



The Methodist Church

ALTRINCHAM METHODIST CIRCUIT

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Dear Friends

As you will be aware, Methodist Conference met over this last week and made many important decisions about how we manage our finance and property, how we engage in mission and act on issues of social justice, about ministry and governance and about our human relationships.

Following a sensitively held debate, the Methodist Conference voted on the resolutions within the Marriage and Relationships report. The Conference agreed that we recognise that the love of God is present in those who freely enter into life-enhancing committed relationship with each other both in informal cohabitation and in more public commitments. It was agreed that as a church we will live together with 2 different understandings of marriage, that of marriage as being between a man and woman, and that of marriage as being between 2 people. The Conference agreed that it accepts in principle that marriages of same sex couples may be held on Methodist premises.

The Methodist Church as a whole has been on a journey that has involved us all in discussion about our understandings of marriage and we all had the opportunity to take part in discussions within our circuit, the comments made being sent as part of the whole church's discernment process.

Within our circuit there are many different deeply held convictions, those who hold very strongly to a traditional understanding of marriage, those who long to be accepted because they are living with the person they love but marriage isn't for them at the moment, and those who have longed for a time when all people, regardless of sexuality, could be treated equally when it came to expressing their loving relationships through marriage. There are many who are still working on defining their understanding within these different perspectives.

There will be those among us who are deeply hurt by the decisions that have been made, and maybe wondering whether it is possible to remain within our church. There will be those who are rejoicing because of these new possibilities.

As a church that has always sought to live with contradictory convictions, we have different understandings about many things within our faith and life together. In our relationships with one another, we are called to love deeply, to share the pain of those who are crying, and to share the joy of those who rejoice. Above all we are called as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ to share together in a ministry of reconciliation, to be compassionate to each other and those around us and show the love of God to all regardless of gender, sexuality, race, ability, status.

Over the coming months there will be more information about decisions that will need to be made within our churches and how we might hold those conversations, recognising again that we will all need to speak with care and love, holding each other in prayer within our different understandings.

Within our churches we talk about welcome: welcoming God, welcoming the friend, welcoming the stranger. Jesus met with people, whoever they were, talked with them, ate with them, befriended them, shared God's love with them. The only people he criticized were those who excluded those whose

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lifestyles didn't fit in with their understanding of their religion or status. It is possible that we may find those who have never been in our church before coming because of the decisions that have been made, wanting to discover whether we will indeed welcome and accept everyone for who they are, whatever their lifestyle and whatever their view point on life and faith might be. I pray that we will be ready to welcome and accept everyone with an openness and love that constantly displays the love of Christ, going out of our way to help anyone who comes to feel valued and able to find a home.

If it would be helpful to talk about your own concerns and feelings and any decisions you might be wondering about, please contact me and we can meet and talk and pray together, as you discern God's leading.

Please be assured of my prayers as together we seek to continue in the peace of God and the love of Jesus and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Yours in the love of Christ

Janet

Rev Janet Aspey
Superintendent Minister