

The Covenant Council – Report 2010

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

REPORT OF THE COVENANT COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES 2010

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, Bishop of Meath & Kildare (Co-Chair)
Ms Elva Byrne
Very Rev Nigel Dunne
Rev Dr Maurice Elliott
Rev Barry Forde
Rev Canon Virginia Kennerley
Mr Cyril McElhinney
Rev Peter Thompson

Methodist Church

Rev Andrew J Dougherty (Secretary)
Rev Winston Graham (Co-Chair)
Rev Donald P Ker
Ms Gillian M Kingston
Dr Fergus O’Ferrall
Rev Janet M Unsworth

Facilitators’ Scheme

The Council has set up a working group to consider the issue of facilitation. For a number of reasons, the role of the Covenant Facilitators has not worked out as originally planned. Because we are in a different place now, the Council believes that at this stage it would be wise to use an existing and effective structure, namely that of the Church of Ireland Rural Deans, in consultation with local Methodist Ministers, as a means of gathering and sharing information about joint projects and other areas of co-operation between our two Churches. The Council is indebted to all appointed and unofficial Facilitators and appreciates their enthusiasm and ministry. They may be called upon again as the Covenant continues to impact at grass-root level.

Synods

While being aware of the full Agendas of Synods, the Council appeals to District Superintendents and Archbishops/Bishops to allow some space for the work of the Council to be considered and stories of joint projects to be heard. The Council believes this would help appraise wider audiences of the maturation in our covenant relationship and also highlight the work of the Council.

Covenant Service

As a further means of advancing relationships between both Churches, the Council encourages local ministers and priests to seriously consider sharing in a Covenant Service. Traditionally within the Methodist Church, this unique service takes place on

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the first Sunday of a new year, but it could be considered at other suitable occasions when the emphasis is on renewal. In addition to its regular use in Methodism, this liturgy is regarded and used by many other Christian communions.

Interchangeability of Ministries

The Council is encouraged that each Church appointed representatives to working groups with the task of considering the significant matter of Interchangeability of Ministries. Each group has met regularly, both separately and together. Issues have been identified and articulated, including each Church's understanding of unity, episcopate/episcopacy and ecclesiology; there is a sense of optimism that these issues are surmountable and a genuine goodwill and desire exists that both working groups will agree a fruitful outcome so that the time in discussion will have been well-spent.

Queen's University of Belfast

The Council is pleased to learn that there is on-going conversation with the relevant governance of both Churches regarding the potential development of a joint Chaplaincy at Queen's University, Belfast. Although this project is only at the embryonic stage and many hurdles have to be faced, the vision and courage shown by the main players is to be encouraged and supported. This has the potential of being a very significant 'flagship' in the future for working together.

Membership

We welcomed two new members to the Council at our meeting in October 2009: the Rev Winston Graham, former President of The Methodist Church in Ireland, as Co-Chair, and Dr Fergus O'Ferrall as a Methodist representative.

The Very Rev Nigel Dunne completed his term in office as Secretary of the Council and was replaced by the Rev Andrew Dougherty. The Council is indebted to Dean Dunne for his commitment and enthusiasm.

Rev Dr W David Rock and Mr Philip Robinson resigned from the Council in the New Year because of other commitments. Their successors will be appointed at the Methodist Conference in June.

APPENDIX A

RESOLUTION TO BE PROPOSED TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

The General Synod continues to encourage congregations to celebrate the Covenant relationship with neighbouring Methodist congregations on or around September 26 each year.

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