

60. Ecumenical Report

Basic Information

Title	Ecumenical Report
Contact Name and Details	The Revd Kenneth G Howcroft Assistant Secretary of the Conference and Ecumenical Officer 020 7467 5147 howcroftk@methodistchurch.org.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Resolutions	60/1.The Conference receives the Report. 60/2.The Conference adopts the recommendation of Y Cyngor concerning the Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales and directs that on behalf of the Conference the Methodist Church in Wales continue to support the work of the Commission on those terms for a further period of five years from 2011. 60/3.The Conference receives the Interim Report of the Joint Implementation Commission entitled "Moving Forward in Covenant".

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	For information about particular developments.
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The Methodist Church in Wales ● The Methodist Church in Scotland ● The Joint Implementation Commission
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resolution 62/2 of the 2008 Conference [Daily Record 6/25] concerning the Joint Resolution ● Agenda item 45 at the 2009 Conference <i>Our Ecumenical Calling</i> setting out an ecumenical Vision Statement

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Further report on progress in response to the Joint Resolution of the Methodist Conference and the United Reformed Church Assembly in 2008

1.1 Background to the Joint Resolution

In 2008, the URC Assembly and Methodist Conference approved a joint resolution which had been proposed by the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District of the Methodist Church and the West Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church. Full details of the resolution can be found on the Methodist Church website [2008 Resolution 62/2]. Its main points are as follows:

- to explore further joint working for the sake of shared mission;
- a structure that minimises ecumenical meetings but facilitates diversity;
- exploration of joint structures at synod/district level;
- effective use of resources.

1.2 Joint Meeting of the United Reformed Church Mission Council and the Methodist Council

A report on this first joint meeting can be found in the report of the Methodist Council elsewhere in this Agenda.

1.3 Other developments

A senior officer of the Methodist Conference now attends the United Reformed Church Mission Council as a participant observer,

and a senior officer of the United Reformed Church attends the Methodist Council in a similar capacity. The Strategic Oversight Group continues to meet regularly. Its membership is currently: from the United Reformed Church, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary and the Treasurer; and from the Methodist Church, the General Secretary, the Secretary for Team Operations and the Secretary for External Relationships [nb the offices of Treasurer of the United Reformed Church and Secretary for Team Operations in the Methodist Church are currently held by the same person]. Conversations are beginning about how the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Committee's work can interact productively with that of the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission.

The Methodist Church in Wales

2.1 The Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales

The Covenant 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 Commission was established in 1976 to expedite the achievement of the Covenant's aim.

2.2 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 has now asked that member churches renew their commitment to support its work for a further five years.

2.3 The Commission has provisionally adopted the following post-2011 agenda:

- to draw up a document jointly to be agreed by all five member denominations stating clearly what mode of governance would be acceptable to them all;
- to draw up a document jointly to be agreed by all five member denominations stating clearly what model of pastoral oversight or episcopate would be acceptable to them all;
- to work towards a Church of Wales that shares one faith, one structure, one ministry and one governance but that honours and celebrates different theological emphases and worship traditions;
- to arrange a triennial delegated Assembly of Covenanted Churches in Wales, beginning in 2012, to worship together, consider reports from the Commission and matters brought by member churches, and to report back to member churches;
- to set up Advocates consisting of at least one senior leader of each member denomination

with the full authority of their denomination to identify areas where a Local Ecumenical Partnership might be established and to engage in conversations with congregations in those areas to encourage the setting up of such a partnership;

- to consider whether there are specific communities which could act as experimental models for ecumenical ministerial deployment;
- to revise the Commission's Eucharistic rite, to provide a shared confirmation rite for use within Local Ecumenical Partnerships and to consider shared ordination services, where possible;
- to explore how advocacy of the Covenant might be taken forward.

2.4 **Response of Y Cyngor to the proposals of the Commission of Covenanted Churches**

Further to the Commission's request in April 2010 that member churches renew their commitment to support its work for a further five years, Y Cyngor [the leadership and co-ordinating team for Yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd yng Nghymru/The Methodist Church in Wales], having consulted with the Wales Synod and Synod Cymru, is pleased to recommend that the Methodist Church in Wales continue to support the work of the Commission for a further period of five years from 2011, with this to be reviewed again in 2016.

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2.5 However, the Commission's request was accompanied by an eight point programme of work to be undertaken over the next five years, and to this Y Cyngor wished to make some suggestions of its own. When in December 2009, the Commission met with Church leaders to ask whether they were still committed to the Covenant, the response on behalf of the Methodist Church in Wales was that:

- we remained committed to the Trefeca Declaration but recognised that “more work needs to be done in terms of what that visible unity means and how we understand it to accord with what Christ wills for our time and place”;
- we had been “disappointed by the failure of recent proposals from the Commission” and so “do not consider that the time is right for further structural schemes to be explored”;
- we considered that “what is most needed at this time are two things; first a deepening of the ecumenical relationships which already exist... and second a further exploration of what is possible under existing agreements... before any new schemes are introduced”.

2.6 The concern of Y Cyngor is that the Agenda proposed by the Commission, in particular the first three points, appears too focused on matters concerning structural schemes, and not enough on

deepening existing relationships and exploring what is possible under existing agreements. In particular it considers that its focus is too much on ordained ministry and not enough on the opportunities afforded by lay and mission-shaped ministry to which Covenant partners are also committed. It also considers that more work needs to be done to explore what ‘visible unity’ might mean for this new century. Accordingly, Y Cyngor would want to see the future Agenda of the Commission adjusted to address these issues and so to focus on work which reflects the practical mission priorities in the areas where we seek to serve.

2.7 Given the connexional nature of the Methodist Church, Y Cyngor submits to the Conference for confirmation of its recommendation that the Methodist Church in Wales continue to support the work of the Commission for a further period of five years from 2011, with this to be reviewed again in 2016. A resolution to that effect can be found below.

2.8 **Other ecumenical engagement**

Synod Cymru exercises the vast majority of its ministry in Welsh. Chapel culture is very strong within the Welsh speaking communities of Wales and so it is more natural for Welsh speaking Methodist congregations to form partnerships with other local Welsh speaking congregations. Such local ecumenical partnerships

(which may or may not be formal arrangements) are most common with the Presbyterian Church of Wales and with chapels belonging to the Union of Welsh Independent Churches (UWI). [The latter is an informal grouping and chapels which are members of the Union of Welsh Independent Churches retain their autonomy – the Union having no oversight or authority over them.] Amongst these partnerships are the Powys Area which is a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) involving ten Methodist churches, and Llanrhaeadr is an LEP involving nine Methodist Churches: both areas have Area Leaders who are ministers of other Churches who have been recognised and regarded as admitted into Full Connexion by the Conference.

- 2.9 So far as Wales Synod is concerned, there are ecumenical partnerships in 12 Circuits. The main partners are the United Reformed Church, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, Baptist churches and churches belonging to the Union of Welsh Independent Churches. There is one circuit partnership involving the Church in Wales. However the Church in Wales is involved with the Wales Synod in a significant number of partnerships in Higher Education, Industrial and Workplace, Prison and other Chaplaincies, often in conjunction with other Churches. The Wales Synod is also a partner of the Church in Wales in St Michael's College, Llandaff, which

involves ministerial, lay and Mission Shaped Ministry training.

2.10 **Challenges and difficulties facing ecumenical co-operation**

Strategic deployment of ministry. The difficulty is that the Churches all use different processes and timing patterns in deploying ministry which can lead to frustration between partners, particularly when there is pressure to reduce staff levels, and where there is a different approach to the length and timing of interregnums. From a Methodist perspective this has been a particular concern in United Areas where we share ministry with the URC and a significant factor in the demise of the Pembrokeshire United Area.

- 2.11 *More limited access to funding to support strategic deployment.* The restructuring of the Connexional Team has led to a reassessment of what are District and what are connexional priorities and what grant resources are available to support them. This has resulted in Districts (in this case the Wales and Cymru Synods) receiving more resources in terms of officers and funds in some areas, whilst having to fund what previously were held to be connexional priorities in others, with a consequent reduction in the total financial resources available for those latter areas (eg it is now the Wales Synod supporting the HE chaplaincy at Glamorgan and not the Connexion).

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2.12 *Changing assessment of key strategic issues.* Faced with a reduced level of funding, the Methodist Church in Wales has to make difficult decisions as to where it can continue to support ecumenical ministry schemes. In some cases this means that given changed circumstances, it can no longer afford to provide resources for some areas of work in the way it once did.

2.13 *Different language/cultural settings require different partners.* The language and cultural geography of Wales means that Methodism may look to different partners in different places. For example, the Wales Synod may look more naturally to the Church in Wales or the URC, whilst Synod Cymru may look to the PCW or UWI as partners. However, in responding to issues across Wales, we need to remain coherent as a denomination.

2.14 **Potential areas of new ecumenical work**

The key is to find common areas of mission priority. These may include:

- areas where significant new housing development is planned;
- areas where chaplaincy work is developing;
- sharing in new approaches to training for ministry for both lay and ordained [eg Mission Shaped Ministry programmes (with the Church in Wales and the United Reformed Church) or cooperating where existing areas of training are under review to

provide ecumenical training schemes in future (eg Reader/ Local Preacher training)];

- sharing in other ecumenical mission projects [eg 'Back to Church Sunday' or 'Street Pastors'].

The Methodist Church in Scotland

3.1 **The Partnership between the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland, and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland (the EMU Partnership)**

Steady progress between the three denominations continues to be made. At a meeting on 14 March 2011 a work-plan, remits and terms of reference were developed. From 2012 it is proposed to operate the partnership with an "Oversight Group" and a "Contact and Implementation Group". Standing "Work Groups" and time-limited "Task Groups" were also considered: the Work Groups being likely to include one on "Ministries" and one on "Learning/Training".

3.2 Significant developments within the three denominations include the Methodist Church District Development Team Review; the Scottish Episcopal Church's "Whole Church Mission and Ministries Policy Process"; and the United Reformed Church's "Advertising a Welcome" programme. The potential impact of these and other developments were discussed in the Partnership.

3.3 Perhaps the most significant progress is being made in areas of training of both ministers and laity. An example of cooperation with EMU partners is a series of three events under the banner “Shaping the Journey” at Dunblane Cathedral.

3.4 **The Church of Scotland Third Article Declaratory**

The Church of Scotland Third Article Declaratory sets out their undertaking to provide ministry across the whole of Scotland, which is one of the bases for their being a national Church. Their General Assembly last year reaffirmed this article. However, in practical terms with shortages in ministers it is proving nearly impossible to enact. A Commission to explore how they can fulfil the Third Article declaratory is in progress and reports to next year’s General Assembly. Along with several other Churches, Methodists have been invited to contribute to the work of the Commission. There may be ways of exploring how ministries may meaningfully be shared in a number of areas, building on the fact that Methodists are already assisting in the delivery of ministry in a number of Church of Scotland charges.

3.5 **Ecumenical Forum**

Building upon an ecumenical forum held last year, another was due to be held in May 2011. This would draw together Methodists and those from partner churches in Scotland who are interested in

further developments of ecumenical relationships. The forum was to explore where the Methodist Church in Scotland is against objectives set out in the Swanwick Declaration in 1987; explore how its local ecumenical relationships are developing; consider from an ecumenical perspective the District Development Team Review of the Scotland District; and develop ideas on how it might continue to “journey together” with partner Churches.

3.6 **Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS): Ecumenical Reviews**

There are two aspects of ecumenical life in Scotland currently under review. Firstly, the National Sponsors Body is seeking to explore denominational perspectives of how effective local ecumenical partnerships are in a changing environment of decreasing resources and under the impact of new legislation (most notably charity law). The second is a broader review asking the Churches to reflect on and respond to the Swanwick Declaration to assess where we now are on our ecumenical journey together. Each denomination will be asked to speak to this at the ACTS residential meeting of members in October 2011.

The Joint Implementation Commission

4.1 The interim report of the Joint Implementation Commission under the Covenant between the

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Methodist Church of Great Britain
and the Church of England entitled
Moving Forward in Covenant is

published separately but as a
part of this Agenda. A resolution
concerning it is found below.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

60/1. The Conference receives the Report.

60/2. The Conference adopts the recommendation of Y Cyngor concerning the Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales and directs that on behalf of the Conference the Methodist Church in Wales continue to support the work of the Commission on those terms for a further period of five years from 2011.

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