

**THE METHODIST CHURCH GHANA
RESPONSE TO MEDIA DISCUSSIONS ON THE DECISION ON SAME-SEX
MARRIAGES BY THE BRITISH METHODIST CONFERENCE**

By

**THE MOST REV. DR. PAUL K. BOAFO, PHD
PRESIDING BISHOP**

Dear People of God, the Media Fraternity, the People Called Methodists and all who are listening to us at this time, we bring you greetings on behalf of the leadership and membership of The Methodist Church Ghana. We have invited you here today to clarify and state our position on certain issues circulating on social media platforms and other communication outlets on a decision by the British Methodist Conference that met in Birmingham in its Representative Session from 29th June to 4th July, 2019. Please allow me to quote from the Conference Business Digest what the whole debate is about: ***“Following debates held on Monday 1 July and Wednesday 3 July, the report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group was commended to the Connexion for study and prayerful discussion. Provisional resolutions were passed on the qualities of good relating, an understanding of cohabitation, celebration of civil partnerships, prayers following the end of a marriage and permission for same-sex marriages to take place in Methodist Churches. These will be voted on by District Synods during the year, and a report will be brought to the 2020 Conference based on those responses. A clause has been included in the proposals that no one would have to officiate at a same-sex marriage if they feel prevented by their conscience”.***

African Methodists, especially those with historical links to British Methodism, are very disturbed, with some even confused about this decision of the British Conference to go beyond recognition and acknowledgment, to regularize same-sex, cohabitation and divorce within the Church. We were all saddened by the decision and there are good reasons for our feelings. This decision would amount to the reversal of long-standing Christian, not just Methodist beliefs, on marriage and sexuality and the normalization of moral behavior that the Christian church has historically rejected as contradictory to God’s word. The responses from Christians on social media platforms to the British Conference decision, have ranged from

shock to consternation and anger, with some asking the Methodist Church Ghana (MCG) to act.

Context of Delayed Response

First and foremost, it would be appropriate to explain why this press briefing is coming later than the public would have expected. I, as the Presiding Bishop of The Methodist Church Ghana attended the British Conference as a delegate, following which I took the opportunity to attend to other pastoral commitments relating to The Methodist Church Ghana interests abroad before returning home. I arrived from the UK on Monday July 15. Given the seriousness of the situation before us, especially in relation to our historical links with the British Conference, it was important that our response was articulated after briefings with the executive.

Adomba TV and Social Media Platform

We have called you here given the way social media works these days, everyone seems to have a take on the issues relating to the British Conference decision and how it the general comments are affecting The Methodist Church Ghana. As a Church we are particularly concerned by a trending report on Adomba TV that seeks to create the impression that The Methodist Church Ghana was bound by this decision made by the British Methodist Conference. We were saddened that the TV reporter chose to file his report in front of a Methodist Chapel to draw home a certain effect without first seeking clarification from any of the Methodist authorities. We kindly ask the public to disregard all allusions to the fact that this has to do with the wider Methodist family that decision does not affect the Methodist Church Ghana's doctrinal position on sexuality or any other issue for that matter.

Autonomous Conference

I want to state with some emphasis and also do so in no ambiguous terms, that the Methodist Church Ghana is an autonomous Conference with its own leadership. We have been independent of the British Methodist Conference since 1961. However, historically we have maintained a working relationship with the British Conference as the "mother church" that gave birth to the Methodist Church Ghana. It is for that reason that the leadership of the Methodist Church Ghana and that of the British participate in each other's Conferences and activities. We share that heritage with the Methodist Churches in other parts of West Africa, including Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, the Republic of Benin and several others. This

historical relationship notwithstanding, being an autonomous Conference means that the Methodist Church Ghana is not bound by decisions of the British, nor any other Conference. We are very aware of our Wesleyan heritage and what it entails and as an autonomous Conference, we resolve to defend tenaciously the biblical faith that was once delivered unto the saints, especially as it affects all areas of human life in our relationship with God in Christ. This we shall continue to do in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Methodist Church Ghana: Marriage and Sexuality

We are as concerned as other Christians are, especially those of the evangelical faith, that the British Conference of the Methodist Church has voted overwhelmingly to consider permitting same-sex marriages on their premises. This is a very sad development for Methodism worldwide given that the roots of the faith lie in the country. These decisions are often made with the laws of the countries in which the particular churches exist in view, and if the British legal system permits same-sex relationships and the church wants to go along with it, we can only have our say on the matter and pray for them. It is never impossible for God to use us in Africa or any remnant believers in the UK to turn things around to his glory. We do not hate homosexuals, but we do not believe that it is possible to opt for that lifestyle and be Christian according to the teaching of the Bible.

On that note, I wish to assure the people called Methodists, and by extension all other members of the Body of Christ, that the Methodist Church Ghana remains unashamedly, a Church that believes in the authority of the Bible. We stand by the Wesleyan teaching on Scriptural Holiness. We believe that “marriage is ordained by God” and as our liturgy on weddings declare, “it is not to be thought of lightly or selfishly but in the fear and love of God.” The Methodist Church Ghana has not amended her position on marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman, and neither do we permit cohabitation by unmarried couples nor encourage divorce by Christians. That is what we believe and that is what we ask our ministers, lay preachers, evangelists and other agents to preach and hold on to. If “marriage is given by God,” then obviously the institution ought to be lived within the context of God’s word. It makes sexuality a sacred act for the expression of love within long-term covenanted relationships with responsibilities and privileges defined both by law and by faith. The seriousness of the decision made by the British Conference is clearer when considered against the backdrop of the fact that as people called Methodists or Wesleyans, we belong to an evangelical

faith that upholds the integrity of the Bible and the pursuit of life of holiness. We have even upheld that position male and female sex outside of marriage and same-sex relationships or any other alternate sexual lifestyles such as gay and lesbian options, are all inconsistent with biblical ethics and morality.

In our liturgy marriage is also described as “the union between one man and one woman, and when blessed with the gift of children”, it becomes “God’s chosen way for the continuance of humankind and the bringing up of children in security and trust.” Same-sex relationships are neither supported by biblical teaching nor can the Bible’s position be revised to support it. The Methodist Church Ghana rejects any revisionists interpretations of the Bible that seeks to make same-sex relationships permissible. We take these matters so seriously that, as Methodists, we often even take disciplinary action against unmarried couples who engage in sexual relations, with some being temporarily excluded from fellowship, if we have evidence that they had flouted the church’s directives. The decision of the British Conference clearly goes against the grain of biblical teaching.

Our position is that sexuality has important implications for the relationship between human beings and God, and for us as Christians, it is an issue that cannot be dissociated from faith commitments and responsibilities. In Psalm 8 the image of God in which the human being was created is made synonymous with his glory. We bear the weight of the glory of the Most-High God in our beings. The sacredness of the covenant of marriage is also seen in the fact that it is the only human institution that is likened to the relationship between Christ and the Church with the Church being described as “the bride of Christ” with its implications for purity and fidelity (Ephesians 5:22-33). Marriage, as far as the Methodist Church Ghana is concerned, is a covenant ordained by God to be strictly speaking, observed between a male and a female only. Historically, there have been no exceptions to this rule in the church, and the Methodist Church Ghana dissociates herself from any decision that contradicts the teaching of the Bible on sexuality and marriage.

Besides our African ethos do not permit such alternative lifestyle and frowns upon them and we still uphold our Ghanaian and African culture as against any other cultures and are proud to be Ghanaian and African. The laws in our land do not permit such strains of behaviour.

We also hope that our Government and politicians will take note of this trends, thread consciously, and not allow themselves to be pressured under the guides of receiving more aid/funding, to give in to these modern lifestyles that overthrows our cultural values and Christian principles as a nation.

Implications for Wider Church

We are aware as a denomination, that there are a lot of our members who worship in British Methodist Churches and even Ghanaian Methodist ministers who serve under the British Conference with our permission. In the month of August when we meet at our General Purposes Council Meeting, the Methodist Church Ghana will give directives regarding how these concerned members and ministers can carry on with their church and personal Christian activities in view of the decision of the British Conference on Homosexuality.

Conclusion

We want to thank you all for the concerns expressed since this matter became public. Our position on the decision made by the British Conference would be communicated to the British Conference office at a later date. We shall continue to engage with them on matters affecting our members and personnel who worship under the jurisdiction of the British Conference. Our prayer is for the Holy Spirit to intervene in these matters so that those who want to uphold a biblical position do not get discouraged by a matter that obviously is very disheartening for all of us. God bless all of you and may He help us to hold on firmly to the faith of Scriptural Holiness and spread it accordingly.