

Anglican – Methodist International Relations

A Report to the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion and the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogue of the World Methodist Council

An Anglican – Methodist International Consultation took place at Wesley’s Chapel, London, between 30th October and 1st November, 2007, in order to discuss the next stages of ecumenical engagement between the Churches of the Anglican Communion and of the World Methodist Council. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Revd Professor Robert Gribben, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogue, on behalf of the World Methodist Council and Bishop Harold Miller, nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Secretary General, on behalf of the Anglican Communion. The meeting was held at Wesley’s Chapel by the kind invitation of its ministers (The Revd the Lord Griffiths, Superintendent, and the Revd Jennifer Potter).

Both Christian world communions maintain their commitment to the search for the full visible unity of the Church of Christ. In the eleven years since the publication of the Report of the Anglican – Methodist International Commission, *Sharing in Apostolic Communion*, which was received by the Seventeenth World Methodist Conference in 1996 and the Lambeth Conference in 1998, the context of Anglican – Methodist relations has developed considerably, including the signing of major covenants between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great Britain and between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland and of an agreement for Interim Eucharistic Sharing between The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church.

The Consultation submits the following recommendations to the Standing Committee on Ecumenics and Dialogue of the World Methodist Council and to the Joint Standing Committee of the Anglican Consultative Council: that an **Anglican – Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission** be established with the following mandate.

Building on our common confession of the apostolic faith and our participation in God’s mission, the purpose of the Commission is to advance the visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists at every level as a contribution to the full visible unity of the Church of Christ.

We envisage the principal work of the Commission will be:

to monitor dialogues and relationships between Anglican and Methodist Churches worldwide,

- listening to the challenges and opportunities offered in the variety of contexts¹
- gathering information and insights

¹ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* stated the context in 1996 this way: “The concern that Christian believers be seen as one in Christ is urgent at this particular time. We are faced by growing secularism and the loss of social cohesion in the older Christian world. At the same time other religious faiths are everywhere challenging Christianity with alternative visions of the human condition and destiny. Thus the present Anglican – Methodist Dialogue is more than Christians talking to themselves about internal ecclesiastical arrangements. The integrity of Christian witness is at stake.” It needs to be noted that the context in 2008 has developed significantly.

- reviewing and evaluating agreements and theological statements, and
- sharing the best practices learned;

to resource developing Anglican – Methodist relationships around the world, in particular by:

- engaging in theological reflection on the nature of the unity we seek, and,
- clarifying questions to be addressed;² and

to propose ways toward the full visible unity of Anglicans and Methodists, by

- suggesting guidelines and protocols; and
- offering models for the reconciliation of churches and ministries.³

Work Programme

Sharing in the Apostolic Communion made specific proposals for further work including the provision of guidelines.⁴ There have been subsequent developments around the world that need to be taken into account. In carrying out its tasks of monitoring developments, resourcing theological reflection, and proposing further steps, the Commission should give attention to, among others, the following five areas:

Towards a single community of Christian disciples

Our goal is to take steps towards a common understanding and practice of Christian initiation, and its implications.

- We ask the Commission to note and explore the various concepts of membership within and between the Methodist and Anglican traditions. Is the concept of membership a valuable and theologically sound one?
- One presenting issue is the transferability of ‘members’ between our churches. Is the practice of insisting on further requirements when a ‘member’ of one church transfers to another justified?
- The Commission should clarify the different ways in which Baptism, Confirmation and admission to communicant life are understood and related to one another within and between the Methodist and Anglican traditions.

² An overview of the areas of doctrinal exploration and agreement to which attention has been given can be found in Part II of the *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion* Report, paragraphs 14 –30.

³ Cf. *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, paragraph 5: “Confessing this oneness together, to the highest achievable degree, is crucial for our evangelization, and may mitigate our disunity which now detracts from the presentation of the Gospel of reconciliation. We seek to be obedient to the will of Christ both in our confession of God’s saving Word and in our witness to the One Lord of the Church and Saviour of the world.”

⁴ *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*, paragraph 95 indicated four areas for the development of guidelines: *The Mutual Recognition of Members, *Eucharistic Communion going beyond mutual hospitality, *Mutual recognition and the inter-changeability of ministries and rites, and *Structures of common decision-making. While these topics have informed the discussion of the Consultation, the areas have been reformulated by the Commission in a way which seems most appropriate to the present context.

Eucharistic Sharing

We recommend that the Commission pursue the implications of the following three statements.

Definition

- By eucharistic sharing is understood mutual participation in the celebration of the Eucharist which goes beyond mutual eucharistic hospitality though falling short of that common Eucharist which will be achieved through full interchangeability of ordained ministers.

Rationale

- Eucharistic sharing reflects the presence of the two churches expressing their unity in a common faith, a common baptism, and a common mission. Thus they seek to demonstrate together that they are seeking that unity which is God's will for the Church, and to strengthen and encourage each other on the way to that goal.⁵

Practice

- Such eucharistic fellowship will involve ministers of both churches jointly leading the worship of the people in Word and Sacrament, and standing together at the holy table but with one minister presiding.⁶

Common Rites

Recent decades have been marked by an ecumenical liturgical movement which has resulted in widespread agreement on the 'shape' and theological purpose of the rites of Sacraments and other forms of worship. In this context, we recommend that the Commission:

- monitor the development of common liturgical rites in our churches
- find ways of encouraging the development of common liturgical structures, texts and actions for the celebration of Baptism, Holy Communion and Ordination, which express in a variety of languages, music and other cultural forms our shared faith.
- note the different ways in which the persons leading liturgy, and the liturgies being used are authorised and promote understanding of these.

⁵ On the way to that God-given unity, there are other sacramental issues which will need to be addressed in the work of the Commission, e.g. the elements of Holy Communion, and the method of their reverent disposal, non-presbyteral presidency and the issue of "Open Communion".

⁶ Cf. paragraph 17B (vi) of the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England, the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic and the Evangelical Church in Germany, which established a number of protocols in this area for the purposes of that agreement.

Steps towards a Common Ministry

In “*Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*”, the report concluded that “We believe the recognition of each other’s apostolicity as churches should include the recognition of the apostolicity of each other’s ministry and allow us to work towards the establishment of that ministry in its traditional threefold form, including, in ways which still need to be worked out, the historic episcopate.” (Paragraph 69) This is a task which we commend to the new Commission.

We recommend that particular attention be paid to the steps or stages that are required to establish a common ministry. Various terms have been used in discussing these issues. These include ‘acknowledging’, ‘affirming’, ‘recognising’ and ‘reconciling’. The Commission will need to recommend appropriate terms to describe the different stages of the overall process.

The first stage results in a mutual attesting to the authenticity of our Churches, ministries and sacraments. The second stage requires a more formal process leading to an interchangeable ordained ministry. The Commission will need to propose ways in which such interchangeability could be celebrated.

In this task, it will be important to recognise the variety of patterns of ministry across both the Churches of the World Methodist Council and of the Anglican Communion, which may lead to different solutions in different contexts, although such solutions must be coherent with one another.

Mutual consultation and common decision making

We recommend that the Commission

- explore structures of consultation and decision-making in both traditions
- examine the limits of diversity in the areas of faith, order, ethics and mission, and to what extent temporary anomalies may be borne
- advocate appropriate processes that will enable listening, discernment and reception on common issues, including the sharing of best practice and addressing issues that cause pain⁷
- offer models that enable the development of trust and collegiality, leading to common decision making, among those exercising episcopate and ministry both before and after interchangeability of ministries has been achieved.

For the sake of our growing unity and our common mission, each of these tasks needs to be considered at every level in both traditions.

The Consultation recommends the appointment of the Anglican – Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission with a membership of six Anglicans and six Methodists, who would be nominated by their appropriate sponsoring bodies, and which would include a Co-Chair to be nominated on each side; with the addition

⁷ These might include issues in human sexuality and the impact of racism in the life of the Church.

of a Co-Secretary from each of the sponsoring bodies, and two ecumenical consultants, nominations for which would be invited from the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Commission would need to have balance across the twelve nominated members of age, geographical and theological background, gender, theological and pastoral expertise, and lay and ordained membership.

The members of the Consultation held in London were:

World Methodist Council

The Revd Professor Robert Gribben, Uniting Church in Australia, Co-Chair
Bishop Heinrich Bolleter, United Methodist Church
Ms Gillian Kingston, Methodist Church in Ireland
The Revd Dr Douglas Mills, United Methodist Church
The Revd Peter Sulston, Methodist Church in Great Britain
The Revd Dr George Freeman, World Methodist Council, Co-Secretary

Anglican Communion

The Rt Revd Harold Miller, Church of Ireland, Anglican Co-Chair
The Revd Prebendary Dr Paul Avis, Church of England
The Rt Revd Franklin Brookhart, The Episcopal Church
The Revd Lloyd Jones, Church in Wales (*unable to be present*)
The Revd Canon Gregory K Cameron, Anglican Communion Office, Co-Secretary

Consultant

The Rt Revd Rupert Hoare, Church of England

Administrative Support

The Revd Terrie Robinson, Anglican Communion Office