

Church council decision about whether or not to register/make available premises for same-sex weddings

Ways to use this material

This suggested session plan, if followed fully, gives three options depending on an indicative vote.

- *If indicative vote is to register/make available premises for same-sex weddings, this session will take between 75 minutes and two hours*
- *If indicative vote is not to register/make available premises for same-sex weddings, this session will take between 75 minutes and two hours*
- *If indicative vote does not show strong agreement in any direction, the session can take 75 minutes, with a decision to meet again to continue the process, which will take an additional two hours.*

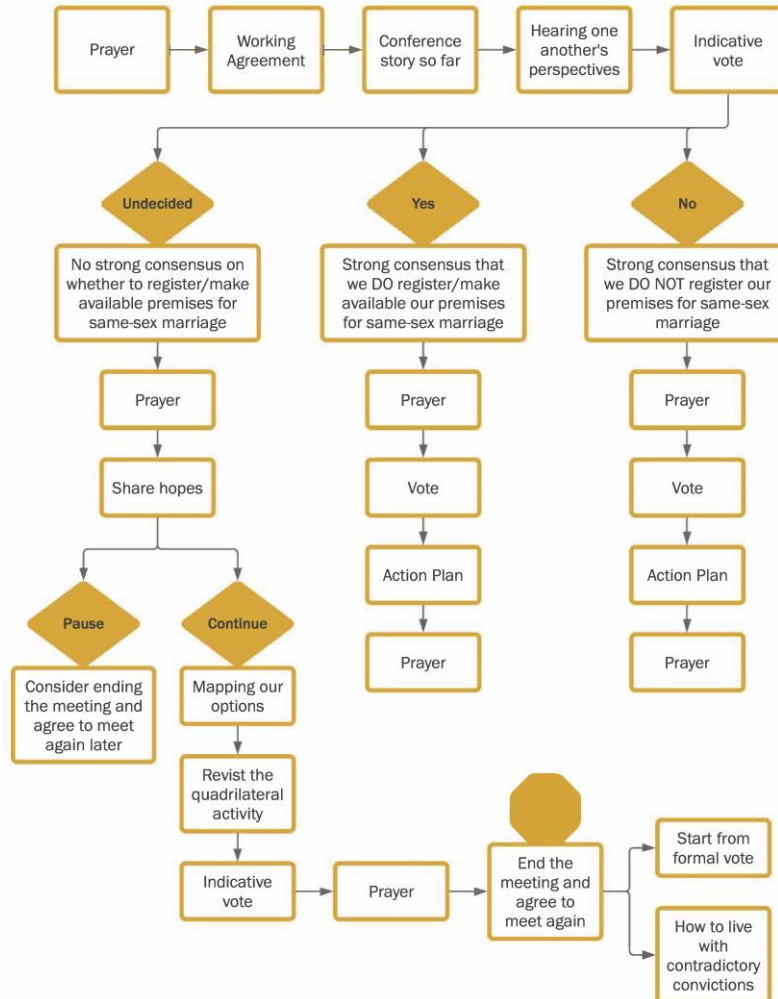
Alternatively, if there is no strong agreement, you may decide to step back from decision-making to focus on living with contradictory convictions, or to continue the process to explore the decision more deeply, and to agree to regather to make a decision another time.

If you realise midway through the meeting that there is a need to step back from a decision-making process and step in to more listening to one another, have the confidence to end the meeting, and suggest reconvening to engage in how to live with contradictory convictions.

The reason there are so many options, and so many opportunities to step back, is to enable the church council to confer well and not feel under too much pressure to make a decision in short space of time.

Same-sex Marriage

Flow chart to support the decision-making process of the church council



For fullsize document showing flowchart [click here](#)

Other resources

- If you know there are strong and different views and it would be of benefit to have a broader conversation before voting as a church council about whether or not to register/make available premises for same-sex weddings, you could use the ideas in 'Conferring well when living with contradictory convictions' [here](#) first
- Wider reading for the facilitator of this meeting [here](#)
- Legal guidance for those who do vote to register/make available premises [here](#)

Aim, objectives and ethos for the conversation

Aim: Church council to decide if at this time, we do or do not want to register/make available premises for same-sex weddings.

Objectives:

- Hear one another's voices
- Make a decision
- Have an action plan about how we will respond, whatever decision we make

Ethos:

We continue to believe that God has been revealed in Jesus Christ, accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, and live in communion with God and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We cherish our place within Christ's Church, recognising that it is Christ alone who chooses, calls and confirms us as members of His church, the body of Christ.

Whilst we may not all agree about everything, we recognise the importance of the truths which bind us together as well as the issues which currently divide us.

Therefore, we resolve:

- To engage with each other openly, honestly, prayerfully and graciously
- To treat each other with respect and dignity, recognising the sincerity of the faith of those who may see things differently
- To seek to learn from one another as we travel together as fellow pilgrims
- To renounce all language and behaviours that attempt to coerce others to change their views or beliefs
- To seek, as far as conscience allows, to preserve the fellowship of Christ's Church
- To unite under the authority of scripture as we seek to live as authentic Christian disciples in our own generation

www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/marriage-and-relationships/archive-marriage-and-relationships-2019/managing-group-conversations-around-marriage-and-relationships/a-model-statement-on-living-with-contradictory-convictions/

This suggested session outline is written for the facilitator of the meeting, and assumes that the facilitator will not contribute their own views, but hold the space for others.

Note: If any non-Methodist congregation uses a Methodist building for regular worship, then the non-Methodist congregation's consent to the registration of the building for same-sex marriage will also be required, even if that congregation does not intend using the building for that purpose.

Suggested session outline

Element	Method	Purpose	Time
Prayer	<i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34 In times of a major decision – As we begin	Worship	10 minutes
Working agreement	<p>Taken from Growing Through Change and Conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confidentiality (clarify what we mean by this) ○ Be careful how much or little you are speaking ○ Speaking to understand rather than agree or change someone else’s view ○ One voice at a time ○ Use of phones (decide) ○ No electronic recordings ○ Start and finish on time ○ Speak for yourself “I think” <p>OR</p> <p>Invite the group to add practical examples to the ethos statement above.</p>	Setting tone and boundaries	10 minutes
Conference story so far	<p>Input with or without PowerPoint</p> <p>What is ours to do in this meeting: Decide if at this time, we do or do not want to register/make available premises for same sex weddings.</p> <p>What is not ours to do in this meeting: Decide if any Minister, or members, will or will not marry same-sex couples. That is a decision for each person to make for themselves, whatever the outcome of our vote as a church council for our premises.</p>	All have the same basic level of information, and clarity of what is ours to do	10 minutes
Hearing one another’s perspectives	<p>Brief input about Wesley’s Quadrilateral; What the Bible tells us. What the Church tells us. What my/others’ stories tell us. What our reasoning tells us.</p>	It is helpful if we can articulate what we believe to one another, and equally helpful if	15 minutes

	<p>'Elevator statement': individually write down what your responses are with regards to the question before us: 'should we register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings, or not?' using these four prompts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What the Bible tells us. ○ What the Church tells us. ○ What my/others' stories tell us. ○ What our reasoning tells us. <p>Try to use ten words or less for each response.</p> <p>In pairs, imagine you are getting in a lift at the ground floor and you have ten storeys to travel together. In that short time, share what you have written down.</p> <p>Repeat so that you both get to speak.</p>	<p>we can listen to what others believe.</p>	
<p>Indicative vote</p>	<p>Have a break with refreshments and in that time, invite people to mark on the flipchart how they would vote.</p> <p><i>(This is an indicative vote, it is not the final decision. We are gauging where we are at as a group. Therefore, you have to choose if a simple majority is enough for you to move on to a final vote, or if you want the bar to be higher. Agree on this as a leadership team before the meeting.)</i></p> <p><i>On flipchart (or some other means) draw up five boxes with these headings:</i></p> <p>STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE</p> <p>If there is a strong consensus one way or another, follow next steps when there is consensus. If there is not a strong consensus, follow next steps for when there is not consensus.</p>	<p>Gauge where the group are in their thinking</p>	<p>15 minutes with a break</p>

<p>Next steps : Strong consensus that we DO register/make available our premises for same- sex weddings</p>	<p>Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we continue.</p>	<p>Discernment</p>	<p>10 minutes</p>
<p>Vote</p>	<p>Hold a formal vote, requiring a simple majority.</p>	<p>Decision making</p>	<p>5 minutes</p>
<p>Action plan</p>	<p>Register/make available with the GRO, (here) when possible.</p> <p>Inform the congregation of the decision. How will we do this? Inform the circuit of the decision. How will we do this? Inform the wider community of the decision. How will we do this?</p> <p><u>Creative ideas</u> to come up with action plans</p> <p>Note: if any non-Methodist congregation uses a Methodist building for regular worship, then the non-Methodist congregation's consent to the registration of the building (England) for same-sex marriage will also be required, even if that congregation does not intend using the building for that purpose.</p>	<p>Good communications</p>	<p>10-30 minutes</p>
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we finish.</p>		<p>10 minutes</p>
			<p>Total (minimum 95 minutes (maximum two hours))</p>

Next steps : Strong consensus that we DO NOT register/make available our premises for same- sex weddings	Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we continue. Vote Action plan	Discernment	10 minutes up to 60 minutes
Vote	Hold a formal vote, requiring a simple majority.	Decision making	
Action plan	Inform the congregation of the decision. How will we do this? Inform the circuit of the decision. How will we do this? Inform the wider community of the decision. How will we do this? Creative ideas to come up with action plans	Good communications	
Prayer	Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we finish.		10 minutes
			Total (minimum 95 minutes, (maximum two hours)

Next steps : Not a strong consensus about whether or not to register/make available our premises for same- sex weddings	Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we continue	Listen more deeply to one another and to God. Listening to understand	20 minutes
Share hopes	Each have a piece of paper. Everyone writes down one hope in relation to this matter and puts it in a central place. Invite two people to take it in turns reading the hopes. We are listening to understand one another, not to change one another's views or condemn one another.		

<p>At this point, people might really need to stop. If so, end the meeting with prayer and agree to meet again to continue the conversation.</p> <p>Below are ideas for the continued meeting (be it at this point or in the future).</p>			
<p>Mapping our options</p> <p>The suggestion is to use the Appreciative Inquiry method of SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results)</p> <p>Have two sheets of flipchart paper, each one laid out as an arrow.</p> <p><i>Give people time to consider what they want to write on their eight post-its. You could play some music in the background as people are thinking, praying and writing. People may not have one for each section. This is fine.</i></p>	<p>SOAR</p> <p>Each person has eight post-it notes (one comment per post-it, and one post-it maximum from each person for each section) and are invited to write responses to these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths as a church? What works well here? • What are the opportunities for us as a church if we DO register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings? • What do we aspire to be as a church in the future if we DO register/make available our premises for same sex-weddings? What is our collective intention in registering/making them available? • What resources do we have and do we need if we DO register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings? <p>Each person has some post-it notes (one comment per post-it, and one post-it maximum from each person for each section) and are invited to write responses to these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are our strengths as a church? What works well here? • What are the opportunities for us as a church if we DO NOT register/make available our premises for same sex weddings? • What do we aspire to be as a church in the future if we DO NOT register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings? What is our 	<p>Give ourselves space to reflect</p> <p>engage with our 'reason'</p>	<p>10 minutes</p> <p>30 minutes</p>

	<p>collective intention in not registering?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What resources do we have and do we need if we DO NOT register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings? This question might seem odd but a no-vote does not necessarily mean business as usual. <p>Once people have added their post-it's to the charts, invite four people to read out what we have.</p>		
Revisit the quadrilateral activity	Elevator statements – this is the same activity as you did earlier, the only difference being that pairs then join another pair and people share their partners' views with the new pair.	Reassess our own view Listen to the detailed view of more people	20 minutes
Indicative vote Explain that we are coming towards the end of this meeting, and that we are committed to meeting again. Explain that as a church council we want to confer well and need not feel under too much pressure to make a decision in a short space of time.	Mark one's position at this moment in time Same as process used nearer the start of the meeting	Gauge where the group is in its thinking	5 minutes
Prayer	Pray using <i>The Work of God in This Place</i> page 34: 'In times of a major decision' as we finish	Prayer	10 minutes
End the meeting and agree to meet again	Pick up from either Strong consensus that we DO or DO NOT register/make available our premises for same-sex weddings Or		

	To explore how to <u><i>Confer well when living with contradictory convictions</i></u>		
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