

The Covenant Council – Report 2009

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

REPORT OF THE COVENANT COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES 2009

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Bishop of Meath and Kildare (Co-Chair)

Ms Elva Byrne

Very Rev Nigel Dunne (Secretary)

Rev Dr Maurice Elliott

Rev Barry Forde

Rev Virginia Kennerley

Mr Cyril McElhinney

Rev Peter Thompson

Methodist Church

Rev David Kerr (Co-Chair)

Rev Donald Ker (The Secretary of Conference)

Rev Andrew Dougherty

Rev Geraldine Gracie

Ms Gillian Kingston

Mr Philip Robinson

Rev David Rock

Rev Janet Unsworth

The Covenant Council met in two one-day sessions and one residential session during the year and its Executive Committee met once during the same period. It has continued to encourage the Churches' engagement with the interim statement on *Interchangeability of Ministry & Episcopate* presented at the General Synod and Conference in 2007 and awaits responses from both. In the last year the Council has begun to re-focus on supporting joint projects and events and on a better 'grounding' of the Covenant at local level, principally in seeking to re-awaken the Facilitators' system and the provision of further resource material for use at local level. It is hoped that as the fruits of such efforts come into effect, our traditions will continue to find ways of making future co-operation more possible through the introduction of the necessary legislation and procedures within their structures.

Interim Statement on *Interchangeability of Ministry & Episcopate*

The Council notes with some disappointment that neither the Church of Ireland nor the Methodist Church in Ireland are ready to respond to the interim statement this year. However, it is encouraging to note that both traditions are now engaging with the document and have indicated that responses will be forthcoming in 2010.

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Joint Projects and Events

The Council continues to receive reports on many of the joint projects whether they be once-off, regular or permanent in nature. We are particularly pleased to hear of ongoing discussions about future cooperation in the chaplaincies in Queen’s University, Belfast.

The Council also continues to receive information about possible areas of misunderstanding at joint events and reminds both Churches about the need for sensitivity in matters of orders of procession and the involvement of each others’ clergy and other ministers at occasions of particular importance to either tradition. The Council’s second booklet, *Working Out the Covenant* *guidelines for the JWO*

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Publications

The Council is pleased to announce the publication of the third booklet in its series designed to help members of both traditions to engage with each other in a more meaningful and sensitive way. The new booklet, *Working Out the Covenant: A Shared Spiritual Heritage*, edited by Ms Gillian Kingston, is designed to provide a wide range of liturgical resources common to both traditions. It is hoped that this booklet will foster a greater appreciation of the collects, hymns and prayers familiar to both traditions and provide a resource for those preparing for joint worship.

Ecumenical Canons

The Council continues to be concerned about the lack of canonical legislation in the Church of Ireland dealing with ecumenical issues. We feel that such legislation is essential in order to set out the necessary framework for future Local Ecumenical Partnerships and to address the liturgical, ministerial and practical issues which continue to arise in joint projects.

Membership

The Council bade farewell to the Rt Rev Harold Miller as Church of Ireland Co-Chair at its meeting in October 2008. Bishop Miller has now taken up the Anglican Co-Chair of the Anglican Methodist International Commission for Unity and Mission (AMICUM), the first meeting of which took place in January 2009. We wish him well in this task and thank him for his work on the Council. We welcomed the Most Rev Richard Clarke as the new Church of Ireland Co-Chair at our meeting in February 2009.

The following members resigned from the Council in the last year: Dr Andrew Pierce, Rev Adrian Empey, Mr David Brown, Ms Sandra Dixon and Rev Brian Griffin.

The Rev Barry Forde was appointed as a Church of Ireland member of the Council in October 2008.

Following a re-evaluation of its membership, the Council proposes that its membership be reduced as per the resolution below.

RESOLUTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL SYNOD 2009

- 1 The General Synod receives the Report of the Covenant Council
- 2 The General Synod recommends that there be co-opted one Methodist member and one Church of Ireland member from the Covenant Council to any relevant committees concerned with the establishment of ecumenical canons for the Church of Ireland.
- 3 The General Synod continues to encourage congregations to celebrate the Covenant relationship with neighbouring Methodist congregations on or around September 26 each year.
- 4 The General Synod agrees to the reduction of the membership of the Covenant Council to eight members from each tradition and appoints its representatives to the Covenant Council for the coming year as follows:
Church of Ireland
Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Bishop of Meath and Kildare (Co-Chair)
Ms Elva Byrne
Very Rev Nigel Dunne (Secretary)
Rev Dr Maurice Elliott
Rev Barry Forde
Rev Virginia Kennerley
Mr Cyril McElhinney
Rev Peter Thompson
- 5 The Synod also agrees to allow the Covenant Council to temporarily co-opt members of either tradition with special expertise relevant to the Council's work from time to time.