

Update on the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy

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This updates the Council on progress on a number of pieces of work following from the recommendations contained in the report 'Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity: working towards a fully inclusive Methodist Church' and other EDI matters.

Recommendation 5 (Stationing and Unconscious Bias training)

Mandatory Unconscious Bias training has been introduced and basic mandatory EDI training is being planned. The EDI Toolkit has had a basic 'update' and there may be quite a different approach to the training going forward, but it is still being developed.

'Conversion Therapy'

The 2021 Conference received Memorial M20 and adopted the reply shown below:

M20 Conversion Therapy

The Birmingham District Synod (Present: 152; Voting: 124 for, 7 against) notes that the current UK Government committed some time ago to banning so-called 'gay conversion therapy' as soon as possible. Whilst there has been a lot of debate about what constitutes this practice, the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' revised and agreed in July 2019 (<https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/mou/>) offers the most significant and widely supported definition. Up to now, 20 health, counselling and psychotherapy organisations have signed up, including the Association of Christian Counsellors.

The Memorandum defines conversion therapy as follows: *'Conversion therapy' is an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis.* It goes on to say *the practice of conversion therapy, whether in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity, is unethical and potentially harmful.*

The Synod notes that in 2017 the General Synod of the Church of England endorsed a statement in similar terms and called on the Archbishops' Council to become a co-signatory to the statement on behalf of the Church of England. The Synod shares the view that the practice of conversion therapy is unethical and potentially harmful and contrary to the Methodist values set out in the connexional Definition and Guidance on Homophobia.

It therefore requests the Conference:

- (1) to support and adopt the Memorandum of Understanding's definition of conversion therapy as quoted above,
- (2) to call on all Methodists to refuse to offer, or participate in offering, conversion therapy in any form, and
- (3) to use its good offices to press the UK Government to proceed to ban conversion therapy without further delay.

Reply

The Conference thanks the Birmingham Synod for its memorial and shares the concerns raised in regard to the practice of 'Conversion Therapy'.

The Conference in 1993 agreed the following resolution:

'Conference recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. Conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality'.

The Conference notes that in 2021 the Methodist Council Report MC21/50: Deliverance Ministry endorsed the following recommendation:

'Deliverance ministry must not be used to attempt to change a recipient's sexual orientation or gender identity'.

The Conference notes that 'Conversion Therapy' would be totally incompatible with the previously agreed resolutions described above and would be contrary to the Methodist values set out in the Connexional Definition and Guidance on Homophobia.

The Conference agrees:

- (1) to support and adopt the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK' definition of conversion therapy as quoted above,
- (2) to call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form.
- (3) that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the Methodist Church.

The Conference directs the Methodist Council to consider, draft and publish a policy on 'Conversion Therapy' in light of points (1) to (3) of this response. The Conference calls on the UK Government to ban 'Conversion Therapy' without further delay and therefore also directs the Methodist Council to consider further the most appropriate way in which to engage with HM Government on this issue.

HM Government has set in train a consultation on conversion therapy and the EDI Adviser, Methodist JPIT lead and Secretary of the Conference are preparing a response. The EDI Adviser is working on a policy which will be presented to the Council in April.

Stationing and the 'not tolerating' of discrimination

The EDI Adviser attended the second meeting of the Stationing Matching Group (SMG 2) to observe the process from an EDI perspective. He did an initial feedback on the day and will be providing a fuller report to the Stationing Committee.

The design of the Discrimination Abuse Response Service (which was described as the Discrimination Response System in the Conference report) has been completed and this will be piloted in the Birmingham and Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Districts early in 2022. This should provide another opportunity for people to disclose any discrimination. Any disclosures will then be followed up and learning will be collected for response.

EDI Toolkit

There is a new EDI toolkit module covering Transgender issues ready to be published. Some film resources are being developed and edited and will be ready by March 2022. Inter-sex and non-binary resources will

be added by the time the EDI foundation module is launched, hopefully by the time of the Conference, but definitely by Autumn 2022.

The Solidarity Circles, which will include gender and sexuality diversities, will help to inform what we need to do about inter-sex and non-binary issues and will begin work early in 2022. Conversation is in train with a group of Transgender Methodists about where they think their experience lies and whether or not they want a separate Solidarity Circle.

These updates represent some slippage from earlier projections but the committee still expect to have responded to all these points by Conference 2022.

*****RESOLUTION**

17/1. The Council receives the report.