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## **The Derby Resolutions on Human Sexuality.**

The Revd Dr Nigel T Collinson

The Methodist Conference is asking us if we wish to change the Derby Resolutions. 'What are the Derby Resolutions?' I hear you say.

They are a set of six decisions our church has had since the Derby Conference of 1993 and they are our guiding principles on the subject of Human Sexuality. Since then the Derby Resolutions have acted as a reference point for all our subsequent discussions which touch on the issue of human sexuality. Last year the Methodist Conference confirmed that the six Resolutions are part of our Methodist discipline, and that a statement of what this means shall be provided to all candidates for ordained ministry. From time to time they have been invoked in our complaints and discipline process. Here they are;

### **The Derby Resolutions.**

*(The votes recorded after each ballot are given in brackets.)*

1. *The Conference, affirming the joy of human sexuality as God's gift and the place of every human being within the grace of God, recognizes the responsibility that flows from this for us all. It therefore welcomes the serious, prayerful and sometimes costly consideration given to this issue by the Methodist Church. [540 for, 6 against, 10 neutral]*
2. *All practices of sexuality which are promiscuous, exploitative or demeaning in any way are unacceptable forms of behaviour and contradict God's purposes for us all. [538 for, 16 against, 3 neutral]*
3. *A person shall not be debarred from the church on the grounds of sexual orientation in itself. [521 for, 29 against, 6 neutral]*
4. *The Conference reaffirms the traditional teaching of the Church on human sexuality; namely chastity for all outside marriage and fidelity within it. The Conference directs that this affirmation is made clear to all candidates for ministry, office and membership, and having established this affirms that the existing procedures of our church are adequate to deal with all such cases. [293 for, 250 against, 16 neutral]*
5. *The Conference resolves that its decisions in this debate shall not be used to form the basis of a disciplinary charge against any person in*

*relation to conduct alleged to have taken place before such decisions were made. [500 for, 41 against, 13 neutral]*

6. *Conference recognizes, 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. [313 for, 217 against, 27 neutral]*

How did they come about?

For several decades prior to 1993, the Methodist Church had discussed successive reports as we sought to reach a distinctive understanding of human sexuality because, in many places, attitudes were changing out of all recognition. All this culminated in a Conference Commission which reported in 1990 and which 'sought to give due weight to the unity and diversity of experience and opinion which exists within the Methodist Church'.

One of the central issues, but by no means the only one, was whether or not there should be a specific ruling about gay men and lesbians entering the ministry.

For the next two years a widespread consultation took place and gradually a set of resolutions emerged which could be put to the Conference in Derby. Several of them offered the Conference alternatives on the question of ministry. Did the Conference want specific rulings on ministry or not?

There is no doubt that, for some, their continuance in the Methodist Church depended upon the outcome. One person said to me, 'If we are to leave, at least let us know clearly what we are leaving about'.

The debate lasted the whole day. There were impassioned speeches and moving testimonies. And the six resolutions gradually emerged.

In his letter to the Methodist People immediately afterwards, the President, The Revd Dr Brian Beck, wrote, 'The Conference had been invited to adopt resolutions which took divergent views of the issues....In the event, the Conference did not adopt any of those resolutions. Instead it adopted a pastoral rather than a legal approach and decided to affirm both the

traditional moral teaching of the Christian church, and the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church, while leaving decisions about particular cases to be taken by the appropriate committees against this background.'

Whatever we think now of the six resolutions, we should not underestimate the importance of the Conference taking them in a single sitting; over six hundred people from all quarters of the church, prayerfully seeking the mind of the church under God. It was an immense day for the Methodist Church in Britain.

Since that day in 1993 we have had our moments but we have always returned to the Derby Resolutions as a defining moment for what we are as a church.

Why are we now being asked again?

At Llandudno in 2003, the Conference decided that it was time to see how far we had come on the pilgrimage which is at the heart of Resolution 6. In 2005 the Pilgrimage of Faith working group reported, '..it is clear from the evidence that there is a wide range of ways in which the 1993 resolutions are understood within the Church. On the one hand, the resolutions have enabled some people to feel more secure that their convictions are upheld by the Church, and thereby to feel able in good conscience to remain within the Church. On the other hand, because there are different interpretations, some people feel insecure and uncertain about what would happen if their views or lifestyle were challenged and this has led to some distressing situations.'

Nevertheless, in 2005 the Group did not feel that there was any compelling case to revisit the Derby Resolutions.

When the Group reported in 2006 they recommended that the Derby Resolutions be included 'as part of our discipline'. And the Conference agreed. So Derby is now in CPD, alongside the Methodist Church Act, the Model Trusts, the Standing Orders of the Church and our Historic Texts. No longer something which you have to turn up in the archives or keep on a yellowing piece of paper in a drawer somewhere, the Derby Resolutions will be reprinted each year and be constantly before us.

But there has also been a major piece of legislation in Parliament which came into force in December 2005 and which affects us all. *The Civil Partnerships Act* creates a new situation because as the Pilgrimage Group reported to the Conference ‘for the first time in Britain, public and legal recognition is available for same-sex relationships’.

The 2006 Conference said that ‘there is no reason per se within our discipline to prevent anyone within the Church, ordained or lay, from entering into, or remaining within a civil partnership (since the Conference report noted that, unlike marriage, a civil partnership does not necessarily imply a sexual relationship). However, the Derby Resolutions still apply to all and rule out any official services of blessing on Methodist premises.

In the light of all this, the Conference decided to see if there is a mind in the church to change the Derby Resolutions in any way.

The Methodist Council has set up a small group to consult widely. The Group members are;

Nigel T Collinson  
Sylvester O Deigh  
Barbara S Duchars  
David Gamble  
Brenda M Mosedale  
Lionel E Osborn  
Hannah Reed  
Richard Vautrey

David Bradwell from the Connexional Team is servicing the group.

We are going about the task in two stages.

**Stage 1** will mean taking soundings between now and Friday 29 June this year. We are asking you, as individuals or as members of particular groups within the church,

Question 1 – Do you think the Derby Resolutions should be revised? Please give reasons for your answer.

Question 2 – If the answer to the first question is ‘yes’, what changes would you suggest? Again, please give reasons.

Ecumenical partners will also be alerted to what we are doing.

A special *Soundings* briefing paper is now available and will go out to all ministers in the February mailing.

The Group will present its findings to the Methodist Council in October 2007 and if there is a mind to revise Derby, there will then be a **Stage 2** widespread consultation throughout the whole church to decide what sort of resolutions should be brought to the Conference.

So this is an invitation to you. What do you think? Do you want the Derby Resolutions to remain the same or can you see ways in which they should be changed? And remember, Derby is not just about same-sex relationships, it is about all human sexuality and the responsibilities and joys that are there for us all.

We want to know what you think about the six Derby Resolutions. Please let us have your written responses, either by letter or email, as soon as possible and by June 30 at the latest. They will all be treated in confidence. If you have a group that would like to speak to us personally, then get in touch and, if it is practicable, we will come to meet you.

Please send your responses to:

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Derby Resolutions  
Methodist Church House  
25 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5JR

E-mail: [bradwelld@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:bradwelld@methodistchurch.org.uk)

All the reports mentioned in this article, and the *Soundings* paper are available on the Methodist website ([www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk))