

Draft Response of the Faith and Order Committee to the JIC Report *The Challenge of the Covenant*

The Faith and Order Committee offers a comprehensive response to the JIC long report, and the main points are highlighted in the Executive Summary (paragraphs 4 – 11). For information, the full report can be downloaded at www.anglican-methodist.org.uk.

The Faith and Order Committee affirms that significant progress has been made towards achieving visible unity in the first ten years of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, whilst noting that some difficult obstacles are still to be overcome. The 'asymmetry' between Anglicans and Methodists concerning their polity, ecclesial structures and attitudes to particular aspects of the Covenant, provides a fundamental challenge in constructively progressing many of the JIC proposals. The Faith and Order Committee therefore proposes that a new ecumenical method is required for the next stage of the Covenant, and that the joint development of an ecumenical vision (and supporting theology) of the Church and its various ministries is needed before substantial progress can be made on the remaining issues.

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Response of the Faith and Order Committee to *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness, the Second Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England*

Preamble

1. The Faith and Order Committee is pleased to respond to the Joint Implementation Commission's Second Quinquennial Report, *The Challenge of the Covenant* (hereafter 'the report'), and hopes its constructive comments will assist the JIC and its successors in preparing for the next phase of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.
2. 'The report covers in detail where we are in our bilateral ecumenical journey after 10 years in Covenant, recognising that, for some, progress is painfully slow. Clearly some issues which were difficult to resolve over 40 years ago are no easier now, and sometimes seem more difficult [...] Thus there are chapters giving detailed consideration of how we might move into deeper communion, what united oversight might entail, how we might move towards more visible unity and how we should improve our joint consultation and decision-making' (Foreword).
3. In each section below, references in parentheses (§) refer to numbered paragraphs in the corresponding chapter of the report. This response identifies key issues in each chapter but does not attempt to provide an exhaustive commentary on the report; its main findings are outlined below in the executive summary.

Executive Summary

4. Much has been achieved in the first ten years of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, and the report rightly draws attention to the significant progress that has been made in this period towards implementing the Covenant and removing the obstacles to visible unity. The pace of development has inevitably slowed as the remaining obstacles are found to be those that are most difficult to overcome.
5. In presenting its recommendations, the report summarises a significant amount of work undertaken by the JIC and others in the past ten years and challenges the Church of England and the Methodist Church to give greater priority to their shared commitments under the terms of the Covenant.
6. The Faith and Order Committee affirms and celebrates the real progress made towards implementing the Covenant, as extensively recorded in the report, and endorses the report's analysis of the specific challenges that the Covenant simultaneously faces and poses in the next phase of its implementation.
7. Probably the most significant challenges facing the implementation of the Covenant in the next phase all stem from what the report calls the 'asymmetry' between Anglicans and Methodists concerning their polity, ecclesial structures and attitudes to particular aspects of the Covenant. That the term 'asymmetry' occurs no fewer than 15 times in the report (but not once in previous JIC reports) suggests that there is now a greater degree of awareness

concerning the nature of the problems that so far have prevented the interchangeability of Anglican and Methodist ministries as one of the stated priorities of the Covenant.

8. The Faith and Order Committee believes that the 'asymmetry' identified in the report reveals the need for a new ecumenical method in the next phase of the Covenant. The present method of seeking to combine elements of Anglican and Methodist polity and structures has exhausted the potential for convergence without any realistic prospect of achieving a complete integration. Further progress towards the interchangeability of ministry will require the development of an ecumenical vision (and supporting theology) of the Church and its various ministries.
9. Subject to the direction of the Conference, the Faith and Order Committee is willing to contribute to the theological work that is required in the next phase of the Covenant, though its present resources are already fully committed to its existing schedule of work. Such work should be undertaken jointly with Anglicans, and the Committee has positive experience of joint working groups with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission. However, formal responsibility for commissioning and directing such work as part of the implementation of the Covenant is beyond the Faith and Order Committee's current terms of reference.
10. Finally, the report's recommendations, as set out in the last chapter 'Let it be according to your will', raise a number of specific questions from a Faith and Order perspective. In particular, the recommendations lack theological precision and are therefore open to different interpretations. Thus it is unclear: (a) what precisely the Methodist Conference and the General Synod are being asked to affirm; and (b) what would be the practical consequences of these affirmations for the implementation of the Covenant.
11. These observations of the Faith and Order Committee have implications for the JIC's report to the Methodist Conference and the Church of England's General Synod in 2014. In particular, the JIC should consider whether its recommendations in that report might usefully be revised and their intended practical implications clearly stated.

Behold the Servants of the Lord: Assessing Ten Years of Living in Covenant

12. If the 'litmus test of progress' is the interchangeability of ordained ministries, then the lack of significant developments in this area will be regarded as disappointing (§35). Nevertheless, in this opening chapter, the JIC traces the progress made in the past ten years toward the implementation of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, paying attention to some of the obstacles that have proved more resistant to resolution than many had envisaged when the Covenant was signed in 2003.
13. In 2003, the Conference and General Synod agreed that the JIC should 'give priority in the next phase of our relationship to the question of the interchangeability of diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries, on the basis of the theological agreement set out in the [Common Statement of the formal conversations]' (§3). This priority now appears optimistic in light of the 'cultural, theological and ecclesiological differences that still divide us as well as the institutional inertia that makes progress so slow' (§6).
14. In considering the appropriate focus of work in the next phase of the Covenant, the JIC asks 'Should this focus be less on the theory and more on the promotion of and advocacy for the Covenant?' (§34). From a Faith and Order perspective, any such promotion and advocacy is misconceived unless the underlying 'theory' (theology?) is also in place. Any shift of focus in the next phase of the Covenant should not be at the expense of sustained work to put in place

the necessary theological foundations that alone provide the secure basis for practical developments.

15. The 'theological agreement' registered in the Common Statement has not proved to be a sufficient basis for further progress towards the interchangeability of ministry. Overall, the implementation of the Covenant has not been well served by the tendency of the Common Statement to register the most optimistic interpretation of 'agreement' and correspondingly to underestimate differences. In particular, the 'agreement in principle' (a formula open to interpretation) concerning episcopacy has not produced substantive progress towards reconciling ministries of oversight in the two churches.
16. In outlining a practical strategy for the next phase, 'The JIC sees two broad categories of challenge ahead for our churches under the Covenant' (§38): firstly, 'to make incremental steps towards recognising and accepting each other and each others' ministries'; secondly, 'to build joint structures of oversight and decision making in order better to discern and resource joint mission and to shape our life and witness together'.
17. In 2003, the Conference and General Synod set as a priority under the Covenant 'the question of interchangeability' of ministry. Now, it seems the challenge is still the basic one of mutual 'recognition' and 'acceptance'. But what meaning does the JIC attach to these terms? Under the mutual affirmations of the Common Statement, the Church of England and the Methodist Church already recognise (and presumably then accept) each other as true churches. What further recognition and acceptance is envisaged as being necessary in the next phase of the Covenant?
18. Developing and then operating 'joint structures of oversight' would presumably require a common understanding of the nature and exercise of oversight in the Church, as well as a high degree of mutual commitment that would signify an advanced stage of the Covenant. At present, it is unclear that there is sufficient convergence in understanding the nature and exercise of oversight. Whether there is sufficient mutual commitment is for the Conference and General Synod to consider.
19. 'The JIC recognises that the development of structures of joint working, decision making and oversight [...] needs to happen gradually, but overall progress has been slow in the last ten years, with little sense of urgency' (§7). The Conference and General Synod may feel this is an unfair observation since a gradual process is not inconsistent with a sense of urgency, even when progress is slow. Equally, it is for these bodies to consider whether 'our churches display a distinct inertia' (§9).
20. The Faith and Order Committee agrees with the JIC that 'the opportunities for shared ministry within current ecclesiological and legal frameworks [are] significant' (§21). Promotion and advocacy of the Covenant in the next phase may well lead to a significant increase in *shared* ministry and mission. As the JIC accepts, however, this falls short of the *joint* mission and ministry that signifies an ecumenical partnership on the way to visible unity.
21. Although the Methodist Church has made no progress in considering episcopacy in the past five years, it is not the case that 'the Methodist Church has resisted considering this issue' (§28). The Faith and Order Committee, on behalf of the Conference, has commented extensively on proposals for a president-bishop. Furthermore, it is incorrect to refer to 'the resistance of Methodism to the historic episcopate'. The Methodist Church is neither theologically nor ideologically opposed to the historic episcopate or to the possibility of introducing an episcopal order of ministry. The reasons for the lack of progress in this area are probably more complex than those cited in the report.

22. The JIC refers to ‘cultural, practical and ecclesiological’ obstacles to unity (§39). These are not necessarily distinct categories since theological differences become embodied in (and reflect) practices, memories and culture. The relationship between theology, practice and culture is thus neither straightforward nor linear, as demonstrated in the complex history of relations between Anglicans and Methodists in Britain. A significant number of cultural, practical and theological obstacles to unity stem from differences between Anglicans and Methodists concerning ordained ministry. It will be necessary in the next phase of the Covenant to develop an ecumenical theology of ministry.

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

23. This largely descriptive chapter considers ‘joint consultation, collaboration and decision making at national and connexional level’, makes ‘some recommendations about how this work might be encouraged further’, and challenges the two churches ‘to do more to make joint decision making a reality’ (§4).
24. The report summarises under various headings the large body of evidence gathered by the JIC illustrating the ways in which joint consultation and collaboration is now a regular occurrence between Anglicans and Methodists at a national and connexional level: Unity in Mission; Fresh Expressions; Faith and Order; Public Issues and Affairs; Theological Education; Education; Research and Statistics; Ethical Investment; Pensions and Retirement Housing for Ministers/Clergy; Safeguarding.
25. The JIC makes ‘three specific recommendations’: (1) ‘that working with counterparts in the Covenant partner should be written into staff job descriptions’; (2) ‘that the terms of reference of committees should be amended to include consulting and possibly collaborating with the appropriate body in our Covenant partner’; (3) ‘that in the work of boards, committees and panels, mutual observership should be the norm, since it is the most effective and efficient way of consulting with each other’ (§61).
26. The Faith and Order Committee does not intend to comment on the recommendations in this chapter since there are no implications for the Faith and Order of the Methodist Church.

Covenant Partnership in Extended Areas

27. This chapter reports on developments in Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas (CPEA) and addresses the issues and concerns previously raised by the Faith and Order Committee (§3) in its ‘Response to *Moving Forward in Covenant*’.
28. The report quotes from a response of the Inter-Anglican Standing Committee for Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO), which notes that among the ‘range of conditions and safeguards’ relating to CPEA is ‘the reaffirmation that it remains the norm that an episcopally-ordained priest or bishop preside at the Eucharist’ (§1; Reference 2). While this is the norm from the perspective of the Church of England, it is not the norm from the perspective of the Methodist Church. How can the provision for a Methodist presbyter to preside at the Eucharist in the context of a CPEA be said to preserve the Anglican norm for Eucharistic presidency? The Faith and Order Committee agrees with the JIC that ‘the legal basis of and the arrangements for sharing worship and ministry in the extended area needs particular attention, in order to affirm the ecclesial identity of both the Church of England and the Methodist Church’ (§6).
29. In theory, the development of CPEA ‘is built upon the sharing of ministry rather than interchangeability’ (§49). However, the concomitant distinction in CPEA between the

celebration of the Eucharist according to Anglican and Methodist usage will be lost on many participants, who will tend to assume that CPEA provide for an interchangeable ministry. As the Faith and Order Committee said in its response to *Moving Forward in Covenant*, 'it is conceivable that in practice the fairly subtle theological difference between "shared ministry" and "interchangeable ministry" would become blurred' in CPEA. Ironically, in providing for a greater degree of *shared* ministry, CPEA may have the unintended consequence of removing the sense of urgency for the reconciliation of ministries necessary for the *interchangeability* of ministry.

30. Addressing concerns raised by the Faith and Order Committee, the JIC acknowledges the 'asymmetry' in the location of decision-making in the Church of England and the Methodist Church (§16). CPEA are established through agreement between the diocesan bishop and the Methodist District Synod (§13). However, 'It is important to note that the agreement, from the point of view of the Methodist Church, is not with the District Chair' (§13). Moreover, the diocese and the district do not have equivalent roles in relation to the formation of CPEA because in the Methodist Church 'the circuit has a primary role, both in joint strategic planning and in establishing a CPEA'. The JIC recommends that partnerships are forged 'between bodies that have similar functions', and 'urges' bishops and dioceses 'to relate more to circuits as well as to districts' (§16).
31. But what would all this mean in governance terms? Unless an established procedure is laid down in Methodist Standing Orders, it is unlikely that 'urging' by the JIC or anyone else would significantly alter the present tendency for Anglican assumptions about the location of decision-making to set the pattern for the establishment of CPEA. This is not a criticism of diocesan bishops or their dioceses but reflects one of the ways in which Methodist ecclesiology is being subtly influenced as a result of the Covenant, often with the cooperation of Methodists unaware of the theological implications of shifting the primary location of decision-making from circuits to the district.
32. An underlying issue here is the present lack of clarity in the Methodist Church about the respective roles of District Chairs and Superintendents in strategic planning for future mission. Allied to this is the question of the nature and purpose of a Methodist District. Whether the current work being undertaken by the 'Larger than Circuit' working group will have implications for the establishment of CPEA remains to be seen.
33. The JIC refers to the 'asymmetry' in the way in which the Church of England and the Methodist Church each regard the other's ordained ministry, particular in the case of ministers who seek to transfer from one to the other (§55). Whereas the Methodist Church will accept Church of England clergy by transfer without subsequently ordaining them, the converse is not true. A Methodist presbyter who is subsequently episcopally-ordained in order to minister in the Church of England is then required by the Methodist Church to resign from full connexion. According to the JIC, 'Methodists find it unacceptable for a minister to remain in full connexion when they are episcopally ordained because in being episcopally ordained they are being re-ordained in a way that denies the authenticity of the Methodist Church's place in the church catholic and so they are required to resign' (§53).
34. This account of the position of the Methodist Church is unsatisfactory. First, the idea that a Methodist presbyter might be 're-ordained' in order to exercise the same ministry in another church is as theologically incoherent as that of someone being re-baptised. Either ordination in the Methodist Church constitutes ordination within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church or it does not. Moreover, it is misleading to imply that there might be some way in which the Church of England could ordain a Methodist presbyter that would not necessarily deny the 'authenticity' of the Methodist Church.

Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission

35. This chapter develops the concept of 'visible unity' between the Methodist Church and the Church of England, first set out in the JIC report *Embracing the Covenant* (2008), as a step on the way to the 'full visible unity' that properly belongs to the 'whole Church of Christ and the uniting in that of all the churches' (§§1-2).
36. The ecclesiological suppositions of the report's treatment of the unity of the Church require comment. In particular, how the report uses the terms 'authentic' and 'true' in relation to the two churches raises a number of questions. The first of the affirmations of the Common Statement is that 'We affirm one another's churches as true churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God' (§5). The term 'true church' is significant in ecumenical dialogue and its use in the Common Statement was the first acknowledgement by the Church of England of the ecclesial status of the Methodist Church.
37. Since 'truth' as a philosophical and theological category is complete and indivisible, to be a 'true church' is to have all the essential attributes of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The JIC, however, prefers to say that 'in the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England we have two churches which are authentic as churches but which lack completeness as churches, not least because they lack unity with each other' (§6). If the Church of England and the Methodist Church are true churches, in what sense can they be said to be incomplete other than that they lack unity with each other and other churches? Paragraph 8 of this chapter is confusing but appears to imply a distinction between quantitative and qualitative completeness; if so, the significance of the distinction is unclear.
38. Even the 'authenticity' of the Church of England and the Methodist Church is qualified: 'They have some assurance of their current authenticity as embodiments of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church' (§7). This authenticity does not consist in the two churches having intentionally preserved and transmitted the catholicity and apostolicity of the Church by some means of succession but instead 'consists in them remaining true to the Gospel, to their identity and to their calling as parts of Christ's body' (§7). Thus authenticity is essentially an existential category with little, if any, historical reference. Such an understanding of what it means to be an authentic church hardly accords with the significance that Anglicans attach to the 'historic episcopate' as an effective sign and, under the Covenant, wish ultimately to share with Methodists.
39. It is consistent with an existential definition of authenticity that the two churches must 'be open to being transformed by grace into whatever God in Christ through the Holy Spirit would have the Church be (including being changed into whatever form or shape God would have the Church take)' (§7). This bold claim needs to be carefully qualified to avoid misunderstanding. Presumably, the JIC does not intend to imply that the future shape and form of the Church need not necessarily include the historic episcopate, since this would be inconsistent with the Anglican tradition, which asserts the enduring nature of the Holy Spirit's providence for the Church in its formative period, especially in providing an ordained ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons in historic continuity with the Church of the New Testament. Anglicans and Methodists do not see themselves as equally free to adapt the shape and form of the Church. Indeed, the Anglican-Methodist Covenant encourages Methodists to attach greater significance to historical continuity and the historic episcopate as effective sign of that continuity.

40. The JIC introduces the terms 'shared oversight' and 'interchangeable oversight' as a conscious 'echo' of 'shared' and 'interchangeable' ministry (§51). Interchangeable oversight denotes a situation in which 'one church may trust the appropriate corporate bodies, office-holders or leaders of the other church to speak, act and make decisions on its behalf (again in clearly delimited ways)' (§48). However, it is difficult to see how the constitutional and legal responsibilities invested in the exercise of oversight might be entrusted to others, even in 'clearly delimited ways'.
41. So far as a theology of ministry is concerned, it is not at all evident that the exercise of oversight can be thought of as being interchangeable on the basis that it 'echoes' the idea that ministries in separated churches are interchangeable. Oversight is so closely bound up with ecclesial identity that it is difficult to see how it might be exercised by ministers and corporate bodies that do not share the same ecclesial identity. The concept of 'interchangeable oversight' therefore requires further study.
42. As a further incremental stage on the way to visible unity, the report envisages 'united oversight' whereby 'the diverse constituent parts of the covenanted churches will become parts of a single uniting church, and all the leaders, office-holders and corporate bodies will be linked together and exercise mutual accountability to each other in a single system of oversight' (§49). Ecclesiologicaly, however, the terms 'united oversight' and 'a single system of oversight' naturally signify the organic unity of the two churches, whereas the description presented by the JIC suggests separate ministries of oversight which will be mutually accountable.
43. The interchangeability of ministries between the Church of England and the Methodist Church will ultimately depend upon a liturgical act in which the ministries are reconciled (§37). The theological interpretation of such an act was a major factor in the eventual failure of the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme of the 1960s. Further study is required by the JIC or its successor body on the reconciliation of ministries.

Developing Bonds of Communion

44. This chapter identifies a number of 'bonds of communion and connexion' that might be developed in 'the light of' the possibilities discussed in the chapter [next following] on Models for Uniting in Oversight' (§1). The order in which these two chapters are presented in the report is therefore surprising.
45. 'Concerning Confirmation' (§§5-8), the JIC suggests that 'Making progress towards mutually accepting the confirmation of each others' churches would significantly change the basis of the relationship between our churches' (§8). At present, 'a baptised and confirmed member of the Methodist Church who offers or seeks to exercise a licensed lay ministry in the Church of England, for example as a reader, would be expected first to be episcopally confirmed' because 'the Church of England does not accept presbyteral confirmation as practised in the Methodist Church' (§6). 'Our churches would take a big step forward if each church were to accept those belonging to the other church as able to fulfil a substantially increased number of responsibilities in itself' (§5).
46. Presumably, the difference between Anglicans and Methodists in their practice of confirmation does not reflect a lack of theological agreement as to whether a presbyter can be the minister of confirmation as the publically authorised representative of the universal Church. That Roman Catholic bishops regularly delegate confirmation to their priests does not appear to be a theological issue in Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. Does it then follow that the primary issue of concern to the Church of England is that the minister of confirmation must have been

episcopally ordained in order to act as the publically authorised representative of the universal Church? If so, it is difficult to see how the Church of England could accept the validity (a term studiously avoided by the JIC) of confirmation in the Methodist Church unless and until the minister of confirmation has been episcopally ordained.

47. The JIC cites the canons of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Porvoo Agreement as establishing precedents for 'the mutual receiving of each others' members even if they have not been episcopally confirmed' (§8). Yet, the Porvoo Agreement relates to churches in which the ministers of confirmation have been episcopally ordained. What was intended to be a concession in particular situations is not necessarily transferable to Anglican-Methodist relations in Britain. The interpretation of a teaching document or ecumenical statement for theological purposes (if not always for legal purposes) must take account of the intention of those who drafted the text and the context for which it was produced. It remains to be seen whether the Church of England would accept the reasoning of the JIC in regard to the texts cited.
48. Even if the Church of England comes to 'accept' Methodist confirmation, this does not necessarily achieve what the JIC intends. Since the requirement for reception into membership to include confirmation (Standing Order 050) is of recent provenance, a significant number of Methodists (including many active office holders) will not have been confirmed, so would remain ineligible to serve in lay ministries in the Church of England. Curiously, there is still no requirement for those received into membership from other Methodist churches to be confirmed (SO 051). Aside from any practical issues associated with maintaining separate lists, it would be invidious to distinguish between confirmed and non-confirmed members of the Methodist Church. Moreover, whereas the *Methodist Worship Book* (1999) contains an authorised liturgy for 'Confirmation and Reception into Membership', its use is not mandatory. Thus, in contrast to the situation in the Church of England, the form and practice of confirmation may legitimately vary within the Methodist Church.
49. 'Concerning *Episkope*' (§§9-24), the method employed by the JIC in this and previous reports is to prepare the way for the eventual integration of Anglican and Methodist structures of oversight by maintaining that these exercise 'the same oversight but in ways which are different to how they are exercised in their own' (§10). This method is exemplified in the way that the JIC compares the Methodist Conference to a diocesan bishop – a comparison that takes no account of the connexional nature of oversight in the Methodist Church and the diocesan nature of oversight in the Church of England. The reader is informed that 'Elsewhere the expression "corporate bishop" has been used to describe the Conference, although this has not been officially adopted as a term by the Conference to describe itself' (§12). Later in the report, the JIC refers to the Conference as 'somewhat analogous to a bishop-in-synod' – a much more tentative comparison. The Methodist Conference has not adopted the term 'corporate bishop' to describe itself because it is inaccurate. The exercise of oversight by the Conference is not equivalent to that of a diocesan bishop, though the extent to which the differences are theologically significant has yet to be fully determined. Altogether, the theological basis upon which the JIC seeks to develop bonds of communion – namely, that the nature and exercise of oversight in the Methodist Church is *essentially* the same as in the Church of England – requires further study.
50. 'Concerning Ordination' (§§25-36), many would agree with the JIC that 'the way that existing ministries are brought together as the churches grow together and develop unity in oversight must not be seen as an ordination or re-ordination, but instead as an ordering of existing ministries of both churches within the historic ministry of the wider Church in a way that is acceptable to the traditional disciplines of both churches' (§33). Whether and how an acceptable way of doing this might be found remains one of the most serious challenges facing

the Covenant. Since Anglicans and Methodists draw on *koinonia* language to describe the Church, it is possible that Anglican and Methodist ministries might be reconciled as a result of both being 'ordered' to a more visible state of communion between the two churches. The theological and liturgical content of such an act of 'ordering' requires further study.

Models for Uniting in Oversight

51. This chapter seeks 'to explore various approaches to our churches' future visible unity, whilst remaining rooted in a realism which takes account of the issues that still need to be addressed' (§1). 'In the next phase of the Covenant relationship, the JIC would like to see our two churches recommit themselves to moving towards visible unity in the broadest sense, in order to restore the focus of the Covenant Statement as a whole' (§3).
52. The JIC envisages a process of transition whereby 'our two churches would retain large elements of autonomy as they gradually grew together through deepening stages of communion into visible unity' (§13). The idea of 'interchangeable oversight' as one of these stages of communion has already been discussed above.
53. The JIC considers how the concepts of 'connexionalism' and 'communion' can be meshed together (§§21-29). If 'greater visible unity' and 'united oversight' are to be achieved, then 'we shall need to develop a framework in which processes based on the principle of having autonomous churches within a Communion of Churches are meshed with those based on the principle of connexionalism' (§28).
54. However, 'meshing' processes within an overarching framework sounds like an attempt at ecclesiastical joinery – an ecumenical method that is now discredited due to its assumption that the corresponding ecclesiologies are compatible. Whether and how a connexional ecclesiology is compatible with an ecclesiology of communion has yet to be explored in the context of Anglican-Methodist relations in Britain, but it should not be assumed that they are. For one thing, the relationship between local churches in a connexional ecclesiology is theologically and canonically different to the relationship between local churches in an ecclesiology of communion, with all the implications this has for oversight. It is premature to envisage 'some form of "connexional-communion" type partnership' (§60) as a stage on the way to visible unity. Likewise, 'bringing connexionalism into a dynamic, uniting relationship with episcopacy' (§62) must not only be 'addressed' but also studied theologically. Altogether, one of the most pressing tasks now facing the Covenant is to develop an ecumenical ecclesiology as the foundation for an integrated structure of oversight and the reconciliation of ministries.
55. The section on 'Anglicans and Methodists in England, Scotland and Wales' (§§35-59) identifies a number of issues that arise from the fact that the Methodist Church relates to three separate Anglican churches: the Church of England, the Church in Wales, and the Scottish Episcopal Church. Ecumenical relations in the three nations may diverge, prompting the question: 'How far can the Methodist Church go towards uniting with those churches before it begins either to compromise its other ecumenical partnerships or to fracture the Connexion?' (§46) 'There are therefore serious questions for the Methodist Church about whether its ecumenical vision of visible unity is one of eventually becoming part of three separate united or uniting Churches in Scotland, Wales and England; or of becoming part of a single united or uniting church that eventually covers the whole of Britain' (§53).
56. In notably uncompromising terms, the JIC rules out the possibility of a united church for the whole of Britain since 'It is clear that the three Anglican Churches will not easily, if ever, agree to create a sort of super-province. It is alien to the polity and practice of Anglicanism' (§57). In

graciously accepting that it is their own polity and practice that will therefore have to adapt, Methodists will wonder whether there is anything alien to the polity and practice of Methodism which should similarly be taken into account under the Covenant.

Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission

57. This chapter considers afresh the subject of personal and corporate oversight, the relationship between them, and how the Anglican and Methodist 'systems of oversight might be brought together into one' (§54). Particular attention is given to 'The Church of England and the Historic Episcopate' (§§6-16), 'Oversight and Apostolic Continuity in the Methodist Church' (§§17-25), and then 'The Methodist Church and the Historic Episcopate' (§§26-36). 'Signs of Unity, Connectivity and Oversight' are present in both churches in personal and corporate bodies (§§37-41).
58. 'Seeking Convergence' (§§42-53) between corporate and personal forms of oversight, the JIC suggests that these twin emphases of the same reality need to be kept in creative tension, just as the New Testament maintains a creative tension between the individual and corporate personalities of Christ (§46).
59. It is important for Methodists to note that 'the Church of England prefers to talk of "personal" rather than "individual" ministry or episcopacy because the personal can only be defined in relation to a community, and it sees the ministry of the bishop not as something that is separate from or set over against the community of the church but rooted in it' (§47). This is compatible with Guideline 7 in the Methodist Faith and Order Statement on *Episkope and Episcopacy* (2000), as cited by the JIC: 'The Methodist Church insists that all ministries, including those of oversight, are exercised within the ministry of the whole people of God and at its service, rather than in isolation from it and in supremacy over it' (§25).
60. The historic episcopate is said to be 'integral to Anglican identity and to the way Anglican churches are in communion with one another' (§16). 'This understanding of the historic episcopate does not require that there should be an empirically verifiable manual transmission of ordination, going back to the apostles, in every case. The emphasis is on the formal intention of a church not to make a new church or to ordain ministers merely for its own church, but to preserve the visible historical continuity of the Church from the beginning; that is, to maintain and sustain its apostolic identity, in the belief that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted and intended that an ordered community – a body of people with certain tasks and structures – should continue his mission until the end of the age (Matthew 28:16ff)' (§11). This is important to note because many Methodists (and Anglicans) misunderstand the nature of the historic episcopate.
61. It is not clear what the JIC intends when it says 'there is little evidence that the historic episcopate would substantially increase the quality of the Methodist Church's worship and its effectiveness in mission if Methodism remains a separate church which is not becoming part of a united church' (§28). The sense of this paragraph in the report is that the Methodist Church has little to gain from adopting the historic episcopate unless part of a unity scheme. The implied suggestion that episcopal oversight contributes little to the Church's worship and mission, and the corollary that corporate structures of oversight fare better in this regard, is unfair and ungenerous to the ministry exercised by bishops in the Church of England. Besides, if 'bishops are [effective?] signs of continuity, connectivity and unity in worship and mission' (§40), then their ministry must surely contribute to the quality of worship and effectiveness in mission.

62. Do Anglicans ‘often perceive’ that Methodists value corporate oversight to the extent that personal leadership is devalued and gifted leaders are prevented from exercising those gifts for the benefit of the whole (§48)? Here the JIC appears to confuse personal oversight with individual leadership, whereas the two are not the same thing. Moreover, the examples of ‘gifted leaders’ in Methodism (‘Sangster, Weatherhead and Soper’) are so outdated as to be irrelevant to the Covenant. Surely, the substantive point is that, from an Anglican perspective, the personal exercise of oversight by Superintendents, District Chairs and the President of the Conference appears to be unduly attenuated by the corporate exercise of oversight. Anglicans would no doubt wish to point out that, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit confers *charisms* upon certain individuals for the exercise of specific ministries on behalf of the Church.
63. There is a tension between personal and corporate forms of oversight which may not always be experienced as ‘creative’ (§46) or as ‘oscillating’ (§49). The suggestion that personal and corporate forms of oversight are ‘complementary signs’ (§40) avoids the difficult question of where authority lies in any particular matter. The history and current experience of the United Methodist Church reveals unresolved tensions between the oversight exercised by its bishops and that of the General Conference. Introducing the historic episcopate into the corporate oversight structures of the Methodist Church in Britain is therefore likely to have more serious implications than so far has been acknowledged. A theoretical ecclesiology may be able to hold personal and corporate forms of oversight in perfect counterpoise, but the inevitable power dynamics involved in ecclesial relations will tend to upset the equilibrium in one direction or another.
64. In view of the inherent tensions between personal and corporate exercise of oversight, Anglicans and Methodists need to study together what might be the specific charisms conferred by the Holy Spirit in response to the imposition of hands and prayer at an episcopal ordination and how these relate to synodical structures.

Christian Perfection

65. The JIC aims in this chapter ‘to demonstrate that there is indeed nothing in the understanding of holiness (personal, social, ethical and spiritual) and Christian perfection to prevent Anglican and Methodist churches coming together’ (§3). What is more, Christian perfection is a ‘rich theme of great contemporary relevance’ for ‘lifestyle, discipleship and mission’ (§4).
66. The Common Statement identified Methodist teaching on Christian perfection as one of ‘two areas of doctrinal controversy where some theological tension remains, both between and within our two traditions’ (§5). The other area of controversy concerned Calvinism and Arminianism.
67. Whilst it is true to say that ‘Christian perfection is not referred to in the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church’ (§6; citing the Common Statement), this is misleading inasmuch as the same can be said of such foundational Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. The Deed of Union does not specify the doctrines that constitute the faith of the Methodist Church but instead refers to the primary sources that comprise the ‘doctrinal standards’ of the Methodist Church. It would be difficult to argue that Christian perfection, as described in John Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament* and the first four volumes of his sermons, does not form part of Methodist doctrinal standards. However, as the JIC rightly points out, the doctrinal standards do not impose upon Methodists any particular interpretation of Christian perfection (§36).
68. The principal theological sources for this chapter of the report are the writings of John Wesley and two contemporary Methodist theologians – Randy Maddox and William J. Abraham –

whose work is broadly representative of the current state of Wesleyan scholarship concerning the nature and effect of grace in the Christian life. Consistent with the intention of Methodist doctrinal standards, the Faith and Order Committee does not intend to invest any particular theological account of Christian perfection with authoritative status. Nevertheless, the account of Christian perfection presented in the report contains nothing that is incompatible with Methodist doctrinal standards.

69. Despite containing much of value, this chapter in the report is unsatisfactory inasmuch as it presents purely a Methodist defence of Christian perfection and makes no attempt to engage with historical and contemporary Anglican interpretations of sanctification. Thus it is difficult to know on what basis the JIC can be confident that 'There is indeed nothing here [in its account of Christian perfection] to prevent our two churches coming together, and much which might enrich them as they do' (§59).
70. The Faith and Order Committee believes that the issue of Christian perfection would benefit from continuing ecumenical study because of its importance in the Methodist understanding of holy living and its relevance to contemporary Christian discipleship. The forthcoming report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church (Houston, 2016), will address the subject of Christian perfection in its study of the call to holiness. That report may usefully be studied by Anglicans and Methodists in Britain.

Let it be according to your will: The Challenge to our Churches

71. The concluding chapter refers to the Anglican-Methodist Covenant in terms drawn from the traditional words of the marriage service and the Methodist Covenant Service: 'What makes the Covenant distinctive is that in it our two churches have bound ourselves together "from this day forward, for better [f]or worse, for richer [f]or poorer" and "freely and wholeheartedly yielding all things to God's pleasure and disposal". In other words we have deliberately made a solemn and lasting commitment to each other, not knowing what the future will hold, in advance of particular issues being resolved, and irrespective of what the solutions might be' (§3).
72. However, it is one of the omissions of the Common Statement, not yet remedied, that the theological nature of the Covenant relationship between the Church of England and the Methodist Church has not been determined. Whereas Methodists have a specific understanding of a covenant relationship based on John Wesley's covenantal theology, there is no equivalent covenantal theology in the Church of England. The recent abortive covenant between the churches of the Anglican Communion was of a different character to how Methodists understand their relationship with the Church of England under the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.
73. The Methodist understanding of covenant relationship was never developed in relation to the institutional life of Christian communities. Thus the question of how two churches in covenant should relate to one another as institutions remains unexplored territory, theologically and practically. The JIC is clear that 'Such a commitment means that our churches have to trust each other, honour each other and take a great deal of care of each other' (§4). But it is far from obvious how the language of a personal covenant relationship translates into institutional terms. How might the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England demonstrate mutual trust, honour and care when they have a legal and constitutional duty to fulfil their respective purposes?

74. 'The JIC [...] recommends that our churches re-affirm their commitment to the goal of the visible unity of our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church' (§12). That the JIC feels this recommendation to be necessary after ten years of the Covenant is a reflection on the present state of bilateral relations.
75. Drawing on 'suggestions' from the chapter on 'Developing Bonds of Communion', the final chapter 'commends' four 'incremental steps', which would make 'a substantial difference in the relationship between our churches' (§13). The suggestion concerning confirmation has already been discussed above. As the following three paragraphs of this response show, the others raise questions that cast doubt on their value.
76. What would it mean in theological and practical terms for the two churches to recognise 'how particular bodies and functions in the other church exercise oversight'? What significance can be attached to this kind of *recognition* such that it constitutes an incremental step in the Covenant? What implications follow from Anglicans being 'able to understand the Methodist Conference being somewhat analogous to a corporate "Bishop-in-Synod"'? Irrespective of whether the comparison is fair (and the Faith and Order Committee suggests not), the affirmation that a particular ecclesial structure is 'somewhat analogous' to another is so imprecise as to be hardly worthwhile.
77. What would it mean for the Church of England to recognise that 'the Methodist Conference has preserved the continuity of Methodism with the tradition from which it emerged'? Setting aside the question of whether this is an entirely accurate statement, what exactly would be affirmed by the recognition that the Methodist Conference has preserved the continuity of the eighteenth-century Anglican tradition from which it emerged, given the subsequent developments in the self-understanding of the Church of England since then? Asking the Church of England to recognise that the Methodist Conference has 'ensured the continuity of the Methodist Church in the apostolic faith and mission' overlooks differences in the way that each church identifies the essential means of ensuring such continuity.
78. What exactly is being asked of the Methodist Church when it is invited 'to consider how it can relate more closely to a church that is ordered with bishops'? The Methodist Church of Great Britain already relates 'closely' to other member churches of the World Methodist Council that are ordered with bishops.
79. The JIC 'urges' the Faith and Order Committee to study the material on oversight in its previous reports and to respond to the Methodist Council and the JIC's successor body, 'indicating any further areas of work that are needed, and making an assessment of how these two systems of [Anglican and Methodist] oversight might be brought together in a way that enriches them both' (§15).
80. All this would be a major undertaking, requiring considerable resources of time and expertise that at present are fully committed to the Faith and Order Committee's other work on behalf of the Conference. Furthermore, the effect of this recommendation would be to make the Faith and Order Committee, in conjunction with the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England, responsible for the implementation of the Covenant. This falls outside the committee's terms of reference.