

Update on the work relating to *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*: report from the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee

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Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To seek the Council's view on the next steps regarding <i>Mission and Ministry in Covenant</i>
Main Points	Update on the <i>Mission and Ministry in Covenant</i> work
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	An Anglican-Methodist Covenant (2002) https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-anglican-methodist-resolutions-only-2002.pdf Mission and Ministry in Covenant http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Mission-and-Ministry-in-Covenant.pdf Further reflection on aspects of Mission and Ministry in Covenant http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MMiC-areas-for-further-reflection-0619.pdf

Update on the work relating to *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*

1. Background

- 1.1. The Anglican Methodist Covenant, signed in 2003, identified work towards ‘a united, interchangeable ministry’ as a priority. The *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* (MMiC) report outlines proposals that would effect that priority. More specifically, the report proposes that, in entering into a new relationship of communion with each other, there would be two interrelated actions that the churches would be asked to take: that the Methodist Church would share in the ministry of the historic episcopate (in the form of a President-bishop); and that all presbyters and priests serving in either church would be welcomed as eligible to serve in both churches.
- 1.2. In 2018 the Methodist Conference and the Church of England’s General Synod had a general conversation about the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* report. Both bodies welcomed the proposals and identified areas which needed some further consideration. As the Faith and Order Committee reported to the 2019 Conference, this work was completed and made available in June 2019 on the Anglican-Methodist covenant website (www.anglican-methodist.org.uk). The final paragraph (143) of the report makes some further recommendations. (All paragraph numbers refer to those of the original report.)

In light of this report, the faith and order bodies invite the Conference and the General Synod to adopt the following recommendations as they take forward the proposals of MMiC.

i. The ‘formal declaration’ envisaged by MMiC at §10, referred to as the ‘first step’ towards a new relationship of communion, should include a commitment to seeking what this document terms the ‘reconciliation of structures’, to enable our churches to act and speak as one church where this serves the mission of God (paragraphs 10–22).

ii. The planning of an inaugural joint service or services of Holy Communion, to take place following from the acceptance of the proposals in both churches and the ordination of the first President-Bishop, should make appropriate space for repentance for past sins, for the welcoming of one another’s gifts and graces and for the commissioning of the churches for mission together, to include a specific episcopal commissioning of all ordained ministers in each church for readiness to serve in and with the other (paragraphs 23–32, 40–50 and 52–54).

iii. Where a minister ordained in one church is accepted to serve also in the other for the first time, a service of welcome should be held, to include prayer and appropriate liturgical action as fitting to the polity of each church (paragraph 51).

iv. A ‘Council event’ should be arranged to take place soon after the inaugural service, to mark the new stage on the Covenant journey, set it in the context of joint mission and service to the world and advise the churches on how the new relationship between them might best be sustained and deepened (paragraphs 55–56).

v. There should be further exploration of diaconal ministry in the two churches, including current developments, in terms of parallels, contrasts and the potential for mutual learning (paragraphs 94–95.)

- 1.3. The 2019 Methodist Conference did not debate the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals nor the further work. This was partly because the additional work was only completed in June, and therefore not in time for the Conference Agenda. More significantly, though, it was because it has been a general principle that in these conversations the Church of England should be asked to declare its mind first. When the proposals in the Anglican-Methodist Conversations in 1969 and 1972 fell at the final Church of England hurdle after the Conference had come to its own mind, deep

hurt and disappointment was felt by many. The Church of England is clear that it does not want to repeat that this time, and so this is intended to be the order of decision-making.

2. Decisions of the General Synod, July 2019

2.1. In July 2019 the General Synod of the Church of England debated a report outlining the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* conversations and the further reflection by the faith and order bodies. The Chair of the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission put down a motion which said, in essence, that the faith and order bodies had completed the work they had been asked to undertake and therefore the way was open for the proposals to be implemented through appropriate legislation. It was for the members of the Synod to agree, amend or reject this motion.

2.2. The debate at the General Synod was given substantial time, with many people wishing to speak and the tone of the debate was generally warm and encouraging. Unity and mission were the focus of many of the speeches, with common themes being the imperative of reaching those who do not have faith, of taking risks, and of working together to proclaim the Gospel of healing and reconciliation in a broken world.

2.3. Concerns were also expressed, and some members noted areas where there continue to be questions and a lack of consensus (not least among the House of Bishops). The Synod was therefore divided about the timing of decisions, although a number of members underlined the urgency of the missional task and felt that now was the time to take the next steps together. The Synod clearly rejected one amendment which would effectively "kick the proposals into the long grass", but eventually voted for a more measured time frame than originally proposed and asked for some drafting work on a series of texts to begin.

2.4. The motion that was passed by the General Synod reads as follows:

'That this Synod:

(a) affirm the priority of doing mission together and welcome the work done by the faith and order bodies to respond to issues raised in the initial reception of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, while also recognising that, for some within the Church of England, concerns about the proposals remain;

(b) support the recommendations intended to address those issues that are listed in the final paragraph of the report on further work from the faith and order bodies regarding Mission and Ministry in Covenant;

(c) request the Faith and Order Commission to work with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee on drafting texts for the 'formal declaration', the inaugural service or services and the service of welcome referred to in the recommendations in the final paragraph of the report on further work, and for the guidelines for the practice of presbyters / priests from one church being received to serve in the other referred to in paragraph 142, with full draft texts being made available to the Synod;

(d) request the House of Bishops to report during the next quinquennium on the progress made on the work described in the previous paragraph, together with proposals for implementation.'

(It is noted that the next quinquennium of the General Synod is from 2020 to 2025.)

3. Potential Further Work

3.1. Following the decision of the General Synod, the officers of the faith and order bodies of the two churches identified five potential pieces of work:

Three pieces of work have been requested by the General Synod, but not (or not yet) by the Methodist Church, namely:

- a. Drafting a formal declaration of a new relationship of communion between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. This will involve considering how to characterise the nature and purpose of the new relationship between the churches that is coming into being;
- b. Drafting a liturgy for the inaugural service or services, and services of welcome for presbyters / priests when they begin particular appointments;
- c. Producing guidelines for the practice of interchangeability of presbyters / priests, including consideration of clergy oversight and discipline.

One piece of work has been requested by the Methodist Conference:

- d. Further exploration of the interchangeability of deacons, involving consideration of the extent of convergence in theology and practice between the two churches. As the 2019 Conference adopted the *Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the MDO* report, the Methodist Church is now in a position to take this work forward.

One final piece of work has not yet been requested, but has been noted as something that members of both churches might find helpful to see:

- e. Drafting a liturgy of ordination for a Methodist President-bishop.

4. **Proposal from the Church of England Faith and Order Commission**

- 4.1. At its meeting in September, the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission discussed the debate at the General Synod and the further work it has been asked to do, working with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee. The Commission noted concerns that there continues to be a lack of clarity and consensus about whether the goal of the Covenant journey, of which the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals are a part, is still the organic unity of our two churches on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church, or whether many envisage a permanent 'semi-detached' relationship. As the General Synod asked for work on drafting a formal declaration of a new relationship of communion, it would be helpful for further reflection on the 'goal' of the Covenant journey to precede that work.
- 4.2. The Commission felt that it would be helpful for a joint forum of members from both churches to discuss and reflect on the goal of the covenant journey. This forum would include those in positions of senior leadership, and its conversations would precede the drafting of the formal declaration. The Commission asked the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee to convey the proposal to the Methodist Council and the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church.
- 4.3. Within the Commission, there was a range of views on whether or not the other two areas of work (the liturgical work and the guidelines for interchangeability) could begin before the forum has taken place, but no final decision was made, partly depending on the Methodist Council's response to both the suggestion and to the further reflection report from the faith and order bodies. It is noted, however, that the work would need to begin in early 2020 in order for the General Synod and then the Conference to make decisions about the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals in 2022. If the work began any later than that it would most likely delay those decisions until 2023.

5. Conversation at the Methodist Council

5.1. It will be helpful for the Methodist Council to reflect on the work relating to *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* and indicate how it thinks this aspect of the Covenant relationship might progress. There are several particular areas for consideration:

- a. There has not yet been an opportunity for any conversation within the Methodist Church about the further report from the faith and order bodies, although it has been available since June. This will be an opportunity for members of the Council to discuss the recommendations of that report and ask any questions. The report is available here: <http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MMiC-areas-for-further-reflection-0619.pdf>.
- b. The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England has suggested that this might be an appropriate point for the churches to think about the goal of the Covenant journey, of which the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals are a part. The Council is therefore asked to consider the idea of convening a joint forum to discuss this as outlined in section 4 above.
- c. Exploration regarding the interchangeability of deacons has not yet been given substantial attention, primarily because the Methodist Church was undertaking work on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate. Now that the Methodist Conference has adopted a report which outlines the Methodist Church's position this work can be taken forward. An initial step might be to convene a meeting in which members of both churches, and particularly deacons, can share their understanding and experience of the diaconate.
- d. Following the recommendations of the further report from the faith and order bodies (found in paragraph 143 of that report), the General Synod asked for some drafting work on the declaration of communion, the inaugural liturgy and welcome services, and the guidelines for interchangeability (listed in 3.1 a-c above). This would require some joint working by the faith and order bodies, consulting as appropriate with other bodies and officers within the churches. As the Methodist Church has not yet indicated whether it wishes this work to proceed, the Council is asked to decide whether the Faith and Order Committee should undertake this work and, if so, to give an indication as to the time-frame.
- e. Members of both churches have indicated that it would be helpful to see a draft ordination service for a Methodist President-bishop. The Council is asked to indicate whether it thinks the Faith and Order Committee should undertake this task before either church makes final decisions about the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals.

5.2. There are, therefore, several potential pieces of work, all of which would involve some significant time and commitment, not least by the Faith and Order Committee. The Council is particularly asked to reflect on which work should be given priority and whether the resulting time frames are realistic. A variety of resolutions are offered in order that some direction might be given to the Faith and Order Committee.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 79A/1.** The Council receives the report.
- 79A/2.** The Council affirms the priority of doing mission together and welcomes the work done by the faith and order bodies to respond to issues raised in the initial reception of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, while also recognising that, for some within the Methodist Church, concerns about the proposals remain.
- 79A/3.** The Council welcomes the suggestion of a joint forum to explore the end goal of the Covenant journey, and directs the Faith and Order Committee to take this forward and provide an update for the April Council.
- 79A/4.** The Council directs the Faith and Order Committee to take forward the work on the interchangeability of deacons as proposed in paragraph 5.1c above.
- 79A/5.** The Council supports the recommendations intended to address those issues that are listed in the final paragraph of the report on further work from the faith and order bodies regarding *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* (and set out in paragraph 1.2 of this report), and directs the Faith and Order Committee to work with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission on drafting the texts for the 'formal declaration', the inaugural service or services and the service of welcome referred to in the recommendations in the final paragraph of the report on further work, and for the guidelines for the practice of presbyters / priests from one church being received to serve in the other.
- 79A/6.** The Council notes the recommendations intended to address those issues that are listed in the final paragraph of the report on further work from the faith and order bodies regarding *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* (and set out in paragraph 1.2 of this report), and directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring them to the 2020 Conference for debate and decision.
- 79A/7.** The Council directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals, the draft texts and proposals for implementation to the 2022 Conference.
- 79A/8.** The Council directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals, the draft texts and proposals for implementation to a future Conference and once the General Synod has begun the legislative process.