

24. Ecumenical Report

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Subject and aims	To provide a report on some areas of ecumenical engagement.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Methodist Church is committed to working with ecumenical partners from a wide variety of Christian traditions. Unity and mission are inseparable and we continue to encourage flexible ways of working together wherever possible.
- 1.2. This report includes updates on the work of some of the ecumenical bodies and accounts of some significant developments in other areas. The Conference has reason to be grateful to all those who represent the Methodist Church on a wide variety of committees, commissions and working groups thus enabling connexional, district, circuit and local initiatives.
- 1.3. In the last months of this connexional year, in the context of a global pandemic, the existing good relationship with ecumenical partners has enabled us to share experience and expertise as we support one another. National Ecumenical Officers have participated in regular virtual meetings hosted by Churches Together in England (CTE) where information has been shared and we have prayed with and for one another. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland has enabled the sharing of resources across the four nations.
- 1.4. In the context of challenging and changing international relationships our ecumenical relationships in Europe and through the World Council of Churches are opportunities for wider engagement and enrichment. The Methodist Church in Britain continues to work with our concordat partners, the United Methodist Church (UMC), identifying areas of work where we are stronger together, such as our response to climate change.

2. The World Council of Churches (WCC)

- 2.1. The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches is planned to take place in Karlsruhe, Germany on 8–16 September 2021. The theme of the assembly is ‘Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity’. The assembly meets every eight years and is the highest legislative body of the WCC. It reviews programmes, determines the overall policies of the WCC, elects presidents and appoints a Central Committee, which serves as the chief governing body of the WCC until the next assembly.
- 2.2. The Conference in 2019 delegated the appointment of representatives to the Assembly to the Methodist Council. The Council reports elsewhere in the Agenda that the nominated representatives are the Revds Michaela Youngson and Ruth Gee.

3. The Conference of European Churches (CEC)

- 3.1. The CEC has continued to develop its strategy to the theme “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), based on the three topics of:
 - i. Promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe
 - ii. Strengthening ecumenical fellowship and promoting the mission of the churches
 - iii. Raising churches’ voice in Europe and the European Institutions.Further information is available on the CEC website.¹

¹ <https://www.ceceurope.org/>

3.2. **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)**

This past year, CTBI has provided, as usual, resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity ('Unusual kindness', which was prepared by churches in Malta and Gozo) and Lent ('Opening the scriptures: setting our hearts on fire'). CTBI has continued to work to its aim of serving the churches of Britain and Ireland on the shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. Information about the scope of this work can be found on the CTBI website.²

- 3.3. In April 2020, CTBI hosted a meeting of senior religious leaders from around Britain and Ireland to hear and support one another during the COVID-19 crisis. Following this meeting, a Holy Week statement from the church leaders was published and shared.

4. **Scotland**

- 4.1. COVID-19 has seen the cancellation or postponement of many meetings of the Assemblies or Synods of partner churches in Scotland, including the Scotland District, in 2020.
- 4.2. The Scotland District has continued its active representation on both ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland) and EMU (Episcopal, Methodist and United Reformed) meetings and committees. Through participation in these ecumenical bodies, consultation is enabled when there are changes in provision of ministry in local partnerships.
- 4.3. Following the review of ACTS, the Trustees and Members' Meeting are moving towards a new network which will form the Scottish Christian Forum. It is expected that this will see the end of ACTS in order to allow for the development of this new charitable body. Progress has been slowed by the COVID-19 situation.
- 4.4. Scottish Methodists rejoice in a number of ecumenical partnerships (formal and informal) which enable shared premises, worship, mission and ministry.

5. **England**

- 5.1. Churches Together in England (CTE) has 50 member churches and continues to support ecumenical initiatives with an emphasis on mission and a flexible approach to new partnerships.
- 5.2. CTE is represented by six Presidents from the major traditions of the member churches. When the Fourth Presidency became vacant the churches in that group appointed Hannah Brock Womack, a Quaker and someone in a same-sex marriage, to this role. At the present time, in response to the request of the CTE Enabling Group, the Fourth Presidency Group has refrained from enacting its Presidency for the current term of office. The empty chair starkly represents the lack of agreement within the member churches of CTE regarding human sexuality. This inability to reach agreement in diversity has been a cause of great pain. The Methodist Church published a response to the decision which included the statement that, "The outcome does not represent the position of the Methodist Church which does not bar people who are in an equal marriage from any roles within the Church."³

6. **Wales**

² <https://ctbi.org.uk>

³ <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/new-s/latest-news/all-news/a-response-from-the-methodist-church-to-the-churches-together-in-england-fourth-presidency-appointment/>

- 6.1. Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales) has continued to offer support to the churches in Wales in issues relating to church and society, faith and witness, and Wales and Europe.
- 6.2. The Commission of Covenanted Churches is continuing to work towards further development of the covenant relationship with an emphasis on shared ministry.

7. **The Free Churches Group (FCG)**

- 7.1. The Free Churches Group celebrates its 80th anniversary this year and further information about events will be publicised when available.
- 7.2. The work of the Free Churches Group continues to be focused on supporting the churches' work in education, healthcare and prison chaplaincy. A major piece of work is the Free Churches Commission into social cohesion in England. This project is being conducted by Theos and the full report will be published in the autumn of 2020.

8. **The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM)**

- 8.1. The aims of MAPUM are to:
 - i. Affirm and uphold the inseparability of Unity and Mission with the conviction that neither can be fully addressed in isolation
 - ii. Promote working together in mission under the Covenant
 - iii. Share insights, address issues, and develop resources in local units in mission for both churches.
- 8.2. Ecumenical work in Milton Keynes and in Cumbria has been a focus for learning about the challenges of working together and for celebrating ecumenism for mission in different contexts.
- 8.3. There has been robust conversation in response to the decisions of the General Synod of the Church of England and the Methodist Council relating to Mission and Ministry in Covenant and MAPUM continues its wider work of encouraging growth in unity in mission for the two churches.

9. **The Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group (MURCLG)**

- 9.1. The Liaison Group has met only once this year, the meeting in March having been cancelled because of the COVID-19 restrictions.
- 9.2. The committee has considered good practice concerning the reporting of compliance in relation to denominational safeguarding policies as they apply to Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs).
- 9.3. The committee considered revisions to guidelines concerning 'Capital Contributions' involving Methodist-URC projects.
- 9.4. In February 2020 an 'Introduction to the Methodist Church' took place in Methodist Church House. Originally designed for URC ministers appointed to Methodist-URC LEPS, the event was offered to those in ordained or in lay ministry from any partner church. The event was well attended and appreciated and will be repeated.

10. **The British Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission**

- 10.1 The Commission began its year-long exploration of the Eucharist in May 2019, meeting for two days at Hinsley Hall. Members of the group led reflections on two key denominational documents: 'One Bread, One Body' for the Catholics, and the Conference document on Holy

Communion, 'His Presence Makes the Feast'. The discussion which followed was profound, personal, and honest, and enabled a deep level of sharing and reflection, which the Commission hopes to be able to offer back to local communities and congregations in some form in the future. Following this, the group decided to devote its day-long meeting in December 2019, at CBCEW in central London, to more personal reflections on the Eucharist from the two Co-Secretaries. It has been a rich and rewarding dialogue, which it is hoped will inform and inspire some deeper sharing in local contexts. The Commission keeps constantly in mind the question of how best to share the fruit of its meetings and conversations more widely and effectively.

11. Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome (MEOR)

- 11.1. The Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome is a presence for the World Methodist Council:
- to be a channel of dialogue with other churches in the search for a deeper unity
 - to foster relationships with other agencies and faith communities in order to promote better understanding and joint action for justice and peace
 - to offer a ministry of prayer and reflection, of learning and growth
 - to be a place of open hospitality to Methodists and all visitors to Rome.
- 11.2. The work of MEOR is overseen by a Forum, the members of which are the World Methodist Council, the Methodist Church, the European Methodist Council, the United Methodist Church Office of Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Relationships, OPCEMI (The Methodist Churches in Italy) and The Wesley Rome.
- 11.3. The Forum has been grateful for the work of the Revd Dr Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman as Interim Director of MEOR in a year that has been exceptionally difficult for those living and working in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 11.4. The Revd Matthew A Laferty has been appointed as Director of MEOR from 1 September 2020 for a period of five years. Matthew is currently serving as Pastor of the English-Speaking United Methodist Church of Vienna. He is an ordained presbyter of the United Methodist Church and has wide ecumenical and international experience.

[Footnotes]

1 <https://www.ceceurope.org/>

2 <https://www.ceceurope.org/>

3 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/a-response-from-the-methodist-church-to-the-churches-together-in-england-fourth-presidency-appointment/>

*****RESOLUTIONS**

24/1. The Conference received the Report.

24/2. The Conference adopted Notice of Motion 2020/113 and encouraged Churches Together in England to allow Hannah Brock Womack to take up the position for which she was duly nominated, rejoicing that we journey together as ecumenical partners despite our various differences.

24/3. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to communicate the text of Notice of Motion 2020/113 to the Revd Dr Paul Goodliff, General Secretary of Churches Together in England and the six Presidents, including Hannah Brock Womack.

Notice of Motion 2020/113: Report 24 – Ecumenical Report

The Conference celebrates the valuable work of Churches Together in England (CTE) and rejoices in its emphasis on mission and flexible approach to new partnerships. (Para 6.1).

The Conference notes that members of CTE work together across deep disagreement on core doctrinal issues, such as around the nature of the Church, the Sacraments and Orders of Ministry, and gives thanks for the grace shown in this way of working.

The Conference further notes that since 2014, being in same-sex marriage is not a bar to any office within the Methodist Church.

The Conference, therefore, expresses its dismay that the CTE Enabling Group asked the Fourth Group to refrain from the duly elected president - Hannah Brock Womack - taking her seat, prompted by her same-sex marriage.

Furthermore, the Conference laments the pain that the Enabling Group's decision inflicts on Ms. Brock Womack, the Religious Society of Friends and LGBTQ+ Christians and their allies.