

# 1. TAKING STOCK AND LOOKING AHEAD

## TAKING STOCK FIVE YEARS ON

The Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England was agreed by the General Synod and the Methodist Conference in the Summer of 2003. The Covenant was signed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and the general secretaries of both churches in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, and celebrated in Westminster Abbey, both events taking place in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen, on 1 November that year.

The Covenant stands out as a major initiative of reconciliation and unity in the history of the Churches in this country. Its significance is brought out if we reflect for a moment on the relationship between Anglicanism and Methodism in England over the past two and half centuries.

The Methodist movement began within the Church of England, as part of the Evangelical Revival. John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were clergymen of the Church of England who, despite pressure from others, never contemplated leaving the established church. For a long time, Methodists continued to worship in their parish churches, alongside their own preaching services and class meetings. They were generally communicants in the Church of England. The 2007 commemorations of the tercentenary of Charles Wesley's birth have reminded us how he strove to keep Methodism loyal to the Church of England and passionately opposed all steps that would loosen the ties.

However, Methodism and the Church of England drifted apart over time, going their separate ways more by accident than design. The movement attracted some who had been formed in historic dissenting churches and welcomed many who had no meaningful church background at all. The movement gradually took on a particular organizational shape and the structures that emerged did not mesh well with those of the Church of England. Methodism, initially a movement of renewal and evangelization within the national church, evolved into a church itself. It seemed that the new wine of Methodism could not be contained in the old wineskins of Anglicanism. By the end of the nineteenth century Methodism, by then itself divided, and the Church of England were in a state of sibling rivalry, competing – together with other churches – for England's soul.

As we show in our chapter ‘The Unity we Have and the Unity we Seek’, both churches were profoundly affected by the ecumenical movement, which began in the second half of the nineteenth century as various European and American missionary societies began deliberately to cooperate rather than to compete in their various spheres of operation around the world. The International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 is often seen as marking the official birth of the ecumenical movement. The Lambeth Conference of bishops of the Anglican Communion in 1920 addressed all the baptized in its ‘Appeal to All Christian People’. Since then, the Methodist Church (together with other ‘Free Churches’) and the Church of England have explored the possibilities of reunion in several conversations. Meanwhile, various branches of Methodism came together in 1932 to form the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The ecumenical movement has transformed the relationships between churches and individual Christians from one of suspicion and hostility to one of friendship and co-operation. The founding figures of the ecumenical movement were right to see it as a great new work of the Holy Spirit.

The conversations that were prompted by the Lambeth Appeal received fresh momentum in 1946 (as we recount in our chapter on unity) and culminated in worked out proposals for uniting the Church of England and the Methodist Church. The final narrow defeat of these unity proposals in the General Synod in 1971 left a legacy of rejection, heartbreak and disillusionment that has not completely faded away. Churches have long collective memories. The Covenant has gone some way towards healing those wounds of more than thirty years ago. But that is only the start. The Covenant has provided a launching pad for further convergence in faith, life and mission, and we believe that it points to our churches acting as one body in more and more ways until we reach the point where we are able to enter into a relationship of full visible communion.

There is no doubt that the intention of the Methodist Church in approaching the Church of England in 1994, at the initiation of the present process, as of the Church of England in responding, was that our two churches should eventually become one. In this report the two chapters ‘The Unity we Have and the Unity we Seek’ and ‘*Episkope* and Episcopacy in our Churches under the Covenant’ are significant contributions that point the way towards that goal. They are not intended for immediate response. Instant off the cuff comments are unlikely to be helpful. We believe that these two chapters need to be considered together. We hope that they will be carefully – and prayerfully – weighed and studied by our churches over the next few years. The JIC needs to be part of that conversation.

We have to admit that the implementation of the Covenant has been uneven. In some dioceses and districts it has been taken up with vision and energy; in others it seems to have made little difference so far. The Covenant provides the rationale, some useful resources and the theological framework for transforming the relationship between our two churches. The JIC has worked with each of the Covenant ‘Commitments’ and, as the body of this report, together with the two interim reports, shows, progress has been made on a number of fronts, especially with regard to the unresolved ‘faith and order’ issues that were identified in the report of the Formal Conversations *An Anglican–Methodist Covenant* (2001).

But the Covenant will only make a difference where it is taken up locally and where church leaders commit themselves to making it work. The Archbishops of Canterbury and of York (both David Hope and John Sentamu) and the successive Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Methodist Conference have been unstinting in their commitment and support. Their example has been a huge asset to the work of the JIC. But the JIC itself – a small group of busy people working at the national level – cannot ensure the successful implementation of the Covenant throughout the Methodist Connexion and the Church of England. What it can do, and has done, is to provide some tools for others to carry forward the implementation in their own spheres. There is further to go in embracing the Covenant, and so playing our part in healing the wounds of division in the Body of Christ.

In the body of this introduction we first set the broader ecumenical context of the Covenant, then gather up the main recommendations that we have made already in our two interim reports, and finally sketch a couple of areas where we have initiated certain developments that need to be carried through into the next phase.<sup>1</sup>

## THE BROADER CONTEXT

### **Wider Ecumenical Relationships**

The Anglican-Methodist Covenant has consistently been described as a step on the way, a new stage in the journey of the two Churches towards the full visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ. Each Church has a

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<sup>1</sup> The JIC has also given careful consideration to the response of the Methodist Faith and Order Committee to *Living God’s Covenant* and will keep the Committee’s observations before it as the work continues.

range of other intentional relationships, both bilateral and multilateral. As it has done its work, the JIC has maintained a full awareness of this wider context. The presence of a representative of the United Reformed Church has helped to ensure this.

One of the tests of all the work being done to fulfil the mandate of the Joint Implementation Commission, whether by JIC itself or by others throughout our two Churches is this: how far and in what ways does the work we are doing sustain and strengthen our other ecumenical relationships? To put it slightly differently: are our two Churches speaking and acting consistently in all the particular expressions of our ecumenical vocations?

### **An English Covenant in the setting of Britain and Ireland**

Under the auspices of the JIC a four-nations Methodist – Anglican consultation took place at St Michael's College, Llandaff, 17-19 March 2008.<sup>2</sup> The Consultation shared experience and documentation regarding the various covenants and other similar relationships involving Methodists and Anglicans in the four nations. The Consultation was briefed on the multilateral Welsh Covenant, the Irish Covenant and the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. It also heard of the trilateral informal conversations in Scotland involving the Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church. Motivated by the biblical imperative to seek the visible unity of Christ's Church and to share together in God's mission, the Consultation reflected on what we could learn from each other's experience and on

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#### **2 The participants were:**

##### Anglican

The Most Revd Dr Idris Jones, Primus Scottish Episcopal Church; The Right Revd David Yeoman, Assistant Bishop of Llandaff; The Revd Gwynn ap Gwilym, Church in Wales; The Revd Canon Dr Peter Sedgwick: Principal, St Michael's College; Mrs Elspeth Davey, Scottish Episcopal Church; Dr Andrew Pierce, Church of Ireland; The Revd Prebendary Dr Paul Avis: Church of England; The Most Revd Barry Morgan: Archbishop of Wales (visiting); apology: The Right Revd Ian Cundy: Bishop of Peterborough

##### Methodist

The Revd Dr Stephen Wigley, Co-Chair, The Wales Synod; The Revd Gareth Powell, former Ecumenical Officer for Y Cyngor (the Council for Methodism in Wales) and Chair of the Connexional committee for Local Ecumenical Development; The Revd Peter Sulston, Connexional Ecumenical Officer; The Revd Lily P Twist, Chair, the Scotland District; Dr William (Bill) Reid, Connexional Liaison Officer, Scotland; Mrs Gillian Kingston, Methodist Church in Ireland; apology: Professor Peter Howdle.

ways in which the various strands of Methodist – Anglican relations could become better connected. The purpose of the Consultation was to achieve more ‘joined up thinking’ in this area.

In approaching this challenge, several factors weighed with the representatives. First, the Methodist Church is a Church in three nations, as a single Connexion, and does its Faith and Order work within that context, as well as having close connections with the Irish Methodist Conference. As the JIC has done its work over the past five years, it has taken seriously the fact that the Methodist Church extends into three nations. However, when first the informal conversations and then the Formal Conversations, that led to the ‘English’ Covenant, were set up, it did not occur to any of those concerned that the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales, which were both involved in national ecumenical commitments – the Scottish Churches Initiative for Union and the proposal for an Ecumenical Bishop in East Cardiff – might have had an interest in what may have appeared to be an ‘English’ Covenant. We believe that that oversight should be repaired in future.

Second, the four British and Irish Anglican churches are now working more closely together in Faith and Order matters. There are regular meetings of the national ecumenical officers and of those carrying out Faith and Order work for the four churches. The Porvoo Agreement (1996) and the Reuilly Agreement (1999) involve all four churches. However, the Meissen Agreement (1991) and the Anglican – Methodist Covenant (2003) are confined to the Church of England. The Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England is exploring whether it is possible to redress this imbalance.

Third, the Methodist Conference 2007, in encouraging the JIC to bring forward proposals regarding *episkope* and episcopacy, also asked that the models of episcopacy found in the Anglican churches of the other nations should be taken into account.

Fourth, we need to be sensitive to the existing ecumenical relationships of our churches within the four nations and a way should be found to bring such an awareness to the heart of the work of the JIC as it continues its work. The JIC will also need to ensure good communication and full consultation with the Covenant Council in Ireland.

Following the consultation in Llandaff, the representatives reported to the appropriate authorities in their churches. The soundings they

took were very positive and encouraged the JIC to recommend in this quinquennial report that the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church be invited to participate in the second phase of the JIC and that there should be Methodist representation from Scotland and Wales. The Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales have already signalled informally their serious interest in having a seat at the table when the JIC resumes its work.

The consultation was clear (and the JIC as a whole endorses this view) that there is scope for development in the wider Anglican participation in the next phase. The Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church will thus be in a position to help to shape the future of the Covenant and to share in its benefits, with the possibility of becoming signatory members if they and the original signatories come to the view that that would be the right step to take.

### **Bilateral Dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church**

Since 1966 and following the Second Vatican Council, both the Anglican Communion and the World Methodist Council have engaged in a series of bilateral dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church. The fruit of these dialogues has been substantial, though their reception in the Churches has been difficult at times.

In 2002 the Faith and Order Committee presented to the Methodist Conference a review of the six reports made by the International Roman Catholic/Methodist Conversations between 1971 and 1996 and gave a brief response to the 2001 report. In 2007 it gave a fuller summary and response to the 2006 report, *The Grace Given You in Christ*. That report is particularly significant because it offers challenges to Roman Catholics and Methodists in those contexts where they exist alongside each other.

The International Anglican – Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) published *Growing together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue* at the end of 2006. This is described as ‘a call for action, based upon an honest appraisal of what has been achieved in our dialogue [the work of ARCIC, the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission]’. It speaks of shared commitment to mission and unity on the basis of the doctrinal agreement that has been achieved. The report was welcomed by the General Synod in February 2008. IARCCUM’s programme of action in unity and mission broadly parallels the final section of *The Grace*

*Given You in Christ.* It would be useful to look at the two international dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church, to see where they converge and to identify where they are distinctive and to feed these insights into the Covenant process.

### **Methodist – Episcopal dialogue in the United States of America**

The dialogue between the United Methodist Church (UMC) and The Episcopal Church has recently achieved Interim Eucharistic Sharing as a stage on the path to their goal of ‘full communion’, which will include an interchangeable ordained ministry on the basis of ordination within the historic episcopate. The UMC is a large church, with nearly 8 million members in the USA and several millions more in other parts of the world, including the mainland of Europe. Its bishops are not at present within the historic episcopate. In October 2007 the Methodist – Episcopal dialogue met in London in order to meet with the co-chairs and co-conveners of the JIC.

The United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church each has a special relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). In 2001 The Episcopal Church and the ELCA entered ‘full communion’. The bishops and pastors of the ELCA are now being ordained within the historic episcopate and more than half of the ELCA’s bishops are now within that order. The UMC and the ELCA also have a dialogue of their own that is aiming at ‘full communion’. The UMC’s General Conference agreed in April 2008 to enter into a relationship of full communion with the ELCA. In 2009 the ELCA legislative body will be asked to make the same decision on the basis of a dialogue report *Confessing our Faith Together*.

### **Anglican – Methodist International Relations**

The report of a Consultation held in London in October 2007 (which involved the co-conveners of the JIC) proposes to the Anglican Communion and the World Methodist Council the establishment of an Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (AMICUM) with the following mandate.

Building on our common confession of the apostolic faith and our participation in God’s mission, the purpose of the Commission is to advance the visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists at every level as a contribution to the full visible unity of the Church of Christ.

The report envisages the principal work of the Commission as:

**Monitoring** dialogues and relationships between Anglican and Methodist Churches worldwide,

- Listening to the challenges and opportunities offered in the variety of contexts;<sup>3</sup>
- Gathering information and insights;
- Reviewing and evaluating agreements and theological statements; and
- Sharing the best practices learned;

**Resourcing** developing Anglican – Methodist relationships around the world, in particular by:

- engaging in theological reflection on the nature of the unity we seek; and,
- clarifying questions to be addressed;<sup>4</sup> and

**Proposing** ways toward the full visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists, by

- suggesting guidelines and protocols; and
- offering models for the reconciliation of churches and ministries.<sup>5</sup>

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3 *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* (the report of the Anglican – Methodist International Commission) stated the context in 1996 this way: ‘The concern that Christian believers be seen as one in Christ is urgent at this particular time. We are faced by growing secularism and the loss of social cohesion in the older Christian world. At the same time other religious faiths are everywhere challenging Christianity with alternative visions of the human condition and destiny. Thus the present Anglican – Methodist Dialogue is more than Christians talking to themselves about internal ecclesiastical arrangements. The integrity of Christian witness is at stake.’ It needs to be noted that the context in 2008 has developed significantly.

4 An overview of the areas of doctrinal exploration and agreement to which attention has been given can be found in Part II of the *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* Report, paragraphs 14 –30.

5 Cf. *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, paragraph 5: ‘Confessing this oneness together, to the highest achievable degree, is crucial for our evangelization, and may mitigate our disunity which now detracts from the presentation of the Gospel of reconciliation. We seek to be obedient to the will of Christ both in our confession of God’s saving Word and in our witness to the One Lord of the Church and Saviour of the world.’

## OUR MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS TO OUR CHURCHES

In line with our mandate from the Methodist Conference and the General Synod, ‘to monitor and promote the implementation of the Covenant’, we have made several recommendations to our churches in our two interim reports *In the Spirit of the Covenant* and *Living God’s Covenant*. We believe that, if implemented across the life of our churches, they will help significantly to bring us closer together. However, we have to say that we do not believe that, to date, they have been taken up as fully as they deserve to be.

In addition to some formal recommendations, we have also tackled, in our interim reports, the crucial question of the interchangeability of ordained ministries in a way that is intended to deepen mutual understanding of the theology and practice of our churches and so to prepare the ground for future attempts to achieve a common theology and practice on matters where agreement is needed for full visible communion. The chapter on ‘*Episkope* and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant’ in this present report takes the discussion further in a set of carefully formulated proposals that we hope will be considered in due course by our churches. A further group of recommendations arises out of the chapter on joint decision making in this present report.

The premise of all our work has been the conviction that there is an indissoluble biblical connection between mission and unity. The implications of this inseparable connection are set out in our chapter ‘The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek’. In the setting of the Covenant the relation between unity and mission has important practical implications and we say a word about these now.

Because of the worldwide movement of peoples there are now many Christians in Britain whose Christian nurture and formation was in churches rooted in other parts of the world. Christians of orthodox belief from various parts of Europe and Asia and from independent, evangelical and charismatic churches, many of them African-instituted, are a significant feature of British church life. There has been a radical shift of the centre of gravity of the Christian world from the North to the South, from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia and Latin America. What vision and structures are needed to enable that ‘big picture’ of what it is to be part of the one worldwide Church of Jesus Christ to emerge? Will our two Churches be open to the prompting of the Spirit to do new things and enter into new relationships?

The twin imperatives of mission and unity grow ever stronger in a world of many faiths and convictions, of human brokenness and alienation and potentially destructive disunity both in the Church and in the world. These global realities also shape the life of the churches in Britain. It is for the Church of England and the Methodist Church to reflect on how they can respond together with greater flexibility to the changing context of our commitment to unity in mission and how that relates to the journey that the whole Church needs to make towards fuller visible unity. We believe that one step that both our churches should take is to embrace the Covenant more radically along the lines we suggest.

Coming closer to home, future patterns of ministerial deployment are a challenge to both our churches. The JIC endorses every initiative for ecumenical collaboration at church/parish, circuit/deanery and district/diocese levels, but also recognises (see our chapter on Decision-Making) the practical difficulties. Realism about the pressures on both our Churches around the availability of ordained ministry for the parishes and circuits, and similar issues for other denominations, may concentrate thinking and planning in the next few years. It is for the responsible bodies in each of our Churches, along with other partner churches, to consider the issue of Christian presence in communities where that presence is becoming increasingly attenuated. Once again unity and mission go hand in hand.

We have not neglected the local, practical implementation of our Covenant relationship, but in our interim reports we have included many examples of good practice (there are more in the ‘cameos’ included in chapter 3 in this report) and given practical guidelines for developing Covenant spirituality. We have also promoted the guidance that the Council for Christian Unity has given with regard to the application of Canons B 43 and B 44 under the Covenant.

We are also taking this opportunity to make it known that expert advice and support on the local implementation of the Covenant is available to bishops and to District Chairs from the Right Revd David Hawtin, former Bishop of Repton and former Chair of the Council for Christian Unity’s Local Unity Panel. He will be pleased to respond to requests made to him at home: 162 Greenhill Ave., Sheffield S8 7TF; tel. 0114 274 0006; email [hawtins1@btinternet.com](mailto:hawtins1@btinternet.com).

Next we summarise the main recommendations that we have already made in our previous reports.

## Holy Communion

The report of the Formal Conversations registered agreement on Eucharistic doctrine between our churches. But certain differences of practice prompted some to question whether there really was agreement on the theology. So we needed to say something about both the theology and the practice. We have fully substantiated that doctrinal accord, by reference to the formularies, official teachings and Eucharistic liturgies of our two churches (see *Living God's Covenant*, chapter 5, 'The Eucharist: Two Theologies or One?'). We were able to conclude that 'there is no discernible difference in the teaching of our churches on the Eucharist' and to claim: 'With regard to this central sacrament of the Christian Church we share a common faith' (LGC, p. 107).

But we also needed to look at certain sensitive issues of eucharistic practice in our churches. In our first interim report *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005) we included a discussion of the bread and wine of Holy Communion and we also set out the positions of our churches on the question of presidency at the Eucharist.

While some might feel that these are comparatively minor matters that should not be allowed to become obstacles to the further progress of our Covenant relationship, for others they are of considerable importance. This is why we addressed them in our 2005 report and repeat our conclusions here.

### The elements of Holy Communion

With regard to the elements of Holy Communion and the method of reverently disposing of surplus consecrated bread and wine, we are aware that there are not a few parishes and local churches where the rules and rubrics of their own church are not followed. We believe that sensitivities would be eased if these disciplines were better observed. We wish to recall our churches first to our Lord's institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper and secondly to the clear rules and rubrics of our churches governing the manner of its celebration.

We commend for consideration in both our churches 'how the symbolism of the one bread may be most adequately expressed'. We recommend that a single loaf of appropriate size should be used (a large wafer of unleavened bread would be equally suitable) and that the bread should not be broken before the thanksgiving prayer.

In both our churches communicants at the Lord's Table are generally given bread that has not been broken liturgically (receiving either a small square of previously cut bread or an individual wafer). That is not being faithful to our Lord's institution or to the significance of the 'one bread, one body' theme in St Paul. We recommend that the best way of expressing that vital theological symbolism is to use a single vessel for the wine (if necessary a flagon) during the thanksgiving prayer and to use a chalice (or chalices) for communicating the congregation.

We also note that both our churches require the eucharistic drink to be derived from 'the fruit of the vine'. For Anglicans this means using the fermented juice of the grape and nothing else; for Methodists it means using either grape juice, or wine from which the alcohol has been removed, and nothing else.

We are aware that the practice with regard to the disposal of surplus consecrated elements has varied considerably in the history of the Christian Church and that differences of practice have sometimes caused acute friction. Both our churches insist that any surplus consecrated elements be reverently disposed of. The Church of England further requires that they be reverently consumed. In the interests of harmony and convergence we recommend that the elements that are no longer needed are always consumed discreetly either after the communion or immediately after the service by the minister and/or others from the congregation.

### Eucharistic presidency

Our aim in setting out quite fully, in our first interim report (SOC, chapter 6), the positions of our churches on the matter of who should preside at the Holy Communion was to inform one another and to improve mutual understanding. In the Church of England, as in all other Anglican Churches, the president at the Eucharist must be a bishop or priest. In the Methodist Church the norm is that a presbyter presides. However, the Conference may authorise, on an annual basis, a suitably qualified lay person to preside in a situation of proven eucharistic deprivation. Where the norm of presbyteral presidency is clear, occasional non-presbyteral presidency need not constitute an insuperable barrier to the Church of England entering into communion with a church (i.e. a relationship that goes beyond the Covenant): the Church of Norway, in the communion of Porvoo Churches, allows the equivalent of probationer ministers to preside in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, the difference of practice limits our convergence as churches and will need to be addressed eventually.

## **Church, State and Establishment**

In 2004 the Methodist Conference received a report from the Faith and Order Committee with this title. The report was well informed, constructive and fair, but it put some challenges to the Church of England as the established church in England. The report was referred to the Methodist representatives on the JIC, who were asked to take it into account in their work. In the JIC's second interim report (LGC, 2007, chapter 3)) the JIC responded in the form of comments by its Anglican members, followed by some observations by the Commission as a whole. The JIC made four recommendations.

First, as requested by the Methodist report, the Church of England should do more to share the special opportunities for mission that are available to it by virtue of its historic relationship with the state, and the Methodist Church should embrace these opportunities when they are offered.

Second, a Methodist representative should be involved in the deliberations of the Vacancy in See Committee when a diocese is considering what kind of new bishop it needs.

Third, the Methodist Church and the Church of England should consult together on the shape of a reformed House of Lords and consider making a joint submission to government.

Fourth, Anglicans and Methodists in both Houses of Parliament should work more closely together and, with MPs and Peers of other Christian traditions, should seek to present a united witness to Christian truths and values.

### **Lay ministry**

In *Living God's Covenant* (chapter 4) we looked carefully at lay ministry in each of our churches. We noted that, while there was considerable overlap between the ministry of Local Preachers and Readers, there were also significant differences in what they were commissioned for. We did not think that the Covenant would be advanced by our suggesting some kind of automatic interchangeability between Readers and Local Preachers. But we made several recommendations that were intended to enhance the sharing of lay ministry that is already possible within the rules of our churches.

First, that when our churches are considering mission initiatives, they should work together and that lay (as well as ordained) ministers from our churches should be called upon.

Second, that there should be more sharing between our churches in training for lay ministry and that Regional Training Partnerships and Methodist Training Networks should seek to provide training for our Readers and Local Preachers.

Finally, that the Church of England should consider whether it can lift the current canonical requirement for the episcopal Confirmation of those seeking a recognised ministry in that Church, who have previously been (presbyterally) confirmed in the Methodist Church.

## ONGOING WORK

### **Exploring the diaconate together**

The report of the Formal Conversations that led to the Anglican – Methodist Covenant described how the diaconate was understood and practised in our two Churches and flagged up the need for work to be done in the interests of further theological convergence (AMC, 146-7). Our discussion of the interchangeability of ordained ministries in *In the Spirit of the Covenant* recommended that our churches should not look at issues concerning the diaconate on their own, but work together under the Covenant for the further development of this order.

At the request of the JIC, two day consultations were held at the Centre of the Methodist Diaconal Order in Birmingham in March and April 2008. The participants were drawn from the JIC, the Methodist Diaconal Order, the Methodist Faith and Order Committee and the Church of England's Faith and Order Advisory Group.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of these meetings was to explore common ground and to note differences in the policy and practice of our two churches, with regard to the diaconate, and to see what each Church could learn from the other.

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<sup>6</sup> Participants: Deacon Sue Jackson (Warden of the Diaconal Order); Deacon Sue Culver (Warden designate – apology for 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting); the Revd Dr Peter Philips (Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee; Consultant to the JIC); the Revd Canon Peter Fisher (Faith and Order Advisory Group); the Revd Prebendary Dr Paul Avis (General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity [FOAG]; Co-Convener of the JIC); Canon Dr Paula Gooder (FOAG – apologies).

It was noted that both Churches had undertaken important work on the diaconate in recent years, but that there was a recognition in both Churches that further reflection was needed. The renewal and development of the diaconate was an issue in both Churches. The Covenant made it appropriate and essential that these questions should be considered together.

The consultations studied recent reports from each Church: ‘What is a Deacon?’ (2004) and ‘The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church’ (2007) and examined the ordination liturgies of the *Methodist Worship Book* and the *Common Worship Ordinal*.

The following areas were identified as requiring further joint exploration:

1. How does the diaconate relate to the Church’s ministry of the word and of the sacraments?
2. What sort of leadership role is appropriate to deacons?
3. How are the languages of service and of proclamation, found in the ordination liturgies of both Churches, related and integrated?
4. What is the significance of the fact that, in both our Churches, deacons are ordained – i.e. the diaconate is an order of ministry?
5. What issues are raised by the difference of custom in our Churches regarding direct or sequential ordination to the presbyterate?
6. What is the significance of the fact that in the Methodist Church the diaconate is a religious order as well as an order of ministry?
7. What can we learn from each other’s ordination services for the diaconate and what questions would we wish to put to each other about these liturgies?
8. What resources and insights can ‘What is a Deacon?’ and ‘The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church’ contribute to our joint reflections on the diaconate?
9. How do deacons equip and enable Christians for mission and ministry?
10. What authority is given to deacons, by whom and for what tasks?

11. How can our Churches' current priority of mission, including evangelism, find expression and embodiment in the ministry of deacons?
12. What issues concerning the interchangeability of ordained ministries are raised by the current theology and practice of our Churches with regard to the diaconate?

The Birmingham consultations recommended that the conversation should be widened to include more practitioners of diaconal ministry from both churches and that the discussion should be held on a more representative basis. The consultations also recommended that the issues be discussed in a way that would allow a fuller sharing of experiences and a more reflective and deeper exploration of the issues. The Birmingham meetings saw a distinct advantage in the Methodist Diaconal Order hosting and facilitating a larger consultation on these themes and we understand that the Order would welcome the opportunity to do that, probably at their residential Convocation (the next one being 9-11 March 2009). The Birmingham consultations recommend that, in addition to members of the Order, the larger consultation should include a number of Church of England distinctive deacons and representatives of the JIC, the Faith and Order Committee and FOAG. A report of the larger consultation should be made to the JIC, with the Faith and Order Committee and FOAG being kept fully informed. The JIC has welcomed the invitation from the Methodist Diaconal Order to host the next stage in the work.

### **Other work to be carried forward**

We envisage that the work programme of the JIC in its second phase will include (but will not be confined to) the following additional main areas of work:

1. There will be a need for the JIC to engage with the churches as they in turn engage with its recommendations, particularly on joint decision making, the nature of the unity we seek under the Covenant and the proposals for development in the areas of *episkope* and episcopacy. The JIC will need to monitor the process of the reception of these ideas and to respond to questions and challenges that emerge. Its own thinking will no doubt be stimulated and it will need to lead the churches on the path to full visible communion.

2. As already mentioned, there is scope for the enlargement of the Covenant relationship. The outcome of the Llandaff consultation between Methodist and Anglican representatives from the four nations earlier this year will help to shape the agenda of the JIC. Methodism in Scotland and Wales should be more visibly represented in the work of the JIC. The Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church have already expressed a strong interest in being represented in the next phase of the JIC. There should be closer links with the Irish Methodist Conference and with the Church of Ireland, so that we can learn from the developments in each other's covenants across the Irish Sea.
3. Other ecumenical partners should continue to help us shape the future of the Covenant in a way that is open and welcoming to any partners who are able to make the Affirmations and Commitments that our two churches have made on the basis of the Formal Conversations. The United Reformed Church should continue to play a full part in the JIC's deliberations.
4. The Formal Conversations established that there was broad agreement between our churches on Christian initiation (with the focus mainly on baptism and Confirmation). However, there is more work to do here and the JIC needs to follow through its formal request to the Church of England that it should consider whether it needs to maintain the current canonical requirement of episcopal (re-)confirmation for Methodists seeking a ministry (e.g. as a Reader) in the Church of England. We are aware that the Meissen Commission, on behalf of the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD), has made a similar request and that the Faith and Order Advisory Group is looking at this question as part of a wider programme on Christian initiation.
5. Closely related to initiation is the question of membership. Here our two churches have rather different understandings. The JIC has commissioned some work on the Methodist Church's understanding of membership (which overlaps with a study being done by the Faith and Order Committee), to match work recently done by the Council for Christian Unity. This task will need to be picked up in the next phase. There are important missiological implications of our understanding of participation, initiation and membership.
6. A vital part of the reception of the Covenant, which the JIC has both monitored and promoted, concerns its local implementation. The JIC welcomes the coming together of the Council for Christian Unity's Local Unity Panel and the Methodist Committee

for Local Ecumenical Development to form a single body, the Methodist–Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), with dual chairing and servicing. The JIC will want to work closely with this new panel in the next phase.

7. The JIC will need to work closely with the officers for Unity in Mission in both our churches to help to bring home to districts and dioceses, circuits and deaneries the possibilities that are available to them under the Covenant for joint initiatives in mission, including evangelism and the imperative of undertaking this work together wherever possible.
8. A recent initiative under the Covenant is the setting up of a joint working group, by the Faith and Order Committee and FOAG, to study the way in which both our churches might respond to the challenge of discerning the implications of Fresh Expressions for our doctrine of the Church and its mission. ‘FX’ is, of course, a joint Anglican–Methodist project. It seems important to us that the Covenant should frame not only Fresh Expressions itself, but how our churches tackle the ecclesiological issues that it raises. The JIC will provide a platform for making the outcomes of that study known.

## THE FUTURE SHAPE OF THE JOINT IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION

The outgoing JIC, having consulted with the appropriate bodies in both churches, makes the following outline recommendations to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod:

1. The Joint Implementation Commission should continue, under the same name (which denotes an ongoing task to be tackled together), into a second five-year phase.
2. It should report to both bodies not later than June-July 2013 (but may of course, as we have done, wish to issue one or more interim reports).
3. The mandate of the JIC should continue to be to monitor and promote the implementation of the Covenant. While the JIC must be allowed discretion in how it carries out this task, each church is, of course, free to suggest a steer to its work.
4. The JIC should consist of eight Methodists and eight Anglicans.

The Methodist team should include representation from Scotland and Wales. The Anglican team should include a representative of the Church in Wales and a representative of the Scottish Episcopal Church (as those churches have requested).

5. The United Reformed Church should continue to have a participant on the JIC.
6. The membership of the JIC should be refreshed, but there should be some continuity.
7. The JIC may need (as now) to co-opt a small number of consultants to part or all of its work, to extend its areas of expertise.
8. The Church of England and the Methodist Church should each provide a Co-Chair and a Co-Convenor (as now).