

The Anglican-Methodist Covenant one year on...

Hundreds of local Methodist churches are involved in covenant partnerships with churches of other traditions in their town, village or neighbourhood. In November 2003 an Anglican-Methodist Covenant was signed in a ceremony at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, followed immediately by a joyful service of thanksgiving and dedication in Westminster Abbey.

What does it mean to make a covenant? When Methodists take part in the Covenant Service at the beginning of each year they are doing something that goes back 250 years to John Wesley and the earliest days of the Methodist societies. The traditional covenant prayer recognises that we can only renew our covenant relationship with God because of God's gracious call to us through Christ. In this understanding of a covenant the emphasis is very much upon the relationship between those who covenant together.

Methodists and the Church of England began to grow apart in the eighteenth century. He then asked a question: "... in those centuries of separation [since], don't we have to say that both of our Church communities have been given gifts and have learned lessons that we might not have learned or received had this never happened?"

He continued: "As we now take this significant step in our growing together again, we do so not in the pretence that 200 years have been wasted, or that we can



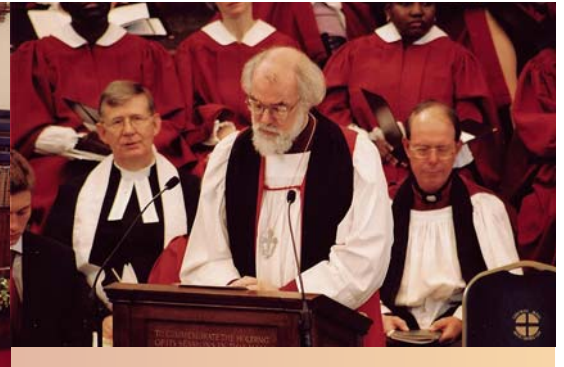
go back to where we were. We have all, in the intervening years, discovered things about Christ and his Kingdom that we are now eager to share with each other, as brothers and sisters working to overcome the distant legacy of arrogance and resentment."

It is in that spirit that in hundreds of places Methodists and Anglicans are taking time to get to know each other better, to pray together and to worship together. As relationships deepen and strengthen we discover that the things we have in common are much more important than the things that keep us apart. We also find ourselves asking, not only as Anglicans and Methodists together, but as all the churches together in a particular place, how we can

This relationship is the emphasis of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. Speaking at the signing, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, spoke of the way

become, together, a Church shaped for mission.

Of course in some places that process has hardly begun. In others it was going on long before the Anglican-Methodist Covenant was proposed, let alone signed. A Joint Implementation Commission was set up by the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England to monitor and encourage work to make the Covenant a reality throughout the life of both Churches. One of its tasks is to identify and share stories of good things happening at local and regional level. This will include encouraging joint



Already work is being done on some of the remaining differences in theology and practice between the two Churches. There is much to celebrate but there is also much work still to do.

When the then President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Dr Neil Richardson, spoke in Westminster Abbey after the signing of the Covenant, he emphasised the shared mission of the Church of England and the Methodist Church: "... the Church's mission begins with the infinite value which our Creator God attaches to every single human life. It derives its character from Jesus, who, for Christians, is the mirror of divine gentleness, sympathy and practical service. And it receives its momentum from the breath of God, which breathed a world into life. So, whilst Churches inevitably have 'domestic' matters to attend to, the wellbeing of our country and the healing of God's world are absolutely central to our agenda."

His concluding words remain a challenge to both Churches: "To that vision, that wider ecumenism, we pledge ourselves today. As Churches we are clear that what we already share far exceeds our remaining differences. This Covenant is a call to go forward together in faith, hope and love. May it be a catalyst for the renewal of our common life and mission. And may its benefits be felt way beyond our Churches."

PETER SULSTON



worship or mission projects, and the sharing of facilities and personnel.

One example would be at Middleton Cheney and Chacombe, near Banbury. In these villages the two Methodist churches are in a covenant partnership with the two Parish churches. The same Anglican incumbent and Methodist minister look after both villages and they have worked together closely. At Middleton there is a united Sunday School and

there is a leadership team that implements a common policy for both churches. The two ministers share together in all the ways that are possible. At Chacombe, a much smaller village, the covenant was only signed in December 2002, but already the sharing is considerable.

Another task of the Joint Implementation Commission is to identify priorities that will help the two Churches work towards unity.

Going forward together in faith, hope and love