

Same-sex Marriage: History of this topic to date

Over recent years, the question of whether Ministers and licensed marriage celebrants within The General Conference of the New Church should conduct same-sex marriages has been the subject of prayerful reflection and structured discussion. What follows is a summary of the process and key developments to this point, and how the church is now seeking to listen more widely.

Initial Facilitated Discussion within the Ministry (November 2023)

In response to feedback received from members during discussion groups at the 2023 Annual Meeting of Conference, the Committee of Ministers held its first facilitated meeting on 13–14 November 2023. The focus of this meeting was to discuss and share considerations about whether same-sex marriages could be offered by Ministers of The General Conference of the New Church, according to the conscience of each Minister.

A statement arising from this meeting was issued on the 22 January 2024. In it, the Committee of Ministers recognised that there is a spectrum of opinions within the Ministry and acknowledged the range of emotions associated with this subject. Ministers explored both their doctrinal concerns and their personal responses, including concerns about the implications of either agreeing or not agreeing to conduct same-sex marriages.

The statement emphasised that variety within the Church is a strength rather than a weakness, and that respectful sharing had contributed to understanding, renewed commitment to working productively together, and the maintenance of bonds of love and regard despite ongoing differences.

Further Facilitation and Sharing of Ministerial Reflections (February–March 2024)

A second facilitated meeting of the Committee of Ministers took place on 27–28 February 2024. During this time, Ministers continued to explore how their individual thoughts and feelings relate to doctrinal concepts and worked together to ensure that all voices were heard.

In a statement shared with the church on 7 March 2024, it was noted that while some Ministers had changed their views as a result of prayerful thought, the overall range of opinion within the Ministry remained wide and varied. It was also acknowledged that a similar diversity of views is likely present among the people of the church.

To assist individuals in forming their own considered views, the Committee of Ministers offered a series of short, anonymous reflections from Ministers who attended the facilitation. These reflections expressed a broad range of positions, including firm convictions, conditional openness, and continued prayerful exploration. Anonymity was agreed in order to allow honesty and openness, while recognising that individual views may continue to develop through further facilitation, prayer, and reflection.

The Committee of Ministers also stated its intention to continue further exploration of this subject, initially within the Ministry.

Vision for the Future and Strategic Aims (July–November 2024)

At the Annual Meeting of Conference on 24 July 2024, members were invited to engage in discussions around a Vision for the Future of the church. Suggested strategic aims were outlined, and members participated in wide-ranging group discussions. Those unable to attend were given the opportunity to submit written responses.

These responses were collated, checked, and verified, and a report was submitted to Conference Council, which holds responsibility for agreeing the strategic direction of the Church.

On 22 November 2024, Conference Council accepted three Strategic Aims:

1. Encouraging and supporting varied and diverse approaches to worship
2. Applying doctrine based on personal conscience
3. Becoming more accepting and inviting

These Strategic Aims now form an important context for ongoing consideration of pastoral and doctrinal matters, including the question of same-sex marriage.

Developing Processes to Support the Strategic Aims (2024–2025)

On 23 January 2024, the Committee of Ministers met to consider how work might be arranged in order to meet the Strategic Aims. It was agreed that:

- individual churches and groups would review their activities in light of the aims,
- the Committee of Ministers would agree a process for checking and safeguarding decisions on contentious issues,
- consideration would be given to providing supportive spaces for individuals to explore issues with a Minister, and
- new ideas would be explored and encouraged.

On 6 May 2025, the Committee of Ministers agreed a formal process for addressing contentious issues. Under this process, a Minister consults the Spiritual Leader if an action may be contentious. The issue may then be brought to the Committee of Ministers for discernment, discussion, and a vote. If 50% plus one of the Ministers present at the meeting are in agreement, the action may proceed, with the Spiritual Leader holding a casting vote if required.

In September 2025, the Meet The Minister initiative was launched, providing an opportunity for individuals to speak with a Minister about spiritual, personal, social, or other matters of concern, including issues requiring discussion and exploration.

A Significant Moment and the Next Stage of Discernment

This is a significant moment in the life of the Church. Recognising the depth and importance of this question, and the range of sincerely held views, it is considered vital that every voice has the opportunity to be heard.

The Committee of Ministers is therefore inviting members of the church and the wider congregation to participate in a straw poll on the following prayerfully considered question:

Whether Ministers and licensed marriage celebrants within The General Conference of the New Church should conduct same-sex marriages.

It is important to note that the straw poll will be anonymous, and each member or church attendee is invited to vote only once.

It is important to be clear that at present there is a confirmed commitment amongst some within the Ministry to conduct same-sex marriages. The straw poll represents Stage 1 of a wider consultation process. If there is sufficient willingness expressed at this stage to consider same-sex marriage further, a Stage 2 consultation will take place.

Participants are invited to spend time considering this subject prayerfully, drawing on their own knowledge and experience, and their understanding of the Church's teachings.

Supporting Reflection and Ongoing Conversation

Over the coming weeks and months, Ministers will be creating and sharing a range of resources to support deeper individual reflection on this issue. These will be offered through a variety of media, including written materials, videos, and workshops. Different subject areas will be authored by different Ministers, reflecting a spectrum of views and interpretations.

This work is intended to model openness and honesty, respect for differing understandings of the Writings, and encouragement for each person to think deeply and prayerfully about their own position.

Planned subject areas include:

- **Introduction, questions and curiosities**
(Revd Lynne Griffiths and Revd Christine Bank)
- **Doctrinal issues: Goodness and Truth, Wisdom and Love, Marriage**
(Revd Jack Dunion, Revd Brian Talbot and Revd Bruce Jarvis)
- **History and change in the church**
(Revd Becky Jarratt, Revd Mary Duckworth, Revd Clifford Curry and Revd Helen Brown)
- **Translations of the Bible**
(Revd Brian Talbot and Revd Jack Dunion)
- **Femininity and masculinity, biological sex and gender**
(Revd Michael Stanley)

As always, everyone is warmly encouraged to speak directly with Ministers through the Meet the Minister programme. Further details can be found on our website at <https://www.generalconference.org.uk/contact/meet-the-minister/>, or you can email ministers.secretary@generalconference.org.uk.

Visit our website <https://www.generalconference.org.uk/same-sex-marriage-consultation/>, which we will regularly update with these helpful resources, and we will be sharing regular updates in E-News.

If you have not received a letter but would like to take part, please email ministers.secretary@generalconference.org.uk with your name and address and a letter and straw poll card will be posted to you, along with a self-addressed envelope.

We are deeply grateful for your thoughtful, prayerful, and respectful engagement and encourage everyone to take part in this important conversation.