

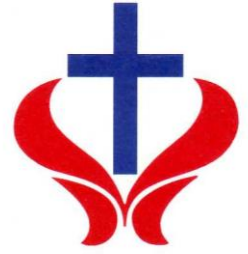
The Methodist Church in Singapore

新加坡基督教衛理公會

சிங்கப்பூர் மெதடிஸ்ட் திருச்சபை

70 Barker Road, Methodist Centre, Singapore 309936

Tel: 6478 4786 Fax: 6478 4799 <http://www.methodist.org.sg>



A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE REPEAL OF SECTION 377A OF THE PENAL CODE

At the National Day Rally this year, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced the Government's intention to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code ("377A") and decriminalise sex between men. PM Lee also announced that the Government would protect the definition of marriage between a man and a woman from being challenged constitutionally in the courts and would amend the Constitution in order to protect it.¹

We would like to reiterate that The Methodist Church in Singapore has not changed our stance, as outlined in our response to the announcement,² *Methodist Social Principles*,³ as well as our agreement with the statements made by the National Council of Churches Singapore (NCCS) on this matter.⁴

Engagement with public policy for the common good

Even though our consistent position on marriage, education, and religious freedom is shared by people of different faiths or none, there are some who criticise the Church for commenting on issues of law. Others may accuse Christians of a sinister desire to impose Christian morality as law. Some construe any move to enshrine the traditional understanding of marriage as an undermining of the secular character of the Constitution. The truth of the matter is that correlation is not causation. Just because the Government intends to enshrine the traditional definition of marriage does not mean that it has arrived at that decision by way of specifically religious reasoning.

Only Parliament has the authority to promulgate laws and has the responsibility of doing so. However, like any citizen and local association, Christians and our Church have an equal right and responsibility to express our concerns on matters related to our country and social well-being. Our public statements are guided by a fundamental principle: to serve the common good of our nation. There is a well-documented tradition of Christian theology that counsels the Church to direct political reasoning towards the good of the community. Christian faith, in this sense, does not supply a

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political agenda. Rather, it compels us to exemplify a care for our common life and future. Thus, the safeguards we urge are not because we want to preserve Christian morality for its own sake, but for the sake of the well-being of society.

Our Church does not believe that individualism, writ large, seen for example in what Charles Taylor et al has critiqued as atomistic individualism, is the standard of human flourishing by which to measure public policy.⁵ Our beliefs are grounded in a vision of human flourishing that stands apart from, but does not deny, personal choices and benefits. In this vision, every institution—like marriage, family, or schools—exists for the common good. Our request that the Government put in place safeguards in these areas is based on the conviction that Christian morality can serve the common good of all.

The distinction is important: we believe that what serves the common good is ultimately beneficial for all individuals; conversely, not every freely chosen individual choice is beneficial for all. Our expressing this is not an attempt to impose a specifically Christian morality. It is rather to engage in a robust conversation about differing visions of the Good drawn from shared morality. There will be differing views and emphases, but it is obvious that one does not need, in principle, to affirm any specific religion to concur with these broader concerns.

As Christians, we are called neither to privilege nor pliancy. We do not want to participate in either religious or secular sectarianism. Rather, we believe it is our God-given responsibility to seek the common good and the welfare of our country. We are committed to public engagement for the sake of the good of all. This vision of communion—of a good that would truly be *common*—is what energises our engagement on substantive matters of public interest.

There is no doubt that our Christian vision of *human flourishing* may be at odds with ideals or priorities held by others. We do not claim to be the sole arbiters of what is good for society. We do not seek to be the main actor on the national stage. We also do not deny the right of others to express their views and ideas, even when it is in opposition to what we believe. However, we do strongly disagree with attempts to mischaracterise Christian beliefs as harmful discrimination.

Furthermore, we are concerned that our right to share our convictions

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stemming from (but which are definitely not exclusive to) our Christian beliefs, may be excluded on the ground that they cross over into politics. As our *Social Principles* state, “decision making by consensus is fair and effective only if the people have sufficient and safe channels opened to them to participate in meaningful and honest discussion, without fear of reprisal”.⁶ *How* we engage in dialogue and public reasoning, even when we are opposed to begin with, may be as profound a priority as what we profess.

We therefore affirm the Government’s call to exercise restraint, and to avoid extreme demands. We fully agree on the need to protect our capacity to live together peacefully and render mutual assistance to each other.

Repealing 377A: What Methodists can and must do in response

The recognition that we need each other recalls the Wesleyan commitment to social holiness—holiness that is pursued and achieved in community, not solitarily. We welcome anyone who wrestles with sexuality into the hospitality of the Church. True freedom is found not in atomistic individualism, but in bringing our desires into accord with our Creator’s design. We will not abandon anyone to the vagaries of human experience and desire. Let us be unequivocally clear: our Methodist churches are open to everyone.

The reminder of the Methodist ethicist Paul Ramsey is wise: “Let the church be the church and let the magistrate be the magistrate.”⁷ The Bible teaches us that the hope of the world does not lie in the realm of legislation or public morality, but in the advent of a new creation in Christ. We do not expect God to save the world through our human reason, our pursuit of justice, our struggle for human rights, or even by our best efforts to order the world for the better, important as they are. But while we live in the world, we submit to the God-given authority bestowed on a legitimate Government, for the ways of judgment. We will not project our hopes for public life upon the world by sheer force of will, or by drowning out other voices in the public square.

A Wesleyan voice in public affairs is not just a voice per se, but “action... in the form of community”.⁸ A genuinely Methodist response to developments surrounding 377A will neither consist primarily of

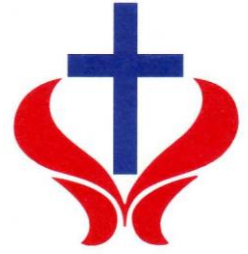
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public proclamations of our moral stand, nor merely in seeking to influence the Government to instantiate our moral vision or policy goals. The call for Christians to love God by loving our neighbour remains. Methodists must, through the Spirit's help, demonstrate a community of love to the world. It is our joy to remind all, regardless of sexual inclinations, of their sacred worth before God. It is also our duty to surround all persons with the love and support needed to live faithfully before the face of God.

The repeal of 377A and the safeguarding of marriage and other aspects of law, though vitally important and deserving of our attention and representations, are not, finally, our highest priorities. The world will not end if, or when, 377A is repealed. The God of our Christian faith is sovereign over the universe, and the arc of history bends inexorably towards his throne. We appeal for all Methodists to keep everyone involved in this discussion—the Government, members of Parliament, community stakeholders, advocacy groups, and all the inhabitants of this city—in prayer.

In all things, we are empowered by the love of God to manifest his love through our concrete acts for others. Expressing our concerns about 377A is one, but not the only, expression of our love for our neighbours. Let us not become weary in doing good. When the dust on this debate settles, may it be said of Methodists in Singapore that it was not coercion but rather the conviction of the holy love of God that illuminated our response to the repeal of 377A and that in our response we have reflected the God whose Nature and Name is love.

¹ <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ndr-2022-section-377a-repeal-constitution-1974206>

² <https://methodist.org.sg/what-s-happening/789-mcs-response-to-repeal-of-section-377a-penal-code>

³ <https://methodist.org.sg/images/mcs/pdf/methodistsg-social-principles-2020.pdf>

⁴ <https://nccs.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NCCS-Statemt-on-Repeal-of-S377A-20220821.pdf>. See also <https://nccs.org.sg/wp->

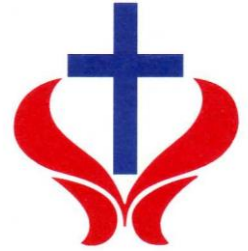
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[content/uploads/2022/03/NCCS-Response-to-Minister-K.-Shanmugams-parliamentary-speech-on-the-Court-of-Appeal-Ruling-on-Repeal-of-Section-377A-.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.sg/content/uploads/2022/03/NCCS-Response-to-Minister-K.-Shanmugams-parliamentary-speech-on-the-Court-of-Appeal-Ruling-on-Repeal-of-Section-377A-.pdf), or <https://nccs.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NCCS-Statement-Retain-377A.pdf>

⁵ See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

⁶ *Methodist Social Principles*, “The Sphere of Politics”, §1c.

⁷ Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1967), 157.

⁸ Ryan Nicholas Danker, “Early Methodist Societies as an Embodied Politic: Intentionality and Community as a Wesleyan Political Vision”, in *Exploring a Wesleyan Political Theology* (Nashville, TN: Wesley’s Foundery Books, 2020), 65.

Rev Dr Nathanael Goh is the Assistant Pastor at Sengkang Methodist Church. Rev Dr Daniel K S Koh is a Pastor of Barker Road Methodist Church overseeing Oasis BRMC Mission at Bukit Batok. Both writers received their PhD degrees in Theology and Religion from Durham University, UK and specialise in Christian ethics.

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(翻译版)

基督徒对于废除《刑事法典》第 377A 节条款的回应

李显龙总理在今年的国庆群众大会中公布了有关《刑事法典》第 377A 节条款将被废除的发表，男性之间的性行为将不再视为刑事罪行。李总理也强调政府将会维护现有一男一女的夫妻婚姻制度。政府将修改宪法保护婚姻现有的定义，不让它在法庭上受到挑战。¹

我们要重申新加坡卫理公会的立场并未改变，正如卫理公会《社会准则》² 和基督教全国教会理事会 (NCCS) 之前的声明所述。³

参与公共政策为促进公共利益

虽然我们对婚姻，教育和宗教自由的立场与其他有或无信仰背景的群体是相同的，但教会仍因为评论与法律有关的事项而受到批评。有的则指控基督徒怀有不良的企图，要将基督教的道德信念立为律法。也有的人诠释任何想将婚姻的传统观念立为宪法的举动为削弱刑事法典本身世俗的特征。不过事实并非如此，其中的关连性并非由一方促成。政府有意将婚姻的传统定义载入宪法内，不代表此决定是取决与宗教论据。

只有国会享有颁布法律的责任和权力。但是，有如其他人民和本地社体，基督徒以及教会也有同等的权力和责任来表达任何涉及我们国家和社会福利事项的关注。我们发表的文告是由一个基本原则为依据：就是要促进新加坡社会的公共利益。基督教神学在指导教会如何倡导政治论据引向提升社体利益有着翔实的传统。为此，基督教信仰并不提倡任何政治议程。反之，它促使我们体现出我们对生

¹ <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ndr-2022-section-377a-repeal-constitution-1974206>

² <https://methodist.org.sg/images/mcs/pdf/methodistsg-social-principles-2020.pdf>

³ 参 <https://nccs.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NCCS-Response-to-Minister-K.-Shanmugams-parliamentary-speech-on-the-Court-of-Appeal-Ruling-on-Repeal-of-Section-377A-.pdf>, or <https://nccs.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/NCCS-Statement-Retain-377A.pdf>

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活和未来的关心。我们敦促政府采取的保障措施不是因为我们要保全基督教的道德观念，而是为了社会的福利。

教会本身不相信个人主义，可从查尔斯·泰乐等社会学家所评论的“单子性质的个人主义”为列。根据这观点，人类繁荣的标准可用来判断法律和公共政策的合宜性。反之，我们相信人类繁荣的愿景与个人选择和利益不同，但也不否认个人意识的存在。每一个制度的存在，无论是婚姻、家庭或学校，都是为了提倡公共利益。我们之所以恳请政府考虑在这些领域采取保障措施是基于我们的道德信念和所带来的公共利益。

这个明显的区别是极为关键：我们相信针对公共利益的政策最终对所有人有益处；反之，并非每个以个人自由为本的选择都对公众有益。我们公开发表声明不是企图强制某个基督教道德观念。而是希望在这种积极的对话中分享彼此，基于共同的道德观点下，对公共利益的不同看见。我们的社会含有不同看法和所强调的论点，但很明确的是，按理，我们是无需认同于某一个宗教，才能赞同以上更广泛的关注事项。

作为基督徒，我们既不需要特权，也不需要一味附和。我们对宗教或世俗的宗派主义都不感兴趣。我们相信上帝赋予我们责任为我们的国家提倡公共利益和谋福祉。为了所有人的益处，我们致力参与公众对话。这种美善交往的愿景 – 一个真正共同的益处 – 是激励我们参与讨论影响公共利益之实质性本身的主因。

基督教的人类繁荣观可能与其他人所持有的理想或优先事项不一致。我们也不宣称自己是唯一知道什么是对社会有益的裁决者。教会即不是国家舞台上唯一的参与者，也不想如此。我们也不否决他人表达观点和想法的权利。然而，我们强烈反对任何将基督教信仰错误描述为不良歧视的企图。此外，我们还关心在我们分享政治信念的权利可能会被剥夺，因为我们的信念有些可能来自于基督教信仰（但也未必局限于此），因为被视为不该跨入政治领域的理念。正如我们卫理公会《社会准则》所言，“我们相信达成共识有助于促

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进社会的和平与秩序，提供健康环境，让各种意见，在公平和透明的情况下互相交流；然而，只有在人们获得足够和安全的渠道，可以进行有意义和诚实的参与讨论，而不必担心会遭到报复的情况下，才能达成共识作公平有效的决策。我们如何参与对话和公共论坛，即使一开始处是被反对的一方，也与我们所宣告有着同等的重要位子。

因此，我们肯定政府的呼吁要相互容忍和保持克制，避免极端的要求。我们也认同有必要保护我们能和睦共处的能力并为彼此提供援助。

废除《刑事法典》第 377A 节条款: 卫理信徒当如何回应

我们承认我们需要彼此扶持这一点与卫斯理运动所看重的“社会圣洁”息息相关。因为我们是在群体中追求和得着圣洁的生活，而不是要与社会隔离。我们的教会欢迎所有面临性取向挣扎的人。真实的自由不是在实现个人主义中得着，而是使我们的欲望更贴近我们创造主的设计。我们不会遗弃任何人于变幻莫测的欲望和经历中。我们要重申的是：卫理公会教会是开放给每一位的。

卫理公会伦理学家保罗·拉姆齐（Paul Ramsey）的提醒是明智的：“让教会成为教会，让法官成为法官。”⁴ 圣经教导我们这个世界的希望不是建立于立法或公共道德，而是在基督里将临的新创造。我们不是期望上帝拯救世界的计划是通过人类的理性、正义的追求、人权的斗争，甚至是我们人为的努力使世界稳定和美好，虽然这都是重要的。然而，我们活在这个世界中，我们顺服上帝赋予合法政府权威和判断的方式，作为审判的途径。我们不会通过强硬的手段或哗众取宠影响世界接受我们对公共生活的愿景。

卫理信徒针对公共事务不仅勇敢发声，更是赋予社会关怀行动。对于《刑事法典》第 377A 节条款相关的进展，一个卫理信徒诚恳的回应既不是单单宣告我们的道德立场，也不是仅仅尝试影响政府将

⁴ Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1967), 157.

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我们的道德异向或政治目标实现化。基督徒通过爱我们的邻舍来爱上帝的呼召依然存在。卫理信徒必须借着圣灵的帮助，为世界竖立一个充满爱的社区的楷模。无论哪类性取向，我们都很乐意帮助人们看到自己在上帝面前的神圣价值。我们也有责任以爱和援助来环绕所有人，让每个人在上帝面前忠实地生活。

关于废除第 377A 条文的课题、保护婚姻、和法律的其他方面虽然至关重要，值得我们关注和表态，但毕竟不是我们的优先事项。第 377A 条文何时废除，也不会是世界末日。上帝是全宇宙的至高者，历史的弧线坚定地向祂的宝座延申。这就是为什么我们呼吁所有卫理信徒诚心为每个参与讨论者祷告，无论是政府、国会议员、社区利益相关者、倡导团体和本国的所有居民。

在所有事情上，在我们对他人爱的具体表达中，我们都效仿及领受上帝的恩典和爱。让我们不要厌倦行善。我们对第 377A 条文课题的关切，是我们表达爱我们邻舍的方式之一。当这场辩论尘埃落定时，但愿新加坡卫理公会在针对可能废除第 377A 条文的课题上给人留下的印象不是我们应用强势的手段以达到目的，而是我们忠实回应上帝圣爱的信念。但愿那属性与名字是爱的上帝帮助我们借着爱我们的邻舍来爱祂。

撰写者：卫理公会吴俊强牧师（博士）和 许加顺牧师（博士）