# Methodist Church in Ireland Issues Apology for Pastoral Failures towards LGBT Community



The Methodist Church in Ireland has issued an unconditional apology for its failures in providing pastoral support and care to the LGBT community and their families. The church, comprising around 200 congregations across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, also condemned all forms of homophobia within the church and the wider community. Despite this, it announced that it would maintain its stance on marriage being defined as a relationship "between one man and one woman," opting not to follow the Methodist Church in Great Britain in allowing same-sex marriages.

This decision came amidst a broader context where the United Methodist Church in the US recently voted to allow LGBT clergy to serve, reversing a long-standing ban. Whether individual Methodist churches in Ireland will have the autonomy to permit those in same-sex relationships to hold leadership positions remains uncertain.

The announcement was made at the church's annual conference in Belfast, where a decade-long review on "human sexuality" was presented. This review assessed Christian teachings and proposed standards for the membership and leadership of the Methodist Church in Ireland (MCI). The review highlighted concerns about inconsistent approaches, such as differing criteria for same-sex and opposite-sex relationships.

Reactions within the church were mixed. Some members expressed strong opposition to the review's recommendations, fearing it could lead to division within the church. Others supported the inclusivity the report represented, emphasizing the need to embrace all members, including those from the LGBT community. The report was ultimately approved with a majority vote of 148 to 64.

Steven Smyrl, a member of the church council in Dublin and in a same-sex marriage, welcomed the apology but questioned its depth. Smyrl, who had previously been dismissed from the Presbyterian church due to his relationship, expressed hope for future changes in the church’s stance on same-sex marriage.