



METHODIST CHURCH

Chair of District:

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Dear friends,

I am writing to update you on the debate which took place at the Darlington District Synod on Saturday 6th February. The Synod had been called specifically to discuss the *God in Love Unites Us* report and in turn to feed its views back to the Methodist Conference. The Conference will then debate the issues again in June 2021 at which point it will make some final decisions about the recommendations in the report.

As you may be aware the Synod was asked to vote on resolutions focused on principles of good relating, a statement on cohabitation, the possibility of allowing same sex marriages on Methodist premises, and possible changes to the guidance on marriage and to standing orders. I know that there are a wide range of views on these issues and we have been concerned throughout to respect the diversity of view and to encourage respectful conversation. I must confess to feeling humbled by both the quality and the tone of the debate on Saturday and by a very real concern amongst Synod members to both celebrate our diversity and to hold together even when we disagree – indeed this active work of reconciliation is, I believe, an important witness to the world about how to disagree well and hold together in community. The feedback from our discussion in both group work and plenary, which reflected this diversity of view will form part of our feedback to Conference.

Overall the Synod strongly endorsed the recommendations within the report although, in relation to certain resolutions, there was a significant minority against. The voting was as follows:

Resolution 10/2 (Principles of Good Relating):	For: 84 Against: 3
Resolution 10/3 (Statement on Cohabitation):	For: 81 Against: 7
Resolution 10/7 (Changes to Guidance on Marriage):	For: 74 Against: 13
Resolution 10/8 (The Principle of Same Sex Marriages on Methodist Premises):	For: 75 Against: 14
Resolution 10/9 (Changes to standing orders):	For: 79 Against: 10

I recognise that there will be different feelings about this outcome across the district. There will be some who celebrate the result: for others this will be a source of pain or continuing discernment. In these circumstances it is important that we hold one another in prayer, that we continue to journey together and to hold one another in Christ's love. In recent years we have talked a lot about living with contradictory convictions. I hope that the compassionate and mature way in which Synod members of different views handled this discussion is a model and sign of the future and of the Church we aspire to be, in which all are welcome and in which our diversity, of many kinds, is seen as a gift to share rather than as something which pulls us apart.

You may be wondering what happens next. As I indicate above, the Conference will debate the report again in June having received votes from all of the District Synods. In terms of Resolution 10/8, if the Conference accepts the recommendation, it will then be up to individual church councils whether or not to register to allow same sex marriage on their premises and for individual ministers to decide whether or not they wish to conduct a same sex marriage. There will be no compulsion upon either a church council or a minister to do so. I recognise that it will take time for church councils to consider the implications of the report in full. I would encourage you to take the time that you need and if you feel district support or involvement would be helpful to facilitate this at a local level, do please let me know. Likewise, if a pastoral conversation before or after my sabbatical would be helpful, do let me know.

A central text for my ministry is Galatians 3:28 which affirms that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. It is a central text in a gospel of reconciliation. In many respects the universal Church has fallen far short of that vision. My prayer is that, in a small way, our modelling of what it means to live together with contradictory convictions is a sign of Christ's presence with us.

Yours in Christ,

The Revd Richard Andrew

Chair of the Darlington District