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MCSA CONFERENCE 2019 STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE

We, the Methodist people in Southern Africa have been on a journey in search for grace and truth with regards to human sexuality, marriage and family life. Our conversation, discernment and common experience have confirmed our commitment to our being a community of love and acceptance that celebrates the unity and diversity expressed in our Methodist spirit and connexional existence.

To recognise the milestones on this journey, Conference 2016 affirmed "A profession of the MCSA's unity and diversity within the context of the Church's conversation on same-sex relationships" (Book of Order 2014:216-218). We also note with appreciation the developments across the global Methodist family and in particular the work done by the British Conference on a Methodist doctrine of marriage¹. In light of this work, DEWCOM propose that Conference adopts the following statements as contributory to the MCSA's understanding of Christian marriage:

- 1. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa recognises that there is a distinct difference between the legal definitions of marriage (held by the respective countries that comprise the MCSA Connexion) and the religious understanding that the MCSA holds. Primarily, legal definitions of marriage pertain to a form of **contractual** relationship entered into by individuals, describing the legal nature of their relationship and the accompanying determinations as set out by law. Whilst recognising the legal aspect of marriage, the MCSA believes that marriage is a **covenantal** relationship between two people, shaped and founded in God's love for them and that this love is expressed as a divine gift to each other.*
- 2. Christian marriage is an exclusive relationship between two people who, united through God's Spirit, provide each other with a life-long commitment of love, affection, care, companionship, trust and faithfulness.*
- 3. In a context where there are cultural, historical and socio-economic factors that have contributed to the fracturing of the family, there is a need for reconstructive work and pastoral focus on marriage and the emergence of new forms of family life.*
- 4. As Methodist people we believe that married life is vital means of grace for the development of individual, children and the strengthening of human society. The Words of the Methodist Marriage liturgy capture this goal of marriage, "Through such marriage children may be nurtured, family life strengthened, and human society enriched."²*

¹ See <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/the-methodist-church/marriage-and-relationships-2019/>

² Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (1999) The Methodist Worship Book. Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House.

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