



THE CHALLENGE OF THE COVENANT

Uniting in Mission and Holiness

**The Second Quinquennial Report (2013) of the
Joint Implementation Commission
under the Covenant between**

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

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nb Please note that the sections of this report (particularly those under the headings “Working Together in Worship and Mission”, “Towards Visible Unity in Worship, Mission and Holiness” and “Growing in Holiness”) are designed to be read in any order.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE COVENANT: UNITING IN MISSION AND HOLINESS

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The Revd Canon Dr Paul Avis was the Anglican Co-Convenor of the JIC until November 2011. He contributed greatly to its work, and therefore to the writing of this report. In particular he contributed material that has been used in the chapter Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission which overlaps with material in the forthcoming report of the Anglican Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission (AMICUM) of which he has also been a member. The JIC is extremely grateful to Dr Avis and AMICUM, neither of whom are to be held responsible for the opinions in this report or the way that the material has been used.

FOREWORD FROM THE CO-CHAIRS

The past five years have seen some significant national and international events and change is always with us. Both of our two churches have also had major issues to address which have consumed much of their time and effort, but now more than ever is the time for the unity of the Church to be evident in our national and international life.

During this second 5 year phase, the Joint Implementation Commission for An Anglican-Methodist Covenant (JIC) has been working at the task set before it by our two churches of furthering the pilgrimage towards visible unity for the mission of the Church.

An interim report was published in 2011¹ which outlined the concept of Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas (CPEAs). This proposal was generally well received, and went to a process of wider consultation in the churches. The concept of CPEAs supports initiatives which enable local ecumenical relationships to flourish in ways that serve the mission of the Church across a strategic area. Several areas are enthusiastic about the proposal and are finding it liberating as they seek to reach out to their communities.

We now publish our quinquennial report for consideration. The report covers in detail where we are in our bilateral ecumenical journey after 10 years in Covenant, recognising that, for some, progress is painfully slow. Reasons for this are suggested. Clearly some issues which were difficult to resolve over 40 years ago are no easier now, and sometimes seem more difficult.

The JIC has sought to broaden its approach and to challenge our churches about their commitment to this process of growing together. Thus there are chapters giving detailed consideration of how we might move into deeper communion, what united oversight might entail, how we might move towards more visible unity and how we should improve our joint consultation and decision-making.

On a more practical level there is a chapter giving more detail about CPEAs, as refined through the consultation process in the churches.

At its inception the JIC was charged with addressing “two areas of doctrinal controversy where some theological tension remains”². The first was related to the division between Arminianism and Calvinism, which was addressed by the JIC in 2008³. The second was related to the doctrine of Christian Perfection and we address this in this report.

The JIC has asked the General Synod and the Methodist Conference to put in train a period of consultation for this report, which has been agreed. There are several bodies in each church which will be asked to respond to this full report and to specific challenges and recommendations which are to be found in a second, shorter report which is related to it and to be understood in the light of it.⁴ This

¹ *Moving Forward in Covenant*. 2011. Methodist Publishing, Peterborough. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

² *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement*. 2001. Methodist Publishing House and Church House Publishing, Peterborough and London. Paragraph 112, p 37. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

³ *Embracing the Covenant*. 2008. mph, Peterborough. Pp 116-128. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

⁴ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Draft Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014* www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/cotc-draftreport.doc

Foreword from the Co-Chairs

shorter report will be revised in the light of feedback received, and then presented to the General Synod of the Church of England and the Methodist Conference in the summer of 2014.

The JIC would obviously welcome any feedback or comments from individuals, church groups, ecumenical consultations or ecumenical partners. These should be sent to the Co-Convenors of the JIC (see below for contact details) by 31 January 2014.

To aid consideration of both the full report and of the draft report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England we have also produced a quick guide which we hope will allow many readers easy access to the main issues, whilst avoiding some of the complexities of ecumenical language!

As co-chairs we wish to put on record our sincere thanks for all the hard thinking and detailed discussion which have been undertaken by the members, observers and consultants of the JIC⁵. In particular we wish to thank the co-convenors, Roger Paul and Ken Howcroft, for an enormous amount of hard work, especially in the production of this report.

As the JIC has worshipped, prayed and worked together we have been more than ever convinced that our two churches have so much to offer to and receive from each other that visible unity is a divine imperative, of life-giving importance for the unity and mission of the Church of Christ in this and every age.

The Rt Revd Christopher Cocksworth
Bishop of Coventry

Professor Peter Howdle,
Past Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

RESPONSES

Any comments or feedback should be sent **by 31 January 2014** to the Co-Convenors as follows:

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⁵ See list below

THE MEMBERSHIP OF JIC 2 (2008 to date)

The Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England agreed to set up a joint commission which would have the task of monitoring and promoting the implementation of the Covenant.

The JIC is appointed for five years at a time. The first Commission, from 2003-2008 was chaired by Professor Peter Howdle, ex Vice-President of Conference, on behalf of the Methodist Church; and the late Rt Reverend Ian Cundy, Bishop of Peterborough on behalf of the Church of England.

The second Commission, from 2008-2013 is chaired by Professor Peter Howdle and The Right Reverend Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry.

Anglican

The Right Revd Dr Christopher Cocksworth, Bishop of Coventry (Co-Chair)
The Venerable Janet Henderson [until October 2011]
The Revd Venerable Dr Jane Steen [from November 2011]
The Revd Dr Will Adam
Dr Philip Giddings
The Right Revd Jonathan Baker
The Revd Canon William Croft (Consultant)
The Revd Dr Bernard Sixtus (Church in Wales) [until February 2013]
The Revd Canon Prof John Richardson (Scottish Episcopal Church)
The Revd Canon Dr Paul Avis (Co-Convenor) [until November 2011]
The Revd Dr Roger Paul (Co Convenor) [from November 2011]

Methodist

Professor Peter Howdle, Vice-President of the Conference 2002-3, (Co-Chair)
Mr Steven Cooper
The Revd Catherine Gale (Wales)
Mrs Jenny Easson (Scotland)
The Revd Ruth Gee
Deacon Sue Culver
The Revd Neil Stubbens
The Revd Dr Peter Phillips (Consultant)
The Revd Kenneth Howcroft (Co-Convenor)

United Reformed Church

The Revd David Tatem (Observer-Participant)

INTRODUCTION: THE TEXT OF THE COVENANT ENTERED INTO IN 2003

On All Saints Day, 01 November, 2003 the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain formally entered a covenant. The text of that covenant and its mutual affirmations and commitments are reproduced below.¹ They will be referred to throughout this report.

AN ANGLICAN-METHODIST COVENANT (2003)

We, the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, on the basis of our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity, as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement, hereby make the following Covenant in the form of interdependent Affirmations and Commitments. We do so both in a spirit of penitence for all that human sinfulness and narrowness of vision have contributed to our past divisions, believing that we have been impoverished through our separation and that our witness to the gospel has been weakened accordingly, and in a spirit of thanksgiving and joy for the convergence in faith and collaboration in mission that we have experienced in recent years.

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.
2. We affirm 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.
3. We affirm that both our churches confess in word and life the apostolic faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the ecumenical Creeds.
4. We affirm that one another's ordained and lay ministries are given by God as instruments of God's grace, to build up the people of God in faith, hope and love, for the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care and to share in God's mission in the world.
5. We affirm that one another's ordained ministries possess both the inward call of the Holy Spirit and Christ's commission given through the Church.
6. We affirm that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight (*episkope*) 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 time and space.

COMMITMENTS

1. We commit ourselves, as a priority, 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. In particular, we look

¹ The text of the Covenant, Affirmations and Commitments can be found in *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House; London: Church House Publishing) 2001 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

Introduction: the text of the Covenant entered into in 2003

forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.

2. We commit ourselves to realise more deeply our common life and mission and to share the distinctive contributions of our traditions, taking steps to bring about closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service in our needy world.
3. We commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.
4. We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.
5. We commit ourselves to listen to each other and to take account of each other's concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches.
6. We commit ourselves 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.

UNITING IN MISSION AND HOLINESS: A BIBLICAL MEDITATION

1. The unity in Christ of those whom Christ calls not just servants but also friends (John 15.15) is part of God's precious gift in Christ. In the Fourth Gospel it is profoundly linked with sharing eternal life with Christ. That in turn means both being swept up in the dynamics of love in the godhead, and also being sent on Christ's mission into the world in the power of the Spirit. So unity, holiness and mission are inextricably linked to eternal life in Christ. They are indeed God's precious gift to us in Christ; but as such, they are also a challenge.

2. This precious gift of God is brought about through the costly sacrifice of Christ and God's continuing work in the power of the Spirit. Commenting on John 3.16, William Temple wrote:

Here is the whole great truth. This is the heart of the Gospel. the words indicate the cost to the Father's heart. He gave; it was an act, not only a continuing mood of generosity; it was an act at a particular time and place.¹

3. The initiative for mission is therefore firmly rooted in the will of God. It is embodied in the loving act of sending the Son into the world to give eternal life. The Fourth Gospel unfolds the meaning of eternal life. Eternal life means to be brought into a complete fellowship, or communion, of love with God through Jesus Christ. As the evangelist comments in an aside in the prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room:

And this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17.3)

4. Here, knowing is not to do with cognition, but with an intimate, personal relationship of trust and love. Thus it is, for example, the way the sheep know the Good Shepherd, and are known by him (10.14). This mutual knowledge is the same as that which the Son has of the Father and the Father has of the Son (10.15). St John also uses the image of the vine and the branches in order to speak about eternal life in terms of the mutual indwelling of love between the believer and Christ, which is drawn into the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (15.1-11).

5. Eternal life therefore includes both the mutual knowledge and the mutual indwelling of the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer. It also includes the unity of all who believe. The sheep are to be gathered into one fold, with one shepherd (10.16). And the disciples are commanded to love one another, as Christ has loved them (15.12). This is made explicit in the prayer of Jesus that they may be one in John 17:

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. (17.11).

6. In St John, God's mission is an act of sending and of gathering. The Son is sent into the world, in order to give eternal life to the world. But equally it is to do with the gathering up of all things in the last day. After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus commanded his disciples:

Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost. (6.13)

7. Later in the chapter, Jesus said:

This is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (6.39)

8. The gathering up the fragments of the meal is a sign of the eschatological ingathering of all things at the resurrection. Crucially, the gathering into unity must be seen in terms of the self-giving of Jesus. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (10.11, 15, 17-18) so that they may be gathered into one. Those who keep Jesus's commandments are the ones who abide in his love. They are his friends and he lays down his life for them (15.13, 14). In his prayer in the Upper Room, Jesus speaks of glorifying the Father by finishing the work he gave him to do (17.4), a clear reference to the glory of his death on the cross. In chapter 12, Jesus also speaks of his death in terms of glory (12.27, 28). **The glory is the gathering of all people into one in him:**

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. (12.32)

9. And in chapter 11, when Caiaphas had spoken of the expedience of one man dying for the sake of the nation (11.50), the evangelist comments that although this was uttered in cynicism, it was nevertheless prophetic:

He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God. (11.51, 52)

10. For St John, running through the whole Gospel is the theme of Jesus laying down his life in order to unite people together with God. This is similar to the way in which the letter to the Colossians speaks of peace being made through the blood of his cross (1.20). But the unity of which St John writes is a deep communion of love, that mutual indwelling, which participates in the mutual indwelling in the Trinity. The scope of this unity moves from the relationship of the disciples with Jesus and each other, through the inclusion of those who believe in Jesus through their word and witness (17.20), the other sheep who do not belong to this fold (10.16), and all the children of God who are dispersed throughout the world (11.52), to the drawing of all people to himself (12.32)

11. So how does this help us as we read together Jesus's prayer in John chapter 17 and reflect on what it means for us to live together in the light of it? We have not chosen each other or even chosen Christ (14.16), but have been given by the Father to Christ (17.9). As Christ and the Father are one, so we are to be one (v11). That is a way of ensuring that everyone is guarded and protected and individuals are not lost (v12). Jesus did that for his disciples during his earthly life, and did so in the name of the Father (v12). As he is raised up to be with the Father through the resurrection and the ascension, he leaves them insofar as his earthly presence is concerned, but asks and trusts that the Father will continue to protect them in the Father's name (vv11, 15). This protection will involve the Father sanctifying them in the truth (v17), in which Christ has sanctified himself (v19). This truth is constituted by the Father's word (v17). The way in which they will encounter it, receive this sanctification and experience this protection will be through the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, coming to them (chapters 14-16 passim).

12. Christ's prayer is explicitly not just for his first followers who knew him before the crucifixion, but for those who succeed them and who have not known him in his earthly existence (17.20-21; 20.30f). They are to be one with the earliest followers and one with God in Christ (vv20-21): the Father in the Son, and the Son in the disciples (v23); the disciples in the Father and the Son, in the same way as the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father (v21). By being sanctified and protected by the Father, the succeeding generations of disciples embody the glory and love of God in the world (vv22, 26). By being one with each other and one with the Son they embody the continuing life and power of Christ in the world. The unity or 'oneness' of the succeeding generations of disciples with the Son and the Father is therefore to demonstrate to the world

beyond the group of disciples that the Father did indeed send Christ (v21). So as well as being protected and sanctified in the world, they are sent into the world (vv18, 23).

13. We are therefore called to holiness and to be sent on mission in the world. Our unity is an essential part of that. When we are not one we are less than fully protected and sanctified, and our faith and mission are seriously compromised.
14. We do not, however, have to create this unity from nothing. All we have to do is accept the grace and unity that God is already giving us, and allow ourselves to be 'changed from glory into glory', transformed into what God would have us be. Our Covenant is a way of allowing ourselves to become more fully sanctified and more fully effective in mission by increasingly opening ourselves to those things together. **Jesus's prayer means that we cannot remain as disciples and friends of Jesus who are separated from each other in churches that have little or nothing to do with each other. We have not so much chosen each other as been given to each other, whether we like each other or not. If we are faithful we cannot choose to remain as we are, for Christ's mission is to gather into one the dispersed children of God.**

¹ Temple, William, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, 1st and 2nd Series, (London: MacMillan and Co, 1950), p 48.

BEHOLD THE SERVANTS OF THE LORD: ASSESSING TEN YEARS OF LIVING IN COVENANT

1. Ten years after the Anglican-Methodist Covenant was signed in November 2003, many people will be asking 'What progress has been made – what difference has the Covenant made to our two churches?'. The point has been made many times that before 2003 at local level, and in our dioceses, circuits and districts, Methodists and Anglicans were getting on with working well together in mission, sharing in each others' worship and each others' congregational life, without the need for a Covenant. In fact the Covenant affirmations and commitments, from the local perspective, seemed to be lagging behind what was already happening, and reflected more the need for the institutional relationship between our two churches at national and local levels, and the levels in between, to catch up with what is already happening on the ground in many places.
2. The General Synod and the Methodist Conference debated the first quinquennial report of the JIC, *Embracing the Covenant*,¹ in July 2008. These debates were marked by rather mixed emotions. There was a sense of frustration that there appeared to be little progress to report at the time. Many speakers spoke of their enthusiasm and passion for the unity of the Church, inspired by the inseparable Biblical imperatives of unity and mission, and by the hopes of Christian unity nurtured in ecumenical encounters, but in reading the report they were filled with a heaviness of heart, with the realisation that there was still a long way to go. One speaker in the General Synod spoke of the 'two ecumenical imperatives given historically to the Church of England: one, the fracture between Rome and Canterbury, and the other, our relationship with the people called Methodists, [first] within the Church of England, and then sadly separated, mostly because of our own fault.' So, although there didn't seem to be wild enthusiasm at the time, there is an imperative laid upon us to go on with commitment: 'There is an ecumenical virtue in slogging on, in being patient, in knowing that this is an imperative, whatever other issues may distract and be placed in front of either of our churches.'²
3. In 2003 following the signing of the Covenant, the Joint Implementation Commission was established as the servant of our churches, 'to carry forward the implementation of the commitments [of the Covenant]'. The General Synod and the Conference also agreed that the JIC should 'give priority in the next phase of our relationship to the question of the interchangeability of diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries, on the basis of the theological agreement set out in the report.'³
4. As the servant of the churches, the JIC has done work on areas where differences between our churches continue to present obstacles to our visible unity in worship and mission. We have made a number of proposals, for example concerning episcopacy and joint decision making, which have challenged our churches to make steps towards establishing unity in oversight and the interchangeability of ministries. We have also proposed some practical initiatives, to give some impetus to working together and to establishing structures of joint decision making and shared oversight at local and intermediate level.

¹ *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2008. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

² The Bishop of Guildford speaking in the debate on the Quinquennial Report of the JIC in the General Synod on Monday 7 July 2008.

³ *An Anglican Methodist Covenant, Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London 2001); paragraph 195 Recommendations. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

5. The reports of the JIC and links to download them are listed in the Annex to this chapter. In what follows, we review the commitments made by our churches in the Covenant and the work which has been done by the JIC in response, and assess how this work has been received.

Towards the Visible Unity of our Churches

6. With over 60 years of ecumenical dialogue behind us, the General Synod and the Methodist Conference will be under no illusion that reconciling the fracture between our two churches is an easy or straightforward task. Enthusiasm and passion for Christian unity are important and need to be inspired and nurtured, but on their own they are not sufficient. It seems that the two key concepts of the Covenant of mutual affirmation and mutual commitment are both essential in our Covenant journey: affirmation provides encouragement; commitment is necessary to tackle the cultural, theological and ecclesiological differences that still divide us as well as the institutional inertia that makes progress so slow. As we dig deeper into each others' identity, we find that we are so much alike, but also so very different. After another five years since *Embracing the Covenant*, we are still in that place of ecumenical hard graft: on one hand, a place of realism about what has and can be achieved; and on the other, a sense of getting down to brass tacks, of dealing with the detail and the implications of growing closer together, and of getting inside each others' skin.
7. But what of the vision of the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church, about which our two churches agree in the Covenant as our common goal? How far is that vision being nurtured by progress towards the visible unity of our two churches in worship and mission under the Covenant? *Embracing the Covenant* presented material on the goal of full visible unity and we have returned to this theme in the present report. The JIC recognises that the development of structures of joint working, decision making and oversight, which will enable our churches to grow towards visible unity, needs to happen gradually, but overall progress has been slow in the last ten years, with little sense of urgency. Although the General Synod and the Methodist Conference received the first quinquennial report of the JIC, and did so without questioning the goal of the visible unity of our two churches, we would challenge our churches to re-affirm this goal.

Towards Joint Decision Making

8. The spiritual, relational and institutional aspects of what it is to be the Church and therefore of visible unity are inter-related. We cannot have spiritual unity of the Church without having to deal with matters of visible unity in an institutional sense. The Covenant commits us to relational, spiritual and institutional binding. Therefore, in order to move towards a greater degree of visible unity, our churches must realise the institutional as well as the relational and spiritual implications of the Covenant. In 2008, *Embracing the Covenant* made this assessment:

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.....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.⁴

⁴ Page 35 of *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2008. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

9. Where progress has been made, for example in developing Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, as reported in the chapter of that name in this report, and in some collaborative projects at national and connexional level, as reported in the chapter entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#), there is strong evidence of real benefits to both our churches. However, the institutions of our churches display a distinct inertia, which continues to reflect the comments quoted from *Embracing the Covenant* above.
10. The analysis of the structures of decision making in our two churches at national, regional and local level in *Embracing the Covenant* revealed the asymmetry between them. The Methodist Church has a strong connexional authority in the Conference, compared with the more dispersed authority of the Church of England at national and diocesan level. Dioceses and districts have very different functions within the polity of our two churches: districts have some strategic functions, but in the final analysis most major decisions are made either by the Conference or by the circuits, which exercise a relatively high level authority on behalf of the Conference within the Connexion. Whereas in the Church of England, the diocese, gathered around the bishop as the chief minister, and the parish are the key bodies, while deanery synods have mainly consultative functions.
11. Furthermore, the ecclesial boundaries of our two churches are mostly incompatible. Few dioceses and districts are coterminous, and at a more local level, the picture is equally untidy. Deaneries do not generally overlap with circuits, although there are some exceptions. The JIC recommended in *Embracing the Covenant* that our churches should consult when boundary changes are being made. However, even where consultation has taken place (sadly, by no means in all cases), the re-organisation of boundaries has tended not to result in greater compatibility, a reflection, perhaps of the weakness of structures of joint strategic decision making.
12. The asymmetry of decision making bodies and the incompatibility of boundaries are two obstacles to developing structures of joint oversight and decision making at intermediate and local level. It is remarkable, in view of these obstacles, how much progress is being made in some dioceses, districts and circuits towards genuine partnership in the key areas of joint mission, the sharing of resources, including transforming buildings as centres for community, and the sharing of ministry and worship.
13. The proposals made by the Joint Implementation Commission in its interim report (2011) *Moving Forward in Covenant*⁵ for a form of Covenant Partnership in Extended Areas - i.e. areas comprising a number of parishes and of a number of circuits or parts of circuits - have fired imaginations both locally and nationally. Using the existing legal framework of our churches, this proposal is intended to stimulate strategic planning and joint mission in dioceses, districts and circuits. It has the potential to raise relationships between our two churches to a new and exciting level of partnership in mission. The proposal is re-presented in this report, in the light of further comment from the faith and order bodies of our churches, along with some examples of how it is being applied locally. The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission [MAPUM], a joint body of the Methodist Council and the Council for Christian Unity, will be continuing to gather experience of the implementation of this proposal, as well as to offer support to areas which are working towards applying the proposal.
14. There are key lessons to be learnt from this proposal for covenant partnerships in extended areas:
 - i. it connects with the aspirations and needs of people locally;

⁵ *Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim report of the JIC (Phase 2)* (Methodist Publishing: Peterborough) 2011. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

- ii. it is not so much a challenge to the churches, but is more to do with giving a solution to a problem – how to overcome some of the obstacles to closer working, without being over-bureaucratic;
 - iii. it therefore is not meant to bludgeon our churches or their leaders with the guilt of not doing enough, but aims to be energising, by offering a focus for imaginative thinking; and
 - iv. it emphasises what is possible now, in making a genuine difference to the effectiveness of mission.
15. A further significant feature of this proposal is that it is built on other key pieces of work of the JIC, for example concerning the difference between interchangeable and shared ministry,⁶ the sharing of lay ministries,⁷ the analysis of decision making and oversight bodies in each church⁸ and guidelines on the sharing of the eucharist.⁹ The detailed work of the JIC is offered as a tool for use by our churches, but it is only when a framework for the imaginative application of these tools is established that their full capabilities are revealed.
16. At national and connexional level, a further complicating factor, in addition to the different functions which the national and connexional institutions have in our two churches, is the fact that the Methodist Connexion has a presence in three nations, and therefore relates to the Anglican churches in Wales and Scotland as well as the Church of England. We explore the implications of this asymmetry in the relations between the Methodist Church and the Anglican Churches in Great Britain in the chapter entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#).
17. The JIC has also surveyed the forms of consultation, collaboration and decision making which take place between our churches at national/connexional level. The annual meeting between the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference demonstrates both the commitment of the Archbishops and successive Presidents and Vice-Presidents to the Covenant, and enables them to reflect together about issues that arise in and the direction of travel of the Covenant journey. In 2004, a survey of joint working between the divisions of the Archbishops' Council and of the departments of the Connexional Team provided a base line for us also to assess the progress which has taken place at a more institutional level. We report on the findings of a similar survey undertaken in the autumn of 2012 and early 2013 in the chapter entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#) which shows that there has indeed been a steady increase of shared activity in some areas, in which the Covenant provides a framework of expectation and reference in the relationships and joint working that are developing. However in other areas, for example theological education, the pattern is of decisions, at least initially, being made by each church with apparently little reference to the effect that these decisions will have on the Covenant partner, which could lead to a reduced level of shared activity, unless new patterns of joint working can be found.
18. The JIC recognises that our two churches are a long way from being able to establish structures of joint oversight and decision making at national and connexional level, to which we are committed

⁶ *In the Spirit of the Covenant – First Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2005, Chapter 7 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

⁷ *Living God's Covenant – Second Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2007, Chapter 4. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf

⁸ *Embracing the Covenant – Quinquennial Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2008, Chapter 4. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch4-250609.pdf

⁹ *In the Spirit of the Covenant – First Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2005, Chapter 5 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc; *Living God's Covenant – Second Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2007, Chapter 5 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf.

in the Covenant. As Churches in Covenant, we have hardly begun to work out the implications of the Lund Principle, formulated in the third World Faith and Order Conference in Lund in 1952:

A faith in the one Church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead. There are truths about the nature of God and His Church which will remain for ever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours Should not our churches ask themselves ... whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?¹⁰

19. Where our acting together goes further than consultation, the general pattern is of partnership working. That is a reflection of where we are in relation to each other, in terms of maintaining identity, controlling resources and taking responsibility for decision making. However, consultation and partnership working are costly in terms of the time and energy they absorb. Where it is possible to go further than partnership, to forming joint structures for decision making, joint action becomes the norm rather than an additional burden. The chapter in this report on [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#) explores these themes further.

Towards the Sharing of Ministry

20. The work of the JIC in developing our understanding of shared ministry, both lay and ordained, and our churches' eucharistic practice has given shape and impetus to commitments three and four of the Covenant to

commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.

commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.¹¹

21. In the light of the continuing challenges facing our churches in moving towards the interchangeability of ministry, the opportunities for shared ministry within current ecclesiological and legal frameworks is significant. Work on developing the understanding of the difference between interchangeable ministry and shared ministry, in *In the Spirit of the Covenant (2005)*, *Moving Forward in Covenant (2011)* and the present report has laid the theological foundations for the practical initiatives which the JIC, and its sister body, MAPUM, have promoted.
22. The sharing of lay ministry is particularly important. It is significant that local training of lay ministry is delivered jointly in a number of places. It would be unfortunate if this should decrease with the development of the Methodist learning network. Under the Church of England's Ecumenical Canons and Methodist Standing Orders, a high level of sharing of the ministries of Licensed Readers and Local Preachers may take place between our churches.¹² The JIC has not been able to gather statistics on the number of readers who are 'authorised to serve as a local preacher', or of local preachers who regularly perform duties in Church of England churches under Canon B 43, but the evidence from Diocesan and District Ecumenical Officers suggests that this is an important and growing area of sharing between our two churches.

¹⁰ World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order, *Faith and Order: the report of the Third World Conference at Lund, Sweden, August 15-18 1952* (SCM Press: London) 1952.

¹¹ *An Anglican Methodist Covenant: Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London) 2001; paragraph 194 Commitments. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

¹² *Living God's Covenant – Second Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2007, Chapter 4. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf

23. The Covenant Affirmations have provided the all important context in which the sharing of presbyteral ministries may take place. One of the most effective pieces of work produced by the JIC has been to show how Canon B 43 can be applied in the context of the Covenant,¹³ to allow for joint eucharistic worship at which a Methodist presbyter presides to take place on a regular basis in Church of England churches. In response to this work, fourteen diocesan bishops have indicated that they give general approval for invitations to be made by incumbents and PCCs for such joint services to take place. Shared eucharistic worship midweek and in some places as part of the Sunday pattern of worship is now well established in these dioceses. A number of these dioceses are now moving on to establish Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, building on this experience of shared worship and ministry.

Towards Unity in Oversight

24. A further theme running through the work of the JIC over ten years has been that of oversight, or episkope, in the various forms in which they are expressed in our two churches. The fundamental difference is that the Church of England is a church ordered within the framework of the historic episcopate, whereas the Methodist Church is ordered with the Methodist Conference as the corporate body exercising corporate episkope, thereby ensuring the continuity of the Methodist Church in the apostolic faith and mission.
25. The interim report *Moving Forward in Covenant* stated that ‘the Covenant is premised on agreement in principle about the historic episcopate’, and indeed the Common Statement concluded that

As we have studied recent theological statements of the two churches (Apostolicity and Succession, Bishops in Communion, Called to Love and Praise, Episkope and Episcopacy, Commitment to Mission and Unity), we have become convinced that there is substantial agreement in principle.¹⁴

26. However, its final comment that ‘nevertheless, further work remains to be done’ seems now to be an understatement of the position. The substantial amount of work done by the JIC on this issue has not yet taken us to a place where the churches can move forward. An immense, and as yet intractable, challenge remains for our churches to move incrementally beyond the mutual affirmation made in the Covenant, that

‘both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight is exercised within them in various forms’.¹⁵

27. As *Moving Forward in Covenant* suggested, the many Conference statements about the Methodist Church being willing to receive the historic episcopate from the wider Church were accepted by the Church of England at face value. On the basis of these statements and a common understanding of episkope the JIC made its proposal in *Embracing the Covenant*¹⁶ about the President of the Conference being ordained in the historic episcopate, as a way of Methodism receiving episcopacy

¹³ *In the Spirit of the Covenant – First Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2005, Appendix A. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

¹⁴ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London) 2001; paragraph 159. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

¹⁵ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London) 2001; paragraph 194 Affirmations. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

¹⁶ *Embracing the Covenant – Quinquennial Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2008, Chapter 5 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch5-250609.pdf

into its own system on its own terms. However, making progress with this proposal has proved very difficult.

28. In the General Synod debate in 2008, a number of speakers agreed that it would be wrong for the Church of England to force the issue of episcopacy with the Methodist Church. It is clear that in the last five years, the Methodist Church has resisted considering this issue. The reasons for the resistance of Methodism to the historic episcopate, which we consider in more depth in the chapter entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#) elsewhere in this report, are just as much a challenge to the Church of England as to the Methodist Church. Three main issues challenge both our churches in this respect.
- The first is that of women in positions of leadership. In the Methodist Church, all posts are open equally to women and men, as a matter of policy based on theological conviction. The failure, in the General Synod in November 2012, of the measure to introduce women in the episcopate, while not undermining in any way the Covenant, means that this is still a major obstacle to making progress towards unity in oversight, and highlights the challenge for the Church of England of accepting change in the model of episcopacy.
 - The second is the need for reciprocity in proposals that are made under the Covenant. If the Methodist Church is being asked to receive the historic episcopate into its own system, it has not been altogether clear what corresponding action is expected of the Church of England in return, if any.
 - The third is to identify some potential models for how our two Churches might relate to each other within a single framework of oversight. In the chapter [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) we suggest that the nature of the goal of visible unity will to some extent guide and influence which particular steps are taken as the churches develop their life and mission together, and so we discuss some theoretical ways in which the systems of the two churches can be connected together, whilst at the same time enabling our churches to grow further into visible unity.
29. In this report, we move the conversation to the point where we can see the issues around the historic episcopate within a wider framework of oversight and the wider context of growing into visible unity. In the latter context there are questions about the form which that visible unity may take and whether there are smaller incremental steps that can be made by each church which will bring our structures of oversight closer together, in order to prepare the way for the journey ahead.

Where are we after ten years?

30. Expectations for achieving the visible unity of two or more churches have often exceeded what can and has been actually accomplished. In 1964, with optimism running high, the British Council of Churches Nottingham Conference raised expectations:

to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union, in appropriate groupings such as nations, by a date which we dare to hope should not be later than Easter Day 1980.¹⁷

31. By 1982, after the failure of the Church of England - Methodist Unity Schemes (1969 and 1972) and of the English Churches Covenant (in 1982), these expectations had been replaced by realism. What were the expectations raised by the making of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant in 2003? The answer to this is quite complex. On one hand, the Covenant was seen by some in both churches as consolidating what was already happening to a great extent between our churches. For others it

¹⁷ *Unity Begins at Home: Report of the BCC Faith and Order Conference, Nottingham 1964* (London: SCM Press) 1964.

was seen as the rekindling of hope for real progress to be made towards removing the obstacles which so far had defied resolution. For others, there was the possibility of making progress in terms of working together, particularly at local level, and for some it appeared to be an 'emperor with no clothes'. Any assessment of where we are now will depend on understanding the range of expectations with which we entered the Covenant in 2003.

32. It needs to be noted that the Covenant affirmations themselves do not alter the legal and institutional relationship between our churches and in a sense represent the furthest we can go without making significant ecclesiological and legal changes, and without addressing key institutional challenges. At some stage the question will arise as to when and how those challenges are going to be identified and faced.
33. It also needs to be noted that the effectiveness of the Joint Implementation Commission's work and the progress of the Covenant is dependent on their reception by our churches at all levels. The JIC is not an executive body. While our reports have been well received in both the General Synod and the Methodist Conference, if our recommendations are to be effective they have to be championed, adopted and acted upon in other national/connexional bodies and in the life of our churches locally within dioceses, districts and circuits. This raises the question about who are the champions of the Covenant. As *Embracing the Covenant* remarked, '*the Covenant will only make a difference where it is taken up locally and where church leaders commit themselves to making it work.*'¹⁸ The JIC has provided the tools for others to take up and use in their own areas. But for this to happen, the encouragement and advocacy of church leaders are essential, as demonstrated in both positive and negative ways.
34. The covering paper of the Quinquennial Report to the 2008 Conference said that the JIC's terms of reference were to monitor and promote the implementation of the Covenant. It was made clear that its responsibility would be 'oversight of the work needed following on the signing of the Covenant'. It would not itself be responsible for doing the work but for identifying the work to be done, finding ways of doing it and ensuring that it was done. The JIC has done a lot of theoretical work, but has not focused on promotional work. We return to the question of the focus for the next phase of work in the concluding chapter, but ask now: Should this focus be less on the theory and more on the promotion of and advocacy for the Covenant?
35. For the many in our churches for whom the litmus test of progress in the Covenant is that we move nearer to the interchangeability of diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries, there will inevitably be disappointment at the lack of progress. The JIC was asked by the General Synod and the Methodist Conference to give priority to this area, and it has been faithful to this charge. However, despite the debates in General Synod and the Methodist Conference, neither of our churches has found it possible to engage seriously with the considerable amount of work that the JIC has done on episkope and episcopacy. It may be that the appropriate time for this may not be until the Church of England has resolved the issues about women in the episcopate, but the JIC challenges the deliberative bodies of our churches to engage creatively with this work, in dialogue with the JIC's successor in the next phase.
36. By contrast, in other areas, the Covenant has provided a context and a framework of expectation for a significant amount of shared ministry and worship, and of effective consultation and collaboration. It is difficult to say whether all of the initiatives summarised above, and presented in full in the successive reports of the JIC, have taken place as a consequence of the Covenant, or would have occurred anyway, but there is convincing evidence that at least some of these

¹⁸ *Embracing the Covenant – Quinquennial Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2008, Chapter 1, page 7. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch1-250609.pdf

initiatives could only have taken place because of the covenant. The following are four of the more important examples.

- i. Much of the joint working which has developed between our churches at national/connexional level has happened because the Covenant provides a framework of understanding and commitment: there is consistency across most of the national/connexional bodies.
 - ii. The greater experience of shared eucharistic worship and of shared lay and ordained ministry, has been made possible because of the context of agreement, affirmation and commitment created by the Covenant.
 - iii. The proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas relies on the Covenant affirmations and the mutual commitment to full visible unity: without the Covenant the proposal would not have been possible or acceptable.
 - iv. The commitment of our two churches to work jointly to encourage fresh expressions, for example through the Fresh Expressions National Team.
37. It needs to be said again, however, that there is so much more which can be done. Our churches have hardly begun to realise the institutional implications of the Covenant commitments, which are encapsulated in the Lund Principle. The processes of consultation and partnership working, where they happen, are too cumbersome, time consuming and long winded to meet the needs of making decisions and taking action in fast moving contexts. As long as our churches hold back from establishing joint decision making structures, the scope for working together at any level is going to be limited.
38. The JIC sees two broad categories of challenge ahead for our churches under the Covenant:
- i. to make incremental steps towards recognising and accepting each other and each others' ministries; and
 - ii. to build joint structures of oversight and decision making in order better to discern and resource joint mission and to shape our life and witness together.
39. The JIC recognises that much has yet to be done in removing obstacles to growing together, obstacles which are cultural, practical and ecclesiological, and others which are rooted in the inertia of institutions. In the following chapters of this report we aim to hold together the vision and imperative of the visible unity of our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church, with a measure of realism arising from the close encounter with each other, in which we cannot avoid differences. Our churches are being challenged to dig deep and to listen to what each church is saying to the other in the name of Christ, and in listening, be ready to receive, to take risks and so move forward together.

ANNEX: REPORTS OF THE JIC

ALL THE FOLLOWING REPORTS HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED BY METHODIST PUBLISHING HOUSE (PETERBOROUGH), AND CHURCH HOUSE PUBLISHING (LONDON).

The Common Statement (2001) and Reports of the JIC 2003 to 2011

An Anglican-Methodist Covenant:

Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England (2001)

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

In the Spirit of the Covenant: First Interim report of the JIC (2005)

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

Contents:

Introduction

Covers the role of the JIC and the presents the structure of the report.

The Covenant Relationship – Foundations and Values

Biblical and theological reflections on the meaning of the Covenant.

The Covenant Relationship - Developing a Lifestyle

A selective survey of how the Church of England and the Methodist Church were already relating in Covenant at local level

A guide to Good Covenanting

Drawing out some principles of good practice in a Covenant relationship

The Bread and Wine of Holy Communion

Differences in our two churches' practices concerning the eucharistic elements and the

method of disposing reverently of any consecrated elements that remain after communion.

The JIC commends some practices, already in the rules of churches that may bring us closer together in our celebration of the eucharist.

Presidency at the Eucharist:

An Anglican Perspective – Dr Martin Davie

A Methodist perspective – The Revd Dr Martin Wellings

These papers consider the question of non-presbyteral presidency.

Towards Interchangeability of Ordained Ministries

Considering the factors that would contribute to bringing about a fully interchangeable ordained ministry between our two churches in the future.

Conclusion

Appendix A: Applying Canon B 43 in the context of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant

This gives advice to bishops about making full use of canon B 43. In particular it points to sharing holy communion in parish churches at which Methodist Presbyters preside, and to bishops giving general permission for Methodist Presbyters and other ministers to preach and lead worship in parish churches.

Appendix B: The Membership of the Joint Implementation Commission

Living God's Covenant: Second Interim Report of the JIC (2007)

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf

Contents:

Introduction and Summary

Living God's Covenant: Practical Initiatives

Reports on the findings of 'The Covenant Roadshow' which visited ten regions of the

country, and explored some of the practical opportunities and obstacles of the Covenant.

The chapter also includes a report on the Fresh Expressions National Team, a national joint initiative of the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

Church State and Establishment

A response to the Methodist Conference report of 2004 'Church, State and Establishment', clarifying several issues in this rather controversial area. The Methodist report challenged the Church of England to do more to share with its ecumenical partners its special opportunities for mission, for witness and service, which it enjoys by virtue of its historic connection with the state.

Encouraging Lay Ministry

Sets out the regulations affecting two authorised lay ministries and shows how they can already be shared locally between our two churches. Although formal interchangeability of Readers and Local Preachers is not feasible at present, the JIC challenges our churches to take a further step in shared lay ministry by co-operating more closely in training.

The Eucharist: Two Theologies or One?

This chapter points to the main official sources for the doctrine of the Eucharist in each church, sets out some aspects of the common tradition – the tradition that John and Charles Wesley inherited from three centuries of the reformed English Church and summarises the current teaching of our churches. The JIC challenges our churches not to require from our covenant partner more than we require from our own communities.

Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the JIC (2008)

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

Contents:

[Foreword, Contents, Membership](#)

[Chapter 1: Taking Stock and Looking Ahead](#)

Presents issues which need to be tackled in the second quinquennium, including the relations between Anglicans and Methodists in the three nations.

[Chapter 2: The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek](#)

States the goal of full visible unity in the context of conversations between our churches and in the wider ecumenical context.

[Chapter 3: Researching and Resourcing Local Covenant Relationships](#)

Presents some proposals and principles for deepening our understanding of local relationships under the Covenant.

[Chapter 4: How Can Decision-Making Be Shared?](#)

Analyses the various decision making bodies of both churches at different levels, and reveals the opportunities for linking up, and the issue of asymmetry.

[Chapter 5: Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant](#)

Here, the JIC made its proposal about the President of the Conference being ordained in the historic episcopate, as a way of Methodism receiving episcopacy into its own system on its own terms. The proposal is based on the agreement on episcopacy expressed in a series of reports of the two churches.

[Chapter 6: 'Calvinism' and 'Arminianism'](#)

Two areas of doctrinal controversy where some theological tension remains were identified in the Common Statement. The first concerns such questions about divine grace which historically divided Arminians and Calvinists and continue to be very important for some Anglicans and Methodists. This Chapter on Calvinism and Arminianism in Embracing the Covenant considered these questions about the doctrines of grace in a missiological framework.

The second area of doctrinal tension identified in the Common Statement concerns the doctrine of Christian perfection, which is addressed in this 2013 Report.

[Appendix I](#) Resources

[Appendix II](#) Deaneries and Circuits: Partners in Mission

[Appendix III](#) Local Preachers and Readers: Sharing Two Ministries

Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report of the JIC in its second phase (2011)

www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

Contents:

Part 1: HOW FAR HAVE WE TRAVELLED IN COVENANT?

Reviews progress in the Covenant, reports on work on the diaconate, and re-presents the proposal, first made, that the Methodist Church takes episcopacy into its system through a President Bishop and suggests the possibility of a college of past-President Bishops. It also summarises the proposal for Covenant Partnerships in extended areas.

Part 2: A MAJOR DEVELOPMENT IN SHARED MINISTRY

This chapter sets out the initial proposal for Covenant Partnerships in extended areas, which is developed further in this report.

Appendix 1: CONFERRING ABOUT THE DIACONATE

The subject of the diaconate has been a continuous thread running through the work of the JIC. In the Interim Report, In the Spirit of the Covenant, the JIC recommended that our two churches considered issues around the diaconate together. In 2008, two day consultations were held, referred to in Embracing the Covenant, which led to a 24 hour conference on the diaconate at the Centre of the Methodist Diaconal Order in Birmingham. This is the report on this conference which has initiated an exchange of experience and reflection between distinctive deacons and others of both our churches. Despite differences of theological understanding and practice of ordination in our churches, this exchange has revealed convergence about the missional ministry of deacons in both churches, and in the experience of those who serve as Methodist deacons and distinctive deacons in the Church of England.

Appendix 2: METHODIST AND ANGLICAN RESPONSES TO THE JIC QUINQUENNIAL REPORT
EMBRACING THE COVENANT

The General Synod and the Methodist Conference asked for responses to Embracing the Covenant from Connexional bodies and synods, and from dioceses. This provides a summary of these responses.

Appendix 3: MEMBERSHIP OF THE JOINT IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION

JOINT CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING

1. The Covenant has committed our churches to develop ways of consulting with one another, and to enable joint decision making to happen wherever possible. There has been steady growth in joint consultation between our churches, both at national/connexional and at diocesan and district/circuit level. There are also some excellent joint projects and examples of collaboration. This work is founded on good relationships and mutual understanding of the way the institutions of our churches work.
2. The example and encouragement given by the senior leaders of our two churches has been a positive influence. The annual meeting between the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference continues to be a place where relationships are established, matters of concern can be aired, and where priorities for our churches can be shared and discerned. Similarly, the bi-annual meeting of senior staff of the two churches provides a model for all our contacts at staff level, setting the tone, and maintaining good channels of communication. Again, the good relationships of church leaders at regional and local level have encouraged some exciting joint initiatives.
3. The JIC wishes to hold up all the examples of the growth of joint consultation and working together as evidence that the Covenant is making a real difference. We are also aware that 'joint decision taking' has proved more difficult.
4. In this chapter, we consider joint consultation, collaboration and decision making at national and connexional level. We summarise evidence that the JIC has gathered and ask whether progress has been made. We make some recommendations about how this work might be encouraged further and challenge our churches to do more to make joint decision making a reality.

Joint Consultation, Collaboration and Decision Making at National and Connexional Level

5. One of the foundations of the Covenant was the collaboration and consultation between our two churches already taking place before the Covenant was signed. The Common Statement¹ acknowledged that Methodist and Church of England leaders have worked together in various ways for most of the past century, and that, prior to the making of the Covenant, there was considerable consultation and co-operation between them at the national and connexional level. In 2002:
 - a. the two Archbishops and the President and Vice-President of the Conference already had an annual meeting;
 - b. the General Synod and the Methodist Conference invited the Covenant partner to appoint an observer to attend sessions of the Synod and the Conference.
 - c. senior staff of the Archbishops' Council and the Connexional Team had begun to meet regularly;
 - d. the members of the central staffs of our two churches consulted over a wide range of work;
 - e. a number of committees, panels and working groups included a representative of the other church;

¹ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House, Church House Publishing) 2001 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

- f. in the field of education and ministerial training especially there were areas of work with a high level of collaboration.
6. The Covenant therefore committed our churches to strengthen what was already an important feature in the relations between them. Commitment number 2 required our churches to 'take steps to bring about closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service'; and Commitment number 5, 'to listen to each other's concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches'.
7. The Joint Implementation Commission was charged from the outset to carry forward the implementation of all the Commitments of the Covenant. In 2004, the JIC undertook a mapping exercise on the co-operation between the Archbishops' Council and the Methodist Connexional Team, which gave evidence of the general willingness of Methodist and Church of England staff to work together, and many examples of where this was already happening. The exercise also threw up some of the practical difficulties of working together, resulting from differences in structure and ethos, and also areas where differences over policy rule out a joint approach. The conclusion reached was that despite some of the practical and policy based difficulties, there was considerable potential for development.
8. A similar survey was undertaken in the autumn of 2012 and early 2013, as part of a wider audit of ecumenical work within the Archbishops' Council, and within the Connexional Team. In the Church of England a set of four questions was sent to each division of the Archbishops' Council and to other National Church Bodies, and this was followed up by an interview with the Director of each Division. In the Methodist Church a similar set of questions was sent to the heads of clusters in the Connexional Team requesting written answers. We present here a summary of the main findings of the exercise.

Unity in Mission

9. The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM) was set up in July 2009 through the merger of the Local Unity Panel of the Council for Christian Unity and the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development of the Methodist Church. It is co-chaired by a bishop and a district chair and has an equal number of Methodist and Anglican members. Observer participants from the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptist Union and the United Reformed Church are also an integral part of the Panel. It reports to the Council for Christian Unity and the Methodist Council and aims to promote the working together of our two churches in mission under the Covenant, and to share insights, address issues, and develop resources in local unity in mission for both churches. MAPUM works in a totally integrated way making joint decisions and has worked with the JIC to develop new thinking and to encourage new initiatives for implementing the Covenant particularly at diocesan and district/circuit level and in parishes and local churches.
10. One of MAPUM's projects has been to develop the proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, first presented in *Moving Forward in Covenant* (2011). The chapter entitled [*Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas*](#) in this report gives an account of significant progress made in the last two years in a number of areas in the country towards a greater degree of collaboration, as dioceses and districts have responded to this proposal. The evidence from these areas - Cumbria, Leeds, Sheffield, North Nottinghamshire, Leatherhead and Dorking, Durham, Cornwall, Suffolk and elsewhere - is that the proposal has provided a much needed impetus for further progress. The initiative for progress in these areas has come from within the areas themselves. In addition, support and encouragement has also come through MAPUM in various ways:

- from the Church of England's National Ecumenical Officer for England and the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer (co-secretaries of MAPUM);
 - from Bishop David Hawtin (consultant to the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission) who with the encouragement of the JIC has been developing the role of 'Covenant Ally'; and
 - through cross fertilisation of ideas and the sharing of experience between these areas.
11. It is noticeable that outside support, encouragement and sharing is most welcome when real opportunities open up in a particular area for the development of collaboration. When church leaders begin to identify specific areas of work that they can do together, it makes more sense for them to seek outside guidance and support for what they want to do. This is particularly the case in the growing number of areas which are seriously considering forming Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas. Although there is generally a good level of awareness of sources of information and advice, in some cases approaching national or connexional bodies can be complex and frustratingly slow. Thus, the help from such bodies as MAPUM and the JIC itself comes through a most circuitous route. This suggests there needs to be a more pro-active role for and greater visibility of MAPUM in promoting and encouraging these initiatives.
12. An important resource for promoting initiatives at regional and local level is the network of Diocesan and District Ecumenical Officers. However, we need to be aware that, particularly when resources are heavily constrained, there are severe limits on the amount of time and energy which they can devote to this work. In addition, there is a need for continuing training and equipping of all ecumenical officers, not only in the developing theory, but also in terms of enabling the process of consultation and shared thinking which is so important to this work. The seriousness of the commitment of our two churches to the Covenant will in part be demonstrated by our willingness to resource the work which making a reality of the Covenant entails.
13. The basis for developing collaboration in the context of the Covenant is the good relationships which grow over many years at every level of church life. There are some good news stories where this approach is paying dividends. By contrast, there is a risk that, in aiming to promote and encourage further progress we can slip into the language of obligation. This can easily feed feelings of guilt, to which there is usually a negative response. The tone of voice in which people are approached is thus crucial. Rather than a heavy handed approach which makes a burden of working together, it is better to cultivate a lightness of touch by offering support and encouragement so that working together is a positive and joyful experience.

Fresh Expressions

14. From its inception in 2004, the Fresh Expressions organisation has been a partnership between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. A range of other partners has joined the organisation as this work has developed. The Fresh Expressions organisation has promoted Fresh Expressions through Vision Days and the Mission Shaped Ministry Course, which have been delivered regionally and locally, and through the Fresh Expressions website. The organisation has also helped to resource Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Teams, which include a range of regional partners. After 2014, new funding arrangements will inevitably have an impact on these relationships. It is likely that there will be a greater emphasis in both the Church of England and the Methodist Church on how fresh expressions can be embedded within the mixed economy of both churches.

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

15. One of the outcomes of the fresh expressions movement has been the development of pioneer ministry. In the Church of England, the training for lay pioneer ministry is carried out through the Church Army and in an increasing number of dioceses. Training for ordained pioneer ministry is provided by a number of theological colleges and non residential courses. VentureFX is the Methodist Church's scheme to promote and encourage pioneer mission and to train pioneer ministers. This is a particular area of work where there are blurred boundaries, particularly at local level, and in the resources and aims of training for this ministry.
16. One particular example of this is in the Northampton Methodist District and the Diocese of Leicester which, following years of partnership in the Gospel to support Fresh Expressions of Church, have formalised a scheme to jointly commission/license Pioneers (non-ordained, normally volunteer, leaders of new forms of church). The scheme, which is an extension of what has been in place in the Diocese for the past two years, means that discernment, training and on-going support and accountability offered to Pioneers will now be provided ecumenically across the county and city. This new development builds on the jointly organised training provided through the Mission Shaped Ministry course – a national Fresh Expressions course, which is run locally with other ecumenical partners, and which has seen almost 200 graduates in Leicestershire over recent years. As well as helping them discern their calling, and training, the new scheme also provides a structure for on-going development and accountability, shared learning to reinforce the universal calling of Christians to be part of the wider Body of Christ, and more customised learning and reflection through, for example, one to one coaching. Pioneers also receive an annual training allowance to help them develop discipleship and leadership in ways specific to their calling.
17. The first candidates to be jointly licensed and commissioned (licensed by the Bishop and commissioned by the District and Circuit) are the leaders of Reside, a Fresh Expression of Church in Loughborough led by a Methodist and Anglican working in partnership. At the annual Called Together service, where all licensed, authorised ministries in the Diocese are commissioned, each will receive the Bishop's license followed by a local Methodist service of commissioning.²
18. The fresh expressions movement has raised ecclesiological issues which have been the subject of a joint Anglican-Methodist Report, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, as described in paragraph 21 below.

Faith and Order

19. The Faith and Order Commission, which acts as a theological and ecclesiological resource for the Church of England, invites a Methodist representative to attend its meetings. There is a reciprocal arrangement with the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church, which is accountable to the Conference and which offers theological scrutiny of the acts of the Conference and of the work of the Connexional Team and others on the Conference's behalf; and at the same time offers theological consultation for work being conducted throughout the Connexion. The participation of Methodist and Anglican representatives goes further and deeper than mutual observership. There is an embedded engagement, through the representation of the Covenant partner on each Faith and Order body, which is instrumental in sharpening the theological and ecclesiological work, as well as leading to greater understanding.

² For more information see www.leicester.anglican.org/news/details/methodists-and-anglicans-unite-to-support-pioneers

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

20. The Faith and Order Commission and the Faith and Order Committee have also inaugurated an annual joint meeting with a joint agenda, two of which have now taken place. The purpose of the joint meeting is to share current work and discuss ideas, to consider in detail joint faith and order work, and to explore areas of joint theological working. Some of the material produced by the JIC in the last quinquennium has benefitted by discussion at these meetings.
21. A notable area of collaborative faith and order work has been around the ecclesiology of fresh expressions. The Methodist Faith and Order Committee began to discuss ecclesiological issues of fresh expressions in 2007. In the light of the Covenant, and the existing co-operation between Anglicans and Methodists in the Fresh Expressions initiative, it was felt that further study of these issues should be done jointly. The two faith and order bodies therefore agreed to establish a working party on the ecclesiology of fresh expressions, which began its work in 2009. The joint working party produced the report *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*³ which was debated at both the Methodist Conference and the General Synod in July 2012. The report sought to crystallise some of the major questions about the ecclesiology of the mission-shaped Church and to provide pointers as to how we may grapple creatively with them. It was warmly welcomed in both debates.

Public Issues and Affairs

22. There is huge potential for working together in the area of public issues and affairs, although the nature and sensitivity of this work requires a subtle and carefully nuanced approach. One channel of addressing public issues for the Methodist Church is the Joint Public Issues Team, which is a joint body of the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union. It has been notable for producing hard hitting reports on issues around peace, social justice, poverty, the environment and politics and elections.⁴ It does its work on behalf of the relevant governance and oversight bodies of the three Churches, and in accordance with their statements and principles. Thus, for example, it is the Methodist Conference that is the body that shapes and adopts policies on public issues for the Methodist Church. Either or both the President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference usually attend the Trades Union Congress, with whom the Methodist Church has historic links. The Public Issues Team usually accompanies the President and/or the Vice-President, along with representatives of the Salvation Army, to the political party Conferences.
23. For the Church of England, the Mission and Public Affairs division of the Archbishops' Council supports portfolios in marriage and family life, foreign affairs, economics and social affairs, home affairs and criminal justice, race and equality, rural communities, and the environment. The Parliamentary Unit supports and advises the Lords Spiritual and liaises with peers and MPs.
24. The potential for joint working in these areas is complicated first by the different sets of associations within which our churches operate within wider society, and second by the fact that although there is broad agreement over a range of policy issues, there are significant areas where our churches differ in policy. However, both these factors can be turned to advantage. Our two churches, having different associations within society, have different perspectives which have the potential to complement one another. Neither church has the full picture. The close working between the staff of our churches ensures that each church gets a fuller picture than would be possible alone. This can be further enhanced by taking opportunities for joint working between

³ *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*: Report of an Anglican – Methodist Working Party (Church House Publishing) 2012

⁴ Further details of the work of the Joint Public Issues Team are available here: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/ It includes the publication in 2013 together with the Church of Scotland of the report "The Lies We Tell Ourselves: Ending Comfortable Myths About Poverty",

our governance bodies, particularly as the different roles of the national bodies of our churches concerned with public affairs can enable more effective advocacy. Our different bodies can say different things in the contexts in which they operate. It is not always possible to agree on policy, but where there is sufficient agreement, similar messages heard from different voices may be a strength. Over some issues, the churches can complement each others' voices. On others, one church may take the lead on behalf of others. The establishment of the Church of England, and the privileged position that affords within Parliament is a significant difference between our churches. This was considered in depth in [Living God's Covenant \(2007\)](#), which recommended the following actions.

- The Church of England should do more to share the particular 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.
 - A Methodist representative should be involved in the deliberations of the Diocesan Vacancy in See Committee.
 - 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.
 - 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.⁵
25. The complementariness of our churches in the public square requires a significant level of trust between us, which is gained through good relations and communications. This is not a substitute for joint working but a good basis for developing it, particularly as in the public square that is often the most effective approach. The work on rural communities is one area where working jointly between the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church has been particularly effective and important, through the Arthur Rank Centre at the National Agricultural Centre in Warwickshire.⁶
26. The Director of Mission and Public Affairs Division of the Archbishops' Council and the Team Leader and Policy Adviser of the Joint Public Issues Team (Methodist/United Reformed/Baptist) meet two or three times a year to update each other on their teams' activities. This contact is prompted partly by the desire to model the Covenant relationship, and is an important channel for explaining each others' position on a range of public issues. All other staff in the two teams also work with opposite numbers.

Theological Education

27. Theological Education has been an important area for sharing. In 2004, there were significant areas of well established joint working between the Church of England and the Methodist Church and other partners in this area, such as Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, the Cambridge Federation and the Wesley Study Centre and Cranmer Hall in St John's College Durham. Many of the non residential courses included students from both traditions. The Hind process setting up

⁵ *Living God's Covenant – Second Interim Report* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough) 2007 Chapter 3, p 39 Summary of Recommendations. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf

⁶ Further details on the Arthur Rank Centre are available from: www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/about-arc/what-we-do

Regional Training Partnerships was also in full swing. In the intervening period several factors have shaped the relationship between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in theological education.

28. The first factor is the way the Hind process has worked out. From an early stage the Methodist Church (and other partners) committed itself to participating fully in the development of Regional Training Partnerships, and a lot of work was put in to make the process work. However, during the process of implementation decisions were sometimes made locally or regionally which moved away from the original proposals. The changes had serious repercussions on the Methodist involvement in some of the partnerships and a sense of being let down. There has consequently been a number of frustrations about the time absorbed and the lack of effectiveness of the process as whole.
29. The second factor is that the Church of England and the Methodist Church, with the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union, have now agreed to work towards the launch of a common suite of higher education awards for ministerial education in September 2014. The awards will be a vehicle for ordination training as well as offering provision for lay ministries and discipleship training. The working group steering this process is chaired by the Bishop of Chichester, and includes Methodist representatives. The process was initiated by the Church of England, gaining general support in the General Synod, before other churches were invited to participate. The awards will be developed and offered in partnership with Durham University, which will enter a contract with the Archbishops' Council on behalf of partner churches. In order to consolidate the participation of the Methodist Church, the contract includes reference to the Methodist Church. The membership of the Management Board has also been strengthened by including a seat for a representative of the Methodist Church.
30. The third factor is the Methodist Fruitful Field process, which was approved by the Methodist Conference in July 2012. The Methodist Church is working towards establishing a learning network with two hubs, one at the Queen's Foundation, and the other at Cliff College, around which all the ordination and lay training of the Methodist Church will be organised. The effect of this development will be that the Methodist Church will withdraw from the present arrangements in Durham between Cranmer Hall and the Wesley Study Centre and the Cambridge Federation. The non residential courses will also be affected since Methodist students will be under the direction of the learning network.
31. In the JIC's own response to the Fruitful Field consultation document in 2012, we suggested that:

In the light of the congruence of interests in the above, the JIC profoundly hopes that the Fruitful Field process will create an opportunity to strengthen the Covenant by further bringing together our training of lay people, and our training of ordained ministers.

So far as the latter are concerned, the three institutions where full-time residential training for ordination in the Methodist Church is currently provided are all intimately related, in different ways, to similar training in the Church of England, and many of those engaged in part-time training for ordination in the Methodist Church do so alongside those similarly training for ordination in the Church of England. Whatever decisions are made in due course about how resources for such training, formation and learning are provided connexionally and delivered locally by the Methodist Church, they should be such as will not weaken but rather strengthen and build on the good practice and experience already gained and so enhance this interaction and collaboration with the Church of England (and similarly with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales).

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

32. The opportunities for future collaboration have yet to emerge, but we encourage our two churches to work creatively to ensure that the ministers in training of our two churches will have opportunities to learn from each other and our two traditions in order to strengthen mutual understanding and the desire for unity.
33. Each of these factors illustrate, in different ways, the challenge of how one partner of the Covenant initiates a review of an area which will have a significant effect on the other, and raises the issue at which point of the process should consultation begin. With the Fruitful Field project consultation with the Church of England did not begin until after the consultation document was published. It invited responses from a wide range of interested parties, including those within the Church of England. The difficulty of the whole process was compounded by the fact that there are so many interested parties and that the proposals remain controversial within the Methodist Church. Involving the Covenant partner at an earlier stage would inevitably identify the Covenant partner, in this case the Church of England, with the proposals, and draw it in to the controversy. In these situations, it is important to nurture the trust between the Covenant partners. Bringing these issues to the confidential joint meetings between senior staff and of the leaders of our churches may be one way of keeping each other informed in a way that does not fuel the tensions within our churches, while maintaining the flow of information.

Education

34. At national level collaboration continues strong, with the Chief Education Officer for the Church of England sitting as a member of and contributing to the Methodist Education Commission which reported to Conference in 2012. Regular meetings between the Head of the Discipleship and Ministries Cluster and the Chief Education Officer maintain the flow of information and the joint development of policy. The Head of Cluster is a co-opted member of the Board of Education. National staff of both churches work together over schools issues, sharing documentation and relating to the Department for Education collectively over faith based schools.
35. There is continued collaboration over support for chaplains in universities and further education colleges, where both churches offer specialist support at national and regional level; and in informal education work.
36. The Report *Going on Growing* was published in 2012, a joint initiative to look at the learning and development needs of older people in the church. The report was written by the Anglican adult education / discipleship officer. The Methodist Council is encouraging the Connexional Team to follow up the report by facilitating discipleship in older age and to produce associated learning resources.
37. During 2012 / 2013 the denominational inspection material has been substantially revised to reflect changes in the Ofsted regime. Among the changes has been a much more explicit acknowledgement of the Methodist heritage in both Methodist and joint Church of England/Methodist schools. The inspection process is now called the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) in all documentation. The Methodist Church has taken back the administration of inspection for all Methodist schools, and in some cases for joint schools as well.
38. Support for schools is delivered at diocesan/district level with Methodist schools usually being included in diocesan service agreements, giving access to courses and other forms of support.

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

39. Following the Dearing Report in 2001 the Methodist Church and the Church of England have worked closely together to promote new church schools, where possible, establishing joint Methodist-Church of England schools. By 2004, a number of joint schools had been agreed and planned, but not yet opened. In 2012, this process had continued and there is now a growing number of joint Methodist-Church of England schools, particularly in areas of new housing. There are now 39 joint Anglican / Methodist schools (19 voluntary aided primary, 19 voluntary controlled primary and one convertor academy). Predominantly the schools are found in the South West and the North West with a scattering in other parts of the country⁷. With the publication of the Chadwick Review – *The Church School of the Future*⁸, which affirms that partnership working is at the heart of successful work with church schools, the Education Division and the National Society have highlighted their commitment to work with ecumenical partners, especially the Methodist Church, in the establishment of new church schools.

Research and Statistics

40. The Research section of the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church and the Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council have been working closely together in partnership since 1993. Since 2003 this partnership has included joint research oversight groups, with joint membership and chairing, around the following themes:
- Statistical gatherers
 - Ecumenical research panel (in development)
 - Fresh Expressions Research steering group
 - Ministerial research oversight group
41. These groups are partnerships of the Research section of the Connexional Team of the Methodist Church (which deals with Statistics for Mission) and the Ministry Division and Research and Statistics of the Archbishops' Council, together with the Fresh Expressions National Team. The partnership now also includes some contractual arrangement for staff working.

Ethical Investment

42. In 2012 the Church of England Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) and the Methodist Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) entered into an arrangement of mutual observership.⁹ Although the aims of the two groups are not wholly equivalent, there is a significant overlap in the purpose of their work within each of the churches. The EIAG supports the Church of England's national investing bodies on ethical investment - the Church Commissioners, the Church of England Pensions Board and the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England funds managed by CCLA. The JACEI provides advice on and exercises scrutiny over the management of funds by the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church. In our conversations with the two bodies, it is evident that they see the development of mutual observership as the establishment of a more formal channel for the communication and

⁷ The total number of Anglican schools: *circa* 4,800; Total number Methodist schools: 37

⁸ *The Church School of the Future – Review*, Education Division of the Archbishops' Council 2012. [www.churchofengland.org/media/1418393/the%20church%20school%20of%20the%20future%20review%20-%20march%202012\[1\].pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1418393/the%20church%20school%20of%20the%20future%20review%20-%20march%202012[1].pdf)

⁹ See the EIAG Annual Report 2011-2012, page 3. www.churchofengland.org/media/1484182/eiag%20annual%20review%202012.pdf

Joint Consultation and Decision Making

co-operation which already existed, but do not have current expectations of joint policies or a united public profile.

Pensions and Retirement Housing for ministers/clergy

43. There is significant contact between the officers of the Church of England Pension Fund and the Methodist Church Pension Scheme. This has been focussed around the challenges of re-organisation, the exchange of ideas and information regarding changes to pension law, such as ill-health provisions, and consultation about issues around clergy pensions. This is particularly useful when systems are changing.
44. The Church of England and the Methodist Church offer a similar scheme regarding clergy/ministers retirement housing. As both schemes are going through changes, sharing information, benchmarking, and good practice is especially important. The Church of England Housing team and the Methodist Ministers Housing Society are working together to set up a forum of faith-based housing providers, which will meet every six months.

Safeguarding

45. Our two churches have collaborated over safeguarding since the Children Act of 1989. Following the 2004 review of joint working at national level between our two churches, which was instigated by the JIC, the decision was made to explore the possibility of making a joint appointment of a Safeguarding Officer for the Methodist Church and the Church of England along with a supporting joint post. An appointment was subsequently made in 2006 to develop oversight of national policy, training and casework. The Church of England subsequently withdrew funding from the second joint post in 2009/2010.
46. The shared work of the National Adviser is supported by the Joint Safeguarding Liaison Group. This is an effective way of working together to which both churches are committed long-term. It predates the JIC, but has been strengthened by the commitment that the Covenant implies. A review of this joint working arrangement in 2008 both confirmed support for continuing the appointment and led to the formation of joint committee structures in order to streamline the work and make the servicing and management of the committees more efficient. The Joint Safeguarding Liaison Group, with Methodist and Anglican co-chairs, now deals with the separate but complementary areas of Safeguarding concern - Children and Young People and Adults who are or may be vulnerable - on behalf of both denominations together. The work of this group is supported by legal officers of both our churches as well as the Safeguarding officer. The two churches launched their latest national safeguarding policies jointly at Church House Westminster in 2011.
47. The Methodist Church deals with particular cases on a connexional basis in three nations, whereas the Church of England operates at diocesan level. Because of this structural asymmetry between our two churches, the safeguarding officer's role in the Methodist Church is quite distinct from that in the Church of England.

Some areas of good practice

Mutual Observership on Church of England and Methodist Church Bodies

48. In *Embracing the Covenant*¹⁰, the JIC suggested that consultation will be facilitated by inviting observers to serve on appropriate bodies in each other's structures. Since its inception in 1990 (in other words, before the Covenant was made) the Council for Christian Unity has invited partner churches, including the Methodist Church, to appoint ecumenical observers. The Board of Education's Discipleship Strategy Seminar and the Children's Work Adviser Executive also have Methodist representation.
49. Having an observer from our Covenant partner on a panel, committee or working group is a more formal arrangement than the contacts between staff. It is therefore a more visible sign of our commitment to working together, and of our willingness to listen to each others' concerns and to understand each other. For this to work properly, of course, observers must be empowered with the knowledge of what is happening in the relevant bodies of their own churches, and must be able to report back to those bodies what is happening in the partner church. In that way mutual observership is more than another form of communication; it is a way in which Covenant partners can assist each other in developing ideas and strategy, by bringing a different perspective into view. While this falls a long way short of making decisions together, as the JIC pointed out in *Embracing the Covenant* mutual observership is a tool for each to make better decisions. The JIC commends this practice for further exploration by a wider range of committees, panels and working groups.

Staff Relationships

50. Much of the contact between staff of the national bodies of the Church of England and the Methodist Church takes place within the context of the national networks and multilateral bodies. Some of these are served by the ecumenical instruments – Churches Together in England (CTE) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) There are other multilateral groups formed around specific areas of work, such as the Churches' Legislation Advisory Service, formerly known as the Churches Main Committee, the RADAR group, which brings together the officers of the main denominations and churches who are responsible for relations with Parliament and public affairs, the Church Investors Group (CIG) for church investors in Britain and Ireland. The churches also work together multilaterally in partnership with government departments and statutory bodies, for example through the English Heritage Places of Worship Forum.
51. Both the Church of England and the Methodist Church are key players in these wider ecumenical networks and bodies. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the Anglican-Methodist Covenant is not an exclusive relationship, but is formed and worked out in practice within this wider context.
52. Having noted the wider ecumenical context, it is the case that staff of the Archbishops' Council and in the Methodist Connexional Team share a willingness to work particularly, although not exclusively, with each other. In nearly all areas of work, the staff of our churches are in regular contact with each other. Sharing information, ideas and issues and seeking areas of collaboration are increasingly the norm.

¹⁰*Embracing the Covenant* (2008) Chapter 4 How can Decision-Making be Shared? www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch4-250609.pdf

Training and Development

53. Some training and development of diocesan and district staff, or those involved in 'sector' ministries takes place multilaterally at national/connexional level. For example, all training and development events for further and higher education chaplains, including the main residential conferences for serving chaplains, and training for new chaplains in post and further education development officers are organized in this way. The training for new ecumenical officers in England and Wales is facilitated by the Field Officer of Churches Together in England assisted by the Faith, Order and Witness Officer of Cytûn, the Ecumenical Instrument for Wales.
54. There are, in addition, some areas where the Church of England and the Methodist Church provide opportunities for officers to attend each others' conferences. For example, Methodist mission enablers have been invited for the last three years to attend the Annual Missioners' Conference and Methodist adult education officers are invited to attend the annual Adult Education Conference. The Anglican and Methodist Ecumenical Officers have a jointly organised annual consultation which sometimes includes ecumenical officers of other partner churches.
55. Where there is sufficient common ground between the roles of Methodist and Church of England officers the opportunities for joint training and development are something well worth exploring. The Methodist Anglican Ecumenical Officers Consultation is greatly enriched by this approach, and the participation of Methodist mission enablers in the Missioners Conference has led to the strengthening of relationships at diocesan and district level. There are practical advantages too, in terms of sharing costs, and drawing on a wider pool of expertise.

Does the Covenant make a difference?

56. Although it is difficult to say where we would be without a Covenant in our joint consultation and working at national/connexional level, nevertheless from the evidence we have gathered, progress has been made from the base line established in 2004. In the interviews we conducted with Directors of Divisions of the Archbishops' Council, we noted three things. First, there is a good deal of joint consultation and joint working taking place. Second that there was understandable realism about the extent of collaboration that is possible. And third, there is a recognition that the Covenant provides a framework of expectation and reference in the relationships that are developing. We believe we can therefore look forward to more joint consultation and joint working as those relationships develop.
57. It is apparent that the areas of work where collaboration is taking place nationally and connexionally have grown since the Covenant was established. The JIC commends partnership working within the context of the Covenant, not only as a stepping stone to greater unity, but as an important strategy in much of our two churches' engagement with society, in mission and in building up the ministry of our churches.
58. Whilst good consultation requires good processes, based on mutual understanding of how each others' institutions work, it does in itself not challenge us to move forward to make institutional changes. While the JIC supports and commends consultation and collaboration, we also recognise that it can put a greater burden on staff, such as additional layers of meetings. Furthermore, the need for decisions to be made by the partners separately can prolong the length of the process. Some of these extra burdens could be avoided if our churches could find the will and the energy for developing joint structures of decision making, which would take responsibility for joint working.

59. Commitment number 6 in the Covenant Statement, committed our churches '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.' The JIC is disappointed that in this area of developing structures for joint decision making very little progress can be seen, due not only to the institutional inertia mentioned in previous reports, but also an apparent resistance in some quarters to making these steps. Yet it is in those few areas where progress has been made, for example in Safeguarding, the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission, the development of joint schools, Faith and Order, the common awards for theological education, that our churches are being most faithful to the vision for the Covenant.

Towards Joint Decision Making

60. We conclude, in the light of the mapping exercise of the relations between our two churches' national and connexional institutions, and from the evidence available from Dioceses and Districts, especially in the progress being made to establish Covenant Partnership in Extended Areas, that substantial communication, consultation and an increasing amount of collaboration is taking place between our churches. The JIC commends this work, but recognises that it often involves a good deal of duplication of effort. Furthermore, where our churches are acting together at present, the predominant model is partnership working, which is a reflection of where we are in relation to each other, in terms of maintaining identity, controlling resources and taking responsibility for decision making. Partnership working is, however, costly in terms of the time and energy they absorb.

61. So much of this work relies on good relationships between the leaders, staff and other representatives of our churches, which not only places a heavy burden of expectation and time commitment on them, but is also dependent on the personal commitment they bring. The JIC suggests that consultation and collaboration needs to be more institutionalised between our churches, so that processes and channels of communication can be established which will support the relationships of church leaders and staff. To this end we make the three specific recommendations:

- that working with counterparts in the Covenant partner should be written into staff job descriptions;
- that the terms of reference of committees should be amended to include consulting and possibly collaborating with the appropriate body in our Covenant partner;
- that in the work of boards, committees and panels, mutual observership should be the norm, since it is the most effective and efficient way of consulting with each other.

The key challenge here is to forge links between the relevant authorities of each church, even if they are at different levels. These measures would not replace the need for good relationships but, we contend, would help to consolidate and support them.

62. The narrative set out in *Embracing the Covenant* helped to raise awareness and understanding of where authority lies in each of our Churches. This is vitally important in shaping expectations of what can be delivered in terms of shared decision making. Although consultation and even collaboration do not of themselves require there to be shared decision-making (ie there can be useful consultation that leads to the various bodies making decisions independently), there cannot be effective decision-making without there first being consultation. What is apparent is that effective consultation requires *good leadership* within each church, *good relationships* between the churches and their leaders, and *a good mutual understanding* of each other's structures and culture.

63. The JIC challenges our churches in Covenant to ask, at an early stage, of any work that is being considered, whether it would be better done together rather than separately. In discerning whether to work together, it is important to recognise that neither of our churches has the full picture and we can be helped by each other to deeper discernment and clearer vision of our churches' priorities for mission and witness. The JIC therefore suggests that in coming to a decision about possible working together, the bodies of our churches take account of the following questions:
- If this is not a matter 'in which deep differences compel us to act separately', then why should we 'not act together'? [the Lund Principle, formulated in the Third World Faith and Order Conference in Lund in 1952¹¹]
 - Will this work further the mission of the Kingdom?
 - Will what is being proposed further the visible unity of the Church?
64. The JIC encourages our churches to respond to the challenge of the Lund Principle in the key area of administration and decision making. The consultation and collaboration which already takes place between our churches falls short of the joint decision making to which we committed to developing in Commitment 6 of the Covenant Statement. Applying the Lund Principle to our structures of administration and decision making, along with the criteria for furthering the visible unity of the Church and the mission of the kingdom, will be a big challenge. The really difficult step, however, will be to develop processes and structures of joint decision-making which may require one or other of the churches to make changes so that the practical structures of each church may be more closely aligned.
65. In the next phase of implementing the Covenant, the JIC sees a need for a more pro-active approach in promoting and encouraging consultation and collaboration at both national and connexional and at diocesan and district/circuit levels. The work of MAPUM has already demonstrated that there is a need and desire for appropriate and contextually sensitive support from beyond the areas within dioceses and districts where collaboration is growing. Greater visibility and recognition of this key group, which is itself a model of joint working, would enhance its work in this area.
66. The JIC has not so far engaged in development work with the national and connexional institutions of our churches. We propose that in the next phase it is time to promote the Covenant in our national and connexional institutions, to encourage better consultation, the discernment of joint working and the development of structures for joint decision-making.

¹¹ World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order *Faith and Order: the report of the Third World Conference at Lund, Sweden, August 15-18, 1952* (SCM Press: London) 1952

COVENANT PARTNERSHIPS IN EXTENDED AREAS

1. The interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission, *Moving Forward in Covenant*¹, proposed a new type of covenant partnership in areas involving areas of a diocese or dioceses comprising several parishes on the one hand, and local churches within one or more circuits and districts on the other. Following the debates in the General Synod and the Methodist Conference in July 2011, the proposal has been considered by the Church of England Faith and Order Commission and by the Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee. Both these bodies have challenged us to address a range of questions which the proposal has raised concerning the distinction between interchangeable and shared ministry, and concerning the relationship between pragmatic working together at local level and the search for visible unity of our two churches. The proposal has also been discussed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Committee for Unity Faith and Order (IASCUFO)², whose response to the proposal has been positive and encouraging in its further development.
2. Since the debates in 2011, the proposal has been considered in a number of different contexts. Notably, the Diocese of Carlisle and the Cumbria District, and the Leeds and Ripon Diocese and the Leeds District have made significant progress towards wider geographical partnership in mission along the lines of the proposal. Other areas, including Sheffield, North Nottinghamshire, County Durham, Dorking and Leatherhead, Cornwall and Suffolk are in various stages of discerning possibilities and implementing a scheme in their own area.

¹ *Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report of the JIC (Phase 2)*, (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough, Church House Publishing: London) 2011. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

² The IASCUFO RESPONSE to the Church of England Faith and Order Commission, on the Joint Implementation Commission proposal for developing Church of England / Methodist 'Covenant Partnerships' in Extended Areas (18th September 2012) stated:

"With any new proposal, IASCUFO considers questions around consonance and coherence with Anglican polity and with other ecumenical relationships and agreements (including, for example, those of ARCIC). We also ask whether it might give rise to an 'anomalous' situation, and if so, how far this is 'bearable', taking account of a number of factors, not least the wider context of commitment to an end goal of full visible unity (cf. Lambeth Resolution 1998:IV.1). ...

.... We are encouraged by the commitment to creatively developing areas of working together, on the journey towards full visible unity, particularly noting the potential to serve the missiological dynamic of the two churches' life. We also welcome the way that this proposal is accompanied both by a careful process of wide discussion, reflection and discernment, and, also important, by the incorporation of a range of conditions and safeguards around the ways the proposals are to be implemented and perceived (including the reaffirmation that it remains the norm that an episcopally-ordained priest or bishop preside at the Eucharist).

IASCUFO has particularly noted that encouraging this extension of current practices of local shared ministry does not require any revision to the Church of England's Canons, but rather falls within the scope of current Canons dealing with local ecumenical cooperation, while extending their practical application. We also noted that in much of Anglican ecclesiology, the Diocese is seen as constituting the 'local' level of Church life. Therefore, we are of the view that this proposal raises no new questions of principle, and that the read-across to other ecumenical relationships remains of the same order as that already arising from the pertinent Canons of the Church of England's and the Covenant agreement.

We also note that the process of discussion, reflecting on, and fine-tuning the proposals continues. We offer our warm encouragement to the task of deepening the sharing of ministry in this careful way, and of promoting the journey towards full visible unity. We look forward to seeing the final proposals in due course, and to following their implementation."

3. In this chapter we report on developments in a selection of these areas as they have engaged with the proposal and we present the proposal in the broader context of the network of relationships which already exist at local level. We also place the proposal in the context of the overall progress in the Covenant towards the visible unity of our two churches as a step on the way to the full visible unity of the Church, and we address the issues raised by our faith and order bodies. The Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM) is also producing more detailed guidelines, which will be published separately³, and which we hope will help other areas engage with this proposal.

The proposal in the local context

4. A Covenant Partnership in an Extended Area (CPEA) is intended to provide a framework of commitment for joint strategic thinking and action across an area larger than that served by a parish or a local Methodist church. The aim is to bring together the following elements within the area:
 - a. congregational sharing, worshipping, witnessing and working together in mission;
 - b. the strong personal commitment and collegiality of church leaders at all levels; and
 - c. joint strategic planning.

Within an extended area the emphasis should therefore be on shared vision and common purpose, rooted in shared common life.

5. As a local expression of the Covenant between the two churches, a CPEA is a commitment under God to a particular set of relationships. As a partnership, it is focussed on working together, joint action and worship. It therefore needs to be set in a framework of discerning and acting together. It is neither simply a church leaders' personal covenant; nor just a working agreement between local Methodist churches and parishes. It is relational, building on the personal relationship between church leaders, and it is also a corporate commitment, needing the agreement of synods and church councils, and established through extensive consultation at all levels of church life. To have any life and chance of success, it must also be rooted in the common life of parishes and local Methodist churches, deaneries and circuits. It is not something that can be imposed from above, but at the same time it needs the committed leadership and vision of all those who exercise leadership in both traditions.
6. The rationale for CPEAs is that they are mission led, and grow out of strong relationships and joint action which are already apparent on the ground. The joint mission, which the CPEA is meant to encourage, needs to be undergirded and supported by prayer, planning together for the use of resources (including buildings), working together in the deployment and sharing of lay and ordained ministry, and increasing sharing of worship. The framework for sharing buildings is already very well established and effective. However, the legal basis of and the arrangements for sharing worship and ministry in the extended area needs particular attention, in order to affirm the ecclesial identity of both the Church of England and the Methodist Church.
7. The development of CPEAs is taking place in contexts where relationships between the Church of England and the Methodist Church are already advanced and where joint strategies for mission and sharing of resources are already being worked out. In some places, there will already be substantial sharing of church life, worship and ministry through existing local ecumenical partnerships and through the application of Canon B 43 in the context of the Covenant⁴. The

³ See note at the end of this chapter

⁴ Applying Canon B 43 in the Context of the Covenant: download from www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/resources/anglican-methodist-covenant-resources.aspx

Covenant Partnership both gathers together what is happening at parish and local Methodist church level, and opens up new possibilities for joint action and worship.

8. One of the obstacles often cited in developing work between our churches is the incompatibility of ecclesial boundaries. Few dioceses and districts are coterminous: Cumbria, Cornwall and the Isle of Man are exceptions to a more general reality of what has been called “dis-coterminosity”. At a more local level, the picture is equally untidy. Deaneries do not generally overlap with circuits, although again there are some exceptions. With larger circuits being created, more deaneries are contained within them, but re-organisation of boundaries at this level still tends to be pursued with little reference to the boundaries of partner churches, despite a recommendation to our two churches in an earlier report.⁵ The question of the most appropriate area in which to establish an extended area is a real issue, and may be perceived as an obstacle to progress.
9. The Methodist Research Team, in collaboration with the Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops’ Council, has produced an interactive map, which is able to superimpose various combinations of Methodist Church and Church of England boundaries. The map can be accessed at www.methodist.org.uk/links/church-webmap-advanced-version and the JIC commends the use of this tool to help to identify where the significant overlaps occur between diocese and district, circuit and deanery. We hope that identifying overlapping areas will help discern opportunities for developing joint working generally between our two churches, and particularly where establishing a Covenant Partnership in an Extended Area may be appropriate.
10. Nevertheless, the good news is that the proposal of CPEAs is flexible. There are examples of extended areas emerging which are county wide, incorporating most of the diocese and most of the district (eg Cumbria); others consisting of a large area of overlap between a larger diocese and a larger district (eg Leeds); others with a centre of gravity around a medium sized city (eg the city of Sheffield) based on the area defined by deaneries and circuits. It is also possible for the extended area to grow outwards from a core cluster of parishes and local Methodist churches (eg North Nottinghamshire). Extended areas can be formed in response to local situations rather than based on ecclesiastical boundaries. They can also be established in an area which relates to more than one diocese and/or district.
11. From the point of view of the Methodist Church, an extended area would be proposed where, in accordance with SO 600(1), one or more local churches in a circuit or adjacent circuits together with their relevant circuit(s) discern that a CPEA would enhance the life, ministry, and mission of those churches and circuit(s). The Extended Area would therefore consist of one or more circuits or parts of circuits. It would be proposed by the circuit meeting(s) as a way of furthering the purposes of the circuit set out in SO 500(1) and established by one or more district synods under SO 412(2) in accordance with the purposes of the district set out in SO 400A(1). This form of ecumenical partnership, like others, has the potential to help local Methodist churches, circuits, and districts fulfil the calling of the Methodist Church – *Our Calling*⁶ – and implement the *Priorities*

⁵ *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission*, (Methodist Church Publishing) 2008, Chapter 4 section 6. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch4-250609.pdf

⁶ *Our Calling* was adopted by the Methodist Conference in 2000.

The four headings – worship, learning and caring, service, and evangelism – describe aspects of what the Methodist Church believes to be ‘our calling as Christians’.

The leaflet *Our Calling ... moving on* (2002) said of the four headings: ‘They are not separate: each contributes to Christian living in every situation. Together they are the work of the whole Methodist Church, alongside other Christians. They apply to every congregation, family, group, or individual, to the Conference and to all Methodist districts and circuits.’

*for the Methodist Church.*⁷ In the Methodist Church, extended areas are known as ‘ecumenical partnerships in extended areas that do not require shared governance’. The introduction of this new type of ecumenical partnership to Methodist polity was required because Standing Orders previously referred only to ‘local ecumenical partnerships’ which did not meet the needs of the new proposal for two main reasons. First, in Standing Orders the term ‘local’ in connection with church courts or officers relates to local churches or societies except where the context otherwise requires, as is the case with local preachers, but is not obviously so with ecumenical partnerships.⁸ Secondly, in Methodist polity, local ecumenical partnerships have constitutions. The Methodist Church, therefore, does not understand ecumenical partnerships in extended areas to be ‘local ecumenical partnerships’.

12. In the Church of England, although the term ‘local’ is often used of the parish, in much of Anglican ecclesiology the diocese is seen as constituting the ‘local’ level of church life. The JIC understands that it is in this latter sense that the term is being used in the Church of England (Ecumenical Relations Measure) 1988 (ERM) and Canon B44. The 1988 Measure makes provision for the bishop *“to enter into an agreement, with the appropriate authority of each Church participating in a local ecumenical project established or to be established in respect of an area in his diocese, for the participation of the Church of England in that project”* (section 2(1)a of the 1988 Measure). The 1988 Measure then defines a local ecumenical project as *“a scheme under which Churches of more than one denomination agree, in relation to an area or institution specified in the scheme, to co-operate in accordance with the provisions of the scheme in matters affecting the ministry, congregational life or buildings of the Churches which are participating in the scheme”* (section 6(1) of the 1988 Measure). For the Church of England a CPEA is established under Canon B 44 by an agreement of the bishop with the appropriate authority of the Methodist Church. It is for this reason that the JIC proposal for CPEAs is regarded by the Church of England as a type of local ecumenical project designated under Canon B 44.
13. The different uses of the word ‘local’ in Methodist and Anglican ecclesiology does not obscure the fact that a CPEA is established through an agreement between the Diocesan Bishop, with the approval of the PCCs and incumbents of the parishes participating and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, and the Methodist District Synod, acting in partnership and agreement with the participating circuit(s) and local churches (and in this acting like all Methodist governance bodies on behalf of the Conference). It is important to note that the agreement, from the point of view of the Methodist Church, is not with the District Chair.

⁷ *Priorities for the Methodist Church* was adopted by the Conference in 2004:

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God’s love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God’s presence and action in the world and in the Church.

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following:

Underpinning everything we do with God-centred worship and prayer

Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor – in Britain and worldwide

Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved

Encouraging fresh ways of being Church

Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centred and flexible

⁸ In the Church of England, although the term ‘local’ is sometimes/often used of the parish, in much of Anglican ecclesiology the diocese is seen as constituting the ‘local’ level of church life. The JIC understands that it is in this latter sense that the term is being used in Canon B44.

Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas

14. From the point of view of the Church of England, the proposal to establish an extended area would be made as a result of consultation within the Mission and Pastoral Committee of each deanery, and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and with all the parishes which are potentially participants. For the Church of England, an extended area will be built up from those parishes in the area, which, after a process of discernment, approve of their participation in the CPEA in accordance with the provisions of Canon B 44.
15. The evidence from those areas which are already being established is that the process of discernment begins as a joint initiative of those who exercise leadership in both churches, and that the interaction of strategic bodies and leaders (in the diocese or district for example) with more local levels is vital.
16. There is however asymmetry about where decisions are made within the polity of the Church of England and of the Methodist Church. In the Church of England, both the diocese and the parish have strong strategic and decision making functions. The bishop enters into the agreement to establish a CPEA, with the approval of parishes, whereas in the Methodist Church, the circuit has a primary role, both in joint strategic planning and in establishing a CPEA. **We therefore strongly recommend that care is taken by both churches to forge partnerships between bodies that have similar functions. This means that bishops and dioceses are urged to relate more to circuits as well as to districts.**
17. In the context of a diocesan wide and circuit (and possibly district) wide strategy, the practical outworking of a CPEA is likely to lead to the formation of sub-areas within the extended area, consisting of perhaps a cluster of parishes within a circuit, in which local clergy and licenced readers and lay workers of the Church of England on the one hand, and Methodist presbyters and deacons, and the lay officers (including local preachers) and lay employees (appointed under SO 570) of the Methodist Church on the other, relate to each other within the context of their local communities. The JIC suggests that these clusters or groupings of parishes and local Methodist churches might form areas of enhanced joint mission, which the permissions available through the Covenant Partnership in the Extended Area would be of great assistance in furthering.

Examples of Developments in Extended Areas

Cumbria

18. The developments which are taking place in Cumbria are building on the strong network of relationships between a wide range of churches, which have been growing over many years. In 1998, the Church leaders in Cumbria signed a personal covenant, committing them to work together and to consult with one another. The excellent relations between the current church leaders have given an impulse to the developments. Excellent ecumenical relations on the ground have been strengthened by the churches' joint response to need in local communities, occasioned by the Foot and Mouth crisis of 2001, the floods in Carlisle and elsewhere over a number of years, and by other tragic events. Furthermore, a number of ecumenical projects have been running successfully through Churches Together in Cumbria, particularly in the area of social responsibility. In partnership with English Heritage, the Diocese, the Methodist District and the Cumbria area of the North West URC Synod have been working together on the strategic use of church buildings in the county.
19. The progress in Cumbria towards becoming an ecumenical county, incorporating a Covenant Partnership in the Extended Area of Cumbria, has been possible because of the coming together of three key factors:
 - a. the positive experience of working together at ground level;

- b. the good relationships between and the commitment of church leaders; and
 - c. agreement on three key areas of working together: the commitment to seek out areas of joint mission; the training, equipping and where possible the sharing of ministry; and making best use of resources, especially buildings in local communities.
20. This combination of factors has led to a strong sense of shared purpose which has given the project momentum. Although decisions continue to be made within the appropriate bodies of each church, there is a growing sense of partnership, shared planning and co-ordination.
21. On Advent Sunday 2011, the Diocese, Methodist District and the URC Synod, in the presence of other ecumenical partners made a Declaration of Intent, committing themselves:
- a. to seek out every possible opportunity for joint initiatives at Local and County Level in mission to all the people of Cumbria.
 - b. to work together to equip both lay and ordained ministry whenever possible, and to share that ministry wherever appropriate.
 - c. to continue the work of developing strategies whereby they optimise the use of their church buildings for the benefit of communities throughout the county.

The full text of the declaration is given in the box below.

22. A tripartite group, including the Bishop, District Chair and Moderator has been overseeing the development of the initiative. Three strategic task groups have been set up to discern potential and priorities for further joint work, and to develop strategic plans, in each of the three areas of commitment.
- a. The Mission Strategy Group is focusing particularly on the first two of the five marks of mission.
 - b. The Buildings Group is in the middle of a well established process. It is at the end of an extensive survey of the buildings of all three churches and is drawing up a strategic plan for future use.
 - c. The Ministry Group has produced a Strategy for Ministry – ‘Better at being Church in every community’, which brings together the strategic development plans for ministry. The strategy is being developed through the idea of mission communities, which will be trialed in Places of Ecumenical Potential (PEPs). The idea is to work towards shared resourcing and deployment bringing together stipendiary, NSM and lay ministry. The developing work on CPEAs is highly relevant.

Ecumenical County of Cumbria: A Declaration of Intent by the Methodist, United Reformed and Anglican Churches.

With the whole Christian Church, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We share a life of faith which is the Spirit's gift, continually received through the Word, the Sacraments and our Christian life together.

We believe that we are being called by God to realise more deeply our common life and mission, to share and respect the distinctive contributions of our traditions, and to bring about closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service.

We commit ourselves and our churches:

to seek out every possible opportunity for joint initiatives at Local and County Level in mission to all the people of Cumbria.

to work together to equip both lay and ordained ministry whenever possible, and to share that ministry wherever appropriate.

to continue the work of developing strategies whereby we optimise the use of our church buildings for the benefit of communities throughout the county.

We believe that God has given our three churches a particular opportunity to work together more closely.

We also affirm our intention to go on praying and working, with all our fellow Christians, for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses, so that people may be led to love and serve God more and more.

23. The ongoing challenge for the initiative is to ensure the work is all locally owned. A key factor assisting this in the diocese is that the ecumenical commitment and strategy is integral to the Diocesan Vision and Strategy, which maintains the pressure, encouragement and expectation that parishes and groups within the diocese will press on with the work at local level. The diocesan secretary has ecumenical targets written in to the plan in order to introduce an element of accountability for progress. Other partners have their own processes for maximising local ownership.
24. The strategic plans developed by these groups have been brought together in the document '*Growing Together: three churches journeying as one for God's kingdom in Cumbria*'.⁹ In the autumn of 2013 these documents will be considered at the Carlisle Diocesan Synod, Cumbrian District Synod, and the North West Synod of the United Reformed Church, at which decisions will be made about future direction.

Leeds

25. A CPEA was formally signed between the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds and the Leeds Methodist District in October 2012, relating to the area of overlap between the diocese and district. The signing followed an extensive period of consultation in the circuits and deaneries, which were encouraged to opt into the provisions of the CPEA, and with overwhelming support in both the diocesan and district synods. The provisions of the CPEA are basically those set out in *Moving Forward in Covenant*.
26. The CPEA can be seen as part of a jigsaw, building upon local and diocese/district developments

⁹ This document along with other material about the Cumbrian scheme is available at:
www.churchestogethercumbria.co.uk/growing-together

Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas

over the past decade. It is based upon local churches rather than on any attempt to integrate diocesan and district bodies, although there is standard representation on each other's Synods, and meetings on an occasional basis of the Bishop's Council and the District Policy Committee, which are not intended to create a joint decision making process.

27. The bishop and the current and previous district chairs have worked hard over the past decade, with others, to establish 'a genuine sharing of oversight', which includes close personal relationships and an awareness of each other's policies and sense of direction.
28. Joint strategic activity is built on growing unity in local action. A number of joint task groups have been set up to tackle particular mission issues, such as those for inter-faith activity and on racial justice. Local preacher/reader training has been carried out jointly, using the resources of the Regional Training Partnership. This last example demonstrates the way in which Methodist/Anglican activity finds its place within the wider ecumenical context. Much of the joint work which is being undertaken is through the County Ecumenical body - the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council. Within that overall work there is a particular ministry to the geographical area of Leeds and within the particular covenantal relationship between the Methodist Church and the Church of England. There are many local joint initiatives such as elderly people's clubs, children's nurseries or youth groups which are supported and encouraged through the Covenant Partnership, although their inspiration is largely local.
29. The assumption behind this activity and the CPEA itself is that they are a temporary point on the road to the visible unity of our churches rather than an alternative to it. The evidence is that the parishes and local churches which have adopted the CPEA with most enthusiasm are those which long most for visible unity. They are also often those with the strongest links with other Christian churches, such as the United Reformed Church or the Roman Catholic Church, though these links lack the encouragement of the national or local Covenant and so are more unpredictable and dependent upon personalities.
30. The CPEA reinforces the local practice of encouraging Anglican clergy to apply for 'associate presbyter' status within the Methodist Church and of the bishop giving his approval for Methodist ministers to officiate within Anglican churches when the request comes from the parish and its incumbent. The CPEA also encourages the existing and growing practice of joint Confirmations within existing local ecumenical partnerships, and provides for the possibility of Methodist ministers baptising according to the rites of the Church of England.
31. The CPEA needs to be seen as the fruit of many years of working together, particularly in relation to the deployment of ministry. West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council has done a lot of the groundwork, which has been synchronised with the churches.

Sheffield

32. In June 2012, the Bishop of Sheffield and the Chair of the Sheffield District initiated a consultation to test the possibility of establishing a CPEA within the city of Sheffield. They suggested that the Partnership could offer a commitment:
 - a. to working together in mission across the four Anglican deaneries and the new Methodist circuit;
 - b. to developing a common mission strategy across the city to working together in the deployment and increasing sharing of ordained and lay ministry across the city;
 - c. to shared discussion and planning in the use of church buildings;
 - d. to a shared strategy in developing fresh ways of church and pioneering new ecclesial communities.

33. They also suggested that such a Partnership would help to build on the possibilities offered by the new Methodist circuit and the substantial degree of working together in mission in many areas of the city. The area concerned consists of four deaneries and one circuit with four co-superintendents. Initial conversations have given a cautious green light to the proposal, and this probably reflects where most people are. There is a task of selling the idea to the areas of the city, and for mapping some of the potential outcomes. The role of the bishop and district chair is crucial in the task of creatively building up the relationship.

*Guildford Diocese and South East Methodist District:
Leatherhead and Dorking Deaneries and Dorking and Horsham Circuit*

34. A joint meeting of people from the overlapping area of the deaneries and the circuit revealed some of the factors which need to be taken into account in developing relationships whether within the framework of a CPEA or not. The area is centred on the towns of Leatherhead and Dorking, both of which have a lively network of ecumenical relationships involving most of the Christian traditions represented in these towns. The first factor is that in both places there is a strong consensus that there is a close link between building good ecumenical relationships and engagement together in community action, service and witness. Without good relationships the work together in the community does not happen very effectively, but without the working together, the relationships are difficult to nurture. There is thus a healthy scepticism about the way these relationships can be undergirded by a structural framework, however permissive that framework may be. It is crucial that the framework follows the needs of mission and the call to worship together.
35. A second factor is to do with the demography of the area. Surrounding both towns is a large number of smaller village communities, in most of which there is mostly one place of worship, usually Church of England. This raises the question of how these single church communities may relate to the wider ecumenical network. For those living and serving in the villages it is not always obvious who are their ecumenical partners.
36. A third factor is the importance of including lay ministry in any discussion of shared ministry, rather than confining such discussion to the sharing of ordained ministry, especially in a situation, such as Leatherhead and Dorking where the proportion of Methodist presbyters to Church of England clergy is relatively low.
37. A fourth factor is to do with the impact that a growing relationship between the Church of England and the Methodist Church under the Covenant may have on relations with other churches. The practical work of outreach and service in the community invariably involves many partners across the spectrum of Christian traditions, and this is true of this area. The Covenant relationship could impact negatively if it is perceived as exclusive. It is notable that in all the examples that we have encountered where Anglicans and Methodists are working very closely together, the presence and inclusion of other churches is being welcomed and encouraged. In Cumbria and Leeds, the intermediate Churches Together bodies fully support what is being done, and have in part helped to facilitate it. In Sheffield, the church leaders have specifically remained open to the inclusion of other churches in the framework which may emerge. Most interestingly, in the Isle of Man, there is already a Covenant which includes all the church traditions of the island. Any developments between the Anglican and Methodist Churches are understood to be taking place within that context.
38. Leatherhead and Dorking will be interesting to watch: whether relationships deepen, and the village and town ecumenical networks connect. It is possible that the relationship will go through a number of stages yet, before an overarching framework will emerge which is able to draw all

the elements together, and give a strategic perspective on the excellent ecumenical work that is already being done.

The Proposal for CPEAs in the Context of the Goal of Full Visible Unity

39. A key question is whether any proposal under the Covenant will foster or inhibit progress towards the full visible unity of the whole Church. Both the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England and the Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee have challenged us with this question in relation to the proposal for CPEAs. Does making provision for an enhanced form of shared worship and ministry over extended areas of dioceses and districts and circuits, give the appearance of interchangeability of ministry, which satisfies the needs of churches at local level? If so the proposal could have the effect of inducing indifference to, rather than encouraging, the search for visible unity between our churches.

40. The JIC has not found any evidence to suggest that this is the case. Based on the evidence from areas which have been considering establishing CPEAs, it seems that interest in this proposal is greatest where there are:

- a. Already strong relationships and much joint working between our churches;
- b. A strong commitment to working for the full visible unity of the Church; and
- c. The recognition that this proposal is just a step towards the goal of visible unity of our churches.

41. The Covenant Declaration makes it clear that the visible unity of our churches is the prime tangible goal, and there is no reason to suggest that after ten years this goal has changed or weakened. It affirms that the Covenant is based on:

*our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity.*¹⁰

42. The Covenant is therefore founded upon a significant degree of unity which we already share. Since the Covenant was signed further progress in agreement has been made. The goal of visible unity is central to the work of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant Joint Implementation Commission (JIC).

43. Commitment number 1 of the Covenant states:

We commit ourselves, as a priority, 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.

44. The journey within the Covenant towards the visible unity of our churches is therefore dependent on establishing the structures and institutions which will bring the two churches into one body. As a result, the approach leading up to and after signing the Covenant was to grow into unity by stages. The signing of the Covenant was a major staging post on the way to unity - a staging post, not an end point. Previous reports of the JIC have spoken in incremental language. In the Quinquennial Report *Embracing the Covenant*, the JIC wrote:

¹⁰ *An Anglican – Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England*, (MPH: Peterborough and CHP: London) 2001, p 59
www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

*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.*¹¹

45. The Covenant Declaration, and the subsequent work of the JIC, therefore recognises that progress towards that goal can legitimately be made in a stepwise manner. The Declaration clearly commits our two churches to take practical steps ‘to deepen our common life and mission’, to ‘welcome each others’ baptised members’, to ‘encourage forms of eucharistic sharing’, to ‘take account of each others’ concerns’ and to ‘develop structures of shared oversight, consultation and decision making’. The proposal for CPEAs is intended as a means towards making these commitments a reality at local level, and from the evidence we have this is the way it is being received in those areas which have so far engaged with the proposal as noted in the examples described above.
46. The Covenant Declaration rejoices not only in the convergence in faith but also in the collaboration in mission that we have experienced in recent years. However, *Embracing the Covenant* acknowledged that, although relationships at local level and between church leaders are growing under the Covenant, the institutional implications of the Covenant are yet to be fully explored. The JIC proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas is intended as a catalyst for strengthening the institutional relationships between our two churches with dioceses, deaneries and parishes and districts, circuits and local churches as one way of fostering progress towards the goal of visible unity of our churches and participation in a common mission.
47. This proposal is not being made in a vacuum but in a context of growing unity between the two churches. Through the Covenant, there is a context for growing co-operation in mission, sharing in congregational life and joint worship which is evident in many places. The JIC intends Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas to be a means of sharing our life and growing together locally while the big ‘national’ issues, especially episcopacy, are making their way through the churches. Agreement at the national level is more likely if the churches are relating well locally.

Interchangeable Ministry – Shared Ministry

48. Commitment number 1 of the Covenant states:

*In particular we look forward to the time when fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united interchangeable ministry.*¹²

49. The development of CPEAs, however, is built upon the sharing of ministry rather than interchangeability. This raises once again questions about how sharing and interchangeability of ministry relate to each other. About this the Church of England and the Methodist Church have different positions. The JIC defines inter-changeability of ministry in Chapter 7 of its first interim report *In the Spirit of the Covenant* as:

¹¹ Joint Implementation Commission, Quinquennial Report: *Embracing the Covenant*., (MCH: Peterborough, CHP: London) 2008, chapter 2. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

¹² Page 61 of *An Anglican – Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England*, (MPH: Peterborough and CHP: London) 2001, p 59 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

Ordained ministers of one church [being] eligible to be appointed to ministerial offices in the other without undergoing re-ordination. The ministerial orders or ordinations are mutually recognised as meeting all the requirements of the other for its ministry.¹³

50. For the Methodist Church, interchangeability of ordained ministry means that Church of England clergy do not have to be re-ordained in order to exercise their ministerial office in the context of the Methodist Church or on its behalf. Some other conditions would, however, have to be met, which would vary according to the relationship of the ministerial duties being undertaken to the jurisdiction of the Conference, and the type of relationship which the bishop, priest or deacon of the Church of England had to the Conference. Regarding ministerial duties, a distinction is made between the pastoral charge which is exercised *on behalf* of the Methodist Church and the pastoral care which is offered *in the context* of the Methodist Church. Regarding the relationship with the Conference, distinctions are made between those who, under the terms of an agreement between the two Churches, are solely or in the first instance accountable for the exercise of their ministerial office and duties to the Methodist Conference (and through it to the relevant bodies in the Church of England); and those who (also under the terms of an agreement between the two Churches) are primarily accountable to the relevant authorities of the Church of England but undertake, by agreement, specific ministerial duties in the Methodist Church.
51. For Church of England clergy to be fully under the jurisdiction of the Methodist Conference and serve it permanently they would have to transfer and be received into full connexion with the Methodist Conference (and thereby cease to be under the jurisdiction of their bishop and the canons of the Church of England). To be and do so for a number of years but not permanently they would have to be 'Recognised and Regarded' as being admitted into full connexion with the Methodist Conference (whilst remaining an Anglican priest). In both cases they would be appointed to one of the stations by the Conference and, if ordained to presbyteral ministry (however termed), would be able to exercise pastoral charge in particular settings on behalf of the Conference (including as a Superintendent of a Circuit), and at the same time would be accountable to it for doing so.
52. If, however, Church of England clergy are to serve the Conference whilst simultaneously also exercising ministerial office in an appointment within the Church of England, they would have to be "Authorised to serve the Methodist Church as a presbyter or a deacon". In this case they would fulfil particular ministerial duties for the Methodist Church in a particular circuit or other appointment within the control of the Conference. Those duties might include the exercise of pastoral charge in a circuit, but not as Superintendent. Those authorised to serve in this way are accountable to the Conference for the duties which they undertake on its behalf, but accountable to the Church of England for their general vocation and development and for their exercise of their ministerial office within specific appointments within the Church of England. [For how Church of England clergy may serve the Methodist Church in forms of shared ministry rather than interchangeable ministry, see paragraph 60 below.]
53. In the case of those who transfer, however, the consequence of an Anglican being admitted into full connexion is that he or she would come under the discipline of the Conference. In case of Anglican clergy being 'Recognised and Regarded' discipline and oversight would normally be exercised by the Conference and through it to their bishop. This arrangement is rather like a secondment from one to the other, and the consequence is that for the duration of the appointment within the Methodist Church, the Methodist Church would have to give permission for that person to serve in their own church (ie the Church of England). In principle, Methodism would not require an Anglican priest who was being admitted into full connexion or being

¹³ Joint Implementation Commission, First Interim Report *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (MCH: Peterborough) 2005, p. 93, paragraph 7.3.1. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

recognised and regarded as such to resign the licence or permission to officiate in the Church of England, but they would expect that the exercise of that licence would be secondary to the person's primary accountability to the Conference. However, such an arrangement would be regarded as irregular by the Church of England, because someone who is primarily accountable to his/her bishop cannot simultaneously be primarily accountable to the Conference. An Anglican who is admitted into full connexion would therefore be expected to resign his or her bishop's licence or permission to officiate. Similarly, Methodists find it unacceptable for a minister to remain in full connexion when they are episcopally ordained because in being episcopally ordained they are being re-ordained in a way that denies the authenticity of the Methodist Church's place in the church catholic and so they are required to resign.

54. For the Church of England¹⁴ the ordained ministry of another church is interchangeable with the ordained ministry of the Church of England if the Church of England is in communion with the other church. One of the conditions for a church being in communion is that it is ordered in the historic episcopate and that its ordained ministry is recognised and accepted by the Church of England. A person who has been episcopally ordained in another church, which is not in communion with the Church of England, but which is in the historic episcopate and whose orders are recognised and accepted by the Church of England, may be transferred to the Church of England without the requirement of ordination, provided other conditions are met. The Church of England is unable to recognise and accept the ordained ministry of non-episcopal churches, and the ordained ministry of these churches may be transferred to the Church of England only through episcopal ordination.
55. The ordained ministries of the Church of England and the Methodist Church are therefore not interchangeable. Furthermore, although Church of England ministry may be transferred to the Methodist Church the transfer of a Methodist minister to serve in the Church of England requires episcopal ordination. This asymmetry between our two churches' positions is a source of continuing difficulty both in individual cases and in making progress towards the full interchangeability of our ordained ministries, which is one of the central commitments of the Covenant.
56. The accredited and licensed lay ministries of our two churches are also not interchangeable, and again there is asymmetry in the positions of our two churches on this subject. These ministries are discussed in detail in chapter 4: *Encouraging Lay Ministry in Living God's Covenant*, the second interim report of the JIC.
57. In this context, shared ministry, which enables the ministers of our churches to participate in joint worship and where possible to lead worship in the other church, is desirable, not only to draw our churches closer together, but also to maximise ministerial resources for mission.
58. *In the Spirit of the Covenant* identifies three significant ways in which shared ministry differs from inter-changeability of ministry:

*It does not involve an interchangeable ministry of oversight (ie an ordained minister of one church exercising oversight over people on behalf of another church, or being under the oversight of another church). It does not entail interchangeable eucharistic presidency (ie a minister of one church presiding at the eucharist of another church). And it does not include interchangeable ordinations (ie the possibility of joint ordinations or of the ordaining ministers of one church being asked to ordain on behalf of another).*¹⁵

¹⁴ The Church of England Overseas and Other Clergy (Ministry and Ordination) Measure 1967

¹⁵ Joint Implementation Commission, First Interim Report *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (MCH: Peterborough) 2005, p. 93, paragraph 7.3.4 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

59. An important part of the CPEA proposal is to provide a framework in which Methodist and Church of England ministry can be shared as fully as possible. The proposal does not bring Methodist ministers under the oversight of the bishop, nor Church of England clergy under the oversight of the Conference, except in so far as the people concerned are affecting or representing local Methodist churches or institutions they shall act in ways acceptable to the Conference. Methodist ministers will not be appointed and licensed to Church of England offices, nor Church of England clergy to offices in the Methodist Church. There are however, differences in the ways in which our two churches enable the sharing of ministry, which are important to acknowledge.
60. For the Methodist Church, authorising deacons, priests and licensed Readers of the Church of England does not depend on participation in any form of local ecumenical partnership. Church of England priests may be given 'associate presbyter' status, which would authorise them to preach, lead worship and preside at the eucharist in Methodist churches. They may also officiate at baptisms and undertake particular functions of the ministry of pastoral responsibility, but not have pastoral charge. Under Canon B 43, the bishop of the diocese is able to give approval to clergy and readers to accept invitations to serve in Methodist churches. Licensed Readers may be 'authorised to serve as a local preacher' within a circuit, which would authorise them to preach and lead worship in local Methodist Churches.¹⁶
61. For the Church of England, Canon B 43 applies to all parishes, and enables invitations to be made to Methodist presbyters, deacons and local preachers to perform any function which they are authorised to do in the Methodist Church, other than preside at Holy Communion, baptisms or weddings in the Church of England. Canon B 43 also allows joint worship, except for Confirmations, as well as worship in another church's tradition to take place within Church of England places of worship. The leaflet, '*Applying Canon B 43 in the context of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant*' shows how Canon B 43 can be used to maximum effect in relation to the Methodist Church, including the provision for joint celebrations of Holy Communion at which a Methodist Minister presides.
62. However, the approvals and authorisations for shared ministry and joint worship, which the bishop is able to make, are greater under Canon B 44, but they can only be applied in the context of a local ecumenical project established under that Canon. These approvals include regularly holding in Church of England places of joint worship services of Holy Communion at which the minister of another church presides and the holding of joint services of baptism and confirmation. The authorisations include authorising ministers of other churches to baptise according to the rites of the Church of England and all the approvals possible under Canon B 43.

Conclusion

63. The proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas is intended to enable the Church of England and the Methodist Church to work more closely with one another in a variety of ways at local level as a step on the way to the visible unity of our churches. A Covenant Partnership in an Extended Area will grow out of many stranded relationships which have been developing between Anglicans and Methodists at local level, and will require the commitment, good relations and leadership of church leaders at all levels within dioceses and in districts and circuits. Although the prime focus of a Covenant Partnership in an Extended Area will be shared mission rooted in common purpose and community life, the proposal recognises the importance of undergirding this focus by enabling our churches to work strategically together to share resources and to share

¹⁶ Within a local ecumenical partnership Readers may be given a slightly different status under SO 566B (1), but as a CPEA is not regarded as a local ecumenical partnership by the Methodist Church, this provision would not apply. The Methodist Church may consider extending this provision to CPEAs .

Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas

ministry. Shared ministry follows and supports shared mission and worship. We recommend that the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission should continue to monitor the development of CPEAs on the ground as they are established, in order to draw out examples of good practice in working strategically together, and in bringing the decision and strategic structures of our churches into fruitful partnerships. Enquiries to MAPUM about details of CPEAs are welcome through the Connexional Ecumenical Officer and the National Ecumenical Officer of the Council for Christian Unity.

NOTE

The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission has produced more detailed guidelines about the application of the proposal for CPEAs. These guidelines are available for download from [Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas](#).¹⁷

¹⁷ Web address: www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/england/methodists/covenant-partnerships-in-extended-areas.aspx

OVERSEEING THE WAY OF UNITING IN MISSION

1. The Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England is not an example of a model of unity in which two churches become a single institution either through one of them absorbing the other, or by both of them replacing their previous doctrinal standards, disciplines, constitutions and traditions with those of a new united church. Nor is the Covenant merely an example of two churches working together in a bi-lateral “Churches Together” type of relationship. It is, rather, an example of a different way of proceeding towards a goal of the full visible unity of the whole Church of Christ, as set out in a major chapter entitled *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek* in the JIC’s quinquennial Report *Embracing the Covenant* published in 2008.¹
2. This chapter seeks to build on that exposition. If “full visible unity” should only properly be used with reference to the whole Church of Christ and the uniting in that of all the churches, the appropriate term to be used for the anticipation of it in the relationship between particular churches is “visible unity”. Visible unity is an ongoing relationship, like a family. In it, within limits, there can be variation and even dissension. As churches grow together into unity, the church that begins to emerge from them both does not have to be uniform, and is also dynamic rather than static: even when churches become one they will continue to change and grow. This chapter and the chapters on *Models for Uniting in Oversight*, *Developing Bonds of Communion* and *Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission* therefore seek to clarify further what is meant by “visible unity” in the context of the Covenant relationship; how that goal may be reached through a series of stages in which deeper communion is developed between the churches as they engage together in mission and grow together in holiness; and how the key element of developing systems of oversight of that mission and common life which are first of all shared, then interchangeable and then united might fit into that process. By clarifying those issues the following chapters seek to make further progress possible.

The Starting Point

3. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant clearly states that the Covenant is made on the basis of various considerations “... as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement...”. One of those considerations is “...agreement on the goal of full visible unity...”. As the Common Statement shows, what is in view is the full visible unity of the whole of the body of Christ, not just of two churches within it.
4. At the same time, the Common Statement recognises that hopes expressed in various conversations and proposals from the 1960s to the 1980s that the unity and mission of Christ’s people could be achieved with a wider range and number of churches have not come to fruition. It therefore seeks a narrower starting point as a step on the journey of pilgrimage and obedience that leads us all towards allowing the greater vision to be realised. The Covenant is therefore made between just two churches in the first instance: the Methodist Church of Great Britain, and the Church of England. The reasons for this choice of partners, and the other considerations on which the Covenant is said to be founded, are “... our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight...” – again, “...as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement”.
5. The starting point of the Covenant is therefore the mutual recognition by two churches of each other as churches. The first of its Affirmations is that “We affirm one another’s churches as true

¹ *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission*, (Methodist Church Publishing) 2008 Chapter 2 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

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”.

6. The consequence of the above is that in the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England we have two churches which are authentic as churches but which lack completeness as churches, not least because they lack unity with each other. This creates a sense of confidence on the one hand, and of unease on the other. That experience is a particular example of a truth to which the New Testament bears witness, namely that the body of Christ exists between the beginning of the new creation (of which the resurrection of Christ is, as St Paul put it, the first fruits of the harvest) and its consummation.
7. The result is that members of Christ’s body in every age and place, and the particular churches which they form or in which they are gathered, live in a tension. They have some assurance of their current authenticity as embodiments of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. That authenticity consists in them remaining true to the Gospel, to their identity and to their calling as parts of Christ’s body. But that very process means that they also have to be open to being transformed by grace into whatever God in Christ through the Holy Spirit would have the Church be (including being changed into whatever form or shape God would have the Church take).
8. Each church therefore lacks completeness. The affirmation of one another’s churches as true churches means that whatever each of the churches involved judges to be lacking in itself or in the other has to be seen as a symptom of that lack of completeness and not of a lack of authenticity. This in turn means that the journey towards full visible unity between those churches cannot and must not be seen as one authentic embodiment of the true Church of Christ absorbing into itself a church that is so deficient as a church that it has to be judged to be an inauthentic one. Instead, the churches concerned need to seek the unity which God requires and to accept the unity which God is giving.
9. The method of the Covenant is therefore that of entering a relationship, as paragraph 1 of the Common Statement puts it, “... *of mutual affirmation and mutual commitment, as a major stepping-stone towards organic unity.*” That involves, as the Co-Chairs of the Formal Conversations that led to the Common Statement put it in their Foreword, “... *seeking greater visible unity by a series of agreed stages.*” The two churches are therefore on a pilgrimage which consists of a number of stages on a journey towards their visible unity being realised. This in turn will be a stage in a wider journey in which other churches make similar pilgrimages towards the full visible unity of all Christ’s people. As a foretaste and reminder of that, the process of implementing the Covenant has already been enriched by the presence of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales as participant observers on the JIC.

The Goal of Full Visible Unity

10. But what is meant by ‘full visible unity’? As shown in the Biblical Meditation which introduces this report, it is something that is intended by God for the Church, given by God to the Church and called for by God from the Church. As such it applies to the body of Christ as a single whole. If particular parts of that body come together in advance of the whole of the body realising that intention, gift and vocation, their unity can be described as ‘visible’ but not as ‘full’. It is real but not yet complete. Yet at the same time it can be a realised sign of what is to come for all. As the vision in the New Delhi Statement of the World Council of Churches put it in 1961 “*We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his 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.”²

11. That is an important and challenging statement, the implications of which may not yet have been fully absorbed by the churches. It takes us a long way forward. Yet it leaves some difficult questions unanswered. It does not, for example, define clearly what is meant by “each place”; how geographical, political or social definitions of ‘place’ relate to the ‘local church’; how Christians can be enabled to be united and cohere if they do not meet physically; and how churches in one place may be linked to the Church in every place.
12. The 2013 World Council of Churches Report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*³ articulates these issues in paragraph 32 and relates them to questions about the role of bishops.

32. Within this shared understanding of the communion of the local churches in the universal Church, differences arise, not only about the geographical extent of the community intended by the expression “local church” but also in relation to the role of bishops. Some churches are convinced that the bishop, as a successor to the apostles, is essential to the structure and reality of the local church. Thus, in a strict sense, the local church is a diocese, comprised of a number of parishes. For others, having developed various forms of self-understanding, the expression “local church” is less common and not defined in reference to the ministry of a bishop. For some of these latter, the local church is simply the congregation of believers gathered in one place to hear the Word and celebrate the Sacraments. Both for those who see the bishop as essential and for those who do not, the expression “local church” has also at times been used to refer to a regional configuration of churches, gathered together in a synodal structure under a presidency. Finally there is not yet agreement about how local, regional and universal levels of ecclesial order relate to one another, although valuable steps in seeking convergence about those relations can be found in both multilateral and bilateral dialogues.

13. These are complicated issues.⁴ It seems self-evident that at the very least there will have to be diversity, differentiation and even elements of legitimate autonomy within the full visible unity of the one Church for which Christ prayed. Local congregations of various Christian traditions will find themselves working and witnessing in diverse contexts. It is for this reason that the Church needs bonds of communion, including the bond of oversight, so that the Church in each place may remain a faithful manifestation of the one undivided Church of Jesus Christ.
14. But this raises a number of questions. First, what criteria - whether geographical or political boundaries, social grouping, historical and cultural identity, or denominational tradition - can be agreed upon to identify legitimate groupings within the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church? Second, how may the differentiated parts be connected and held together within a greater whole? And third, where is the balance between the constituent parts of that greater whole becoming so differentiated that they cease to be united with the other parts, or conversely becoming so united that all signs of diversity and differentiation are obliterated?

² www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1961-new-delhi/new-delhi-statement-on-unity

³ *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper no. 214 (World Council of Churches: Geneva) 2013
www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision

⁴ The various situations of Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches in England, Scotland and Wales show just how complicated these issues can be. See further the chapter [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#).

15. *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek*⁵ admitted that for many years people have understood the ‘full visible unity’ of the whole Church of Christ in terms of ‘organic unity’. They have then understood ‘organic unity’ (particularly when considering how particular parts of the one Church of Christ develop ‘visible unity’ as steps towards realising the full visible unity of all) in terms of “heavily institutionalised, monochrome unity” in a way that “harks 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”.⁶
16. But to characterise ‘visible unity’ (be it full or partial) as ‘organic’ is not to see it in terms of an architectural metaphor but a biological one. We are talking of our churches becoming a single, living entity, not two. The botanical images of the vine and the branches (John 15), and the grafting of the wild and cultivated olive (Romans 11:17ff), the physiological image of several members of the one body (1 Corinthians 12) and the relational image of the marriage of Christ and the Church (Revelation 19:7 and 21:2) are helpful here. Take marriage, for example, where two persons grow in relationship and become, in a sense, one being (“the two shall become one flesh”). In a healthy marriage husband and wife do not become the same as each other, but become one flesh in a way which means that they relate to and affect each other, giving to and receiving from each other, accepting limitations and allowing themselves to be taken beyond their previous limits for the sake of each other. They become more distinctively themselves as well as becoming more one. Marriage, expressed in this way, is a participation in the dynamic unity of the triune God and the loving relationships between the persons of that Holy Trinity.
17. Certainly, as the body of Christ, the Church becomes part of the inter-connectedness and inter-relating of the Father, the Son and the Spirit within the one living and loving God. Moreover, as the body of Christ, the Church’s life and relationships must be continually embodied. The full visible unity of the Church therefore has to be fleshed out by the constituent parts of the Church being inter-connected in every part and at every level of its life. As parts of that Church inter-connect in advance of the whole doing so they increase the visibility of unity not as an end in itself but as steps towards the full visible unity to which all are called.

***Koinonia* and Communion**

18. But as parts of the one Church of Christ interconnect, their visible unity becomes a matter of how they relate to each other, and those relationships can be characterised as *communion*, an expression of the biblical concept of *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is the expression of the life of the Spirit in the life of the church. The biblical starting point for understanding this is John 17.⁷
19. The proclamation of the gospel is made through the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments ordained by our Lord and also by the provision of pastoral care and oversight, expressed in many forms, as well as through other forms of worship, teaching and mission. These are all facets of the total presence of the Church in the world. They are all part of its comprehensive communication of the gospel, because the Church's message is conveyed in actions as well as words. Those actions include its pastoral ministry, as well its wider mission and service (its “*diakonia*” in the broadest sense of that term). All are expressions of the Spirit in the life of the Church. All are therefore embodiments of *koinonia*.

⁵ See paragraph 1 above.

⁶ Page 33f of *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough 2008). www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

⁷ See [Uniting in Mission and Holiness – a Biblical Meditation](#) on this passage.

20. Christ's followers are brought into that *koinonia* through the one baptism, and it is profoundly expressed and deepened as they gather round the Lord's Table to break bread and share wine in eucharistic celebration. But the expression of *koinonia* is not restricted to eucharistic fellowship. It also includes teaching and learning, praying together, having a say in the use and enjoyment of each others' possessions and resources, and shared discernment and decision-making (see eg Acts 2:42-47; 4:32ff.; Galatians 2:9-11). So when we talk of being in 'communion' we ought not to reduce it to a matter of eucharistic participation, important as that is, but recognise the breadth of its meaning. 'Communion' is a relationship which is symbolised and nurtured by sharing at the one table, but which extends to include all the aspects of the sharing of life in common that are represented by the biblical term.
21. In talking of the goal of full visible unity we have therefore to address the question of how the constituent parts of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church relate to each other. In other words, we have to consider how the full visible unity of the one Church of Christ is embodied through dynamic processes or relationships which are sometimes characterised as 'being in communion'. As *The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek* notes⁸, the WCC 1991 Canberra statement recognised that '*the goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in its fullness*' and that '*this full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action*', ie through councils and synods at various "levels" of the Church's life. But it also stated that although diversity is illegitimate when it prevents these things, nevertheless '*diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts are integral to the nature of communion*' and '*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.*'
22. Over the last hundred years an ecumenical consensus has emerged regarding this aim of the full visible unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ. The major impetus for this vision came originally from the mission field where the demand for a united witness and proclamation in the face of other faiths was irresistible. The imperative of seeking a visibly united testimony to the world in evangelisation has remained the guiding thread of the ecumenical movement, from its formal beginnings in the World Missionary Conference of 1910 in Edinburgh to the message of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.
23. What is true for the ways that the full visible unity of the one Church of Christ is embodied in relationships and dynamic processes of 'being in communion' is also true for parts of that body as they develop visible unity with each other on the way to the full visible unity of the whole. Numerous ecumenical dialogues have therefore concentrated on identifying four components of such relationships:
1. a common confession of the apostolic faith, grounded in Scripture and set forth in the historic creeds;
 2. a common baptism and a single eucharist;
 3. a common, interchangeable ministry of word and sacrament; and
 4. a common ministry of oversight.

They are listed as such in *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.⁹

⁸ See paragraph 1 above.

⁹ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House; London: Church House Publishing, 2001), paras 101-193. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

24. As a result, questions of ministry and ordination, sacramental theology, pastoral authority and structures of oversight have come to dominate ecumenical conversations, including those of the Covenant. They cannot be kept out of initiatives for a united witness. At the same time, the search for full visible unity cannot simply be reduced to them alone. Full visible unity requires there to be communion in all aspects of the life, work, mission and worship of the Church. The 1986 Nairobi report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council defines the goal of its dialogue as 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life'. Similar insights underlie the use of the term 'full visible communion' in the Mississauga Statement in 2000 which led to the setting up of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission, and in the Common declaration by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and Pope Benedict XVI in 2006.
25. **As the body of Christ, the Church's calling is to worship God and to share in God's mission. Looking at how visible unity is embodied in relationships of communion enables that calling to take precedence over structural and institutional preoccupations. Together the churches need to discern the will of God, decide how they are going to respond, and then allow themselves and their structures to be shaped and transformed by the Spirit so that they may make that response most effectively.**
26. One consequence of this is that if visible unity in the sense of organic and therefore institutional union between two or more churches is going to be achieved in the future as steps towards realising the eschatological gift of full visible unity, it is most likely now to be through a series of steps of developing visible bonds of communion in which churches work together without losing their own identities. Taken separately, such moves do not by themselves produce 'visible unity', but 'deeper communion' on the journey towards it.
27. The phrase "bonds of communion" is a striking juxtaposition of images. Bonds are what tie people or things together, and can easily be seen as the means of restriction or oppression. Communion is something which frees and enriches people as they share a common life (*koinonia*) which is rooted in and nurtured by love. The origins of the phrase can be seen in the New Testament. Colossians 3:14 states in the King James Version "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection". The 'bond' is a principle of unity and coherence, and the word translated as 'perfection' is connected to the word for 'maturity (in Christ)' in Colossians 1:28, and is variously translated as "perfect harmony", "perfect unity" and "union". Thus the New Revised Standard Version has "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony". Related to this is Ephesians 4:3 "... making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (NRSV), which leads to the statement that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. These texts are drawn on by the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church 813ff, which then goes on to say "But the unity of the pilgrim Church is also assured by visible bonds of communion" (815). The Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany (written in 1988 and signed in 1991) and the Reuilly Statement between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and French Lutheran and Reformed Churches (written in 1991 and signed in 2001) pick up and develop the phrase in identical ways in identifying: "Bonds of communion which enable the Church at every level to guard and interpret the apostolic faith, to take decisions, to teach authoritatively, to share goods and to bear effective witness in the world. The bonds of communion will possess personal, collegial and communal aspects" [Meissen para 8; Reuilly para 23]. Yet in a parallel development of the Biblical texts the Anglican Communion has tended to characterise its internal relationships in terms of "bonds of affection". This was the title of the Anglican Consultative Council's publication outlining 5 Marks of Mission in 1984, and the phrase has most recently been used in discussion of the proposed Anglican Covenant. Methodists, on the other hand, have not generally used the phrases 'bonds of communion' and 'bonds of affection', but do use the phrase "bonds of the Connexion": Standing Order 110(3) states that one of the roles of the President and Vice-President

of the Conference is “to strengthen the bonds of the Connexion by a ministry of visitation to Districts and Circuits, to connexional committees and institutions (including schools) and to the Connexional Team, offering encouragement and support and sharing insights gained by such visits”. Methodists also have a strong understanding of being both bound and freed by the love of God. This finds its deepest expression in its Covenant service “We meet therefore as generations have met before us to renew the covenant which bound them and binds us to God”.

28. It is important here to be clear about the terminology being used. As illustrated in some of the quotations in the paragraphs above, the literature on these matters, including at times the JIC’s reports, uses an almost bewildering range of terms: ‘(full) visible unity’, ‘(full) visible communion’, and ‘organic unity’ to mention just a few. It is not clear whether these terms are used as synonyms, or alternatives, or as overlapping concepts which have major differences in emphasis or minor differences in nuance. For the sake of clarity, in talking of the Covenant relationship between our particular churches in what follows we shall eschew the phrases ‘full communion’ and ‘full visible communion’. The question for our particular churches now, at this stage of our Covenant relationship, is how as part of our commitment to realising the full visible unity of the whole of Christ’s Church, we move from where we are into visible unity with each other (understood as described above in paragraphs 10 and 16). This will involve identifying the stages through which we grow together and develop or deepen our communion in faith, mission and sacramental life.

Reaching Full Visible Unity through Developing Deeper Communion in a Series of Stages

29. It is important at this point to re-emphasise the universal and ‘eschatological’ perspectives of the phrase ‘full visible unity’ noted above. When we talk of ‘full visible unity’ the use of the adjective ‘full’ implies that it is possible for there to be degrees of unity and expressions of communion (in the broadest sense of *koinonia* noted above) which are authentic but which are less than full. As noted above, the *Covenant* is built on that assumption. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church recognises that it has different degrees of communion with other churches, as *Lumen Gentium*; *Unitatis Redintegratio*; *Ut Unum Sint* and other documents show. The absorption and transformation of all churches into the one, perfected Church of Christ will therefore involve a number of different processes with different partners. It is, of course, possible that in the providence of God, the Spirit might suddenly intervene and accomplish all of these processes in one, instantaneous event. We must be ready for that to happen, and ready to cooperate if it does happen. Yet if we only wait prayerfully for a single event to happen, we will have to wait for everyone to be ready to cooperate with God before anything happens. There might then be a danger that waiting for the best might become an excuse for avoiding doing the good that is also of God. We might fall into a sort of ecumenical quietism and miss seeing what the Spirit is doing in various times and places before our eyes. For God is as capable of renewing, transforming and perfecting gradually as through an instantaneous event.
30. We therefore need to journey towards accepting the gift of full visible unity of all Christ’s Church by engaging with particular partners within that body in what can be called developing “*communion by stages*”¹⁰. This concept encourages and enables people to take such steps towards embodying communion as are available to them at a particular time, bilaterally or multilaterally. Allied to insights about “receptive ecumenism”¹¹ it enables people to recognise in themselves and in others particular gifts of understanding, practice, tradition, experience and identity, and to allow

¹⁰ The Malta Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission (1968) envisaged the coming together of the Roman Catholic church and the churches of the Anglican Communion in terms of “unity by stages”. “Communion by stages” is a development of that term.

¹¹ “Receptive Ecumenism” is the process whereby as well as focussing on what gifts our own tradition can add to those of others, we look at the gifts and strengths of others, to notice what we can learn or receive from them.

themselves to be enriched by those gifts. It enables churches to work together even when particular issues of theology or history or context or structure prevent them from re-expressing their identities through a single, shared structure rather than separate structures.

31. Some would argue that there are dangers in this. Growing into communion in this way may appear to be directed towards a form of ecclesial reconciliation that stops short of full visible unity. It could be argued that this is inherent in the shift to a model for ecumenical working that is encapsulated in the phrase "Churches Together". It could also be argued that it is inherent in the methodology of the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement between Protestant Churches in Europe, to which the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the other Methodist Churches in Europe (many of which are of the United Methodist tradition whose origins are in the United States) are signatories, but Anglican Churches are not (although Lutheran members of the Porvoo Communion are). The Leuenberg Agreement is built on the principle of "reconciled diversity". Documents of the Leuenberg churches emphasise repeatedly that "reconciled diversity" does not require there to be a single church order or practice. On several occasions when they try to set out a consensus on such matters, that consensus is said to be "differentiated". Moreover, the differentiated positions then seem to be given an absolute value. So there is a danger that although they say that the shape, form or order of the Church is a contingent or secondary matter, they arrive at a position where they do not have to countenance changing any of it. As the Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright points out the danger of this is that processes aimed at 'reconciled diversity' too easily become the acceptance or even promotion of static pluralism, reconciled denominationalism or even peaceful ecclesial co-existence.¹²
32. Generally, Methodists have regarded 'reconciled diversity' to be entirely unsatisfactory as the only outcome or, worse, the only aim. There is also debate about these and other issues between Anglicans and the churches of the Leuenberg Agreement. There is a sense in which the ecumenical calling of the Methodist Church may include the need to engage with both sides in that debate, which for historic reasons it is suited to do. Methodists can participate in the Leuenberg Agreement because they do not question other churches' ordinations (to take what seems to be a major point at issue in some parts of the debate). They join in because they are prepared to co-operate with others pragmatically in limited or secondary ways for the sake of the Kingdom even if that does not immediately achieve co-operation in full or primary ways. Reconciled diversity is only valuable if it is treated as a step on the way to a goal of visible unity (and eventually the full visible unity of all of the body of Christ) and not as an end in itself. That will involve recognising that not all the steps that are possible to take will necessarily lead to the goal of full visible unity, and therefore require a careful discernment of which are appropriate steps to take at any one time.
33. To accept this is not to give up on the goal of the full visible unity of the one Church of Christ, but to recognise that to refuse to take the steps on the road as they appear before us, and to do so on the grounds that they represent a diminution of desire for full visible unity, may be preventing the development of the circumstances in which we may be able to receive the gift from God of that full unity in Christ. Moreover, by not taking the steps of deepening our communion where we can, we may be hindering not so much the effectiveness of our separate churches as the mission of God's kingdom.
34. Taking steps towards deeper communion is therefore a legitimate and prudential way of two or more churches realising the goal of visible unity between themselves. It is also a legitimate and prudential thing to do as a stage towards realising the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church.

¹² Wainwright, G in the Foreword to [Tjorhom](#), *O Visible Church-Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and "The Great Tradition of the Church"* (Unitas Books) 2004

Identifying the Stages: the Importance of Unity in Oversight

35. The implications of the above are yet to be fully absorbed. For example, what we might caricature as a “visible unity in one step” model assumes that the institutions of each church will be replaced by a single system of such things in a new united Church. This is particularly true with regard to our various ways of exercising oversight, our systems of governance, and our disciplines and doctrinal standards. Thus the way we have dealt up until now with the recognition or authorisation of each other’s ministers has been predicated on the assumption that a minister is fully in the service and under the jurisdiction of one church and cannot simultaneously be under the jurisdiction of another (the nearest we get to the latter is in the practices of some churches which might most conveniently be described as forms of ‘secondment’). We have therefore assumed that any form of church unity will involve the replacement of that church’s systems for authorisation and deployment, discipline and accountability of ministers with those of a united Church.
36. But how are we to deal with these things when we are not achieving visible unity in one step but working towards it through a series of stages in which we increasingly grow into communion with particular partners? In the early stages of such a journey churches keep large measures of separate autonomy, which makes it hard to develop easy mechanisms for such matters. Moreover, if the fact that we are moving forward in stages means that we allow such mechanisms to be developed piecemeal, we are likely to create a situation of fragmentation and incoherence which militates against us ever completing the journey and reaching the destination of the full visible unity of the body of Christ.
37. It is increasingly clear that the developing of unity in oversight (episkope) is one of the bedrock issues to be addressed in the coming together of the churches in the Covenant, or the coming together of any churches, in mission and holiness. In the past conversations have tended to concentrate separately on issues of
- developing systems of common governance and other decision-making structures¹³
 - acts of reconciliation concerning ordained ministries;¹⁴
 - the interchangeability of ministries;¹⁵
 - the balance between corporate and individual responsibilities for ensuring that the Church remains true to the gospel, and in exercising the cure of souls or pastoral office;¹⁶
 - the role of oversight in signifying and effecting continuity in an apostolic tradition of faith and mission, and how that is focussed for the Church of England in the historic episcopate, and for the Methodist Church in the Conference;¹⁷ and
 - the role of lay people as well as those who are ordained, and of women as well as men in embodying the exercise of oversight.¹⁸

¹³ See Chapter 4 of *Embracing the Covenant* www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch4-250609.pdf; and the chapter in this report entitled *Joint Consultation and Decision Making*.

¹⁴ See the section “The Uniting of *Episkope* and Bringing Together of existing Ministries” in the chapter in this report entitled *Developing Bonds of Communion*.

¹⁵ See the section “Interchangeable Ministry – Shared Ministry” in the chapter in this report entitled *Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas*, and the section “The Uniting of *Episkope* and Bringing Together of existing Ministries” in the chapter entitled *Developing Bonds of Communion*.

¹⁶ See the chapter in this report entitled *Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission*.

¹⁷ As in the JIC’s proposals to the Methodist Church about a President Bishop that are re-presented in *Moving Forward in Covenant* paras 38-52 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf. See further the chapter in this report entitled *Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission*.

¹⁸ As in *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* paras 161-162 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf, *Embracing the Covenant* p. 110 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf, *Moving Forward in Covenant* para 39 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf.

38. If each of these issues is dealt with in isolation, only limited progress can be made. So, for example, progress about the interchangeability of ministries has depended on making progress on issues around the historic episcopate, which in turn has depended on the Church of England completing the process of receiving women into the episcopate. The different issues, taken separately, appear to clash with each other. What is needed is to spell out more clearly the concept of oversight as a whole and then delineate the resolution of these and other issues as outworkings of it.
39. Central therefore to the process of growing into visible unity through developing deeper communion in a series of stages is the question of how unity in oversight of a common search for holiness and commitment to mission might be achieved. We need to develop a clear, over-arching understanding of oversight and all its interlocking parts. In the beginning this will have to be expressed in varying ways in our different churches, because in the early stages of developing communion with each other it will not immediately be possible to create a single system in which our churches exercise all aspects of oversight together. We therefore also need to identify how the various aspects of the ways in which we exercise oversight are to be inter-related and reconciled, not haphazardly or pragmatically, but in a series of stages that are planned in the light of an over-arching vision.

Defining Unity in Oversight

40. Drawing therefore from both the corporate and personal strands of thinking in our churches, we can start to describe the over-arching concept of oversight as follows.

Oversight is the process of:

- **enabling the Church to remain true to the gospel, Christian tradition and the promptings of the Spirit, both as a faith community and as a missionary organisation;**
 - **ensuring and signifying the apostolicity of the Church's preaching, teaching, sacraments, ministries and mission;**
 - **prompting and assisting the Church to offer glory to God in all it is and does;**
 - **nurturing and guiding individuals, groups of individuals and the Church itself in their relationships with God, each other and the world (in what we variously call the 'cure of souls', the 'pastoral office');**
 - **encouraging mutual accountability in the Church, and leaders to be servants, and servants, leaders;**
 - **co-ordinating the Spirit-led diversity of the Church in mission, guiding and promoting fresh expressions of the gospel;**
 - **voicing and co-ordinating the Church's engagement in public life and debate; and**
 - **enabling the constituent parts of the Church to be connected with each other and held together within a greater whole.**
41. The process of oversight (episkope) therefore provides a framework that releases the Church, as the body of Christ, to be truly One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. As such, it is a responsibility of the whole church (and each embodiment of it). It involves the whole church, and in particular those persons and corporate bodies set apart by the church to enable it to fulfil particular responsibilities in these matters on its behalf.

These responsibilities involve

- *discerning* the presence, activity and will of God (in the light of scripture, reason, tradition and, Methodists would add, experience), and so *guiding* the Church in its response;
- *deciding* how the Church responds in particular places to the call of mission and thereby *guarding* the mission, witness and presence of the Church where it is vulnerable, fragile and misunderstood;
- *deploying* resources (not least of people's time and energy) to effect that response, not simply a matter of management, but of nurturing, equipping and supporting the church as the body of Christ.

The exercise of this oversight by individuals and groups on behalf of the whole Church includes such things as *preaching, leading worship, offering spiritual counsel, requiring accountability* of others *and offering it* themselves, and *exercising discipline*. Beyond that it takes them severally and variously into exercising *leadership* (articulating and inspiring vision; encouraging and sustaining people in appropriate and measured action; and providing models of how to give guidance and exercise power with authority, justice and love, inspiring and guiding the mission of the Church); *governance* (exercising formal authority in formulating the policies and ordering the practices of the Church in both local, regional and national or connexional expressions of its existence); and *management* (implementing strategies to enact the vision and policies, deploying people and other resources to that end and monitoring the results). These aspects cannot be completely differentiated, and in practice blur into each other in a variety of ways. They are therefore embodied in different ways (not least in different individuals and structures) in our churches.

42. Both the Anglican and the Methodist traditions would agree that the exercise of oversight is the responsibility of the whole church, lay and ordained. The way that is expressed (personally, collegially, communally; individually, collectively, corporately¹⁹) and the way the different parts are weighted or emphasised varies between them. Specifically, it can be said that the Methodist Church of Great Britain cherishes the principle that lay people and those who are ordained share in decision-making at every level of the Church, whereas the Church of England cherishes the role of bishops in the historic episcopate as personal embodiments of apostolic oversight. But even that is not a complete antithesis. For example (and at the risk of reinforcing the impression that matters of ordained ministry are all that matter), so far as the making and authorising of ministries is concerned, in the Methodist Church it is the Conference in its Representative (lay and ordained) Session which has the final say in who should be received into full connexion and ordained (although those who are members of the order of ministry concerned have an exclusive say at an earlier stage in the process); whereas in the Church of England it is the bishop who makes those decisions (although in the light of recommendations from panels consisting of both lay people and those who are ordained).
43. If therefore our churches are to grow deeper into communion with each other, one of the most important and urgent things they will need to do is to develop ways of sharing the exercise of oversight with each other in all its aspects through a series of planned stages. As noted in paragraph 8 above, that cannot be by one church replacing its polity and ecclesiology with that of another, whilst that of the latter remains unchanged. Instead, it will involve individuals and corporate bodies in our two Churches fulfilling their separate responsibilities in these matters together²⁰, and doing so within a shared understanding of the nature and practice of oversight.

¹⁹ See the chapter entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#).

²⁰ As proposed by the JIC in 2011: see *Moving Forward in Covenant* para 93 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf and the *Supplementary Ecumenical Report* to the 2011 Methodist Conference (Agenda Item 60A) www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-60A-supplementary-ecumenical-report-0812.doc

Shared oversight

44. The starting point in this will be that at first no church assumes responsibility for or control over such things as another church's understanding of faith, or its liturgies, practical resources, governance processes or cure of souls, but that each deals with its own issues in consultation with the other. A major emphasis in that consultation will be on seeking to discern the will of God together; of trying to establish in the light of the apostolic faith and mission that we have inherited what we believe that the Spirit is now saying to the churches in matters ranging from the doctrinal to the practical, and what it is calling them to do in worship and mission. Such *discernment in consultation with each other* is vital, but since it may not always be as explicit or central to the lives of our churches in their current autonomous existences as it should be, a great deal of care and effort will have to be put in to devising ways in which it can be effected by the churches together in every part of their structure, from local to national or connexional bodies.
45. Discernment in consultation with each other will lead to *decision-making in consultation with each other*. Again, the relevant bodies, leaders and office-holders of each church will retain their current autonomy in making their own decisions, but will do so in the knowledge of how the relevant office-holders, leaders and corporate bodies of their partner church bodies will view those decisions, and how the decisions of the partner might complement their own. A vital area for this will be as our churches begin to make decisions in concert with each other about how to deploy their personnel and other resources to further the worship and mission of Christ's body, and the work of the kingdom.
46. Where this begins to happen, the leaders, office-holders and corporate bodies of one church will allow the appropriate equivalents in the partner church to participate in clearly delimited ways in their work and responsibilities. Thus the relevant authorities of the various churches may vote on a single resolution together and may agree that even if the vote is counted in separate 'constituencies' one church body will only proceed if the other is in agreement.
47. Such consultation in processes of discernment and decision-making which remain essentially autonomous is what we might usefully term **shared oversight**.

Interchangeable oversight

48. Beyond that would be what we might term **interchangeable oversight**, in which one church may trust the appropriate corporate bodies, office-holders or leaders of the other church to speak, act and make decisions on its behalf (again in clearly delimited ways)²¹.

United oversight

49. Beyond that again there might be a form of **united oversight** in which the diverse constituent parts of the covenanted churches will become parts of a single uniting church, and all the leaders, office-holders and corporate bodies of the constituent parts will be linked together and exercise mutual accountability to each other in a single system of oversight.
50. A significant amount of *shared oversight* is possible between our two churches on a pragmatic level, within current structures of oversight. However moving to a level where *interchangeable oversight* is possible will only happen when a number of crucial incremental steps are taken, which are discussed in other chapters of this report.²² These incremental steps are necessary in order to

²¹ See below and the chapters in this report entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) and [Developing Bonds of Communion](#).

²² See the chapters entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) and [Developing Bonds of Communion](#).

link two very different forms of oversight, which, however much they may be exercised functionally in shared oversight, are still divided over the issue of episcopacy,²³ which prevents movement towards an interchangeable ministry, and ultimately to a united ministry in a single system of oversight in a united church.

51. The terms *shared oversight* and *interchangeable oversight* have been deliberately chosen to echo those of shared ministry and interchangeable ministry.²⁴ Shared ministry correlates most easily to a situation where there is shared oversight. However, our two churches have different approaches to developing interchangeable ministry.
52. For the Methodist Church, which recognises the ordinations of other churches, for example, in the Leuenberg agreement (in which it participates), shared oversight is sometimes seen as sufficient for there to be interchangeable ministry. But there are two parts to being a Methodist minister. One is ordination to an order of ministry in and on behalf of the universal Church. The other is to exercise that ministry in a covenant relationship with the Methodist Church through being in full connexion with the Conference. With regard to the latter, the Methodist Church in Great Britain and the Methodist Church in Ireland (for example) have their common history and reciprocal arrangements for oversight and governance written into their foundational documents which means that the ministers of one Conference are automatically recognised and regarded as being in full connexion with the other. Thus there is a situation of interchangeable oversight which enables full interchangeability of ministries.
53. The position of the Church of England is that those who exercise ordained ministry within it must be suitable to minister in terms of their learning and personal conduct and that they must have been episcopally ordained, either in the Church of England or in some other church. Whether the existing ordination of the person concerned can be accepted as meeting the requirement for episcopal ordination is determined under the Overseas and Other Clergy (Ministry and Ordination) Measure 1967. This enables the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to give clerics not ordained in the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales or the Scottish Episcopal Church written permission to minister in their respective provinces if they were either
 - ordained by a bishop of the Church of England or a church in communion with the Church of England, or
 - episcopally ordained priest or deacon in a church not in communion with the Church of England whose Orders are recognised and accepted by the Church of England.
54. Because of the importance of the different perspectives of our two churches on these matters, we devote a chapter in this report to the continuing conversation about the historic episcopate, which has shaped our conversations within the Covenant. Much has been written on this subject, but we believe the context of the conversation has changed in the last 10 years, which requires us to understand why this subject remains such a deep seated issue.

Conclusion

55. In other parts of this report we begin to set out some of the detailed steps that may ensue as our churches develop unity in oversight.²⁵ It is important to emphasise again that united oversight

²³ For a definition and explanation of the term 'historic episcopate' see paragraph 6 of the chapter [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#).

²⁴ See *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005) pp 90-92 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc; *Moving Forward in Covenant* (2011) pp 22-25 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf.

²⁵ See the chapters entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) and [Developing Bonds of Communion](#).

cannot involve the system of one church absorbing that of another. Both churches will be challenged, enriched and changed as the goal is realised. It is also important to realise that developing in stages from shared to interchangeable to united oversight will not involve any party in giving up immediately all of its separate autonomy or identity. So the sharing of oversight needs to involve a proper attention to the nurturing of our churches' senses of identity. As that happens further steps may be possible in which within the overarching model of oversight autonomy is shared and eventually merged. That is what will enable deeper communion to be realised which then in turn leads to full visible unity.

56. The goal to which we are being called and drawn and the gift which we are being given is therefore that of the **full visible unity of the one Church of Christ**. The Covenant between our Churches commits us to realise **visible unity** between us in anticipation of that full visible unity of the whole body of Christ. Achieving visible unity will involve deepening **communion**, or, to put it another way, strengthening the bonds of communion and connexion between us. That in turn will require us to bring our systems of oversight together in a series of identifiable stages in which shared oversight leads to interchangeable oversight and eventually to united oversight.

DEVELOPING BONDS OF COMMUNION

Introduction

1. In the light of the possibilities discussed in the chapter [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#), what bonds of communion and connexion can be identified and nurtured to help our churches move through the stages of shared oversight and interchangeable oversight to that of united oversight as they grow into visible unity?¹ The communion that we share already is embodied in many practical ways, especially at local and intermediate level, often through shared worship, shared mission and the multi stranded relationships that have built up over many years. The Covenant commitments are meant to support and encourage these existing bonds of communion. As more dioceses and districts and circuits explore the potential of strategic planning together for mission, sharing resources and deploying ministry in Extended Covenant Partnerships², the JIC hopes that these existing bonds of communion will deepen and strengthen.

Developing Bonds of Communion

2. The JIC wants to celebrate the ways in which our churches express the Covenant Affirmations in the ongoing joint working and consultation which takes place both formally and informally at national and connexional levels³. The Covenant here provides a given framework which has assisted some national agencies and departments to embed covenantal working in their development plans. At 'national' and 'connexional' levels the practical expressions of joint working, such as in the areas of faith and order, safeguarding, ethical investment and fresh expressions should be replicated in other areas.
3. Regular communication and informal consultation between our churches takes place at senior staff level. So far, formal contact between the Archbishops' Council and the Methodist Council has not been established, although some of the connexional bodies and Councils of the Archbishops' Council do have mutual observership. As more work is undertaken jointly, the question of establishing more formal links will arise. Similarly, **although there is already reciprocal representation (with participant observer status) on the General Synod and the Conference, other forms of interaction might be developed between them.** For example, when matters of common interest are being discussed, part of the debate might be conducted by video link so that both bodies were involved, even if they then dealt with procedural matters and voted on resolutions separately.
4. But the JIC would also like to see our churches explore ways in which the degree of communion between our churches may be increased by taking some incremental steps into greater communion. The Covenant Statement created a new relationship, but did not change the legal framework in which that relationship is worked out in practice. Within that framework, by "incremental steps" we mean significant changes in our relationship which would require a formal agreement and in some cases a change in the rules governing the relationship. As deepening the bonds of communion that already exist strengthens the respect and confidence that exists between our churches, so each of these incremental steps would build up trust, and also would be tangible signs of the good intent and seriousness of the commitments we have made.

¹ For the phrase "bonds of communion and connexion" see the chapters [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paras 27 and 56 and [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) para 24.

² See the chapter entitled [Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas](#).

³ As described in the chapter entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#).

Concerning Confirmation

5. **Our churches would take a big step forward if each church were to accept those belonging to the other church as able to fulfil a substantially increased number of responsibilities in itself.** We recognise that belonging can have very different meanings both within and between our churches. What we are thinking of here are, in Methodist terms, people who are baptised and confirmed, and whom a local Church Council on behalf of the whole of the Methodist Church in Britain has admitted into membership in order to exercise their discipleship and fulfil their responsibilities as part of the body of Christ. In terms of the Church of England we are thinking of people who are baptised and confirmed, who are actual communicants and on the electoral roll of a parish. Within the life of each of our churches our lay people who belong in these ways are able to exercise their discipleship and fulfil their responsibilities as part of the body of Christ.
6. Between our churches, there is already agreement on the basis of faith and a mutual acceptance of baptism. However, while the Methodist Church accepts Church of England confirmation, this is not reciprocated. A confirmed member of the Church of England may be admitted to membership of the Methodist Church, subject to meeting the other requirements for membership. However, the Church of England does not accept presbyteral confirmation as practised by the Methodist Church. For this reason, although there are some things that a Methodist is permitted to do in the Church of England, they are expressly stated to do them as Methodists not Anglicans; and there are some things that Methodists cannot do at all in the Church of England unless they have been episcopally confirmed. For example, a member of the Methodist Church who is an habitual worshipper in a parish may declare him/herself to be a member of the Church of England for the purposes of being entered on the electoral roll of the parish and serving on the PCC, and be invited under Canons B15 and B43 to participate in the worship of the parish, but does so as a Methodist. However, a baptised and confirmed member of the Methodist Church who offers or seeks to exercise a licensed lay ministry in the Church of England, for example as a reader, would be expected first to be episcopally confirmed.
7. There is already convergence in agreement between our churches on the meaning of confirmation.⁴ However, the main difference is that the minister of confirmation in the Methodist Church is a presbyter, whereas in the Church of England the minister of confirmation is the bishop, as the chief minister of word and sacrament of the diocese. An essential point for the Church of England is that the bishop represents and acts on behalf of the universal Church, so that a person who receives confirmation is brought into communion with the bishop within the whole Church of Christ.⁵ In the sense that a Methodist presbyter is in full connexion with the Methodist Conference, a presbyter is understood by the Methodist Church to be also representing and acting on behalf of the universal Church.⁶
8. **Making progress towards mutually accepting the confirmation of each others' churches would significantly change the basis of the relationship between our churches.**⁷ The Church of England would then recognise the members of the Methodist Church as being in full communion with itself, and allow them not only to participate fully in its processes of decision-making and government, but also to exercise a licensed lay ministry, without ceasing to be members in their original

⁴ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement*, paragraph 126. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

⁵ For a fuller discussion of this point see: *The Journey of Christian Initiation*, (Church House Publishing: London) 2011, Hill, C. Chapter 6 The Minister of Confirmation

⁶ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement*, paragraph 127. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

⁷ For a working paper about the issues involved in this, see JIC 13 14 *Episcopal Confirmation* at www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/resources-working-papers.htm

tradition. There are already precedents for such a move within the canons of the Scottish Episcopal Church⁸ and within the Porvoo Agreement, which includes the mutual receiving of each others' members even if they have not been episcopally confirmed.

Concerning Episkope

9. In the sixth affirmation of the Covenant Statement, our two churches:

Affirm that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight (episkope) is exercised within them in various forms.

10. For there to be practical progress, however, this necessarily generalised affirmation needs to be spelt out in a way which enables members of each church to understand how particular bodies and functions in the other church exercise the same oversight but in ways which are different to how they are exercised in their own.⁹ For example, the position of the Methodist Church in relation to its Act and the Church of England in relation to the law of the land are quite different and shape the different ways in which oversight is exercised in each church. Within the legal framework provided by The Methodist Church Act 1975, the Methodist Conference is the supreme authority governing the Methodist Connexion, including establishing its doctrine, setting its standing orders, and being responsible for the calling, training and deployment of ministers. Anglicans might be able to understand this as the Conference being somewhat analogous to a corporate "Bishop-in-Synod". On the other hand, so far as the Church of England is concerned, it is not just a case of the law of the land providing a legal framework for oversight that is exercised by the Bishops, General Synod and other institutions. Rather, the Westminster Parliament has the power to play an active role in the oversight of the church, just as the church (not least through Bishops in the House of Lords) plays an active role in the legislature.
11. Although spelling these differences out would not effect any immediate change, it would help the churches to develop a framework for visible unity which is realistic and viable; and in which neither church is absorbed by the other, but where the particular gifts of each tradition have an honoured place within the greater whole. For a model of visible unity in which the Methodist tradition had a visible place this mutual understanding would be essential.
12. **The Church of England might then recognise the Methodist Conference as having preserved the continuity of Methodism with the tradition from which it emerged.** In one significant conversation within the JIC an Anglican talked about the significance of particular bishops in his own journey of discipleship and ministry. The other Anglicans then spoke of what they felt about bishops, based on their personal experience of them. The Methodists in the group were then asked to respond. They replied that what the Anglicans said they felt about bishops, they felt the same about the Conference. That produced a breakthrough in understanding for the whole group, and the recognition of a huge overlap in experience, even if that experience has been differently focussed. Elsewhere the expression 'corporate bishop' has been used to describe the Conference, although this has not been officially adopted as a term by the Conference to describe itself.
13. This might enable the Church of England to recognise and affirm that the Methodist Conference as a collective body (which is always in session, even if it is not always physically meeting: it adjourns from one meeting to the next) has **ensured the continuity of the Methodist Church in the apostolic faith and mission; in other words the Church of England might recognise that the**

⁸ See Scottish Episcopal Church Canon 15 Section 2 (re LEPs). See also the discussion in the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England (FAOC) *The Journey of Christian Initiation* www.chpublishing.co.uk/uploads/documents/journeyofchristianinitiationsample.pdf

⁹ For the definition of oversight, see the chapter [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paras 40-42

Methodist Church has exercised its *episkope* corporately and responsibly through the Conference.

14. **This in turn would be to recognise the Conference as another strand that makes up the rope of apostolic or historical succession.** The Porvoo statement “argues that apostolic succession in the Church is like a rope of several strands. If one strand, such as the personal tactile succession, is broken, other strands, such as for example, the continuity of historic sees, can hold it. According to this understanding, as para 53 points out, ‘the mutual acknowledgement of churches and ministries is theologically prior to the use of the sign (sc. of the historic episcopate)’, and its resumption ‘does not imply an adverse judgement on the ministries of those churches’ which previously did not use it. This has freed churches such as the Church of Norway to embrace the sign (sc. despite not having it previously), without denying their past apostolic continuity.”¹⁰.
15. **The Methodist Church might then be able to consider how it can relate more closely to a church that is ordered with bishops in the historic episcopate.** This might involve formally recognising that some of those who represent the Conference are the personal embodiments of the Conference’s *episkope* in a particularly intensive way, and are thereby personal representatives of the corporate sign which in other traditions is described in terms of the historic episcopate. Since the *episkope* that they embody is that of the body (albeit a corporate one) charged with ensuring that the Methodist Church continues in faithful continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission, the Methodist Church might then begin to invite bishops in the historic episcopate to take part in their installation or ‘making’ as the Methodist Church orders its life.

Methodist contributions to the understanding and practice of episkope and episcopacy

16. The issues underlying the question of how the *episkope* and episcopacy of our two churches might be brought together are explored in the chapters [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) and [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#). The way forward outlined there is based on the recognition that as a unified set of processes for exercising *episkope* is developed, the question of how the forms of episcopacy in each of the churches can be brought together will find its proper place.
17. The insights with regard to *episkope* and episcopacy that the Methodist Church would contribute to the process of developing unity in oversight include the fact that oversight is shared between lay and ordained, with each having distinctive but complementary roles. Within that context, any personalised expressions of leadership (lay or ordained) in the exercise of *episkope* would above all have to be *connexional*. That would also be true – and particularly true – for any personalised expressions of ordained leadership in *episkope* that might become signs of the historic episcopate in the Methodist Church, should such a move ever be taken by the Conference.
18. Thus, if the Conference were ever to move to having bishops in the historic episcopate, any Methodist bishops would be *connexional* bishops. That would mean that they were bishops *in the Conference* and *for the Conference*. That would in turn mean that they would be members of the Conference and exercise leadership in it, but not constitute a separate session of it or house within it. They would preside over the Conference and, by virtue of that fact, exercise its authority throughout the Connexion even when the Conference is not meeting, formally representing it and the wider Connexion in particular parts of the Connexion, or to ecumenical and world church partners, or on public occasions. They would visit widely in the Church, affirming and cementing the link between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’. They would serve as pastors and consultants throughout the church, and especially to those who are ordained, standing at some distance from

¹⁰ Quotation from the official Porvoo Communion website, with parentheses added for the sake of explication. www.porvoochurches.org/whatis/output02.php

the executive machinery of the church and able to assist in the resolution of misunderstanding and conflict. They would preside at the reception into full connexion and ordination of those whom the Conference decreed should become its new presbyters and deacons. They would also preach and preside at the sacraments wherever they go. They would offer teaching and vision, but also feed back insights and vision to the Conference as it seeks to discern God's will and formulate policy. In all this they would help to energise the whole of the Methodist Church in its worship and mission.

19. Moreover, such bishops would be fully *accountable*. The leadership they would show would be in the service of the Conference and the Connexion, and they would be accountable to the Conference for it. They would exercise a role in guarding and promoting the tradition of faith and mission that the Church has received from the time of the apostles, but would do so on behalf of the Conference and its delegated authorities such as the Faith and Order Committee (which in many ways exercises a function in the Methodist Church which is episcopal). They would also seek to strengthen the accountability of one part of the Connexion to another, and above all to the Conference and through it to the wider Church of Christ spread through space and time.
20. It is clear from the above that the most natural place for any such bishops would be in the Presidency of the Conference. It is possible to think of presbyters such as Circuit Superintendents and District Chairs becoming bishops, but it is hard to think of others being recognised as embodying the *episkope* of the Conference in such an intense way that their own ministry becomes episcopal¹¹ whilst excluding the episcopal ministry from the Presidency of the Conference. To do so would be to undermine radically the central importance and authority of the Conference itself within Methodist theology and polity. As the numbers of Presidents whose ministry was recognised as being in the historic episcopate increased, however, attention would have to be paid to the question of in which areas of connexional life each President would serve after their initial year of office. They might be expected to concentrate on one of the nations or one or more of the districts or any future regional groupings. But in doing so, they would always be bishops *of the Conference* and *for a particular place or role* and not bishops of a particular place or role.
21. Finally, any such bishops would have to be *complementary* bishops. The Presidents of the Conference have a 'principal and directing part' to play, as do presbyters in exercising pastoral charge on behalf of the Conference in every aspect of the life of the Connexion. But it is not an exclusive part. The Presidency of the Conference consists of a President (who is always a presbyter) and a Vice-President (who is either a lay person or a deacon). The Presidency is therefore a complementary ministry of leadership which embodies the collaborative nature of leadership in the Church, affirming the significance and value of both ordained (presbyteral and diaconal) and lay ministry. Any Methodist bishops would therefore have to seek out, celebrate and nurture such collaboration in everything they do.
22. In these ways bishops might emerge as signs of continuity, connexion and communion in the Methodist Church who are both authentically embodying the historic episcopate and authentically honouring Methodist insights and traditions and fitting into Methodist polity. As such, they would be a gift that might both enrich and challenge the Church of England as the two churches grow together into visible unity.

The Uniting of *Episkope* and Bringing Together of existing Ministries

23. It is important to note that it would be unlikely that the Methodist Church would move towards taking episcopacy into its system unless there had already been **an indication from the Church of**

¹¹ It is worth noting here that in its parallel conversations on these matters with the Church of Ireland, the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland has agreed that Church of Ireland bishops would be involved in the making of its future Presidents who would be defined as "Episcopal Ministers".

England that it would recognise and accept in those circumstances that the Methodist Church was indeed ordered in the historic episcopate; and that acceptable ways of dealing with existing ministries of both churches would be provided as they grew together in oversight.

24. The only examples of sister churches which have received the sign of the historic episcopate and with which the Church of England has entered into communion are the churches of the Indian sub continent which are now members of the Anglican Communion (but also members of the World Methodist family of churches and its Council). Following the formation of the Church of South India in 1947¹², for example, it took until 1990 before it was permitted to join the Anglican Communion and was recognized as a constituent member of the Anglican Consultative Council, following which its bishops were invited to the 1998 Lambeth Conference as members not observers.¹³ A similar delay would make it difficult for the Methodist Church to move towards episcopacy, as would the lack of clear proposals about what would happen to existing ministries. The practical outworking of any such recognition and acceptance by the Church of England would depend, of course, on the particular goal of visible unity towards which our churches were working.¹⁴

Concerning Ordination

25. On the part of the Church of England there will also have to be clarity about whether interchangeability of ministry will apply to those Methodists who were ordained before the historic episcopate was taken into the Methodist system. Similarly, there will have to be clarity on the Methodist side about how far Anglican priests can, without further consideration, serve the Methodist Church (including preaching its doctrines and upholding its discipline) interchangeably until such time as the oversight systems of the two churches are fully united. In other words, procedures will need to be developed for dealing with existing ministries.

26. This is, of course, not a new problem. The unity proposals put forward in 1968 (revised in 1972) presented a scheme for the reconciliation of ministries. The options considered in the previous decade were:

- (i) a gradual process following the Methodist Church receiving episcopacy into its system, in which all ordinations from that date would be episcopal [ie involving bishops in the historic episcopate];
- (ii) the mutual reconciliation of ministries at a service which included a sacramental act which would be both symbolic and performative;

¹² See M Bruce: *The Church of England and South India The Convocations' Decisions*. The article was first published online: 16 April 2010 DOI: 10.1111/j.1758-6623.1955.tb02976.x © 1955 World Council of Churches; The Ecumenical Review [Volume 8, Issue 1](#), pages 42–54, October 1955.

¹³For a brief summary of the history and the issues involved see the article on the Church of South India in Colin Buchanan *The A-Z of Anglicanism* Scarecrow Press, Plymouth UK 2009. The 1948 Lambeth Conference had taken the view that “ministers of the Church of South India who have not been episcopally ordained should not be regarded as having acquired any new rights or status in relation to the Anglican Communion as a whole solely by reason of the fact that they are ministers of that Church.” [Resolution 54(d)]. The same Conference also resolved “(f) that lay communicants who in the Church of South India have received episcopal confirmation should, in Churches of the Anglican Communion, be received as communicants, subject to the approval of responsible authority, but should not thereby acquire any new status or rights in relation to the Anglican Communion as a whole; and (g) that other recognised communicants of the Church of South India should, in Churches of the Anglican Communion, subject to the approval of responsible authority and to any such regulations as may locally obtain, be admissible to communion by an exercise of the principle of “economy.””

¹⁴Some of the possible models are explored in the chapter entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#).

Developing Bonds of Communion

- (iii) mutual acceptance by the Church of England and the Methodist Church of each other's ministry following unity with no accompanying liturgical act. This might involve for example the Church of England amending the canonical requirement with respect to Methodist ministers for ministers to be episcopally ordained.
27. The first and last were rejected at an early stage of conversations. The second was caught between some Methodists suspecting that what was proposed was re-ordination, and some Anglicans objecting because the act was ambiguous and therefore not sufficient in their eyes to give confidence that the ministry of Methodists was adequately ordered to officiate in the Church of England.
28. The JIC recognises, sadly, that after fifty years, the dilemma seems as insoluble as ever. It is therefore keen to avoid raking over old coals, but offers instead the following observations.
29. In the Covenant, each church has already and irrevocably affirmed the ecclesial authenticity of the other's ministry of word, sacrament and oversight. The ministries of both churches are authentic, and the ordinations to them were conducted with prayer and the laying on of hands, and with the clear intention that it was to a life-long ministry in the universal Church. Those ordinations must therefore stand. Any act or procedure which denies or substantially downgrades what previously happened in ordinations conducted in either the Anglican or the Methodist traditions is extremely unlikely to win acceptance in the church concerned.
30. At the same time, however, the ministries of both churches (and all other churches) lack completeness, not least because they are not in communion with each other. That incompleteness and lack of communion has become institutionalised in the cluster of rites and actions that constitutes the making of ministries ("ordination") in the various church traditions. The shape of the overall cluster of rites and actions in each church, and the emphases of the elements within it, may vary from church to church, but the overall intention in almost all of them is the same. In faith and hope, and also sacramentally, each church takes the people whose particular calling has been discerned and tested. It takes the people with their gifts which in the course of their training and formation have begun to show the fruits of the Spirit. It takes them and offers them to God in thanksgiving. It receives them back from God transformed into ministers of the universal Church through whom Christ is present in the Church and in the world in a particular way. But they are also received back by the particular church which has offered them, usually for use in its own community or tradition. The making of ministers in the universal church is therefore rightly and inextricably linked to the forging of a relationship between those ministers and the particular church in which their ordination has occurred. Moreover, the nature of the relationship forged between a particular minister and a particular church has always been one that has actually excluded and prevented that relationship from being simultaneously forged with other churches.
31. For Methodists the relationship with the particular church within the universal Church is defined as "being in full connexion with the Conference". That means being committed to "preach our doctrines and observe our discipline", and ultimately being prepared to serve the church by exercising ministry wherever and whenever the Conference directs. Because of the strong lines of discipline and accountability in that relationship, ministers ordained into the universal Church in other traditions cannot enter it whilst still maintaining an equivalent relationship with the authorities of their own church.
32. For Anglicans, that relationship involves being in "canonical obedience" and relating to a particular bishop. The forging of it is such that on the one side the Roman Catholic Church has declared that *'ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been, and are, absolutely null and*

utterly void¹⁵; and on the other the Church of England, for example, cannot allow those who have not been episcopally ordained (which is understood to mean “have not been ordained by a bishop who is within the historic episcopate”) to exercise their ministry under its jurisdiction.¹⁶ Yet things have not always been like this.¹⁷ For a hundred years after the Reformation until the Act of Uniformity in 1662 the Church of England was not prepared to proscribe or refuse to receive into its ministry those who were not episcopally ordained but were ordained by other means (usually Presbyterian), even though the Book of Common Prayer prescribed episcopal ordination as the norm. With the Act of Uniformity of 1662, however, and the Great Ejection which followed it, the norm was enforced.¹⁸ So far as the Church of England is concerned, therefore, the matter is not just a matter of church doctrine and discipline but of the law of the land.

33. Within the context of the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England the way that existing ministries are brought together as the churches grow together and develop unity in oversight must not be seen as an ordination or re-ordination, but instead as an ordering of existing ministries of both churches within the historic ministry of the wider Church in a way that is acceptable to the traditional disciplines of both churches. Rather than at best ignore and at worst deny the previous ordination of anyone concerned, it will build on it and make it possible for those whose ministry begins in one church to exercise it also in the other.
34. From the perspective of the Methodist Church this would mean that, until such time as a single uniting church had been formed with a single system of oversight, the clergy of the Church of England could be treated like ministers of the Irish Conference of the Methodist Church as those who would be automatically granted (ie without further investigation or judgement being required) the status of ‘recognised and regarded as ministers in full connexion with the Conference’ at such time as they might exercise their ministry in serving the Methodist Church (for which service they would be accountable to the British Conference). From the perspective of the Church of England it would mean that everything necessary in theological principle had been achieved to enable Methodists to exercise their ministry within the Church of England, thereby correcting one of the anomalies of history and allowing Methodists to fulfil the original intentions of the Wesleys.
35. The bringing together of the ministries of the churches will therefore mean that the ministers and ministries of both churches, and therefore those churches themselves are enriched, changed, and empowered by the Spirit for greater service both in the Church and in the world. It would need to be shaped by the following elements:
 - (i) acknowledgement by each of the churches that (a) its own and (b) the other’s ministries are gifts of God;
 - (ii) mutual confession of the effects of their separateness in the past;
 - (iii) mutual offering of the gifts of themselves and each other to God in thanksgiving;
 - (iv) some sacramental sign, together with an invocation of the Spirit that these gifts may be enriched by each other and become more what God would have them be in Christ;

¹⁵ Pope Leo XIII *Apostolicae Curae* 1896.

¹⁶Although the theological and historical issues are not the same, there is a basic mirroring of how the Anglican tradition is treated in the way that it treats others.

¹⁷Colin Buchanan *Anglican Ordination Rites: A Review* page 124 in a collection of essays by several authors entitled *Visible Unity in the Ministry of Oversight: The Second Theological Conference Held Under the Meissen Agreement Between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany* Church House Publishing 1997.

¹⁸On 7 February 2012 a “Service of Reconciliation, Healing of Memories and Mutual Commitment” between the United Reformed Church and the Church of England was held at Westminster Abbey. ¹ The actual phrase in Commitment 1 of the Covenant was about working “.. 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”. See paragraphs 16-17 and 25ff of [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) for an explanation of how the language is being used in these reports, which has led to the paraphrase here and elsewhere.

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- (v) receiving of themselves and each other back from God, transformed by grace;
- (vi) commitment to minister together in the future.

36. As noted in paragraph 24 above, it would be important (and not easy) to frame any such proposals in ways that did not run the risks of reactivating the problems that emerged in the Conversations between 1968 and 1972. Another alternative would be for the Church of England to make temporary provision, as a 'bearable anomaly' for existing Methodist ministers to be given an interim recognition by license permission to officiate.

Conclusion

37. The JIC invites both our churches to renew their commitment to the goal of visible unity between them. But a goal cannot be sustained unless some movement towards that goal is felt and experienced by individuals and communities, and unless some of the fruits of unity are received in advance. This is why, at the same time as we advocate this vision, we urge our two churches at all levels of their life to grow deeper into the communion that we already share, by using the opportunities for sharing that are already available.

38. In the chapter *Joint Consultation and Decision Making* we look at the questions of how we bring together those processes at all levels of our churches. The forming of these bonds of communion on those lines and on the lines outlined above could be a significant step in the developing of unity in oversight. They do not have to be established at once. Indeed it may be a better approach in any case if they were to build up visible unity over a period of time, in order to ensure greater reception by our churches at all levels. But **establishing such bonds of communion would enable the churches to begin to grow through *shared oversight* to *interchangeable oversight* and eventually to *united oversight*. That in itself would be a stage in developing fuller communion between the churches as a means of eventually receiving from God in Christ through the Holy Spirit the gift of full visible unity.**

MODELS FOR UNITING IN OVERSIGHT

Introduction

1. In this chapter we seek to explore various approaches to our churches' future visible unity, whilst remaining rooted in a realism which takes account of the issues that still need to be addressed. **The overriding challenge remains that of bringing episcopacy and the connexional system of oversight into a dynamic unity, which does not diminish the authenticity of either system.**
2. In the present phase of the implementation of the Covenant there has perhaps been a tendency to focus on the historic episcopate and interchangeability of ministry as the most important goals. That runs the risk of contributing to a narrowing or weakening of the overall vision of deepening communion between the churches as steps on the way towards their visible unity (which will in turn be part of the journey towards the full, visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church).¹ The way forward outlined in the chapter *Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission* is not to see the historic episcopate as the only question or a stand-alone question. The starting point of the conversation should be much broader, setting out an over-arching framework of episcopate first, and then identifying a unified set of processes for exercising it.
3. **In the next phase of the Covenant relationship, the JIC would like to see our two churches recommit themselves to moving towards visible unity in the broadest sense, in order to restore the focus of the Covenant Statement as a whole.**

Moving towards visible unity

4. We have noted elsewhere that what the New Testament calls *koinonia* (communion) is the expression of the life of the Spirit in the life of the Church². On the one hand, it is what makes a particular community or grouping authentically church, by forging the bonds "that create and sustain a Christian community around the apostolic teaching, the eucharist and worship – that is to say, around the ministry of word and sacrament". On the other hand, it is what makes a particular community or grouping a living part of the whole Church of Christ, by forging the bonds "that unite Christian communities within the universal Church".³ These characteristics were derived from a study of the Acts of the Apostles in a report of the Joint Anglican-Methodist Working Party on *Fresh Expressions and the Church*⁴ where they were termed "Intensivity" and "connectivity" respectively. They are applied in that report to fresh expressions of the Church which are emerging within a particular locality. But it is equally legitimate to apply them to the whole of the Methodist Connexion and to the Church of England as a whole.
5. The Covenant affirmations may therefore be re-expressed as each of the Covenant partners affirming the intensivity and connectivity of the other. However, if we stand back from both churches and view the scene in a larger perspective, a different picture emerges. It is still true to

¹ The actual phrase in Commitment 1 of the Covenant was about working "... 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". See paragraphs 16-17 and 25ff of [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) for an explanation of how the language is being used in these reports, which has led to the paraphrase here and elsewhere.

² See [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paragraph 18ff.

³ These two quotations are from *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican Methodist Working Party* (CHP: London) 2012; Chapter 6: Towards a Mission Shaped Ecclesiology p. 154.

⁴ *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (CHP: London) 2012.

say that the whole of the Church of England and the whole of the Methodist Church each have intensivity – this is equivalent to saying they are each authentic churches celebrating word and sacrament with an authentic system of oversight. But when we consider the connectivity between the Church of England and the Methodist Church, we find that it is incomplete. The ministry and particularly the ministry of oversight of both the Church of England and the Methodist Church are therefore in a sense incomplete because they are not in communion with each other (nor in communion with many churches of other traditions). There is of course some connectivity between the two systems of oversight, but it is fragmentary.

6. Yet the two churches have affirmed their agreement on the essential principles of the Church, the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments and Ministry, and have renewed their commitment to work and pray together for the full visible unity of the Church. The intention in entering the Covenant was clear. *“Entry into the Covenant would be a step towards closer unity. It would be the sign of a deepening relationship between our two churches but would not in itself bring about ‘organic unity’ nor would it prescribe a particular shape for future unity. It would make possible a growing common life of sharing together in worship, service and mission. The visible unity we seek to live out together is a stage on the way to the full visible unity which we hope to realize with the whole Christian family. We see our journey as Anglicans and Methodists in England as part of a wider ecumenical endeavour to which we are committed.”*⁵
7. In the light of that intention, the Covenant has been a dynamic relationship of growing together, not a predefined scheme for unity. Because in the past such detailed schemes have failed to win sufficient agreement and have foundered there has not been a single blueprint for that growth, and the JIC has been careful not to map out future scenarios as if there were.⁶
8. At the same time, the mandate for the JIC both in its first phase beginning in 2003 and for its second phase beginning in 2008 has been to *“monitor and promote the implementation of the Covenant”*. The Covenant itself included a commitment 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”* and *“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.”*⁷
9. In its first phase the JIC therefore made proposals about how some of the perceived obstacles might be overcome. The assumption was that if some of the big issues could be resolved, ways would be found, for example, whereby the Methodist Church could accept bishops in the historic episcopate into its system; the Church of England could accept the ministry of existing Methodist ministers without re-ordaining them; and each church could accept the confirmations of the other. The hope was that if such steps could be taken, the Church of England and the Methodist Church would reach such a stage of visible unity that more and more joint work would become possible and they would gradually and naturally evolve into one new church.
10. There has, however, been little progress made in taking the steps that had been identified to resolve what had been perceived as the big issues. Some of the possible reasons for this are alluded to in the chapter entitled [Behold the Servants of the Lord: Assessing Ten Years of Living in Covenant](#) and those relating to episcopacy in particular are treated more extensively in the

⁵ Report of the Joint Liaison group of the Church of England and the Methodist Church to the Conference of 2003, para 6.3.1. That report draws the last sentence quoted from para 14 Section II of the 1996 report of the Informal Conversations entitled *Commitment to Mission and Unity*.

⁶ This position is set out in chapter 2 of the 2008 JIC report *Embracing the Covenant*. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

⁷ Commitments 1 and 6 respectively.

chapter entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#). Overall, some may have thought that the 'big issues' had been wrongly identified. More may simply have been reluctant to resolve them because they were fearful of the type of "one new church" that they imagined might "gradually and naturally evolve". To give but one example, and to put it bluntly, many Methodists were afraid that, despite genuine good will and protestations to the contrary from many Anglicans, if a stage of greater visible unity were to be achieved, the most likely way that 'one new church' would evolve out of it would be for the Church of England to absorb the Methodist Church into itself without itself being changed very much in the process. Such fear results in people saying "Why should we take these steps we are being asked to take? What is in it for us? Why cannot the others just accept us and work with us? What is the hidden agenda?".

11. The result is a form of inertia. Although in its second phase the JIC has not engaged in advocacy for the proposals it produced in its first phase (from 2003 to 2008), it has attempted to work on things which could re-create momentum. Prominent amongst these has been the proposals to develop Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, which we describe in the chapter of that name in this report. We have sought to use existing provisions and legislation so that our two churches can discern, discuss and decide things together, and work together as much as possible. If we start doing as much as we can together, frustration that we cannot yet do everything together may motivate us to deal with the big issues that prevent more happening. At the same time, doing more together may take away the fear that taking big steps forward will destroy us rather than benefit us.
12. In the process, the JIC has started to address some of the issues about how the systems of our churches may grow together which we had originally assumed could be left until some of the big issues had been resolved. In other words, even though it would be wrong to set out a detailed scheme for unity, the nature of the visible unity that might be achieved at various stages in our Covenant journey cannot be completely ignored, and must to some extent guide and influence which particular steps are taken as the churches develop their life and mission together. In what follows we seek to articulate ways in which the systems of the two churches can be connected together, whilst at the same time enabling our churches to develop through a stage of shared oversight to one of interchangeable oversight, and then potentially to one of united oversight.⁸

From Shared to Interchangeable Oversight: Autonomous Churches in Communion

13. **The basic model, at least for the immediate future, is that our two churches would retain large elements of autonomy as they gradually grew together** through deepening stages of communion into visible unity. **The Covenant has brought us into the stage of shared oversight** as we define it in paras 44ff of [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#). That means that although in some places there is still much to be done, in every form of expression of the life of our churches there is an increasing amount of *discernment and decision making in consultation with each other*. **That progress needs to be consolidated, extended and quickened.**
14. As the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain continue on that journey towards visible unity they will develop from shared discernment and decision making towards a stage of interchangeable decision making and oversight in which they are **share some communion with each other but remain autonomous**.⁹
15. There are at least partial precedents for this in the relationship between the Anglican churches in the British Isles; and also in the *Porvoo Agreement* signed in 1996 between those churches on the

⁸For this terminology see [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paras 35-56, and in particular paras 44-50.

⁹ See [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) para 20ff for a discussion of the term "communion".

one hand and the Baltic and Nordic Lutheran churches on the other. The latter has greatly facilitated the growth together in communion of all these churches without threatening their existence as entities. Achieving this has perhaps been made easier for all the churches concerned because they are all ordered in the historic episcopate, and they are all based on the supposition that there is one church in each nation. Neither of those factors would be the case with regard to the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which does not express its continuity with the faith and mission of the apostles through the sign of the historic episcopate, and which is a single church covering the three nations of Scotland, Wales and England, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, Malta and Gibraltar, in each of which its jurisdiction overlaps geographically with that of an Anglican church. We address the first of these factors in the chapter entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#). For help with the latter we might turn to an Anglican-Lutheran agreement known as the *Waterloo Declaration* which was subsequent to the Porvoo Agreement. It was signed in 2001 between the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and deals with two churches which have overlapping areas of jurisdiction in the same nation.

16. On the Methodist side, there are at least partial precedents for the idea of two churches being fully in communion with each other whilst remaining autonomous in the connectedness of the Irish and British Methodist Conferences. That partly springs from the fact that they have a lot of common history. They are two Connexions so far as stationing jurisdictions and organisational matters are concerned, but they acknowledge that their doctrinal standards and other practices are so much the same that the ministers of the one are automatically counted as if they are in full connexion with the other (with all that entails) should they be stationed by the latter. So they provide a model of being in communion or connexion with each other without threatening their existence as entities.
17. In the case of the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, being autonomous in this way would mean that each church would have its own way of living the faith, shaped by its liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage. Each would have its own canon law or polity, and its own system of oversight with its own mix of corporate and personal bodies exercising that episcopate. The two churches might have different but complementary emphases in mission to public life, with, for example, the Church of England having a distinctive role in Parliament through its bishops in the House of Lords, and the Methodist Church working on campaigns with other partner churches through their Joint Public Issues Team. Being fully in communion with each other, on the other hand, would mean that there would be a full interchangeability of membership and ministry between the churches; a sharing of resources on the understanding that those resources are held by one church for the benefit or use of both; a sharing of decision-making at every 'level' in the two churches; and, potentially, interchangeability of oversight (in which one church might trust the appropriate corporate bodies, office-holders or leaders of the other church to speak, act and make decisions on its behalf).
18. The situation described in the previous paragraphs applies to churches that are growing through stages of shared oversight to those of interchangeable oversight. **In the chapter *Developing Bonds of Communion*¹⁰ we outline some of the practical steps that might be taken to achieve that end.** In what follows below we look beyond the immediate and foreseeable future and offer some thoughts about how we might go beyond interchangeable oversight and develop forms of united oversight as we grow towards visible unity. We do so not to create a blueprint but to stimulate further imaginative and creative thinking.

¹⁰ See the chapter [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) para 27 for a discussion of this phrase.

Beyond interchangeable oversight: developing a single framework of united oversight

19. **The further our churches go towards visible unity the more they will need to develop a single framework of united oversight.** If that is to happen, both churches will have to let go of some of their autonomy. They will no longer be able to protect their authenticity as churches by remaining autonomous in the sense of being separate from each other. They will have to grow into a situation where their authenticity at least partly comes from being in relationship with each other. They will have to entrust their being and identities to each other in order to receive them back from the other enriched with the being and identity of the other. They will have to die to themselves in order to be raised to new life together in Christ.
20. That will not be easy. There is a difference between entrusting your self and your identity to a partner and to Christ on the one hand, and obliterating it or denying it on the other. So as the churches move towards visible unity there is a proper question about how the traditions of each are both cherished and nurtured within the emerging church. In other words, there is a need to ensure that the identities, histories, gifts and charisms of the two churches are offered in thanksgiving and received back again enriched and transformed.

Connecting 'in connexion' to 'in communion'

21. Both Anglicans and Methodists would agree that communion (*koinonia*) describes the relationship between the persons of the Trinity; then the relationship of Christ to believers; and through that the relationship of believers to each other. It is therefore something essentially spiritual, but it is also relational and so necessarily becomes institutional (though without detriment to being relational and spiritual). For example, in the Acts of the Apostles, *koinonia* is expressed through the sharing of possessions in 2:43ff which in turn becomes institutionalised in the setting apart of people to care for widows in 6:1ff.
22. Communion within and between churches has to have institutional expression. Visible unity has to be embodied in practice. As we have set out in the chapters [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) and [Developing Bonds of Communion](#), we shall be brought into visible unity as we identify and deepen the bonds of communion and the bonds of connexion between us.
23. It becomes important here to spell out the relationship between the overlapping terms of "communion", "connexion" and "visible unity". The natural language Anglicans use to talk about their relationships with one another is that of "communion", whereas for Methodists it is that of "connexion". For Methodists, who think and work in terms of accountable subsidiarity, 'being in connexion' implies a tighter relationship and discipline than 'being in communion'.
24. The Anglican Communion is a prime example of an institutional expression of an Anglican understanding of what it means to be 'in communion'. The Anglican Communion is held together by a complex interaction of common history, liturgical, spiritual and theological tradition and crucially four stated instruments of communion. One of these recognises the office and ministry of the Archbishop of Canterbury as the spiritual leader of the whole communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury is *primus inter pares*, first among equals of the other Primates (Chief Archbishops, Presiding Bishops) of the various provinces. To be in communion with the See of Canterbury is the key criterion of belonging to the Communion, from which flows participation in the other three instruments of communion: the Lambeth Conference, the primates' meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council.
25. It needs to be recognised, however, that the extent to which members of the Anglican Communion relate to each other formally, and their ways of doing so, have been under pressure in recent years. Most recently proposals to establish an Anglican Communion Covenant have been

rejected by, amongst others, some of the dioceses of the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church, leading to questioning of what the Communion is and what holds it together. In his Advent letter of 2 December 2012 to the Primates of the Anglican Communion and Moderators of the United Churches that are part of that Communion, the then Archbishop of Canterbury said the following: “.... *the truth is that our Communion has never been the sort of Church that looks for one central authority.... in the Church we have to have several points of reference for the organising of our common life so that none of them can go without challenge or critique from the others. Another way of saying this is that we are a ‘community of communities’..... a ‘network of networks’. not a federation of loosely connected and rather distant relatives who sometimes send Christmas cards to each other, but a true family and fellowship in which we share our hopes and know that we are responsible for each other’s well-being and integrity before God.*”

26. The Methodist Church (in this respect like the Roman Catholic Church) would, though, think of itself as the sort of church that does look for a unified or single authority and discipline. Every part of the Connexion is ultimately accountable to the Conference. Being a Connexion means that the Methodist Church has a single system of oversight (including a unified system of governance); a single set of doctrinal statements and standards for the authorisation of preaching; a single framework of authorised liturgies and standards for the conduct of worship; a single polity and discipline; a single system for the discernment, selection, training and authorisation of ministries (lay and ordained); and a single process for the stationing (deployment) of all its ordained ministers.
27. Nevertheless, just as Anglican Churches world-wide often find it hard to be a community of communities (or, we might say, Communion of Communions), so for reasons of history and culture Methodist Churches world-wide often find it hard to be a Connexion of Connexions (for which there would have to be a Conference of Conferences that exercised oversight and governance).¹¹
28. If we are eventually to go forward beyond interchangeable oversight towards greater visible unity and united oversight, we shall have to develop ways in which being “in communion” can be meshed with those of being “in connexion”. In other words, we shall need to develop a framework in which processes based on the principle of having autonomous churches within a Communion of Churches are meshed with those based on the principle of connexionalism. That in turn raises the question of what models there might be that would fulfil that need.
29. These issues apply to the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. But the same issues are raised when we consider how the Methodist Church in Britain is to grow into visible unity in the future with a variety of partners in England, Scotland and Wales. In the next section we explore that situation as a particular case study in order to help in the developing of a further potential model for creating united oversight.

¹¹There is no world-wide Conference of the Methodist family of churches which has governance responsibilities or a discipline to which the member churches are accountable. The World Methodist Council is not a governance body, but (as its website puts it www.worldmethodistcouncil.org/whatwedo/) “is an organization that works to bring together 76 member churches spanning the entire Wesleyan tradition. In essence, the council works as a United Nations for Methodism – we provide a global table for all churches in our family to come to while respecting the autonomy of individual organizations”.

Some challenges in creating models of united oversight

One Church developing into a New Church into which other Churches merge

30. One possibility might be that the systems of one of the churches that is a party to the Covenant could be taken over and used (with possibly a few variations) by the new church that is growing out of them. The systems of the other church or churches could then be subordinated to those of the first, having been revised to make them fit, but with significant elements of their heritage permitted to remain as legitimate exceptions. So, for example, the bishops and synods of the Church of England could become subsidiary to the authority of the Methodist Conference, reconstituted and expanded to be the supreme governing and oversight body in the uniting church.
31. That example, however, would be as unlikely to be acceptable to members of the Church of England as its converse would be to Methodists. Both of them would run the danger of being a type of absorption that is the antithesis of the way of the Covenant.¹² In *Embracing the Covenant*, the JIC asked what visible unity might look like.¹³ The JIC concluded that it does not mean the absorption of one church by another.¹⁴ For example, whereas Methodism began as a religious society, a movement for discipleship in holiness and mission within the Church of England, over the years it has (whether through its own actions, or those of others) grown into what the Church of England and others have affirmed as an authentic church outside the Church of England rather than within it. It is difficult to see either the Methodist Church or the Church of England agreeing simply to be absorbed into the other as if they had not been or were no longer to be an authentic church.
32. In general terms, whereas Christian history has examples of movements within the Church growing to a point where they become separate churches, it is hard to think of examples of separate churches ceasing to be such and becoming movements inside some other church. The only examples seem to be of churches uniting into a single church, not of one of the parties ceasing to be a church. For one partner to move from being a church to being a movement inside another church raises a potential danger that the doctrinal standards and discipline and, above all, the processes of exercising oversight (in the broadest sense of that term) of the one church will not be succeeded by those of a united church but replaced by those of the partner church.

Creating a new source of authority in an overarching system of oversight

33. Another possibility would be the creation of a new supreme source of authority and oversight to which the systems of both churches would become subsidiary. In the case of “canon law”, for example, there would have to be a basic set on which the ‘laws’ of the two churches could be

¹² See for example [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paras 1, 8, 35 ff, 55

¹³ *Embracing the Covenant*; Quinquennial Report of the JIC (MCH: Peterborough) 2008; Chapter 2 *The unity we have and the unity we seek*. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

¹⁴ One insight gained from the long story of conversation between our two churches is that attempts to arrive at unity by absorption or institutional take-over or merger will be doomed to failure. The 1969/1972 schemes for unity had the express aim of merging the two churches, in two stages: first to reconcile their ministries, and then to establish institutional unity. The 1982 Covenanting Proposal, which included also the United Reformed Church and the Moravian Church, focussed on a gradual reconciliation of ministry through a common ordination, which would lead to organic unity on the ‘all in one place’ model. Although the Methodist Church accepted both proposals, there was concern that Methodist charism would be lost, and Methodist identity would in time disappear, whereas in contrast that of the Church of England would still be recognisable.

built or, to put it another way, which could be applied in the 'laws' of the two churches.¹⁵ This, of course, requires that the autonomy that the two churches enjoyed when they were essentially separate becomes circumscribed as they move into unity. At the same time it requires the creation of another layer of oversight in addition to the existing ones of the two churches, another system of polity and canon law and, doubtless, another secretariat to administer it – at least until such time as the new ones and those of the participant Churches can be rationalised and simplified. This again is unlikely to be welcomed in either church.

Other problems

34. Other problems which make it difficult to develop a model in which being “in communion” and “in connexion” can be meshed together have already been alluded to. One is that so far as the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain is concerned, those two churches overlap substantially (but not completely) as jurisdictions in the same geographical area. Another is the fact that the Methodist Church of Great Britain exists in three nations, and if we start to consider how it is going to grow into visible unity in the future not just in England but also in Scotland and Wales, a variety of partners will have to be taken into account, including three autonomous Anglican churches (the Church of England, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church in Wales). Whereas the Methodist Church overlaps in jurisdiction to some extent with each of the Anglican partners, the three Anglican churches do not overlap with each other. In the next section we explore that situation in more detail.

Anglicans and Methodists in England, Scotland and Wales

35. When we look at the situations and roles of the various churches in England, Scotland and Wales and their inter-relationships, we find that they raise questions which are specific examples of issues which we address more systematically in the chapter [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) elsewhere in this report.¹⁶ They are questions of how expressions or groupings of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church are affected by such factors as geographical or political boundaries, social groupings, matters of historical and cultural identity, or denominational traditions (and how those factors are weighted in relation to each other).¹⁷
36. One major development in the Covenant since its signing in 2003 has been that since 2008 Methodists and Anglicans from Scotland and Wales have explicitly participated in the work of the JIC. As reported in the 2011 interim report *Moving Forward in Covenant*¹⁸ this came in response to a recommendation in the first quinquennial report of the JIC in 2008, entitled *Embracing the Covenant*. That recommendation was in turn the outcome of a four-nations (Scotland, Wales,

¹⁵ There is at least a partial analogy here to the situation in the Roman Catholic Church, in which alongside the Western Church there are autonomous, self-governing Eastern Catholic Churches. They are all subject to the Pope, who has supreme and full authority which he can exercise freely in all of them. In terms of canon law, in 1990 a Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches was promulgated to match the Code for the Western Church. The Code for the eastern Churches is a framework document that reflects the common inheritance of the Eastern Churches. Each Church then applies that Code in its own canon law.

¹⁶ It is important to note that many of these issues and questions are not new but have been identified in outline previously. There are brief chapters on Wales and Scotland in the 1968 Report of The Anglican-Methodist Unity Commission *Anglican-Methodist Unity Part 2 The Scheme*, SPCK and Epworth Press. There are also references in paragraphs 1.2.3; 2.7.12; 3.1.1; and 3.3.1 of *In the Spirit of the Covenant (2005)*

¹⁷ See the chapter [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paragraphs 9-14; for the detail of how those issues work out in the context of the Methodist and Anglican churches in England, Scotland and Wales see the Annex to this chapter.

¹⁸ *Moving Forward in Covenant* 2011 paragraphs 18-21 and 26. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

Ireland, England) Methodist-Anglican consultation held under the auspices of the JIC at St Michael's College, Llandaff, in March 2008.¹⁹ The recommendation was restricted to Scotland and Wales because there is an autonomous Methodist Church in Ireland as well as an autonomous Anglican one. Both the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church in Ireland extend throughout the whole island in Ireland, and so do not solely relate to bodies falling under the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament. Moreover, the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Church in Ireland are also already committed to each other in a Covenant signed in September 2002, to which the one signed in 2003 between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain is parallel. That relationship has now reached a point where both churches are legislating to create an interchangeability of ministries in a way which involves the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland being recognised as an 'episcopal minister'.

37. The goal of the recommendation from the consultation at Llandaff was clear. *"The Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church will thus be in a position to help 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"*²⁰. Consequently, since 2008 Methodists from Scotland and Wales have been full members of the JIC (the Methodist Church being a single church in the three nations of Scotland, Wales and England). The representatives from the two Anglican Churches in those nations, namely the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales, have been participant observers as those churches are not currently signatory members of the Covenant. All however have contributed greatly. In what follows we describe the enrichment that that has brought, examine what progress has been made towards the possibilities identified at Llandaff, and seek to discern what the possible outcomes might be.

Issues arising from developments in Scotland and Wales

38. From a Methodist point of view, the developments in the Welsh Covenant and in the partnership of the Episcopal, Methodist, and United Reformed Churches in Scotland (EMU)²¹ raise questions about the apparent asymmetry in the ways that the Methodist Church in Britain relates to its various partners. The annex gives details of these complicated relationships for those who are interested (21). The Covenant with the Church of England was entered into by the Conference on behalf of the whole of the Connexion. It is therefore a "whole-church" to "whole-church" relationship. It is not a relationship between all Methodist and all Anglican churches in the world, nor is it the only relationship of this type between particular Methodist and Anglican churches (and those of other traditions): hence its title "An Anglican-Methodist Covenant" with an emphasis on the indefinite article.
39. One implication of the fact that the Covenant is a "whole-church" to "whole-church" relationship is that Methodists in, for example, its districts in Scotland and Wales are committed to a relationship with the Church of England, irrespective of the relationships they have with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Wales respectively. That distinguishes the Covenant and other agreements like it from other relationships and partnerships made by sub-sections of the Connexion (such as districts) with sub-sections of other churches (such as dioceses). The latter arrangements do not commit other districts and dioceses in any particular way to the particular relationships they propose.

¹⁹ *Embracing the Covenant* 2008 pages 8-10 and page 21 paragraphs 2-3. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

²⁰ *Embracing the Covenant* 2008 p 10.

²¹ For details, see the Annex.

40. The Covenant between the Methodist Church in Britain and the Church of England has been a particularly privileged form of “whole-church” to “whole-church” relationship. There are regular meetings of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York with the President and Vice-President of the Conference, and of senior officers of both churches. There are reciprocal arrangements for the Church of England and the Methodist Church to have permanent ‘associate member’ or ‘participant observer’ status at the Conference and the General Synod respectively. In the case of the Methodist Church, only the Church of England and the United Reformed Church are invited to be associate members of the Conference every year: the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and the Baptist Union of Great Britain are currently invited to be members for two years out of four; other churches are invited occasionally on a rota basis.
41. The situation with the Welsh Covenant is somewhat more ambiguous. It too is a ‘whole church’ commitment so far as the Methodist Church is concerned, and it has been endorsed as such by the Conference over the years. But there are not regular meetings between the President and Vice-President of the Conference and the church leaders of the other partners to the Covenant, or between the senior officers of the churches concerned. Nor do the partners in the Welsh Covenant have continuous associate membership of the Conference, but, as with other churches, are invited to attend from time to time according to a rota. Instead the relationship is seen to be expressed on the Methodist side through members of two districts in Wales which are jointly described as The Methodist Church in Wales. It can rightly be said that they represent the whole of the Connexion in the sense that any districts or circuits and their officers do. But in this case the leadership and co-ordinating team of the two districts, Y Cyngor, is also charged in Standing Order 491(3) with the oversight and co-ordination of ecumenical strategy, policy and relationships in Wales (albeit in line with connexional policy). In the same Standing Order, however, Y Cyngor is also charged with authorising representatives to speak with ecumenical partners and government on behalf of The Methodist Church in Wales (without any explicit reference to representing the whole of the Connexion in doing so, although it is implicit that any speaking must be in line with connexional policy).
42. The EMU Partnership in Scotland is, in a sense, even more ambiguous. It falls between the types of a ‘whole-church to whole-church’ and a ‘district to diocese’ partnership. It too was endorsed by the Conference, but it is a relationship where one of the other partners (the Scottish Episcopal Church) is a ‘whole-church’, whilst on the Methodist side it is one of the two districts in the political entity of Scotland which has formally agreed to enter the partnership, and there is a sense in which the partnership only commits that district. The Shetland District is also in the political entity of Scotland but is not a declared signatory to EMU, whereas the parts of the Scottish Episcopal Church located in Shetland are. However, the Shetland District is in favour of EMU and is hoping that in its spirit it may one day be able to share training with the Scottish Episcopal Church without forming a separate partnership agreement. The United Reformed Church’s position is different again. Its National Synod of Scotland is a member of EMU, and is related to the whole of the political entity of Scotland (although it does not have a physical presence in Shetland). It is part of the structure of the whole of the United Reformed Church, which also exists in England and Wales, but within that structure it has more autonomy than the Methodist districts do within the Connexion.
43. All this raises particular issues for the Methodist Church. It is clear that the Conference has endorsed the Covenant with the Church of England, the Welsh Covenant and the EMU Partnership in Scotland. To that extent they are each ‘whole church’ decisions of the Methodist Church. It is less clear whether there is parity between those agreements about whether their respective outworkings affect the whole or only part of the Connexion.
44. It needs to be noted at what point this becomes a problem for the Methodist Church. For as long as relationships and partnerships are dealing with the practicalities of what in the chapter

[Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) we have termed “shared oversight” and “shared ministry” there is not much problem for the Methodist Church or any other church because pragmatic arrangements can be made with varying partners in different nations or regions without those arrangements changing the overall polity of the churches concerned. This can take things quite a long way forward.²²

45. Methodists would share the view of most churches that the achieving of visible unity would eventually require the development of a framework of united oversight in a single church (as, for example, the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales recognises). As Methodists would express it, the final stages of this would involve the creation of a single set of doctrinal standards, single discipline, and single polity. It is therefore when things move through matters of “interchangeable oversight” and “interchangeable ministry” on the way towards “united oversight” and “united ministry” in uniting churches that difficulties may start to arise, because such moves start to require major changes to the overall polity, discipline and oversight of each of the partner churches in terms of such as its doctrinal standards, its standards of preaching and the conduct of worship, the ordering and deployment of its ordained ministries, and its governance processes and systems of accountability.²³
46. **This poses a fundamental question to the Methodist Church of Great Britain when it considers entering partnerships with another church or churches whose area or areas of jurisdiction comprise only part of that under the jurisdiction of the Conference. How far can the Methodist Church go towards uniting with those churches before it begins either to compromise its other ecumenical partnerships or to fracture the Connexion?**
47. This problem is something that has perhaps been endemic since at least 1964 when the British Council of Churches Conference on Faith and Order, held in Nottingham, challenged churches to “covenant together to work and pray for inauguration of union in appropriate groupings, such as nations.” “National” groupings are not the only example of what might be “appropriate groupings”, although it is the only example given. Some would doubtless have immediately thought that national groupings are appropriate, although it is an interesting question whether ‘nations’ would have meant the same to most people in 1964 as it does now. On the other hand, others (Methodists perhaps prominent amongst them) would have immediately looked to other sorts of groupings.

²² As noted above, in the case of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Canon 15 already provides for interchangeability of ministry with another Trinitarian Church within Local Ecumenical Partnerships, ‘subject always to the pastoral oversight and canonical authority of the Bishop of the Diocese’. Methodist ministers could interchange with those of the Scottish Episcopal Church on these terms without any major change to the overall polity of the Methodist Church. All that would be needed would be a recognition in Standing Orders of the types of Ecumenical Project that exist in Scotland (which differ somewhat from the types that exist, say, in England).

²³To give some hypothetical examples of these distinctions: it would be possible for the Methodist Church to identify people such as its Chairs of District in, for example, Scotland and Wales who would act in those nations as the opposite numbers of Anglican (ie the Scottish Episcopal Church or Church in Wales) bishops and of the equivalent officers of other partner churches, and who would work with them in their common tasks and shared responsibilities. It would also be possible to identify district bodies as the opposite numbers of diocesan ones and of their equivalents in other partner Churches. These would be examples of ‘shared ministry’ and ‘shared oversight’ and would not require any change in current Methodist polity (any more than is required for the interchangeability of ministry with the Scottish Episcopal Church in defined situations). But if, say, people were to be consecrated as bishops in the historic episcopate in parts of the Connexion, a third order of ministry would thereby be created in the Methodist Church in Britain. Similarly if Methodist district bodies were expected to exercise independently of the Conference some of the roles and powers of, say, diocesan bodies (which in Methodism are currently exercised by the Conference), a kind of entity would be created that is currently unknown in British Methodism. Both moves would constitute major changes to the current polity of the Methodist Church which it is hard to see being instituted just for parts of the Connexion and not for the whole.

48. It is sometimes said (often, but not only, by people representing its Anglican partners) that the Connexion could allow there to be different dispensations in different parts of the Connexion, and could tolerate the variety and any inconsistency that ensued for the sake of increasing the unity of Christ's Church in those areas. Such toleration would involve explicitly restricting the effects of "An Anglican-Methodist Covenant" to those Methodists in England, the Welsh Covenant to those in Wales, and the EMU partnership to those in Scotland; and the granting of large amounts of autonomy to the different parts of the Connexion, just as the Anglican Churches concerned belong to one family or communion, but have their own autonomy and independence. The parts of the United Reformed Church in Scotland and Wales also have much more autonomy than the Methodists in those nations, and are more loosely federated with the parts of that church which are in England.
49. It is true that within the unified framework of the Methodist Connexion some variations are possible. There are already Standing Orders which specifically relate to Wales, and which adapt more general procedures to the bi-lingual context and history of the Methodist Church in that nation. It might therefore be possible to envisage a generic set of Standing Orders that apply everywhere and then particular sub-sets which set out varying applications of them to such as Wales, Scotland and England.
50. There is a limit, however, to how far different provisions can be developed for different parts of the Connexion, not least when the parts concerned are working with separate ecumenical partners. Major changes to doctrinal standards, discipline and polity could not simply be treated as pragmatic localised arrangements in one part of the Connexion that did not affect the rest of it. This becomes a problem if the Methodist Church is seeking to grow into visible unity and united systems of oversight with more than one partner church. It becomes a particular problem in situations where each partner church relates to only one part of the area covered by the Connexion and where those partner churches intend to remain independent of each other. In those circumstances the Methodist Church as it is currently configured would not be able to enter visible unity with all of them whilst remaining a single Connexion as currently understood. It would either have to do so with none of them, or at most it could do it with just one of those partner churches. In this latter case all the parts of the Connexion would enter visible unity with a partner church whose jurisdiction coincided with just one part of the Connexion. Yet that would leave an asymmetry in the Methodist Church's ecumenical relationships in different parts of the Connexion, and could (and possibly would) lead to an unbearable tension within the Connexion. Unless another way of holding all the parties together could be found, that tension might lead inexorably to the Methodist Church of Great Britain separating into at least three separate Methodist Connexions and Conferences – one for England, one for Scotland and one for Wales – whilst also seeking to make arrangements for the Isle of Man, Channel Islands, Gibraltar and Malta.
51. The implication of the above is that if the desire for visible unity were to be linked with too strong an emphasis on national identity in the three nations, the Methodist Church in Britain might not as such be able to continue to exist. There might however be precedents for parts of the Connexion separating off to become autonomous churches. In the current Methodist Standing Orders [Section 77] there are the vestiges of provisions for the Methodist Church's Overseas Districts. The Overseas Districts were districts of the British Connexion but also the embodiment of Methodist Church in a particular region or nation (the last to exist was The Methodist Church The Gambia). They were gradually allowed considerable autonomy under the Conference and the ability to adapt some procedures to their own contexts and circumstances, particularly in the selection, training and stationing of ordained ministers. The fact that this was done under the authority and supervision of the British Conference meant that there was therefore a single connexional polity, and an interchangeability of those who were ordained and in full connexion throughout the Connexion; but there were also differentiated stationing jurisdictions and other

differentiated practices between the Overseas Districts and the Home Districts. Moreover, although there might appear to be a precedent here for 'bearable anomalies' being permitted in different parts of the Connexion, it has to be noted that such provisions were only as part of processes which without exception led to the overseas District eventually becoming an autonomous Church (ie an autonomous Connexion with an autonomous Conference) or part of a uniting Church in its own region or nation.

52. If, however, the Methodist Church were eventually to be separated into three independent parts (England, Scotland and Wales) in a similar way to how the Church in Wales was separated from the Church of England in 1920, and become parts of united churches in each of the three nations, there would be serious questions about how the Methodist presence in each of those nations (but particularly in Scotland and Wales, because of the smaller numbers involved) would be nurtured in their Methodist identity by the wider Methodist family; and therefore whether they would be strong enough to enable them to contribute the gifts and charisms of the Methodist tradition to the relevant united church, and beyond that to the wider church including the other branches of Methodism in Great Britain.
53. **There are therefore serious questions for the Methodist Church about whether its ecumenical vision of visible unity is one of eventually becoming part of three separate united or uniting Churches in Scotland, Wales and England; or of becoming part of a single united or uniting church that eventually covers the whole of Britain.** Developing towards the former goal might be at the cost of the fragmentation of the current Connexion. In other words, achieving greater unity in each of the three nations might ironically involve decreasing the visible unity of the Methodist Connexion. Working towards the latter goal might be at the cost of having the Conference holding back from making precipitate moves in one of the nations until consent could be gained for them in the others.
54. This, however, is not just a Methodist problem, in the sense of it being either a problem for Methodists or a problem posed by Methodism to its partners. It is an issue that affects all the members of the various partnerships in England, Scotland and Wales, not least the three Anglican churches which (perhaps for understandable reasons to do with their geographical bounded-ness and particular histories) approach these matters separately much more than they do together. This throws the spotlight and the challenge onto the Anglican Churches in the situation as well as the Methodist Church. In many ways it is not just a question of how they relate to the various parts of the Methodist Connexion, but of how they relate to each other.

Potential ways forward

55. The problems might be avoided or at least diminished, however, if the partner churches in the three nations did not intend to remain so independent of each other. The JIC has considered two formal ways in which this might be facilitated. The most institutionalised would be for the three provinces of the Anglican Communion in Wales, England and Scotland to commit themselves to becoming in some way a sort of super-province (possibly eventually including the Church in Ireland). Such a super-province of federated Churches would have a common framework of doctrinal standards, discipline and polity, within which there could be devolved and differentiated but inter-related practices and canons for the appropriate Church in each of the three nations.
56. The second, less institutionalised, way would be for the Anglican churches, without creating a super-province, to co-ordinate their interactions formally with the Methodist Church in their different partnerships with it by associating themselves with each others' agreements. Thus the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church could be invited to become associate signatories to the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great

Britain. In so doing they would make a statement about their own situation and understanding, which might include:

- expressions of desire to support the Church of England (CofE) and the Methodist Church of Great Britain (MCB) in their making of the Covenant;
- the making of the Covenant Affirmations;
- the making of commitments to support the CofE and MCB in making their Covenant Commitments, and to correlate what they are doing in their own partnerships (EMU, Welsh Covenant) with what the CofE and MCB are doing in the Covenant.

On such terms, the Church of England could be invited in a similar way to associate itself with the Welsh Covenant and EMU (recognising that these partnerships are multi-lateral ones whose scope is wider than just Anglican-Methodist inter-relationships; and that the United Reformed Church is in both EMU and the Welsh Covenant, and also the Presbyterian Church of Wales and the Covenanted Baptists in the Welsh Covenant would have to agree to the Church of England taking this step).

57. The JIC recognises that it cannot continue with either of these suggestions. It is clear that the three Anglican Churches will not easily, if ever, agree to create a sort of super-province. It is alien to the polity and practice of Anglicanism. The fact that the Church of England is ‘by law established’ and that its canons are therefore part of English law creates an asymmetry in the relationships between the Anglican churches which could make any such moves fraught with difficulties. It is therefore hard for the three Anglican churches to see what the benefit would be to them should they associate themselves with each others’ ecumenical partnerships which involve the Methodist Church. In particular, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church ask what benefits there are in associating themselves with the Covenant, when one of the fears that they have is of being more closely bound in with the Church of England whose canon law and other provisions they would consider to be restrictive and even retrogressive.²⁴
58. At the same time the JIC recognises the great richness that has been brought to it by having representatives from Scotland and Wales at its meetings. They have changed the nature of the conversations and have ensured that some unexamined suppositions and difficult questions have been identified and articulated. For example, their presence has meant that the Church of England’s model of bishop has not appeared to be the only one to be considered. **The JIC recommends that such participation be continued and extended by establishing regular informal meetings of representatives from each of the partnerships, together with the relevant ecumenical officers.** Such a development would support the three Anglican churches and the Methodist Church as they worked for visible unity in each of the three nations in a way that was differentiated and contextualised in each of those nations but also co-ordinated across all of them.
59. The JIC recognises, however, that for such meetings and interactions to be most productive, they need to be within an agreed framework of understanding. There are suggestive pointers on both sides about how such a framework might be created.

Criteria for developing a model of united oversight

60. Following from the above the JIC suggests that one model would be some form of “connexional communion” type partnership which would enable our churches to begin to develop from a stage of interchangeable oversight towards one of united oversight. Such a partnership would increase

²⁴For example, the proposals for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas make it possible for the Church of England to move closer to what is possible in the Scottish Episcopal Church, but are still not as permissive.

visible unity, without requiring that to be embodied in or expressed through the organic unity of a single, united church with a single set of doctrinal standards, single discipline, and single polity. As such it would apply to the first concern of the JIC, namely the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain, but it might also be of use in the Methodist Church's relationships with other churches (not just Anglican ones) in the Welsh Covenant and the EMU Partnership in Scotland.

61. Such a model would pose challenges to each of our churches. The key issue for Anglicans would be the challenge to accept parallel jurisdictions. Since the structure of dioceses is essentially territorial, a partnership with an alternative jurisdiction with a lesser emphasis on territorial boundaries would take the churches concerned into a new set of relationships.²⁵ It needs to be recognised, however, that the idea of parallel jurisdictions is a sensitive one within the Church of England following the debates about proposals concerning women in the episcopate. But there are some precedents in the Anglican Communion for parallel jurisdictions in the same territory,²⁶ and it is at this point the Methodist understanding of connexionalism might have something to offer to the Church of England and other partners about how they might be held together in a form of inter-dependence and mutual engagement.
62. The key challenge for Methodists, on the other hand, would be to embrace a form of visible unity which is based not solely on connexionalism but also on the idea of a communion of churches in which unity of oversight would be expressed collegially, while decision making and governance would be held within those churches' separate jurisdictions. It is at this point that the issue of bringing connexionalism into a dynamic, uniting relationship with episcopacy needs to be addressed.
63. The development of such a model would have many things to offer as our churches move through shared oversight to interchangeable oversight and on towards expressions of greater visible unity and united oversight. Without it there is a danger that our churches might become stuck in a form of 'reconciled diversity' which institutionalises division between them, and which encourages them to accept something less than the unity for which Christ prayed and for which he laid down his life. That would be regrettable whether it occurred in the Covenant or in other partnerships and potential multi-lateral relationships of our churches. **We need to find new ways of envisioning how we might develop visible unity between us as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church.**

Conclusion

64. The JIC has argued for a vision of unity which allows the traditions and distinctive gifts of each church to thrive alongside each other in a dynamic relationship. In this we are trying to address the issue of what happens to our current identities as we come together into expressions and embodiments of the Body of Christ which are neither the Church of England nor the Methodist Church nor any other church as we know them at present.

²⁵As John MacQuarrie put it in *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* (SCM Press, London) 1975 p. 44 "Cyprian's famous question, 'Does anyone imagine that there can be in one place many shepherds or several flocks?' demanded a negative answer in the days when societies were homogeneous, but this is no longer the case in the pluralist societies of the contemporary world." This is still contested in parts of the Church of England.

²⁶ For example, there is the 1992 Constitution of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia which provides for three partners to order their affairs each within their own cultural context within the one church. Within the Church of England there is the way that the Sees of Ebbsfleet and Beverley work in parallel with dioceses which have geographical boundaries.

65. In this chapter we have looked at what it might mean to move from the current stage of the Covenant, which we can characterise as one of shared oversight, to the next phase which can be characterised as interchangeability. That progress will involve encouraging, strengthening and extending the developments which are set out in other chapters of this report, particularly those entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#) and [Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas](#). But it will also involve deepening other 'bonds of communion' between us. Some suggestions about how that may be done are set out in the chapter entitled [Developing Bonds of Communion](#) and **the JIC recommends that the churches study and respond to these seriously.**
66. The JIC also recognises that it is hard to judge what immediate steps to take to deepen bonds of communion and develop interchangeable oversight when it is not clear even in outline what form visible unity might eventually take. Much of this chapter is therefore an attempt to envisage some possibilities and stimulate thinking. To that end, the JIC hopes that some variation or combination of the models outlined in the previous paragraphs might prove to be enormously creative and helpful.²⁷
67. Some of that creative thinking has led to the identification of questions concerning the overall ecumenical vision and policy for both our churches, and for our other partners in Scotland and Wales.
68. In all of this we have tried to work in the spirit of the first Commitment of the Covenant, which reads *"We commit ourselves, as a priority, 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. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry"*. We believe that the content of our whole report reflects the second sentence of that Commitment. Through it we are working to create the "fuller visible unity of our churches". We believe that doing so will make possible "a united, interchangeable ministry". The steps we have outlined are those that will take us from shared to interchangeable oversight, and then on towards united oversight. They are therefore steps on the way to what the first sentence in the Commitment talks about, namely the 'organic unity of our two churches'. We cannot yet spell out what that stage of unity will look like, but we believe that meshing together systems built on principles of connexion and communion will enable it to develop naturally; and that reaching it will be a step on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church.

²⁷In this respect, the JIC draws attention to the stimulating paper given by the Bishop of Guilford in Bury St Edmunds on 16 May 2013. The JIC has not, however, yet had a meeting at which it can consider the paper fully.

ANNEX

Background: the situations and roles of the Churches in Scotland, Wales and England

1. How are expressions or groupings of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church affected by such factors as geographical or political boundaries, social groupings, matters of historical and cultural identity, or denominational traditions (and how are those factors are weighted in relation to each other)? In practice these issues work out in different ways in different contexts and places. In the particular context of the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England they can be seen at play in the fact that the Methodist Church of Great Britain relates primarily to England, Scotland and Wales (but also to the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, Gibraltar and Malta). The Methodist partner in the Covenant therefore relates to the principal (but not the only) areas under the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament, although in Scotland and Wales it also relates to forms of government currently devolved to those nations under the Westminster parliament. Scotland is due to have a referendum about independence in 2014, and the result of this referendum will impact further on the relations between the churches and the state.
2. The Methodist Church of Great Britain is constituted legally by an Act of the Westminster parliament which applies in England, Scotland and Wales, but it is not thereby an 'established church' in the sense of being recognised as the official church of the area governed by the Westminster parliament or of any of those three nations. Nor is it a 'state church' in the sense of being supported by the Westminster parliament or the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales. Nor is it a 'national church' in the sense of only or primarily catering for a particular ethnic group or political jurisdiction.
3. The situations of the three Anglican churches in England, Scotland and Wales differ from that of the Methodist Church in Britain, but they also differ from each other. On the one hand, even though the jurisdiction of the Church of England in church matters does not extend to Scotland and Wales, it is established under the Westminster parliament (not least because England does not have a devolved form of government). But being established extends its influence beyond church matters and gives it a particular privilege and responsibility in affairs of the state with regard to the whole of the Westminster parliament (again, because England does not have a devolved form of government). The most visible expression of this is the presence of Bishops of the Church of England in the House of Lords. But the Church of England does not consider itself a state church because it is not directly supported financially by the Westminster parliament. Nor does it tend to talk of itself as a national church (eg that phrase is not used on its official website).
4. The Church of England does, however, claim that being established gives it a particular privilege and responsibility with relation to all inhabitants of all local communities in England. Thus its official website states that "From ancient times through to today, they (sc parish priests), and their bishop, are responsible for the 'cure of souls' in their parish. That includes everyone. And this explains why parish priests are so involved with the key issues and problems affecting the whole community".
5. Whereas people of other traditions and none sometimes find it comforting to know that someone has a responsibility or duty to provide ministry in their particular community, it is worth noting that the way that this statement is phrased reflects an attitude that Methodists and others can find hard to comprehend and potentially hurtful. The 'parish' is here defined in terms that are geographical and which reflect a wider definition of community than the internal structuring of the Church. Yet Methodists, for example, also believe that the gospel that they are called to preach is 'for all' and that their care and concern is therefore for anyone in the community. So to whom or what is the Church of England "responsible" for the 'cure of souls' of everyone in the

'parish' in what sounds like an exclusive sense? If to God, this seems to contradict statements in which the Church of England recognises the authenticity of the Methodist Church and other churches as churches, ie as parts of the body of Christ. But the concept of the 'cure of souls' is not just a theological one. It is also a legal one in the history of England that is connected with the role of the parish in English law and society. As a result of that history, all parishioners have rights in relation to the parish which means that in return the parish church and its clergy have legal duties towards them, including rights and duties around baptism, marriage and the burial of the dead. Those parishioners who are entered on the civil electoral roll of the parish may also vote in the election of churchwardens. Although the Methodist Church is able to baptise, marry and bury people, it does not have a duty in law to do so and people do not have a right to be baptised, married or buried according to the practices of the Methodist Church. It is important therefore to recognise that although the 'cure of souls' has been limited by successive acts of parliament which have given freedom to other religious traditions over the centuries, the situation of the two churches that are party to the Covenant is very different. Nevertheless, a problem potentially still remains. If the Church of England is accountable to the law of the land and the institutions of the state for the 'cure of souls', this enhances the difficulty in how a church with this status may be united with those that do not have it.²⁸

6. The situation is different however in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland there is an established Church, but it is not the church in the Anglican tradition, the Scottish Episcopal Church. Rather, another church, the Church of Scotland (which is a Presbyterian church in the Reformed tradition) is the 'Kirk by law established' for Scotland. It does not have representatives as of right in the Westminster parliament, but it does think and talk of itself as the 'national church' for Scotland in the sense set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 above. It has an historic duty to provide ministry throughout the nation, and is seeking to find ways of fulfilling it in our time; and it has an equivalent responsibility for the 'cure of souls' with, for example, every parish resident having the right to be buried by the parish minister and every person having a right to be married in their parish church. In this respect the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church in Britain relate to the Church of Scotland in the same way as the Methodist Church in Britain relates to the Church of England.
7. So far as Wales is concerned, whereas the jurisdiction (and establishment) of the Church of England originally included Wales, several pressures including that of growing national identity led to the Welsh Church Act of 1914. This provided for the separation of the Anglican churches and dioceses in Wales and Monmouthshire from the Church of England and the creation of the (Anglican) Church in Wales. The Act was put into effect in 1920. It disestablished the Church in Wales, and to a substantial extent disendowed it. There is therefore formally no church established for Wales, and the Church in Wales does not have representatives as of right in the Westminster parliament. But people in Wales do have a right to be buried in the parish burial ground and to be married in their parish church, and so some of the duties and privileges which the Church of England attributes to the fact of establishment continue to apply in Wales. This can create surprise both within the Church in Wales and beyond it when similar legislative measures are proposed in the Westminster parliament for the Church in Wales as for the Church of England.²⁹
8. There is therefore both pluralism and lack of symmetry in the way that the Anglican and Methodist Churches relate to communities in different places – and, for our current concerns, in

²⁸The JIC addressed the issues of the establishment of the Church of England in *Church, State and Establishment* Chapter 3 of its 2007 Interim Report *Living God's Covenant*. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf

²⁹For example, the proposed safeguards sometimes called the 'quadruple lock' in the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013).

Wales, Scotland and England in particular. These are not just issues that affect relationships between the Anglican and Methodist traditions. The Methodist Church has in recent years been reflecting on tensions arising within its experience of being a single church (a single “Connexion” to use the Methodist term) in three nations when the sense of political, social and cultural identity and the independence of those nations are increasing. Anglicans, on the other hand, have to deal with what it means to be three autonomous churches in those nations, one of which is established and two of which are not; and how they may co-exist and co-operate when those nations have varying degrees of government devolved to them, but ultimately all fall under the jurisdiction of the Westminster parliament.

Ecumenical developments in Scotland and Wales

9. With regard to **Scotland**, the Scottish Episcopal Church is an autonomous church whose area of jurisdiction and primary mission is co-terminous with the boundaries of the whole of the nation of Scotland (including Orkney and the Shetland Isles). Its role in the nation is not analogous to that of the Church of England, because the Church of Scotland is the ‘Kirk by law established’ for Scotland. Nevertheless, the Scottish Episcopal Church relates to the political, social and cultural institutions of Scotland, both historic and developing. Its story goes back to the roots of Scottish history whilst the arrival of Methodism dates from the post-Reformation (post 1560) period. The Methodist Church, however, relates to the nation of Scotland and its institutions not through an autonomous body but through two districts of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, namely the Scotland District and the Shetland District. The Scotland District has the permission of the Conference (enshrined in Standing Order 427) to call itself “The Methodist Church in Scotland”, but this does not make it an autonomous church. Nor does the other embodiment of the Methodist Church in the nation of Scotland (the Shetland District) have that permission, nor has it requested it. The Chairs of the Scotland and Shetland Districts are, however, required by Standing Order 427 to consult together on matters of joint concern.
10. In terms of formal ecumenical relationships in Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC) and the Methodist Church made an agreement to work together in 1996, building on the previous work known as “The Multilateral Conversations”. The subsequent SCIFU (Scottish Churches Initiative for Union) conversations between the Church of Scotland (the ‘Kirk by law established’ mentioned above), the Scottish Episcopal Church (SEC), the Scottish Congregational Church (SCC) [to 2000] and the United Reformed Church (URC) [from 2000 representing the SCC tradition], and the Methodist Church continued until 2003 when the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted against the Report. The debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland included reference to the stumbling block caused by proposals that the scheme include provision for bishops in the historic episcopate. The other three churches, which had each accepted at least some of the SCIFU proposals, then sought a way forward together. The Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland (ie the Scotland District of the Methodist Church of Great Britain acting in its own name but with the blessing of the Conference) and the United Reformed Church in Scotland (which under the polity of the United Reformed Church has a greater degree of autonomy as a body than the Methodist Church in Scotland, but not to the extent of being a separate Church) entered an agreement known as the EMU Partnership (Episcopal, Methodist, URC) The formal Statement of Partnership was signed by the three appropriate Church Leaders during an Act of Worship in Perth on 23 January 2010, in the presence of the Methodist Connexional Ecumenical Officer and leaders and representatives of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and other ecumenical partner Churches.
11. The EMU partnership is an agreement to explore together ways of:
 - (a) being Church and serving God together;
 - (b) increasing the confidence of church members to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to others;

- (c) cooperating in teaching and learning about Jesus Christ, and mission together;
 - (d) cooperating on Church and Society issues, supporting community development and taking action together for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor in Scotland;
 - (e) sharing in the provision and deployment of both lay and ordained ministries of all the people of God;
 - (f) sharing resources across Scotland to fulfil a shared Christian mission to spread the Gospel.
12. It is noticeable however that many of the points in that agreement require the development of shared decision-making, but have not so far made the matter of the historic episcopate the central issue in that process. In particular some progress has been made on sharing in the deployment of clergy (as in (e) above) without the matter becoming dominated by issues concerning the interchangeability of ordained ministries and the role in that of the historic episcopate. Whereas a lot of the work of the JIC goes into that particular knotty area, it may not seem as great an issue in the Scottish context (although some would argue that there is still work to be done on mutual recognition). That may be due to the differences in the canons governing the Scottish Episcopal Church when compared with those governing the Church of England. In canonical terms, the underlying canon of the Scottish Episcopal Church for the recognition and interchangeability of ministries is Canon 15. It begins with churches with which the Scottish Episcopal Church is in full communion, but then moves wider. Section 2 of Canon 15 effectively provides for interchangeability of ministry and the sharing of oversight in the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships involving the Scottish Episcopal Church and other partners which are Trinitarian Churches. This is a pragmatic localised arrangement which does not require the introduction of an episcopal order into the Methodist Church or any other partner church, and which is not designed to lead to a uniting church. The canons are primarily concerned with matters of jurisdiction, not theology: for example the question of the recognition of an individual as 'duly ordained' is left to the person's own church.
13. The experience of the EMU Partnership over the last three-and-a-half years, including the collegueship and collaborative working of the three Ecumenical Officers and those with responsibility for training and formation in the three churches, provides helpful pointers for the future. A number of joint events have been held and others organised by one church have invited wider participation. The warm personal relationship and commitment to regular table fellowship between the three Church Leaders is also making a valuable contribution to the thinking and working of EMU.
14. At the same time, it has to be recognised that the major church in Scotland is the Church of Scotland. It is seeking to find ways of fulfilling its duty to have a ministerial presence in each community. It might need help from its ecumenical partners to do that. But previous reactions against bishops in the historic episcopate mean that any moves towards taking the historic episcopate into the Methodist system in a way that affects Scotland (either through the relationship with the Scottish Episcopal Church in EMU or through the Covenant with the Church of England) may make it more difficult for the Church of Scotland to accept help from the Methodist Church in Scotland in this matter.
15. With regard to **Wales**, the Church in Wales is an autonomous, bi-lingual Anglican Church whose area of jurisdiction and primary mission is co-terminous with the boundaries of the whole of the nation of Wales. It therefore relates to the political, social and cultural institutions of that nation, both historic and developing. The Methodist Church, however, relates to the nation and its institutions not through an autonomous body but through two districts each roughly co-terminous with the boundaries of the nation, one working principally in the Welsh language and the other principally in the English language. They are jointly described as "The Methodist Church in Wales" and there is a team ("Y Cyngor") which co-ordinates their work.

16. The Church in Wales and the Methodist Church of Great Britain are already members of a Covenant that was established in 1975 with the goal of establishing 'visible unity' between the Church in Wales, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and those Baptist Churches willing to accept the Covenant. The Church in Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales are 'whole churches' within Wales; the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church are 'whole churches' which have presence within Wales but also beyond it; the Baptists are autonomous local congregations within Wales which have opted in to the Covenant. A Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales was established in 1976 to expedite the achievement of the Covenant's aim. The Trefeca Declaration of 2005 reaffirmed the member churches' commitment to the Covenant and it was agreed to fund the Commission for a period of six years until 2011. The Commission then asked that member churches renew their commitment to support its work for a further five years.

17. At an event known as "The Gathering" held on 13 October 2012 the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales launched a series of discussion papers about the future. They included recommendations that the five covenanted churches move to think of themselves as the Church Uniting in Wales. This Uniting Church would have nine jurisdictions – the six existing Anglican dioceses of the Church in Wales plus a Methodist jurisdiction, a Presbyterian jurisdiction and a URC/Covenanting Baptist jurisdiction. Each of these jurisdictions would be invited to elect its own bishop. Each of those bishops would be consecrated into the historic episcopate. Each would consult with and share full collegiality and interchangeability with all the other bishops in the Uniting Church (although it is not explained how they would be incorporated into the polity of each others' Churches until such time as a new, single polity for the Uniting Church is created). The bishop elected for each jurisdiction would then ordain all those who are to become ministers in that jurisdiction (it is suggested that as things stand at present in the Methodist Church in Great Britain this would involve the President of the Conference devolving his or her role in ordination for those ministers stationed in Wales to the bishop for the Methodist jurisdiction in the Church Uniting in Wales). All existing ministers would have to agree to the laying on of hands by at least one Anglican bishop and at least one other bishop representing the other traditions within the Church Uniting in Wales, with such an act being regarded not as an ordination but as a step forward to full covenanted ministry (ie a ministry in a wider jurisdiction than previously).

SIGNS OF CONTINUITY IN FAITH, WORSHIP AND MISSION

Introduction

1. In the Common Statement of the Formal Conversations leading to the signing of the Covenant sufficient agreement was found on the subject of episkope or oversight for the following mutual affirmations to be made:

(6) We affirm that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight (episkope) is exercised within them in various forms.

And

(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 time and space.

2. On the basis of these affirmations, in the sixth commitment of the Covenant:

(6) We commit ourselves 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.

3. The phrase “the principles of episcopal oversight” in Affirmation 7 is capable of a wide range of interpretation. For better or worse, however, most of the subsequent conversations in our churches have centred around the issue of bishops (sometimes using the term ‘personal episcopal ministry’ or ‘personalised episkope’); and, in particular, (sometimes using the term ‘the historic episcopate’) bishops who are vested with the importance of being effective signs of the Church’s continuity with the apostolic faith that is transmitted and restated in every generation. The Joint Implementation Commission, in working to fulfil the commitment quoted above, has done further work on the issues of episkope and episcopacy which continue to divide our churches. The first quinquennial report [Embracing the Covenant](#) contained a substantial chapter (“Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant”), which summarised the position on this subject as it stood in 2008. It provided a summary of the material presented in the Common Statement and of further work presented in the interim reports of 2005 and 2007. It went on to give an account of various Methodist studies and decisions on the subject of episkope and episcopacy in recent decades, and a statement of the current understanding of the bishop’s ministry in the Church of England. The chapter then offered further reflections on episkope and episcopacy under the Covenant, suggesting parallels between the exercise of oversight by the Methodist Conference (as a corporate personality) on the one hand, and the personal oversight of bishops on the other. These reflections led to a proposal for a way forward for the Methodist Church to take episcopacy into its system in the form of successive Presidents of the Conference being made bishops in the historic succession. This proposal was restated in [Moving Forward in Covenant](#) (2011) the interim report of the JIC in its second phase.

4. The present chapter does not attempt to go over this ground again, but to offer some new insights on the subject. It does so in the recognition that it is at this point that we come up against the asymmetry in the Covenant churches concerning the nature and relative importance of the issues. For the Church of England, the historic episcopate often appears to be the crucial issue. But the Methodist Church in Britain does not have bishops (and, unlike most Methodists throughout the world, does not even have bishops who are not in the historic episcopate). For it, therefore, the

question of the historic episcopate is not crucial and it is the corporate exercise of oversight by the Conference in which lay people and those who are ordained share (a situation which is mirrored in bodies throughout the church) that is of supreme importance.

5. In seeking to offer some new insights, this chapter follows the way forward outlined in the chapter [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) of not seeing personal episcopacy as the only question to be addressed or as a stand-alone question. The main need is rather to develop a concept of oversight in the broadest sense of that term and a unified set of processes for exercising it. Within that system the question of the historic episcopate will have to find its proper place and be dealt with in it. Whatever its relative importance for the various parties, it is still a question that needs to be addressed as the two churches grow together. In doing that care will have to be taken to respect and honour the traditions of both churches.

The Church of England and the Historic Episcopate

6. The report of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission in 1996 *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* sets out the understanding of the historic episcopate that is accepted by Anglicans, as well as Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

Within Anglicanism, the historic episcopate denotes the continuity of oversight in the Church through the ages from the earliest days, expressed in a personal episcopal ministry, the intention of which is to safeguard, transmit, and restate in every generation the apostolic faith delivered once for all to the saints. It is not the only way by which the apostolic faith is safeguarded and transmitted, nor is it exercised apart from the Church as a whole. It is exercised within the Church, recalling the people of God to their apostolic vocation. It is exercised in an interplay with the whole people of God, in which their reception of that ministry is a crucial element . . . It is a personal episcopal ministry, but always exercised collegially (ie together with other bishops, and with the clergy within each diocese), and also communally (ie together with the laity and clergy in synod, convention or council).¹

7. Anglican churches have followed the 1920 Lambeth Conference *Appeal to all Christian People* in claiming that the historic episcopate in this sense is the best means of developing unity in oversight and growing into full visible unity.² Its importance to the Church of England is bound up to some extent in the historical and communal influences which have shaped that church's sense of its own identity and role within the universal Church.³ What it more often argues, however, particularly in recent times, is that the historic episcopate is vital to the way that it sees itself "sharing in the apostolic communion" (as the title of the 1996 report quoted above termed it)⁴. The phrase 'apostolic communion' refers to the experience Christian disciples have of relating to Christ and each other, nurtured by and faithful to both apostolic truth and apostolic mission. Although through human frailty and sinfulness that experience may be marred, in principle it extends back through the continuous history of the Church to the mission of the apostles; and in principle it extends throughout the world today, uniting churches in a universal fellowship that is one with 'the apostles' teaching and fellowship' (Acts 2:42) and one with the apostle's mission (Matthew 28:16-

¹ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* paragraph 76f.

www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/methodist/docs/apostolic_communion1996.cfm

² Paragraph VII of the *Appeal to All Christian People* Resolution 9 of the 1920 Lambeth Conference
www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/downloads/1920.pdf

³ For example, at the Restoration of the Monarchy in England in 1660, it was built into the polity not just of the Church but also of the State (in so far as it affected England) that it should have bishops in the historic episcopate.

⁴ See footnote 1 above

20; Acts 1:1-2, 6-9). The apostolic communion thus has 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' dimensions, that is to say historical depth and contemporary extent.

8. Another way of putting this is to talk in terms of 'apostolic continuity'. In describing the history and the present experience of Christ's body, the Church, it is possible to identify points of disjunction and moments of apparent discontinuity. Yet through them all can be seen strong threads of continuity. As the body of Christ moves into the future, however, the fear of further disjunction and discontinuity may make it unresponsive to the promptings of grace and the needs of mission. How then can the Church ensure that it remains open to the Spirit which is constantly creating things anew whilst being sure that it remains in continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission? The best way is if it is in living contact with the other parts of Christ's body in the present and throughout the ages, and can check out its insights against theirs. That means that the various constituent parts of the Church need to have a strong sense and living experience of being in apostolic communion both with their contemporaries in the present age and also with their predecessors in a tradition that reaches back to the first apostolic disciples of Jesus.
9. For that to happen, that awareness and living experience of both the world-wide contemporary Church and the 'cloud of witnesses' from the past needs to be constantly nurtured and made real in each generation and each situation. So far as the contemporary Church is concerned, each part of the body of Christ needs to have the other parts presented and made real to it even when they are not physically in its presence. Similarly, the teaching and calling of the earliest apostles and those who succeeded them need to be presented and made real in each contemporary church.
10. In the life of the Church there therefore need to be signs that 'represent' all the constituent parts of the body of Christ in the world today and throughout history, and which also 're-present' them to each other in the sense of making them real to each other, connecting them to each other, and making them impinge upon the consciousness, understanding, prayer and action of those who gather in a particular place. In a profound sense such signs are sacramental. They make visible those profound realities that are otherwise invisible; and by making them visible they effect what they signify: they do not just speak of or point to bonds of communion or connections, they actually connect people. Moreover, since what is being realised is a matter of personal relationships (both individual and corporate; both spiritual and practical), and because the Christian faith is incarnational, the signs which point to, nurture and effect them are most appropriately embodied in persons (individually and collectively).
11. It is at this point that the Church of England talks of the importance of bishops in the historic episcopate. The expression 'the historic episcopate' refers to the formal intention of Anglican and other churches that there should be *visible historical continuity* between the Church of today and the Church of the apostles so that we may say that there is one Church and it is the same Church now as it was then. The Church of England sees that visible historical continuity particularly embodied in the ministry of senior pastors from age to age, particularly in the making of new ministers. This understanding of the historic episcopate does not require that there should be an empirically verifiable manual transmission of ordination, going back to the apostles, in every case. The emphasis is on the formal intention of a church not to make a new church or to ordain ministers merely for its own church, but to preserve the visible historical continuity of the Church from the beginning; that is, to maintain and sustain its apostolic identity, in the belief that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted and intended that an ordered community – a body of people with certain tasks and structures – should continue his mission until the end of the age (Matthew 28:16ff).
12. In maintaining this discipline the Church of England and other Anglican churches believe that they are being faithful to the pattern of the early Church. They hold that this pattern comes down to the Church of today from apostolic and early post-apostolic times and carries the authority of the early

tradition⁵, and significant ecumenical support and consensus (as we see in the responses to the World Council of Churches document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*⁶). Anglicans are also very conscious that they have agreed statements with the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches to which agreement on the historic episcopate is integral.⁷ Moreover, Anglicans believe that the historic episcopate is '*the one means of providing ... 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*'.⁸

13. For Anglicans, three aspects of the historic episcopate stand out. First, as we have discussed above, it is *personal*. The historic episcopate refers to persons who have been entrusted with the responsibility of *episkope*, oversight. There is no substitute for person-to-person pastoral ministry – with all its risks and vulnerability. The historic episcopate is a particular expression of personal *episkope*.
14. Second, the historic episcopate is *historic*: it is an expression of the visible historical continuity of the Church today with the Church of the apostles. It is not dependent on a hypothetical unbroken chain of hands on heads – though succession of ordinations is an important outward sign – but refers primarily to a church's intention to ordain to the same ministry as that of the apostles within the same Church and to pass on the apostolic calling to each new generation of the Church's pastors.
15. Third, the historic episcopate is *received*. All the gifts and graces of the Christian life are received from God through God's Church. 'What do you have that you did not receive?', asks St Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:7. The historic episcopate cannot be created from scratch; it cannot be home-grown. All our churches are debtors to the wider Church, the Church catholic, and our highest aspiration is simply 'to do what the Church does' – not 'our own thing'. Anglicans believe that the historic episcopate is a precious aspect of catholicity, that is to say of the fullness and wholeness of the Church. For Anglicans, the historic episcopate is something they have received from others just as all churches have received the Scriptures, the Creeds and the sacraments from the wider Church, the Church that was before we were and will endure after we are gone.
16. We must emphasise, however, that the historic episcopate is not the only element in the constitution of the Church that Anglicans think important. Moreover, Anglicans do not say that a church cannot be a church without it. The many ecumenical agreements made by Anglican churches with churches that are not ordered through the historic episcopate (including the Church of England's Covenant with the Methodist Church of Great Britain) clearly show the reverse. It is, however, integral to Anglican identity and to the way Anglican churches are in communion with one another. It is because of this that they cannot envisage entering a deeper communion with other churches without the historic episcopate, expressed in some form or another within the life of that church. For it to be otherwise would impair their unity with more parts of the body of Christ than those with whom it increased unity.

⁵ Preface to the Church of England's Ordinal (bound with the *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662).

⁶ World Council of Churches *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper no. 111, the "Lima Text") 1982 www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text

⁷ Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Final Report* (London: SPCK/CTS, 1982), especially 'Ministry and Ordination' [1973] and its 'Elucidation'; International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God (The Cyprus Agreed Statement)* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 2006).

⁸ Lambeth Conference 1920, *Appeal to All Christian People* (Resolution 9).

Oversight and Apostolic Continuity in the Methodist Church

17. It is important to note that the Methodist Church, of course, also sees itself as being part of the universal Church spread through space and time, and in continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission. It addressed this idea of continuity in the Conference Statement *The Nature of the Christian Church* in 1937.⁹ That Statement points out that in the Deed of Union (1932) 'a continuity of Methodism with the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church is affirmed'. The statement locates this continuity in six areas. First, the Methodist Church 'claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ'. Second, the Methodist Church embraces the Apostolic Faith, inherited from the Church through the ages. Third, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are observed 'as of divine appointment and perpetual obligation'. Fourth, the Methodist Church accepts 'the fundamental principles of the historic creeds'. Fifth, Methodism accepts 'the fundamental principles of the gospel, which were re-affirmed at the time of the Protestant Reformation'. Sixth, there is continuity in the mission for which Methodism was raised up – 'to spread Scriptural Holiness through the land'.

18. For Methodists it is the corporate body of the Conference which is the supreme sign and guarantor of apostolic continuity, connection (connexion) and communion. But within their corporate experience of faith, worship, discipleship and mission in which lay and ordained share, Methodists have always had a counterbalancing emphasis on personal experience. The 1937 statement speaks eloquently of the transmission of Christian experience from person to person through the ages:

Behind each believer of today there stretches a long chain, each link a Christian man or woman, till we find ourselves, with the first disciples, in the company of the Lord Himself. Through such a succession of believers Methodists may echo the confession of one of the early Apologists: 'Christians trace their genealogy from the Lord Jesus Christ.'

19. The Statement then adds a nuanced comment about 'apostolic succession', which it finds primarily in faithfulness to the apostolic message, handed down through the ministers of word and sacrament.

..., the Word of Life has been transmitted to us by a multitude of ministries, known and unknown, remembered or forgotten..... We give thanks to Him that, even in the days of its feebleness and faithlessness, the Word and Sacraments of His Church have never been wholly without power, and that men have been continually ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

20. That is how the British Methodist Church in 1937 described how it shared in the apostolic communion. It was a remarkably 'progressive' theological vision, anticipating the holistic understanding of apostolicity set out in the World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* (BEM) in 1982.¹⁰ The response of the British and Irish Conferences to the latter document was built on, together with the 1937 Statement, in the British Conference Statement of 1999 *Called to Love and Praise: The Nature of the Christian Church in Methodist Experience and Practice*. This Statement restated the understanding of what it means to share in apostolic communion by reference to the four notes of the traditional description of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic:

These four traditional 'notes' of the Church find their fullest expression in the communion of all the saints, in heaven and on earth. This company 'which no-one can number' is united by its common thanksgiving to God. The saints on earth remain on pilgrimage, journeying towards and praying for an ever fuller expression of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The saints in heaven are their unseen friends, divided temporarily by death, but united in faith, love, thanksgiving and praise. For

⁹ This and subsequent quotations from the faith and order statements of the British Methodist Church are available at www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/faith-and-order-statements

¹⁰ See further paragraph 44f below.

Christians in this life the four notes of the Church are both an invitation to thank and to trust God, and at the same time, a reminder that the Church is always in need of reform. In a word, unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are what God gives to, and requires of his Church.

21. The second important thing to note is that the Church of England has formally recognised that the Methodist Church in Great Britain shares in the apostolic communion and is in continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission; and that its ministries of word, sacrament and oversight have an apostolic character. This is to be found to a greater or lesser extent in each of the Affirmations of the Covenant, printed at the beginning of this report.
22. It cannot be stressed too strongly that these affirmations have been made by the churches of each other as they currently are, not as they might become. In other words, the Church of England, which is ordered in the historic episcopate, has made them of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, which has not retained the particular sign of bishops in the historic episcopate; and vice versa.
23. The third important thing to note is that the Methodist Church holds views of ‘apostolic continuity’ that are consonant with those expressed in paragraphs 6 to 10 above. It recognises that there need to be signs that represent all the constituent parts of the body of Christ in the world today and throughout history, and also make them real and connect them to each other. It recognises that those signs are appropriately embodied in persons (individually and collectively) and, for example, has a ‘representational’ understanding of ministry.¹¹ But it has expressed those signs in ways other than through the historic episcopate.¹²
24. However, the fourth important thing to note is that Methodism has always seen its reason for existence as being mission. In the words of the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church of Great Britain *“It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the evangelical faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission”*.¹³ Theoretically at least it has seen the way it is structured as being contingent on achieving that end. As a result, for a period of over forty years it has formally stated that it is prepared to undergo major structural change for the sake of increasing its and other churches’ unity and effectiveness in worship and mission. As part of such change it has been prepared to countenance accepting bishops in the historic episcopate. Thus in its response to the World Council of Churches’ document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), the Conference had this to say:

The Methodist Conference has ruled that the acceptance of the historic episcopate would not violate our doctrinal standards, and indeed has shown itself ready to embrace the three-fold ministry to advance the cause of visible unity. Such an acceptance would see the historical episcopate as a valuable sign of apostolicity, but not as a necessary sign, nor as a guarantee . . . We see the historic episcopate as one possible form of church order . . . but neither normative nor clearly superior to any other. We agree that the episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal functions need to be exercised in

¹¹Methodist Conference statement on Ordination 1974 especially para 14
www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/Faith_and_Order_Statements_Vol1_0409.pdf.

¹² See further paras 28ff below.

¹³This quotation resonates with particular Methodist understandings and usages. The ‘evangelical faith’ refers to what it has inherited from the Church of England and, through it, from the principles of the Reformation and the creeds and councils of the early Church. Proclaiming it involves both the Word and Sacraments. ‘Scriptural holiness’ is both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, personal and social. Documents of the Conference such as *Sharing in God’s Mission* (1985) and *The Mission of God’s People in the World* (1987) show how the terms are understood as referring to mission in the broadest sense.

the Church [and] are, or could be, adequately discharged by the Methodist Church as at present constituted.¹⁴

The Conference went on to express a readiness to accept the historic episcopate:

There is the challenge to all churches to recognize that their structures are in constant need of reform. We accept this as applying to ourselves. God is calling us to a fuller ministry than we have yet known ... As far as the mutual recognition of ordained ministers is concerned, we have listened to the testimony of churches that are episcopally ordered, we have judged that the acceptance of episcopacy would be no contradiction of our doctrines, and we await the occasion when it would be appropriate 'to recover the sign of the episcopal succession'.

25. This positive evaluation was further supported by the Conference Statement on ecclesiology *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) and by the report *Episkope and Episcopacy* (2000), with the latter phrasing it variously as “willingness to embrace episcopacy”, “willingness in principle to receive the sign of episcopacy” and “would willingly receive the sign of episcopal succession” (paras 52, 114 and Guideline 4 respectively), on the understanding that:

- partner churches acknowledge that the Methodist Church has been and is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and accept that different interpretations of the significance of the sign exist (Guideline 4);
- the Methodist Church expects to engage in dialogue to clarify the nature and the benefits of the gift (Guideline 5);
- the Methodist Church insists 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 (Guideline 7).

This remains the official position of the Methodist Church of Great Britain.

The Methodist Church and the Historic Episcopate

26. On a number of occasions the Conference has gone on to approve specific ecumenical proposals that would involve embracing the historic episcopate in one form or another within the context of particular unity schemes,¹⁵ even though nothing was then enacted because those particular schemes did not come to fruition. In 1969/1972 there were schemes for unity with the Church of England, and in 1982 a proposed Covenant for Unity between the Methodist Church, the Church of England, the Moravian Church and the United Reformed Church. In 2002 there were proposals for an Ecumenical Bishop in South Wales. The Methodist Church voted very positively in favour of these schemes but they all failed to get the required majority in the Church of England and Church in Wales respectively.

27. Moreover, despite (or perhaps because of) the failure of the unity schemes, the Conference has not moved unilaterally to take what it had identified as the “sign of episcopacy” or the “sign of episcopal succession” into Methodist polity on its own terms in ways that would have been in line with Archbishop Fisher’s suggestion¹⁶ that the Free Churches receive the episcopate on their own terms and express it in their own way. In many ways it has seemed increasingly resistant to doing so. The most recent example was the responses to the 2005 report *What Sort of Bishops?*. This

¹⁴ Conference *Agenda*, 1985, pp 582f.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that in relation to a Faith and Order Committee report on *Episkope and Episcopacy* the Conference of 2000 amended a proposed resolution and adopted it in this form “*The Conference affirms its willingness in principle to receive the sign of episcopacy in the context of appropriate ecumenical developments, on the basis of the Guidelines set out in this report.*” [underlining added for emphasis]

¹⁶ In a sermon before the University of Cambridge on 3 November 1946.

report attempted to describe how the sign of episcopacy might be embodied in British Methodism, what forms it might take that were consonant with Methodist traditions and understanding, and where they might be located in Methodist polity. With regard to the latter a large number of possibilities were discussed which were grouped into five major options, together with a further option of "None of the above". The whole of the Connexion was consulted (both formal bodies and individuals) but there was a very low rate of response. That fact together with the content of the responses (56% of which rejected the possibility of having bishops in any form) led to the 2007 Conference resolving not to take any steps towards embracing the historic episcopate at that time. At the same time, the Conference also adopted resolutions recognising that it would be inappropriate not to envisage taking up this discussion at some point in the future, and specifically encouraging the JIC to continue its discussions in relation to episcopacy and to bring recommendations to the Conference at a future date. This effectively meant that the previous expressions of willingness to receive the sign and commitments to explore how it might be embodied in the context of unity schemes were not rescinded. At the same time the resistance to enacting them was clear.

28. The reasons for this resistance are probably many and various. It may be that the Conference discerned and decided things in advance of the rest of the Connexion, and that those decisions may never have been fully or properly received (ie consented to) by the whole church. The earlier commitments were made in the context of unity schemes, on the understanding that accepting the historic episcopate would hasten the uniting of the churches, which would in turn increase the effectiveness of all the churches in mission (which has always been a major motivator for Methodists) and in the quality of their worship. But the unity schemes have all failed over the years, and there is little evidence that the historic episcopate would substantially increase the quality of the Methodist Church's worship and its effectiveness in mission if Methodism remains a separate church which is not becoming part of a united church. So it may be hard now for Methodists to see an adequate reason for moving to accept the historic episcopate. Moreover, the long passage of time since original commitments were first made may have led to people forgetting that the reasons that led their predecessors to make them sprang from an overwhelming sense of the urgent needs of mission.
29. There have possibly been other factors at work as well. Methodists have a long history of having to define themselves and justify themselves over against Anglican churches. This may have produced a conditioned reflex amongst them that even if the rest of the Methodist world has bishops (though not currently bishops in the historic episcopate) British Methodists are the people who do not have them on principle, simply because the Anglican churches (primarily the Church of England but also the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church) do. Moreover, the way that the historic episcopate has been presented to them might have seemed like a non-negotiable requirement before there can be much progress in other areas. This may have made some Methodists believe that they are being forced to jump through an Anglican hoop in a way that is humiliating. Similarly, the apparent lack of willingness to talk about how the model and role of Church of England bishops might develop or possibly change as the two churches become more fully one may make some Methodists feel that, despite assurances that Methodists can develop their own models of episcopacy, the Methodist church will eventually be absorbed into a dominant and unchanging Anglican model (and specifically a Church of England one). Again, the lack of public discussion in recent years about how existing Methodist ministers will be treated by the Church of England should the Methodist Church accept the historic episcopate into its system and the oversight structures of the two churches begin to be linked together, may make some Methodists think that there is nothing certain to be gained by making the move to accept the historic episcopate.¹⁷

¹⁷ It needs of course to be noted that the Church of England is not the only Anglican Church, and the ways in which episcopal ministry is exercised is different in eg the Church in Wales and Scottish Episcopal Church. It also needs to be noted that there is a range of views about the historic episcopate in the Church of England – see Bishop

30. In addition, the way some Methodists have interpreted their own experience of the way some bishops have acted in local contexts and also further afield may have made them start to perceive bishops as part of the problem rather than of the solution. On a wider front, the current tensions, battles and fracturing within the Anglican Communion generally and the Church of England in particular, and the high visibility and activity of bishops in that, may make it hard for Methodists to perceive bishops as signs and agents of unity in mission.
31. As a result, it might appear that Methodism has no place for personal signs of continuity, connexion and communion or personal expressions of leadership in the exercise of oversight. In this context, therefore, it is important for Methodists as well as Anglicans to notice that Methodism already has a way of talking about the need for there to be signs and agents of unity in mission. For example, in 1955 and 1956 major reports were presented to the Conference as the church sought to respond to the changes in both church and society in the aftermath of the Second World War. They concentrated on the districts and the role of what are now known as Chairs of District. They argued that for the sake of effectiveness in mission the role of Chairs of District should be developed with an emphasis on being District Missionaries.¹⁸
*In spite of the fact that we have in our connexional system a God-given instrument of co-ordination and united effort, there was too little continuity of policy or of leadership..... , (therefore)... to meet the present urgent situation Methodism needed a body of men who had full knowledge of what was happening in the Circuits and Districts, who could frequently confer and who, when policy was formulated, could see that it was carried through over a period of time by sustained effort..... Such men would have to speak for the Districts and Circuits at a connexional level and speak to the Districts and Circuits on behalf of the Church as a whole.*¹⁹
32. Some important points need to be recognised here. The first is that the reports were written at a time when districts were growing in importance, but were secondary in importance to the circuits on the one hand and, above all, to the Connexion on the other. Over fifty years later they have indeed grown in importance, but are still secondary to circuits and the Connexion. In British Methodism the 'intensity' of what it is to be the church is experienced by people most in the local congregation (which used to be termed the local 'Society' and is now formally defined in British Methodist polity as the 'Local Church'). It is there that people gather round the Word and the Table of the Lord and are formed for discipleship in worship and mission. But the parts of the church which most embody the 'connectivity' of what it is to be the church are the circuit on the one hand, and the whole Connexion gathered together in the Conference on the other.²⁰ It is there that the

Christopher Hill's chapter "Seeking the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church: do Bishops exhibit or obscure it?" in *Paths to Unity* Church House Publishing 2004. Moreover, the way that *episkope* is exercised in the Church of England is always developing: 21st century "missionary bishops" are very different from 18th century London-based bishops and different again from Mediaeval Prelates.

¹⁸*District Missionaries and General Policy* 1955 Conference Agenda; *District Missionaries and General Policy* 1956 Conference Agenda. (The exclusively male references in this and the 1956 report reflect the historical reality that at that time only men could be ordained as presbyters and so be appointed to the role.)

¹⁹1956 report.

²⁰The terms "Intensity" and "Connectivity" are drawn from the report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party published by Church House Publishing, London in 2012 *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*. On page 154 in Chapter 6: *Towards a Mission Shaped Ecclesiology* the report discusses the ecclesial dynamics of fresh expressions in terms of **intensity** and **connectivity**, terms which derive from a study of Acts of the Apostles, as follows:

- a. **Intensity** 'denotes the process by which are forged the bonds of *koinonia* (fellowship, communion) that create and sustain a Christian community around the apostolic teaching, the eucharist and worship –that is to say, around the ministry of word and sacrament'.
- b. **Connectivity** 'denotes the process by which are forged the bonds of *koinonia* that unite Christian communities within the universal Church'.

organisation and oversight of preaching and teaching, worship and sacraments, pastoral care and mission take place. So the local churches are like inter-dependent cells which together constitute the circuit. The circuits are then gathered together in districts which support them in their primary tasks and responsibilities. The primary purpose for which districts are constituted is to advance the mission of the church in a particular region. In this the districts act for practical purposes as subdivisions of the whole Connexion. In recent decades more of the work of administering the Connexion has been delegated from connexion-wide agencies to the districts, which have consequently developed significant infra-structures of their own, with a consequent danger of there being too much bureaucracy in local church, circuit, district and connexional expressions of the Methodist Church's life and work. At the same time, there has been a steady growth in the size of circuits both in terms of geographical extent and in the number of local churches. There is therefore currently a working party and connexional consultation looking at what structures between the circuit and the Conference the Methodist Church actually needs. What is clear, however, is that Methodist districts do not have the same role and importance in Methodist polity as dioceses do in the Church of England.

33. Second, what is said in the 1955 and 1956 reports about Chairs of District can in many ways be said even more strongly about circuit superintendents and, supremely, about the President of the Conference. That is partly as a consequence of the above. But it is also because British Methodism has never seen circuit superintendents, district chairs or even Presidents of the Conference as exercising separate or formally different ministries, but the same ministry as all ordained Methodist presbyters. They fulfil the same presbyteral ministry but in different contexts. This has been spelt out in a number of Conference reports.²¹ For example:

*All presbyters exercise the same ministry, equal in regard but specific in role. All embody the essential characteristics of their ministry in the particular contexts to which they are sent and through distinctive ways of functioning in those contexts. The context for a Superintendent is the Circuit... The context for a Chair is the District but also..... the wider Connexion...*²²

34. Third, the Methodist Church of Great Britain has a very different understanding of and relationship to areas of geographical jurisdiction to that of the Church of England. All Methodist presbyters (including those who are circuit superintendents and district chairs) are in full connexion with the Conference, and are stationed by the Conference to exercise its oversight in a particular part of the Connexion (normally a circuit) over which the Conference exercises jurisdiction, or a particular expression of the Connexion's life. They are therefore not presbyters of, say, a particular circuit (still less of a particular church or churches in a circuit) but presbyters of the Conference for that circuit.²³
35. For all these reasons, the 1955 and 1956 Conference reports do not lead to an easy equation with Anglican understandings or expressions of the historic episcopate. Districts are not the simple equivalents of dioceses. District chairs are not a Methodist equivalent of diocesan bishops.

The terms usefully spell out some of what is meant at the end of paragraph 7 above by the concepts of signifying 'depth' and 'extent'.

²¹ *What is a Presbyter?* 2002; *What is a Circuit Superintendent?* 2005; *What is a District Chair?* 2006. All are available for download from www.methodist.org.uk

²² *What is a District Chair?* 2006 Conference Agenda pp 91-92 paras 14-15

²³ As well as being ordained and members of a dispersed religious order, Methodist deacons are also in full connexion with the Conference and stationed in particular appointments throughout the Connexion. But whereas presbyters are ordained to an order of ministry whose main marks or emphases are the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral responsibility, deacons are ordained to one whose main marks or emphases are a ministry of witness and service. Deacons exercise pastoral care and undertake pastoral work, but do not exercise pastoral responsibility, particularly in so far as exercising pastoral charge is concerned.

36. Laying that aside for the moment, there are still some important general points to be gathered from the 1955 and 1956 reports. They point to the fact that if the church is going to be effective in response to its call to participate in the on-going mission of the body of Christ, it is going to need to have embodied in its life and structures effective signs of unity, connectivity and oversight.

Signs of Unity, Connectivity and Oversight

37. Such signs are already present in both our churches in both personal and corporate bodies. They will need to be present and to be owned in common as our churches grow closer together. So far as oversight is concerned, amongst other aspects of encouraging people to act consistently with apostolic teaching and faithfully in apostolic mission, such bodies will have to fulfil what the Porvoo statement calls “*a ministry of co-ordination*” of the diversity of God’s gifts and of the multiplicity of tasks involved in serving that diversity “*so that they enrich the whole Church and its unity*”.²⁴ That in turn means that there will have to be people charged with developing an overview of the church’s mission in a particular context; being prepared to listen, discern and then propose initiatives to the appropriate governance and executive bodies in the church, both locally and further afield; being able to nurture the initiatives if the bodies concerned catch the vision and agree to enact them. An example of this in the Church of England is the recent development and increasing use of Bishop’s Mission Orders, particularly in the field of pioneering ministries and fresh expressions of church.
38. The recent report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party entitled *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* has outlined the role of those exercising oversight in prompting, nurturing and guiding the mission of the church in this area as follows:

The ministry of oversight exercised by bishops in the Church of England and by the Methodist Conference has a special responsibility in guarding against diversity that threatens to impair connectivity. This responsibility is exercised in partnership with fresh expressions pioneers.

*The task of those entrusted with oversight, acting in the name of Christ, is to foster the promptings of the Spirit and to keep the community within the bounds of apostolic faith, to sustain and promote the Church’s mission, by preaching, explaining and applying its truth. In responding to the insights of the community, and of the individual Christian, whose conscience is also moulded by the same Spirit, those exercising oversight seek to discern what is the mind of Christ.This is consistent with the idea of a two-way channel of communication between the centre and the margins as described in the Acts of the Apostles Ultimately, the General Synod of the Church of England and the Methodist Conference may be called upon to exercise their respective discernment in a way that is comparable to the first Apostolic Council as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15; ...).*²⁵

39. These paragraphs demonstrate that the vision set out in paragraph 8 above is not only urgently required by the mission of the church, but also profoundly effective in it. There need to be personal and corporate bodies who are holy and sacramental signs that represent all the constituent parts of the body of Christ in the world today and throughout history, and also make them real to each other and connect them to each other; and that oversee and effect the unity and faithfulness of Christ’s body in worship and mission. As the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain continue to grow together in deepening communion in both worship and mission such signs of ‘connectivity’ are going to become increasingly important. They will be needed to ensure that vision is shared, decision-making co-ordinated, and resources used in complementary ways as the

²⁴ *The Porvoo Common Statement* (of the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches), 1993, para 42. www.porvoochurches.org/whatis/resources-0201-english.php

²⁵ *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* Church House Publications 2012 paras 6.3.7ff

churches seek to respond to the increasing needs for mission and the urgent promptings of the Spirit in the land in which they are situated. The Fresh Expressions movement is both an example of what is needed and an exciting demonstration of what might be possible.

40. As set out in the chapter of this report entitled [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) and noted above²⁶, both Anglicans and Methodists have corporate and personal bodies which fulfil the role of embodying these holy and sacramental signs in their respective churches. What is more, in each tradition the corporate and the personal elements interact with each other in doing so. Thus in the Anglican tradition there are bishops in the historical episcopate, but they are “bishops in synod” because the corporate body of the Synod also has a responsible role in the exercising of oversight. In a sense, therefore, the bishops are signs of continuity, connectivity and unity in worship and mission, and the Synod and other corporate bodies are complementary signs.
41. In the Methodist tradition that emphasis is reversed. It is the Conference that is the primary sign (with other corporate bodies subsidiary to it). The Conference is then represented by a series of officers, both lay and ordained, who exercise oversight on its behalf. A primary strand in this oversight is the ministry of those ordained as presbyters, who exercise the distinctive functions of the ‘pastoral office’ on the Conference’s behalf.²⁷ Within this strand of presbyteral oversight, there are not separate orders of ministry such as an episcopal order and a presbyteral order, but one order of presbyters exercising episcopate on behalf of the Conference in a number of different contexts. Some of these are senior pastors exercising this ministry in wide-ranging contexts, beginning with circuit superintendents and district chairs and culminating supremely in the President of the Conference.

Seeking Convergence

42. It is here that we return to the asymmetry in the two Churches. Anglicans affirm the place of the historic episcopate in their own churches and require that it be present in some form or another if it is going to move towards fuller unity with other churches. In doing so they are following what they believe to be right. It is worth emphasising again that they are not thereby intending to pass any kind of judgement on churches that are not ordered in the historic episcopate.²⁸ For Methodists, the idea that something is not essential in order for a particular church to be counted as part of the universal Church of Christ, yet appears to be a non-negotiable requirement if churches are to grow together can seem confusing. Yet in many respects Methodists hold analogous views. For example, Methodists do not consider that the particular ways in which they practise what they term ‘connexionalism’ and the central importance of the Conference in their theology of the church and in their polity are essential elements that have to be present in other churches if it is to count them as part of the universal church of Christ. But it does consider them to be precious expressions of what makes them Methodist members of the universal body of Christ.

²⁶ [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#) paras 40ff; and paras 18ff and 37ff above.

²⁷ It is worth noting that in the making of Methodist presbyters, it is the Conference as a whole (lay and ordained) which ultimately decides whom the Conference should receive into full connexion with itself and ordain in and on behalf of the universal Church. But those who are already ordained presbyters have an exclusive contribution towards the making of that decision. The Conference as a whole can only authorise the ordination of those whom the presbyters, meeting in a separate Presbyteral Session of the Conference for this purpose, have approved (although the Conference as a whole is not required to ordain those whom the Presbyteral Session has approved). When the Conference has authorised that particular candidates be ordained, it is the President of the Conference (a presbyter) or a former President acting on the current President’s behalf who actually ordains in the name of the Church. Thus both the body of ordained presbyters and the church as a whole (which of course includes presbyters) have distinct parts to play in ensuring the replication of ordained ministry and the transmission of presbyteral responsibilities.

²⁸ *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005), p 97 [7.6.3-4]. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

They are therefore non-negotiable attributes of which account must be taken if Methodists are to move towards visible unity with other churches.

43. Over time, however, a three-fold delineation has been increasingly applied to the concept of episkope (oversight), not least in the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant (AMC)* paras 181-184, in which oversight is said to be personal, collegial and communal in nature. Not least, those paragraphs make it clear that there is agreement between our churches that oversight is exercised in three forms (personal, collegial and communal), which are all embedded in the *koinonia* of the whole Church.
44. That three-fold delineation is in turn an extension of concepts to be found in statements in the seminal World Council of Churches text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* that ordained ministry should be thought of and exercised in three ways: personal, collegial and communal.²⁹ The move to apply a delineation of ordained ministry to the concept of oversight raises the interesting question of whether ordained ministry or episkope is the prior reality. If the former, oversight is an expression of the role of ordained ministers (although participation in the exercise of every aspect of oversight may not necessarily be reserved exclusively to those who are ordained).³⁰ If the latter, ordained ministry is one of the means (and a main but not necessarily the sole means) of ensuring that oversight is exercised in the Church.
45. If there is a tension or difference of emphasis here, it is between the fact that in the former view ordained ministry is seen as something that is primarily *personal* (ie pertaining to people who then act individually, collegially or communally), whilst in the latter view oversight is seen as something that is primarily *corporate* (ie belonging to the whole Church but then having individual, collegial and communal expressions of it).
46. These twin aspects or emphases need to be kept in creative rather than destructive tension. But such a tension between the personal and the corporate nature of a concept or an entity is not new. It can also be seen in the way that Christ is thought of both as the individual incarnate, crucified, raised and ascended Jesus, and also as the corporate body of Christ, the Church. The New Testament oscillates between these two emphases, which are foundational to the ordering of the Church. It also shows that they are reconcilable.
47. The same is true with regard to the understanding of ordained ministry and oversight in our churches. The Church of England is often perceived by Methodists as having a tendency to emphasise that oversight is an expression of ordained ministry exercised individually, and to assume that individualism militates against affording the weaker or less noticeable parts of the body equal respect³¹ and is subversive of corporate responsibility. Yet the Church of England prefers to talk of 'personal' rather than 'individual' ministry or episcopacy because the personal can only be defined in relation to a community, and it sees the ministry of the bishop not as something that is separate from or set over against the community of the church but rooted in it. There can be no space therefore for charismatic leaders who found communities in which they are the supreme

²⁹World Council of Churches *Baptism Eucharist Ministry* para 26.

www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text See also the new draft WCC material in paragraphs 52 following of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision

³⁰ Within this view, there is then a debate about whether the role primarily belongs to the bishop and then is shared by the bishop with the priest and the deacon (a processional view), or primarily belongs to all the ordained and then focussed in different ways in the various orders (a perichoretic view).

³¹ 1 Corinthians 12:14-31.

authority, or for so-called *episcopi vagantes*, or wandering bishops, who put great emphasis on an act of ordination which they claim to be able to trace back through the historic succession but act in a freelance way, with no accountability or connection within the Church universal. It is inconceivable to Anglicans generally (not just to the Church of England) to have bishops divorced from the wider community of the church which calls them or the local community in which they are called to serve.

48. On the other hand, the Methodist Church of Great Britain is often perceived by members of the Church of England as emphasising the corporate nature of oversight and then seeing the ordained ministry as an expression of that oversight, and so devaluing personal leadership and preventing gifted leaders from exercising those gifts to the enrichment of the whole. Yet, as we have seen above³², Methodism has always had a strong sense of the contributions of and need for gifted leaders. It has valued them, and vested them with importance in such roles as being pre-eminent preachers (many older Methodists, for example, still talk about the influence of the “great era of Sangster, Weatherhead and Soper”). It has not, though, seen the need to consecrate them as bishops although all were Presidents.
49. **Both churches therefore can be said to have both personal and corporate expressions of oversight that are rooted in the community of the church, and to oscillate between them.** There is a difference between having individual authority over against the community of the church and personal oversight within the community. In the latter an individual is chosen (in various ways) and called to a particular office within the life of the church. That person is held accountable by the community, and operates within a framework of doctrine, law and a set of relationships within the governance and oversight structures of the church. Within the Methodist Church that framework is set by the Conference and all accountability is ultimately to the Conference. Within the Church of England a key role is played by bishops, both in their dioceses and in the wider church. In their dioceses, bishops act both collegially with other ordained and lay colleagues and communally in their diocesan synod and bishop’s council. Beyond the diocese they also act collegially with other bishops within the Church of England (with the House of Bishops being one of the houses of the General Synod) and the Anglican Communion. But they are also accountable within and to the community of the church.
50. It is extremely important (and reassuring to Methodists) in this regard to note the clear statements in the paragraphs from the Covenant quoted above³³ that the personal exercise of oversight presupposes the collegial, and that the collegial presupposes the conciliar; and that it is not the other way round. Throughout Christian history major emphasis has always been placed on the Councils of the Church, in a tradition going back to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15.
51. The tensions that exist between Methodist and Anglican models of oversight are as much to do with cultural values as ecclesiological differences. On one hand, Methodist emphasis on corporate oversight, based on egalitarian values, contrasts with the Anglican sense of the bishop as the representative of a diocesan community within the greater whole, and as the representative of the greater whole to the diocese. The tension is one between not so much corporate and individual understandings of ministry, but between corporate and communal models of the church, with their different ways of expressing the relationship of the individual to the body as a whole, although the differences are not hard and fast.
52. All of the above suggests that both churches have ways of holding together the personal and the corporate. It may therefore well be possible to mesh them together. For example, previous

³² See paras 16, 17, 29.

³³ Para 41.

Methodist and Church of England reports have emphasised the representational role of ordained ministers in both traditions. Yet this factor cannot be taken in isolation. It is important to recognise that there needs to be an active relationship between the representative and what is represented (the wider Church): it is not a case of representing a concept, a static entity or a passive constituency. This is especially pertinent to the office of bishop.

53. The coming together of our two churches in the Covenant is therefore prompting a re-evaluation of the personal and corporate elements of oversight and an increasing reconciliation of them. This is not just a matter of resolving the tension between the polities and the ecclesiologies of our churches. There are also signs of tension about them within the polity and ecclesiology of each of our churches. It is hoped that the work undertaken together by the Covenant partners can build on and then contribute significantly to the re-evaluation and reconciliation of these issues that is also happening, for internal reasons, within each Church.

Conclusion

54. Many of the practical implications of the material in this chapter can be found in the chapters [*Models for Uniting in Oversight*](#) and [*Developing Bonds of Communion*](#). As well as those particulars, **the JIC urge that further work be undertaken by our churches on how their two 'systems' of oversight might in due course be brought together into one.** The time must soon come when a decision one way or the other has to be made about these matters.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Introduction

1. In opening the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops in October 2012, Pope Benedict XVI stated that *“One of the important ideas of the renewed impulse that the Second Vatican Council gave to evangelization is that of the universal call to holiness, which in itself concerns all Christians (cf Lumen Gentium, 39-42).”* In his address to that Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury echoed that theme in saying *“Thus the humanity we are growing into in the Spirit, the humanity that we seek to share with the world as the fruit of Christ’s redeeming work, is a contemplative humanity.”* The theme is also central to the World Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue, the working title of which is *“The Call to Holiness”*.
2. Yet there has often been a reticence in talking of growth in holiness in conversations between Anglicans and Methodists, despite the fact that John Wesley frequently stated that the ‘charism’ and purpose of the Methodist movement was ‘to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land’. That may be the legacy of arguments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about one aspect of the theme of holiness which was often called *“Christian Perfection”*; and of a nineteenth and twentieth century history in which some major Holiness Movements developed within and out of Methodism, which in turn then led to the development of some Pentecostal Movements.
3. In what follows we demonstrate that there is indeed nothing in the understanding of holiness (personal and social, ethical and spiritual) and Christian Perfection to prevent Anglican and Methodist churches coming together. Rather, there is much which might enrich them as they do, particularly as they grapple with contemporary concerns about Christian lifestyle, discipleship and mission. Moreover, the topic is one that will have an increasing importance in contemporary conversations with Pentecostal churches as we seek to develop a common mission to the nations in which we are situated.
4. What we have discovered is not just a matter of dealing with historic problems and their legacy (important and interesting as that is). We have uncovered a rich theme of great contemporary relevance which would repay much greater attention than can be given in this short account. All that we can do here is point to that significance, identify the issues that would bear further investigation and commend that work to our churches.

Christian Perfection: an outstanding issue under the Covenant

5. *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (signed in 2003) stated that the interdependent Affirmations and Commitments of the Covenant were being made *“on the basis of our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity, as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement...”*. Within that framework, the Common Statement proceeded to identify a number of issues that would benefit from further examination, on the understanding that they were not of themselves matters that would prevent our two churches from coming together. Most of those issues identified have subsequently been explored in the four reports of the Joint Implementation Commission to date, and that work is summarised in chapter 1 of the Commission’s Quinquennial Report (2008) *Embracing the Covenant*. Amongst them, the Common Statement identified in particular *“two areas of doctrinal controversy*

where some theological tension remains, both between and within our two traditions”.¹ The first concerned Calvinism and Arminianism, which was explored in Chapter 6 of *Embracing the Covenant* (2008). The second concerned the doctrine of Christian Perfection, to which we now turn.

6. Paragraphs 118-119 of the Common Statement of *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (AMC) noted that the emphasis on Christian Perfection is not referred to in the Deed of Union of the Methodist Church in Great Britain; that a range of views on it exists, and Methodist preachers are not bound to a particular interpretation; and that the issue should not keep our churches apart.² Paragraph 112 of AMC, however, requested a more detailed examination of the issues, which this paper now seeks to provide.
7. Any such more detailed examination immediately requires us to note that paragraphs 118-120 of AMC appear to be explaining Methodism to the Church of England. That could easily lead to the assumption that there is a single Methodist position about the matters in question which have to be justified to Anglicans, and about which the Church of England in particular will have to cast judgement; and vice versa (although the latter possibility is not even hinted at anywhere in the paragraphs concerned). Yet paragraph 112 of AMC clearly states that Christian Perfection is one of the issues where “... some theological tension remains, both between and within our two traditions” (emphasis added). If true, that rules out either the Anglican or the Methodist tradition reserving the right to have a plurality of views itself whilst insisting on treating the other as if it had a single, homogenous one.

Sources for doctrinal statements in both traditions

8. That in turn takes us to the question of what is “taught” and “preached” in both traditions.³ AMC para 103 states that “Both churches affirm the apostolic faith in their official formularies and celebrate it in their liturgies and hymnody”. Paragraphs 104-106 then state that for the Church of England this inheritance of faith is grounded in the Scriptures, which are held to be inspired by God. Under the Scriptures, it is expressed in the ‘Catholic Creeds’ and other “such teachings of the Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the.... Scriptures”⁴. Following these, “Led by the Holy Spirit, it (sc the Church of England) has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons”⁵. Subordinate to these are more recent statements of a doctrinal nature in the ecumenical agreements with other churches entered into by the Church of England; the teaching documents commended as theological resources by the House of Bishops; and the General Synod’s approval of the World Council of Churches’ document *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* and the statements on Ministry and Eucharist in the *Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* as, in each case, consonant with Anglican faith.

¹ *An Anglican Methodist Covenant, Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London 2001); paragraph 112. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf.

² *An Anglican Methodist Covenant, Common Statement* (Methodist Publishing House: Peterborough; Church House Publishing: London 2001); paragraph 118-20. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf.

³ “Teach” is the more usual Anglican verb in these contexts, “preach” the more Methodist one. The difference in emphasis is interesting, but does not have any substantial importance for our current purposes.

⁴ Canon A5.

⁵ The *Preface to the Declaration of Assent* as found in *Common Worship (2000)* p. xi: the Declaration of Assent is required in one form or another of bishops, priests, deacons, readers and lay workers (Canon C15).

9. Similar (but not the same) formularies hold good for other members of the Anglican Communion such as the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church.
10. The Methodist Church in Great Britain also holds that its inheritance of faith is grounded in the Scriptures, which are inspired by God. As paragraphs 107-108 and 116 of the Common Statement noted, the 'doctrinal standards of the Methodist Church are set out in the Deed of Union 1932' (AMC para 107). Clause 4 of that Deed states that '*The Methodist Church rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation.... The doctrines of the evangelical faith which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds are based upon the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures. The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and practice.*' Clause 4 goes on to state that '*These evangelical doctrines to which the preachers of the Methodist Church are pledged are contained in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his sermons.*' But it then notes that these texts provide what AMC para 116 terms "secondary standards": '*The Notes on the New Testament and the 44 Sermons 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.*' AMC para 108 notes the existence of other texts of a doctrinal nature which explicate and derive their authority from the standards set out in the Deed: '*..... the Catechism of 1986 and the reports on faith and order authorised by the Conference, notably the two volumes (in three parts) of Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order from 1933 to 2000 (including Called to Love and Praise). The hymns of John and particularly of Charles Wesley have considerable significance in both shaping and expressing the faith of Methodists and are, of course, used very extensively by Anglicans and others.*'
11. Again, similar (but not the same) formularies hold good for other members of the world-wide Methodist family of churches.

Background in the tradition of the Church of England to the discussion of Christian Perfection

12. The first point to note is that on the basis of biblical passages such as Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 the Church of England teaches the doctrine of justification by faith. In the words of Article XI of the *Thirty Nine Articles*:

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification.
13. The second point is that on the basis of biblical passages such as James 2:18, 2 Peter 1:10 and 1 John 3:6-7 the Church of England teaches that justification by faith will result in what we might now term sanctification. In Article XII of the *Thirty Nine Articles* it is declared that justification will result in the performance of good works:

Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruit of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.

What this article means by performing 'good works' is living a holy life in obedience to God's commandments. The homily 'Of Good Works annexed unto Faith' in the *First Book of Homilies* of 1547, describes what the English Reformers understood by 'good works' as follows:

*And travailling continually, (during this life) thus in keeping the commandments of God (wherein standeth the pure, principal, and right honour of God, and which wrought in faith, God hath ordained to be the right trade and path way unto heaven) you shall not fail, as Christ hath promised, to come to that blessed and everlasting life, where you shall live in glory and joy with God for ever: to whom be praise, honour and empery, for ever and ever. Amen.*⁶

14. What is being stated here is how the justifying grace of God becomes effective in the life of the believer. For the English Reformers the sacramental means by which that occurs is baptism. In the baptism services in the *Book of Common Prayer*, in line with New Testament passages such as Romans 6:1-4, Ephesians 5:25-27 and Titus 3:3-7, it is taught that those who are baptised will become holy in the sense of being progressively cleansed from the power of sin. This is shown, for example, in the service for the *Publick Baptism of Infants* in the prayers offered by the Priest both prior to the baptism and after it.
15. The third point is that on the basis of biblical passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Philippians 2:13 the Church of England teaches that the justifying grace of God that issues in sanctification is prevenient grace. That is to say, it is grace which precedes and enables our human response. In the *Thirty-nine Articles* this is taught in Article X 'Of Free-Will' and in Article XVII 'Of Predestination and Election' (the first paragraph in particular).
16. A fourth point to note is that in Anglican understanding, holiness is not only the result of God's justifying and sanctifying work in individual Christians. It is also a mark of the whole Church as confessed in the Nicene Creed (which is used regularly in Anglican worship), '*We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church*'. Related to this is a form of the president's invitation to communion which can be used in the *Common Worship* eucharist Order One: '*God's holy gifts for God's holy people*', with the response '*Jesus Christ is holy, Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.*' The holiness of the Church is also described in paragraph 38 of the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) statement *Church as Communion* thus:

.... The Church is holy because it is "God's special possession", endowed with his Spirit (cf 1 Peter 2:9-10; Ephesians 2:21-22), and it is his special possession since it is there that "the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure" is realized, "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Christ" (Ephesians 1:9, 10).

*Being set apart as God's special possession means that the Church is the communion of those who seek to be perfect as their Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). This implies a life in communion with Christ, a life of compassion, love and righteousness...*⁷
17. A helpful contemporary statement of this Anglican understanding of the relationship between grace, justification and sanctification can be found in *Reuilly Common Statement* of 1999 which the

⁶ *The Homilies*, Bishopstone: Brynmill Press/Preservation Press, 2006, pp 44-45.

⁷ *Church as Communion* ARCIC II.

www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/church_as_communion.cfm

Church of England agreed with the other British and Irish Anglican churches and the French Lutheran and Reformed churches, The section of the statement on Agreement in Faith declares:

*We believe and proclaim the gospel that in Jesus Christ God loves and redeems the world. We 'share a common understanding of God's justifying grace, ie that we are accounted righteous and are made righteous before God only by grace through faith because of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not on account of our own works or merits... Both our traditions affirm that justification leads and must lead to 'good works'; authentic faith issues in love. We receive the Holy Spirit who renews our hearts and equips us for and calls us to good works. As justification and sanctification are aspects of the same divine act, so also living faith and love are inseparable in the believer.*⁸

18. Similarly, in paragraphs 15 and 17 of the second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) statement *Salvation and the Church* we find

15. Justification and sanctification are two aspects of the same divine act (1 Corinthians 6:11). This does not mean that justification is a reward for faith or works: rather, when God promises the removal of our condemnation and gives us a new standing before him, this justification is indissolubly linked with his sanctifying recreation of us in grace. This transformation is being worked out in the course of our pilgrimage, despite the imperfections and ambiguities of our lives. God's grace effects what he declares: his creative word imparts what it imputes. By pronouncing us righteous, God also makes us righteous. He imparts a righteousness which is his and becomes ours.

17. Sanctification is that work of God which actualizes in believers the righteousness and holiness without which no one may see the Lord. It involves the restoring and perfecting in humanity of the likeness of God marred by sin. We grow into conformity with Christ, the perfect image of God, until he appears and we shall be like him. The law of Christ has become the pattern of our life. We are enabled to produce works which are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Thus the righteousness of God our Saviour is not only declared in a judgement made by God in favour of sinners, but is also bestowed as a gift to make them righteous. Even though our acceptance of this gift will be imperfect in this life, Scripture speaks of the righteousness of believers as already effected by God through Christ: "he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6).⁹

19. Finally, it is important to note that with regard to perfection, the Anglican tradition has always emphasised the need to desire to grow in love. The Collect for Purity originates in prayers in the Sarum Missal and the fourteenth century work *The Cloud of Unknowing*. It then appeared in the communion liturgy in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and in many Anglican (and Methodist) liturgies since. In it the congregation prays for the gift of the Holy Spirit that '*we may perfectly love thee/you*'.

Methodist contributions to the discussion

20. It is important to note that when we talk of the Wesleys' contributions to the discussion of what came to be termed by some "Christian Perfection" we are not talking of Methodist statements as opposed to Anglican ones but of Methodist Anglican contributions to a debate that took place within the Church of England as much as beyond it (where "Methodist" is being used as an

⁸ *Called to Witness and Service*, London: CHP, 1999, p 26.

⁹ *Salvation and the Church* ARCIC II.

www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/catholic/arcic/docs/salvation_and_the_church.cfm

adjective). The Wesleys remained priests of the Church of England and believed that they were thoroughly loyal to its teachings and formularies throughout their lives. Thus, to allow one quotation to stand for many, in a period when John Wesley was producing major works entitled “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion” and “A Further Appeal” which set out his understanding of Christian faith and discipleship, and of his movement’s role as an evangelical order within the Church of England, he discussed at length in a series of letters a number of serious and insightful comments raised by an obviously eminent theologian of the Church of England writing under the pseudonym ‘John Smith’. In a letter of 30 December 1745, Wesley states that *“In saying ‘I teach the doctrines of the Church of England’ I do, and always did, mean (without concerning myself whether others taught them or no, either this year or before the Reformation) I teach the doctrines which are comprised in those Articles and Homilies to which all the clergy of the Church of England solemnly profess to assent, and that in their plain, unforced, grammatical meaning.”*

21. The reference to ‘plain meaning’ is explicated by the sentence prior to the one quoted above, which reads *“In writing practically, I seldom argue concerning the meaning of texts; in writing controversially, I do.”* He goes on to say that Article XI of the *Thirty-nine Articles* and the Articles following it were not *“ambiguously worded”*, and contrasts them with Article XVII “Of Predestination and Election” (the first part of which is referred to in paragraph 15 above) which he says was - *“I suppose on purpose”*. He accepts and subscribes to the Article concerned, whilst at the same time recognising that he has an understanding of it which is different to that of some others, such as George Whitefield, whom he recognises can also subscribe to the text. Within that framework he then engages where appropriate in controversy about the correct understanding or interpretation of the Article.
22. Wesley therefore upheld the formularies of the Church of England. Interestingly, though, when in 1784 he made provision for the communities in America he adapted the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Thirty-nine Articles*. It is important to note that these adaptations never gained any authoritative status for the Methodist movement in England, because of Wesley’s insistence on maintaining the formularies of the Church of England. However, in making provision for America he seems to have understood himself as acting on behalf of the authorities of the Church of England in a situation where they could not or would not act because of the War of Independence, but where there was a missionary need to act. That need to act involved making the liturgies and formularies of the Church of England appropriate for the new context. In a sense, it was a matter of setting parameters for what the Church of England might look like when it was in a place other than England and not under the jurisdiction of the British crown and state (factors which still influence relationships within the world-wide Anglican Communion).
23. In the case of the Articles of Religion, Wesley deleted fourteen of the *Thirty-nine*, and edited a few of the others. Some of the changes were to remove any reference to the British state. Others, as with his editing of other texts in, for example, the *Christian Library* that he published, were to simplify matters and avoid duplications. An example in this category is perhaps his deletion in Article IX *“Of Original or Birth-Sin”* of the words from *“so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit...”* to *“... hath of itself the nature of sin”* at the end of the Article. Other amendments were probably a response to the new context of a young church which did not have a mature leadership or easy links to other churches, and were made to exclude the possibility of what he considered to be doctrinal misinterpretations. Examples of this category are that he retitled Article XVI so that it dealt with *“Of Sin after Justification”* rather than *“Of Sin after Baptism”*; and he deleted Article XVII *“Of Predestination and Election”* (quoted above) completely.

24. When Wesley behaves in this way or when he engages in controversy about the interpretation of an Article or other formulary, it is often because of the stances that he took in the wider debate between what we might term “Arminian” and “Calvinist” emphases in the teaching and preaching of the Christian faith. It is important to recognise here that, as Chapter 6 of our earlier report *Embracing the Covenant* shows, this was not a debate between Anglicans on the one side and Methodists on the other, but a debate in the first instance between various Anglicans, some of whom happened also to be Methodists. There were, in other words, both ‘Calvinists’ and ‘Arminians’ amongst Methodists, and also amongst those Anglicans who were not Methodists. It is interesting to note, however, that when the Calvinistic constituency of Methodism finally parted company completely it was not just a matter of them having nothing to do with the Arminian Methodists but of them leaving the Church of England to form, respectively, the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion and the Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales (more recently known as the Presbyterian Church of Wales).
25. In the case of the liturgy, of particular interest for our concerns in the light of the references in paragraph 14 above is the Baptismal Office. In the *Book of Common Prayer’s* sentence “*Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child is regenerate and grafted into the Body of Christ’s Church*” Wesley omitted the word “regenerate and”. He omitted the same words in the phrase “*is regenerate and the child of God by adoption*”. But he retained the petitions that the child “*coming to thy holy Baptism may receive remission of sins by spiritual regeneration*” and that God “*sanctify this Water to the mystical washing away of sin*”, and there is plenty of evidence elsewhere that Wesley believed in baptismal regeneration.¹⁰ But he did so in a nuanced way. In maintaining Article XXV of the Thirty-nine (which became Article XVI of his version for America) Wesley accepted the understanding that goes back to Augustine that in sacraments the external material sign (“*signum*”) and the internal thing signified (“*res*”) are distinct but cannot be completely separated. But he also struggled to understand these things in terms of process. Thus baptism begins a process of new birth, but (as set out in Article IX even in Wesley’s shortened version) the human condition is such that original sin inclines all people to commit sins, which they normally and almost inevitably do. The process of new birth therefore leads to a second aspect of regeneration for those who accept responsibility for themselves and turn to God in repentance, seeking God’s forgiveness and help in dealing with their condition in the future. As Karen Westerfield Tucker puts it:

On the matter of infant baptismal regeneration, Wesley never wavered. Infant baptism was effectual and efficacious. But... to appeal to the new birth of one's baptism while living as a wretched sinner was to admit a false assurance of salvation and consign oneself to damnation.... A conscious experience of saving grace, also termed by Wesley the "new birth," was necessary to restore the divine image that had been distorted or suppressed...

In effect, two new births, one sacramental and objective, and the other experiential and subjective, were necessary for most individuals baptized as infants. Though Wesley apparently did not regard the two births as unrelated, nevertheless he did not establish definitively the connection between the two....¹¹

¹⁰ See the summaries in pp 158-165 of Rupert Davies *The People Called Methodists: 1. 'Our Doctrines'* published as Chapter 5 of Volume 1 of *A History of the Methodist Church in Britain* ed Davies and Rupp Epworth Press, London 1965; and pages 268-9 of A Raymond George *The People Called Methodists: 4. The Means of Grace* published as Chapter 8 in the same volume.

¹¹ Karen B Westerfield Tucker *American Methodist Worship* OUP New York 2001 p 91

26. This struggle to articulate things in terms of process affects what John Wesley said about what he named “Christian Perfection”. Significantly, his preferred ways of talking about it were in terms of perfect love, holiness and sanctification. What he had to say in this area caused more controversy with his contemporaries than any other theological statement. It is perhaps surprising that he did not forget about it or quietly relegate it to the margins. But he never did. Again and again he tried to defend it in the light of criticism, sometimes hedging or modifying his previous statements to explain better what he meant. That is partly because, as he argued in his earliest treatment of the topic, he believed that he had to deal with it because Scripture does, and we cannot remain silent about things of which Scripture speaks.¹²
27. But the concept of perfection also represented something extremely important in John Wesley’s understanding and experience of what we might term Christian faith and discipleship. Wesley and others were concerned about how to evangelise people and how to develop appropriate Christian lifestyles as individuals and communities in a social world that was beginning to change rapidly. They lived in a period when the growth of philosophical systems of inductive reasoning and cognition and the development of science led to a concern about the role of experience in faith, and whether and, if so, how a person could know the state of his or her relationship with God.¹³ Yet it was also a period when the debates raised by the Reformers and the reactions to them were still being hotly contested. In particular there were arguments about ‘justification’ and ‘salvation’, which in an era that had not yet developed the insights of such as quantum physics and psycho-dynamic theories, were often described as if they were immutable entities, or solid states.
28. Wesley’s solution was, in a sense, to put together the theology of justification with the tradition of holy living. He drew this from a wide range of influence and reading. Above all he drew from his reading of and wrestling with Scripture. The ways in which some passages were translated created controversies and so needed to be wrestled with.¹⁴ To give but one example, the King James Version (KJV) of Matthew 5:48 reads “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”. That is a direct taking over of the Latin adjective ‘perfectus’ which is found in the Vulgate version of the verse. The Latin word has a dominant meaning of “in a state of having

¹²This statement is in the treatise *Christian Perfection* of 1741.

¹³This cultural connection is much discussed in scholarly work on Evangelicalism these days. D W Bebbington, in particular, makes it a key element in his analysis of Wesley’s thought, stating that Wesley certainly rejected the sceptical Enlightenment of the continent but that his mind was moulded by the new intellectual currents of his time, and he was supremely an empiricist. [David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London: Routledge, 1989, p 52.] Bebbington goes on to stress Wesley’s indebtedness to John Locke in his presentation of holiness and Perfection as hard proofs of Salvation over against ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘inward Impressions’. Interestingly, Wesley saw Aristotle and Lord Francis Bacon as two universal geniuses. He traced a connection between them through Roger Bacon and Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century, a connection through which essential elements in Aristotle’s thought which the ‘Schoolmen’ had lost sight of were recovered. [Some of this material is explored in Kenneth G Howcroft *Christian Conferring: A Way of Discerning, Witnessing and Making Truth Claims in the Present Age?* - a paper presented to the Systematic Theology Working Group, Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies Christ Church, Oxford, August 2007 <http://divinity.duke.edu/oxford/docs/2007papers/2007-4Howcroft.pdf>] There would be great value in further exploration of these philosophical and cultural influences on early Methodism, not least as they might be compared with parallel Anglican responses to the Enlightenment such as Latitudinarianism and Cambridge Platonism.

¹⁴ Chapter 5 in W E Sangster *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection* Epworth Press, London 1945 is entitled “The Texts on which he built”. Sangster concludes that there are thirty biblical texts to which Wesley keeps returning. There would be great value in a careful modern study of the texts which Wesley used, and of what he has to say elsewhere about other texts which we might have expected him to use or dismiss.

been brought to completion". But the original Greek text has the adjective 'teleios', which has a range of meaning which overlaps with that of the Latin but also emphasises the sense of being 'mature' and 'orientated towards the goal [the "telos"]'. Matthew 5:48 is one place where Wesley does not follow the KJV.¹⁵ What Wesley has is "Therefore ye shall be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect", taking the Greek verb as a future tense rather than as an imperative (the forms are the same). In the commentary, Wesley then sees the verse as summing up the theme of holiness, which "our Lord in the beginning of the chapter recommends as happiness, and in the close of it as perfection". He recognises the statement as a promise that God will put his "laws in our minds and write them in our hearts"; in other words that God will make it possible for us to live in God's way. This moves the emphasis away from any claim that we have actually been able to live in perfect obedience to God to one of looking to a future goal and to becoming totally dependent on God.

29. For Wesley the Scriptures are always supremely important. Yet he also always asserted that to be a person 'of one book' (the Bible) you had to read many books. So he drew from (and occasionally quarrelled with) the great Reformation figures like Calvin and Luther. He was also influenced by reformed writers about 'holy living' such as Richard Baxter, and by writers who drew more widely on the Catholic tradition such as Taylor, á Kempis and Law. He also had access to some of the eastern orthodox traditions through reading such as 'Macarius the Egyptian' and Ephraem Syrus.¹⁶
30. The result was that Wesley linked together justification and sanctification, regeneration and new birth. In the Standard Sermons he followed the sermon on *'The Circumcision of the Heart'* with a pair of sermons about regeneration.¹⁷ It is as if Wesley is saying that God can do more with sin than forgive it forensically. As Rupert Davies noted, Wesley understood that Justification and Sanctification are two distinct things, and must not be confused; but the latter invariably follows the former. The former is the work of the Son and the latter the work of the Spirit. Both are gifts of God received by faith alone: 'By faith we are saved from sin and made holy', as Wesley put it in one of his last sermons.¹⁸
31. Wesley's struggle with the notion of Christian Perfection is therefore a constant attempt to express it in terms of the dynamics of holiness (both inward and outward, individual and communal) and sanctification; and to do so within the overarching theology which he synthesised over the years, the dominant emphasis of which was on grace. As Albert Outler put it, "*The Christian life, in Wesley's view, is empowered by the energy of grace: prevenient, saving, sanctifying,*

¹⁵In his *Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament* first published in 1754, Wesley says that in making his own translation he mainly works with the common (ie King James) version, but that "I do not say that it is incapable of being brought, in several places, nearer to the original. Neither will I affirm that the Greek copies from which this translation was made are always the most correct; and therefore I shall take the liberty, as occasion may require, to make here and there a small alteration".

¹⁶ Given Wesley's encouragement of his associates to read the Fathers, and given his sponsorship of the Christian Library as a mark of this, there would be great value in further exploration of Wesley's interaction with both Eastern and Western Fathers on this theme of holiness and perfection, especially perhaps with respect to Clement of Alexandria, Anthony of Egypt and Augustine (with regard to the latter, particularly in relation to the crucial Pelagian controversy, the *summum bonum*) and the other legacies bequeathed by Augustine to the debate about how justification relates to sanctification, and about how each relates to perfection.

¹⁷ p 415 in *The Works of John Wesley Volume 1: Sermons I (1-33)* edited by Albert Outler, Abingdon Press 1984 (volume 1 in the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley's Works).

¹⁸ p 167 of Rupert Davies *The People Called Methodists: 1. 'Our Doctrines'* published as Chapter 5 of Volume 1 of *A History of the Methodist Church in Britain* ed. Davies and Rupp Epworth Press, London 1965.

sacramental.”¹⁹ Outler goes on to say that Wesley’s doctrine of the means of grace (as in the sermon of that name) sees grace as “preventing, co-operant and sanctifying”.

Questions and criticisms

32. The various controversies alluded to in paragraph 26 above included vigorous arguments with his brother Charles. Whereas Charles tended to think of perfection in terms an absolute renovation and restitution of the *imago dei* within a person and so tended to assume that it would only occur after death, John thought that that set the bar too high: he had a more qualified understanding of perfection as one’s will becoming conformed so far as it voluntarily can do with the will of God, and so he tended to assume that it could be experienced in this life as a blessing. It was when Charles’ emphasis on “absolute renovation” was combined with John’s emphasis on “now” by such as Thomas Maxwell and George Bell (who formed a schismatic group who claimed to be ‘as perfect as the angels are perfect’) that both brothers united in condemning them. In a sense they agreed about things more than they disagreed, and the points of difference were to do with rigorously teasing out the implications of the notion of Christian Perfection, and what the effects of preaching it were and should be on ordinary people.
33. All the controversies, however, meant that John Wesley had to spend a lot of time saying what he did not mean when he talked of Christian Perfection. Various and repeatedly he asserted that the process he was describing for human beings would not entail such as:
- having perfect physical health;
 - having perfect knowledge;
 - making no errors or mistakes;
 - no longer violating the will of God through ignorance or ‘sinful’ tempers of which they are unaware;
 - no longer being subject to temptation;
 - being in a state in which they could be improved no further;
 - being in a state which they cannot later lose.
34. A critical issue concerns John Wesley’s definition of sin. In a key paragraph in his 1775 work *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he explains that for him sin ‘properly so called’ is ‘a voluntary transgression of a known law.’ He also acknowledges, however, that there is sin ‘improperly so called’ which he defines as ‘involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown.’²⁰ However, traditional Church of England teaching as represented by Article IX of the *Thirty-nine Articles* does not make such a distinction between voluntary and involuntary sin.
35. Traditional Church of England teaching therefore sees sin as something that has infected the whole of human nature as a result of the Fall and that expresses itself in a variety of actual sins both voluntary and involuntary. But whatever the language used, that would describe Wesley’s underlying view as well. As we have seen above, he accepted and stood by the thrust of Article IX, even in the shortened version he provided for those in America. Wesley believed that original sin produces depravity and the need for regeneration. It was when he attempted to describe how that original sin and depravity were expressed in the practical form of what we might call actual sins that he began to make distinctions in the terms that he used. He began to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary transgressions and relate those emphases to material in the scriptures in a sermon of 1748 entitled *The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God*. In 1759 he gathered together material entitled “Thoughts on Christian Perfection” for discussion at that year’s

¹⁹ Albert Outler *John Wesley* OUP New York 1964 p 33.

²⁰ T Jackson (ed), *The Works of the Revd John Wesley MA*, 3ed, London 1872, Vol 11, p 396.

Conference. It was published in 1760 in Volume IV of *Sermons on Several Occasions* and then incorporated in an abridged form in the version of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* published in 1766. The original included the following:

(1.) and (2.) *Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,) needs the atoning blood, and without this would expose to eternal damnation.*

(3.) *I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality.*

(4.) *Therefore 'sinless perfection' is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself.*

(5.) *I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions.*

(6.) *Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned.*

36. It is notable that here Wesley does not make his terminology binding on others. It is not binding on Methodists now. Nor, as paragraph 10 above and *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* paragraph 119 demonstrate, is Wesley's particular argumentation about sin and perfection binding. Methodist scholars in particular have been critical of Wesley's definitions of sin, suggesting that he treated sin too much as a "thing" that could be extracted from a person; that he therefore pays inadequate attention to moral evil; that he does not deal adequately with sins of omission; and that he is naïve in his appraisal of human behaviour and conduct.²¹ But Wesley was writing before the insights of personal and social psychology, for example, were available. Many theological statements of eighteenth and nineteenth century theologians of Methodist, Anglican and other traditions would need to be re-articulated in the light of those insights. Moreover, Wesley was himself attempting to re-articulate the inherited tradition to meet the changing understandings and needs of his own time. According to George Bailey, Newton Flew argued that "*a more adequate account of sin as the thorough corruption of faculties that are essentially good would lead to a more careful attitude to the possibility of rescue from sin and to the assurance of this only ever being in, and for, the present moment, neither resting solely on a previous experience nor able to underpin future sanctification.*"²² But Bailey goes on to suggest that Randy Maddox has shown that most of the aspects for which Flew and other critics are looking were emerging in Wesley's thinking as it developed over the years.²³

37. Another more positive evaluation of the potential in Wesley's thinking which builds on the work of such as Maddox is provided by Barry E Bryant as follows:

One may conclude that original sin was significantly relational for Wesley. It was concerned with the divine and human relationship, the inner-personal relationship, and inter-personal relationships. The moral, natural, and political images also provided Wesley with a doctrine of original sin that allowed him to talk about the attainability of Christian Perfection in this lifetime as the renewal of the moral image of God. All this illustrated how Wesley tried to rethink the association of original sin

²¹ See for example variously Flew, Rattenbury, Lindstrom, C Williams.

²² George Bailey *Entire sanctification and theological method: A Wesleyan dynamic for discovering good news in every context* in ed. Tom Greggs *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture and the World* Taylor & Francis 2009.

²³ Bailey *op cit*; Randy Maddox *Responsible Grace* Kingswood Books 1994.

*with concupiscence, and how he came to see original sin as a way of explaining the corruption of original sin without focusing on its guilt.*²⁴

38. That takes us to a second question of what degree of holiness Christians are able to attain in this life. As Herbert McGonigle notes in his study of Wesley's theology, a twofold understanding of Christian Perfection seems to follow on from Wesley's two-fold distinction between voluntary and involuntary transgressions. For Wesley, he says:

*There is a final and ultimate perfection which belongs to heaven alone, but there is also a perfection for this world, a perfection characterized by no conscious breach of a known law which it is in our power to keep.' This twofold understanding of perfection depended, in turn, on a twofold definition of sin. Perfection, understood as cleansing from all inner sin, is possible when sin is understood in terms of conscious violations of law. Perfection, understood as flawless obedience to the law of God is not possible when sin is understood as any infringement of that absolute law.*²⁵

It seems that Wesley, and some parts at least of the Methodist tradition following him, were able to envisage some Christians reaching – for a period of time, short or longer – a state of holiness in which they were able to obey perfectly the dual command to 'love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind' and to 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Traditionally, however, the teaching of the Church of England, by contrast, envisages no such possibility, but instead, on the basis of biblical texts such as Psalm 14:2-3, Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8-9, has emphasised the universal sinfulness of everyone except Christ. This emphasis finds expression in Article XV of the *Thirty-nine Articles*, which was designed to counter the perfectionist teaching of some of the radical Protestant groups that existed in the mid sixteenth century.

39. This emphasis also finds liturgical expression in the confessions of sin contained in the services in the *Book of Common Prayer*, both at morning and evening prayer and in the communion service. Unlike Article XV these confessions do not specifically address the issue of perfectionist teaching, but they express the belief that everyone in the congregation without exception will have sinned against God and they offer no mitigation in terms of a distinction between intentional and unintentional sins. All have sinned. All are guilty. All need forgiveness from God.
40. Wesley would have agreed that all have sinned, all are guilty and all need forgiveness from God. In the version of the *Book of Common Prayer* which he sent to America he maintains the confessions quoted in paragraph 39 above. But he removes the quotations from 1 John 1:8-9 where they occur in the scriptural sentences at the opening of morning prayer and evening prayer, and deletes Article XV which ends with a quotation of the same verses. The idea in them that everyone is constantly in a state of sin might appear to be in tension with 1 John 3:6 and 9 which state that 'No one who abides in him [Christ] sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him' and 'No one born of God commits sin; for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God' respectively. It might therefore be argued that a person who is in a state of sin cannot by definition have been born of God, or if she or he has been born of God once, has lost that state again. The problem here is that there is a tension between the various sections of the epistle itself, and there has been much written by scholars over the centuries to attempt to explain or resolve it. Some Anglican commentators have tended to do so by arguing that the use of the present tense in the Greek of 1 John 3 indicates that what the epistle is talking about is what B F Westcott calls a

²⁴Barry E Bryant *Original Sin* in eds William J Abraham and James E Kirby *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* Oxford University Press 2009.

²⁵ H B McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001, p251. See also H D Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, London: Epworth Press, 1989 pp 399-402.

‘character’ or ‘prevailing habit’ of sin²⁶ and it is this from which the Christian believer is set free. Wesley attempted to resolve it another way by interpreting this Johannine teaching in relation to his distinction between voluntary and involuntary transgressions of God’s law. He argued that what the epistle is referring to is the former and that what it is saying is that Christians can and should be free from voluntary transgressions of God’s law. On that view, all breaches of God’s law that are involuntary are not sins but ‘infirmities.’

41. Both of the above are interpretations of the biblical texts. Those texts are difficult and need interpreting. Neither Methodists nor Anglicans are bound by particular interpretations of them.
42. This takes us back to the question of how much holiness can be achieved by a human being, in what areas of life, and when. There can be general agreement that a time will come when we are perfected in love and so are able to obey God’s law perfectly, but perhaps most would say that this will happen in the life that is to come rather than in this life. How much sanctity is possible in this life? How far can someone be ‘made perfect in love’ ie how far is it possible for a Christian to reach a state where she or he perfectly obeys the command to love God and neighbour?
43. It is not just in Methodist thinking that the answers to this might be problematic for some. There are similar questions raised in Anglican thinking about the saints. Article XXII of the *Thirty-nine Articles* (which was retained by Wesley in his version for the Americas) dismisses adoration of images and invocation of saints as “*a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God*”. That makes what happens in many Anglican liturgies, churches and shrines look extremely odd to many Methodists, and is something about which Anglicans hold differing views. The Lambeth Conference of 1958 attempted to define a ring in which all could co-exist by clarifying the commemoration of Saints and Heroes of the Christian Church in the Anglican Communion. Amongst other things, it stated that names to be included should be limited to those whose historical character and devotion are beyond doubt. That, together with shifts to language of “heroes”, of “veneration” (rather than “worship”), and of “commemoration” has the effect of decreasing any emphasis on miracles or on knowledge of people’s state beyond this life. But at the same time it opens up the possibility that people can be seen to have a degree of holiness in this life that is exemplary – in other words that it can inspire people to desire it and hope to imitate it.
44. Similar things can be seen in Methodist thinking. As William J Abrahams puts it
*While Wesley’s Protestantism has no formal place for the canon of saints, their very existence makes it clear that conspicuous sanctity really is possible in this life. The call to perfection is not an idle ideal; it is an attainable goal, made visible in the lives of the saints.....*²⁷
45. Wesley was interested in setting before people the lives of exemplary Christians. That is what he was doing in publishing various *Lives of the Preachers* in such as *The Arminian Magazine*. That meant that he was interested in how people experienced and practised holiness. One of the reasons why he hung on to the idea of ‘perfect love’ was the fact that he encountered people whose Christian experience could not to his mind be well explained by themselves or by others in terms of the religious language of his day as normally used. He tried to respond to criticisms over the years by limiting and clarifying what he was saying. He was not saying that perfection in love meant that all effects of sin (original or other) were obliterated in this life. He recognised the

²⁶ B F Westcott, *The Epistles of St John*, London: Macmillan, 21883??, p101.

²⁷ William J Abraham *Christian Perfection* in eds William J Abraham and James E Kirby *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* Oxford University Press 2009.

dangers of Antinomianism that such a position might produce. He was only thinking of that part of the human personality over which the person had some measure of responsible control, the conscious will. In that area a person was able and needed to co-operate with the transforming grace of God in order to grow in holiness as God desired.

46. Wesley went on to say that it might be possible for some people to be sanctified to such an extent by the grace of God that for at least a moment and sometimes longer they were able so far as their conscious will was concerned to obey the command to love God and neighbour. The main reason why he felt unable to deny the possibility that people might experience this is that he felt unable to put a limit on what God might do. He understood what God normally did, but was not prepared to state categorically what God could not or would not do. But another factor preventing him withdrawing from his position was his belief that many people needed evidence that the goal was attainable in order to motivate them to begin the process of growing towards it. One of the most influential texts in all his thinking about Christian faith (not just about perfection) was Hebrews 11:1 *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"*. What people hoped for in terms of being made perfect in love had therefore to be expressed in substance in some visible form within human experience.
47. Wesley was quick to say that any such experience might be momentary. He also said that it was not of itself the finishing point or the final destination: the person who experienced being made perfect in love would still go on growing in love, because that is the nature of love. In his hymn "Love divine" Charles Wesley echoed 2 Corinthians 3:18 and expressed this in terms of "changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place". This and John Wesley's statements are remarkably similar to the final sentences of Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Perfection* in the fourth century which echo the same scripture: *"(let a person be) ever changing for the better and transforming from glory to glory through daily growth ... without ever reaching the end of perfection. For true perfection means that one never ceases to grow towards that which is better and never reduces perfection to any limit."* Scholars debate whether what John Wesley encountered when he read what he knew as "Macarius the Egyptian" was a tradition descending directly from Gregory or simply material from the same milieu. But in any event the similarity of understanding is remarkable.
48. Most important therefore is John Wesley's final attempt to summarise what perfection does mean. *"In one view (perfection) is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God; it is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, mind and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves"*.²⁸
49. There is therefore a clear trajectory in Wesley's thinking as it develops. It leads to the talk of Christian Perfection being the language of prayer and aspiration, and of opening ourselves up to the transforming grace of God, rather than the language of doctrinal statements. When Methodists sing that is one of their major expressions of prayer. To extend the old tag, for Methodists *lex credendi, lex orandi, lex cantandi*. The hymns of Charles Wesley have probably been much more influential in shaping Methodist experience, spirituality and mind-sets than the theological statements of John Wesley. They are sung and experienced in terms of prayer and aspiration much

²⁸ John Wesley *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* section 27, 1765.

more than of doctrinal statement, as for example in the great response to the wonders of Christ's incarnation "Let earth and heaven combine" which contains the verse

*Made perfect first in love,
And sanctified by grace,
We shall from earth remove,
And see his glorious face:
His love shall then be fully showed,
And man shall all be lost in God.*

50. Within this overall trajectory, there have been and doubtless are individuals and groups in the worldwide Methodist family who hold to Wesley's position that it might be possible for people to experience in some way being perfected in love within this life. Others hold other opinions. This is not a church-dividing issue among them, any more than the veneration of saints is a church-dividing issue amongst Anglicans. They ought not therefore to be church-dividing issues between Anglicans and Methodists.

Future developments?

51. The importance of this theme for Methodists, the way that they talk of it now, and the fact that it is not heterodox but a way of talking of things that are held in common by a wide range of churches, both the Church of England and others, can perhaps best be seen by the statements made in 2006 when the World Methodist Conference became a signatory to the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, which had been agreed between those churches in 1999. This substantial agreement between Roman Catholics and Lutherans expresses a far reaching consensus in regard to the theological controversy which was a major cause of the split in Western churches in the sixteenth century. In welcoming it and proposing that the World Methodist Conference become a third signatory to it, the World Methodist Council adopted a statement in which section 4 set out the Methodist tradition on these matters, and in particular its understanding of the link between justification and sanctification, and the continuing importance of the dynamic of holiness in contemporary discipleship. It is a remarkable section which sets out a lot in a little. In particular, in paragraph 4.2 it summarises the points that it is making as follows:

4.2 The deep connection between forgiveness of sins and making righteous, between justification and sanctification, has always been crucial for the Methodist understanding of the biblical doctrine of justification. John Wesley saw in salvation a twofold action of God's grace: "By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin and restored to the favour of God; by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin, restored to the image of God" (Sermon 85, II.1). The redemptive acceptance into communion with God and the creative renewal of our lives are entirely the work of God's grace.

52. It would be good for the Methodist Church in Great Britain to see its Covenant partner, the Church of England, helping the Anglican Communion to enter the conversations and potentially become the fourth major signatory to the *Joint Declaration*.
53. Christian Perfection is on this understanding a process of being transformed by the love of God. It is therefore profoundly eschatological. It is, to echo Wesley's favourite texts from Hebrews quoted above, a substance of things hoped for, received by grace through faith.
54. To be received there has to be an intention to allow that transformation to occur, and a process of growth and development towards a goal. That process should not lead to ideas of "second-blessing Christians" being the only authentic Christians, or to the claim that perfect Christians have within

themselves the witness of the Spirit that they have attained some superior state in which they have no further need of anything. Sadly, the teaching of Christian Perfection has sometimes led to such excesses. Yet fear of them has also led to a danger of missing an important truth, namely that our acceptance of the witness of the Spirit that in Christ we are children of God is the start of a journey not the end. The emphasis on perfection should lead to a growing in love, a sense of humility and of our utter dependence on God, and a sense of God's infinite grace. As William J Abrahams has put it, the Methodist understanding has been that *"the doctrine of perfection was an exercise in ascetic theology, which was also a form of realized eschatology that posited a distinctive phenomenology of the Christian life. Methodism's doctrine of perfection was a noble experiment in spirituality that gave birth to a host of fresh expressions of the Christian faith that continue into the present. These have not always been a pretty sight and some are doomed to extinction, but the question to be asked is whether the core elements can be retrieved and updated."*²⁹

55. Abrahams is thinking there of the holiness movements which developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries first within Methodism and then outside it. Specifically, there are quite direct legacies to be traced through the Keswick Conventions and the associated 'Higher Life' stream identified with Anglicans like T D Hartford-Battersby, J N Webb-Peploe and Handley Moule, and the earlier Albery Circle associated with Henry Drummond and the Presbyterian proto-Pentecostal Edward Irving. Some of those movements had a profound effect on the growth of Pentecostal movements. The concept of 'Two New Births' alluded to in relation to Wesley in para 25 above carries through quite starkly into key Pentecostal accounts of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Even if Wesley himself evaded any causal connection between 'experiential and subjective' regeneration and supernatural or extraordinary charismata, early Methodist leaders such as Thomas Walsh were more open to this link, and Wesley himself was adamant in stating that 'I do not recollect any Scripture wherein we are taught that miracles were to be confined within the limits of either the apostolic age, or of any period of time.'³⁰ Indeed, the Pentecostal Scholar Vinson Synan has gone so far as to call Wesley the father of modern Pentecostalism, and in March 2013 the Society for Pentecostal Studies met at the Methodist-founded Seattle Pacific University to focus on the theme of holiness, particularly exploring precedents for Pentecostal understanding of this theme in the work of Wesley and his Methodist successors.
56. Conversations with Pentecostals about worship and mission are becoming increasingly important. In Latin America, there are tensions, competition and even conflict between such churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Yet the global dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church is currently exploring the common ground between them on sanctification, both personal and social. Methodism may have something important to offer here as it explores its tradition in dialogue with others. Similarly, in the UK Pentecostal Churches and other churches which are sometimes called 'Black Majority Churches' are increasingly keen to relate to the Church of England. Again, the discussion of sanctification and holiness between Methodists and Anglicans may help to build bridges with others. There is great potential here, and a need for further work.
57. What Methodism has to contribute springs from the fact that in its origins, it was both a holiness movement and a missionary movement inside the Church (and particularly within the Church of England). It reached out to people to bring them to a recognition and acceptance of God in Christ, and brought them to church (in the early days, the parish church). It encouraged and called those

²⁹ William J Abraham *Christian Perfection* in eds William J Abraham and James E Kirby *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* Oxford University Press 2009.

³⁰ 'Letter to the Bishop of Gloucester', in *Works of the Reverend John Wesley Vol V* New York: Mason & Lane, 1839, p 472.

who had accepted Christ to deeper discipleship within the community of the body of Christ, in other words to allow themselves to be transformed by grace and to grow and develop in their learning and following of Christ.

58. This meant availing themselves of the ‘means of grace’, by which Wesley said he means “*outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to [sc human beings] preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace*” and immediately went on to quote the *Book of Common Prayer’s* phrase “the means of grace and the hope of glory” before summarising the *Book of Common Prayer’s* definition of sacraments as ‘an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same’.³¹ In the same sermon he identified the chief of these means of grace as prayer (individual and communal); searching the Scriptures (by reading, hearing and meditating on them); and receiving the Lord’s Supper.³² In the Minutes of the 1744 Conference, Wesley adds two further ones: fasting; and what we have more recently termed Christian Conferring.³³ These five things Wesley sometimes called ‘Works of Piety’ and sometimes the ‘Institutional Means of Grace’ (in that he found scriptural warrant for them). But he also recognised what he called ‘Prudential Means of Grace’ which, by their very definition could vary according to the people, contexts and situations concerned but were always directed towards “*watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God*”. They included following particular rules or engaging in particular acts of holy living; doing all the good you can, and so far as you were able, doing no harm; visiting those who were sick; feeding and clothing the poor; visiting those in prison; comforting, educating and challenging people. He therefore also called the Prudential Means of grace ‘Works of Mercy’. They again had personal and communal aspects to them. In Wesley’s day, for example, they led to the fight against slavery. The call to holy living has personal and social ethical dimensions to it.
59. It could be argued that such things are relevant and needed in today’s context. ‘Holiness’, ‘formation’, ‘mission’, ‘lifestyle’ and ‘discipleship’ are important terms in contemporary discussions, and in many ways are the current ways of talking about things to which the Methodist tradition bears witness and to which it has a contribution to make. **There is indeed nothing here to prevent our two churches coming together, and much which might enrich them as they do.** In a sense Methodism gathered people in and then built them up in a way of holy living that also sent them out. It was concerned with what we might term ‘apostolic discipleship’. That in turn was not a way of claiming special status for oneself, but of allowing oneself to be transformed by the grace and love of God into being gracious and loving members of the body of Christ. As the letter to the Philippians 3:12ff puts it “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal³⁴; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.... forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus”. Or as Charles Wesley prayed in his great hymn to “Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down”: “... *Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be; let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee: changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place. Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise!*”

³¹ *Standard Sermons number XII* (number 16 in the more recent edition by Outler).

³² Another sermon *On the Duty of Constant Communion* recommended that this should be done regularly and as often as possible; his *Rules for the Bands* in 1744 urged that people go to communion in the parish church each week.

³³ Wesley’s version of the term was “Christian Conference”, but he used it in a wide sense to involve sharing in and making decisions about the common life (as in the biblical term ‘koinonia’).

³⁴ This is the NRSV translation of a verb from the same root as the adjective ‘teleios’ (see paragraph 28) which the NRSV notes could also be translated (and was in earlier versions) as “have already been made perfect”.

LET IT BE ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL: THE CHALLENGE TO OUR CHURCHES

1. The vision of the Covenant is of working together for the visible unity of our churches. To that end we have made a number of significant affirmations:
 - that both our churches are true churches within the universal Church of Christ, churches where the word of God is authentically preached and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist duly administered and celebrated, and which confess the apostolic faith and participate in apostolic mission;
 - that the ministries – lay and ordained – of both our churches are given by God as instruments of God’s grace; and possess both the inward call of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s commission given through the Church;
 - and that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church with communal, collegial and personal expressions of oversight.¹
2. As the Covenant Statement recognises, growing into visible unity and creating a united, interchangeable ministry go together, hand-in-hand. Thus visible unity will only come about as a result of the meshing together of the life of our two churches at all levels which will occur as we address the remaining obstacles to unity in oversight.
3. We are well aware that the Covenant is but one part of the wider ecumenical endeavour. Both the Methodist Church and the Church of England have partnerships with other churches. What makes the Covenant distinctive is that in it our two churches have bound ourselves together ‘from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer’ and ‘freely and wholeheartedly yielding all things to God’s pleasure and disposal’. In other words we have deliberately made a solemn and lasting commitment to each other, not knowing what the future will hold, in advance of particular issues being resolved, and irrespective of what the solutions might be.
4. Such a commitment means that our churches have to trust each other, honour each other and take a great deal of care of each other. Being in Covenant therefore means that our two churches have particular as well as general responsibilities and commitments to each other. The way that those are expressed in the affirmations and commitments of the Covenant challenge us to take our Covenant relationship seriously. The Covenant is a walking together in which we are called to grow together in unity and mission and to develop relationships, structures and processes which progressively bind our churches together institutionally and develop a new culture.
5. The Covenant is therefore a dynamic process, which commits both our churches to allowing ourselves to be transformed as we grow into visible unity. The JIC believes that it is vital that this process is sustained by making substantive progress in bringing the institutions of our churches more closely together and by making incremental steps in recognising each church in practical ways. The JIC is convinced that such progress will only be made if the process of transformation is mutual – that each church responds to the other in ways which involve real changes in both as we each receive from the other. The JIC also recognises that this process of mutual transformation takes place within the wider ecumenical context as both our churches develop relationships with other partner churches.

¹ For the full text of the *Affirmations* see the Introduction to this report.

6. The JIC urges both our churches to renew our commitment to the goal of visible unity between them. But as with the coming of the Kingdom, openness to the vision can only be sustained if some movement towards it is felt and experienced by individuals and communities, and there are foretastes of some of its fruits. This is why, at the same time as we advocate this vision, we urge our two churches at all levels of our life to grow deeper into the communion that we already share, by using the opportunities for sharing in mission and ministry that are already available.
7. In this final chapter, we present to our churches challenges for the way ahead. We encourage our churches at all levels to take the Covenant more seriously and urge them to take some actions which, we believe, will help to move the Covenant forward significantly. **In each case the underlying challenge is to ask our churches what is our vision for the way ahead.**

Challenges ahead

Affirming the goal of Visible Unity

8. The Covenant Commitments expressly commit our churches to work for the visible unity of our churches on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. With the strong emphasis in the current ecumenical climate on working together in practical ways to further the mission of the Kingdom, there is a risk of losing sight of the goal of the full visible unity of the universal Church. However, the goal of full visible unity cannot be set aside. The mission of God includes reconciling all things together in Christ, and breaking down the walls of hostility which divide human beings. The unity of Christ's Church is an integral part of this overarching mission – a divided Church is less effective in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom simply because the Good News is a gospel of reconciliation.
9. The unity of the Church is both a fruit of God's mission of reconciliation and a means of that mission. It therefore needs to be visible, in order to witness to the effects of God's reconciling love, and to bear witness against divisions which are only too visible. Furthermore the effectiveness of the Church working for the mission of the Kingdom is closely related to its visible unity – in terms of discerning the priorities of mission, of the ability to make decisions and of deploying resources.
10. The Covenant Statement uses the language of stepwise progress into visible unity. Knowing that past attempts to offer a blueprint or a scheme for unity in the past have run into great difficulties, the JIC has thus far been reluctant to present what the shape of our churches may look like as a result of taking any particular steps. Nevertheless, at this stage of our journey, we are keen to encourage imaginative thinking about the shape of things to come. If we do not have some ideas about where we might be heading it is hard to judge which are the most appropriate steps to take. That in turn could easily lead to us not taking any intermediate steps of working together.
11. 'Working together' is not cost free. Our churches may choose to avoid working together because working in partnership is often seen as a drain on resources, time and energy, as well as because of the obstacles presented by different cultures, institutional inertia and asymmetry of structures. However, where there are good structures and processes of decision making in place which are understood by all parties, working in partnership to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom is not only more effective, but also energising and inspirational. What might be seen as a 'cost' is transformed into an investment which yields fruit for our common mission and ministry. This is the ethos and the motivation which the JIC would like to encourage at all levels of our churches, not to bludgeon people into working together out of a sense of duty or guilt, but as a joyful expression of our calling to share in God's mission together.

12. **The JIC therefore recommends that our churches re-affirm their commitment to the goal of the visible unity of our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church. We also commend to our churches the biblical imperative that is inseparable from of our common calling into visible unity, namely to serve the mission of the Kingdom, and to do so joyfully together.**

Taking incremental steps into greater communion

13. The JIC has considered whether there are smaller incremental steps which could be taken to enable some progress to be made, before the major step of resolving the issue of a united oversight is taken. The JIC challenges our churches to explore ways in which the degree of communion between our churches may be increased by taking some incremental steps into greater communion, as tangible signs of the good intent and seriousness of the commitments we have made. In the chapter entitled *Developing Bonds of Communion* we make a number of suggestions which would make a substantial difference in the relationship between our churches. In particular the JIC commends the following incremental steps, presented more fully in that chapter, for consideration by our churches.²

- **We urge the Church of England to consider its assessment of confirmation in the Methodist Church in order to allow a fuller recognition of each others' members, a step that would significantly change the basis of the relationship between our churches.**
- **We urge each of our churches to work towards recognising how particular bodies and functions in the other church exercise oversight.** As the supreme authority governing the Methodist Connexion, Anglicans might be able to understand the Methodist Conference being somewhat analogous to a corporate "Bishop-in-Synod".
- **We encourage the Church of England to consider recognising the Methodist Conference as having preserved the continuity of Methodism with the tradition from which it emerged, and having ensured the continuity of the Methodist Church in the apostolic faith and mission.**
- **We encourage the Methodist Church to consider how it can relate more closely to a church that is ordered with bishops in the historic episcopate,** and in particular to recognise formally that some of those who represent the Conference are the personal embodiments of the Conference's *episkope* in a particularly intensive way and are charged with ensuring that the Methodist Church continues in faithful continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission. **The Methodist Church might then consider inviting bishops in the historic episcopate to take part in their installation or 'making' as the Methodist Church orders its life.**

Working towards Unity of Oversight and Interchangeability of Ministry

14. In earlier chapters we have aimed to set the challenge of developing unity of oversight within the wider context of the unity of our churches and of our growing into visible unity. However, our two churches' different and distinctive expressions of oversight remain and there is a basic asymmetry between the Covenant churches concerning the nature and relative importance of the issues involved.

² [*Developing Bonds of Communion.*](#)

15. As we have noted in the chapter entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#), for the Church of England the historic episcopate often appears to be the crucial issue, whereas for the Methodist Church in Britain the corporate exercise of oversight by the Conference in which lay people and those who are ordained share (a situation which is mirrored in bodies throughout the church) is of vital importance. The JIC has produced material in a succession of reports on this subject, but we have received very little feedback on this material from our churches. There are particular reasons for this reticence – the process in the Church of England to introduce women into the episcopate has been one factor, and the tensions raised in the Methodist Church over the report ‘What sort of bishops?’ is another. **The JIC, however, urges our churches to study the material that we have produced on the issues of oversight in this and previous reports. Specifically, we urge our two Faith and Order bodies jointly and separately to study this material in depth and to respond to the Council for Christian Unity, the Methodist Council and the JIC’s successor body, indicating any further areas of work that are needed, and making an assessment of how these two systems of oversight might be brought together in a way that enriches then both.**
16. In order to make progress towards unity in oversight, and towards the interchangeability of the ministries of our churches, the JIC recognises that both churches have challenges to address. One of the dangers has been that for some Methodists the challenge of taking episcopacy into their system, in whatever form, looks like the Methodist Church being asked to jump through an Anglican hoop. However, it is important to recognise there will also be significant challenges for the Church of England if and when the Methodist Church agrees to make such a move.
 - Would the Church of England be prepared to indicate that if the Methodist Church were to take the step of taking episcopacy into its system, perhaps through a succession of president bishops, the Methodist Church would be ‘recognised and accepted’ as a church ordered in the historic episcopate?
 - Would the Church of England be able to agree with the Methodist Church on a process of reconciling existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries, which would lead to interchangeability of ministry?
17. It is unlikely that the Methodist Church will be able to move towards embracing episcopacy without an assurance of recognition from the Church of England and with agreement on the reconciliation of ministries. This underlines the importance of both churches recognising that growing together in Covenant involves the transformation of *both* churches.

Growing together in three nations

18. The present JIC includes representatives from the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church as well as Methodist members from Wales and Scotland. This has focussed our attention on how the Anglican churches in each of the three nations relate separately and together to the Methodist Church, which is one church in three nations. It has also focussed our attention on how developing ecumenical partnerships in each of the nations affects the Methodist Church’s sense of being a single Connexion across those nations. In the Chapter of this report entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#) we have begun to explore ideas about how these relationships might develop within a framework in which the identity of each church, Methodist and Anglican, might be affirmed.
19. **The JIC therefore recommends that the participation of representatives from Scotland and Wales be continued and extended by establishing regular informal meetings of representatives**

from each of the ecumenical partnerships in the nations of England, Scotland and Wales, together with the relevant ecumenical officers.

20. The JIC has constantly argued for a vision of unity which allows the traditions and distinctive gifts of each church to thrive alongside each other in a dynamic relationship, and which at the same time allows each church to be transformed as it receives gifts from the other. **To that end, we need to find new ways of envisioning how we might develop visible unity between our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church.**

Working together in practical ways

21. The practical challenges of decision making and working together are crucial to the next phase of the Covenant journey. The JIC has noted above that as churches in Covenant, we have hardly begun to work out the implications of the Lund Principle:

A faith in the one Church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead. There are truths about the nature of God and His Church which will remain for ever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours We would, therefore, earnestly request our Churches to consider whether they are doing all they ought to do to manifest the oneness of the people of God. Should not our Churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other Churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?³

22. Within the Covenant this principle applies in a general sense to the whole life, worship and mission of our churches. **But the JIC also urges our churches to apply it now in particular situations in which we are responding to specific challenges of mission and of resourcing mission.** By applying this principle to specific contexts, such as the deployment of ministry and resourcing new initiatives for mission, so much more may be done together than separately, as demonstrated in the initiatives which are developing in some dioceses and districts/circuits.
23. The Lund Principle should also be applied specifically to those who are appointed to exercise office within our churches at all levels. At the very least, job descriptions could include joint consultation with the nearest equivalent office in the Covenant partner to affirm the expectation of mutual communication and co-operation. **Furthermore, the JIC recommends that the terms of reference of boards committees and panels should include the expectation that there will be consultation with the nearest equivalent body in the Covenant partner, and where appropriate, the appointment of observers from that partner.** Mutual observership is more than simply 'observing'. It means having representatives embedded in the structures of the other church, empowered with knowledge of their own church, and carrying the responsibility of reporting back and assisting in developing ideas and strategy.
24. As *Embracing the Covenant* (2008) stated joint decision making relies not only on good communication and collaboration, but also on good processes and structures. As a key priority in the next phase of the Covenant journey, the JIC commends the development of structures of joint decision making, to which we have already committed ourselves in the Covenant Commitments. The acid test of moving from joint consultation to joint decision making and action will be whether the work we do together more effectively furthers the mission of the Kingdom, and

³ The Lund Principle from the World Council of Churches Third World Faith and Order Conference in Lund in 1952. www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/vi-church-and-world/churchandworldtextonly.pdf/view

whether it is leading us to the visible unity of our two churches. We recommend it because we are convinced that it will achieve exactly that: furthering the mission of the Kingdom.

The Challenge of the Covenant

25. In this report the JIC has been realistic in assessing the progress made in the first ten years of the Covenant journey. We are under no illusion that there are significant difficulties to overcome on the way to the visible unity of our two churches. We share common roots, proclaim the same faith, hear the one call to share in the mission of the Kingdom, bound in Covenant. Yet we continue to struggle with structures and processes which do not always easily relate to each other, with ecclesiological and cultural differences in the way we order the life of our churches, and with institutional inertia which resists development and change. **Now, therefore, as a Commission charged with the task of facilitating the Covenant's implementation, we call our churches back to the solemn promises that we have made to God and each other in the Covenant, to be obedient to God's call to work and pray for the unity of his Church.**
26. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant is at a decisive moment. The JIC has kept in sight the crucial question as to whether there is evidence that the Covenant is making a difference. We have suggested that the criteria in this are the flourishing of the Kingdom and the greater unity of the Church, which are ultimately intrinsically intertwined. If the Covenant is to make a difference it must honour diversity, be purpose led, and place a high value on the coming of the Kingdom of God. It must assist in the discernment of the movement of the Kingdom and the dynamics of God's grace; and it must combine the energy and resources of our churches for the sake of mission.
27. We have also stressed throughout this report that growing into visible unity will not be gained through proposing a master plan of institutional merger or through the absorption of one church by another, with the loss of the distinctiveness and charism of either tradition. We have however stressed the vision of each church embracing change, and being open to transformation as we each encounter the other in Christ and receive each other's gifts. Growing into visible unity is thus a transformative process of dying and rising again. As Christ the Good Shepherd laid down his life to give abundant life to his sheep and to unite his flock (John 10.10-11; 15-17), so our churches are called to die in order to live, and in living fully to God we grow into a deeper unity. The Christian calling is to live a life of discipleship in which we lose our lives to gain eternal life (Mark 8:35-36). The covenantal challenge is to apply this calling of dying so as to live at one in Christ to the institutional life of our churches.