

51. Responding to an Anglican-Methodist Covenant

1. The Joint Implementation Commission for the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church for 2008-13 (JIC2) has begun its work. The early discussions have been enriched by the presence of representatives of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales, and by one of the eight Methodist representatives being from Wales and another from Scotland. This enlarged membership plus the presence of a representative of the United Reformed Church creates a new context for the Commission's work, and promises to offer a lot of wider ecumenical developments.
2. JIC2 has already begun its work on the implications for our common mission of our understanding of membership. It has also discussed what processes and steps might be appropriate in making progress from the mutual affirmation of churches, ministries and sacraments in the Covenant towards the interchangeability of ministries.
3. JIC2 is also keen to address the need noted in the Methodist Council's report to the 2008 Conference about the appointment of this second phase of the JIC's work that "some Methodists feel that the implementation of the Covenant is yet to have much impact on their worship, mission or ministry". To this end, it has supported the merging of the work of the Methodist Committee for Local Ecumenical Development (CLED) with that of the Church of

England's Local Unity Panel (LUP) to form a Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), which also has representatives of the United Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church. This merger was one of the recommendations resulting from the review of ecumenical work undertaken as part of the *Team Focus* process. It was felt that a panel like MAPUM would be better placed to respond to emerging themes in local ecumenism as well as being able to offer guidance and advice to local situations. The panel is a clear expression of the Covenant relationship which exists between the Methodist Church and the Church of England. Participation by representatives from the United Reformed Church and the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, along with membership drawn from across the Connexion, ensures that the panel retains a wide overview of ecumenical work and development. This in turn enhances the bilateral Covenant out of which the new panel has emerged.

4. The abolition of CLED requires some Standing Order changes and these appear below. The Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 requires that some body or office holder has the authority to grant consent for the making or amending of any sharing agreement which is made under the provision of the 1969 Act. It is proposed that rather than burden the new panel with this function the responsibility should

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lie with the Ecumenical Officer who shall discharge the functions of the Committee in this respect.

Recommendations concerning the study of *Embracing the Covenant*.

5. The Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) (2003-8) for an Anglican-Methodist Covenant published its quinquennial report in June 2008, entitled *Embracing the Covenant*. Both the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England commended the report for study, action and response in their churches.
 6. The General Synod on 7th July 2008 specifically requested “that Bishops’ Councils consider the report and refer it for study by other appropriate bodies in the dioceses and that responses be sent to the Council for Christian Unity by 31 December 2009”. The Methodist Conference on 8th July 2008 requested “that the Methodist Council consider the report and ensure that it is studied in appropriate ways in Districts, Circuits and Local Churches, and that responses be sent to the Assistant Secretary of the Conference by 31st December 2009”.
 7. The Methodist Council has approved some recommendations about how key areas of the report might be considered by the Methodist Council itself and also studied in other connexional bodies and throughout the Connexion.
 8. It is proposed that the **Methodist Council** undertakes a detailed consideration of the Report at its meeting in September 2009. This consideration will be resourced by the Ecumenical Officer and the Methodist Co-Chair of the JIC. The following Chapters will require particular attention from the Council.
 9. Chapter 2, *The Unity we have and the Unity we seek*, deals with something which is fundamental to the rest of the report. In this chapter the JIC laid out its vision of “full visible unity/communion”. It is important to note that this is not a scheme for structural unity, for two churches becoming one, but is a pilgrimage or journey where by being faithful to the Spirit the outcome should be “full visible communion”. To achieve this, the JIC believed, would be an enormous step forward for ecumenism.
 10. Chapter 4 *How can Decision-making be shared?* contains several recommendations about:
 - ∞ Boundaries (section 6.1, pp. 74-75);
 - ∞ Deployment of clergy/ministers (6.2, pp. 75-76);
 - ∞ Mission Initiatives (6.3, p. 77);
 - ∞ Training for Ministry (6.4, p. 79);
 - ∞ Public Affairs (6.5 p. 80).
- These matters are properly the concern of the Methodist Council to consider and advise upon, referring where appropriate to relevant connexional bodies such as the

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Connexional Leaders' Forum and the Stationing Committee.

The Comparative Table of the Churches' Structures shows how authority for different areas of our life is distributed in our two churches (pp. 56-73).

11. In Chapter 5, *Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant*, the JIC was seeking to be true to its mandate. The chapter makes clear that under an Anglican-Methodist Covenant the JIC was expected to continue to explore how oversight is expressed in our churches and how episkope, including personal episkope (or 'episcopacy') is expressed. The Conference of 2007 encouraged the JIC to offer some specific proposals in its quinquennial report. In responding with the proposals in chapter 5 the JIC recognised that both churches have difficult issues to face regarding bishops: the Church of England in ordaining women to the episcopate and the Methodist Church in having bishops at all. In each church there are those who do not wish to see such changes. The JIC urged all, however, to consider carefully its proposals. They clearly have enormous implications for the Methodist Church, but are offered faithfully in the search for that fuller visible communion between the two churches which is an important stage on the ecumenical pilgrimage.
12. So far as **other connexional bodies** are concerned, it would be very helpful if they responded in areas relevant to their work, particularly with reference to the recommendations in chapter 4 about joint decision-making. Such bodies might include, for example, the Chairs' Meeting, the Stationing Committee, the newly formed Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission, the Fresh Ways Working Group.
13. The Faith and Order Committee is already in the process of making a considered response. The Law and Polity Committee is being asked to respond with particular reference to the matters of polity in chapters 4 and 5 of the report.
14. So far as ensuring study and response **throughout the Connexion** are concerned, the Connexional Team will shortly initiate a connexional consultation in order to gain observations on and reactions to the report. In order to enable this to happen the Council has invited the Scotland and Wales Synods, as well as six other synods (including an Island District) to respond. Ten to twelve Circuits from different areas are also being asked to respond. A further ten to twelve Superintendents will be invited to suggest a local church from their Circuit to take part in this exercise.
15. In order to facilitate this connexional consultation, questions for discussion in the various groups have been formulated and individual chapters of the report have been made available on the Covenant website.

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16. As well as the structured consultation exercise outlined above, any interested individual or group is invited to submit comments and responses.
17. It is important to note that as well as the quinquennial report Embracing

the Covenant (2008) the two previous reports of the JIC [*In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005) and *Living God's Covenant* (2007)] are also available electronically on the web site.

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RESOLUTIONS

51/1 The Conference received the report.

51/2 The Conference amended Standing Orders as follows:

334 Local Ecumenical Development. (1) The Methodist Council shall annually appoint **representatives to the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission, or such successor ecumenical body as the Council shall from time to time designate**, a Committee for Local Ecumenical Development to exercise the functions specified in this Standing Order. **They shall include a member of the Connexional Team, designated as the ecumenical officer of the Methodist Church.**

(2) The committee shall consist of:

- (i) the ecumenical officer of the Methodist Church, who shall be the secretary for local ecumenical development;
- (ii) the Secretary of the Conference;
- (iii) ~~deleted~~
- (iv) two representatives of the Faith and Order Committee;
- (v) two other members of the Connexional Team, one of whom shall have knowledge of legal and property matters;
- (vi) one district Chair;
- (vii) five other persons, of whom two shall be ministers and of whom one shall be the convener.

(3)[see below]

(4)**(2)** The **Methodist representatives to the committee Panel** shall act on behalf of the Methodist Council in performing the following functions:

- (i) keeping under review the development of local ecumenical relationships in Britain and advising the Connexional Team accordingly;
- (ii) providing guidelines for use of the Synods in designating local ecumenical partnerships and other local schemes involving constitutions for shared churches, and monitoring their operation, and through the convener **ecumenical officer**, receiving and scrutinizing all proposals for new schemes;
- (iii) making recommendations to the Conference on applications for the designation of ecumenical areas under schemes involving partnership at circuit level, and on proposals to give or revoke a direction under Standing Order 512, as to all of which the committee shall first obtain the report of the district Policy Committee;
- (iv) offering advice in new or difficult situations;
- (v) compiling information for the committee's report to the Conference on the above matters, including a list of all new schemes approved by the Synods under Standing

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~~Order 412 (2) and all sharing agreements authorised by the committee;~~

~~(vi) [deleted]~~

~~(vii) [deleted]~~

~~(viii) acting in liaison with the Group for Local Unity and similar ecumenical bodies in Great Britain together~~

(3) By virtue of section 1, sub-sections (4) and (10), of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act, 1969, the consent of the committee **Ecumenical Officer** shall be required for the making or amendment of any sharing agreement under that Act or any legislation amending or replacing it. Where any such agreement requires consent to its termination to be given on behalf of the Church the committee **Ecumenical Officer** is authorised to give such consent.

(4) The Ecumenical Officer shall be responsible for the making of recommendations to the Conference on applications for the designation of ecumenical areas under schemes involving partnership at circuit level, and on proposals to give or revoke a direction under Standing Order 512 and 611, as to all of which the Ecumenical Officer shall first obtain the report of the district Policy Committee.

(5) The Ecumenical Officer shall compile a list of all new schemes approved by the Synods under Standing Order 412 (2) and of all sharing agreements authorised by him or her, and shall ensure that they are reported to the Conference.

412(3) After the Synod has given its approval its decision shall be reported to the connexional Committee for Local Ecumenical Development **ecumenical officer** and a copy of the constitution shall be sent to **him or her** the convener of that committee.

434(3) The [district Policy] committee shall:

(i) ~~represent and assist the connexional Committee for Local Ecumenical Development in the furtherance of ecumenical understanding in all areas of the Church's activity; promote, develop and co-ordinate ecumenical work within the Circuits; report annually, or as required, to the connexional committee~~ **ecumenical officer**

...

(iv) be responsible for making recommendations to the connexional Committee for Local Ecumenical Development **ecumenical officer** on applications for sharing agreements under the terms of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969, or any legislation amending or replacing that Act;

(v) be responsible for recommending to the Synod the designation of local ecumenical partnerships and the approval of local constitutions, but only after submitting each such constitution to the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development **ecumenical officer**

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and the Faith and Order Committee and taking into account the **their** advice of those committees;

(vi) consider and report to ~~the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development~~ **ecumenical officer** on all applications for the designation of ecumenical areas;

(vii) consider and report to the Synod or the ~~Committee for Local Ecumenical Development~~ **ecumenical officer**, as appropriate, on all proposals for the issue or revocation of directions under Standing Orders 512 or 611.