney
 The Revd Dr Stephen Mosedale
 The Revd Colin A Smith
 The Revd D Paul C Smith
 Mrs Louise C Wilkins
 Advisor – Ms Rachel Lampard

3. The working party has held its first meeting, at which it considered in detail:
 - its terms of reference
 - the legal context in which the church now finds itself
 - a wide range of earlier Methodist official statements on marriage, civil partnership and sexuality.

4. The working party was mindful of what was said to the Conference about the relatively limited ambit of the working party’s remit at this stage: “to consider whether the Methodist Church’s position needed reviewing in light of changes in society rather than to make substantive proposal for change. If a revision is thought potentially necessary, it is expected that a further working party would be appointed to examine the substantive issues.”

5. The working party has therefore identified a range of possible areas for consideration, and intends to test out by wide consultation whether these are indeed the issues about which it should make recommendations to the Conference of 2014 for fuller exploration and decision. Before going out to full consultation however, there will be a short pilot consultation with a small number of selected groups during the next few weeks, designed to clarify how to frame the consultation questions.
6. Meanwhile, it was thought important to offer some clear and concise guidance as to the actual legal provisions of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, and it is hoped that this will appear on the Methodist website shortly, together with information to say that the consultation will be taking place in due course.

*****RESOLUTION:**

78/1 The Council receives the report.