



THE GREEN SOCK

NEWS FROM THE SHROPSHIRE AND MARCHES METHODIST CIRCUIT

MAY 2021

SYNOD VOTES TO OFFER SAME SEX MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District Spring Synod, which was attended by around one hundred and forty delegates using Zoom, voted overwhelmingly for the Methodist Church to offer same sex marriage ceremonies. The result could in future give ministers the option to conduct such marriages should they wish to do so.



Over the past five years discussions held across Methodist Districts have fed into *God in Love Unites Us*, the Conference 2019 report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group, facilitating deeper discussion of relationships, at all levels of the Methodist Church. Resources comprising Bible passages, hymns, prayers, and activities selected and designed to aid frank debate, have encouraged members to openly address how we relate as sexual, diverse beings and the ways in which our faith is intrinsic to and drives our relationships.

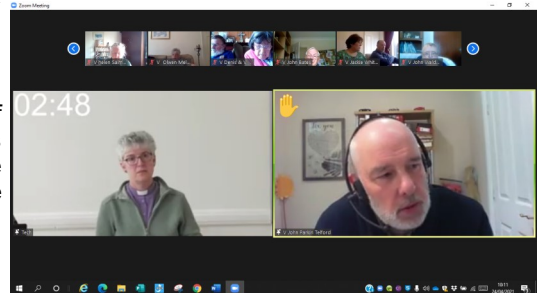
Resolution 10.2 of the report summarising the principles and qualities of good relating, speaks of "significant relationships being built on self-giving love, commitment, fidelity, loyalty, honesty, mutual respect, equality and the desire for the mutual flourishing of the people involved", and states that "It is through that, the self flourishes and begins to experience life in all its fullness (though it needs to be recognised that the universal Church's historic emphasis on

self-sacrifice has often been misunderstood and misused [e.g. by abusive partners] in a way that is destructive of the wellbeing of the ones abused [often women]).

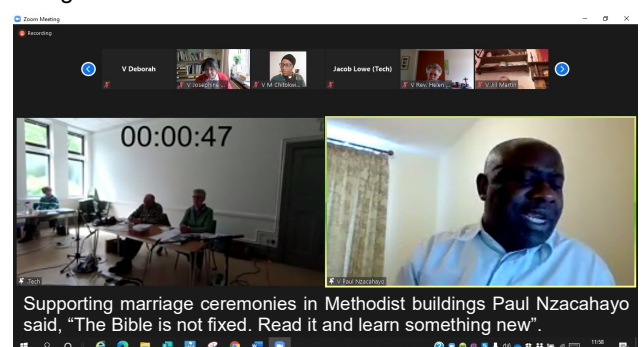
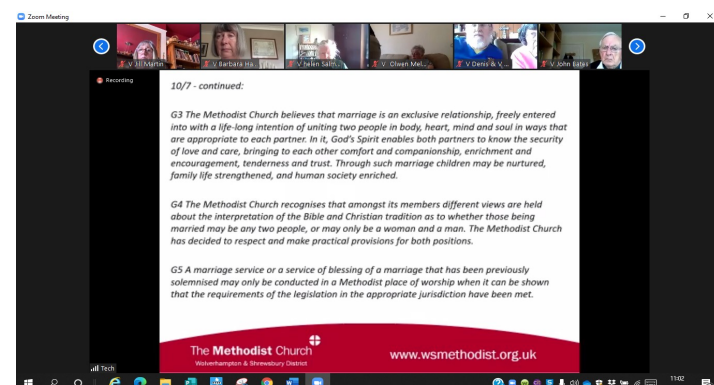
John Parkin of the Telford Circuit took a historical approach. He reasoned with fellow representatives: "You can't ignore the New Testament and the concept of sexual sin; the fallen state of mankind or concupiscence. All significant relations should be based on self-giving love. Self-giving is an important concept for the relationship discussion. I'm not suggesting that "anything goes" as we have references to abuse being hidden within the concept of marriage, but resolution 10.2 is really important and I hope we can express this".

It was generally felt that the *God in Love Unites Us* report, was refreshing in its inclusion of co-habiting relationships in the conversation. However, Resolution 10.3 speaking to such relationships, required an amendment (see image below). It was debated whether adding the clause, in parenthesis, had the adverse effect of undermining co-habiting relationships and reinforcing the impression that marriage, being a covenant with a public commitment and including God in that commitment, is morally preferred.

Helen Croft spoke against the amendment. She pointed out that for some people their experience of marriage might have been difficult thus a second marriage may be too challenging a step for them to take and they may wish to continue indefinitely in a co-habiting relationship. Voting on the amended resolution, Tony Jeffries was dismayed that the resolution seemingly omitted childrearing and family structure. He presented statistics that suggest that twice as many children in co-habiting parental households have mental health issues and that forty-eight percent of births now take place in co-habiting households. Rachel Wood thought that putting children into the frame (of the report,) would be problematic and require much care. Bill Caldwell felt the discussion would benefit from greater definition of co-habiting and Ruth Childs added that co-habitation can be as much a gift as marriage and therefore should be similarly viewed. Anthony Jeffries argued that agreeing with Resolution 10.7 (see image below) and that while one might agree with these definitions of marriage in reference to heterosexual marriage, one might not agree with them in reference to same sex marriage.



Telford Circuit Synod Representative John Parkin puts forward his points in the three minutes allotted

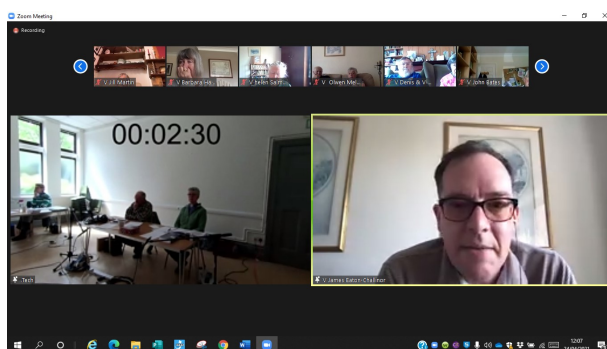
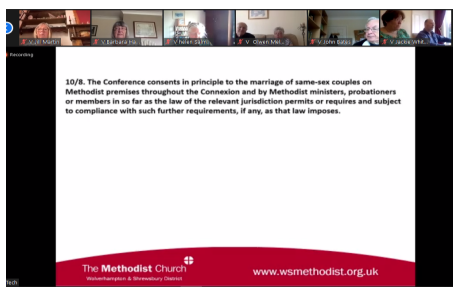


Supporting marriage ceremonies in Methodist buildings Paul Nzacahayo said, "The Bible is not fixed. Read it and learn something new".

He felt that the clauses made it difficult to make a clear vote. In his own case he said he could agree to the definition of marriage as it relates to heterosexual marriage, but he could not agree to the definition relating to same sex marriage. Yet, he said, there was no way of specifying this. Agreeing to a definition of marriage that covers both heterosexual and same sex marriages was, he felt potentially misrepresentative. Talking of differences in interpretation of Christian traditions and the Bible, for example, "Adam and Eve," he went on to say, "some people have difficulty with this but a man and a woman, I can't see any other interpretation of that." Revd. Richard Hall responded, "It seems to me that Resolution 10.7 (G4) is stating the simple fact that members of the Methodist Church have different interpretations which may be strange to you, but there are different interpretations, as is." Ruth Childs added that this difference in interpretations "gives us the space to differently interpret and thus disagree." Steve Jackson voted against Resolution 10.7, emphasising that "Since the beginning of Christendom, we have an understanding of marriage between man and woman. In a sense it doesn't matter what I or any of us think. It is not our church, it is God's church so what does God think? Has God changed his mind? This is the question we should be asking." Jo Cox-Darling replied, "Resolution 10.7 explores and explains where we have got to on our journey in the Methodist Church so it puts into place where the Methodist Church is already exercising this in both our discipline and in our practice. The Connexion is now inviting us to adopt this version of understanding of marriage which shows that the Methodist people live with contradictory understandings of marriage." Paul Shuttleworth stressed the importance of allowing people to express themselves as they are. "We have come very far in the understanding of the range of human sexuality. People are ignorant of so much. People having to keep so much of their lives in the shadows because part of who they are is not acceptable. I don't think God likes that," he said.

Representing the members from Gornal and Sedgely, Tim Coles offered, "Lots of people in this Circuit are uncomfortable with and find it unbiblical to change the definition of marriage to suit same sex marriages. Procreation is not possible so there is no purpose but self-serving." Revd. Hall countered that our current understanding of marriage has led to our treatment of divorcees, particularly those who seek to marry again. Stuart Read reminded Synod that they were not being asked to vote on same sex marriage but to vote on whether such marriages should take place in Methodist buildings, as addressed in Resolution 10.8.

Bill Anderson, remarked that we move on in our understanding of life and how we see the world and that the world is already moving in a more inclusive direction. "In the Old Testament there was a pressure on countries to procreate. We have stories of relationships that are perplexing, which we would find very difficult today. God is love and we shape our world according to God's love. We are watching that happen in our societies where mum and mum live together and have families and are supported, and dad and dad do the same." Overlooking the international impact Antony Jeffries voiced his disappointment with Methodist leaders in Uganda and the USA and the division the report has caused within the Methodist Church worldwide. He said that unlike maintaining the Church of England's position of marriage being intended as a life-long union between man and woman, the Methodist Church in forcing some members into conflict with the Bible and impeding unity between churches, is divisive. James Peterson's response was to highlight the position of young Methodists and the 3Generate Manifesto calling for an inclusive and equal church which Revd. James Eaton-Challinor said could be realised because God will allow us to live with our differences of opinion, interpretation and beliefs.



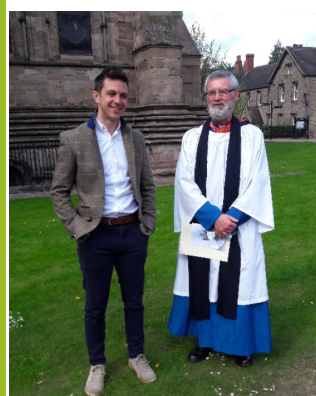
PUB SERVICE IN LEINTWARDINE

Despite the Bank Holiday weekend weather, for some, church last Sunday meant a trip to the Lion Pub in Leintwardine. Members of the local Cluster met for their service in the pub's outdoor area which, located by the riverside, provided perfect surroundings for thanking God for a loosening of Covid 19 restrictions, enabling them to meet in groups of six.

Lay Pastor Sharon O'Connell who organised the service remarked, "It was lovely to meet in such a relaxing environment, and although we were small in number it was nice to chat and find out more about each other, something we



have not been able to do. We all shared coffee and scripture and agreed that we should meet in that way again. There is a need to do church in a different way and the group are open to new ideas, maybe church in the pub will become a regular thing."



Nick Read, (right) with David Gwatkin

BORDERLANDS' CHAPLAIN IS MADE PREBENDARY

Also last weekend, Borderlands Chaplain Revd. Nick Read was installed as Prebendary at Hereford Cathedral. The ceremony, to which a limited number of family and friends were invited, bestowed similar honour upon Revd. Fiona Gibson currently the vicar of a rural benefice in Bedfordshire. Asked whether this earned him a swanky new title Revd. Read replied, "The Revd. Prebendary Nick Read", which is virtually meaningless as no one knows what a Prebendary is."

The invitation had come with an explanation: Prebendaries are senior clergy appointed by the Bishop in recognition of their ministry and as a way of giving them a particular link with the Cathedral. Some Cathedrals call their Prebendaries 'Honorary Canons', whereas Prebendary is the term used in Cathedrals like Hereford that were never monasteries.

Joining the College of Cannons Nick will support the work of the Cathedral church and sit in the prebendal stalls near the choir stalls.

For more information on church services and events please consult the Plan or contact churches directly.

Contact us at: media.smcircuit@gmail.com 01588 630 769 or visit our website at shropshireandmarches.org.uk