

# **EMBRACING THE COVENANT**

**Quinquennial Report (2008) of the  
Joint Implementation Commission  
under the Covenant between**

**The Methodist Church of Great Britain  
and  
The Church of England**

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## FOREWORD

As the Co-Chairs of the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) of the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, we are pleased to present the Commission's quinquennial report to both our churches. We believe that this report contains stimulating ideas and challenging recommendations, which need to be studied widely in both churches.

We recognise that some feel that 'the Covenant' has not yet made the difference that they expected in the relationship between our two churches. But the JIC cannot on its own 'implement' a covenant. That can only be done by both churches taking the Covenant to heart and putting it into practice in every area of their lives.

However, in our three reports we have addressed many issues, including those which were specifically referred to us. A covenant by its very nature requires both parties fully to engage and grow into it. In much of our work, particularly through the ten regional workshops for our church leaders, that we organised, as well as in our reports, we have pointed the way ahead and encouraged the necessary changes in thought and practice throughout our churches, in order to allow the Covenant to flourish as a practical reality.

We share the disappointment of others at the slow pace of change in the covenantal relationship between our churches. Yet we recognise how far things have changed for the better in British ecumenical experience in recent years, not a little of which is due to the influence of this Anglican–Methodist Covenant and the work of the JIC. We have been encouraged by many examples of good practice and by the seriousness with which many have engaged in a mutual covenant lifestyle.

We wish to thank all the members of the JIC and its consultants for their collegueship and hard work during the past five years. In an extremely encouraging way the members of the JIC have come together in a covenantal relationship that has brought to us all many gifts and graces from each of our churches. We particularly want to thank the Co-Conveners who have guided the work of the commission.

We commend this report as a further step on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church.

The Right Revd Ian Cundy  
Bishop of Peterborough

Professor Peter Howdle  
Vice-President of  
the Methodist Conference 2002-3

## **MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION 2003-8**

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Miss Margaret Faulkner (*Secretary*)  
Deacon Hilary Smith  
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## ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

Unless otherwise indicated, references to these reports in the text are by paragraph number.

AMC *An Anglican – Methodist Covenant: Report of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House and Church House Publishing, 2001).

SOC *In the Spirit of the Covenant: Interim Report (2005) of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House, 2005).

LGC *Living God's Covenant: Second Interim Report (2007) of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House, 2007).



# 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).

## 2. THE UNITY WE HAVE AND THE UNITY WE SEEK

In this chapter, we take our cue from the title of a recent collection of essays from various Christian traditions on the prospects for the ecumenical movement in the twenty-first century: *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek*.<sup>1</sup> As that title suggests, we want to explore the paradox of unity that we are experiencing in a covenant such as ours. The Covenant is an expression of unity and itself generates deeper unity. Yet within the Covenant we are committed to working for a fuller unity than the Covenant itself assumes. We know that we are united in a covenant, which is a serious commitment, yet we remain apart in various ways. We both have and have not unity.

For the past century, Christ's prayer in John 17.21 'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be [one] in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' has been understood as speaking of unity in mission. The Methodist Conference Statement on the Church *Called to Love and Praise* says: 'We must begin from the premiss that the prayer of Jesus has been heard. So his prayer creates unity: Churches are already one in Christ ... Yet the responsibility remains of responding to the prayer of Jesus, since divisions – and denominations – are a visible denial of that fundamental unity' (3.1.2).<sup>2</sup>

Under the Covenant we have a real and visible expression of the unity of the Church of Christ. The Covenant has already proved to be a catalyst for unity in mission between Methodists and Anglicans in many situations (as our two interim reports have shown). The Covenant builds on the baptismal unity (mutual recognition of baptism; common baptism) that is one of the foundations of the ecumenical movement today. Baptism unites not only individual Christians in Christ (Romans 6.3-4; 1 Corinthians 12.13), but binds together the whole Body (Ephesians 5.25-27). The Covenant is an expression of our shared communion (*koinonia*) with the Father and the Son (1 John 1.3), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13.13).

So our unity under the Covenant is not entirely something that still remains to be achieved, something that only lies ahead of us. It is already

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1 J. Morris and N. Sagovsky, eds, *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek: Ecumenical Prospects for the Third Millennium* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

2 Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999.

a reality, a present possession, a gift received. The Covenant was seen by our own churches and by ecumenical partner churches as a significant step in terms of the unity of the whole Church. That is something to rejoice in and to be thankful for. The unity we have is set out in the terms of the Covenant itself (*An Anglican–Methodist Covenant*:194, consisting of the Preamble, the Affirmations and the Commitments) in specific ways. It is worth reminding ourselves of these.

In the Covenant we have affirmed 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...'. We have affirmed that 'in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated'. We have affirmed that both our churches 'confess in word and life the apostolic faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the ecumenical Creeds'. We have gone on to affirm the authenticity of one another's ordained and lay ministries as bearing Christ's commission and the authenticity of the ministries of oversight in both our churches. In our covenant relationship, our unity is already expressed in many forms of shared ministry and mission.

Nevertheless, the Covenant is only a beginning: the vision of fuller visible unity still lies before us. In the Commitments our churches have pledged themselves to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to fuller visible unity, to realise more deeply their common life and mission and to bring about a closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service in a needy world, including through joint or shared oversight and decision making. It is clear from the terms of the Covenant that a deeper unity does indeed remain to be received from God. It is that deeper unity that lies beyond our present experience that we wish to explore in this chapter. *The Grace Given You in Christ*, the report of the international Methodist – Roman Catholic dialogue, sets the right tone:

What then is the Church's deepest and hidden reality, the mystery that lies at the heart of its nature and mission? It is the invisible presence of the Triune God, the one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God who is Holy Love. As Pope Paul VI said, 'The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.' The Church is a fruit of God's grace, and its nature and mission cannot

be understood apart from the mystery of God's loving plan for the salvation of all humanity.<sup>3</sup>

### **The vision of unity**

The over-arching horizon for all unity-talk is the visible unity of the whole Church, the one Church of Jesus Christ. We have seen in our chapter on the nature of unity that a major impetus to unity came from the demands of 'the mission field' for a united witness in the presence of other faiths. The imperative of a visibly united testimony to the world has remained the guiding thread of the ecumenical movement, from the Edinburgh International Missionary Conference of 1910 to the statement *Called to be the One Church* of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006. One of the first declarations of this vision was 'An Appeal to All Christian People', issued by the 1920 Lambeth Conference.<sup>4</sup> Addressing all baptised Christian believers throughout the Church, the Appeal stated:

We believe that God wills fellowship. By God's own act this fellowship was made in and through Jesus Christ, and its life is in his Spirit. We believe that it is God's purpose to manifest this fellowship, so far as this world is concerned, in an outward, visible and united society, holding one faith, having its own recognized officers, using God-given means of grace, and inspiring all its members to the world-wide service of the Kingdom of God.

The bishops added: 'This is what we mean by the Catholic Church.'

The Appeal pointed out that this united fellowship was not yet visible in the world. On the one hand were the ancient episcopal communions of East and West, 'to whom ours is bound by many ties of faith and tradition'. On the other hand were the 'great non-episcopal Communion, standing for rich elements of truth, liberty and life which might otherwise have been obscured or neglected'. With them, the bishops said, 'we are closely linked by many affinities, racial, historical and spiritual'.

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3 *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists reflect further on the Church*; Report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council (Lake Junaluska: World Methodist Council, 2006), 49 (p. 23).

4 Text in M. Kinnamon and B.E. Cope, eds, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 81-83.

Now we come to the heart of the Lambeth Appeal:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all ‘who profess and call themselves Christians’, within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and be made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ.

The vision was of diversity in communion: communities long separated would retain what was precious to them, for ‘it is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled.’

The Appeal went on to restate the ‘Lambeth Quadrilateral’ of 1888, itself based on the ‘Chicago Quadrilateral’ of two years earlier. The bishops in 1920 believed that the visible unity of the Church would involve the ‘wholehearted acceptance’ of:

‘The Holy Scriptures... as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith’;

The ‘Nicene’ Creed, ‘as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith and either it or the Apostles Creed as the Baptismal confession of belief’;

‘The divinely instituted sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion’;

‘A ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.’

In the context of the Covenant, we should note that the Appeal went on to suggest that episcopacy was the only available means of providing a ministry that could be acknowledged by the universal Church. The bishops immediately added that they did not question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of Communion that were not episcopally ordered. ‘On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace.’ But the Appeal suggested that

episcopacy would prove ‘the best instrument for maintaining the unity and continuity of the Church’.<sup>5</sup>

The Free Churches responded to the Appeal in 1921 and conversations took place at Lambeth Palace (Dr Scott Lidgett leading for the Methodists and Archbishop Lang for the Anglicans) in two phases until 1938, when *Outline of a Reunion Scheme* was published. It was an attempt to sketch ‘the kind of Church in which the Churches ... might find themselves united without loss of what is specially valuable in their distinctive traditions’. It envisaged an organically united Church in England, which would be episcopal from the start and would eventually have a fully united ministry on the basis of episcopal ordination. The Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches issued a cautious response in 1941 and then matters lapsed during the War until Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, in a sermon preached before the University of Cambridge on 3 November 1946, suggested a different approach. Instead of an ambitious constitutional scheme for multilateral reunion, the Archbishop suggested that the Free Churches ‘take episcopacy into their system’ and ‘try it out on their own ground’, in the hope that the churches might come together in the future on the basis of a common order. It was subsequently agreed that the discussion would be taken forward between the Church of England and various Free Churches directly, with the Federal Council having a facilitating and monitoring role.<sup>6</sup> This was the background to the vision of unity that informed the Anglican – Methodist conversations of the 1950s and 1960s, which narrowly failed to achieve the required majority in the Church Assembly and subsequently in the General Synod. The bitterness and disillusionment, particularly on the part of Methodists, induced by this failure, should not be underestimated; it is still a significant factor in our relationship.

The Lambeth Appeal was an early example of the aspiration to work for visible unity that found many expressions over the next few decades. The

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5 The passage continued: ‘But we greatly desire that the office of a Bishop should be everywhere exercised in a representative and constitutional manner, and more truly express all that ought to be involved for the life of the Christian Family in the title of Father-in-God.’ The 1888 version of the Quadrilateral simply referred to ‘the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of his Church.’

6 *Church Relations in England: Being the Report of Conversations between Representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury and Representatives of the Evangelical Free Churches in England* (London:SPCK, 1950). G.K.A. Bell, *Christian Unity: The Anglican Position* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), ch. V.



first world conference on Life and Work was held in Stockholm in 1925 and the first world conference on Faith and Order took place at Lausanne in 1927. The United, Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Churches came together in 1932 to form the Methodist Church of Great Britain. In the years leading up to the Second World War, Faith and Order and Life and Work converged in the planning of the World Council of Churches, which finally came into being in 1948.

The third world conference on Faith and Order in 1952 enunciated the famous Lund principle: that churches should work together in everything, except where differences of conviction compelled them to act separately. Although it is a principle that has been honoured more in the breach than the observance, it states a practical vision of unity in mission that remains valid.

Shortly before the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) committed the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in New Delhi in 1961, articulated a vision of unity that has not been superseded or surpassed:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to the Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.<sup>7</sup>

The Canberra Assembly of the WCC in 1991 also enumerated the marks of full visible unity (what it called 'full communion'): 'the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognised and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation'. The statement went on to say that 'the goal of the search for full communion is realized when

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7 Report of the Section on Unity, Third Assembly of the WCC, New Delhi, 1961: Kinnamon and Cope, eds, p. 88.

all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness'. It specified that 'this full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action', through councils and synods at various levels.<sup>8</sup>

The Canberra statement immediately addressed the question of diversity within communion, stating that 'diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts are integral to the nature of communion.' Canberra went on to point out that there must be limits to diversity: 'Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever' (cf. Hebrews 13.8) and when it impedes the Church's confession of salvation that embraces the whole of humanity according to Scripture and the apostolic preaching. The statement believed that, within these limits, diversity was a positive good: 'In communion diversities are brought together in harmony as gifts of the Holy Spirit, contributing to the richness and fullness of the church of God.'<sup>9</sup>

### **'Full visible unity'**

The preliminary informal conversations (which reported in *Commitment to Mission and Unity*, 1996) clearly established that both our churches shared the common conviction of the ecumenical movement (described above) that the Body of Christ should be visibly one and that the 'full visible unity' of Christ's Church was a gift of God's grace and the goal towards which we, as Methodists and Anglicans, should be contributing.

Against this wider ecumenical context, the Common Statement *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* explored the position of our churches in relation to four commonly recognised dimensions that, when held together in all their richness, make up the full visible unity of the Church of Christ (AMC, 101ff).

- \* 'a common profession of the apostolic faith, grounded in Holy Scripture and set forth in the historic creeds'
- \* 'the sharing of one baptism and the celebrating of one Eucharist'
- \* 'a common ministry of word and sacrament'
- \* 'a common ministry of oversight'

Where these four elements become present, we have, in a particular

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8 Kinnamon and Cope, eds, p. 124 (2.1).

9 Ibid., p. 125 (2.2).

situation, the essential components of the full visible unity of the Christian Church. This is clearly not a prescription for a rigidly institutional form of unity. There is no blueprint for full visible unity, but a portrait can be sketched. In that portrait, these elements must be present. The fabric or texture of the communion that is experienced in the Church's life will show that it is visibly and manifestly one in the sight of the world, even though it will remain diverse in its cultural expressions of worship, belief and practice.

The Formal Conversations showed that our churches were sufficiently agreed on the goal of the full visible unity of the one Church to make a Covenant, on the basis of which we would work together on the remaining obstacles.

We may note several features of the way that these four elements are portrayed in the Faith and Order tradition and in the Common Statement:

First, these elements are all visible, manifested in time and space. The WCC Faith and Order statement *The Nature and Mission of the Church* says: 'Working for the unity of the Church means working for fuller visible embodiment of the oneness that belongs to its nature' (53).<sup>10</sup> It is true that the deepest sources of our unity surpass our human understanding: they are personal and relational and reside in the spirit and in the heart. But it is equally true that they need to become manifest, to be incarnated, so to speak, in the material world. Jesus' high priestly prayer is for a unity that is visible to the world (John 17.21). The hidden work of the Holy Spirit that binds Christians together is not more 'spiritual' than the tangible ministry of the word, the sacraments and pastoral care, which we are called to hold in common: these are the Spirit's means of grace and the primary expressions of our unity.

Second, the marks of full visible unity do not imply any particular organisational structure. While this unity will inevitably have some kind of institutional expression, as every communal human activity does, no single institutional model is assumed. Through its long history the Church has developed various forms of conciliar life for the purposes of consultation, discernment and decision-making – which are all involved in oversight – and these are what we should be addressing as our two churches draw closer together.

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10 Geneva: WCC, 2005.

Third, the vision of the full visible unity of Christ's Church makes a rich diversity possible. It does not carry any connotations of uniformity of worship or practice – in fact, as we saw in the Lambeth Appeal and in the Canberra Statement, quite the reverse. Each tradition of the Christian Church has developed its own way of confessing the faith (in creeds, formularies, catechisms and hymns) and its particular patterns of ministry and organisation as it has travelled through history. Cultural factors play their part and at best should be seen as adaptations for the sake of mission.<sup>11</sup> These distinctive features help to make up the identity of a Christian community. They need to be respected and preserved, while also being enriched – and, if appropriate, challenged – from elsewhere. Legitimate diversity does not detract from unity, but enriches it. The opposite of unity is not diversity, but division. After all, both our churches are examples in themselves of communion in diversity.

Fourth, full visible unity can be attributed only to the whole Church, not to a particular part of it. As our second interim report *Living God's Covenant* pointed out (p. 4: 12), it is not appropriate to think of full visible unity being achieved bilaterally. What can be accomplished bilaterally is a significant step towards the ultimate goal, as we make our journey towards our God-given destination when the indestructible unity of the Body of Christ will be fully revealed. Two or more churches coming together seek to be 'in communion', as for example through the Porvoo Agreement of 1996 between the four British and Irish Anglican Churches and six Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches.<sup>12</sup> Churches already in covenant partnership, as we are, should seek the full visible communion of their churches. The term 'full visible communion' has been found helpful in recent Anglican–Roman Catholic relations.<sup>13</sup> It is a formula that allows space, respects the fact of difference and resists any suggestion of a 'take-over'. Similarly, the slogan 'united, not absorbed' has been a watchword

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11 *Called to Love and Praise* 3.1.3-4.

12 *The Porvoo Common Statement, etc.* (London: Church House Publishing, 1992). North American Agreements, Called to Common Mission between The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Waterloo Declaration between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, use the term 'full communion'.

13 E.g. The Mississauga Statement 2000 which led to the setting up of the International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission, and the Common Declaration by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and Pope Benedict XVI in 2006.

in bilateral conversations since the Malines Conversations of the 1920s and sums up what we aim for in the Covenant.<sup>14</sup>

### **Enhancing unity**

The process that led to the Covenant followed the method of seeking unity by stages. The Covenant is a major staging post on a journey. The Common Statement and the two interim reports have used what we might call ‘incremental language’ about unity, unity by degrees. ‘Greater visible unity’ and ‘further and fuller forms of visible unity’ are expressions used in the Foreword to *An Anglican–Methodist Covenant* and the main text talks about ‘closer unity’ (120). *In the Spirit of the Covenant* refers to ‘a further phase of visible unity’ (1.1.2) and *Living God’s Covenant* talks about ‘making more visible and effective the unity that is already ours in Christ through faith and through our baptism into the Spirit-bearing Body’ (p. 4:12).

This incremental way of speaking about unity serves to emphasise the truth that visible unity can grow in depth and strength; it can be enhanced to an unlimited extent. But by the same token, visible unity can diminish, and disunity can become more conspicuous. There is no steady state, no standing still. We go forward or we go back. Unity language implies an imperative to work at it. As has been often said: unity is both gift and task.

### **‘Organic unity’**

While the Common Statement set the Anglican–Methodist relationship in the framework of the goal of the full visible unity of the one Church of Christ, and used incremental, step by step language about developing and enhancing unity, it also spoke of ‘organic unity’.

The phrase ‘organic unity’ makes even some ecumenically committed Christians nervous. For them it carries overtones of heavily institutionalised, monochrome unity. For such Christians, it threatens to flatten out diversity and to sap energy. ‘Organic unity’, for some, seems to hark back to the rather grandiose ideas of top-down denominational merger that were current in the 1960s, but do not seem either attractive or feasible now. That is not what the phrase ‘organic unity’ is intended to convey in the context of the Covenant.

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14 ‘United, not absorbed’ was a theme of the informal Malines Conversations in Belgium between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, presided over by Cardinal Mercier, from 1921 to 1925.

The Common Statement (AMC) used ‘organic unity’ twice, once at the beginning and once at the end. In the very first paragraph it pointed out that stepping-stones were needed if organic unity was ever to be achieved (1) and in the Covenant Commitments the churches pledged ‘to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ’s Church’ (194).

The phrase was used quite deliberately, to put down a marker about the serious, visible character of the unity that we are committed to pursue in the Covenant. ‘Organic’ has always had to do with life and process, with growth and development. Today ‘organic’ is a ‘golden’ word in everyday speech, standing for what is natural, wholesome, nourishing and generally healthy. It is opposed to what is artificial, contaminated and bad for your health. In the context of unity, ‘organic unity’ means a unity that is natural, not forced, and that is true to the traditions and identities of the parties concerned. Organic unity is a unity that has vitality because the partners each bring their strengths to it. It is not contrived, but flows from the deep spiritual unity that the Holy Spirit brings about when the Spirit incorporates us into the Body of Christ in baptism (1 Corinthians 12.13).

Organic unity is another way of speaking about the ‘full visible communion’ of two or more churches. To borrow the language of Lambeth 1920, it will involve ‘the wholehearted acceptance’ of the four dimensions of full visible unity, which will need to be expressed in specific ways in various contexts. The Covenant is premised on acceptance of these elements, set out in the Common Statement. We understand them as gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church and, in their outworking, open to development under the guidance of the Spirit. Together they shape and give substance to the mission of the Church.

- \* ‘a common profession of the apostolic faith, grounded in Holy Scripture and set forth in the historic creeds’
- \* ‘the sharing of one baptism and the celebrating of one Eucharist’
- \* ‘a common ministry of word and sacrament’
- \* ‘a common ministry of oversight’

For Methodists and Anglicans in a deepening Covenant, working towards organic unity means that they will continue to bring their Methodist and Anglican identities, traditions and experiences for mutual enrichment. In a relationship of organic unity – whatever that may look like in practice – it will still be true that what Methodists and Anglicans respectively treasure will not be lost. But it is equally true that both Anglicans and

Methodists will be challenged by what they learn and receive from each other. *Metanoia*, repentant rethinking, is a condition of organic unity. Organic unity ultimately means being one church with distinct traditions and communities within it that interact creatively. This is already our experience within the Methodist Church and the Church of England: why not in a larger whole?

### **Conclusions**

The JIC believes that the Covenant relationship must be allowed to unfold gradually – that is to say, organically, though with plenty of encouragement from the leadership of our two churches and from Methodists and Anglicans locally – so that our churches learn to work together and to think and decide together in every conceivable way (as the Lund principle proposed more than half a century ago), particularly in mission, until they act as one (LGC: 11).

The vision of full visible unity is much wider than a relationship between two churches, however precious. That deeper convergence in theology and practice will leave open the door for other churches to participate on the basis of shared theology and practice, if they wish to do so. The boundaries of visible unity must be extended as far as possible.

It is fair to say, however, that the institutional implications of the Covenant have not yet been discerned by either church, or by the JIC. This task of discernment will be on the agenda of the next phase of the JIC. Both churches are going through significant changes at the present time, with shifting perspectives and the emergence of fresh priorities. To some extent, though, we believe, not nearly enough, they are consulting and collaborating together through all this. In our chapter ‘How can decision-making be shared?’ we have tried to show a better way.

The energy for implementing the Covenant is mainly at local level and among senior church leaders. But we wonder whether the churches have either the energy or the will to adapt institutionally to each other in any significant way. Our report contains some recommendations about the practice of *episkope* and episcopacy in our two churches that will, we believe, significantly assist the coming together of the ministries of pastoral oversight and leadership in mission in our churches.

The JIC believes that, as churches, we should consistently act as one in every possible way, so that more and more areas of our church life and mission are shared and jointly carried out, until the moment eventually

comes when we face becoming one church in every respect and are ready to take that step – facing full visible communion.

Although the pace of progress towards full visible communion cannot be forced, deeper unity should not be pursued in a leisurely or casual manner. We began with the biblical imperative, grounded on our Lord's 'high-priestly prayer' in John 17, to make unity visible. We continued by setting out some of the strands in the ecumenical movement that articulated that vision of unity. Division is a denial of the Body of Christ and (as the international Methodist – Roman Catholic dialogue puts it) 'clouds our understanding of the Church'.<sup>15</sup> If there is an urgency attached to mission and evangelism, there is an equal urgency attached to seeking the unity in Christ that will help the world to believe in him. It is against this background that we bring forward the rest of what we have to say in this quinquennial report.

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15 *The Grace Given You in Christ*, 46 (p. 22).



### 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

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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

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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.

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<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

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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>

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6 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.

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<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.

## 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.



<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.1 CENTRAL STRUCTURES &amp; GOVERNANCE – Conference &amp; General Synod</b>	
<p><b><u>The Methodist Conference</u></b>  <b>The source of all authority within the Connexion.</b>  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><b><u>The President &amp; Vice-President of the Conference</u></b> 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
<b>5.1 CENTRAL STRUCTURES &amp; GOVERNANCE – Conference &amp; General Synod</b>	
<p><b><u>The General Synod</u></b>  <b>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.</b> 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 &amp; Sodor &amp; 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><b><u>Diocesan bishops</u></b>  <b>The Bishop is the source of authority in his diocese.</b> 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 <b>Diocesan Synod</b> with elected representatives of the clergy and laity of the diocese, and with the <b>Bishop’s Council</b>, 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

<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.2 ORDINATION</b>	
<b>Authority for Ordination</b>	
<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) <b>‘received into full connexion’</b> 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), <b>ordained</b>, 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>



<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.2 ORDINATION</b>	
<b>Authority for Ordination</b>	
	<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.

<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.3 DEPLOYMENT OF MINISTERS</b>	
<b>Deployment of Ministers (Stationing)</b>	
<p>Arrangements for the deployment of presbyters and deacons are made centrally on behalf of the Conference by the <b>Stationing Committee</b> (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>

<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.3 DEPLOYMENT OF MINISTERS</b>	
<b>Deployment of Clergy (Licensing/Institution)</b>	
	<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><b>Comment</b></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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<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.4 PASTORAL ORGANISATION</b>	
<b>Pastoral organisation</b>	
<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><b>Comment.</b></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 ‘<b>parish</b>’ (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 <b>the circuit</b> (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>
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<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.4 PASTORAL ORGANISATION</b>	
<b>Pastoral organisation</b>	
<p>Pastoral reorganisation is governed by the provisions of the Dioceses, Pastoral &amp; Mission Measure 2007, and the Pastoral Measure 1983 as amended by the Dioceses, Pastoral &amp; 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><b>Archdeacons</b></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 <b>faculties</b> for minor works to the Church and its churchyard, though major changes require the determination of the <b>Diocesan Chancellor</b>.</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

<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.5 COLLEGIAL STRUCTURES</b>	
<p><b>Connexional Leadership Team/Leaders' Forum</b></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 &amp; 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>	

<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.5 COLLEGIAL STRUCTURES</b>	
<p><b>College of Bishops</b>  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
<b>5.6 Local structures – Circuits/Districts; Deaneries and Dioceses</b>	
<b>Circuits</b>	
<p>The <b>Circuit</b> 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 <b>Circuit Meeting</b>, 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 <b>Superintendent Minister</b>, 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 <b>Circuit Stewards</b>, 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>

*Table continued on page 70.*



<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.6 Local structures – Circuits/Districts; Deaneries and Dioceses</b>	
<b>Diocesan and Deanery Synods</b>	
<p><b>Diocesan/Deanery Synod</b> 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 <b>Deanery Synod</b> 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><b>Rural/Area Deans</b> 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 <b>Lay Chair</b>) 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>

*Table continued on page 71.*

### **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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

<b>METHODIST CHURCH</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.7 Local Structures – churches &amp; parishes</b>	
<b>Local structures – church and congregation</b>	
<p><b>The ‘local church’</b> 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 <b>Church Council</b>. (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 <b>General Church Meeting</b> meets annually for fellowship and to consider the state of the local church.</p>	<p>The <b>Church Stewards</b> 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 <b>class leaders or pastoral visitors</b> 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>

<p><b>Comment.</b> 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 <u>parishioners</u> 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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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<b>CHURCH OF ENGLAND</b>	
<b>Communal/Collegial</b>	<b>Personal</b>
<b>5.7 Local Structures – churches &amp; parishes</b>	
<b>Local structures – parish &amp; benefice</b>	
<p><b>Parish/ Benefice</b> 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 <b>Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM)</b> 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 <b>Parochial Church Council</b> 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><b>Incumbent/Priest in Charge</b> 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 <b>Churchwardens</b> 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.

## 5. EPISKOPE AND EPISCOPACY AND OUR CHURCHES IN COVENANT

### Introduction

At the heart of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant of 2003 is a journey towards the full visible communion of our churches. We have discussed what this might mean in practice in the chapter ‘The Unity We Seek and the Unity We Have’ in this report. But such visible communion certainly includes an interchangeable ordained ministry. Unrestricted communion with each other as churches is not possible until our ordained ministries and structures of pastoral oversight are also in visible communion. A common ministry is a key focus of the visible unity of the Christian Church. The JIC was asked to give priority to working towards an interchangeable ordained ministry. In our two interim reports we have already put in place several building blocks that are intended to contribute to this goal. It has always been clear to both churches that in seeking to bring about a common ministry, the question of *episkope* and episcopacy cannot be avoided.<sup>1</sup> The 2007 Methodist Conference encouraged the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) to bring forward its proposals on *episkope* and episcopacy and at the same time to take into account models of Anglican episcopacy in the other nations of Britain and Ireland.

But it is not only considerations of unity that motivate us; we are also driven by a passion for effective mission, including evangelisation, in our society and culture, where there is huge opportunity, but also some hostility. Both our churches, when reflecting on episcopal ministry, have underlined the role of the bishop as a leader in mission. Visible, public, representative leadership in the cause of the Kingdom of God is needed for effective mission today. We need to ask where that can be found. Although our churches are blessed with many who lead in mission without being bishops, the question of episcopal ministry in this context can hardly be avoided.

For these reasons the JIC has had issues of *episkope* and episcopacy on its agenda from the start. One of the foundations of the Covenant was the conclusion of the Formal Conversations that there was no disagreement between our churches on the principle of personal *episkope* (the New Testament Greek word for pastoral oversight) as expressed in the historic episcopate. Precisely while the Formal Conversations that led to the Covenant were under way, the 2000 Conference adopted the guidelines of

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<sup>1</sup> See *Episkopé and Episcopacy* (2000), para. 97.



the report *Episkopé and Episcopacy* which reaffirmed what the Methodist Church had said many times before: that it was willing in principle to accept episcopacy in the form of the historic episcopate.<sup>2</sup>

Responding to the encouragement of the 2007 Methodist Conference, we offer some specific proposals in this chapter, with regard to *episkope* and episcopacy, for both our churches to consider. We believe that there is a way forward that has not been fully articulated in the Methodist discussions so far. We believe that it is faithful to the Methodist Church's understanding of the nature and mission of the Church (its ecclesiology) and to its connexional polity. Our model builds on Conference decisions over a considerable period of time. But we are not putting forward proposals for immediate decision. We hope that the Methodist Church will take our suggestions and consider them in its own time and in whatever way it sees fit. What we have to say also puts a number of challenges to the Church of England in the area of *episkope* and episcopacy and we trust that these too will receive careful consideration. Both our churches have taken decisions in principle in this area and are currently attempting to work out how those decisions might be implemented. The Church of England's General Synod in July 2006 authorised the setting up of a legislative drafting group to bring forward proposals that would have broad support for the ordination of women as bishops and would take account of the pastoral needs of those opposed in conscience to this step. The group's report will be debated by the Synod in July 2008.

First we summarise where we believe matters stand now in the implementation of the Covenant as far as *episkope* and episcopacy are concerned.

The Common Statement *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (2001) recognised that there was agreement between Methodists and Anglicans on the principle of episcopacy. It noted that the Methodist Conference had affirmed on a number of occasions its willingness to adopt the sign of the historic episcopate as a step towards visible unity. It commented that 'the willingness of the Methodist Church to become a church ordered in the historic episcopate' was of great significance for Anglicans. It gave grounds for believing that, in due course, 'the common ministry for which both churches long', will become a reality (AMC: 174). The same

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2 The shorthand expression 'the historic episcopate' refers to the orderly transmission of ordinations by bishops, in intended visible continuity with the mission of the apostles.

report commented that both Anglicans and Methodists were aware of ‘the substantial ecumenical consensus that recognises that ministry within the historic episcopate should be a feature of united churches (as it already is of several in South Asia with whom Methodists and Anglicans are in communion)’ and that both churches were mindful of the cause of unity with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches and of their dialogues with those communions (173). It was these perceptions, as well as what was said about the diaconate and the presbyterate, that led the Common Statement to conclude that ‘all the essential theological ingredients to bring about an integrated ministry in the future seem to be in place’ (176).

Our first Interim Report, *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005), devoted a chapter (7) to the question of the interchangeability of ordained ministries. After pointing out that the discipline of the Methodist Church already made interchangeability possible and underlining the authority of the Conference in this respect, the report noted that in the Church of England, as in all other provinces of the Anglican Communion, only episcopally ordained persons may hold the office of bishop, priest or deacon. It pointed out that, in this respect, the Church of England believes that it is being faithful to the pattern of the early Church, because it holds that this pattern comes to us from apostolic and early post-apostolic times and is intended to be followed. For Anglicans, it is important that there should be a formal expression of the intention to ordain in visible continuity with the ministry of the Apostles themselves. The report also pointed out that, in maintaining this pattern, the Church of England is ordering its own ministry, and not passing judgement on the practice of other churches (SOC: 7.5-6). This chapter concluded: ‘If the Methodist Church were to implement what it has approved in principle several times over many years – to embrace episcopacy – a new situation within the Covenant relationship would arise. From an Anglican point of view, the prospects for achieving an interchangeable ordained ministry would be transformed’ (7.10.17).

In its second interim report, *Living God’s Covenant* (2007), the JIC took account of the outcome of the Connexional process of consultation on the reports *What Sort of Bishops?* (WSB) and *The Nature of Oversight*, describing the result of the consultation as ‘a major setback to the progress of the Covenant’. It noted the tension between this outcome and the numerous Conference resolutions, going back many years, that the Methodist Church was willing in principle to accept episcopacy. It commented that, ‘if the Methodist Church were to adopt a form of personal *episkope*, in continuity with the greater part of the Church through the centuries, and to do this in its own way and on its own terms’, that step

would provide ‘a key building block to bring about the interchangeability of ministries’. The JIC promised to say more about this matter in its 2008 report, for consideration by Conference as it saw fit (LGC: 1.14-17). The purpose of this chapter of our quinquennial report is precisely to set out those ideas for consideration by the Methodist Church and the Church of England.

As we have done our work over the past four years, we have discovered many ways in which Methodists and Anglicans can – and do – work together in mission and many ways in which the ministry of our churches can be shared.<sup>3</sup> But we have also become increasingly aware of how much of the future potential of the Covenant hinges on the achievement of an interchangeable ordained ministry – a ministry that would help to give a visible public focus to the unity of the Church and to make possible a full and equal sharing in its sacramental life, so releasing energy for the joint mission of our churches. We believe that our suggestions here could help to bring this further stage of the Covenant significantly closer.

The Affirmations and Commitments contained in the Covenant (AMC: 194) are fundamental to our work. We wish to underline the significance of the following Covenant Affirmations:

- 1 ‘We affirm 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’;
- 4 ‘We affirm that one another’s ordained and lay ministries are given by God as instruments of God’s grace...’;
- 6 ‘We affirm that... communal, collegial and personal oversight (*episcopate*) is exercised within them in various forms’;
- 7 ‘We affirm that there already exists a basis for agreement on the principles of Episcopal oversight as a visible sign and instrument of the communion of the Church in space and time’.

The Covenant Commitments that we have made as churches are also crucial. The first Commitment is an imperative to work to remove the remaining obstacles to a deeper and more visible unity that will entail an interchangeable ordained ministry.

We commit ourselves, as a priority, to work to overcome the remaining

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3 This is evidenced in our two interim reports, *In the Spirit of the Covenant* and *Living God’s Covenant*.

obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.

The rest of this chapter falls into three parts.

1. A brief synopsis of the various studies and decisions of the British Methodist Church on the subject of *episkope* and episcopacy in recent decades (though they can be traced as far back as Methodist re-union in 1932). This may be particularly helpful to Anglicans, who may not be aware of the substantial discussions of episcopacy that have gone on in the Methodist Church or of Conference decisions. This material may provide a useful *aide memoire* to Methodists as well.

2. A concise statement of how a bishop's ministry is currently understood in the Church of England. This may be helpful to Methodists, some of whom, in our experience, are still working with an outdated picture of episcopal ministry. This statement could serve as a useful summary for Anglicans too in setting out the model that Anglicans profess and in challenging them to live up to it more adequately.

3. Some reflections, in the light of the Covenant, on *episkope* and episcopacy in our churches, leading finally to some challenges to both.

### ***Episkope, episcopacy and the British Methodist Church***

This section provides an overview of the studies that the Methodist Conference has commissioned and the decisions that it has taken over several decades with regard to episcopacy.

The Methodist Conference's statement in 1985 in response to the WCC Faith and Order Commission's report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* said 'we await the occasion when it would be appropriate to recover the sign of the episcopal succession'. In 1998 it adopted a report which included this conclusion (para 44):

The Conference of 1997, in adopting Notice of Motion 14, directed the Faith and Order Committee to clarify British Methodism's understanding of episcopacy. Having briefly reviewed Methodist considerations of this subject during a period of sixty years, the Committee believes that the following summary may be helpful to the Conference:

- a) The Conference has asserted its view that episcopacy is not essential to the Church, but has also expressed its belief that the coming great Church will be congregational, presbyteral, and episcopal.
- b) The Conference has declared that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would not violate the Methodist doctrinal standards.
- c) In the context of proposals towards closer unity, the Conference has on several occasions indicated its willingness to embrace episcopacy, while insisting that Methodists should have no less freedom of interpretation than Anglicans enjoy in respect of the historical episcopate.

The Conference has recognized that *episkope* is already exercised in personal and communal ways within the life of the Methodist Church.

The Conference Statement *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) pointed out that ‘a connexional understanding of the Church recognises the need for ministries of unity and oversight (*episkope*) within the universal fellowship of believers.’ It added: ‘If in practice episcopacy serves to reinforce the unity and *koinonia* of the whole Church, it is to be welcomed. Thus episcopacy can be a valuable witness (though not the only witness) to continuity in and faithfulness to the apostolic tradition.’ (4.6.9)

The Methodist Conference agreed as recently as 2000 to affirm its willingness in principle to receive the sign of episcopacy on the basis of the Guidelines set out in the report, ‘Episkopé and Episcopacy’. Guideline 4 said: ‘In the furtherance of the search for the visible unity of Christ’s Church, the Methodist Church would willingly receive the sign of episcopal succession on the understanding that ecumenical partners sharing this sign with the Methodist Church (a) acknowledge that the latter has been and is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and (b) accept that different interpretations of the precise significance of the sign exist.’<sup>4</sup> With regard to these two conditions, we note:

- a. The first affirmation made in the Anglican-Methodist Covenant by both our churches means that the Church of England acknowledges that the Methodist Church has been and is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

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4 The Guidelines in full are appended to this chapter.

- b. The Church of England, along with other Churches of the Anglican Communion, already accepts that different interpretations of the precise significance of the sign of episcopal succession exist and discussions on this subject continue throughout the Anglican Communion and in dialogue with other Churches and Communions.

It is also worth recalling that the Conference approved the episcopal Ordinal for the Anglican-Methodist unity scheme of the 1960s and the proposal for the Ecumenical Bishop in Wales. The Conference has also been willing to contemplate episcopal ministry in the contexts of the Covenanting for Unity proposals of 1981 and the recent Scottish Churches' Initiative for Unity.

How has the Methodist Church understood the ministry of a bishop? *Episkope and Episcopacy* said this:

It is generally agreed, in episcopal churches, that bishops are to exercise oversight, both within their particular areas of responsibility and in the wider Church. Bishops exercise their oversight both individually and collegially, and in many episcopal churches play a leading role, alongside presbyters, deacons and lay people, in church government. They have responsibility for the transmission and safeguarding of the apostolic faith, for providing for the administering of the sacraments, and for leadership in the Church's mission. They ordain presbyters and deacons. Their prophetic role includes the responsibility to represent the concerns of the wider Church to their dioceses, as they listen to and share with others the insights and witness of their own local churches.

(4)

*What Sort of Bishops?* set the question of episcopacy in the contexts of mission as well as unity:

This present report [WSB] on models of episcopacy reflects the fact that the move to an episcopal order of ministry may be regarded as a *Methodist* matter as much as an ecumenical one. ... as a Methodist matter, episcopacy is also a *public and social matter* as it relates to the potential enhancement of the contribution that the Methodist Church makes to public life, as part of its mission as a church. ... We are examining models of bishops with *the possibility that Methodist practice and thought will be enhanced*. In so doing, we may better be able to fulfil our own task, and in so doing contribute to the mission of the wider Church in Britain and beyond. [6]

## ***Episkope and Episcopacy in the Church of England***

This section aims to set out succinctly how the office and ministry of a bishop are understood in the Church of England and in Anglicanism more generally. It does not deal with structures of the Church, or with how authority is distributed, but is a more of a ‘job description’ for a bishop in the Church of England. It is drawn from the official texts of the Church of England, which are listed below. These can be read against the background of other, less official discussions, which are also mentioned.

Like everything else in both our churches, the Anglican understanding of episcopacy has evolved over the centuries. However, there is a strong case for thinking that the essentials have remained much the same over time, while the emphasis may have varied. Certainly, Anglicans believe that they are justified in looking to patristic and mediaeval, as well as to Reformation and modern models of episcopacy as sources for how they understand that ministry now. An historical overview can be found in the ‘Rochester Report’, *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

The main official sources for the Church of England’s understanding of episcopal ministry are:

- The Ordinal of 1550, which received its definitive form in 1662 and is bound with the Book of Common Prayer.
- The *Common Worship* Ordinal of 2005 (Study Edition, 2007).
- The Canons of the Church of England.

Other, more or less contemporary sources, which carry less (and varying) authority include:

- *Women Bishops in the Church of England?* (The Rochester Report, London: Church House Publishing, 2004), ch. 2 – the main resource for the current work on women in the episcopate.
- *Episcopal Ministry* (The Cameron Report, London: Church House Publishing, 1990).
- ‘Apostolicity and Succession’: a House of Bishops paper (London: Church House Publishing, 1991).

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5 A concise view is provided in C.J. Podmore, ‘The Church of England’s Understanding of Episcopacy’, *Theology*, May-June 2006. See also P. Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005).

- ‘Bishops in Communion’: a House of Bishops paper (London: Church House Publishing, 2000).
- ‘Suffragan Bishops’ (GS Misc 733, 2004).
- *Saepius Officio*, the response of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to the Papal Bull *Apostolicae Curae* (1896).
- *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), in which the General Synod and the Lambeth Conference of 1988 were able to see ‘the faith of the Church through the ages’.
- ‘Ministry and Ordination’ (in Anglican Roman-Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report*, London: SPCK and CTS, 1982).
- *Together in Mission and Ministry: The Porvoo Common Statement, etc.* (London: Church House Publishing, 1992).
- *The Meissen Agreement: Texts* (Church House, Westminster, 1992).
- *Called to Witness and Service: The Reuilly Common Statement with Essays on Church, Eucharist and Ministry* (Church House Publishing, 1999).
- *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church* (Faith and Order Advisory Group, 2007; available from Church House Bookshop).

These sources help us to get at the ‘essence’ of episcopal ministry as Anglicans understand it. But it is important to note that many of these attributes are not exclusive to bishops and are shared with the whole Church, or with all the ordained, and are exercised in a collegial and/or communal context. Furthermore, while there are differences of style in the practice of bishops throughout the Anglican Communion (just as there are between individual bishops of the Church of England), the theology of what a bishop is and does is essentially the same. We can say that, according to the Church of England (and there is no suggestion that this differs essentially from the understanding of episcopacy held by the other churches of the Anglican Communion), the identity of a bishop in the Church of God is made up of a number of constituent and complementary aspects. When they are brought together in one person, they result in a significant ministerial office, one that is therefore regarded as of vital importance for the unity and continuity of the Church, and for its mission, by Anglicans.

**A baptised Christian believer.** This is surely the right place to start. ‘With you I am a Christian; for you I am a bishop’ (St Augustine of Hippo). A bishop is first of all a member of the *laos*, the people of God.



**A deacon.** A bishop remains a deacon, called to serve God and God's Church. A deacon bears the fundamental commission of Christ to his Church (Matthew 28.16-20), a commission that is expressed in the ministry (*diakonia*) of word, sacrament and pastoral care that is appropriate to a deacon. Anglicans practise 'sequential ordination': deacon-priest-bishop. A presbyter does not cease to be a deacon and a bishop does not cease to be a presbyter and a deacon. The character of an order, once given, remains (Canon C 1.2).

**A presbyter or priest** A bishop remains a priest ('priest' is the language of Cranmer's Ordinal), ordained to the apostolic ministry of reconciliation through the gospel (2 Corinthians 5. 18-20), to preaching and teaching, presidency at the celebration of the sacraments and to the exercise of pastoral oversight in collaboration with others. (Cf. the House of Bishops' statement *Eucharistic Presidency*, London: Church House Publishing, 1997.) The order of bishop 'includes' the orders of deacon and priest.

**A pastor** A bishop is the senior pastor or shepherd of the portion of the people of God committed to his or her care: 'the chief pastor of all that are within his diocese, as well laity as clergy, and their father in God' (Canon C 18). The bishop is also a collegial pastor: 'As chief pastors, it is their duty to share with their fellow presbyters the oversight of the Church' (*Common Worship Ordinal*).

**A minister of word and sacrament** The Church is the community of word and sacrament (Thirty-nine Articles). A bishop's primary tasks are to proclaim the gospel and to celebrate the sacraments of the gospel: bishops are 'principal ministers of word and sacrament' among the portion of the people of God committed to their care (*Common Worship Ordinal*; cf. Canon C 18.4).

**An overseer** (*episkopos*) Bishops have a crucial role in the governance of the Church. They have a special responsibility of oversight for the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight within the diocese and, collectively with other bishops, throughout the Church of England (cf. *Bishops in Communion*), including a special responsibility for the doctrine and worship of the Church. A bishop's oversight is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways – collaboration is ensured through synodical structures, including the Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Council. The bishop administers the law of the church. 'As chief pastors, it is their duty to share with their fellow presbyters

the oversight of the Church, speaking in the name of God and expounding the gospel of salvation. With the Shepherd's love, they are to be merciful, but with firmness; to minister discipline, but with compassion' (*Common Worship Ordination of a Bishop*).<sup>6</sup>

**A guardian of true doctrine** A bishop is a guardian of the apostolic faith and carries out this responsibility by teaching, preaching and discipline. 'It appertains to his office to teach and to uphold sound and wholesome doctrine, and to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange opinions' (Canon C 18. 1). Of course, all the ordained share this responsibility, as, of course, do all Christians.

**A successor of the Apostles** A bishop is regarded as a successor of the Apostles – not, obviously, in their unique role as witnesses to Christ's resurrection, but in the sense of upholding and promoting the apostolic faith and leading the apostolic mission of the gospel through the Church, and of being a visible link with the Church of the Apostles. 'Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts, and didst charge them to feed thy flock: give grace, we beseech thee, to all bishops, the Pastors of thy Church...' (The Ordinal, 1662).

**A leader of mission, including evangelisation** A bishop is a leader in mission within the diocese, primarily through the ministry of the word and the sacraments. Although clearly contained in the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care, this aspect was made explicit in the (now superseded) *Alternative Service Book 1980* Ordinal, which derived from Anglican-Methodist conversations in the 1960s, but it has received greater emphasis since then. 'They are to seek out those who are lost and lead them home with rejoicing, declaring the absolution and forgiveness of sins to those who turn to Christ'; 'Will you lead your people in proclaiming the glorious gospel of Christ, so that the good news of salvation may be heard in every place?' (*Common Worship Ordinal*).

**A focus and minister of visible unity** A bishop has a special role and responsibility with regard to the visible unity of the body of Christ, not only within the diocese, but also between dioceses and between

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<sup>6</sup> The Ordination of Presbyters in *The Methodist Worship Book* uses similar language of the oversight of presbyters: 'Be shepherds to the flock of Christ. As you exercise mercy, do not forget justice; as you minister discipline, do not forget mercy.'

the Church of the present and the Church of the past and the future. The bishop's office is an effective sign and instrument of this visible continuity across space and time. 'Will you promote peace and reconciliation in the Church and in the world; and will you strive for the visible unity of Christ's Church?' (*Common Worship Ordinal*).

**The minister of ordination** A crucial role for a bishop is to preside liturgically at ordinations. The bishop alone ordains deacons (perhaps deriving from the special relationship between the deacons and the bishop in the early Church). In the ordination of presbyters members of the presbyteral college lay on hands together with the bishop. In the ordination of bishops the Archbishop of the province normally presides and members of the episcopal college join in the laying on of hands. 'They are to preside over the ordination of deacons and priests, and join together in the ordination of bishops' (*Common Worship Ordinal*; cf. Canon C 18). The ministry of ordination is an expression of the oversight of mission and ministry that is entrusted to the bishop. The sending out of ministers is part of the Church's mission.

## **The shape of oversight in the Methodist Church and in the Church of England**

### **The ecumenical context**

In relation to *episkope* and episcopacy, both churches are conscious of the wider ecumenical environment and of their relations to, and dialogues with, other communions. The Methodist Church, in considering the possibility of embracing episcopacy, has taken the wider ecumenical scene into consideration. The World Methodist Council includes both episcopal and non-episcopal Methodist churches. The majority of Methodists in the world belong to episcopal churches, though most of these churches have bishops who are not within the historic episcopal succession. However, in the United States, the United Methodist Church (UMC) is in dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and with The Episcopal Church, both of whom have bishops in the historic episcopal succession. The goal of these dialogues is to bring about 'full communion', resulting in an ordained ministry in three orders, within the historic succession, that is common to those three churches. We believe that it is important that the British Methodist Church and the Church of England should take an active interest in these developments.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In October 2007 the Co-Chairs and Co-Conveners of the JIC were invited to take part in a meeting of the Episcopal-UMC dialogue meeting in London.

The Methodist Church has recently considered various specific models of episcopacy. While we do not intend to evaluate all the options that are set out in *What Sort of Bishops?* – and share the hesitations that the report expressed in the case of some models – the question needs to be asked, which models (if any) would be helpful in terms of the quest for Christian unity? Which models would enhance visible unity with other Christian communions? The wider ecumenical implications of Methodist bishops have been noted before (e.g. in Section E of *Episkopé and Episcopacy*) and remain relevant. We agree with WSB that the various proposals that were canvassed in the report should be examined in that light. For example, would making hundreds of Superintendents bishops (as some, but not WSB, have proposed) advance the cause of unity, not just with the Church of England, but also in the universal Church (bearing in mind also the international Methodist – Roman Catholic dialogue)? Even if the number of circuits were to be significantly reduced in the future, would it be helpful to have, say, even a hundred Superintendents who were made bishops – roughly as many as the numerically larger Church of England (including its suffragan bishops) and three times as many as the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales? Again, if District Chairs only were to be made bishops (as some, but not WSB, have suggested), would this imply that districts should be seen as ‘dioceses’ (thirty-one), that is to say, communities of oversight, and how would this perception of districts as ‘dioceses’ relate to (a) the Methodist Connexion as a whole, in which the Conference exercises oversight and (b) the dioceses of the Church of England, given the fact that the already acute mismatch of boundaries between our churches would be exacerbated? We endorse the concerns of WSB in these respects.

### **Bishops within the Christian community**

We believe that the specific link between a bishop and a particular eucharistic community is important. It is vital to ground the ministry of a bishop in the preaching and teaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments of the gospel. A bishop is seen as a representative minister of word and sacrament, one who takes the lead in worship (though not to the exclusion of other ministers, ordained and lay) and has responsibility for the oversight of worship and the administration of the sacraments, to ensure that they are carried out ‘decently and in order’ and in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Church. It is important for the spiritual health of both the bishop and the community that they should be linked to each other. In the Church of England, the cathedral is the ‘seat’ of the bishop and therefore the mother church of the diocese. Many cathedrals now have ecumenical canons, including those drawn from the Methodist

Church, who help to enhance the cathedral's ecumenical, rather than purely Anglican, character, as ideally a spiritual centre and home which is shared with all Christians in the region. The bishop's oversight of the diocese is seen in the bishop's presidency of the diocesan synod, including its eucharistic celebration (the Chair of the House of Clergy and the Chair of the House of Laity being Vice-Presidents). In a similar way, the President of Conference presides not only at the business of the Conference, but also at its worship, including the Conference Eucharist.

The representative role of bishops is also pivotal. The concept of a representative ministry is one that has proved fruitful ecumenically and has been employed in various Methodist documents on ministry (most recently in *What is a Presbyterian?* and *What is a Deacon?*) and in the Common Statement that led to the Covenant. It enables us to affirm both the royal priesthood of all baptised believers and the specific ordained ministry within the *laos* (people of God). Ordained ministers represent the people to God, leading them in prayer and worship, and bring God's word and sacraments to the people. It is because Christ can never be separated from his Body, and the Church cannot live without its Head, that ministers are said to represent Christ in and through his Church (cf. *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*: 144). Against this background of the representative role of ordained ministers, bishops in any tradition are significant representative persons. They represent one part of the Church to the whole and the whole to the part. They represent the Church to the wider community and in the public square. They are seen by the media and by government as those who can speak on behalf of the Church. They help to make the Church visible and to make its message audible. Bishops also play a vital role in strengthening the ties of unity between one church and another: they are links in the fabric of unity. A bishop is called to be an instrument of unity (as *Called to Love and Praise* pointed out: 4.6.9).

### **The Church as communion in Anglicanism and Methodism**

There is an important sense in which the Church of England, is not simply one church, but forty-four churches. The Church of England is made up of its constituent dioceses, which are (ecclesiologically speaking) 'local churches', spheres of communion under the bishop's pastoral oversight, with the cathedral as the 'mother church'. The diocese is the portion of the people of God entrusted to the bishop's care. Dioceses have their own synod; and local policy with regard to mission and ministry is determined by the synod, the bishop being the President, assisted by the Vice-Presidents, the chairs of the houses of clergy and of laity.

However, the dioceses are not isolated units, but are held together within the Church of England by a framework of national policy with regard to doctrine, mission, ecclesiastical law and finance, under the primacy of the two Archbishops and in relation to the state, including the Crown. The ‘Church of England’ consists of two provinces of the mediaeval Western Church (Canterbury and York), but even in the Middle Ages it was regarded as a single Church (*ecclesia anglicana*). The Church of England as a whole is rightly described as a church, but strictly speaking it is a church in a derivative sense. A national (or to use Reformation language, ‘particular’)<sup>8</sup> church, like the Church of England, depends for its existence both on the universal Church – the Church Catholic – and on its own constituent dioceses as ‘local churches’. The universal and the local are the primary manifestations of the Church of Christ and of its communion.<sup>9</sup>

A great strength of the Methodist Church is that the whole Methodist community, consisting of local churches grouped in circuits, is bound together in Connexion. The Connexion is a visible expression of the living communion that should always characterise the Church of Christ. Both Circuits and Districts are defined as expressions of the interconnectedness of the Methodist Church.<sup>10</sup> Looked at in terms of the nature of the Church (ecclesiology), the Connexion is clearly one church, an expression of communion and a single sphere of oversight under the Conference. If we compare the nature of the Methodist Connexion and the character of a diocese of an episcopally ordered church, we can see certain similarities. The Connexion is actually a single ‘portion of the people of God’.

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8 Cf. Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, Article XXXIV, ‘Of the Traditions of the Church’: ‘... Every particular or national Church hath authority to ordain, change, and abolish, ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man’s authority, so that all things be done to edifying.’

9 The three Provincial Episcopal Visitors (PEVs), whose ministry is provided for under the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993, are suffragans of the Archbishops, to carry out pastoral ministrations within the province. They act at the invitation of the diocesan bishop in relation to those parishes that are not able to receive the ministry of women priests and have petitioned the bishop for this purpose. A number of bishops have made the relevant PEV an assistant bishop within the diocese in order that they may work closely with the diocesan and suffragan bishops. In Anglican ecclesiology the episcopate has a special role in manifesting and maintaining the communion of the Church. All bishops are in communion with the Archbishops and with the whole college of bishops.

10 Standing Orders 500: ‘The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ...’ and 400A: ‘The District is ... an expression, over a wider geographical area than the Circuit, of the connexional character of the Church.’

The implication of this perception for any form of episcopacy that the Methodist Church might introduce in the future is that its bishops should be ministers of communion for the Connexion, rather than for one part of it. This would tie in with the Conference's requirement, stated in Guideline 2 of *Episcopate and Episcopacy*, that 'the Methodist Church is a connexional Church and all *episkope* should be exercised within this context.' This suggests that any Methodist bishops in the future would exercise their ministry and oversight on behalf of the Conference, which is the source of oversight in the Methodist Church. On any understanding of episcopal ministry, bishops have a 'cure (care) of souls' within the portion of the people of God for whom they have received a particular responsibility. For Methodism, it seems to us, that 'portion' is the Connexion.

### **Bishops in mission**

We believe that it is vital to underline the role of a bishop as a leader in the mission of the Church, and particularly in evangelisation or evangelism. The Methodist Church has recognised (*Episkopé and Episcopacy*, Guideline 3) that all forms of *episkope* should enable and encourage the Church's participation in God's mission. The ministry of the word and sacraments, combined with pastoral care in its many forms, is at the cutting edge of the Church's mission; and word, sacrament and pastoral care are tools of evangelisation. If the bishop is a principal minister of word and sacrament, the bishop is inescapably a leader in mission and evangelisation. His or her role in mission is to lead, guide, support, advise, model and oversee the major expressions of mission and evangelisation that are undertaken on behalf of the portion of the people of God that is committed to his or her care. This means that episcopal ministry cannot be defined solely by reference to a bishop's 'internal' functions. As *Episkope and Episcopacy* implies, to think of a Methodist bishop purely for Methodist people would be inadequate. Episcopal ministry must be outward looking and have a shepherd's care for the lost sheep and for those who have never been part of the flock. In the Church of England, the bishop is specifically seen as the pastor of the whole diocese (Canon C 18).

It seems clear to us from an analysis of how oversight is exercised within the Methodist Church that it is not *episkope* (oversight; pastoral responsibility) that is the issue, but the *personal* form of *episkope*. The reality and authenticity of *episkope* within our respective churches was affirmed in the Covenant. Within the Methodist Church oversight is vested in the Conference and is exercised in a dispersed way, through many channels, individual and collective. The report *The Nature of Oversight* summarised the position like this:

The report explores how ‘connexionalism’ is fundamental to the Methodist way of being Church. This in turn makes it fundamental to Methodist understanding that oversight (episkopé) is essentially shared between different groups and individuals and different formal bodies and types of ‘officer’ across the whole Church. Consequently any exercise of personal (lay or ordained) or corporate expressions of oversight cannot be self-sufficient or independent of each other but must be intrinsically linked with the other expressions. Since Wesley’s death, oversight in Methodism has been corporate in the first instance and then secondarily focused in particular individuals and groups (lay and ordained). Therefore 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. There are two main strands of this oversight. One is that of formal bodies (e.g. Church Pastoral Committee; Church Council; Circuit Leadership Team; Circuit Meeting; District Policy Committee; District Synod; the Methodist Council) and particular office holders (e.g. class leaders; pastoral visitors; church and circuit stewards; Local Preachers; district officers; members of the Connexional Team; Vice-President of Conference). The other is that of ministers (presbyters) stationed by the Conference to exercise pastoral responsibility and, when appointed to circuits, pastoral charge. Oversight is not complete if the two strands of it do not collaborate and interact.

The exercise of *episkope* is richly present, distributed throughout the Methodist Church and its ministry. The communal and collegial expressions of oversight are found in abundance. But, as many Methodists frankly acknowledge (and as WSB points out), it is the personal expression of oversight that is comparatively weak, though certainly not absent, in British Methodism and is related to a lack of public visibility. Personal communication is crucial in mission and especially in evangelising.

### **Personal *episkope*, leadership and authority**

Personal *episkope* can be exercised at many levels in the life of the Church, as it is so exercised in both our churches. But personal *episkope* at the level of a church as a whole (in the case of the Methodist Church, the Connexion) is actually a form of *episcopacy* by any other name. In the British Methodist Church, the person who is particularly entrusted with that level of personal *episkope* is the President of Conference. Personal *episkope* is evident in the role of the President in pastoral care, visitation and the sharing of vision. At the Induction of the President of Conference he or she is asked: ‘Will you endeavour so to lead the Church under



your care in unceasing mission that Christ's name may everywhere be proclaimed and that many may be brought to salvation and built up in that holiness without which no one shall see the Lord?'<sup>11</sup> As the report to the 2007 Conference 'Senior Leadership in the Methodist Church' points out, the Presidency (President and Vice-President together) represents and embodies the authority, the oversight of Conference in a unique way: it is 'the representative embodiment of the authority of Conference' (para. 32). The President and Vice-President carry out their roles in ways that are appropriate to their callings: one being ordained and the other lay.<sup>12</sup>

However, Presidents and Vice-Presidents have little opportunity to let their position go to their heads or to exercise undue influence, because their tenure of the office is limited to one year. While that may limit the harm that a President can do, it may also limit the good that can be achieved. It may restrict what can be accomplished in leadership in mission, in relating to government on public policy and to the media in making the Methodist voice and witness heard. It may restrict the ambassadorial role of the Presidency (which was affirmed by the 2007 Conference),<sup>13</sup> including in relation to other Christian churches and certainly means that fresh efforts have to be made every year to build rapport, trust and affection with ecumenical colleagues, particularly within the Covenant – for example, with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York at their annual meeting. As

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11 Similarly, it should be noted that, at the Induction of the Vice-President, he or she is asked: 'Will you endeavour so to discharge the duties of your office that under your leadership all the members of the Church may be encouraged in the exercise of their ministry, strengthened in their witness, and kept alive to their charge?'

12 Cf. Standing Order 110: '(1) The President and Vice-President shall preside at the Conference and act as the representative embodiment of its authority as prescribed by the Deed of Union and in accordance with Standing Orders. (2) The President and Vice-President, the ex-President and ex-Vice-President, and the President-designate and Vice-President-designate shall together be known as the Presidency. (3) The Presidency shall play a significant part in the oversight and leadership of the Church in responding to God's Spirit and developing prophetic vision. The President and Vice-President shall in particular exercise a ministry through visits to and encouragement of the constituent parts of the Connexion and beyond.

Standing Order 111 President's Powers. (1) The President shall have power to assist at any Synod, if requested to do so by the Chair or by a majority of the Superintendents in the District. (2) The President shall have the right if requested to do so to visit any Circuit, to inquire into its affairs, and to take any steps open to him or her which he or she judges beneficial.'

13 Ibid., para. 32: 'a very important strength of the Presidency is its ambassadorial capacity, to affirm and encourage.'

WSB acknowledges, Methodists tend to be very cautious about entrusting sole authority to individuals.

Many Methodists, it seems to us, have the impression that Church of England bishops have a lot of power in their dioceses; that they have the authority to do exactly what they want to do. That is very far from the reality, as the bishops themselves and the majority of Anglicans experience it. Bishops in the Church of England lead their people by teaching, by example, by encouragement and persuasion and they have jurisdiction – authority to apply the law of the Church. They are able to make direct appointments to some posts and to influence appointments to others. But they alone do not make the rules: they operate under the law of the Church and uphold that law. They alone do not make the pastoral or financial policy, though they contribute to shaping it: policy is made at the national level by the General Synod and, more locally, by diocesan synods (both of which have a House of Bishops). And bishops do not hold the purse strings: diocesan budgets are worked out by the Diocesan Board of Finance or the Bishop's Council (acting as the DBF) and are approved by the Diocesan Synod. The Church of England is both episcopal and synodical. Its bishops are 'bishops in synod' and this applies both nationally and in the diocese.

### **Communal, collegial and personal dimensions of oversight**

*What Sort of Bishops?* insists that, in the Methodist Church, oversight is always shared. The only sort of oversight that it believes is appropriate for the Methodist Church is 'shared oversight'. This needs a little further analysis. If this means that the laity plays a vital part in the governance of the church, we can affirm that that is a principle that is embodied in the polities of both our churches. To that extent we can say that for Anglicans, as well as Methodists, oversight responsibilities are distributed between the ordained and lay people and that they are called to work together.

The report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) distinguished three dimensions of ministry (including oversight): personal, collegial and communal. That report noted that the balance of the three was differently arranged in the various main Christian traditions, and challenged them to examine their own practice and to ask themselves whether there were any imbalances that needed to be adjusted. Partly as a result of this challenge, the bishops of the Church of England have been working on the meaning and practice of collegiality and this has been the subject of two reports (*Bishops in Communion*, 2001, and 'Suffragan Bishops', GS Misc 733). We think that there is a different challenge to the Methodist Church in

the recommendation of *BEM*: to examine the weight given to personal *episkope* within the overall economy of oversight.

Communal oversight is another way of speaking about the wider conciliar life of the Church: the Methodist Conference and the Church of England's General Synod are both expressions of communal oversight (though not exhaustive of it). Collegial oversight, on the other hand, is where those with special responsibilities work together, share their wisdom and their burdens, and perhaps divide up the work. The Methodist Connexional Leadership Team/ Leaders' Forum and the Church of England College of Bishops (wider than the House of Bishops and consisting of all serving bishops) are both expressions of collegial oversight. Collegiality also extends to bishops and presbyters working together. Both the communal and the collegial expressions of oversight, by their nature, involve shared responsibility.

But is personal oversight (*episkope*) also shared? In one sense it is, because oversight is inescapably relational. It is not possible to be an overseer (*episkopos*) in isolation, but only in relation to others – in connexion, we could say. The relationship may be constructive and rewarding, or it may be detrimental and demoralising. That ambiguity is not, we want to stress, because it is personal, for history testifies that collegial and communal expressions of oversight can also be harmful. Juntas and cabals have been tyrannical and even parliaments have legislated for oppression and injustice. We recognise that, in both our churches, power is not always used as it should be. However, the suspicion remains among Methodists that personal oversight is more risky than other forms of oversight and that it must therefore always be shared somehow. We think that this idea needs to be nuanced a little more. Personal *episkope* can be and must be shared in the important sense that it must be representative of the whole body, that it must be accountable to wider authority, that it must be supported and guided by the wisdom of others. But can all burdens be shared? Does not the leader sometimes have to walk a lonely path in carrying the responsibilities of office? We regret that WSB finally remains over-cautious at this point, plays safe, and therefore misses an opportunity to challenge the Methodist Church to rectify weaknesses in leadership and public visibility by being a little bolder about personal *episkope*.

### **The *episkope* of the Methodist Conference and of bishops**

The oversight that is vested or embodied in the Conference has been referred to. We now want to explore this a little further. The Conference,

which of course consists of lay and ordained representatives, exercises oversight in various ways:

- Conference teaches the faith with authority and adjudicates on doctrinal matters.
- Conference determines the practice of the Methodist Church and makes the rules.
- Conference ordains through its deputed instruments, and the President of Conference, who is always a presbyter, presides at ordinations (or Past Presidents, on the President's behalf, do). The President presides at ordinations by virtue of presiding at Conference – a significant conjunction of ideas.
- Conference deploys ministers and deacons and certain lay officers within the Methodist Church.
- Conference exercises pastoral discipline throughout the connexion in accordance with the rules of the Church.

As we have seen in looking at Anglican and Methodist material on episcopacy, these are precisely the tasks (determining doctrine and practice; ordaining, deploying and disciplining) that are entrusted to bishops to carry out (not on their own, but through the collegial and communal expressions of their oversight). If the Conference exercises an episcopal type of ministry, it is appropriate to regard it as a corporate bishop – and this is not a controversial idea, but is increasingly recognised in the Methodist Church. For example, the Methodist Faith and Order Committee's formal response to the JIC's first interim report suggested that, because the Conference is a corporate bishop (and, as the Methodist ordination rites make clear, intends to ordain to the diaconate and the presbyterate of the one Church of God), Methodist presbyters and deacons are already, in that sense, episcopally ordained.<sup>14</sup> So the Conference is, as it were, the bishop for the Methodist Church. Every bishop belongs to and exercises authority within a particular community, the portion of the people of God entrusted to his or her care. In the British Methodist Church, that community is the whole Connexion. Because the conference is the 'bishop' and the Connexion is 'the bishop's' community, the connexion can be seen as having certain key characteristics of a diocese within the Christian Church – albeit an exceptionally large one!

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14 The Faith and Order Committee's response to *In the Spirit of the Covenant* said: 'The episcopal function of the Conference ... means that, in Methodist perspective, Methodist presbyters and deacons have already been "episcopally ordained" in so far as their ordinations only occur at the specific request of the Conference, those presbyters who preside doing so on behalf of the President of the Conference' (p. 7).

We have already said that it is not *episkope* (oversight) that is in question here, but personal *episkope*. The strongest expression of personal *episkope* is in the office of the President of Conference. The President not only presides at ordinations, but, with the Vice-President, speaks on behalf of the Conference, gives spiritual and pastoral leadership to the Conference and to Methodists throughout the connexion, through intensive visitation, and relates to leaders or senior pastors of other churches. Together with the Vice-President, the President is a focus of unity and a leader in mission. Above all, perhaps, the President is a minister of word and sacrament and pastoral responsibility throughout the Methodist Church. The role of the President of Conference is the fullest expression of personal *episkope* that the Methodist Church knows. In fact, we can go further than that and say that the President exercises an episcopal ministry in many ways.

So what we have now is a suggestive conjunction of three things: the Conference can be seen as ‘the bishop’, the Connexion bears certain key marks of a ‘diocese’, and the President is clearly the fullest expression of personal *episkope*, linking the Conference and the Connexion. We suggest that, if these perceptions were to become widely recognised, certain possibilities would be opened up for enhancing the covenantal relationship between our two churches.

## A POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

### **A President bishop?**

If the Methodist Church were to decide to revisit the question of becoming an episcopally ordered church, we suggest that the most appropriate way of bringing this about would be for the President of Conference to be the first bishop. For the President to be incorporated into the historic episcopate of the universal Church would be to recognise (this is the crucial step in the argument) what is already the case, that the President exercises an ‘episcopal’ ministry on behalf of an ‘episcopal’ Conference. We believe that it would be a desirable and proper step for this recognition to be given. The Methodist Church would not be creating an episcopate from nothing, but giving appropriate recognition to what is already true, and building on both corporate and personal *episkope* in their fullest expressions within British Methodism. To apply the language of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Methodist Church clearly has the reality of *episkope* (that is mutually acknowledged in the Covenant): it is therefore free to receive the sign of that reality (incorporation into the historic episcopate by means of ordination by bishops within the historic succession). This is a sign that is recognised throughout the greater part of the Christian Church, and one

that will open doors ecumenically in several directions, without closing any (cf. BEM M 53).

An episcopal President of Conference would be a bishop for the whole Connexion, which, as we have pointed out, already has certain characteristics of a very large diocese. We are not convinced that a President-bishop would be ‘disconnected from the organised life of the church’, as WSB suggests – far from it. As now, the President, working with the Vice-President, would have a Connexion-wide ministry of leadership. But, while the first ordination could very well be of one bishop, some more bishops would be necessary for an effective episcopal ministry throughout the connexion (including ordinations) and in relation to wider society and to other churches. Various options for establishing an episcopate have been discussed in WSB. We recommend that the episcopate should continue to be closely connected to the office of President, as already a *de facto* ‘episcopal’ ministry and as the locus of a Methodist episcopate that would be least controversial and which would command the broadest support among Methodists and which would, we believe, also commend itself to other churches that are ordered in the historic episcopate.

Any such decisions would be for Conference to determine, but we suggest that one way of achieving this would be by each incoming President being ordained bishop for the whole Methodist Church. Within a few years, on the present system, there would be small group of bishops, ordained for a lifelong ministry, serving throughout the connexion. Active outgoing presidents, while being particularly linked, through stationing, with certain districts, circuits or institutions, would retain (as they do now) a recognised Connexion-wide ministry, closely related to the identity of the Methodist Church – a role that is entirely appropriate for a bishop. If this episcopal team came to be regarded as, in effect, a ‘college’ of bishops (made up of the President-bishop and Past President-bishops), there would be alongside a ‘college’ of Vice-Presidents, whose members similarly already have an acknowledged role in the Connexion. We also note that the 2007 Conference directed the Methodist Council to set up a working party on role of the Presidency, including the length of the terms of office that the President and Vice-President should serve.

There are already several distinct groups of bishops, ordained within the historic episcopate, in Britain. As well as Anglican bishops, there are Roman Catholic bishops, Eastern Orthodox bishops, Oriental Orthodox bishops and bishops of other churches. On the whole, these groups are not in communion with each other. In terms of the unity of the Church,

this is a scandal. The churches work hard to bring about greater unity, and with some success, but full ecclesial communion generally eludes them. Were there to be a large number of Methodist bishops, this would add to the confusion and would not advance the visible unity of Christ's Church. Successive resolutions of Conference have made it clear that a Methodist episcopate could only be justified if it were to enhance the visible unity and mission of the Church. It might actually be a virtue that the Methodist Church had one bishop to start with. Then it would be clear that this was a pioneer episcopacy, one that was established for mission and unity. It would be an example to all the churches.

Before a first Methodist President-bishop could be ordained, the Methodist Church would have to agree a doctrinal statement about the nature and duties of episcopal ministry. In our view, it would be a relatively simple matter to compile this from various statements that have been approved by Conference over the years. There would also be a need for a Methodist liturgy for the ordination of a bishop. Once again there are plenty of models among the reformed episcopal churches that could be adapted if that is what the Methodist Church wished to do.

How would the first Methodist President-bishop be ordained? Most episcopal churches follow the Council of Nicaea, AD 325, which ruled that at least three bishops should take part in an episcopal ordination, as an expression of episcopal collegiality and to testify to the acceptability of the candidate to the wider Church. The Methodist Church is in communion with a number of churches that are ordered in the historic episcopate and that could be invited to send a bishop to take part in the laying on of hands: the United Churches of South Asia and some Lutheran Churches of Northern Europe that are members of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (Leuenberg Church Fellowship). These churches are also in communion with the Church of England.<sup>15</sup> The First Interim Report of the JIC said that 'the JIC believes that it would be appropriate for the Methodist Church's Covenant partner also to be invited to participate' (7.10.19).

In our view, it would be important that, after the first ordination of a Methodist bishop at Conference, the President-bishop should preside at all subsequent ordinations, without exception, at least until there is one or

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15 The significance of an interchangeable ministry in a relation of 'communion', as far as the Church of England is concerned, is set out in our first interim report *In the Spirit of the Covenant*, ch.7.

more episcopal Past Presidents to share this ministry (with the appropriate participation of the Vice-Presidents). With around 50 candidates for ordination anticipated each year, it is not out of the question for the President-bishop to preside at an ordination of presbyters and an ordination of deacons around the time of the Conference.

### **Marks of a possible Methodist episcopate**

The sort of Methodist episcopate that we have outlined, would have several distinctive characteristics. We believe that each of these features would be true to the ecclesiology and polity of the Methodist Church as a connexional Church and would draw out what is latent there. Our challenge to the Methodist Church is: ‘Become what you are.’

It would be a *collegial* episcopate: the bishops (a small number comprising the President and, after a few years, some active Past Presidents) would work with each other and with others who share in oversight, sharing the tasks agreed by Conference; the current President, as *primus inter pares*, would convene them.

It would be a *flexible* episcopate – certainly not provisional with regard to the episcopal orders of the bishops, but with respect to structures: no ‘dioceses’ would be created, for the Connexion would remain, as it were, the ‘diocese’. Flexibility for unity would be retained, because no new fixed boundaries would be established.

It would be a *pioneer* episcopate: the Methodist Church would be exploring fresh forms of episcopal ministry; it would actually be doing precisely what Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher suggested for the Free Churches in his Cambridge sermon as long ago as 1946 – taking episcopacy into its system and (Archbishop Fisher emphasised) trying it out on its own ground.

Very clearly it would be an *accountable* episcopate, because it would be subject to Conference and carry out a ministry of unity and mission on behalf of Conference.

It would be an *earthed* episcopate, because (after their Presidential term) bishops could, if appropriate, continue to serve in their previous appointments, while being called to various episcopal duties further afield.

It would be an *ecumenical* episcopate, because, while new bishops in the historic episcopate would be added to the Anglican, Roman Catholic and



Orthodox episcopates that already exist in this country – in one sense, as we have said, an ecumenically questionable step – it would be with the purpose and goal of making visible unity (at least with Anglicans) a reality, and would actually make a unified episcopate possible in the end.

Crucially, it would be an *apostolic* episcopate – a visible testimony to the churches and to the world of the Methodist Church’s abiding intention to ordain to the ministry of the Church of Christ. As the report of the Formal Conversations put it: ‘This intended apostolic continuity is an expression, first, of trust in Christ’s faithfulness to his Church, and, second, of the Church’s obedience and faithfulness to the one apostolic mission’ (175).

Finally, it would be a *covenantal* episcopate, because bishops of the Methodist Church and of the Church of England would work closely and collegially together, with mutual participation in the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons, sharing in bishops’ collegial gatherings in the two churches, and with close consultation and co-operation on the ground, as our churches move yet more closely together until eventually they become one church.

### **Challenges to the Church of England**

In what ways would this initiative on the part of the Methodist Church send out a challenge to the Church of England? We believe that each of these challenges would be true to the ecclesiology and polity of the Church of England as an episcopal Church and would draw out what is latent there. Our challenge to the Church of England is: ‘Become what you are.’

The Church of England could learn from such a pioneer episcopate the need for greater flexibility and imagination in responding to the demands of mission in our culture – ‘fresh expressions’ of episcopal ministry!

The collegial character of a Methodist episcopate, operating collaboratively throughout the connexion, could challenge the Church of England about how it practises episcopal collegiality. Collegiality applies both in the House of Bishops and in the wider College (all serving bishops meet annually in the Bishops’ Meeting and are joined by other Anglican and ecumenical bishops from elsewhere) and in the diocese, where there are usually suffragan or assistant bishops working with the diocesan. There is an intra-episcopal collegiality and a wider, less formal collegiality between bishops and presbyters and lay officers (such as lay chairs of diocesan and deanery synods, Readers, and Churchwardens) of the church.

The Connexional nature of a Methodist episcopal ministry could challenge the Church of England to be a more united church, with more internal coherence. We believe that Methodists would welcome greater consistency in policy across the dioceses. The recent trend for dioceses to collaborate and to share resources could be given a boost.

The close relationship between Methodist bishops and the Conference would parallel the Anglican understanding of ‘the bishop in synod’, and these models could be mutually enriching, without undermining the particular responsibilities that bishops in the Church of England have to guide the church in matters of doctrine, liturgy and ministry.

The fact that a Methodist episcopate, within the historic episcopal succession, would be open to women from the very beginning needs to be taken seriously by the Church of England as it seeks to implement the General Synod’s intention, expressed in July 2006, to make it possible for women to be ordained bishop in the Church of England, while holding together as a Church. The Methodist Church believes that women and men are equally called to every area of ministry and that this is a truth that it has received from God.

Finally, we believe that this action, if it were taken by the Methodist Church within the setting of the Covenant, would call for an imaginative and generous response from the Church of England. It would be clear that all future ordinations in the Methodist Church would be within that intentional visible continuity with the Church of the Apostles that is called in shorthand ‘the historic episcopate’. The Church of England would be challenged to anticipate, as far as it could, a future that was already becoming a reality, and therefore to take a constructive view of what the 1998 Lambeth Conference called ‘bearable anomalies’ in order to make it possible for Anglican and Methodist bishops, presbyters and deacons to work together on equal terms.

**How would this step directly assist our covenantal journey towards the goal of full visible communion?**

The Methodist Church would have taken a step that it has said many times that it was willing to do for the sake of mission and unity.

It would create a much more level playing field as far as ordained ministry is concerned: there would be no sub-text of one church lacking something that the other thought it should have and no one-way transaction of ‘gifts’.

Consequently, such a Methodist episcopate would become the source of an episcopally-ordained ministry that would, in principle, be interchangeable with the ordained ministry of the Church of England.

As *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* suggests, those churches that have the particular sign of visible continuity in *episkope* (i.e. the historic episcopate) are free to recognise ‘the apostolic content’ of the ministry and the reality of *episkope* in a church that so far is without the sign. This is precisely what the Church of England has done in the Covenant. BEM also says that a church that does not have the sign of the historic episcopate, yet has the apostolic content of its ministry recognised, is free to accept the sign (BEM M 53). This is what we hope the Methodist Church will do.

Finally, the practical integration and joint mission of our churches would be enhanced, as Anglican and Methodist ordained ministers would in the future be eligible to be appointed, in accordance with existing procedures, to any position of responsibility and leadership within each other’s churches. Some imaginative appointments could be made, at a senior level, to positions that would enable the same person to be a pastor to Anglicans and Methodists alike in the same geographical area. Our journey towards full visible communion would take a major leap forward.

Altogether, in a way that is true to their teaching and polity, our churches would not only have taken an important step towards full visible communion, but both would be helped to become more fully what they are and what they aspire to be, and would be better able to work as one body in mission, while they continue to work for the full visible unity of Christ’s Church.

## APPENDIX

**'Episkope and Episcopacy' Guidelines (in bold), adopted by the 2000 Conference, with the commentary by the Faith and Order Committee.**

**1. The Methodist Church recognizes that *episkopé* is exercised within its life in communal, collegial and personal ways.**

**a. The Methodist Church values communal *episkopé*, exercised by representative bodies throughout the Church's life.**

The Conference and the District Synod, in their representative sessions, Circuit Meetings and Church Councils are examples of the exercise of communal *episkopé*.

**b. The Methodist Church values collegial *episkopé*, and its tradition of expressing collegiality, not only among members of the same order of ministry, but also among lay persons and ordained persons.**

Examples of such collegiality include the Ministerial Session of the Conference, which is made up of ministers, and Local Preachers Meetings and local church Pastoral Committees, where collegial oversight is shared by ordained and lay persons.

**c. The Methodist Church values personal *episkopé* in every part of the Church's life, but believes that such *episkopé* should be exercised within a collegial or communal context.**

It is important that personal episkope be allowed for within connexional structures in ways consonant with its exercise in Circuits and Districts. Because the episkope exercised by individuals within the life of the Methodist Church is derived or representative oversight, it is important that those who exercise personal episkope remain accountable to the wider Church. It must be recognized that the need to be accountable and the need to maintain proper confidentiality may sometimes be in conflict.

- 2. The Methodist Church is a connexional Church and all *episkopé* should be exercised within this context. In the development of any structures, due consideration should be given to their impact upon the life of the whole Church. There is a proper balance to be maintained between, for example, Circuit and District or District and Connexion.**

While recognizing the value of a diocesan model, the Methodist Church would be uneasy about the development of any models of personal episkope which isolated Districts from the whole Church.

- 3. The Methodist Church began as a missionary movement and continues to have mission at its heart. Methodists believe that a key function of episkope is to enable and encourage the Church's participation in God's mission.**

The missionary imperative was an important consideration in the introduction of 'separated' Chairmen. The experience of some Methodist Churches, including the United Methodist Church, which have adopted episcopal systems of oversight provides encouraging precedents for expressions of episkope that are mission-led.

- 4. In the furtherance of the search for the visible unity of Christ's Church, the Methodist Church would willingly receive the sign of episcopal succession on the understanding that ecumenical partners sharing this sign with the Methodist Church (a) acknowledge that the latter has been and is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and (b) accept that different interpretations of the precise significance of the sign exist.**

As to (a), this was something that the Conference asked of the Church of England in 1955 as the 'Conversations' began. Many people in our partner churches would themselves be anxious to ensure that nothing done in the uniting of ministries should imply that previous ministries were invalid or inauthentic.

As to (b), Methodism has previously insisted that there should be freedom of interpretation as to the significance of the historic episcopate. The concept that episcopacy is a 'sign but not a guarantee of the apostolicity of the Church' may be widely acceptable as a testimony to its symbolic witness to links across time, while testifying too to the obvious truth that bishops are not automatically and invariably wise or faithful.

**5. The Methodist Church, in contemplating the possibility of receiving the sign of the historic episcopal succession, expects to engage in dialogue with its sister Churches to clarify as thoroughly as possible the nature and benefits of this gift.**

In considering the introduction of the historic succession to Methodism in the sort of circumstances outlined in Guideline 2, the Methodist Church recognizes the need to explore its potential for complementing and enriching the Methodist Church's present experience of episkope and for enhancing Methodism's sense of communion within the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

**6. The Methodist Church would be unable to receive the sign of episcopal succession in a context which would involve a repudiation of what the Methodist Church believed itself to have received from God.**

An obvious and important example of what is meant by this Guideline is the ministry of women. Since women were ordained to the presbyterate in the Methodist Church, every office for which male ministers are eligible has been open also to women. In its preliminary consideration of the scheme for an Ecumenical Bishop in Wales, the Conference was extremely concerned by the statement that the first such bishop would necessarily be male, and it gave its approval for further work to be done on the scheme on the understanding that serious efforts would be made in the ongoing discussions to ensure that such a restriction should not obtain in relation to any subsequent appointment.

**7. The Methodist Church, in receiving the sign of episcopal succession, would insist that all ministries, including those of oversight, are exercised within the ministry of the whole people of God and at its service, rather than in isolation from it and in supremacy over it.**

In earlier conversations, the Methodist Church has emphasized the value which it would place on the pastoral office of bishops, and on bishops having leadership responsibilities for mission and a representative role in community affairs. The view has been expressed that they should know and be known at many levels, and that they should exercise authority with gentleness and be humble servants of Christ.

As the survey of styles of episkope and of episcopacy indicated, Methodists should not fear that the adoption of episcopacy would, of necessity, involve the adoption of a hierarchical model. Increasingly, in episcopally ordered churches, emphasis has been placed on the pastoral, teaching and missionary roles of the bishop. As Commitment to Mission and Unity insists:

The office [of a bishop] is relational in character and must be exercised in, with and among the community which it is called to serve. The office should not be so overburdened with bureaucratic demands that bishops are prevented from being alongside their people, or that their collegiality with their fellow bishops, presbyters and deacons is diminished. It is a ministry of service which requires an appropriate lifestyle and pastoral demeanour.<sup>16</sup>

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16 CMU, p. 10.

## 6. 'CALVINISM' AND 'ARMINIANISM'

In this section of our report we turn, as we have been asked to do, to an area of doctrine that, in the past, has been contested within the traditions of our churches, but that also has significant implications for mission and evangelisation today. The issues are far from dead: for example they are sometimes aggressively promoted in university and college Christian Unions. We believe that the challenge of the mission of the Church today is the proper context within which the tension expressed in the historic terms 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism' should be considered.

The terms 'Calvinist' and 'Calvinism' usually refer to a specific aspect of the theology of salvation (soteriology) that arose from the teaching of the French Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) in Geneva. Drawing extensively on the theology of St Augustine of Hippo, and deploying a wide range of biblical material, Calvin applied the doctrine of the sovereignty of God with some logical rigour to the work of grace in the individual.<sup>1</sup> His teaching on unconditional election, with its corollary of double predestination (predestination to salvation or damnation) was further developed by later Reformed theologians and was articulated by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. To reject that particular tenet is not to disown the Reformed tradition as a whole or to disparage Calvin's massive contribution to the Christian theological tradition, particularly through his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and his many commentaries on the books of the Bible. The whole question was been recast by Karl Barth in the mid-twentieth century, who placed the decrees of God and the destiny of the whole human race within Christology: Jesus Christ is both the Elect of God and the one rejected by God. The terms 'Calvinist' and 'Calvinism' are used here to refer to specifically to the area of Calvin's theology that is often described as 'the doctrines of grace'.

The terms 'Arminian' and 'Arminianism' spring from the work of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch reformed theologian who, in the early seventeenth century, wrote and preached against the Calvinistic doctrines of predestination and reprobation.<sup>2</sup> From the seventeenth century onwards Arminius' name has often been used to describe anti-calvinist religious

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1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk III, chs xxi-xxiv; *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. and ed. J.K.S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961).

2 Jacobus Arminius, *Theological Works*, ed. C. Bangs (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).



thought, whether or not that thought is directly based on Arminius' work.<sup>3</sup>

The Formal Conversations that led to the Covenant asked: 'What can Anglicans and Methodists confess together about God's gracious purpose, the mission of God, in which we are called to share?' The report believed that a shared understanding about the mission of God would 'put our quest for unity into the right perspective and give direction to the ways in which it is worked out in practice' (AMC: 84). We too believe that this missiological framework is the right one in which to consider the issues around 'the doctrines of grace'. We are also convinced that the conclusion that the Formal Conversations reached is fully justified, namely that, in spite of the various emphases that have existed in the past and may still remain to some extent today, our two churches should not be separated by this area of doctrine: 'We do not believe, therefore, that this issue, though an important one, should prevent closer unity between our churches, any more than it prevents communion between them' (117).

The Formal Conversations explored the terms in which our two churches confess the apostolic faith as a whole, as one of the marks of visible unity. They concluded that we share a common faith and make the same confession. They also recognised differences of context, idiom and emphasis. The report of the Conversations stated:

A careful comparison of Anglican and Methodist formularies and of more recent doctrinal statements will show that the two churches stand side by side in confessing the fundamental apostolic faith as it has been received in the orthodox Christian tradition. This inheritance of faith essentially comprises the trinitarian and christological doctrines, ecclesiology, and the doctrines concerning salvation. (110)

The report then lists eleven key areas of doctrinal common ground. These include – significantly in our context – belief in 'the prevenient grace of the Holy Spirit at work in us' and in 'the power of the Spirit, working through the means of grace, to overcome habits of sin and to conform us more and more to the image of Christ and to bring forth in us the fruit of the Spirit'.

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3 From an extensive literature, see e.g. Nicholas Tyacke *Anti-Calvinists: the Rise of English Arminianism c1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); P. White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Against this background, the report of the Formal Conversations goes on to note two areas of difference: the first concerning the individual's appropriation of salvation (sometimes called 'the doctrines of grace'), the second concerning 'Christian perfection'. In this chapter we explore the first of these issues, as we have undertaken to do. As the report puts it, this matter 'concerns such issues as: whether human beings have freewill to respond to the gospel; whether divine grace is irresistible; whether Christ died for all or only for the elect; and whether those who are saved will persevere to the end' (113). The report notes that these particular issues were among those that historically divided Arminians and Calvinists and that they continue to be important. 'We do not underestimate the seriousness of these issues' (113). Conscious of the sensitivity of these matters, we endorse the points that the report goes on to make, summarised as follows.

First, it is not the views of individuals, however influential they may have been in the formation of our traditions, that need to be considered when churches seek to reach theological agreement with each other, but the official positions of the churches as expressed in their formularies or doctrinal standards. It is what our churches have said in their official teachings – and what they have not said – that counts; and that is what we are concerned with primarily here.

Second, in the case of both our churches, these official statements have always been interpreted with differing emphases by individuals. Our churches today recognise and accept that this is the case and both of them make some space for a range of viewpoints. The report suggests, therefore, that 'the way in which the terms of subscription to the formularies [of both churches] are expressed softens the impact of underlying historical controversies' (117).

Third, these official statements are not polemical and are characterised by moderation. They do not advance the more extreme positions within the existing spectrum, but point to the possibility of some centre ground. In particular, those of the Church of England's formularies that are broadly 'Calvinist' in character do not support the doctrine of double predestination (predestination to condemnation; 'reprobation'); and the Methodist Church's 'Arminian' doctrinal standards do not countenance the view that we can be saved by our own efforts without prevenient divine grace (which would be Pelagianism) (114).

Against this background, we now comment briefly and in very general terms on the traditions of our churches and we look at the relevant formularies.

### **The Church of England<sup>4</sup>**

Although the first generation of English Reformers does not appear to have taken what would later come to be called a Calvinist approach to the doctrine of predestination, such an approach came to be widely accepted across the Church of England from the 1560s to the 1620s. Its classic expression was the treatise *The Golden Chain* by the Cambridge theologian William Perkins, which explained in great detail how the decrees of God work out in the lives of the elect and the reprobate respectively.

The Calvinist consensus in the Church of England was challenged from the 1620s onwards by Arminian theologians such as Richard Montague, later Bishop of Chichester, who responded to Roman Catholic criticism of the Church of England's Calvinism by arguing that the official formularies of the Church of England were not Calvinistic but allowed for the possibility of salvation for all. However, the dispute between Calvinists and Arminians was not only about 'the doctrines of grace', but also about polity and worship. The agenda of some Calvinists included radical further 'reform' of the English Church and the establishment of presbyterian church government, while the Arminians were associated with a high sacramental emphasis and the beautifying of church buildings. The battle that then ensued, precisely on these issues, tore apart both the English nation and the English Church during the middle years of the seventeenth century. The Calvinist position was put forward in the Westminster Confession of 1647, but Arminianism became the dominant tendency in the period following the restoration of the monarchy and the Church of England in 1660, and during the High Church reaction to the abolition of 'Anglicanism' before and during the Commonwealth.

During the early years of the eighteenth century the prevailing tendency within the Church of England was Arminian. However, although not all Calvinists were Evangelicals, there was a strong Calvinist strand within the Evangelical movement that emerged during the 1740s, associated with figures such as George Whitefield and Augustus Toplady (author of the hymn 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'). As we shall see in more detail

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4 We are grateful for advice from Dr Martin Davie and Dr Colin Podmore in this section.

shortly, at the end of the eighteenth century moderate Evangelicals such as Charles Simeon were able to establish a theological *modus vivendi* with the Arminianism of Methodists such as John Wesley on the grounds that, while the two sides might disagree about predestination, they were agreed on the central point that our salvation is totally dependent on the prevenient grace of God. The belief that it was legitimate to differ on questions of predestination provided that the priority of grace was upheld became the standard approach within the Evangelical wing of the Church of England from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the middle years of the twentieth century and is reflected in the writings of representative Evangelical theologians such as William Goode, E.A. Litton and W.H. Griffith Thomas.

In the years after the Second World War there was a revival of specifically Calvinist theology among Anglican Evangelicals. This revival of Calvinism was influenced by a re-discovery of the Puritan theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century whose works were reprinted by the newly formed Banner of Truth Trust and the most influential Anglican associated with it was the Evangelical scholar J. I. Packer. It should be noted, however, that the Evangelical movement has continued to include many who would not describe themselves as Calvinists. Calvinism represents one school of

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5 'Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity. As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feeling in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchedness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation. Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture; and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.'

thought in Anglican Evangelicalism and is definitely a minority position in the Church of England as a whole.

The principal text, dealing with this topic, in the Church of England's historic formularies is Article XVII of the Thirty-nine Articles.<sup>5</sup> The character of the statement is essentially biblical and pastoral. Its opening words are 'predestination to life'. It is extensively made up of the very words of Scripture: Romans 8 and 9 and Ephesians 1. It speaks of the comfort and assurance that believers derive from knowing that their salvation is in the hands of God and that God's purposes will be fulfilled. It warns against speculating about divine mysteries and of the shipwreck of faith that that can bring, either in despair or in throwing off all restraint in the belief that, if we are elected, no wilful sin of ours can affect our salvation (which would be Antinomianism). Finally, it exhorts us to embrace God's promises as they are set forth in Scripture and to live in accordance with God's expressed will in his Word.<sup>6</sup>

The approach of Article XVII follows the tone and content of the article on predestination in Cranmer's abortive attempt to produce a reformed canon law for the Church of England, the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* (1553).<sup>7</sup> Beyond that source lies Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, which strikes exactly the same notes. (It was, of course, during the reading of Luther's Preface to the Romans that John Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed' at the Aldersgate Street meeting on 24 May 1738.) Luther points out that Paul's teaching on predestination is necessary because it takes our salvation entirely out of our hands and places it in God's. 'For we are so weak and uncertain that, if it depended on us, not even a single person would be saved,' he says. Luther attacks those proud spirits who attempt to 'search the abyss of divine predestination' and to locate their position in God's secret purposes. They are bound to plunge to destruction, either through despair, or by casting off all restraint. In approaching this doctrine, Luther continues, we need to follow carefully the order of argument in the epistle. Paul first shows us our sin and weakness, then teaches us to embrace Christ and his gospel, and when we are securely set under the cross, yet facing the perils of suffering and

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6 For an exposition (with the Latin text) see E.C.S. Gibson, *The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (7<sup>th</sup> edn, London: Methuen, 1910), pp. 459-487.

7 Text in G. Bray, ed., *Tudor Church Reform: The Henrician Canons of 1535 and the Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press and Church of England Record Society, 2000), pp. 210-213.

death, he comforts us with the message of God's eternal purpose.<sup>8</sup> Luther's points are closely paralleled in the Article.

It is significant that every edition of the Book of Common Prayer, from Cranmer's first book in 1549 to the definitive edition of 1662, affirmed in the eucharistic prayer that Christ died 'for the sins of the whole world'.<sup>9</sup> Thus at the heart of the Church of England's historic liturgy (which was of course the service of Holy Communion that John and Charles Wesley used) we find this affirmation of the universal scope of Christ's redeeming love. It is also significant that the Thirty-nine Articles, unlike the later Lambeth Articles of 1595 and the Irish Articles of 1615 (and the Westminster Confession of 1647) make no mention of double predestination. And unlike the Lambeth Articles and the Westminster Confession, they have nothing to say about final perseverance. They present the hidden purpose of God as part of the good news, the gospel, and address it in a pastoral manner.

**While John and Charles Wesley would have made an explicit (ex animo) assent to the Articles of Religion, clergy and Readers of the Church of England now affirm that, together with the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and the Ordinal of 1662, 'they bear witness to the faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds'. This 'inheritance of faith' is taken as their 'inspiration and guidance under God' (Preface to the Declaration of Assent, Canon C 15).<sup>10</sup>** As it has done since the early seventeenth century, the Church of England today contains some who identify with the Calvinist or Reformed tradition in this area of doctrine and some who more readily fit the description Arminian (as well as many who are hardly aware of the issues at all). And although communion between Anglicans is sometimes strained, 'the doctrines of grace' are not a particular pressure point. Those who see themselves as upholding the Reformed element within Anglicanism are noted, like others, for their commitment to evangelism, to the proclamation of the gospel.

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8 M. Luther, 'Preface to the Epistle to the Romans' [1522, 1546] in H.T. Lehmann, ed., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), vol. 35, p. 378. William Tyndale also used Luther's Prefaces to the New Testament extensively, but freely and creatively: see D. Daniel, *William Tyndale: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 119ff, 149f.

9 *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward the Sixth* (London: Dent [Everyman], 1910).

10 For a study of the development of clerical assent in the Church of England see C.J. Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), ch.4.

## The Methodist Church<sup>11</sup>

The collective self-understanding of the Methodist Church today is unequivocally Arminian. The doctrinal clause of the Methodist Church's Deed of Union does not make any explicit comment on these matters, but refers to the first four volumes of John Wesley's sermons and to his *Notes on the New Testament*, which are clearly Arminian in emphasis. The clause makes it clear that these secondary standards 'are not intended to impose a system of formal or speculative theology on Methodist preachers, but to set up standards of preaching and belief which should secure loyalty to the fundamental truths of the gospel of redemption and ensure the continued witness of the Church to the realities of the Christian experience of salvation.' Like the Anglican Article XVII, this statement is restrained, pastoral and experiential in tone. Though, as a priest of the Church of England, John Wesley had lived with Article XVII in his ministry in that Church, he omitted it from the version of the Thirty-nine Articles that he prepared for Methodists in America.<sup>12</sup>

A popular summary of Arminian Methodism – later incorporated into the Catechism of the Methodist Church – derives from the founder of the Wesley Guild, William Fitzgerald, in 1903, which he called 'the four-Alls of Methodism':

1. All need to be saved
2. All can be saved
3. All can know they are saved
4. All can be saved to the uttermost

To many today this way of putting it seems rather individualistic and inward looking, with no mention of the Church, the sacraments or, indeed, the wider world.

John and Charles Wesley came from Puritan stock through both their parents, Samuel and Susanna: their mother kept the Puritan tradition of devotion and discipline alive. The brothers also inherited the High Church, Arminian tradition within the Church of England from both parents. The

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11 We are grateful to the Revd J.Munsey Turner and the Revd Dr Martin Wellings for advice in this section.

12 See F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), p. 249; T.C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), p. 122. H. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), p. 509, n.70.

sixteenth-century writings that particularly shaped John Wesley's theology were not the works of Arminius, but the Church of England's Homilies and Richard Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.<sup>13</sup> We should not overlook the fact that Arminius himself (a Reformed theologian) and both the Wesleys taught the doctrine of prevenient (or 'preventing') grace, the divine initiative that precedes any human response. John Wesley held that 'no man living is without some preventing grace, and every degree of grace is a degree of life.'<sup>14</sup> The Methodist Conference of 1745 considered how close Methodist preachers could come to Calvinism. The answer agreed was:

1. In ascribing all good to the free grace of God.
2. In denying all natural free-will and all power antecedent to grace.  
And
3. In excluding all merit from man, even from what he has or does by the grace of God.<sup>15</sup>

As Charles Wesley wrote (*italics original*):

Thy *undistinguishing Regard*  
Was cast on *Adam's* fallen race  
For *All* Thou hast in Christ prepared  
*Sufficient, sovereign, saving Grace.*

The sense of the universality of the love and grace of God was what motivated their evangelistic zeal. As Charles Wesley put it in the hymn ('Where shall my wond'ring soul begin?') that he wrote after his 'conversion' on 21 May 1738:

Outcasts of men, to you I call...  
He spreads his arms to embrace you all.

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13 H.B. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001); K. Cracknell and S. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 100.

14 13 Letter to John Mason (1776), cited Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines: Methodist Theology as Classical Christianity* (Cliff College Publishing, 1998), p. 63. G. Wainwright, *Geoffrey Wainwright on Wesley and Calvin* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1987).

15 Conference *Minutes* (1812 edn), I, p. 24.



The strong affirmation of the prevenience of grace has continued to mark Methodist doctrine to the present day.

The early Methodist movement was divided between the Arminian views represented by the Wesley brothers and John Fletcher, on the one hand, and the Calvinist views, in the persons of George Whitefield and Selina Countess of Huntingdon and the leaders of the Welsh revival, notably Howell Harris, on the other, with Evangelical polemicists who were not part of organised Methodism, such as Augustus Toplady, contributing ferociously from the wings. Bitter conflicts, marked by caricature and mutual insult, disfigured the Evangelical revival, largely within the Church of England, over these doctrines in the second half of the eighteenth century. Attempts at reconciliation there were, however. For a time John Wesley and Whitefield agreed not to attack each other publicly and to work in separate spheres of influence. John Wesley preached at George Whitefield's funeral in 1770 (though this was not quite the olive branch that it appeared to be and it was what Wesley left out of his oration that enraged Whitefield's supporters). Eventually part of the Calvinist constituency of Methodism went out from the Church of England, forming the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion and the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales (later the Presbyterian Church of Wales). The quarrel within the Evangelical Revival movement during the eighteenth century was not so much resolved as overtaken by issues of social reform and the anti-slavery movement. In the nineteenth century the controversy became less intense.<sup>16</sup> The membership of the Methodist Church today is overwhelmingly Arminian.

### **Affirming together the grace of God**

The convictions that were so passionately proclaimed in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival are still alive within both our churches. As the Common Statement noted, in practice both our churches contain a range of emphases in this area of doctrine, within the limits of the forms of assent that they require. This degree of latitude helps to maintain communion (koinonia) within each of our churches. The report concluded that this issue, though important, should not prevent closer unity between our churches, any more than it prevents communion within them (117).

The tension between the Reformed and the Methodist approaches to questions of the appropriation of salvation was addressed by the international dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the

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16 Cracknell and White, pp. 113-7.

World Alliance of Reformed Churches at its meeting in Cambridge in 1987.<sup>17</sup> The dialogue noted that grace had been a major emphasis in both traditions; both had affirmed that ‘from first to last our salvation depends on the comprehensiveness of God’s grace as prevenient, as justifying, as sanctifying, as sustaining, as glorifying.’ But, in their ways of confessing that primary truth, the two traditions had emphasised different aspects: the one stressing God’s sovereignty in election, the other the freedom of human response. The dialogue believed that these differences of emphasis should not be overstated. It cited John Wesley’s account (though without references) of three areas in which he concurred with Calvin: ‘(1) in ascribing all good to the free grace of God; (2) in denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace; (3) in excluding all merit from man, even for what he has or does by the grace of God.’ The dialogue stated that, for John Wesley, prevenient grace was the universal inheritance of Christ’s saving work and enabled a free, responsible decision in response to the offer of the gospel, while not guaranteeing salvation in any individual case. It affirmed that the imperative of missionary outreach applied equally in the two traditions, though the emphasis in terms of motivation might be different. It concluded that such historic differences of perspective can be mutually corrective and enriching and certainly should not constitute barriers that divide the churches.<sup>18</sup>

Two hundred years before, on 30 October 1787, a rather similar dialogue had occurred between John Wesley and the moderate Calvinist Charles Simeon (1759-1836, vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge 1782-1836). Simeon opened the conversation, remarking that as they were known as Arminian and Calvinist respectively, they should be at daggers drawn. But before that happened, he wished to ask Mr Wesley a few questions.

‘Pray, sir,’ Simeon began, ‘do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not put it into your heart?’

‘Yes,’ replied Wesley, ‘I do indeed.’ ‘And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything that you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?’ continued Simeon.

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17 Text in J. Gros, H. Meyer and W.G. Rusch, eds, *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Geneva: WCC Publications; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 270-274.

18 See also Wainwright, *Geoffrey Wainwright on Wesley and Calvin*.

‘Yes, solely through Christ.’...

‘Allowing, then, that you were first turned by the grace of God. Are you not in some way or another to keep yourself by your own power?’

‘No.’

‘What, then, are you to be upheld every hour and moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother’s arms?’

‘Yes, altogether.’

‘And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God, to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?’

‘Yes, I have no hope but in Him.’

‘Then, sir, with your leave,’ replied Simeon, ‘I will put up my dagger again: for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification, my final perseverance. It is in substance all that I hold, and as I hold it; and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be the ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.’<sup>19</sup>

Simeon’s irenic conclusion is still relevant today. Whether we lean towards the Calvinist or the Arminian tradition, we can affirm together the truth of the prevenient grace of God, as expressed in the words of Scripture: ‘By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no-one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life’ (Ephesians 2.8-10). Differences of emphasis within that shared affirmation should not hold Christians apart or prevent communion between churches. Because the grace of God goes before us into every situation we have an incentive for working closely together in mission and evangelisation.

### **Working with the grace of God in mission**

A clear area of convergence among many churches in contemporary mission theology is the *missio dei*, the mission of God. This concept provides a framework for a shared understanding of mission that allows for the different emphases that Calvinism and Arminianism have brought

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19 L.E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), pp. 206-207, citing Carus, *Memoirs of Simeon*, pp. 182f.

to mission and evangelism. The central insight of *missio dei* is that mission is primarily an activity of the Trinitarian God. God the Holy Trinity is the origin of mission and the church is ‘the privileged instrument of God’s mission’,<sup>20</sup> though not the exclusive instrument.

*Missio dei* holds the different emphases of Calvinism and Arminianism within its overarching concept. However, both Calvinist and Arminian approaches are likely to be worked out differently in the actual practice of mission and evangelism. Calvinists may emphasise the element of rescue from depravity, while Arminians are likely to emphasise the personal response to the gracious activity of God.

Calvinism’s stress on the sovereignty of God in election means that the missional activity of God in the world is not dependent on the Church or on human activity – God’s action in the world is both free and sovereign. Equally, the emphasis in Arminianism on the freedom of human response reflects the essence and motivation of God’s missional activity, which is love. God’s prevenient grace, common to both understandings of salvation and strongly affirmed by Anglicans and Methodists alike, is an outworking of the mission of God, the divine activity that draws the created order to the Creator’s love.

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20 See *Called to Love and Praise* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), 3.2.1 and *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church*, GS Misc 854 (Archbishops’ Council 2007), page 57.

# APPENDIX I

## Resources

*for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant*

The Anglican-Methodist Covenant web site, [www.anglican-methodist.org.uk](http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk), carries a wide range of stories of initiatives that are in the spirit of the Covenant, as well as background information and resources. Both Churches can be very grateful to the Methodist Communications Team for dealing with the technicalities. The site Moderator, managing the site content, is the Revd John Cole, a member of the Joint Implementation Commission.

## A: Publications

Unless otherwise stated, all the following publications are available for download on the web site or can be purchased via

EITHER **Methodist Publishing House**, 4 John Wesley Road, Werrington, Peterborough PE4 6ZP, Tel 01733 325002. [www.mph.org.uk](http://www.mph.org.uk).

OR **Church House Bookshop**, 31 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BN, Tel 020 7898 1300. [www.chbookshop.co.uk](http://www.chbookshop.co.uk)

### \* **An Anglican-Methodist Covenant**

Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England (2002) ISBN 1 85852 218 - 8 Price £4:25

### \* **Reader's Guide to An Anglican-Methodist Covenant**

An A3 folded leaflet including the text of the Covenant, Affirmations and Commitments with pointers to key parts of the Report. Price: 50p Available in packs of ten at price £5. (*Not downloadable*)

### \* **A church shaped for mission:**

Study group material, based on *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, compiled by John Cole (2002) ISBN: 0 7151 5766 3 Price: £4:95 (*Not downloadable*)

### \* **Theological workbook on An Anglican-Methodist Covenant**

Produced in 2002 on behalf of the Methodist Church and the Church of England by Dr Martin Davie, the Theological Secretary to the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity. Intended for clergy, ordinands, lay ministers and all who are interested in theological study.

*This resource can be downloaded from the web site and is available from the Council for Christian Unity, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ. Telephone: 020 7898 1481. Fax 020 7898 1483 Price: £4.00*

✳ **In the Spirit of the Covenant:**

The first ‘interim’ report from the Joint Implementation Commission for an Anglican-Methodist Covenant, as presented to General Synod and to the Methodist Conference in July 2005. ISBN: 1 85852 299 4 Price: £5.95

✳ **Living God’s Covenant:**

The second ‘interim’ report from the Joint Implementation Commission for an Anglican-Methodist Covenant, as presented to General Synod and to the Methodist Conference in July 2007. ISBN: 1 85852 334 7 Price: £5.00 (*Not downloadable*)

**B: Handouts for general use**

The following are available for free download from the web site, and can be given to anyone who wants to think more about what the Covenant can mean in their local church context.

1. **Living God’s Covenant:** The text of the Covenant  
The seven affirmations and six commitments of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, together with the preamble, presented in a handy format.
2. **Living God’s Covenant:** Six benchmarks  
Section 3.2 from the 2005 Interim Report *In the Spirit of the Covenant* – with a brief Scriptural introduction and suggestions for group work.
3. **Living God’s Covenant:** Six ways to respond  
Section 3.3.1 from the 2005 Interim Report, slightly abbreviated – with suggestions for group work
4. **Living God’s Covenant:** A guide to good covenanting  
Chapter 4 from the 2005 Interim Report – with suggestions for group work
5. **Living God’s Covenant:** Covenanting for Mission  
Four convictions, with a brief Scriptural introduction, exploring the essential connection between covenant and mission – with suggestions for group work.

These five handouts could form the nucleus of a display about the Covenant at major Church gatherings.

The following are also downloadable for use on a display:

- \* A three minute silent PowerPoint presentation designed as an endless loop featuring the key ingredients of covenanting living.
- \* A printable facsimile of the covenant document signed on 1 November 2003.

The logo used on the cover of most of the covenant literature is also available for incorporation in local publicity.

### **C: Workshop and group learning materials**

\* **“Living God’s Covenant”** was the title for the series of day workshops organised regionally during 2006. Material from these workshops is now provided on the covenant web site to enable workshops to be constructed more locally on similar themes.

Available material includes possible timetables, handouts and the text and slides of the main PowerPoint presentation that was used in the context of worship. The relevant worship material is also available.

The full PowerPoint presentation (30Mb) is available free of charge on a CD, with the associated papers in Word format. To request a copy send your name and address to Mrs Elspeth Coke, CCU, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ.

\* **A set of case studies** is now available on request, via a special link on the web site. These studies explore both the potential and the challenges of living in covenant relationships with other Christian communities.

\* **“Take me to your leader!”** is a light-hearted PowerPoint presentation, for members of circuit meetings and deanery synods who are struggling to understand each other’s ways of working. It might make an attractive way into discussing the issues raised in the chapter on Shared Decision-Making in this quinquennial report.

## **D: Interpreting Church of England disciplines in the light of the Covenant**

The Methodist Church and the Church of England entered their Covenant relationship on the understanding that the Covenant, in itself, did not change any of the constitutional arrangements or disciplines of either Church.

For the Church of England, however, new opportunities arise within its existing disciplines because of the Covenant relationship. Guidelines have been produced to inform diocesan bishops of the options now available to them.

### **\* Guidelines on the application of Canon B43**

Canon B43 deals with how ministers of other Churches may take part in Church of England worship in any parish, and how Church of England ministers may be permitted to lead worship in other Churches. These guidelines highlight in particular the scope for Church of England clergy to preside at Holy Communion in Methodist churches.

### **\* Guidelines on the application of Canon B44**

Canon B44 deals with how local Church of England churches may enter formal Partnerships with other Churches. A full set of guidelines is now downloadable from the web site, highlighting the increased scope for local covenant partnership between Anglican and Methodist churches.

## **E: Standard suggested paperwork for formal Partnerships between Anglican and Methodist churches**

Model documents have now been prepared for most aspects of formal Local Ecumenical Partnership between our two Churches. They are made available for downloading, however, on the clear understanding that professional advice will always be required so that they can be appropriately adapted to the local situation. The first point of contact should be the District or Diocesan Ecumenical Officer.

**\* A pro forma Sharing Agreement** – a legal document under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act – for Methodists and Anglicans sharing a Church of England parish church (whether or not they then form a single congregation). Guidelines file also available.



✱ **A pro forma Sharing Agreement** (as above) when sharing a Methodist church. Guidelines file also available.

✱ **A pro forma constitution** for a single-congregation Anglican-Methodist Ecumenical Partnership occupying a shared building under a Sharing Agreement. This document incorporates extensive guidelines.

✱ **Pro forma paperwork** when a Methodist and an Anglican congregation wish to come together in a formal ‘Local Covenant Partnership.’ These texts are included within the set of guidelines on the application of Canon B44 – see above.

## **F: Briefing Papers**

### **“Deaneries and Circuits – Partners in Mission”**

This booklet has been commissioned by the Church House Deaneries Group as part of their ‘Briefings’ series, setting out the contrasts between deaneries and circuits and therefore their potential to complement each other.

“Deaneries and Circuits – Partners in Mission” is published by Parish and People and available via their web site on [www.parishandpeople.org.uk](http://www.parishandpeople.org.uk), price £1 post free.

*The full text is also included in this report as Appendix II*

### **“Local Preachers and Readers – Sharing Two Ministries”**

This booklet, in a similar format, addresses the distinctive but overlapping ministries of Local Preachers and Readers, and explores how both Churches can benefit from their gifts.

“Local Preachers and Readers – Sharing Two Ministries” is published by Parish and People and available via their web site on [www.parishandpeople.org.uk](http://www.parishandpeople.org.uk), price £2 post free.

*The full text is also included in this report as Appendix III*

## APPENDIX II

### Deaneries and Circuits

#### *Partners in Mission*

*A briefing note by John Cole, National Adviser (Unity in Mission) for the Church of England and member of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant*

#### **Foreword**

#### **by the Co-Chairs of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant**

The potential for collaboration between deaneries and circuits was one of the key lessons learned from a series of workshops that were staged across England during 2006, which explored how an Anglican-Methodist Covenant can be implemented locally.

This booklet is not an official publication either of the two Churches or of the Joint Implementation Commission that was set up to develop the Covenant.

However, John Cole's text offers fresh insights into how we can each learn to think from within the other's mindset, and provides practical suggestions for how we can draw on each other's strengths and resources in our common service of God's mission.

We commend it warmly.

The Right Revd Ian Cundy  
Bishop of Peterborough

Professor Peter Howdle  
Former Vice-President of the  
Methodist Conference

## **Acknowledgements**

A great many colleagues have given advice and support in the compiling of this little book – including colleagues on the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, Chris Sissons and Margaret Jones from the Methodist Connexional Team, the Rural Deans and Circuit Superintendents whose experience has shaped the snapshots on pages 7 and 8, and fellow-members of the Church House Deaneries Group. All have saved me from many errors. Those that remain are my own!

John Cole

January 2007

# Deaneries and Circuits

## *Partners in Mission*

### Introduction

Deaneries in the Church of England and Circuits in the Methodist Church of Great Britain are superficially similar, yet deceptively different. In both Churches they provide the unit of association larger than local churches and parishes, but smaller than dioceses or districts.

Deaneries and circuits vary greatly in size – whether measured by the number of congregations or by the number of paid staff or by geographical area. At one extreme, a few large city centre and inner city Methodist churches are ‘circuits’ in their own right. At the opposite extreme, a small team of deanery clergy may be exercising ministry in up to fifty parishes.

Since an Anglican-Methodist Covenant was signed between our two Churches in November 2003, many observers have commented on the mission potential of deaneries and circuits learning to work more closely together. Across the country, however, less than a score of examples have been identified. Despite years of inter-denominational goodwill, most deaneries and circuits – and the churches within them – continue to inhabit parallel universes.

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.

#### ***Thinking like a circuit***

*In a rural area, the deanery and the circuit together contained more than fifty small churches. How could they all have regular Sunday worship including Holy Communion? The solution was a “circuit plan” that included the Anglican churches as well! All the necessary permissions for Methodist ministers to take communion services (according to Methodist discipline) in parish churches were carefully worked out under Canon B43.*

## A: Appreciating the differences

### The Deanery

A number of precisely-defined geographical areas (parishes and benefices)

Clergy have autonomy (“freehold”) within their parishes/benefices. Responsibility rests with them, and their Parochial Church Councils, under their diocesan bishop

The Rural/Area Dean has limited powers of ‘visitation’ in parishes on behalf of the bishop and archdeacon

The representatives of the parishes on the Deanery Synod may, in some dioceses, be given responsibilities for resource allocation and the deployment of paid ministers

The Deanery Synod is the electoral college for the Diocesan and General Synods. Clergy and lay people vote in separate ‘Houses’.

### The Circuit

The primary unit of mission made up of a number of congregations

Ministers are a team within the circuit, each usually exercising pastoral charge with a group of congregations in a section of the circuit, but expecting to work and conduct worship in other sections from time to time.

The Superintendent minister exercises a personal ‘episcopate’ within the circuit and is responsible to Conference for all aspects of its mission

The Circuit Stewards share a collegial and communal ‘episcopate’ with the Superintendent and other ministers, and with the Circuit Meeting, together carrying responsibility for the life, ministry and mission of the congregations.

Circuits elect lay representatives to the District Synod – attended by all active ministers. Synod elects to the Methodist Conference where final decisions are taken on church-wide matters. The circuit takes financial decisions re the costs of ministry with money raised by a compulsory assessment on churches.

## *Two differences of structure*

**DIFFERENCE ONE** In our two Churches, power and responsibility lie in different places and are handled in different ways.

- \* In the Church of England (at least in theory) responsibility lies personally with the *parish incumbent* and the *diocesan bishop* – acting synodically, of course!
- \* Methodists visualise power and responsibility being handled corporately, in the Methodist *Conference* and in the *circuit* – although John Wesley himself recognised the ‘episcopal’ role exercised by his superintendent ministers.

**Those in leadership roles in each Church should not be surprised at finding no one equivalent to themselves to talk to – or when they think they do, finding that the other person wants to share very different concerns.**

**DIFFERENCE TWO** Our two Churches have a very different ‘take’ on boundaries:

- \* The Church of England (at least in theory) is committed geographically – although clearly in practice many urban churches gather their congregations from far and wide.
- \* Methodists recognise a missionary responsibility to those around them but tend not to pay much attention, for example, to circuit ‘boundaries’.

**Those in leadership in the Church of England should be careful not to force Methodists to be constrained by Church of England boundaries. Methodists, however, will sometimes benefit from thinking in more ‘geographical’ terms.**

### ***Thinking like a Deanery***

*When a deanery and two circuits plotted their local churches on a map, they were shocked to see that God had placed them side by side in almost twenty locations across the same area.*

*Along with congregations from other traditions in those locations, they realised their common vocation was to provide a “single Christian presence” in each location – something which they then discovered could take many forms according to local circumstances.*

### ***Two differences of style and priority***

**DIFFERENCE THREE** A Rural Dean and a Methodist Superintendent, when invited to describe their role, reveal marked differences in responsibilities and concerns:

#### **Thinking like a Rural Dean**

##### ***The range of tasks***

- Chair Chapter meetings
- Sooth clergy egos
- Attend to vacant parishes and ensure service cover
- Deal with queries and grumbles from clergy and laity (the latter mainly about the clergy!)
- Meet with Deanery Lay Chair for planning, prayer and envisioning
- Chair the Deanery Synod jointly with the Lay Chairperson
- Oversee Deanery budget and Share payment

##### ***Biggest concerns***

Clergy who “don’t pull their weight” or fail to adapt to new roles

#### **Thinking like a Superintendent**

##### ***The range of tasks***

- Chair Circuit Meeting
- Oversee the Preachers’ Meeting
- Write the Plan for all future acts of worship (in consultation – normally quarterly)
- Liaise with the Circuit Leadership team over Circuit mission and development.
- Supervise Probationers and work with those exploring vocations.
- Hold regular (compulsory) staff meetings
- Conduct worship in all the circuit churches
- Support colleagues
- Has right to chair all meetings in the churches of the Circuit (delegating as appropriate)

##### ***Biggest concerns***

- Encouraging others to catch the vision for the changing mission of the church
- Finding preachers to lead worship

It is noticeable that, unlike the Superintendent, the Rural Dean is primarily concerned with the (largely autonomous) clergy and with parishes where there is a clergy vacancy.

The more strategic issues only become prominent when they have been specifically devolved by the diocese – and many deaneries are likely still to be struggling to come to terms with these new responsibilities.

**DIFFERENCE FOUR** The typical agenda of business meetings reflects a comparable difference of emphasis:

***The Deanery Synod***

1. Reports from Diocesan and General Synods
2. Anything devolved from the diocese - e.g. 'share' allocation, pastoral planning, training and mission
3. Any issues brought from a Parochial Church Council.
4. Resolutions to Diocesan Synod
5. Invited speaker from diocese or elsewhere

***The Circuit Meeting***

1. Reports from Synod and Conference - sometimes to respond with an opinion.
2. A presentation on the work, life and mission of the circuit or individual churches at the start of business
3. Recommendations and reports from Circuit Committees (Preachers, finance, property etc)
4. Decisions on major developments in any church.  
(Other approvals needed re major property developments)
5. "Memorials" – by which issues are presented direct to Conference
6. Management of the Circuit Advance Fund (subject to Connexional approval)
7. Conversation on the work of God

This suggests that, unlike the circuit (with its direct responsibility for staffing issues, Local Preacher training, joint finances etc), the deanery primarily functions as the venue for receiving information and instruction from the wider Church of England – mainly the diocese – or for raising issues with the diocese. Deanery-wide initiatives are usually only possible when autonomous parish clergy volunteer to collaborate.



## **B: Discerning the possibilities**

The contrasting snapshots in the last two pages may be typical but they are not final! If deaneries and circuits are to develop as effective partners in mission, those responsible in each will need to make themselves aware of how the other is changing.

Both Churches are engaged in a continual process of re-organisation, largely because of having fewer stipendiary ministers. Deaneries and circuits are re-configured, often bringing both into closer alignment with secular boundaries – boroughs, etc. In both Churches there is talk of having fewer but larger units.

As this happens, the missionary vocation of both the deanery and the circuit changes.

- \* The deanery and the circuit become the ecclesial units best equipped to contribute to secular bodies such as Local Strategic Partnerships – and the local Churches Together Group probably needs to be re-configured to match.
- \* Deaneries and circuits achieve the necessary scale to be able to resource and manage specialised projects and chaplaincies, which might need to be set up as charities – e.g. youth work projects.
- \* Deaneries and circuits become the natural context for exploring ‘fresh expressions’- new forms of Christian community for a new generation of disciples. The Church of England’s new Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure specifically opens up opportunities for new “Mission Initiatives”.

### ***Needing each other***

#### *1. Complementary Resources*

Deaneries and circuits are well placed to bring complementary resources to develop these new mission opportunities.

- \* Deaneries, in cases where they have been given these powers, can manage the deployment of personnel funded from the Diocesan Stipends Fund.

- ✳ Circuits sometimes have accumulated wealth from the sale of property, held in Circuit Advance Funds. Consent is given by the wider connexion to proposals from the circuit for investment from the Advance Fund in the re-development of premises and in the funding of personnel.

## *2 A shared learning environment*

As a missionary vision releases people from dependency on ordained clergy, so deaneries and circuits can share resources for the training and development of lay ministries.

- ✳ Licensed Readers and Local Preachers, although their roles are not identical, share a common need for follow-up training and opportunities for study. Some of this could well be organised locally.
- ✳ The development of other forms of lay ministry – including pastoral work and leading worship – is something deaneries and circuits are well able to tackle together. Some dioceses already provide training programmes on a deanery basis.

### ***Thinking strategically together – three examples***

- ✳ *The leadership in a deanery and a circuit, already meeting regularly and working together in a number of other ways, worked with the Local Strategic Partnership to provide internet access in a number of rural communities in their area.*
- ✳ *The deanery and the circuit, working closely together in a seaside town, developed a project to provide a rota of volunteer lay chaplains in the town centre – a resource for shoppers, tradespeople and holidaymakers.*
- ✳ *The deanery and the circuit, developing a project already operating between two local churches, set up a charitable trust which is facilitating the appointment of youth workers across the area. Already neighbouring deaneries and circuits are planning ways of extending the work to their areas.*

## **C: First steps to partnership in mission**

- \* Check boundaries and decide on an area of collaboration. Where the deanery and circuit share similar boundaries, life is obviously easier!
- \* Create a steering group, the core of which is likely to be the Rural/Area Dean and the Superintendent Minister plus a circuit steward and the Deanery Synod Lay Chair.
- \* Involve a representative of another Christian tradition as a participant observer.
- \* Alongside this, ensure regular, frequent and prayerful meetings between the Rural Dean and the Superintendent. These are essential.
- \* Look for opportunities to hold Deanery Chapter meetings with Methodist ministers present and/or Circuit staff meetings with Anglican clergy present – but don't create additional meetings just for the sake of it!
- \* Invite each other's clergy and ministers (with spouses) to all informal social events.
- \* Plan special agendas and workshops to bring together members of the Circuit Meeting and the Deanery Synod – but don't assume that the normal business of the two bodies can easily be done together.
- \* Make opportunities to dream dreams together – on away-days, with mission consultants, praying together, listening to God.
- \* Be aware that although developing close links between the ordained clergy is often the place to start, close links between lay people are what will enable the partnership to endure and deliver effective mission.

### ***The mission agenda***

The over-riding value of bringing deaneries and circuits closer together is that it then creates a climate of presumption in favour of joint initiatives more locally between individual churches and parishes.

Beyond that, joint ventures across the whole area deserve to be explored under five headings:

1. Chaplaincy – with other ecumenical partners
2. Youth work – ditto
3. Training programmes
4. Re-development of buildings
5. “Mission Initiatives” – fresh ways of being Gospel

### ***Shared Ministry***

Only as the relationship grows, and only as a clear need arises, will it be appropriate to authorise ‘shared ministry’<sup>1</sup> across the deanery and circuit – although this is something that may have happened for years in particular locations.

Four steps will achieve this:

1. *For Methodists, the circuit will ask Conference to confer ‘Associate Minister’ status on the deanery clergy.*
2. *For the Church of England, each parish (through its incumbent and PCC) will ask the diocesan bishop for permission for named Methodist ministers to conduct worship on a regular basis. This will include services of Holy Communion conducted in accordance with Methodist discipline.*
3. *Each parish will similarly ask permission from the bishop for their clergy to conduct worship in Methodist churches in the circuit. This will include services of Holy Communion.*
4. *The incumbents of the deanery will agree a document authorising their fellow clergy and Readers in the deanery to conduct worship in any Methodist church that is situated in their benefice.*

All this is possible for Church of England parishes within the framework of Canon B43. It cannot be done by the deanery en bloc.

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1 ‘Shared ministry’ needs to reflect the major contribution made by Methodist Local Preachers (and, for that matter, the often insufficiently realised contribution of Licensed Readers). In the light of this, Anglican parishes may need to review their expectation that their main Sunday service will always be Holy Communion.

If a serious commitment emerges between a deanery and a circuit to create a single ministerial team, the way forward is likely to be a so-called ‘Covenant Partnership’ – a Local Ecumenical Partnership to which all the churches in both deanery and circuit are individually committed. In the Church of England, the bishop would agree this under the terms of Canon B44.

### **D: A Final Thought:**

Growing effective working relationships between deaneries and circuits must never be at the expense of working with members of other Christian traditions in the area.

Joint enterprise specifically between the deanery and the circuit often makes sense because other Christian traditions generally have far fewer congregations in the same geographical area, and so they will be pursuing a different (but hopefully complementary) missionary strategy.

Through their covenant commitment to each other, the Church of England and the Methodist Church are in a significant way ‘pioneers’. As part of the pilgrimage of all God’s people, our two Churches (and all who are members or adherents) are being challenged by our covenant commitment to explore a manner of discipleship to which *all* are called. It is a call to live a Gospel of healing and reconciliation, bearing witness to God’s covenant love, until all humankind, “all in heaven and on earth,” are one in Christ.

## ***Resources***

✱ *To catch a vision for the circuit:*

Deaneries and circuits should study “Shaping the Future” together. This excellent study guide (XA282) is available, price £2.00, from Methodist Publishing House. Visit [www.mph.org.uk](http://www.mph.org.uk)

See also the ‘Building Confidence’ CDROM – full of resources for Circuit Reviews (MPH XA355, £2.00)

✱ *To catch a vision for the deanery:*

Join the National Deanery Network, with its range of publications and biennial national conferences. See back cover for details or visit [www.chdg.org.uk](http://www.chdg.org.uk)

✱ *To catch a vision for an Anglican-Methodist Covenant:*

Visit the web site at [www.anglican-methodist.org.uk](http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk)

Find more details on this web site of the stories told in this booklet, by visiting the “Circuits and Deaneries” page under “Stories of Covenant Living.”

## APPENDIX III

### **Local Preachers and Readers**

#### *Sharing Two Ministries*

*A briefing note by John Cole, member of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant – and formerly National Adviser (Unity in Mission) for the Church of England.*

#### **Foreword**

**by the Co-Chairs of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant**

Following the success of the recently-published briefing note on ‘Deaneries and Circuits – Partners in Mission’, we welcome this new booklet exploring how Readers in the Church of England and Local Preachers in the Methodist Church can share their distinctive ministries.

John Cole presents the basic facts about Local Preachers and Readers and how they fit into the life of our Churches, and then offers insights into how the two ministries can be shared so that each can enrich the other.

As with the previous booklet, this is not an official publication of either Church. However, on behalf of the Joint Implementation Commission, we commend it warmly.

Rt Revd Ian Cundy  
(Bishop of Peterborough)

Professor Peter Howdle  
(former Vice-President of  
the Methodist Conference)

## **Acknowledgements**

A great many colleagues have given advice and support in the compiling of this little book – especially colleagues on the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, Chris Sissons – Development Officer for Local Mission and Unity in the Methodist Church, Joy Barrow, Connexional Local Preachers’ Secretary and Alan Wakely, General Secretary of the Central Readers’ Council. All have saved me from many errors. Those that remain are my own!

John Cole

April 2008



## **Local Preachers and Readers**

### *Sharing Two Ministries*

#### **Introduction**

In the Methodist Church of Great Britain, when a lay person stands in the pulpit to preach, he or she will most probably be a Local Preacher. When the same thing happens in the Church of England, the person preaching is most likely to be a Reader.

From the perspective of those in the pew, it can easily seem that here are two roles that are, or ought to be, interchangeable. In the context of an Anglican-Methodist Covenant, why should all Readers not be accepted as Local Preachers and vice versa?

In this booklet we take a closer look at the distinctive roles of these two groups of people in the life of our two Churches, and explore the possibility that, while interchangeability may be attractive, there may be a better path to follow. 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?<sup>1</sup>

#### *Local Preachers in the Methodist Church*

#### **KEY FEATURES**

- Unlike other lay offices and appointments within the Methodist Church, Local Preachers are appointed ‘for life’.<sup>2</sup>
- Local Preachers can exercise their role in any part of the Connexion, and their status is transferred with them whenever they move circuits.
- Selection and training is a carefully graded and demanding process.
- Local Preachers are full, active and indispensable members of the ministry team of a circuit. They are deployed routinely by the

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1 For a fuller discussion of the concept of sharing two ministries, see Chapter Four of ‘Living God’s Covenant’, the second interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant 2007.

2 Subject to relevant Methodist disciplines and the requirements of safeguarding legislation.

circuit Superintendent Minister to conduct worship and to preach in local churches and they thus become widely known and respected throughout the circuit.

- Across the Methodist Connexion it is estimated that Local Preachers conduct seven out of every ten Methodist services, either in their own circuit or in others where they are invited as ‘visiting preachers’. They have overall responsibility for the act of worship, although they are to seek to work collaboratively with others in leading worship.
- Historically in the Methodist Church, the normal route to becoming a minister has been through being a Local Preacher – and today for most presbyters having been a Local Preacher is very much part of their identity, although on ordination they become ‘Itinerant’ preachers rather than ‘Local’ preachers.
- The same route is not required for those being ordained to the diaconate and admitted to the Methodist Diaconal Order, although a number of deacons are also Local Preachers, and remain so whilst ministering as deacons.
- In the circuit, all presbyters and Local Preachers meet quarterly in the Local Preachers’ Meeting (commonly known as ‘the Preachers’ Meeting’) – a time for mutual support, prayer, study and strategic thinking. The Local Preachers’ Meeting has a significant formal role in every circuit, holding Local Preachers to account and supervising those in training.
- Alongside Local Preachers, the Methodist Church has in recent years introduced a new category of locally-authorized Worship Leaders, who take part in various aspects of leading worship, but do not preach and do not have overall charge of the particular service.

## *Readers in the Church of England*

### KEY FEATURES

- Readers are admitted ‘for life’<sup>3</sup> – just like Local Preachers, and unlike most other lay appointments in the Church of England. Their role is transferable between dioceses – subject to their being licensed by the bishop, who will also specify where they may exercise their ministry.
- Individuals can be licensed to a parish, a benefice, a deanery, or to the whole diocese. Licences need to be renewed whenever there is a change of bishop or incumbent.<sup>4</sup>
- As with Local Preachers, the process of selection and the training of Readers is rigorous and demanding. Each diocese is responsible for its own programme of training, to standards moderated by the Ministry Division of the Archbishops’ Council.
- The role of the Reader can include a wide range of ministerial responsibilities that may benefit from the Reader’s theological competence.
- Of these the Reader’s catechetical role of preaching and teaching is best known and is universal across all dioceses of the Church of England. In some dioceses Readers are expected to do no more than this.
- However, the role of a Reader, as specified in the Canons, is threefold:

*To visit the sick, to read and pray with them, to teach in Sunday school and elsewhere, and generally to undertake such pastoral and educational work and to give such assistance to any minister as the bishop may direct (Canon E4.2 (a))*

*during the times of divine service to read Morning and Evening Prayer (save for the Absolution), to publish banns of marriage ..., to read the word of God, to preach, to catechize the children, and to receive and present the offerings of the people (Canon E4.2 (b))*

*to distribute the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to the people. (Canon E4.2 (c))*

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3 Subject to relevant Church of England disciplines and the requirements of safeguarding legislation.

4 Readers’ licences are not renewed after age 70, but the individual is usually given ‘Permission To Officiate’.

- A Reader can thus be invited to preach or lead the ‘Service of the Word’ in situations where a weekly service of Holy Communion is the normal routine. However, the Reader’s role in these services is at the priest’s discretion.
- Canon E4.2A also makes it possible for a Reader to be licensed to take funerals, but this will depend on diocesan policy and the individual’s personal circumstances.
- In rural areas, where a Reader is licensed to a multi-parish benefice or to a deanery, taking services and preaching is likely to form a more significant part of the Reader’s role than in a more urban setting. In this context the parallels with the role of the Local Preacher are most apparent.
- Apart from preaching and leading worship, many Readers undertake significant responsibilities in other contexts, e.g. training for baptism and confirmation, pastoral visiting etc, according to their individual gifting.
- In contrast to Methodist practice, selection and training for ordained ministry requires no prior involvement in Reader ministry – and ordained ministers are often perceived as failing to appreciate the Reader’s role.
- In the deanery, the ordained ministers meet at Chapter meetings for mutual support, prayer, study and strategic thinking. Readers may be, but are by no means always, invited to join them.
- Traditionally Readers have met in ‘Areas’ for mutual support and further training. These Areas have often borne little relationship to other church boundaries. However, as more responsibility is entrusted to deaneries, some dioceses are re-aligning their Reader Areas to fit in with deanery boundaries.
- As the range of accredited lay ministries increases, and questions are asked about the potential for a distinctive (often mistakenly called ‘permanent’) diaconate, many Readers see the distinctiveness of their ministry as being under threat.<sup>5</sup>
- At least three dioceses in the Church of England no longer use the title ‘Reader’ but license lay people as “Licensed Lay Ministers”.

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5 In 2007 the Church of England’s Faith and Order Advisory Group published an important report “The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church” addressing these issues.

## **Why not ‘interchangeability’?**

*‘Interchangeability’ of ordained ministries is rightly seen as one of the more urgent goals within the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church.*

*This makes sense, since presbyters and deacons are two of the three historic ‘orders’ within the universal Church and both our Churches believe we are ordaining into the diaconate and the priesthood/presbyterate of the whole Church of God.*

*Bishops, of course, make up the third ‘order’ – hence the significance of the ongoing debates about bishops within the Methodist Church in Great Britain and about women being bishops in the Church of England.*

*Similar arguments, however, do not apply to Local Preachers and Readers. The roles of the two groups take their shape from the way each of the two Churches is organised. In fact, as shown in these pages, Local Preachers and Readers perform different albeit overlapping functions, and are trained accordingly.*

*It just so happens that the individual gifts and training of a Local Preacher are likely to equip that person to fulfil very well many of the roles undertaken by a Reader in the Church of England. And the same will be true of a Reader in the context of the Methodist Church.*

*Subject to the disciplines of the two Churches, it is perfectly possible for individuals to be accredited to serve at the same time as a Local Preacher in the Methodist Church and a Reader in the Church of England.*

*There is, however, no universal ‘order of lay ministry’ to which both Readers and Local Preachers claim to belong. While our two Churches retain their existing polities, there is no compelling reason for the roles to be merged.*

## **Readers**

### ***Offering their gifts to the Methodist Church***

Individual Readers may, with appropriate permission,<sup>6</sup> accept invitations to lead Methodist worship and preach.

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6 The formal requirements are set out in Canon B43(6)(b).

The invitation would come from the Methodist Circuit – initially most probably at the suggestion of a local congregation where the Reader was already known. All those who stand in Methodist pulpits are required to preach nothing at variance with the doctrines of the Methodist Church.<sup>7</sup>

### THREE WAYS IN FOR READERS

#### *a) As a 'Visiting Preacher'*

The Reader can appear on the Circuit's preaching plan simply as a 'Visiting Preacher.' Although the Reader may be invited quite frequently, each service he or she leads is technically by separate invitation.

#### *b) As a person 'Authorised to serve as a Local Preacher'*

If the Reader is licensed to a Local Ecumenical Partnership where the Methodist Church is a partner, the Reader 'may apply to be authorised to serve as a local preacher' in the circuit of which the LEP is a part (SO566B(1)). In situations other than a Local Ecumenical Partnership, if the Reader is likely to be preaching frequently in the circuit, the Reader 'may apply to be authorised to serve as a local preacher' (SO566B(2)). If the application is successful, he or she will become a member of the Local Preachers' Meeting – a responsibility that ought to be taken very seriously. The requirements of those 'Authorised to serve as a Local Preacher' are, however, quite stringent, including meeting connexional standards of training.

#### *c) As a Local Preacher*

Any Reader who is also a member of the Methodist Church (or chooses to become a member)<sup>8</sup> and is able and willing to fulfil his or her commitments

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7 If this appears to be problematic, two quotations may be helpful – from paragraphs in the Anglican-Methodist Covenant Common Statement:

“A careful comparison of Anglican and Methodist formularies and of more recent doctrinal statements will show that the two churches stand side by side in confessing the fundamental apostolic faith as it has been received in the orthodox Christian tradition.” (110)

“Methodists and Anglicans do not necessarily confess the faith in the same idioms or with the emphases always in the same places. Moreover, there is diversity within each of the two churches as well as between them.” (111)

8 A person who wishes to become a member of the Methodist Church is not required to renounce their membership of another Christian Church, unless required to by that other Church.

and to take a full part in the worship and mission of both Churches, may seek to be appointed a Local Preacher – thus serving the two Churches in both roles in parallel.

Methodist Standing Orders (SO565B) state, ‘It is the general policy that the interests of local preaching are best served if all those who wish to become local preachers follow a programme prescribed or validated by the Methodist Council.’

## **Local Preachers**

### *Offering their gifts to the Church of England*

Individual Local Preachers are free, according to the disciplines of both Churches, to make themselves available or be invited to perform any of their usual functions in the context of Church of England worship.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Except in more rural areas where the need might be greater, Local Preachers should not be surprised if they are only very rarely invited to conduct the entire service in a parish church. In this respect, Readers would be in an identical position. An invitation ‘to preach’ in the Church of England means simply an invitation to preach the sermon, while someone else takes responsibility for leading the rest of the service.

## THREE WAYS IN FOR LOCAL PREACHERS

### *a) Invitations from individual parishes*

Occasional invitations must come from the incumbent of the parish. Invitations to perform these functions on a regular basis need the prior approval of the Parochial Church Council and the bishop.

A number of bishops, in the context of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, are indicating their approval in general and in advance, so that the approval becomes applicable whenever the incumbent and PCC agree to make the invitation.

All these arrangements are expressly permissible within the working of the Ecumenical Relations Measure 1988 and are covered by Canon B43.

### *b) More general invitations*

Local Preachers who are willing to make themselves more generally available across a whole diocese, and who are actively involved in the worshipping life of a Church of England parish – as indicated by placing their names on the Church Electoral Roll, may also be granted ‘permission to preach’ by the bishop.

This provision has long been available under Canon B18.2, but the terms of its use are not clearly defined. Only in a few dioceses does it appear to have been used in relation to Methodist Local Preachers.

*At the request of his local Anglican parish church, a Methodist Local Preacher of many years’ standing in East Yorkshire recently received a formal letter from the Archbishop of York giving him permission to preach in Church of England churches in the diocese.*

*This individual story is just one of many signs of a growing friendship and collaboration between ‘church’ and ‘chapel’ in many rural communities in Yorkshire and elsewhere.*

### *c) Becoming also a Reader*

Local Preachers who are able and willing to fulfil their commitments and



to take a full part in the worship and mission of both Churches, may in many cases follow the normal procedures for seeking to be licensed as a Reader in the Church of England – thus serving the two Churches in both roles in parallel.

The Church of England authorities responsible for the person's training and accreditation are likely to take some account of the training he or she had already received as a Local Preacher, but each person's case will be considered individually.

A difficulty for some Methodist Local Preachers in following this route lies in the current canonical requirement that Readers must have been confirmed prior to admission. In this case 'confirmation' means 'confirmation by a bishop according to the discipline of the Church of England'. This obviously does not apply to those who have been confirmed in the Methodist Church. The question of the recognition of confirmation conferred in other churches is currently being discussed within the Church of England.

None of these arrangements raises any disciplinary issues within the Methodist Church, provided the Local Preacher continues to fulfil his or her obligations within the circuit.

*Across the country a number of individuals have already taken on this dual ministry as both Local Preachers and Readers. As with other examples highlighted on these pages, the possibility seems to make most sense to people in rural settings.*

## **Local Preachers and Readers**

### ***Shared resources and training***

Despite the significant differences between Readers and Local Preachers, more attention could perhaps be given to where the roles overlap and where shared support and resourcing would be beneficial to both groups. The initial training of Local Preachers and Readers may, however, not be the best place to begin.

## CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO TRAINING

Initial training for Local Preachers currently follows a standard programme authorised for the whole Connexion by the Methodist Council. In 2007, Regional Training Partnerships at St John's College, York and Chester University had foundation level Degree Courses validated as alternatives to the Methodist Council's training specification for Local Preacher training. Such courses might facilitate the training of Readers and preachers from other Churches alongside Methodist Local Preachers.

Each Diocese in the Church of England is free to develop its own training scheme, although the quality is carefully moderated through the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council. This allows greater flexibility and local relevance – even though this has meant, at least in the past, that the scope of the training could vary quite considerably.

The two contrasting approaches to training – and the levels of accountability attached to each – have so far limited the development of integrated programmes, but the Regional Training Partnership initiatives at York and Chester may be pointing to a way forward.

### Ongoing Learning

The continuing training and resourcing of Readers and Local Preachers *after* they have begun their ministries perhaps offers greater potential for mutual benefit. Greater co-ordination is inhibited only by relatively trivial practical considerations – mainly geography! However, underlying the trivia, the cultural perspectives cannot be ignored.

The natural ongoing learning environment for the Local Preacher is the Local Preachers' Meeting in the circuit. There the Local Preacher is part of a close-knit learning community alongside the ordained ministers where together they share responsibility for preaching and leading worship across the circuit. Regular participation in the Preachers' Meeting is an integral and obligatory part of the Local Preacher's role; the system would not work without it.

Most Readers, at least until recently, have been offered a much less intense experience of sharing in a common purpose. Although the importance of Area Readers' Meetings varies from diocese to diocese, it seems they have only begun to grow in significance when Areas have become more closely related to deaneries. In these circumstances, questions can be asked when

a Reader fails to attend. Where these developments have not happened, attending the Area Readers' Meeting tends to be treated as very much an 'option.' Individual Readers commonly decide whether or not to attend largely on the basis of whether the programme of the meeting interests them.

In principle at least, it had been implicitly assumed that Readers would experience teamwork and sharing in a common purpose through their relationship with their Incumbent. On this basis it was expected that the ministry team in their parish or benefice would be their 'learning community'.

Perhaps as a result of these differences of practice, very little attention has yet been given to what could prove to be a very considerable common learning agenda. Where joint initiatives have been attempted, they have mostly taken the form of specially-arranged joint study days.

**Singing the Lord's song in a strange land (!)**

*In one part of the country, where the Diocese and the District are almost completely co-terminous, Readers and Local Preachers recently enjoyed two creative day workshops exploring the cultural differences affecting their experience of leading worship and preaching in each other's Churches.*

**A possible scenario for shared learning**

The trend in some dioceses towards relating Readers more closely to their deaneries suggests a possible scenario provided four ingredients are in place:

1. The Readers' Area is the Deanery
2. Deanery Chapter meetings regularly include the Readers from the deanery
3. The Deanery and the Circuit are mostly co-terminous
4. The Deanery and the Circuit are prepared to make a commitment to work together

In these circumstances, the Local Preachers' meeting and the joint meeting of the Deanery Chapter and the Readers could develop a single common

agenda that met the requirements of all concerned. Finding the common agenda is critical. Too often, when superficially similar groups meet from two different Christian traditions, they are surprised to find they have little to discuss.

### **Mutual Cherishing**

An unlikely area of mutual cherishing is the pastoral care that is offered to Readers by their Area Warden under the oversight of the bishop. There is nothing to prevent the Area Warden being a Methodist – and in a rural area, where Readers contribute a great deal to leading worship in a Methodist circuit, such a relationship can make a lot of sense.

It is not so easy to see how this arrangement could be reciprocated since, for Local Preachers, pastoral care is exercised mutually, with oversight from the Superintendent Minister working with the Circuit Local Preachers' Secretary.

#### **A Methodist Area Warden of Readers**

*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 the popular and successful Warden of Readers.*

### ***An individual exchange of gifts***

One of the distinctive marks of a covenant relationship, as discernible from scripture, is the mutuality of a gracious giving and a grateful receiving – all for a purpose beyond the self-interest of the covenant partners.<sup>10</sup>

So when the roles of Local Preacher and Reader are often very different, what are the gifts that can be exchanged? What resources are released when the two ministries are shared?

**As individuals, Local Preachers and Readers bring gifts and talents, which both our Churches need to learn to accept with gratitude.**

*The essential gifts that all Local Preachers and Readers will want to offer and share include*

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2 of 'In the Spirit of the Covenant' – the 2005 interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.

- Knowledge of the Bible and a clear personal Christian faith
  - Theological competence and the capacity to reflect
  - Professional and practical skills and wisdom from daily life
- Other gifts may include*
- Communications skills, especially in preaching and leading worship  
– a priority amongst Local Preachers
  - Teaching and pastoral skills, as well as skills in leadership in mission  
– which may form a particular vocation for many Readers

### ***Making a virtue out of the differences***

As Deaneries and Circuits face the challenge together of being partners in mission, the distinctive gifts of Local Preachers and Readers represent a resource for ministry and mission that cannot be ignored.

In any locality both Methodists and Anglicans will be called to share in God's mission alongside other Churches. Should both Local Preachers and Readers be asking what their gifts and training might enable them to offer to the whole family of Christ's disciples who are seeking to live out the Gospel in that place?

Readers especially might be able to stimulate lay collaboration in mission across all traditions – and they might find that, alongside Local Preachers, there are other potential partners in the Methodist Church (and other Churches) with roles in training and community development, mission and evangelism.

In turn Local Preachers might have a role in stimulating creative links between worship-leaders and evangelists, visual artists and musicians not just within the life of the Methodist Church, in order to develop new ways of enabling people to come into God's presence in worship.

### ***Further information:***

#### **Readers**

The Central Readers' Council of the Church of England maintains its own web site (linked to the Church of England web site) [www.readers.cofe.anglican.org](http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org)

It also publishes a quarterly magazine, 'The Reader' – which is available from the Central Readers' Council, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3AZ – price £5 for four issues. Cheques payable to 'Central Readers' Council'.

#### **Local Preachers**

There is material about Local Preachers on the Methodist Church website ([www.methodist.org.uk](http://www.methodist.org.uk)). Follow the links "Open to You", then "Training and Vocations".

Or contact Methodist Church House, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR

[localpreachers@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:localpreachers@methodistchurch.org.uk)

Telephone 020 7486 5502

Support for Local Preachers is also given through the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust (LWPT) [www.lwpt.org.uk](http://www.lwpt.org.uk)

The LWPT publishes 'Ichthus,' a quarterly magazine which includes regular reports from the Connexional Office.