

My name is Mark Rowland, I'm a Methodist minister, a member and potential trustee of OneBodyOneFaith as well as being a founder member and part of the leadership team of Dignity and Worth, which works for the full and active participation of LGBT+ people in the Methodist Church. A big hello to the OneBodyOneFaith AGM. I'm sorry I can't be with you myself – I have to be in the Methodist Birmingham District Synod today, although I'd rather be with you! I want to especially say a thank you and wish blessings to Tracy as she moves on towards ordination and public ministry. I want also to express my support and excitement for Luke as he looks to becoming the new director.

This is an update on where we're at in the Methodist Church about LGBT+ people. There are of course LGBT+ Methodists, some of us ordained, some of us lay. LGBT+ people are accepted for ordination and are appointed to lay posts in the church. The reality of the experience on the ground varies hugely from very affirming to seriously hostile. We have an official definition of homophobia but institutionally there is plenty more still to do to combat discrimination – and to attend to biphobia and transphobia as well as homophobia. Same-sex marriages cannot currently be solemnised in Methodist Churches, although the Conference has passed resolutions saying nothing stops Methodist ministers or members from being in civil partnerships or same-sex marriages. Ministers therefore don't put their ministry in danger simply for being married.

This year's Conference will be considering same-sex marriage again and we are waiting for the report. I had hoped it would be out before I gave you this update. Whether the delay is that the processes are going slowly or something else I don't know. The Conference directed last year that the report must include a mixed economy approach as one of its options. In other words, a plan where those who feel called to offer same sex marriage are enabled to do so and others whose conscience prevents that are not put under any obligation or expectation to change their current practice. Realistically the other two options are the status quo and a blanket policy in favour of same sex marriage. I don't think either of those are viable ways forward and I would personally oppose them both – the status quo just isn't sustainable and it doesn't do us any favours to try to force people into inclusion.

It's likely that the Conference will be asked to deal with the report as provisional legislation. That means that the Conference will need to debate it and pass it all this year. It would then be referred to all the District Synods for them to consider and approve, amend or reject. The 2020 Conference would then consider it all again and finally approve it, amend it or reject it. My sense is that there is a growing momentum for us to adopt a mixed economy. However, more conservative groups and people are mobilising and gearing up to oppose it. A little known trust within Methodism has financed Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) to make 'a principled stand' against any change.

At last year's Conference, we succeeded in passing a Notice of Motion relating to trans people, directing that the Methodist Church Trans stakeholder group should be expanded to ensure it includes trans people as well as others with relevant expertise. The Methodist Church has a toolkit for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion but the trans module of it was never completed. That group was directed to complete that module and to report to the Conference by 2021, considering pastoral good practice to ensure the welfare of trans, intersex and non-binary people, the pastoral and liturgical issues relating to transition, the use of appropriate language in official church documents and theological reflection on the unique contribution trans and intersex people can and do make to the life of the church. We are looking forward to hearing news of how that work is going.

I am hopeful that we will take some steps forward at this year's Methodist Conference, but we can take nothing for granted and the unexpected is always a possibility.