Methodist Marriage: a new definition:

“...marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of two people who freely enter it...”

The Methodist Conference consents in principle to the marriage of same-sex couples on Methodist premises throughout the Connexion...

This decision was taken by a majority of 254 to 46 at the Methodist Conference this year. It involved redrafting the Methodist marriage canon to replace the premise that marriage is between one man and one woman. The relevant standing order now states:

“The Methodist Church believes that marriage is given by God to be a particular channel of God’s grace, and that it is in accord with God’s purposes when a marriage is a life-long union in body, mind and spirit of two people who freely enter it.

Within the Methodist Church this is understood in two ways: that marriage can only be between a man and a woman; that marriage can be between any two people. The Methodist Church affirms both understandings and makes provision in its Standing Orders for them.

As Lay Pastors of Baildon Methodist Church, we recognise that there will be those in our congregation that welcome this change and those who do not. It is important that we all continue to listen to each other and remain friends. It is important that we recognise the hurt that gay Christians have felt before this decision, and that those with more traditional views may feel now.

Romans 12:15-18
Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.
... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

This decision is the result of many years’ discussion within the church. For some time, the Church has accepted legally married couples of the same gender into the ministry and has received into baptism the children of same-sex partnerships. Every circuit has had two open discussions about same-sex marriage, giving guidance to synods across the Connexion seeking to answer the question, “How can the Church best reflect the love and care which Jesus showed to outsiders.” This is not a decision that is likely to be reversed.

The Bible does not anywhere address the issues of sexual orientation or same-sex marriage. We must therefore depend on the continuing emphasis of Jesus on including minorities, welcoming strangers, and promoting loving relationships.

The “Methodist Quadrilateral” describes the four-fold approach to decision-making in the Methodist Church: Scripture; Tradition; Reason; Experience.

John 14:1-4
“I am the road, the truth and the life...”

John 16:4-16
“the Spirit of truth will guide you...”

The Church has sought to work with the Spirit to determine the right thing to do in this changing world. The writers of the early church, reflecting on the gospels with the guidance of the Spirit, generally emphasised the inclusive nature of His life, teaching and example:

Galatians 3:28
There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Romans 15:7
Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Colossians 3:11
Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

We urge members to unite behind the spirit of inclusion embraced by Conference. If any member of the congregation would like an interpretation of scripture on this issue, we have prepared a document that may help, or check out the Reformation Project at www.reformationproject.org.

Wishing every blessing to you

Claire, Peter, Mervyn.