

The Covenant Council – Report 2020

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

REPORT 2020

Headline

Over the past year, the work of the Council has focused on issues relating to the interchangeability of ministry. Alongside this the Council continues to monitor, advise and support the growing number and range of joint projects which are developing across Ireland.

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

Rt Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory (Acting Co-Chair)
Ms Elva Byrne
Very Rev Nigel Dunne
Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott
Rev Barry Forde
Rev Dr Peter Thompson

Methodist

Rev Dr Heather Morris (Co-Chair)
Rev Andrew Dougherty
Ms Gillian Kingston
Rev Dr Tom McKnight
Rev Dr Janet Unsworth (Secretary)

Presbyterian Observer

To be confirmed

The Role of the Covenant – Moving Forward

The Covenant Council continues to act as a vehicle and advocate for the furtherance of the Covenant agreed between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. Over this past year the Council has been examining the opportunities, as well as the challenges presented by the journey that the two denominations are making. It is clear that while the introduction of Interchangeability of Ministry in 2014 has allowed for a deepening of the mutual recognition of ministries, the Council needs to continue its detailed discussion of practicalities and protocols in regard to the implementation of Interchangeability. The main areas of discussion are:

- Presidency at the Eucharist
- The nature of personal *episcope*

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- The recognition of those who have been ordained in other contexts and who now serve within either denomination

The Council is looking at these issues alongside relevant bodies within each denomination and hopes to be in a position to report to both the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and the Conference of the Methodist Church in May / June 2021.

However, it is necessary that this work is accompanied by further implementation of the Covenant at every level. Thus, we continue to urge local churches to look again at the clauses of the Covenant and to engage with each other to consider how co-operation in mission can be enabled.

Local Covenant Partnerships and Projects

The Covenant Council continues to monitor those partnerships and projects that have been enabled by the Covenant. The Council is continuing to review the protocols and guidelines for partnership in use within the various projects. Following consultation with those working in local settings, revised guidance will be issued to facilitate the working out of the covenant in local situations.

In the Single Covenant Churches, at the Church on the Hill in Maghaberry and the Church of the Good Shepherd in Monkstown, the Covenant is being worked out in action. Shared buildings at Movilla Abbey and Primacy and the partnership between Longford Methodist Church and the Edgeworthstown Group of Parishes (Church of Ireland) continue to present opportunities for joint working in ministry and mission. In advance of the planned re-location of the Jordanstown Campus of Ulster University to Belfast city centre, the existing joint Chaplaincy team at Queen's University is working jointly with the Ulster University Jordanstown and Belfast Methodist Chaplain. Building on work during 2018-2019, this joint Chaplaincy team has continued to develop ministry in Belfast Metropolitan College and Stranmillis University College.

In May 2019 the staff and students of the Church of Ireland Theological Institute and Edgehill Theological College came together for their annual two-day Integrated Seminar which was hosted in CITI. Taking the theme of “Eschatology,” staff and students alike appreciated the opportunity for joint study and fellowship. The two colleges continue to look for opportunities for enhanced cooperation. Collaboration in teaching on some Queen’s University, Belfast, Open Learning Centre Courses, which contribute to the programmes of training for Ordained Local Ministry, step 1 of Methodist Ordination training and Methodist Local Preaching training, continues to provide a concrete example of the benefits of co-operation and to be an exciting development for the Covenant relationship.

Conversations continue in the exploration of mutual recognition of Diocesan Lay Readers and Methodist Local Preachers, and in regard to further covenant partnerships in Chaplaincy ventures in Higher Education, and in Prison and Healthcare Chaplaincy.

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Communications

Following the publication of some articles telling the stories of Covenant partnerships, the Council hopes to send out a questionnaire to provide an opportunity for further stories of cooperation and joint working to be shared. It is intended that the standalone website will be replaced by a Covenant Council page on the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland websites. These pages will provide a platform for general information, as well as access to key Covenant Council documents and resources.

The Covenant Council continues to encourage all dioceses and parishes to look for opportunities in which the Covenant might be of assistance for ministry and mission. Further, the Council continues to encourage all churches to consider celebrating the Covenant on or around the date of 24th May each year, this date being designated “John Wesley Day” within the Church of England.

Thanks

The Rt Rev Alan Abernethy announced his retirement following a period of absence due to illness. We wish to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to him for his years of service as Co-Chair. We have valued greatly his encouragement to engage with the Covenant within the local setting and at national level. We wish him well in his retirement.