

## The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness

### *Comments received from members of the Council*

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In order to help prepare for this item of business, members of the Council were encouraged to give notice of their comments on the Joint Implementation Commission's *Draft report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014* to the Connexional Ecumenical Officer before 24 January. Two members of the Council did so and neither expressed serious reservations about any of the JIC's recommendations.
- 1.2 The response of the Faith and Order Committee to the JIC's quinquennial report, *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness*, was distributed to members of the Council in its then 'latest draft' version (MC/14/12B pages 81-94); there have been no amendments to that draft so it can now be considered the final version.

#### 2.0 Comments received

- 2.1 Mrs Heather Shipman said that she is conscious of the response of the Faith and Order Committee and of the fact that their current workload does not permit them to take on any additional work. She observed, however, that the Committee said that it would be available to give theological input to any further discussions. She also noted the two resolutions before the Council and wondered whether a third might offer the Council the opportunity both to 'puts its weight' behind the five recommendations in paragraphs 42, 45, and 46 of the *Draft Report* and suggest that the Conference give consideration as to how these might be taken forward. She feels that some action is now required and is concerned that what we readily acknowledge as a biblical imperative remains merely a well debated issue in the decision making bodies of our two churches.
- 2.2 Dr Nigel Hardwick expressed support for Mrs Shipman's comments and also feels an additional resolution is needed; its aim would be to ensure some specific action is taken to make active progress on the issues that are preventing a move to further engagement on resolving outstanding issues. He said it is important that the sterling work of the JIC bears fruit and that that the report is not 'kicked into the long grass'. He noted the importance of having time to consider and be able to comment on and discuss the complex issues raised by both the JIC report and 'the excellent and detailed response of the Faith and Order Committee.' He pointed to the examples of lack of progress highlighted in paragraphs 5 and 14 of the JIC's *Draft Report* (pages 69 and 71 respectively of the Council papers). He thinks that 'Council/Conference also needs to address the concerns of the FOC regarding its terms of reference, resourcing and other commitments/priorities (para 80, p 94), if they are to engage in the process (para 9, p 83) as they would wish and we should recommend.'

#### 3.0 Reflections on the comments

- 3.1 Since both the above members of the Council affirm the JIC's five recommendations in paragraphs 42, 45, and 46, the draft response below expresses the Council's support for those recommendations.

- 3.2 The comments received raise the possibility of the Council considering additional resolutions to those in paper MC/14/12, including one or more to be addressed to the Conference. It is suggested that, at this stage, the Council focuses on responding to the JIC and then, in the light of the revised version of the JIC's report to the Conference and General Synod, it can decide whether it wishes to consider any further resolutions.

#### 4.0 Draft response to the JIC

The following is offered to the Council as a first draft of its response to the JIC. The indented text in italics points to various matters the Council may wish to consider including in the response.

- 4.3.1 The Council supports the JIC commending 'the development of structures of joint decision making, to which we have already committed ourselves in the Covenant Commitments' (*Draft Report*, para 42).

*Does the Council wish to offer further suggestions about when and how this might be done?*

*Does the Council wish to say anything about what is said in paragraph 3 of chapter 9 of the JIC's quinquennial report about the establishment of formal contact between the Archbishops' Council and the Methodist Council.*

- 4.3.2 The Council supports the view of the JIC that, in the next phase of the Covenant, 'there is a need for advocacy in the implementation of the Covenant' (*Draft Report*, para 45).

*From its perspective, does the Council wish to say how wide ranging this advocacy should be and where should be its focus?*

- 4.3.3 The Council agrees with the JIC that the bodies and institutions of our churches should give priority to the sixth commitment of the Covenant. The Council concurs with the JIC's recommendation about how this work should be encouraged.

*Does the Council wish to offer some particular insights to the JIC on this matter?*

- 4.3.4 The Council supports the second recommendation in paragraph 46 (agenda page 67) of the JIC's *Draft Report*. The Council is pleased to know that MAPUM welcomes this recommendation and, if a stronger mandate was given to it, would see this as a natural development of the work it already does to fulfil its aims under the Covenant both between our two churches and in the wider ecumenical situation.

*Does the Council wish to say anything more to the JIC about the role, priorities, and resources of MAPUM?*

- 4.3.5 The Council agrees with the JIC about the importance of carrying forward the ecclesiological task of moving towards visible unity. In the light of noting the Faith and Order Committee's response, the Council recognises that a number of matters need to be explored, including the comments in paragraph 8 of the Faith and Order Committee's response about 'the need for a new ecumenical method in the next phase of the Covenant' and '[f]urther progress towards the interchangeability of ministry will require the development of an ecumenical vision (and supporting theology) of the church and its various ministries.'