

The Covenant Council – Report 2008

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

REPORT OF THE COVENANT COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES 2008

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

Rt Rev Harold Miller (co-Chair)	Rev Canon Adrian Empey
Mr David Brown	Rev Canon Virginia Kennerley
Ms Elva Byrne	Mr Cyril McElhinney
Very Rev Nigel Dunne (Secretary)	Dr Andrew Pierce
Rev Dr Maurice Elliott	Rev Peter Thompson

Methodist Church

Rev David Kerr (co-Chair)	Rev Brian Griffin
The Secretary of Conference	Ms Gillian Kingston
Mrs Sandra Dickson	Mr Philip Robinson
Rev Andrew Dougherty	Rev David Rock
Rev Geraldine Gracie	Rev Janet Unsworth

The Covenant Council met in two one-day sessions and one residential session during the year and its new Executive Committee met twice during the same period. It has continued to encourage the churches' engagement with the *Interim Statement on Episcopate and Interchangeability* presented at the General Synod and Conference last year. The Council also continues to encourage further engagement between the churches both in responding to issues raised and in providing guidance on matters which surface at joint events in local situations. The Council continues to develop reflective and liturgical material which may be of use for the planning of such events. Our work in the last year has also taken on an international dimension with the Council having played a major role in the re-awakening of Anglican/Methodist dialogue. This report will demonstrate how the Council has continued to work out the aims and objectives of the Covenant at theological, pastoral and practical levels.

Interim Statement on Episcopate and Interchangeability

Representatives of the Faith and Order and General Committees of the Methodist Church are engaging with the Statement whilst a group nominated by the Standing Committee of the Church of Ireland has been asked to formulate a response. The Council emphasises the importance of local engagement with the Interim Statement and reminds the churches that such consultation/reflection ought to be completed by 2009.

Visit of Primate and President

We were delighted to welcome the Primate and President to our January meeting and thank them for their guidance, particularly with regard to the reception of the Interim Statement and the need for joint local projects and contacts to be encouraged in a proactive way. The Council will devote much of its energy to this latter task in the coming year.

Joint Mission Events

A joint Mission Event centred on *Fresh Expressions*, organised by representatives of the mission committees of both churches, was held last November in Dublin. Despite a smaller attendance than anticipated, there was very positive feedback from those who attended and many valuable contacts were made. By the time this report is received by the churches, the joint committee will have organised a second and larger event for 26 April 2008 in Lurgan. The Rev Steve Croft will again be the key speaker at his event. The Council is grateful to Mrs Sandra Dickson and Mr Cyril McIlhinney for their input to this important area of engagement between our churches. We believe that cooperation in mission is one of the key ways in which the Covenant will be worked out in the future.

Restructuring of the Council

The Council spent some time, in the last year, assessing its own work and has now restructured itself with a view to achieving more between meetings and enabling more of its energy to be used in encouraging a working out of the Covenant at a local level. The Council now has an Executive Committee (2 Co-Chairs, Honorary Secretary and the ex-Honorary Secretary) and five Sub-Groups as follows: Communications, Facilitation, Administration and Finance, Theological Reflection, and Mission. Each sub-group has its own convenor and is free to co-opt additional members according to its needs.

Resources and Publications

The second booklet in our series, *Working Out the Covenant*, entitled *Guidelines for the Journey* addresses issues of best practice, particularly at joint events. The Council recommends that at least one copy be kept in every parish/congregation in order to ensure that issues of sensitivity in each tradition do not become points of friction or embarrassment when planning joint events.

Celebrating Wesleyan Heritage

Material on the Wesleyan hymns in the hymn books of both churches, kindly written by the Rev Dr Dudley A Levistone Cooney, and some resource material for sermons and reflections, written by Ms Gillian Kingston, are now on our website www.covenantcouncil.com. We are most grateful to both for their contributions.

Ecumenical Canons

The Council continues to seek a way forward in clarifying and/or amending Church of Ireland canon law to allow for the provisions of the Council's *Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Partnerships* to be fully implemented. A preliminary response from the Bishop of Cork to the

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draft canons, drawn up by the Council last year, was considered. Following the Bishop's comments on the need for such proposals to be placed within a wider framework of canon law governing all ecumenical work in the Church of Ireland, it was decided to contact the Commission for Christian Unity and Dialogue of the Church of Ireland outlining the need for such a framework and the history of the Council's interaction with this issue. It is now felt that the Council's proposal comes at an opportune time in the light of the Church of Ireland's current process of reviewing its Constitution. It is important that the Church of Ireland refers to the Methodist Manual of Laws when undertaking this review. With this in mind, the Council suggests that one Methodist and one Anglican be co-opted from the Council to the relevant Church of Ireland committee. (See motion below)

Chaplaincies

The Council greatly welcomes the possibility of further collaboration in ministry in hospital, prison and university chaplaincies, something both our churches have agreed to explore in article 6. B of the Covenant. We are of the opinion that the churches urgently need to establish a joint system and/or committee to oversee the nomination of lead chaplains in the new Northern Ireland Prison Service structures. We are greatly encouraged by ongoing discussions on student chaplaincy at Queens University, Belfast.

International Dialogue

Following the raising of concern about the current impasse in International Anglican/Methodist dialogue at the World Methodist Council meeting in Seoul, Korea in 2006 and some significant input from some Council members, a meeting of international representatives from both churches was held in London in November 2006. This meeting resulted in a new framework and agenda being agreed which, hopefully, will lead to the successful establishment of the proposed *Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission*. The Council takes considerable pride in the fact that it was the Irish churches that took the initiative in this process and that the meeting was attended by Ms Gillian Kingston and co-chaired by the Rt Rev Harold Miller. A report on this meeting is published as Appendix A to this report. We ask the General Synod and Conference to strongly welcome this development with enthusiasm (see motion below).

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Resolutions for Consideration by the General Synod 2008

- 1 That the Report of the Covenant Council be received.
- 2 That the General Synod recommends that there be co-opted one Methodist member and one Church of Ireland member from the Covenant Council to the relevant committee concerned with the establishment of ecumenical canons for the Church of Ireland.
- 3 That the General Synod continue to encourage Church of Ireland congregations to celebrate the Covenant relationship with neighbouring Methodist congregations on or around September 26th each year.
- 4 That the following be appointed as the Church of Ireland members of the Covenant Council:
Rt. Rev Harold Miller, Bishop of Down and Dromore (co-Chair)
Mr David Brown
Ms Elva Byrne
Very Rev Nigel Dunne (Secretary)
Rev. Dr Maurice Elliott
Rev. Canon Adrian Empey
Rev. Canon Virginia Kennerley
Mr Cyril McElhinney
Dr Andrew Pierce
Rev Peter Thompson.

APPENDIX A

**Anglican – Methodist International Relations
Report on the Anglican – Methodist Consultation
held on 30 October and 1 November 2007**

An Anglican – Methodist International Consultation took place at Wesley’s Chapel, London, between 30th October and 1st November, 2007, in order to discuss the next stages of ecumenical engagement between the Churches of the Anglican Communion and of the World Methodist Council. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Rev Professor Robert Gribben, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogue, on behalf of the World Methodist Council and Bishop Harold Miller, nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General, on behalf of the Anglican Communion. The meeting was held at Wesley’s Chapel by the kind invitation of its ministers (The Rev the Lord Griffiths, Superintendent, and the Rev Jennifer Potter).

Both Christian world communions maintain their commitment to the search for the full visible unity of the Church of Christ. In the eleven years since the publication of the Report of the Anglican – Methodist International Commission, *Sharing in Apostolic Communion*, which was received by the Seventeenth World Methodist Conference in 1996 and the Lambeth Conference in 1998, the context of Anglican – Methodist relations has developed considerably, including the signing of major covenants between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great Britain and between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland and of an agreement for Interim Eucharistic Sharing between The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church.

The Consultation submits the following recommendations to the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogue of the World Methodist Council and to the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council: that an **Anglican – Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission** be established with the following mandate.

Building on our common confession of the apostolic faith and our participation in God’s mission, the purpose of the Commission is to advance the visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists at every level as a contribution to the full visible unity of the Church of Christ.

We envisage the principal work of the Commission will be

To monitor dialogues and relationships between Anglican and Methodist Churches worldwide,

- Listening to the challenges and opportunities offered in the variety of contexts;¹

¹ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* stated the context in 1996 this way: “The concern that Christian believers be seen as one in Christ is urgent at this particular time. We are faced by growing secularism and the loss of social cohesion in the older Christian world. At the same

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- Gathering information and insights;
- Reviewing and evaluating agreements and theological statements; and
- Sharing the best practices learned;

To resource developing Anglican – Methodist relationships around the world, in particular by:

- engaging in theological reflection on the nature of the unity we seek; and,
- clarifying questions to be addressed;² and

To propose ways toward the full visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists, by

- suggesting guidelines and protocols; and
- offering models for the reconciliation of churches and ministries.³

Work Programme

Sharing in the Apostolic Communion made specific proposals for further work including the provision of guidelines.⁴ There have been subsequent developments around the world that need to be taken into account. In carrying out its tasks of monitoring developments, resourcing theological reflection, and proposing further steps, the Commission should give attention to, among others, the following five areas:

time other religious faiths are everywhere challenging Christianity with alternative visions of the human condition and destiny. Thus the present Anglican – Methodist Dialogue is more than Christians talking to themselves about internal ecclesiastical arrangements. The integrity of Christian witness is at stake.” It needs to be noted that the context in 2008 has developed significantly.

² An overview of the areas of doctrinal exploration and agreement to which attention has been given can be found in Part II of the *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* Report, paragraphs 14 –30.

³ Cf. *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, paragraph 5: “Confessing this oneness together, to the highest achievable degree, is crucial for our evangelization, and may mitigate our disunity which now detracts from the presentation of the Gospel of reconciliation. We seek to be obedient to the will of Christ both in our confession of God’s saving Word and in our witness to the One Lord of the Church and Saviour of the world.”

⁴ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, paragraph 95 indicated four areas for the development of guidelines: *The Mutual Recognition of Members, *Eucharistic Communion going beyond mutual hospitality, *Mutual recognition and the inter-changeability of ministries and rites, and *Structures of common decision-making. While these topics have informed the discussion of the Consultation, the areas have been reformulated by the Commission in a way which seems most appropriate to the present context.

Towards a single community of Christian disciples

Our goal is to take steps towards a common understanding and practice of Christian initiation, and its implications.

- We ask the Commission to note and explore the various concepts of membership within and between the Methodist and Anglican traditions. Is the concept of membership a valuable and theologically sound one?
- One presenting issue is the transferability of ‘members’ between our churches. Is the practice of insisting on further requirements when a ‘member’ of one church transfers to another justified?
- The Commission should clarify the different ways in which Baptism, Confirmation and admission to communicant life are understood and related to one another within and between the Methodist and Anglican traditions.

Eucharistic Sharing

We recommend that the Commission pursue the implications of the following three statements.

Definition

- By eucharistic sharing is understood mutual participation in the celebration of the Eucharist which goes beyond mutual eucharistic hospitality though falling short of that common Eucharist which will be achieved through full interchangeability of ordained ministers.

Rationale

- Eucharistic sharing reflects the presence of the two churches expressing their unity in a common faith, a common baptism, and a common mission. Thus they seek to demonstrate together that they are seeking that unity which is God’s will for the Church, and to strengthen and encourage each other on the way to that goal⁵.

Practice

- Such eucharistic fellowship will involve ministers of both churches jointly leading the worship of the people in Word and Sacrament, and standing together at the holy table but with one minister presiding.⁶

⁵ On the way to that God-given unity, there are other sacramental issues which will need to be addressed in the work of the Commission, e.g. the elements of Holy Communion, and the method of their reverent disposal, non-presbyteral presidency and the issue of “Open Communion”.

⁶ Cf. paragraph 17B (vi) of the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England, the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic and the

Common Rites

Recent decades have been marked by an ecumenical liturgical movement which has resulted in widespread agreement on the ‘shape’ and theological purpose of the rites of Sacraments and other forms of worship. In this context, we recommend that the Commission:

- monitor the development of common liturgical rites in our churches
- find ways of encouraging the development of common liturgical structures, texts and actions for the celebration of Baptism, Holy Communion and Ordination, which express in a variety of languages, music and other cultural forms our shared faith.
- note the different ways in which the persons leading liturgy, and the liturgies being used are authorised and promote understanding of these.

Steps towards a Common Ministry

In “*Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*”, the report concluded that “We believe the recognition of each other’s apostolicity as churches should include the recognition of the apostolicity of each other’s ministry and allow us to work towards the establishment of that ministry in its traditional threefold form, including, in ways which still need to be worked out, the historic episcopate.” (Paragraph 69) This is a task which we commend to the new Commission.

We recommend that particular attention be paid to the steps or stages that are required to establish a common ministry. Various terms have been used in discussing these issues. These include ‘acknowledging’, ‘affirming’, ‘recognising’ and ‘reconciling’. The Commission will need to recommend appropriate terms to describe the different stages of the overall process.

The first stage results in a mutual attesting to the authenticity of our Churches, ministries and sacraments. The second stage requires a more formal process leading to an interchangeable ordained ministry. The Commission will need to propose ways in which such interchangeability could be celebrated.

In this task, it will be important to recognise the variety of patterns of ministry across both the Churches of the World Methodist Council and of the Anglican Communion, which may lead to different solutions in different contexts, although such solutions must be coherent with one another.

Mutual consultation and common decision making

We recommend that the Commission

- explore structures of consultation and decision-making in both traditions
- examine the limits of diversity in the areas of faith, order, ethics and mission, and to what extent temporary anomalies may be borne

Evangelical Church in Germany, which established a number of protocols in this area for the purposes of that agreement.

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- advocate appropriate processes that will enable listening, discernment and reception on common issues, including the sharing of best practice and addressing issues that cause pain⁷
- offer models that enable the development of trust and collegiality, leading to common decision making, among those exercising episcopate and ministry both before and after interchangeability of ministries has been achieved.

For the sake of our growing unity and our common mission, each of these tasks needs to be considered at every level in both traditions.

The Consultation recommends the appointment of the Anglican – Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission with a membership of six Anglicans and six Methodists, who would be nominated by their appropriate sponsoring bodies, and which would include a Co-Chair to be nominated on each side; with the addition of a Co-Secretary from each of the sponsoring bodies, and two ecumenical consultants, nominations for which would be invited from the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Commission would need to have balance across the twelve nominated members of age, geographical and theological background, gender, theological and pastoral expertise, and lay and ordained membership.

The members of the Consultation held in London were:

World Methodist Council

The Rev Professor Robert Gribben, Uniting Church in Australia, Co-Chair
Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, United Methodist Church
Ms Gillian Kingston, Methodist Church in Ireland
The Rev Dr Douglas Mills, United Methodist Church
The Rev Peter Sulston, Methodist Church in Great Britain
The Rev Dr George Freeman, World Methodist Council, Co-Secretary

Anglican Communion

The Rt Rev Harold Miller, Church of Ireland, Anglican Co-Chair
The Rev Prebendary Paul Avis, Church of England
The Rt Rev Franklin Brookhart, The Episcopal Church
The Rev Lloyd Jones, Church in Wales (*unable to be present*)
The Rev Canon Gregory K Cameron, Anglican Communion Office, Co-Secretary

Consultant

The Rt Rev Rupert Hoare, Church of England

Administrative Support

The Rev Terrie Robinson, Anglican Communion Office

⁷ These might include issues in human sexuality and the impact of racism in the life of the Church.

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