

4. HOW CAN DECISION-MAKING BE SHARED?

1. Introduction

In *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* our two churches committed themselves ‘to continue to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight’ (*An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, p.61, para 194, Commitment 6).

Issues of shared oversight, particularly in relation to the exercise of *episkope* by bishops and others, are discussed elsewhere in this and our interim reports (cf chap 4 *Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant*, *In the Spirit of the Covenant*, chap 7, *Living God’s Covenant*, chap’s 3 & 4). The purpose of this chapter is to explore ways in which our commitment to develop ‘shared consultation and decision-making’ can be advanced. It seeks

- to describe where authority for different decisions currently lies within the Methodist Church and the Church of England;
- to acknowledge areas of existing co-operation and consultation;
- to set out areas of our life where the lack of consultation and joint decision-making creates tension;
- to enumerate current ecclesiological developments in which consultation is essential if we are ‘to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches. . .’ (*An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, Commitment 1); and
- to suggest ways in which consultation and joint decision-making could be improved within our existing structures.

Churches Together in England (CTE) has recently published a leaflet, *Making Decisions Together In a Common Life* which sets out some principles and examples of good practice in making decisions ecumenically, or with good ecumenical awareness. They acknowledge that all churches have to make decisions within their own life and structures, some of which will have direct ecumenical significance, and most, if not all, of which will have indirect ecumenical significance. As a result, particularly where a Church or its leaders has entered into a Covenant or other formal agreement with other churches and their leaders, ‘all decisions should be made with the awareness that they may have implications for other Churches’. In many contexts this is already acknowledged, though there are too many examples of failure to consult to suggest that it has fully

entered the life-blood of our two Churches. The question should be asked before any decision is made, ‘What are the implications of this decision for our covenanting partner?’

2. Different Ecclesiologies?

The Common Statement provided a brief description of our churches and how they function (*Our Churches Today*, in *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, GS1409/PB 140 pp 10-13) and went on to discuss a number of ecclesiological issues which, while illustrating different emphases, did not prevent us affirming ‘one another’s churches as true churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God’ (*An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, Affirmation 1, p60 and preceding chapter, *Full Visible Unity*, pp 34-59).

These ecclesiological differences clearly underlie the tensions in reaching common decisions, and the starting point for any conversation between our churches about the increased co-ordination of our decision-making processes has to be a clearer understanding of each other’s systems and of the underlying ecclesiological ideas which inform them. We have addressed some of these issues in our chapter on *Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant* elsewhere in this report. But the practical consequences remain. For example, it remains a source of frustration to many in the Methodist Church, with its more ‘centralised’ structure of authority residing in the Conference, that each of the 44 dioceses of the Church of England may potentially implement a report of the General Synod in different ways and with significantly different emphases. Where a District covers the area of more than one diocese (eg the new Northampton District includes all or parts (often small) of the dioceses of Leicester, Oxford, Peterborough, St Albans, Ely, Lincoln, Gloucester and Coventry) this can create considerable personal challenges for the Church Leaders which are time-consuming and militate against common policies and practices.

The differences also mean that, both centrally and locally, there is no direct equivalence of posts and when we look for a colleague in the other church with whom to discuss a particular issue there may be no obvious person who shares the same brief or interest.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss these ecclesiologies or the self-perceptions which underlie our different processes, partly because

we have discussed them elsewhere (particularly in relation to ordained and lay ministry, cf *In the Spirit of the Covenant* chapter 7, *Living God's Covenant*, chapter 4, and to questions of Church & State, *LGC*, chapter 3), nor to look at different patterns of decision-making drawn from secular and other ecclesial examples. Our purpose is to describe our current decision-making processes, and to suggest ways in which we could move within those present structures towards a better awareness of the other's views and a more integrated process of reaching a common mind where that is required for the development of our covenant relationship and as a step on the road towards the achievement of 'a fully united ministry of oversight'. If we can achieve these modest but significant steps, it will help us together to fulfil God's mission, to which we are both committed, more effectively and efficiently.

3. Current Good Practice

Much consultation already happens at many levels of our Churches' lives. Because not everybody will be aware of the present situation we have set out some of the formal ways in which regular consultation takes place. In addition there is regular informal contact between different groups and individuals.

- The President, Vice-President and Secretary of Conference, and Co-ordinating Secretary for ecumenical relations meet annually with the Archbishops of Canterbury & York, the Secretary General and the Chairman and Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity (CCU).
- The Secretary and Assistant Secretary of the Conference and the Co-ordinating Secretary for ecumenical relationships meet with the Secretary General, the Clerk to the Synod and the General Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity three times a year.
- For several years both churches have invited the other to send representatives to the Conference and to the General Synod. In both cases they have the right to speak (and are regularly invited to do so) but not to vote.
- There is a Methodist representative on the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, and on its Faith & Order Advisory Group (FOAG), and a Church of England representative on the Faith & Order Committee of the Methodist Conference.

- Bishops and District Chairs meet regularly at Church Leaders meetings throughout the country, and in some areas where there is a close correlation between the diocese and the district (eg Cumbria, Blackburn/North Lancs) the bishop and district chair meet regularly in addition.
- For many years the annual conference of District and Diocesan Ecumenical Officers has met jointly.
- There are several examples where District Synods and Diocesan Synods have met together, as do Circuits and Deaneries.

All these facilitate the process of sharing each other's thinking, informing the decision-making process in our churches, and communicating decisions made. But while there is much good practice, it falls short of the 'shared decision-making' to which we committed ourselves under the Covenant.

Such examples also reveal the disparity between the decision-making bodies of our two Churches, both in the level of oversight which they represent and the authority and responsibilities which they have.

4. Questions to be addressed

In our discussion a number of significant questions have arisen to which we have sought to provide an answer:

1. Within our two structures who has authority for what/whom?
2. Where do our different authority structures fail to connect?
3. What improvements can we make within the existing structures?
4. What changes are necessary to move on?

In answering the first of these questions we have provided a comparative table setting out how authority for different areas of our life is distributed in our two churches. We hope this will provide a way of understanding where authority resides and who needs to consult whom if our shared and common life and mission is to be improved.

Detailed study of the table also indicates (in answer to question 2) where our authority structures fail to make immediate connections and therefore why joint decision-making is difficult in some areas.

5. Current structures of decision-making:

(1. Important disclaimer: While we believe that the following table accurately describes current practice within our two churches, it is not a legal document, and the precise legal position can only be determined by consultation with the appropriate legal documents and/or advisers.

2. Although ordained ministry in the Methodist Church is exercised by presbyters and deacons, presbyters are often called ‘ministers’ and therefore in the table below both terms are used interchangeably.

3. To simplify the presentation, we have included ‘collegial’ and ‘communal’ ways of exercising authority in the same column, but they need to be carefully distinguished. For example, bishops act collegially when they consult with their episcopal or presbyteral colleagues, communally when they are ‘in Synod’ or ‘in Council’ and the Synod or Bishop’s Council is the effective decision-maker.)

We have set out the loci of decision-making in both the Methodist Church and the Church of England under two columns, not because there are two sources of authority in our Churches, but because it is widely recognised that authority is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways (cf *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, Lima WCC 1982). However while individuals exercise personal authority in both churches there are significant differences in the source and extent of their authority.

The centre of authority in the Methodist Church is the Conference, and the authority which individuals exercise in the connexion derives from that body. ‘At the heart of oversight in the Connexion is the Conference which in turn authorises people and groups to embody and share in its oversight in the rest of the Connexion’ (*The Nature of Oversight*, cf Chap 4, *Episkope and episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant*). The two strands of this oversight in the formal bodies and particular office holders, and the ministers stationed by the Conference must collaborate and interact.

In the Church of England, authority is distributed in a number of ways, and individuals – particularly bishops, archdeacons and parish priests – have the authority to make decisions about certain matters by virtue of their office, and not by delegation from the Synod. In doing so they receive the support and advice of their own diocesan synod, Parochial Church Council etc. Archbishops and bishops have personal jurisdiction in their provinces and dioceses, which is often exercised in collegial and communal ways.

The General Synod, in turn, has a limited legislative function (which is set out below) and for example has no authority over decisions about candidates for ordination or the deployment and licensing of clergy in a diocese. Contrary to much popular opinion, the Synod is not the centre of authority in the Church of England, though anything requiring legislation must have its support, and Measures and Canons (once they have received the Royal Assent) are binding on all exercising authority in the Church. The collective veto of the House of Bishops, acting collegially, particularly in relation to matters of worship and doctrine, and of the other houses in relation to legislation, needs to be noted.

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.1 CENTRAL STRUCTURES & GOVERNANCE – Conference & General Synod	
<p><u>The Methodist Conference</u> The source of all authority within the Connexion. Meets annually to confer, to legislate, to exercise oversight and to determine strategy. Consists of 3 sessions meeting consecutively: Ministerial, Diaconal (each with the membership indicated by its name and defined functions related to that order of ministry) and Representative, including ministers, deacons and lay persons, which legislates, determines strategy and carries out all other functions not specific to one of the other sessions. Members are mainly elected by the Representative Sessions of the District Synods, but there are also other categories including some connexional officers and all District Chairs.</p>	<p><u>The President & Vice-President of the Conference</u> are elected annually by the Conference and serve for one year as the personal representatives of the conference. They (and Past Presidents/Vice-Presidents) have considerable standing in the Methodist Church, and they act for the church with the authority of the Conference.</p>

Table continued on page 58.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.1 CENTRAL STRUCTURES & GOVERNANCE – Conference & General Synod	
<p><u>The General Synod</u> The General Synod replaced the National Assembly of the Church of England (the ‘Church Assembly’) in 1969 and gave the national body the power to legislate. It consists of three ‘houses’: the House of Bishops (all diocesan bishops + 9 elected suffragan bishops), the House of Clergy (at least 3* members elected by the clerical members of each diocese), the House of laity (at least 3* members elected for each diocese by the lay members of the deanery synods). (*the dioceses of Europe & Sodor & Man have 2 each)</p> <p>Meets 2 or 3 times a year to consider matters concerning the Church of England and make provision for them by Measure (which require the consent of Parliament), Canon, Order or Act of Synod and secondly, to consider and express its opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest It has no executive function, which remains vested in the bishops (and partially in the Archbishops Council).</p>	<p><u>Diocesan bishops</u> The Bishop is the source of authority in his diocese. Each bishop has executive authority within his diocese by virtue of his Episcopal office. His powers are determined by Statute and by the Canons. He is responsible for ordinations and all clergy and other ministers must have received authority from the bishop in order to officiate regularly in the diocese.</p> <p>He meets regularly in the Diocesan Synod with elected representatives of the clergy and laity of the diocese, and with the Bishop’s Council, which is both the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod, and advisory to the Bishop.</p>

Table continued on page 59.

Comment:

While the Conference and the General Synod have similar roles in relation to legislation (though the Church of England has an additional Parliamentary step in the process) which is binding on the members of each church, the personal authority of bishops (often endorsed by the legislation) in the 44 dioceses and collectively in the House of Bishops, especially in their role in relation to matters of worship and doctrine, means that important decisions are not always taken by the Synod but are ‘dispersed’ in ways which can be misunderstood and frustrating. These can be acute in relation to ordination and the deployment of clergy (see below, Sections 5.2 and 5.3).

Procedures: Reports from committees and working groups are 'received' or 'adopted'. In the latter case they become the policy of the connexion. The **Business Committee** determines the order of business of the Conference

Work is delegated to a number of Committees, the main ones being:

Methodist Council (and its **Strategy and Resources Committee**): responsible for strategy and resources, employing body for connexional staff; exercises Conference's delegated authority generally between Conferences. Its membership consists of: the current, ex-, and designate President and Vice-President of Conference, the Secretary of Conference, senior connexional officers, various connexional representatives and a representative of each District (about 60 members in total).

It has a **Strategy and Resources Committee** consisting of 13 ex-officio or Conference-appointed members, with senior connexional officers as non-voting members.

Law & Polity: responsible for advising the Conference re matters of law and polity of the Connexion

Stationing: recommends the appropriate deployment of presbyters and deacons in full connexion, for approval by the Conference. The detail of the stationing process is currently the subject of review by the Stationing Review Group, due to report in 2008

Faith & Order: responsible for guiding the Conference re matters of faith and order

Procedures: Synod debates and ‘takes note’ of Reports and agrees recommendations (eg to dioceses; to prepare legislation etc.). The order of business is determined by **the Business Committee**.

As a constituent part of the General Synod, the **House of Bishops** has particular responsibility for matters relating to doctrine and worship, which can only be finally approved by the Synod in a form agreed by the House.

The Archbishops’ Council has since 1999 taken over the functions of the Standing Committee of the Synod and as a national executive and the central financial body of the C of E. It answers to the Synod, but is not subordinate to it. Its membership consists of:

Archbishops of Canterbury & York, the Prolocutors of the Convocations of Canterbury & York, the chairman and vice-chairman of the House of Laity, two members of the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity elected by the members of each House, up to six persons appointed by the Archbishops, and one of the Church Estates Commissioners appointed by the Archbishops.

The Council works through nine ‘divisions’: **Education, Cathedral & Church Buildings, Central Secretariat, Finance, Communications, Human Resources, Legal, Ministry, Mission & Public Affairs**; and is also the responsible employing body for these divisions.

The **Faith & Order Advisory Group** is responsible to both the General Synod (through the Council for Christian Unity) and the House of Bishops, and advises them about matters relating to the ecclesiology of the Church of England, with particular reference to ecumenical relations

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.2 ORDINATION	
Authority for Ordination	
<p>Authority for ordination to the Presbyterate and Diaconate resides with the Conference. Ministers and deacons are in two distinct, though closely linked, relationships with the Methodist Church. They are:</p> <p>(i) ‘received into full connexion’ with the Conference, and thereby become Methodist ministers or deacons, accountable to and accounted for by the church. Although usually lifelong, full connexion can be ended by transfer to another conference or communion, resignation or expulsion, and can be resumed; and</p> <p>(ii), ordained, irreversibly and unrepeatably, into the presbyterate or diaconate in the universal Church of God. Deacons are also by virtue of their ordination admitted into the Methodist Diaconal Order.</p> <p>The Conference, in Representative Session ‘receives ministers and deacons into full connexion’ on the recommendation of the Ministerial and Diaconal Sessions respectively, having received reports from those with responsibility for training and selection, and by that same act directs that those not already ordained (for example in another connexion or communion) be ordained, always (where practicable) on the same day.</p>	<p>The President and Past-Presidents ordain candidates on behalf of and by the direction of the Conference with the affirmation of the congregation.</p>

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.2 ORDINATION	
Authority for Ordination	
	<p>The authority to ordain as deacon and priest resides with the Bishop, on the recommendation of those responsible for selection and training, and with the affirmation of the congregation.</p> <p>Every candidate for ordination must have evidence that he/she has an ecclesiastical office in the diocese where he/she will serve.</p> <p>In order to exercise a ministry in a diocese, a priest or deacon must have received authority to do so from the Bishop (subject to the power of a minister with cure of souls to allow any minister in good standing to officiate in his church on a limited, occasional basis)</p>

Comment:

In the Church of England the power of ordination vested in the bishop is regarded as part of his ‘generative’ role as a leader in mission, fostering new initiatives and sending presbyters to sustain the life of the parishes and their congregations. The presbyters / priests share that responsibility with their bishops (‘the cure of souls which is both yours and mine’ as the words in the service of institution express it). In the Methodist Church a similar responsibility for mission and the sending (‘stationing’) of presbyters and deacons resides in the Conference. Those responsible for training make recommendations as to ordination through the appropriate bodies to the Conference in Methodism, and ordinations take place in the Conference itself. In the Church of England those responsible for training always make recommendations to a bishop, who is not bound by the advice he receives. Ordinations take place locally in the diocese.

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.3 DEPLOYMENT OF MINISTERS	
Deployment of Ministers (Stationing)	
<p>Arrangements for the deployment of presbyters and deacons are made centrally on behalf of the Conference by the Stationing Committee (for deacons, in conjunction with the Methodist Diaconal Order). Requests to have a presbyter or deacon are submitted by the circuits to the Committee or the Diaconal Order. A presbyter thought to be appropriate is suggested by the Stationing Matching Group and after mutual consultation, an invitation to the presbyter is issued by the circuit and accepted, or the process repeated. The recommendations of the Stationing Committee, based on these arrangements, are formally endorsed at the end of the annual Conference by the adoption of the annual stations.</p> <p>Presbyteral and diaconal probationers are deployed by the Conference, again by the adoption of the stations proposed by the Stationing Committee, based on recommendations made by those responsible for initial training.</p>	<p>During the interval between Conferences the President can make changes to the stations as necessary to deal with deaths or withdrawals from active work or if for any other reason he, or she, judges it to be necessary or expedient to do so.</p>

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.3 DEPLOYMENT OF MINISTERS	
Deployment of Clergy (Licensing/Institution)	
	<p>Deployment of clergy is the responsibility of the bishop, who grants his licence or permission to officiate to (or, in the case of a beneficed priest, institutes) all clergy who hold office in the diocese.</p> <p>The bishop, in consultation with the elected parish representatives, appoints ‘priests in charge’ and incumbents of benefices of which he is the patron. In other cases a ‘patron’ may hold the right of Presentation, but the bishop (and representatives from the parish) may object to the nomination, and only the bishop can institute.</p> <p>The bishop determines where curates are deployed (usually advised by his staff), though the invitation is issued by the incumbent/priest in charge</p>

<p>Comment</p> <p>The more centralised locus of appointment in the Methodist Church contrasts with the local (diocesan) and personal (Episcopal) source of authority for appointment in the Church of England. Whilst the circuit has a pivotal role in the stationing process, which is not directly mirrored in the Church of England, deaneries too are increasingly involved in the consultation about the appointment of clergy.</p> <p>In the Methodist Church the annual stationing process also means that normally ministers move at the same time. This contrasts with the Church of England where vacancies may occur at any time during the year. There is therefore a pressure, particularly from the parishes, to ‘fill the vacancy’ without waiting on other decisions. This can frustrate attempts, in LEPs and elsewhere to develop a shared policy about the deployment of ministers.</p> <p>However, the fact that in both churches vacancies are discussed in the deaneries and circuits does give greater opportunity for consultation and mutual awareness of each other’s strategies for the deployment of ministers. Nevertheless greater co-ordination could aid our sense of joint mission in and to a community.</p>
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METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.4 PASTORAL ORGANISATION	
Pastoral organisation	
<p>The Methodist Connexion is organised in ‘circuits’ (see below) which usually embrace a number of ‘local churches’ (as defined by Methodist legislation). The number of ministers and deacons in the circuit is determined through the ‘stationing’ process. The composition of the circuits (and the districts within which the circuits are arranged) is not defined territorially but in terms of the arrangement of the ‘stations’ as adopted by the Conference. Changes in the composition of Circuits and Districts are made by the Conference after consultation with the relevant bodies involved.</p> <p>Closure of a place of worship generally requires the decision of the local managing trustees (see below), and the approval of the Circuit Meeting and the District Synod. There is a residual power in the Conference (rarely exercised) to declare a property to be redundant</p>	

<p>Comment.</p> <p>With the current drive to build more houses – particularly in the South-East and parts of the Midlands – and create new communities, there is a growing need for all the churches to consult together about the emerging Christian communities within these new estates and villages etc. Within the Church of England’s self-understanding, virtually everyone lives within a ‘parish’ (see below) and is therefore under the spiritual care of the incumbent or priest in charge of the parish. However, the parish boundaries may well not be appropriate to these new developments, generating a need for pastoral re-organisation. In the Methodist Church (cf the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union among others) the churches and chapels are the foci of church life and are included in the circuit (see below) which has no clear geographical boundaries – it is a collection of local churches, rather than a specified area.</p> <p>If duplication of effort and resources, and the potential for unhelpful competition, is to be avoided early consultation about who is able to ‘take the lead’ – either alone or in partnership – in establishing a worshipping community in these new residential areas is essential. Recent legislation in the Church of England (the <i>Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007</i>) is partly designed to facilitate this process <u>before</u> issues of boundaries, creating new parishes etc arise.</p>

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.4 PASTORAL ORGANISATION	
Pastoral organisation	
<p>Pastoral reorganisation is governed by the provisions of the Dioceses, Pastoral & Mission Measure 2007, and the Pastoral Measure 1983 as amended by the Dioceses, Pastoral & Mission Measure 2007. The 2007 Measure requires every diocese to have a Mission and Pastoral Committee which makes recommendations to the Bishop. Reorganisation of parishes/benefices is achieved by ‘pastoral order or pastoral scheme’ following the submission of draft proposals by the mission and pastoral committee to the Church Commissioners who supervise the making of schemes and orders. Interested parties have the right to object to particular proposals and any representations are considered by the Pastoral Committee of the Church Commissioners. The Church Commissioners may reject a draft order or scheme, or ask the bishop to re-consider them in the light of the representations. Interested parties who made representations in relation to a draft scheme (but not in relation to a draft order) have the right to appeal to the Privy Council with their leave. In practice this power is rarely exercised.</p> <p>Pastoral schemes are formally made, following the giving of consent by the Bishop, by the Commissioners sealing the draft scheme. Pastoral Orders are formally made by the Bishop sealing the Order.</p>	<p>Archdeacons</p> <p>Archdeacons are appointed by the bishop and have authority in certain areas of church life in the archdeaconry which they serve. They have a particular responsibility through their annual visitation to report to the bishop on the state of the parishes and their clergy. They are able to grant faculties for minor works to the Church and its churchyard, though major changes require the determination of the Diocesan Chancellor.</p> <p>Archdeacons often chair the (Archdeaconry) Pastoral Committee and make recommendations on its behalf to the bishop. They must induct any priest whom the bishop has instituted into the benefice (usually at the same service).</p>

Comment continued from previous page

Conversely, where the closure or ‘redundancy’ of a church is contemplated, consultation is also vital about the future pastoral care of the community affected by such a decision.

Given our different procedures, there is a key role for Church Leaders in facilitating this consultation, supported by Archdeacons (who often chair their archdeaconry pastoral committees), Rural/Area Deans and Superintendent Ministers and Circuit Stewards

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.5 COLLEGIAL STRUCTURES	
<p>Connexional Leadership Team/Leaders' Forum</p> <p>This consists of the current, the ex- and the designate President and Vice President of Conference, the Secretary of Conference, the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee and (at present) the five Co-ordinating Secretaries, the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order and the District Chairs. It meets for consultation usually three times per year. It has no formal powers.</p>	

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.5 COLLEGIAL STRUCTURES	
<p>College of Bishops All the bishops (including Suffragans and full time Assistants) meet once a year at the ‘Bishops’ Meeting’ for mutual support and consultation, with appropriate members of the staff of the Archbishops’ Council and its divisions. The College has no formal powers, but can consider matters which the House of Bishops will later consider formally either at a meeting of the House or in General Synod.</p>	

Comment.

In the Church of England the Bishops’ Meeting provides an opportunity to seek a common mind among all the active bishops (the retired bishops do not attend the meeting) which can then be formally reflected by the House of Bishops in the General Synod. The Bishops’ Meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss matters of Episcopal practice and concern, including the implementation of synodical legislation, recognising that both diocesan and suffragan bishops are part of the same order and share a responsibility which can benefit from mutual and collegial support from their peers. The Methodist Connexional Leadership Team (CLT) was set up to create a network which interacts in a variety of ways electronically and in small groups, and which meets occasionally as a whole group to nurture the underlying ambition of creating, sustaining and developing a culture and ethos of collegiality and collaboration, mutual sharing, mutual accountability, trust, loyalty, effective communication and good practice amongst the senior officers of the Connexion (lay and ordained) as they exercise leadership across the whole Church in and on behalf of the Conference. The CLT is to be reshaped as a Connexional Leaders’ Forum which builds relationships, spends time in worship, prayer and peer supervision and support, discusses what works in implementing the vision and policies of the Conference, and envisages options for the future life of the Church which can influence the forming of the agenda of the Conference and the mission of the wider Connexion. It is not a governance or management group but an oversight group with a primary emphasis on leadership.

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.6 Local structures – Circuits/Districts; Deaneries and Dioceses	
Circuits	
<p>The Circuit is the primary unit in which local churches relate for purposes of mission and mutual support. Ministers, deacons and probationers are stationed there, and stipends are paid centrally, via ‘assessments’ on circuits. Local preachers are trained and admitted there, although accredited connexionally.</p> <p>The ministers appointed to the Circuit together have ‘pastoral charge’ i.e. they share with others in the courts of the church, have oversight on behalf of the Conference of the worship, pastoral care and mission policy of the Circuit and its constituent churches.</p> <p>The principal meeting responsible for the affairs of a Circuit is the Circuit Meeting, which includes the ministerial staff and representatives of each local church. It meets at least twice a year for the development of circuit policy and deployment of resources. It has managing trustee responsibility for circuit property (principally, manses).</p>	<p>The Superintendent Minister, so designated in the stations, has the responsibility of ensuring that Methodist discipline is upheld and of exercising leadership and oversight, in collaboration with ministerial staff, the circuit leadership team and the Circuit Meeting (as appropriate). The Superintendent has the right to preside at every official meeting connected with the Circuit or Local Churches, but may delegate this to colleagues or (in the case of committees and local Church Councils) suitably qualified lay persons.</p> <p>The Circuit Meeting appoints at least two lay members of the Circuit as Circuit Stewards, who are responsible, with the ministerial staff (as a leadership team), for the spiritual and material well-being of the Circuit, with particular responsibility for ministerial stationing invitations, finances and manses.</p>

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CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.6 Local structures – Circuits/Districts; Deaneries and Dioceses	
Diocesan and Deanery Synods	
<p>Diocesan/Deanery Synod The powers of both Diocesan and Deanery Synods are defined by Measure. They exist for consultation and discussion of matters relating to the life and mission of the Church, and to make provision for matters relating to the diocese and deanery.</p> <p>The Deanery Synod consists of a house of clergy and a house of laity. The former consists of all beneficed and licensed clergy in the deanery together with one or more clergy with Permission to Officiate; the latter consists of one or more elected member(s) of every parish in the deanery calculated by reference to the numbers on the electoral roll, as the diocesan synod shall determine. The members of the House of Laity act as the electoral college for the election of lay members to the higher synodical bodies.</p> <p>The frequency of its meetings is determined by the rules for deanery synods made by the Diocesan Synod.</p>	<p>Rural/Area Deans are appointed by the Bishop after consultation with the clergy of the deanery. Their functions are prescribed by Canon (C23).</p> <p>They are joint chairs (with the elected Lay Chair) of the Deanery Synod, and exercise pastoral care of the clergy in the deanery on behalf of the bishop.</p> <p>They are increasingly given responsibility for leading the mission of the Church in the Deanery and for liaising with their ecumenical partners.</p>

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District Synod

The **District** is constituted to advance the mission of the Church in a region, by offering support and resources to circuits, and by serving local churches, circuits and the Conference in support, deployment, training and oversight of ordained and lay ministries.

The **District Synod, chaired by the District Chair**, is the policy-making body of the District, serving as a link between the Conference and the circuits. It consists of all ministers, deacons and probationers stationed in the district (who are under a duty to attend), representatives of each circuit and various district officers. It is required to meet once a year (but usually meets twice). The separate Ministerial Session meets to deal with defined matters relating to presbyteral candidature and training and for pastoral conversation.

The Synod is required to appoint a **District Policy Committee**.

The **District Chair** is responsible, in conjunction with the members of the Synod, to the Conference for the observance of Methodist order and discipline; exercises oversight over the character and fidelity of the ministers; is a pastor to the ministers, deacons and probationers; leads the District in the work of God.

Comment.

While circuits and the Conference existed during Wesley's lifetime, the districts were created in 1791 after his death and consisted of a number of circuits. They helped to fill the supervisory gap between the annual Conferences. District chairmen were originally appointed primarily to chair the District Meeting (later Synod). Generally they continued to be ministers with pastoral charge in a circuit or 'District Missioners' until most of them became 'separated' (i.e. to a full time appointment as chairs) in 1957. Their meeting together formally as a collegiate body was officially recognised and provided for in 1993. The district chairs (officially so named since 2004) have assumed a larger role in recent years.

In the Church of England, while the office of Rural Dean is very ancient, pre-dating the Reformation, Deanery Synods were only established by statute in the 19th Century (as 'ruridecanal conferences') and re-constituted under the Synodical Government Measure in 1969. The same Measure also re-created the Diocesan Synod, performing the functions of the former diocesan conferences. These recent changes have given lay people a greater voice in the governance of the church. (The history of synodical government in the Church of England is complex and can be confusing. A good guide is to be found in Colin Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity*, chapter 7)

The **Diocesan Synod** consists of three houses: the house of bishops (the diocesan bishop, any suffragan bishops and other bishops working in the diocese whom the bishop nominates); the house of clergy and the house of laity. Members of these two houses are elected every three years, and each house elects its own chair at the first meeting of the Synod.

The Synod is responsible for constituting the **Diocesan Board of Finance**, which holds property on behalf of the diocese, and manages the diocesan budget.

It also elects the **Bishop's Council**, which acts as the standing committee of the Synod and as an advisory council to the bishop. The diocese must also establish a Mission and Pastoral Committee, a Parsonages Board, a Diocesan Advisory Committee and a Board of Education. The Synod may appoint and determine the terms of reference of other diocesan boards and committees.

The **Chairs of the Houses**, as Vice-Presidents of the Synod share the responsibility for chairing the Synod with the president, the Diocesan Bishop.

Comment continued from previous page

The evolving roles of circuits and districts in Methodism and deaneries and dioceses in the Church of England has led to some constructive convergence. Circuits and Deaneries are increasingly the locus of discussion about the deployment of ministers and the mission of the Church. This convergence has already proved beneficial to the development of the Covenant (see *In the Spirit of the Covenant*, chapter 3) and could have considerable potential for the improvement of our decision-making processes.

In these developments the relationship between the Rural Dean and the Superintendent Minister is crucial in order to facilitate good communication and mutual understanding. Many already meet regularly and such regular consultation is to be encouraged.

METHODIST CHURCH	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.7 Local Structures – churches & parishes	
Local structures – church and congregation	
<p>The ‘local church’ This means the whole body of members and the larger church community of the Methodist Church connected with and attending one particular place of worship (or ‘chapel’) – although it is possible in certain circumstances for a local church to use more than one such place, or conversely for a place of worship to be used by more than one local church!</p> <p>The principal meeting with responsibility for the local church’s ministry of worship, fellowship, pastoral care, mission and service is the Church Council. (Other groups include the mandatory Pastoral Committee). It meets at least twice a year and deals with policy and deployment of resources. It authorises admissions into membership of the Methodist Church and has managing trustee responsibility for the church property.</p> <p>The General Church Meeting meets annually for fellowship and to consider the state of the local church.</p>	<p>The Church Stewards are elected by the General Church Meeting and are responsible, with the minister/probationer having pastoral responsibility, for giving leadership and support over the whole range of the church’s activity.</p> <p>The class leaders or pastoral visitors appointed by the Church Council are each responsible for the pastoral care of the members of one of the ‘classes’ to which every Methodist member is allocated, and, where the class meets for fellowship, for the leadership of the meetings.</p>

Comment.
The history of the parish church as the place of prayer and worship for the whole community (still part of the Church of England’s self-understanding of its mission to the nation) is reflected in the annual meeting of parishioners to elect the churchwardens. In many rural areas they remain significant people in the community as well as in the congregation. In urban areas particularly, a number of churches are becoming more ‘associational’ (rather than ‘communal’), though clergy are still aware of their role in, and of making decisions for, the wider community as well as the regular worshippers.

In the Methodist Church its origins as a ‘Society’ within the wider Church has been reflected in its greater focus on the church community and its ‘members’. But its evangelical origins meant that it viewed its mission to the wider community as fundamental. Thus there is much that PCCs and Church Councils can do and are doing in joint action to fulfil their common sense of mission. It is now thankfully rare for one church to take a major initiative in mission without involving its ecumenical partners, especially where relationships are strong and mutually supportive.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND	
Communal/Collegial	Personal
5.7 Local Structures – churches & parishes	
Local structures – parish & benefice	
<p>Parish/ Benefice A parish is a geographical area committed to an incumbent or priest in charge, who shares with the bishop responsibility for the ‘cure of souls’ in the parish. It is the most localised of the organs of government of the Church of England. A ‘benefice’ to which the priest is instituted or licensed may consist of one or more parishes.</p> <p>The Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) meets every year and is open to all members on the electoral roll of the parish. It receives an annual report from the PCC and is responsible for electing members of the PCC, and every third year of the Deanery Synod.</p> <p>The Parochial Church Council meets regularly (at least four times a year) and the minister of the parish is its chair. It must elect a lay vice-chair. The rights and duties of the PCC, Churchwardens and other officers are set out by Measure and in the Church Representation Rules.</p>	<p>Incumbent/Priest in Charge The incumbent, or priest in charge, of a parish holds the ‘cure of souls’ of the parish and its parishioners. Canon C24 sets out the duties of those who have the cure of souls which include the leading of worship (including a weekly celebration of Holy Communion), preaching and teaching the congregation, visiting the sick in the parish, and preparing candidates for Confirmation. They must consult the PCC on matters of general concern and importance in the parish.</p> <p>The incumbent (but not the priest in charge) holds the freehold of the benefice and while in office is legally the ‘owner’ of the church and parsonage. In practice their rights and liabilities are severely limited and held in trust for the benefit of the parishioners.</p> <p>The Churchwardens of the parish are officers of the bishop and chosen by a meeting of parishioners (which is often held at the same time as the APCM, though it must be open to all parishioners). While they no longer have their former secular powers in local administration they are key figures in the life of the local church. Their responsibilities are set out in Canon E 1 and include an active participation in the Church’s mission, being ‘foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent’ and are ‘to maintain order and decency in the church and churchyard’. They are to maintain an inventory of the property vested to them during their period of office, namely the plate, ornaments and movable goods of the church. They must respond to any inquiries made by the bishop and keep him informed of any matters requiring his intervention, as well as responding to the archdeacon’s articles of inquiry for the purpose of his annual visitation.</p>

6. Issues where joint decision-making could be improved

In seeking to address our third and fourth questions, we have identified a number of issues where the need for greater consultation and joint decision-making could be improved, even though the decision rests at different ‘levels’ within our churches:

6.1 Changing Structures/Boundaries

In the ten regional workshops we led in 2006, the issue of our different diocesan and district, deanery and circuit boundaries was frequently raised as one which hampered further ecumenical co-operation and frustrated some of the good initiatives which had been taken at a variety of levels in implementing the Covenant commitments. While we do not underestimate the difficulty of solving the issue, it is clearly one where a joint decision would be required.

In the meantime various changes have already been made in our structures and there are currently important discussions in both our churches which require us to consult closely if we are not going to increase the problem but move towards a more integrated geographical structure.

Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission is a programme enabling Circuits and Districts to review their life, work and mission in the light of the *Priorities for the Methodist Church* adopted by the Conference in 2004. Its primary purpose is mission and not the changing of structures and boundaries, but as various parts of the Church regroup for mission there may be implications for those structures. District Chairs have been reminded that discussion of these implications should include ecumenical consultation but we are not aware of any formal procedures as yet to include the Church’s Covenant partner, the Church of England, in the general review.

The JIC believes that urgent attention should be given in both our churches to making such consultation integral to the Review.

In the recent *Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007* the Church of England has re-established its Dioceses Commission with a strengthened brief ‘to keep under review the provincial and diocesan structure of the Church of England and, in particular –

- (a) the size, boundaries and number of provinces,
- (b) the size, boundaries and number of dioceses and their distribution between the provinces, and

- (c) the number and distribution of Episcopal offices and the arrangements for Episcopal oversight.’ (Section 3 (1))

The same Measure also establishes a Mission and Pastoral Committee in each diocese (to be ‘called by such name as the diocesan synod may decide’ – an illustration of our comments re the authority of dioceses in implementing decisions of the General Synod, in this case of a Measure) which in future will consider and make recommendations previously dealt with by the Diocesan Pastoral Committee. These will include reviewing ‘arrangements for pastoral supervision and care in the diocese as a whole [which include boundary issues, the creation of new parishes etc.] and . . . in particular parts of the diocese [e.g. Deaneries] or in particular parishes (including sharing agreements in respect of a church or parsonage house [see below 6.2] and any proposals for sharing agreements)’.

In both cases in exercising their responsibilities the Commission and the Committee have the power to consult such other persons and bodies as they think fit or appropriate, but there is no specific requirement for ecumenical consultation except in the case of mission initiatives (see below), nor for the inclusion of the Church of England’s Covenant partner in the process.

The JIC believes that both the Dioceses Commission and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committees should use their powers of consultation with other bodies to ensure that ecumenical consultation is the norm, and that, in particular, the appropriate Methodist authorities should be actively involved in the formulation of any proposals.

We also wish to make more specific proposals in relation to the Deployment of Clergy and the establishment of Mission Initiatives, to which we now turn.

6.2 Deployment of clergy/ministers

As the comparative table demonstrates, decisions about the deployment of ministers are made centrally in the Methodist Connexion, and in the diocese in the Church of England. However, the key discussion takes place in the District/Circuit on the one hand and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee/Deanery on the other.

The JIC believes that consultation would be improved if the Superintendent Minister and senior Circuit Steward were invited to attend the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, with the Rural

Dean, when proposals which could affect the circuit and deanery were under discussion, and if the Superintendent and senior Circuit Steward consulted the Rural Dean and/or the Pastoral Committee before submitting requests for the stationing of a presbyter or deacon.

Recent legislation in the Church of England, the *Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007*, and current discussions in the Methodist Church about the Stationing process have maintained, or enhanced, the importance of local consultation on these matters. The proposals of the Stationing Review Group are due to be considered by the Conference in 2008 and we welcome their ecumenical recommendations (nos. 24 – 29), in particular no. 24:

We recommend that ecumenical collaboration at church/parish, circuit/deanery and district/diocese levels continues to be vigorously encouraged and that windows of opportunity (such as when clergy move) and propitious moments (such as the Church of England looking at new models of ministry to cover larger parish areas and new provincial structures in the United Reformed Church) be grasped.

Our proposal would create a natural forum for this to happen.

In the case of the new power of a bishop to create a *Mission Order*, the bishop is specifically required to ‘consult such other Churches and religious organisations as he thinks fit’ (Part V, section 47 (6)). Again, the opportunity to have ecumenical, and specifically Methodist representatives at the meeting of the Mission and Pastoral Committee would facilitate this consultation.

We also commend the wider use of the power which exists (under section 7 of the *Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969* and section 24 of the *Endowment and Glebe Measure 1976*, as amended by the *Miscellaneous Provisions Measures 1992 & 2003*) when the Parsonage House is not required to house the incumbent to allow the minister of another church to live in the Parsonage House (which has already been used in some dioceses to permit a joint appointment in a benefice, where the Methodist and Anglican ministers can exercise a ‘shared’ ministry). Similarly in some circuits greater use could be made of the possibility of the shared use of a circuit manse.

6.3 Mission initiatives/specialist ministers

There is a problem of definition about initiatives in mission. Some may be made by a local parish or circuit and will be supported by parish or circuit funds. Others will involve diocesan/central funding and will be covered by a Mission Order granted by the Bishop (under the *Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, Part V*) or by District/Connexional funding and supported by the Stationing process. In this latter case a Church of England priest would require the authorisation of the bishop, and a parish cannot carry on a formal 'Mission Initiative' unless a Mission Order is in place, particularly if the area of the initiative covers part or all of another parish. As indicated above, in the case of a *Mission Order* consultation with other churches is required if the bishop(s) thinks fit. This should be a natural and established process under the Covenant and could improve the planning of these initiatives and avoid unnecessary duplication of resources.

The collaboration at national level between our churches in the Fresh Expressions initiative is much to be welcomed. Similar cooperation at diocesan level (which already happens in a number of places) would be a natural extension of this initiative.

We therefore recommend that regular consultation about potential new developments should take place between church leaders generally, and the bishop and district chair in particular. Increased collaboration will also be facilitated by the circuit presence on the Mission and Pastoral Committee (see above) and regular consultation between the Superintendent and the appropriate Rural/Area Dean.

We are aware that until there is a closer integration of our churches, joint 'Mission Initiatives' and 'Fresh Expressions' raise difficult issues relating to the relationship between the new congregation and our ecclesial structures, both within and between our churches. These are being addressed by a joint working party between the Faith and Order Advisory Group and the Faith & Order Committee of the Conference. Some of the issues are similar to those raised for the Church of England by single congregation LEPs, which the Council for Christian Unity has been trying to resolve, in consultation with our ecumenical partners.

Within the Covenant we have the potential to develop a new model of ecumenical cooperation in which one partner takes the lead on behalf of us both, so that the new congregation has a clear locus within the structures of one of our churches, while drawing inspiration from both traditions in

its worship, and local life and mission. This might be facilitated through wider use of the existing power to enter into Sharing Agreements for buildings, and also by taking full advantage of the possibilities of shared ministries as outlined in our previous reports.

6.4 Training for Ministry

Throughout the development of Regional Training Partnerships (RTPs), and the discussion of the future use of our Theological Training Institutions by the House of Bishops and/or the Conference, the need for better processes of consultation and joint-decision making has been demonstrated on more than one occasion.

Given the amount of ecumenical work, including fully ecumenical teaching which has been done in these institutions for a number of years, there are strong arguments for trying to move beyond consultation into a process of joint decision making, formalising the work at staff level (through the close co-operation between the officers of the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council and the Ministerial Committee of the Conference) of sustaining common work and policies in this area.

The present level of joint decision-making is reflected in the following:

- the ecumenical representation on the Hind Committee which first advocated these developments;
- the presence of a Church of England representative (from the Ministry Division) on the Working Group set up following the Conference discussion in 2006 to reconsider the proposals for the recognition of Methodist Institutions for 'residential' training (reporting in 2007, *Talking of God, Acting for God.*)
- all RTPs involve the Regional Church Leaders (incl Bishops and District Chairs) as well as the institutions themselves in the development of proposals; and
- the close cooperation at staff level between the Ministry Division and the Connexional Ministerial Committee.

However, problems have arisen, in spite of the aspirations set out in 1996 in *Commitment to Mission and Unity* (GS Misc 447) para 37, because the locus of decision in these matters remains with the Conference itself, on the one hand, and the House of Bishops on the other. Both bodies have not always followed or endorsed the recommendations which others, with consultation, have made, because they retain separate authority for their own processes and institutions

The JIC believes that better understanding could be reached, and hopefully better decisions made, if the new Ministry Council of the Ministry Division and, say, the Methodist Council were able jointly to endorse any proposals made by the Division and/or the Committee before they went to the Conference and/or the House of Bishops. Further, as part of their own processes of reaching decisions in this area both the House and the Conference could require the other body to approve any proposals which would significantly affect the institutions of the other church before they were implemented. This will inevitably slow up the process of reaching a decision, but given the importance of training for ordained ministry to both our churches, delay may be a price worth paying.

The new RTPs will also have responsibility for coordinating **lay training**, including that for recognised lay ministries. As we said in our second interim report, *Living God's Covenant*, chap 4, much more could be done in joint training under the existing structures. We would encourage RTPs to ensure that these developments are fully consistent with the Covenant and that wherever appropriate joint training takes place.

We commend the recently published Church of England report on *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* (GS Misc 854) for study in both our churches in the light of our own comparative work on Lay Ministries. In addition some joint work by the Methodist Council and the Ministry Division could usefully be done on ways in which the requirements of the Local Preachers' Training Course, *Faith and Worship* could more readily take into account the training proposed, or already being offered to Readers. We understand that some work is already in hand in this area.

6.5 Our Voice in Public Affairs

Currently, the Conference and the Synod both pass resolutions addressing significant developments and issues in the public square. In addition the President, bishops and others are approached by the media about these matters, or, in the case of Bishops and other peers who are members of our churches in the House of Lords, are able to raise them in Parliament.

Considerable consultation already goes on between the officers of the Mission and Public Affairs (and other) divisions in Church House and the Connexional Team in the Methodist Church. In many (but not all cases) those who speak are able to do so with the knowledge of our ecumenical partners' views.

The Churches' Legislation Advisory Service (formerly the Churches Main Committee) also enables the churches to speak together to government about matters of common concern, particularly where issues and concerns which affect the churches are raised by, or need to be enshrined in, legislation.

We have argued elsewhere (*Living God's Covenant*, chapter 3) for greater consultation between Bishops and Church Leaders (including District Chairs) when they are approached about local or national issues and it is important that these processes not only go on, but are seen to go on. In addition, we both have representatives on Conference / General Synod who have made significant contributions to national debates about these matters (though the timing of debates mean that sometimes they must speak for themselves, rather than on behalf of their Church's agreed position). However, there is much more that could be done in setting up joint working parties where that is appropriate and holding parallel debates about the same issues, so that we can more effectively speak together on these matters.

We recommend that wherever possible joint working parties should be set up on matters of concern in the 'public square' reporting to both the Conference and the General Synod.

6.6 Towards shared decision-making

In this section we have set out (in bold type) a number of specific suggestions about ways in which our current structures could be used to bring about greater co-operation and communication about specific areas of our church life. **We hope both that the new JIC will give attention to these proposals in its continuing role in monitoring the development of the Covenant, and that the appropriate bodies in our churches consider urgently whether they could use their existing powers to improve their shared responsibilities in the ways we have suggested.**

7. Current Ecclesiological Developments

Elsewhere in this report (chapter 5) we have considered the implications of the Covenant for the development of *episkope* and episcopacy in our churches, and we have made reference to the discussion about the ordination of women as bishops in the Church of England and the recent work in both our churches about the nature of the diaconate. All these have important implications for both churches as we develop the Covenant relationship we have established. Neither of us can make decisions about

these ecclesiological questions without being aware of the importance of that decision to the other. That has already been acknowledged in the level of ecumenical input (specifically but not exclusively from each other) at different stages of the process in each case.

In all three areas, but particularly in the two discussions about the episcopate, we have recognised the need (referred to in the CTE discussion) for each church to ‘make decisions within our own life and structure’. That has required each of us to give the other space in the confidence that they have heard our concerns and are taking them into account in reaching their own decision. Such mutual trust is at the heart of any Covenant commitment. We have also been conscious of the need to assure each other that we are aware of the need to address the concerns of those for whom a decision which we would welcome would challenge their own understanding of their church’s ecclesiology.

If the Methodist Church were to decide to incorporate a third (episcopal) order of ministry into its polity and become a church ordered in the historic episcopate and the Church of England were to legislate to ordain women to the episcopate we would have taken two further important steps on the road to ‘a fully united ministry of oversight’. Such a new situation would present a further set of challenges and opportunities to create better structures of joint and shared decision making.

In our discussions we have reflected on the need to ensure that whatever proposals emerge from the continuing consideration of *episkope* and episcopacy by the Conference, and from the drafting group seeking to produce draft legislation to implement the decision of the General Synod ‘to remove the obstacles to the Ordination of Women as Bishops’ proper weight is given to the views of our partner; neither on the one hand suggesting that a particular decision would invalidate the Covenant, nor on the other ignoring the declared stance of our partner in reaching a decision.

8. Conclusion

In setting out the present structures of our churches and considering points at which consultation could be improved we have sought

- to build greater understanding of each other’s processes,
- to commend the good practice which already exists at all levels of our churches’ lives and suggest strategies for avoiding the hurtful mistakes of the past,

- to maximise the opportunities for consultation where decisions affect each other's life and witness,
- to propose some modest changes in current practice which could achieve a greater mutual understanding and in significant areas ensure that we reach a common mind in making decisions which affect both our churches.

In exploring these issues we have been conscious of the difficulty of bringing together two different systems, each of which has its own characteristics and culture. The mapping of decision-making in our two churches has revealed the different dynamic of a system which invests the responsibility for some decisions in certain individuals, usually with a requirement to consult appropriately, from that of a more centralised system, in which individuals still make decisions, but on the authority of the central body. In any organisation, the character of the entire system, its culture, self-perception and its sense of common purpose and vocation will ultimately govern how decisions are taken. Shared decision making involving two or more bodies must take account of these differences.

That does not mean, however, that better processes cannot be achieved in the short term:

- ✳ Communication is always possible, and should inform the decisions taken by each body or individual.
- ✳ Invitations to serve on appropriate bodies in each others structures will facilitate consultation.
- ✳ Increasing contact and a sense of common mission will make us more aware of the effect of decisions on each other. Many decisions have greater co-lateral impact than we realise.

There are other aspects of decision-making, and other patterns drawn from other churches and organisations, which deserve greater reflection. The Regional Workshops in 2006 revealed the importance of attitude and a willingness to explore better ways of collaboration. In our essentially practical exploration we have not pursued this material, though our successors may wish to do so as we move forward in this area. It has been a long-standing commitment to improve our shared decision-making as we have demonstrated. We deserve to honour that commitment as far as we can within our present relationship.

In reflecting on the nature of covenants in our first report, *In the Spirit of the Covenant*, we made the point that covenants were primarily about

relationships rather than rules. Our proposals will assist the process of growing together, but they will depend on the continuing establishment of good personal relationships and on the desire in each of us to live and decide in the light of the Covenant. The question, ‘What will this mean for my Covenant partner?’ needs to enter the lifeblood of our churches.