

CSR Council amended Pastoral Responses 12th March 2011

Pastoral Responses:

The rule of faith of the Methodist Church in Ireland is the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. Based on this understanding Methodists are inclusive Christians. We therefore believe that God loves everyone and Jesus died for all. We teach that people are made in the image of God but our lives have been tainted by sin; that sin has spoiled God's original intention for us and that sin affects every aspect of our lives, including our sexuality. However we also emphasise that God's grace is available to all and from the moment people respond to Jesus in faith, the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctification, i.e. enables us to grow in grace.

All pastoral care is based on this premise. Those who struggle with issues of sexuality are no different from those who struggle with other difficulties. All deserve our attention, care and Christian love. This is vital because some families believe they have not received this care.

The Methodist Church in Ireland in common with every other Christian Church has members who are of homosexual orientation (whether lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender). Many never have heard any reference to sexuality from their pulpit, or if they have, it has often been negative. As a consequence some feel confused and hide their true feelings because they fear being marginalised and excluded from the Church family.

The Committee/Council if of a mind that homosexual orientation is not, in and of itself, a sin, however the Committee/Council is unable to come to an agreed mind on the question of homosexual lifestyle. In common with many churches we find ourselves divided into two main streams of Biblical interpretation in relation to the latter issue.

It is therefore important that we respect the integrity of those whose interpretation of scripture is different from our own and continue to work together in Christian love.

We pledge ourselves to search the Scriptures continually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In order to provide pastoral care to those who feel isolated and on the margins because of their sexuality, Conference recommends the following:-

1. The Methodist Church strongly condemns all forms of homophobia both within the church and the wider community. Recognising the subtle forms in which homophobia is expressed; it urges all our members to carefully examine our thoughts, words and actions before God so that we may not be guilty of any form of homophobia, either consciously or unconsciously.

2. We acknowledge that in the past, we have sometimes condemned and hurt those who are of homosexual orientation.
3. We acknowledge that we, often unconsciously, have reacted differently toward heterosexual and homosexual people.
4. All individuals, irrespective of orientation, should be encouraged to make responsible decisions regarding relationships and sexual practice.
5. We urge all in leadership to show compassion in our discussion, statements, preaching and teaching about people irrespective of their sexuality.
6. We encourage the careful use of language on this issue.
7. For various reasons and at various times in their lives, people may struggle with their sexual identity and with its rightful expression. We underline the need to listen more and say less, so those who experience such struggles know they are valued as persons.
8. We urge the rejection of none on the grounds of their sexual orientation.
9. We emphasise that sexual orientation is not a barrier to anyone becoming a member of the church.
10. We invite every Church Council and Circuit Executive to discuss how they can ensure that all know they are welcome to share in worship.
11. We affirm our belief that the Communion Table is the Lord's and all who seek to be His disciples are welcome.
12. We do all that we can to encourage people to remember that every person matters to God and reaffirm our belief in the gospel of grace, forgiveness, healing and power available to all.