

Methodist Church Conversion Therapy Policy

MC/22/50

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	Bevan Powell, EDI Adviser: powellb@methodistchurch.org.uk David Hardman, JPIT: hardmand@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	50/1. The Council receives the report.

The Methodist Conference in 2021 agreed an immediate and complete ban on Conversion Therapy anywhere within the Methodist Church in Britain.

This policy applies to anyone leading worship or offering pastoral care in the name of the Methodist Church and to any business/function or prayer/fellowship meetings:

- on Methodist Church premises,
- online or using any form of social media,
- in a private home or
- in non-Methodist venues, such as hotels, conference venues, youth or social clubs.

This policy also applies to individuals or groups using, renting or hiring Methodist Church premises to conduct non Methodist Church business or social functions.

The ban also prohibits the use of online social media or technology (such as video conferencing) to promote or offer conversion therapy to any persons in this country by a practitioner in another jurisdiction.

1 Introduction

This policy is based on the Conference response to the Memorial (M20) brought by the Birmingham Synod.

Conference response to the Memorial:

The Conference agreed:

- (1) To support and adopt the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK',
- (2) To call on all Methodists to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form.
- (3) That no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the Methodist Church.

The Conference directed the Methodist Council to consider, draft and publish a policy on 'Conversion Therapy' in light of points (1) to (3) of this response. The Conference called on the UK Government to ban 'Conversion Therapy' without further delay and therefore also directed the Methodist Council to consider further the most appropriate way in which to engage with HM Government on this issue.

2 Definition

The Methodist Church has adopted the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK (bacp.co.uk).

The MoU defines conversion therapy as:

'Conversion therapy' is an umbrella term for a therapeutic approach, or any model or individual viewpoint that demonstrates an assumption that any sexual orientation or gender identity is inherently preferable to any other, and which attempts to bring about a change of sexual orientation or gender identity, or seeks to suppress an individual's expression of sexual orientation or gender identity on that basis.

The MoU further states:

'the practice of conversion therapy, whether in relation to sexual orientation or gender identity, is unethical and potentially harmful.'

3 Why is this policy important

Sexuality is a core aspect of what it means to be a human being created in love by God. Since 1979, reports on sexuality to the Methodist Conference have noted a diversity of sexual and, more recently, gender identities, and the Methodist Church has continued to develop its theological understanding of what it means to be human in the light of the widening understanding of the diversity of human sexuality.

In 1992 the Methodist Conference affirmed that "every person has infinite value before God", that God has "made nothing in vain" and loves all that God has made¹. In 1993 it agreed the following resolution:

'Conference recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church. Conference calls on the Methodist people to begin a pilgrimage of faith to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality'.

In 2021 the Methodist Council Report MC/21/50: Deliverance Ministry endorsed the following recommendation:

'Deliverance ministry must not be used to attempt to change a recipient's sexual orientation or gender identity'.

'Conversion Therapy' is totally incompatible with the previously agreed resolutions described above and would be contrary to the Methodist values set out in the Connexional Definition and Guidance on Homophobia.

4 Pastoral Support and Conversation

It is important to note that this policy does not prohibit pastoral conversation with an individual in regard to their gender or sexual identity. The purpose of pastoral care is to help support someone in dealing with the realities they are facing, someone who maybe unsure or feeling unhappy in regard to their sexual or gender identity. Conversations need to be an open exploration with no significance being placed on any particular perceived outcome as being preferable.

5 Legal Context

At the time of writing this policy the government has stated that it will introduce a legislative ban on the practice of conversion therapy. It is important to note, should the government introduce legislation that includes a conscience clause, the position of the Methodist Church in Britain is for a complete ban, and therefore this policy will still apply.

A consultation process was undertaken by the government to seek views on its proposals to ban conversion therapy practices, which in the main affect people from the LGBT community.

The consultation sought views on a set of proposed measures that would apply to England and Wales, as follows:

- A ban on conversion therapy – introducing a new criminal offence alongside sentence uplifts for existing offences
- A package of support for victims, restricting promotion of conversion therapies, removing profit streams, and strengthening the case for disqualification from holding a senior role in a charity
- Introducing Conversion Therapy Protection Orders to protect potential victims from undergoing the practice including overseas
- Exploring further measures to prevent the promotion and advertisement of conversion therapy

¹ The 1992 Conference Statement on A Christian Understanding of Family Life, the Single Person and Marriage p.29, emphasised in the 2019 God in Love Unites Us report para 1.5.7.

6 The Methodist Church's Response to the Consultation:

The Methodist Church formally responded to the consultation, stating:

'The Methodist Church, therefore, welcomes the commitment of the Government to introduce legislation in 2022. We support a ban on Conversion Therapy and welcome the measures to support those at risk in this country and abroad.

In adopting the Memorandum of Understanding of Conversion Therapy our position is that any conversion theory assumes that a particular sexual orientation or gender identity is preferable. This assumption is at odds with our position affirming dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality or gender. Therefore, we ask the Government to remove the conscience clause for over 18's and ban conversion therapy in all situations'.

7 Further Information and Support

Any congregation or minister of another Church using a Methodist building under MT14(2A) must be made aware of and signal agreement to this policy, and any report of a group using Methodist premises and engaging in conversion therapy must be reported to a Superintendent Minister, District Chair, and District Safeguarding Officer.

If you require further information or clarification on any aspect of this policy, please contact:

Bevan Powell, EDI Advisor: powellb@methodistchurch.org.uk

David Hardman, JPIT: hardmand@methodistchurch.org.uk

*****RESOLUTION**

50/1. The Council receives the report.