



## **News release**

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### **Methodist Church to review its understanding of marriage and relationships**

**A task group established to consider whether the Methodist Church's understanding of marriage and relationships should be revisited has reported back to this year's Methodist Conference.**

Following a decision at the Conference in 2014, people from across the Methodist Connexion have been considering marriage and relationships as part of a process overseen by the task group. The discussions show that there is a broad range of opinions held by Methodists on these matters.

The Church is to reconsider how its understanding of marriage should be expressed. This does not necessarily mean that there will be a change of definition, but that the Church wishes to re-examine the definition through a period of theological and scriptural reflection.

The task group prepared guidance and other resources to help members of the Methodist Church in their discussions on marriage and relationships.

The task group was established at the Methodist Conference in 2014 to consider whether or not the Methodist Church should revisit its definition of marriage and its understanding of family life, marriage and the single person. Its report, received by the Methodist Conference earlier today, 5 July 2016, is the result of two years consideration by the task group, along with reflection and conversation within the Methodist Church. So far, at least 8,000 members have taken the opportunity to participate in conversations across the Methodist Church, where a wide range of views were expressed.

The Church's definition of marriage was one of those subjects discussed. The task group considered the existing 1992 "Statement on Christian Understanding of Family Life, The Single Person and Marriage". In the Statement the Methodist Church reiterates its view that marriage is "the lifelong union of one man and one woman". However, whilst many Methodists support this definition as it stands, there is a range of reasons to revisit it. For example, some people feel the Church's definition should be extended to include the marriage of same sex couples. Some people feel that the definition only describes the status of marriage, not its purpose and responsibilities and revisiting the definition is important part of the process even if it remains unchanged. The Conference directed that a new Statement on marriage and relationships should now be prepared and that, as part of that process, the definition of marriage should be revisited.

The Methodist Children's Youth and Assembly, 3Generate, also considered marriage and relationships at the request of the young people themselves. 3Generate recommended that youth workers and ministers should be trained to create safe spaces to talk about all interpretations of relationships to encourage discussions about same sex marriage.

The Revd Graham Carter, Chair of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group commented; "It is essential to take time over this issue because the process of finding a way forward is as important as reaching a decision. Enabling people in the church to talk openly about their differing convictions and value their common commitment to Jesus Christ is key to what it means to be a Christian community.

"The decision of the Conference to establish a working party on the matters of marriage and relationships is an important step which comes from a widespread conversation in which people have listened, respected each other's position and engaged in deep reflection together. The conversations will continue and we will go on responding to the challenges of interpreting God's love for today's society.