

Response to the recommendations of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

Basic Information

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolutions	As set out in the paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To agree the next steps in the process to enable the Conference in 2014 to respond to the recommendations of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales published in October 2012.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Y Cyngor has agreed its response to the Commission's recommendations. • To fulfil its responsibility under resolution 12/3 of the Conference in 2013, the Council should invite all the district policy committees except those of Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod to comment on the Commission's recommendations to the Ecumenical Officer. • The Council should direct the Ecumenical Officer to draft a report for its meeting in April 2014 which will help the Conference consider its response to the Commission.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Covenant dates from 1975 and the Covenanted Churches are the Covenanted Baptist Churches, the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, and the United Reformed Church. • Two discussion documents published in October 2012 by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales: <i>Pastoral Oversight</i> and <i>Church Governance</i>. • Section B of the Ecumenical Report to the Conference in 2013 (Agenda, pp.95-97) and resolution 12/3.
Consultations	The Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Committee produced responses to the Commission's recommendations to help inform Y Cyngor.

Summary of Impact

Wider Connexional	The proposed consultation enables the wider Connexion to be involved without making it a burdensome process.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The Covenanted Churches in Wales.

Response to the recommendations of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

Introduction

1. Section B of the Ecumenical Report to the Conference in 2013 contained a very brief introduction on the work of the Commission; it included the Commission's summary of the recommendations made in the two discussion documents on *Church Governance* and *Pastoral Oversight* that were launched at the Gathering in October 2012.¹ It also contained a proposed process of consultation to produce the Methodist Church's response to the Commission's recommendations.² The Conference adopted resolution 12/3, directing that:

in the light of the recommendations agreed by Y Cyngor in response to the recommendations of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales, the Methodist Council shall consult with all the districts except Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod on the recommendations of the Commission, and report to the Conference in 2014. [Daily Record (2013) 7/8.]

The response of Y Cyngor to the recommendations of the Commission

2. Y Cyngor undertook an extensive process of consultation across the 16 circuits and 12 ardaloedd ('areas' in Synod Cymru) that make up the Methodist Church in Wales. It received 55 responses (including 24 from groups and individuals) and was informed by the responses of the Law and Polity and Faith and Order Committees. It agreed its response to the Commission at its meeting in November 2013.
3. The response notes the range of views offered (including some positive ones), identifies a series of concerns about the recommendations (including a memorial from the Wales Synod about the proposed 'act of reconciliation'), lists a number of specific points raised in the responses, and concurs with the Commission's identification of some immediate difficulties for Methodists with its recommendations.
4. Moreover, It notes:
 10. The same concerns which were picked up in the responses from across the two Synods in Wales, were also identified in those from the connexional bodies. All of them highlight the importance of ensuring that an accurate and adequate understanding of Methodism informs such discussions. For example, the paper on Church Governance emphasises the commonalities between the Covenanted Churches while ignoring or underplaying the theological differences between them, while the paper on Pastoral Oversight underestimates both the theological differences about oversight and the ramifications such a scheme might have for a Welsh Methodist Jurisdiction. They also suggest that some more theological work is required before any recommendations concerning governance structures and the role of bishops in a Uniting Church in Wales can be further explored.

¹ The reports are available at <http://www.cydgynulliad.org.uk/>.

5. The response of Y Cyngor concludes:

13. Taking all these strands together, it seems to Y Cyngor that there is a significant degree of consistency in the responses received from across the two Synods in Wales and the wider Connexion. Both from within Wales and from the connexional bodies there is recognition that what is contained in the Commission's recommendations i) does not adequately address our understanding of what it means to be part of a connexional church, ii) poses real challenges as to how a Methodist jurisdiction would remain in connexion with the British Methodist Conference and iii) raises fundamental questions about our ecclesiology, not least our understanding of oversight.
14. The underlying question asked by the Commission through its papers was whether there was sufficient support for the recommendations among Covenant partners to proceed towards drawing up a more detailed scheme for a Uniting Church in Wales. Based on the responses received, it is clear to Y Cyngor that there is not sufficient support for them among Methodists both in Wales and across the wider Connexion. Indeed the recommendations themselves reveal both a lack of understanding of our polity as a connexional church working across three nations and other jurisdictions and also of the Guidelines that were adopted by the Conference in 2000 as a summary of its position on *episkopé* and episcopacy.
15. However, this does not mean that the Methodist Church is turning away from ecumenism or from the Covenant. Reflecting back on the responses received, Y Cyngor is struck by how far they resonate with the response it made to the original Work Plan from which the Commission's recommendations emerged. Our response then, which was reported to the Conference in 2011, was to say:

"Our concern is that the Agenda proposed by the Commission, in particular the first 3 points, appears too focused on matters concerning structural schemes, and not enough on deepening existing relationships and exploring what is possible under existing agreements. In particular we consider that its focus is too much on ordained ministry and not enough on the opportunities afforded by lay and mission-shaped ministry to which Covenant partners are also committed."

16. Examples of what this might mean in practice include a serious attempt to explore the possibilities available, but hardly used, of the ecumenical canons of the Church in Wales, to further develop our work with Fresh Expressions, building on our joint involvement in Mission Shaped Ministry courses, and to commit to a regular pattern of meeting with church leaders from the Covenant partners.
17. Our reflection is that this response was not heard as clearly as it might have been by other Covenant partners at the time. It may be, as partners now reflect on and respond to the Commission's recommendations, that our original response may be heard afresh; and with it the positive affirmation with which we closed, pointing to the Agenda that we see as crucial to the Commission's future work:

"We also consider that more work needs to be done to explore what 'visible unity' might mean for this new century. Accordingly, we would want to see the future Agenda of the Commission adjusted to address these issues and so to focus on work which reflects the practical mission priorities in the areas where we seek to serve."

Consultation with the remaining districts

6. Resolution 12/3 of the Conference in 2013 directed the Methodist Council to consult with all the districts except Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod on the recommendations of the Commission 'in the light of the recommendations agreed by Y Cyngor', and report to the Conference in 2014.
7. Although Y Cyngor has not responded to the Commission in the form of recommendations, it has concluded that, based on the responses received, it is clear that the answer to 'the underlying question asked by the Commission' is that there is not sufficient support among Methodists to proceed towards drawing up a more detailed scheme for a Uniting Church in Wales. It has also reassured the Commission that the Methodist Church is not turning away from ecumenism or from the Covenant and reminded the Commission of the critical and constructive comments Y Cyngor made on the Commission's programme of work for 2011-16.
8. It is recommended that, in the light of this response, the Methodist Council consult with the relevant districts by inviting their policy committees to send comments on the recommendations of the Commission to the Ecumenical Officer by 28 February 2014. It is recognised that district policy committees may have particular insights to offer on the recommendations in paragraphs four and six.
9. It is also recommended that the Methodist Council direct the Connexional Ecumenical Officer to draft a report for its meeting on 5-7 April 2014 which will help the Conference consider its response to the Commission.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 13/1. The Council invites all the district policy committees except those of Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod to submit comments on the Commission's recommendations to the Ecumenical Officer by 28 February 2014.**
- 13/2. The Council directs the Connexional Team to report to the Council in April 2014, in order that the Council may advise the Conference on its response to the Commission.**

Appendix 1: Section B of the Ecumenical Report to the Conference in 2013

B: The Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

15. Introduction

15.1. In 2011, the Conference adopted Resolution 60/2 which adopted the recommendation of Y Cyngor concerning the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales and directed that, on behalf of the Conference, the Methodist Church in Wales continue to support the work of the Commission on those terms for a further period of five years from 2011.³

15.2. At the Gathering in Aberystwyth in October 2012, the Commission launched two discussion documents: *Church Governance* and *Pastoral Oversight*.⁴ The following is a summary of the recommendations of the Commission:

It is the Commission's hope that, at the end of the consultation period these recommendations – perhaps refined by our combined wisdom – may become proposals for the future.

1. The Commission **invites** the five Covenanted Churches to think of themselves as the Church Uniting in Wales.
2. The Commission **recommends**:
 - that the Uniting Church will have nine jurisdictions – the six existing Anglican dioceses plus a Methodist jurisdiction, a Presbyterian jurisdiction and a URC/Covenanting Baptist jurisdiction, each of which will be invited to elect its own bishop;
 - that a description of the bishop's role be drawn up and agreed by all five Covenanted Churches;
 - that the bishop be consecrated into the historic episcopate, i.e. ordained by the laying on of hands by at least three bishops who are themselves part of the historic episcopate;
 - that the bishop will ordain all those who are to become ministers within the bishop's jurisdiction;
 - that the bishop will be a bishop in the Church Uniting in Wales and will share collegiality and full interchangeability with all the other bishops of that Church;
 - that the bishops of all nine jurisdictions in the Church Uniting in Wales consult with each other at least twice a year;
 - that all existing ministers agree to the laying on of hands by at least one Anglican bishop and at least one other bishop representing the other traditions within the Church Uniting in Wales. This would be regarded not as an ordination but as a step forward to full covenanted ministry.

³ See Agenda (2011), pp.770-774 (<http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-60-ecumenical-0812.doc>); Daily Record (2011), 8/9.

⁴ The reports are available at <http://www.cydgynulliad.org.uk/>.

3. Following acceptance of the invitation outlined in 1. above, the Commission **recommends**:
 - that all member jurisdictions will, for the present, continue to operate their existing ecclesiastical polity;
 - that the Gathering of the Church Uniting in Wales be held annually; and
 - that leaders, lawyers and administrators representing all five member Churches be asked to draw up, within a period of five years a Scheme and Constitution for the Uniting Church based on the recommendations in Section 5 of the Report of the Working Group on Church Governance.
4. The Commission **recommends** as good practice the appointment in the Church of England of cathedral canons from other denominations.
5. The Commission **recommends** that its member churches explore together the role of the diaconate to see whether they can reach a common mind on this issue.
6. Within Local Ecumenical Partnerships, the Commission **recommends**:
 - that ministers be encouraged but not required to attend a denominational court other than that of the denomination to which they belong; and
 - that churches entrust the administration of the Partnership to a Sponsoring Body selected from members of the Commission of Covenanted Churches or Cytûn.

16. Process of consultation to produce the Methodist Church's response to the Commission's recommendations

- 16.1. The Methodist Church needs to formulate its response to the Commission's recommendations by the summer of 2014.
- 16.2. At its meeting last November, Y Cyngor initiated a process of consultation on the recommendations. With the support of Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod this is taking place with the circuits and ardaloedd in Wales and responses will be reported back to Y Cyngor for its meeting in November 2013.
- 16.3. The Faith and Order Committee has been and the Law and Polity Committee will be asked to produce their responses, both of which will also inform Y Cyngor later this year.
- 16.4. It is proposed that, in the light of the recommendations agreed by Y Cyngor in response to the recommendations of the Commission, the Conference should direct the Methodist Council to consult with the remaining districts in the Connexion on the recommendations of the Commission.
- 16.5. A report will be presented to the Conference in 2014 so that the Conference can consider its response to the Commission.