

### 3. RESEARCHING AND RESOURCING LOCAL COVENANT RELATIONSHIPS

An important part of the role of the Joint Implementation Commission has been to support and encourage local Covenant relationships. This chapter reviews progress to date.

In some places the pace of change since the Covenant was signed between our two Churches in November 2003 has been slow. However, it is possible to argue that, given limited resources and a fast-changing context, the level of commitment revealed by those who attended the 2006 series of regional workshops was impressive.

Scattered through this chapter are a number of cameos illustrating how Covenant relationships are developing in a variety of contexts. The cameos illustrate how people in different situations are trying to implement the principles of living within a Covenant commitment.

The basement of Methodist Central Hall in Manchester is now the home of three initiatives meeting the needs of younger people visiting the city centre for a night out. Volunteers from Anglican and Methodist Churches run a night café – ‘Nexus’ – with its slogan, ‘Prepare to be Surprised’. A Creative Arts Centre provides a night time venue for film, art and gigs. Both are part of the local authority’s ‘City Centre Safe’ strategy for young people enjoying a night out. In an innovative new development, the venue also now hosts Sanctus 1, offering a contemporary church for city dwellers, mainly in the 18-40 age range.

#### *Lessons from the 2006 Workshops*

The series of ten regional workshops during 2006, entitled ‘Living God’s Covenant’ (also the title of the JIC’s 2007 interim report), brought together around 600 people in key positions in both Churches. In 60 small groups they were able to think through what Covenant living might entail in their context.

The feedback from these workshops<sup>1</sup> provides the most comprehensive

---

1 See Chapter Two of *Living God’s Covenant*, the 2nd Interim Report of the Joint Implementation Commission 2007

evidence available to date for how local church people perceive the Covenant commitment between our two Churches.

Three key lessons can be drawn from this feedback:<sup>2</sup>

1. Good practice in particular situations cannot be directly copied – one size does not fit all;
2. Local responses cannot be predicted according to a pre-determined pattern;
3. It is crucially important to learn from our failures.

From this it follows that, even where the problems relating to shared decision-making are resolved (see chapter 5 in this report), there will continue to be a mismatch between the intentions of decision-makers and actual outcomes. It should be recognised that this mismatch is a normal part of human experience, and the unexpected outcomes will often illuminate potential new directions.

Regular meetings are now in the diary between members of the Bishop's staff and District leadership teams in several dioceses and districts, e.g. Blackburn/North Lancashire and Lincoln/Lincoln and Grimsby. Clearly this arrangement shows the greatest potential when the diocese and the district cover similar areas. But what sort of arrangements can bring decision-makers together when the diocese overlaps five districts (e.g. Oxford Diocese) or the district overlaps more than five dioceses (e.g. Northampton District)?

### ***Two new learning opportunities***

If any relevant support or encouragement is to be given to parishes and local churches – or indeed to deaneries and circuits, districts and dioceses – the Joint Implementation Commission believes that both our Churches need a clearer understanding of what enables and what inhibits deep and enduring covenant relationships.

This question is critical, since many missionaries and missiologists now accept that Gospel communication is most likely to take place when people see the quality of the relationship between Christians. What applies

---

2 These reflect the views of the organisational theorists Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley: see P. Senge, C.O. Sharrow, J. Jaworski and B.S. Flowers, *Presence – An Exploration of Profound Change in People Organisations and Society* (Doubleday/SoL, 2005); M. Wheatley, *Leadership and the new Science* (rev. edn, Berrett Koehler, 1999).

between individuals can also be applied to the relationships between Christian communities, including major Churches.

Two recent initiatives provide fresh learning opportunities: a pilot set of case studies to explore what may be involved in covenant relationships, mainly from the point of view of those in positions of ministerial leadership; and a pilot research programme focusing on deanery/circuit partnerships.

The Methodist and Anglican Chaplains in Higher Education institutions hold a bi-annual conference for mutual support and learning, which alternates with a wider convention for all Christian chaplains in Higher Education. There is a joint national/connexional adviser's post in Further Education.

At St Albans Cathedral the adult education programme is now led by a Methodist minister who is seconded one day per week by the circuit. This is a three year project carried out as a direct response to the covenant process and is the first fruit of a discussion between the Chapter and the local circuit and district as to how we might live the covenant in the context of a cathedral.

### **1. A pilot set of case studies**

A disciplined way to gain insight into more effective and enduring relationships is through the use of case studies.

It is vital that people in our Churches, as elsewhere, discover how to use problems and failure as opportunities for learning, rather than treating them only as occasions for apportioning or avoiding blame.

As a tool for learning, case studies, adapted from genuine local experiences, can operate at various levels. Their primary purpose is to enable people to reflect upon the quality of relationships between individuals and groups as they attempt to respond to a common purpose.

Case studies are an appropriate tool to be used to equip ordained and lay people for the difficulties they are likely to encounter in working with Christians from different traditions. All too often in these situations they have no experience to draw upon when problems begin to emerge following creative initial ideas. Equally, however, they can be used in local situations to enable people to gain perspective on their own experience.

Four types of case study have been described by George Lovell<sup>3</sup>.

#### A SITUATION

Taking time to look in depth at what is really happening – and looking wide enough to avoid tunnel vision. This might be used to help individuals, lay and ordained, plan their ministry in a variety of ecumenical environments.

#### A PROBLEM

Taking time to look at issues and see the connections between them – learning to look beyond ‘quick-fix’ symptomatic solutions. Identifying the actors and their roles within problem situations.

#### A PROJECT

Taking time to plan or evaluate a specific enterprise, its benefits and limitations – learning how it might work or how it might have worked better – key lessons for future projects

#### A CASE STORY

Taking time to understand the decisions that led to a particular problematic situation. This type of study is written as from the viewpoint of one particular actor. It helps users to understand the forces acting upon the individual concerned, and how a different pattern of behaviour might have led towards a more favourable outcome.

In accordance with this framework, the JIC has prepared four pilot studies, one for each type, together with an associated independent commentary<sup>4</sup>, to enable users to explore the issues that may arise as our two churches seek to work together locally.

This first set of case studies focuses primarily on the responsibilities of ministerial leaders and has been designed primarily for use on training courses in local situations. However, its potential value in training institutions is being explored.

---

<sup>3</sup> George Lovell, *Analysis and Design* (Burns and Oates, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> The commentary records the responses of a group working with and reflecting on the case study material. The Joint Implementation Commission gratefully acknowledges the help given in developing the case studies by the Revd Ian Johnson, the Revd David Copley and the work of the Revd Dr George Lovell.

On one of the part-time ordination training courses used by our two churches, there are plans to incorporate this first set of studies in their ecumenical module, and initial interest has been shown by a number of other course organisers.

The full pilot set is now available by request via the Anglican-Methodist Covenant website: [www.Anglican-methodist.org.uk](http://www.Anglican-methodist.org.uk),

Two Methodist and Anglican churches in Leeds have their own charitable partnership, 'Faith Together in Leeds 11', in association with a number of Muslim groups, to develop community facilities in the area. Together they have opened the Building Blocks Centre, which is now home to a new Methodist church and a full programme of weekday events for the community. And the site of the church hall at the nearby parish church is currently being re-developed.

A Mission Partnership in North Lincolnshire is evolving in an area where 30 Anglican churches and 20 Methodist churches are served by six Anglican stipendiary clergy and two Methodist ministers. Other Christian Churches (just six congregations in the entire area: Baptist, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army and two community churches) give it their prayerful support.

## **2. A pilot research programme**

In order to resource further case studies and to develop other learning resources, further data-gathering and analysis of local experience is needed.

As a pilot exercise, a small and mainly interview-based survey was set up during the first half of 2008, taking a close look at three contrasting deanery-circuit partnerships.<sup>5</sup> The aim was to gather some answers to the key question identified earlier: What factors enable and/or inhibit the establishing of deep and enduring covenant relationships?

Leading the exercise is Dr Paul Rolph of the Methodist Church, County Ecumenical Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and postgraduate

---

5 The cost of this pilot exercise is being met from funds accrued as a result of the 2006 Regional Workshops.

tutor/supervisor in the Department of Theology, University of Wales, Bangor.

Dr Rolph is being supported by two Anglican members of the JIC (Janice Price and John Cole) and by the Revd Lynda Barley, the Church of England's Head of Research and Statistics.

The survey results, even from such a small sample, will meet several objectives. They will provide:

- a snapshot of local covenant implementation after five years
- a resource for the JIC in its next phase – something more in-depth that will complement the broader overview contained in the feedback from the 2006 workshops
- data from which further case studies and other learning exercises can be developed for different client groups
- an indication as to how more substantial research can be undertaken.
- a clearer picture of the kind of support that would really help people engaged in local initiatives.

The results and outcomes of the research will be made available on the Anglican-Methodist Covenant website. The work is due for completion in time for the residential meeting of Diocesan and District Ecumenical Officers in the Autumn of 2008.

It would be helpful if more substantial research into local implementation of the Covenant were to be undertaken as a follow-up to this pilot exercise.

In a West Country holiday town, the circuit and the deanery have developed an exciting joint initiative which the local newspaper has christened the 'High Street God Squad' – volunteer chaplains available for shoppers, retailers and visitors. In the North East, Anglican and Methodist Churches have invited in team members from Youth for Christ. They are making a great impact in the schools and on the streets.

### ***Resourcing local Covenant living***

The JIC has continued to extend the range of its resources for those seeking to develop local covenant relationships. A full listing is included as Appendix A, *Resources* in this report.

#### **1. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant website**

The Joint Implementation Commission is most grateful to the Methodist Communications Team, especially Dave Webster and Lynne Newland, for developing and servicing the Anglican-Methodist Covenant website, [www.anglican-methodist.org.uk](http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk), that was set up in 2005.

The site contains a wealth of information and resources in support of the Covenant relationship between our two Churches – including more than 50 stories of initiatives and activities that express our covenant commitment, as well as feedback from the 2006 Regional Workshops.

The website also contains downloadable resource material, including explanatory leaflets, handouts, posters, and PowerPoint presentations. A separate section also addresses the more technical aspects of how local congregations from our two Churches can develop closer partnership.

A Church in the Potteries is a covenant partnership between St Peter's Methodist Church and St Andrew's parish church which began as an 'Area of Ecumenical Experiment' in 1973. Both churches date back to the development of the area in 1938 and they continue as separate worshipping communities. But Peter and Andrew were brothers! Apart from their normal weekly worship, the two churches do everything together. Their latest joint venture is the appointment of a Youth Outreach Worker. In the West Midlands, a single-congregation Anglican-Methodist church has been in existence for around ten years. Recently it has become involved with two more Methodist and two Anglican churches to form what Lichfield Diocese calls a 'cluster'. It's enabling them to think and plan mission together.

#### **2. Making best use of what Church of England Canons permit**

- a) B43 in all parishes – the Covenant as a 'special circumstance'  
In May 2004 the Local Unity Panel of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England offered guidance to bishops<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> The full text of this guidance appeared as Appendix A in *In the Spirit of the Covenant*, the first interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission, 2005.

outlining the opportunities for hospitality and sharing of ministries under Canon B43 in the context of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. They included recognition that the Covenant is one of the ‘special circumstances’ that would justify a bishop in allowing a Church of England priest to preside at Holy Communion in a Methodist Church.

b) B44 – shared ministry in Local Covenant Partnerships

In 2007 the Local Unity Panel, after wide consultation, issued a new set of standardised procedures to enable neighbouring Anglican and Methodist churches to share worship and mission in the more extended ways made possible by Canon B44 – sharing deeply in ministry and sacramental life in the context of a Local Covenant Partnership (a ‘Category 2’ LEP as recognised through Churches Together in England).

On the basis of the Covenant, standard documentation has been agreed to facilitate partnership. This opens up significant opportunities for making the Covenant come to life locally.

The resources are available in a set of eight handouts – each of which can be downloaded separately from the Anglican-Methodist Covenant website.

Printed copies, in booklet form, have been sent to all bishops, Diocesan and District Ecumenical Officers and to the Chairs of all Methodist Districts.

Section 1 provides an introductory vision for all those with responsibility for developing Covenant relationships locally.

Sections 2, 3 and 8 are provided specially for bishops.

The remaining sections are for parishes and come in two batches:

Sections 4 and 5 outline the preliminaries and provide important guidance notes.

Sections 6 and 7 provide draft texts for the formal documentation that is required under Canon B44. These pro forma texts have already received the necessary general approvals from the Methodist Church.



The key to enabling these standardised procedures lies in the bishop's initiative set out in section 2, alongside the pre-approval given to the formal texts by the Diocesan Pastoral and Mission Committee.

Many diocesan bishops, including the Bishops of Ripon and Leeds, Lincoln, Carlisle and Derby, are now offering general consent for Methodist ministers to conduct services in parish churches wherever local relationships are growing and where the incumbent and Parochial Church Council request it. These arrangements are consistent with the guidelines issued by the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity.

### **3. Using differences creatively**

The first of what may prove to be a series of practical booklets was published in 2007. They are designed to help local churches and parishes to see how it is possible to use much more creatively the differences between the Methodist Church and the Church of England.

They are the work of John Cole, a member of the Joint Implementation Commission, and they are published independently by Parish and People<sup>7</sup>. The booklets have been endorsed by the Joint Implementation Commission, although they cannot be regarded as 'official' publications of the two churches.

The first two booklets are "Deaneries and Circuits – Partners in Mission" and "Local Preachers and Readers – Sharing Two Ministries"

"Deaneries and Circuits – Partners in Mission"

Of all the settings in which we conduct our life together as Churches, the deanery and the circuit perhaps offer the greatest potential for parallel development in mission. In the introduction to "Deaneries and Circuits" John Cole writes:

The booklet challenges deaneries to think like circuits, and circuits to think like deaneries. Out of this creative exchange new initiatives are likely to emerge and things not possible separately will become possible together.

---

<sup>7</sup> Parish and People, The Old Mill, Spetisbury, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 9DF Phone: 01258-453939; e-mail: pandpeople@tiscali.co.uk website: www.parishandpeople.org.uk

Copies may be obtained from Parish and People, price £1 post free.

“Local Preachers and Readers – Sharing Two Ministries”

The booklet on Local Preachers and Readers suggests that it does a disservice to both groups to press too quickly for ‘interchangeability’. Instead John Cole asks:

Could it be that both Churches will be richer – and more serviceable to God’s mission – if the individual contribution of Local Preachers to the Church of England and of Readers to the Methodist Church is seen more in terms of a covenantal sharing of two distinct but overlapping ministries?

Copies are again available from Parish and People (as above) price £2 post free.

By kind permission of Parish and People, the full text of both booklets is reproduced in appendices to this Quinquennial report.

Two linked study days were laid on recently for Local Preachers and Readers, introducing each group to good practice in leading worship in each other’s churches. The days were well attended and valued by participants. The next step could be for a Local Preacher and a Reader to share the preparation of a service in each other’s churches, before they take sole charge in what can often seem a strange environment. In one rural area of the country, the Methodist Superintendent Minister, whose circuit almost exactly matches the local Readers’ Area, has for some years been a popular Warden of Readers.

### *For the future*

#### MISSION ACCOMPANIMENT

Mission Accompaniment, as developed by the (virtual) ‘Centre for Mission Accompaniment’ ([www.missionaccompaniment.com](http://www.missionaccompaniment.com)), envisages participant observation of the life of the local Christian community by someone who may not be outside the situation, but who may well be from another Christian tradition. There are parallels here with some models of group counselling and therapy. The Centre for Mission Accompaniment is located within Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

The growth of covenant relationships at local level may well depend on how local Christian communities grow in awareness of their distinctive vocations and discern their place within the wider Church. Mission accompaniment is one of a number of approaches that has been found to be of great value to churches and other organisations engaging in processes of change and development. A mission companion could bring much, for example, to a circuit and a deanery thinking of working more closely together.

#### A JOINT PANEL FOR LOCAL ECUMENICAL MISSION

At the December 2007 joint meeting of the Council for Christian Unity's Local Unity Panel and the Methodist Committee for Local Ecumenical Development, a proposal was made for the formation of a joint 'Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission' (MAPUM) – as a step on the way towards our two Churches acting as one on ecumenical matters. This is now being put into effect by a functional merger of the two bodies.

#### JOINT WORKING BY DIOCESAN AND DISTRICT ECUMENICAL OFFICERS

For some years the (Anglican) Diocesan and the (Methodist) District Ecumenical Officers have held a joint annual conference. A different pattern was followed in 2007 when for the first time the Anglicans met with Roman Catholic colleagues and the Methodists met with colleagues from the Baptist and United Reformed Church traditions. In the near future – after the planned 2008 consultation between Anglican and Methodist Ecumenical Officers to take stock of this Quinquennial Report – the ecumenical officers and advisers from all five churches will hold a combined conference.

A new joint Anglican-Methodist voluntary aided primary school opened in Ashford, Kent in September 2007. As well as providing an exciting learning environment for the children during the day, it is now providing much-needed community facilities at other times. The JIC has encouraged the creation of more joint Methodist-Anglican schools.

It can be costly when both partners in a marriage are committed disciples of Jesus Christ but follow different Christian traditions. The Association of Inter-Church Families was formed to support couples in so-called 'mixed marriages', especially where one partner is in the Roman Catholic or Orthodox traditions. But even when a husband and wife wish to maintain their individual loyalties to the Church of England and the Methodist Church, the subtle differences between the two traditions can be keenly felt – especially when both are ordained.