

GENERAL SYNOD 2017

Covenant Council Report Proposer: The Very Revd Nigel Dunne

**Embargoed Against Delivery
Check Against Delivery**

Your Grace,

The work of the Covenant Council over the last year has largely focussed on two principal areas: issues that have arisen in facilitating the operation of the interchangeability of ministry between our two traditions and the monitoring and supporting of existing and new local Covenant partnerships and projects.

The first of these, facilitating interchangeability, has seen several issues arise which have raised questions as to the extent our ministries are interchangeable outside of direct ‘transfers’ of clergy from one polity to the other.

The intention of interchangeability from the beginning was to further the life and mission of the Church by the working closer together of our two traditions. We are trying to work out to what extent this may be of help, for example, in areas where clergy deployment is scattered across large areas. One situation might be where a Methodist minister is asked to celebrate the Eucharist in a Church of Ireland church when the rector is away. The question naturally arises, should he or she be permitted to use the Book of Common Prayer rite? We need to give such questions careful consideration and perhaps draw inspiration from existing arrangements such as those already well tested, for example within our relationship with the Porvoo Communion. If a presbyter from the Methodist Church in Ireland were to be invited to celebrate in a Church of Ireland church, would the same episcopal permissions be needed as for a visiting member of one of the Porvoo churches? And so on.

Other issues which have arisen include less weighty matters such as what exactly is to happen when the Methodist President or a former President takes part in a Church of Ireland ordination and vice versa? What are the protocols for our bishops to follow when taking part in the consecration of a new Methodist President as an ‘episcopal minister’?

There are also some technical questions regarding pensions which arise in both polities should a priest or minister transfer from one to another, either temporarily or permanently.

Other issues which need to be addressed, principally on the Methodist side, include the question of stationing which is an annual process in that tradition versus the board of nomination system in the Church of Ireland.

Because these matters have come to light, the joint working party of six people referred to in the report has been constituted to work alongside the already existing group of church leaders from both traditions, the latter of which only meets once or twice a year. Because these issues have arisen as the reality of the historic decision of this Synod and the Methodist Conference in 2014 to allow for interchangeability 'beds in' there is significant and careful work by all involved to be done in the coming year.

In our dealings with existing local Covenant partnerships and projects, and as possible new projects come to the fore, it has become clear that the failure by the Church of Ireland to formally ratify the guidelines and protocols for such situations has not helped in some situations when problems arise and are not strong enough when considering new initiatives. With this in mind, the Covenant Council will be revising the existing guidelines and protocols with a view to both Churches formally signing up to them in the near future.

In the meantime, the Covenant Council strongly urges the Church of Ireland to move forward as a matter of urgency with the drawing up of a full set of ecumenical canons and other relevant legislation to assist in building and strengthening existing and new ecumenical relationships on this island.

Your Grace, I have pleasure in proposing that the report of the Covenant Council be received.