

The Covenant Council – Report 2011

THE COVENANT COUNCIL

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

REPORT OF THE COVENANT COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES 2011

MEMBERSHIP

Church of Ireland

The 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

Rev Peter Thompson

Mr Cyril McElhinney

Methodist

Rev Winston Graham (Co-Chair)

Rev Donald Ker

Rev Andrew Dougherty (Secretary)

Rev Janet Unsworth

Rev Louise Donald

Ms Gillian Kingston

Dr Fergus O'Ferrall

Mr Nigel Beattie

Facilitators' Scheme

After much thought and discussion, it was agreed that our facilitators should take on a reactive rather than a proactive role and act as representatives in a particular area rather than be fettered by District/Diocesan boundaries. The following areas were agreed: Cork & Kerry, Limerick & Tipperary, Galway, Sligo & Mayo, the Midlands, South East, Gorey, Dublin, Derry & Donegal, Enniskillen & the Lakelands, Armagh & Tyrone, Belfast & North East and Down & Dromore. The Council has recruited some new facilitators and most gaps have now been filled. At the end of each of our meetings news items are agreed and uploaded onto our website to keep facilitators and others informed of our work. (www.covenantcouncil.org)

Signing of the Covenant

2012 will mark the tenth anniversary since the signing of the Covenant and we are hoping it can be celebrated in a number of hubs. In particular, it will be celebrated as part of the Mission Meeting at the Methodist Conference in Enniskillen on Friday 8 June 2012. There is an open invitation to attend that evening.

Local Covenant Partnerships

During the year, the Council has endeavoured to actively support and encourage Covenant Partnerships that have shown signs of immense strain. Sadly, despite best efforts, some relationships have come to a natural end often because of misunderstanding. Notwithstanding difficulties, the Council would want to encourage

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those partnerships that have dissolved to keep the channels of communication open and to continue to exercise mutual respect for the sake of mission. Consequently, the Council offers the following recommendations to existing and future Covenant Partnerships.

Recommendations to Covenant Partnerships

1. When two congregations wish to move forward in a local covenant partnership they should consult and follow the guidelines provided by the Covenant Council. The Covenant Council should appoint Mentors to assist with establishing the Covenant partnership and to ensure that there is continuing adherence to the guidelines.
2. Any covenant arrangement must cover all aspects of the union of the two congregations and be reviewed periodically.
3. An essential element of any new covenant arrangement must be a forum.
4. As both the Church of Ireland and Methodist churches operate different mechanisms for guidance on child protection, each local covenant agreement should stipulate to which scheme it will adhere.
5. Care should be taken over joint initiatives, to ensure that both parties to any such agreement have the same understanding of all issues involved.

Interchangeability of Ministries

The Council has been encouraged to see the progress being made in furthering the proposals for establishing interchangeability of ministry between the two traditions. The Second Statement on the Interchangeability of Ministry and Episcopate to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and the Conference of Methodist Church in Ireland, included as Appendix B on page 367, is presented to both the General Synod and the Methodist Conference for acceptance by both churches and agreement that the proposals will be pursued.

Queen's University of Belfast

The Council has been regularly updated regarding this project and is encouraged by the admirable progress made. The main players are very close to creating a Local Covenant Partnership, having consulted with and received the imprimatur of all stakeholders. Both chaplains are regularly sharing in ministry and serving as co-chaplains in the Church of Ireland, Church of the Resurrection. They have even given the common space of church and cafe, that sits between the two chaplaincies, a new identity that is all about connections and bringing different networks together. They have also given it a new name *The Hub* as a visible sign of their present endeavours and future goal.

Meeting with Church Leaders

The Council welcomed the Most Rev Alan Harper, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland and Metropolitan and the Rev Paul Kingston, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, along with other distinguished guests, to our January 2011 meeting which was held in Edgehill Theological College, Belfast. We were updated about the joint Queen's University Chaplaincy Project and considered a working paper on the issue of interchangeability of ministries. The wisdom, encouragement and support offered by both church leaders and other guests, was much appreciated.

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Membership

It was agreed to invite two Student Observers to the Council, one nominated by Edgehill Theological College and the other by the Church of Ireland Theological Institute (CITI), which are to be renewed after a twelve month period. Mr Paul Maxwell was nominated by Edgehill and Mr John Godfrey was nominated by CITI. We have also welcomed Rev Denis Campbell as an Observer from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

APPENDIX A

RESOLUTIONS TO BE PROPOSED TO THE GENERAL SYNOD

1. That the report of the Covenant Council be received.
2. That the General Synod receives the *Second Statement on the Interchangeability of Ministry and Episcopate (Book of Reports 2011 page 367)* and refers it to the Standing Committee for further implementation.
3. The General Synod re-appoints its representatives to the Covenant Council for the coming year.

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

APPENDIX B

The Covenant Council

Second Statement on the Interchangeability of Ministry and Episcopate to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and the Conference of Methodist Church in Ireland

I. Introduction

The Council welcomes the support of the working groups of both churches for proposals to bring about the full interchangeability of ministry between our traditions. We believe the joint report and the Agreed Principles tabled at Conference and Synod in 2010 alongside the warm reception of our report to both bodies means that our most urgent task is to help our churches bring about full interchangeability of ministry within the next few years. This is another vital step towards that unity which is both God's will and gift to his people and the end to which the Covenant aspires. The mission of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church will be greatly strengthened by reaching this important point on our journey together.

Whilst there has now been substantial agreement on key theological and ecclesiological issues, those who prepared the Agreed Principles also noted that among the unresolved issues was 'the manner in which personal *episcopate* is, or could be, manifested in both churches without compromising the best tradition of either as well as some practical matters.'

II. Office and Function of Bishops and Presidents

The same Agreed Principles were centred on the close relationship between office and function in the case of Church of Ireland Bishops and the Presidents/Past Presidents of the Methodist Church. The Council suggests that the following be considered for agreement in this key area:

That, from an agreed future date: (The Council suggests 2014 at the latest)

- 1.a. the Church of Ireland accept that the Methodist President and his/her predecessors and successors give personal expression to the historic episcopate as embodied in the Methodist Conference.
- b. the Methodist Church in Ireland embrace the title 'episcopal minister' as descriptive of the role and function of the Methodist President and his/her predecessors and successors and Church of Ireland bishops and Archbishops. The term 'episcopal minister' expresses the role of personal oversight currently exercised by the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland in a manner parallel to that in which the Church of Ireland describes the role of personal oversight exercised by a bishop.
2. a. the Methodist President and at least one former Methodist President participate fully in the ordinations/consecrations of Church of Ireland bishops
- b. at least two Church of Ireland bishops participate fully in the Installations of the Methodist President.

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- c. after both the above have taken place, Methodist Presidents or former Presidents and Church of Ireland Bishops should participate fully in the ordination of presbyters/priests in either church.
3. both churches would be prepared to live with ‘a period of anomaly’ (just as the Church of South India did in the past) where those ordained as priests/presbyters and consecrated/installed as bishops, archbishops and Presidents before the mutual participation of both churches in each others’ consecrations be fully recognised and accepted within both churches.
4. a. both churches continue to explore the full meaning of the diaconal order/diaconal ministry and commit to working together to further explore and strengthen its role and function.
 - b. the Church of Ireland accepts that the diaconal ministry can be discerned in a variety of forms, including that of Probationers within the Methodist Church in Ireland.

III. Liturgy - Ordination, Consecration, Installation

The Agreed Principles have already stated that our churches ‘affirm the collegial participation of at least three persons, who express the office and function of Episcopal ministry, in the act of Installation of a new President and in the consecration of a Bishop and the communal affirmation of the action by the People of God.’ This is already embodied in the Church of Ireland Ordinal. The Methodist liturgy (or the regulations governing it) for the Installation of a President may need to be amended to ensure that this is made a mandatory requirement.

The Agreed Principles have already noted that ‘common features of the act of Installation/consecration in the two Churches are prayer, the laying on of hands, the presentation of the Bible and vesting’. The invocation of the Holy Spirit is of course also essential. We recommend that just as the Church of Ireland Ordinal uses the phrase ‘for the office and work of a bishop/archbishop’ the Methodist Installation of a President would include something like ‘graciously behold this your servant now called to the sacred office of episcopal ministry and as President of the Conference’.

IV. Liturgy - Regulation

The Church of Ireland may need to amend some of its Constitution regarding who may use Church of Ireland rites in Church of Ireland churches. It may also need to look at regulations governing consecrations to allow the first time participation of a Methodist President. This will not arise if a Church of Ireland bishop participates in the Installation of a President first.

V. Authority

It is proposed that both churches will continue to operate their own ecclesiastical polities post-interchangeability for the time being. However, should a presbyter/priest from either polity take up a post in the other church, he/she will be deemed to be under the authority and regulations of that church.

V. Church Polity and Governance Issues

There are many church polity and governance issues which will have to be addressed, some of which are beyond the remit of the Covenant Council:

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1. Disciplinary Policies and Procedures

Provision will need to be made for the mutual recognition of disciplinary policies and procedures in both polities.

2. Appointments

It is assumed that both churches will continue to operate their regulations for the appointment of presbyters/priests through the Stationing Committee, Boards of Nomination, Bishops' appointments etc. However some thought needs to be given to how clergy might be affected when it comes to moving from one church to the other and back again. Our concern here is that there needs to be a seamless movement from one system to the other.

3. Finance

Cognisance would need to be taken of differences between clergy stipends and allowances in the two polities. Both churches may have to amend their clergy pension schemes to allow those working in the other church to continue making payments to the scheme in which they began.