

## 19. Ecumenical Report

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<b>Subject and aims</b>	To report on areas of ecumenical engagement.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Methodist Church continues to be committed to working with ecumenical partners from a wide variety of Christian traditions. We continue to encourage flexible ways of working together wherever possible as we engage in God's mission. The call to unity is a gospel imperative and a mission imperative and we continue to be challenged by the "Lund Principle"<sup>1</sup> that we should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately." The challenge is not only to seek to act together but to articulate, understand and seek ultimately to resolve or to hold together those deep differences which divide us.
- 1.2 This report includes updates on the work of some of the ecumenical bodies and accounts of some significant developments in other areas. The Conference has reason to be grateful to all those who represent the Methodist Church on a wide variety of committees, commissions and working groups thus enabling connexional, district, circuit and local initiatives.
- 1.3 This year has been a year of global pandemic and nationally already existing good relationship with ecumenical partners has, in most cases, grown stronger. We have continued to share experience and expertise as we support one another. National Ecumenical Officers have participated in regular virtual meetings hosted by Churches Together in England (CTE) but including representatives of the three nations and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The round-table meetings now meet each month and have developed from the weekly meetings focused on COVID-19 to a regular forum for information sharing on a wide range of subjects including our response to issues of injustice. This building of relationships through prayer and fellowship lies at the root of our relationships and strengthens them. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland continues to enable the sharing of resources across the four nations.

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1 The Lund principle is derived from a question raised by the 1952 Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches, held at Lund, Sweden. "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?"

- 1.4 Globally our ecumenical relationships in Europe and through the World Council of Churches are opportunities for wider engagement and enrichment. The Methodist Church in Britain continues to work with our concordat partners, the United Methodist Church (UMC), identifying areas of work where we are stronger together, such as our response to climate change.
- 1.5 The restrictions on travel and social gathering have been challenging in an area of work where the building and sustaining of relationships is of central importance. Many meetings with churches in Europe and further afield are conducted in English and this can be difficult for our partners. Misunderstandings due to language are most easily identified and addressed where there is the possibility of further informal conversation and this is very difficult to replicate online. However, the advantage of online meetings has been an increased attendance at business meetings and webinars attracting larger numbers than would attend if travel were involved. As we go forward there will be need to take account of this learning and find the appropriate balance of physical and online meetings.

### **2. The World Council of Churches (WCC)**

- 2.1 The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches has been postponed and will now take place in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31 August to 8 September 2022. The theme of the assembly is 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity'. The assembly meets every eight years and is the highest legislative body of the WCC. It reviews programmes, determines the overall policies of the WCC, elects presidents, and appoints a Central Committee which serves as the chief governing body of the WCC until the next assembly. The Conference had nominated the Ecumenical Officer (The Revd Ruth Gee) and the Chair of the Global Relationships Committee (The Revd Michaela Youngson) as its representatives to the Assembly. In light of the postponement of the Assembly, the Conference is asked to confirm the nomination of the Revd Michaela Youngson and the Revd Dr Jennifer Smith as representatives to the Assembly.
- 2.2 The Faith and Order Commission has published two volumes on moral discernment. Volume 1 "Learning from Traditions" provides self-descriptions on how 14 different church traditions engage in the process of moral discernment. Volume 2 examines historical examples where churches have changed or modified their understanding. The volumes can be accessed at <https://www.oikoumene.org> Further papers published by the Commission this year include "Love and Witness: proclaiming the Peace of the Lord Jesus Christ in a Religiously Plural World" and "Cultivate and Care: An Ecumenical Theology of Justice for and within Creation". The Conference is grateful for the continuing service to the Faith and Order Commission of Professor Tom Greggs.

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2.3 A wide range of resources are to be found on the WCC website and churches and individuals are encouraged to explore them.

### 3. The Conference of European Churches (CEC)

3.1 The CEC has continued to develop its strategy to the theme “You shall be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8), based on the three topics of:

- i. Promoting peace, justice and reconciliation in Europe
  - ii. Strengthening ecumenical fellowship and promoting the mission of the churches
  - iii. Raising churches’ voice in Europe and the European Institutions.
- Further information is available on the CEC website.<sup>2</sup>

3.2 This year there has been a particular emphasis on the work of the churches during the pandemic. An online theological series “Exploring Church in Mission” has been launched with the theme for this year being, “Communion in Crisis: The Church during the Covid-19 Pandemic” highlighting different theological positions on Holy Communion and contributing to a better understanding of the differing responses of churches during the pandemic.

### 4. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

4.1 This past year, CTBI has promoted, as usual, resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (‘Abiding in Christ’, which was prepared by the Monastic Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland), Lent (‘The Poet’s Gospel’) and Creation Time (1 September to 4 October). CTBI has continued to work to its aim of serving the churches of Britain and Ireland on the shared journey towards full visible unity in Christ. Information about the scope of this work can be found on the CTBI website.<sup>3</sup>

4.2 During the year, CTBI has hosted many webinars often in relation to work on justice and inclusion and these have been well attended.

4.3 In the course of the year the Revd Canon Graham Sparkes has been appointed as Moderator of CTBI, succeeding Archbishop Angaelos. The General Secretary of CTBI, Bob Fyffe, is standing down from 1 July 2021. The Conference is grateful to him and wishes him well as he moves on after 15 years of service.

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2 <https://www.ceceurope.org/>

3 <https://ctbi.org.uk>

### 5. Scotland

- 5.1 Under pandemic restrictions a new, broader set of ecumenical relationships has been evolving. This is perhaps best evidenced in the creation of the Scottish Church Leaders Forum born out of a commitment to call the churches in Scotland to prayer each week throughout the pandemic period. The forum is deliberately relational, focusing on common goals, needs and activities (eg, COP26 Glasgow, Mental Health crisis, research projects, engagement with Scottish Parliament).
- 5.2 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) members made the sad, brave decision to instruct the trustees to wind up this ecumenical charity and transfer assets to the newly formed ecumenical instrument for Scotland which will be known as Scottish Christian Forum (SCF). The new forum is being created by a task group comprising ecumenical officers. It is expected that the end of ACTS and beginning of SCF should be completed by the end of the summer 2021. The SCF will act as an umbrella of forums each focused on an area of ecumenical interest and engagement. We give thanks for the work of ACTS and hold hope for the work of SCF.
- 5.3 The EMU (Episcopal, Methodist, United Reformed) partnership welcomed the appointment of the Revd Paul Whittle as the new moderator of the URC Scotland. The Revd Paul Whittle, Bishop Mark Strange (SEC) and the Revd Mark Slaney (Chair of District) are keen to make plans to be more visible together and hope a post pandemic road-trip to communities identified by the EMU ecumenical officers as having local partnership potential will produce new models of ecumenical sharing in times of decreasing resource and missional opportunity.

### 6. England

- 6.1 Churches Together in England (CTE) has 50 member churches at the time of writing and continues to support ecumenical initiatives with an emphasis on mission and a flexible approach to new partnerships. The "Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission" and the supporting toolkit are available to all who are planning to work together. It is exactly as described, a tool to enable local churches to work together flexibly and with confidence, identifying the most appropriate form of agreement for their venture which might be light touch or more formal.
- 6.2 The Ecumenical Officers are working in consultation with the churches in reviewing and revisioning the role of the intermediate bodies. The intermediate bodies functioned at county or regional level and were often served by a County or Regional Ecumenical Officer. These bodies had an important oversight role but

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in recent years have been less well supported and in a number of places have disappeared. The review and revisioning aims to identify the work that needs to be done at regional or county and offer models to support this.

- 6.3 Following the adoption in 2018 of the report of the research commissioned from Theos, *That they may all be one*, the trustees of CTE have been developing a strategic plan. The first draft of the plan has now been considered by member churches and the CTE Enabling Group and the trustees are producing an updated version which will be a working document, regularly reviewed and updated.
- 6.4 The CTE Forum meets next from 14 March to 16 March 2022 in Swanwick. The theme of the Forum is “Reconciling Hope – a broken Church for a broken world.” The Forum Moderator is Dionne Gravesande, a senior manager at Christian Aid and member of the New Testament Church of God. The Deputy Moderator is Anton Muller, County Ecumenical Officer for Lancashire and a parish priest (Church of England). The Methodist Church in Britain is asked to nominate 12 delegates to the Forum and the nominations will be presented to the Conference.
- 6.5 The 2020 Conference adopted Notice of Motion 2020/113:

**Notice of Motion 2020/113: Report 24 – Ecumenical Report**

*The Conference celebrates the valuable work of Churches Together in England (CTE) and rejoices in its emphasis on mission and flexible approach to new partnerships. (Para 6.1).*

*The Conference notes that members of CTE work together across deep disagreement on core doctrinal issues, such as around the nature of the Church, the Sacraments and Orders of Ministry, and gives thanks for the grace shown in this way of working. The Conference further notes that since 2014, being in same-sex marriage is not a bar to any office within the Methodist Church.*

*The Conference, therefore, expresses its dismay that the CTE Enabling Group asked the Fourth Group to refrain from the duly elected president - Hannah Brock Womack - taking her seat, prompted by her same-sex marriage.*

*Furthermore, the Conference laments the pain that the Enabling Group's decision inflicts on Ms. Brock Womack, the Religious Society of Friends and LGBTQ+ Christians and their allies.*

Letters were sent to the General Secretary of CTE and the Presidents as directed by the Conference. This year there has been continuing work by the General Secretary and the Enabling Group to ensure that the churches in the fourth presidency group are able to contribute fully to CTE and to respond intentionally to the issues of justice and representation that have been raised. A series of round-tables has been planned to explore how member churches can better live

together with diversity.

- 6.6 CTE has constituted a Racial Justice Working Group which is working in collaboration with CTBI. The Methodist Church is represented in this group by the Equalities and Diversity Adviser, Bevan Powell. CTE's contribution includes its wide range of member churches and the prioritisation of addressing these issues by the historic churches.

### **7. Wales**

- 7.1 Cytûn (Eglwysi ynghyd yng Nghymru /Churches Together in Wales) has continued to offer support to the churches in Wales in issues relating to church and society, faith and witness, and Wales and Europe. Additionally this year there has been close working with the devolved administration in relation to response to the pandemic in Wales.
- 7.2 The Commission of Covenanted Churches is continuing to work towards further development of the covenant relationship with an emphasis on shared ministry.

### **8. The Free Churches Group (FCG)**

- 8.1 The Free Churches Group comprises 26 churches promoting working together where possible while recognising that each member fulfils its own distinctive witness and mission.
- 8.2 The Conference will be pleased to learn that the Revd Helen Cameron has served as Moderator elect of the Free Churches Group from April 2021 and will become Moderator in April 2022.
- 8.3 The work of the Free Churches Group continues to be focused on supporting the churches' work in education, healthcare and prison chaplaincy. The report of the Free Churches Commission into social cohesion in England was published in the autumn of 2020 and is available online.<sup>4</sup>

### **9. The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM)**

- 9.1 The aims of MAPUM are to:
- i Affirm and uphold the inseparability of Unity and Mission with the conviction that neither can be fully addressed in isolation

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4 <https://www.freechurches.org.uk/commission-report>

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- ii Promote working together in mission under the Covenant
- iii Share insights, address issues, and develop resources in local units in mission for both churches.

9.2 The work of MAPUM has been affected by the impact of COVID-19 on local ecumenism. The co-chairs intend to make personal visitations to specific ecumenical projects as soon as circumstances allow.

### **10. The Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group (MURCLG)**

10.1 The Liaison Group continues to work on the production of model constitutions for Methodist and URC areas. This work has been ongoing for a number of years but it is hoped that a way forward can be found to the approval of the model constitution by the Charity Commission. Legal advice is being sought from both churches.

10.2 Following the appreciation of the 'Introduction to the Methodist Church' for URC ministers and others appointed to LEPs with the Methodist Church another event is planned for the autumn of 2021.

### **11. The British Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission**

11.1 This year the Commission has explored the theme 'Mary and the Communion of Saints'. Residential meetings and meetings in person have not been possible but two meetings were held online. The Commission keeps constantly in mind the question of how best to share the fruit of its meetings and conversations more widely and effectively.

### **12. Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome (MEOR)**

12.1 The Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome is a presence for the World Methodist Council:

- to be a channel of dialogue with other churches in the search for a deeper unity
- to foster relationships with other agencies and faith communities in order to promote better understanding and joint action for justice and peace
- to offer a ministry of prayer and reflection, of learning and growth
- to be a place of open hospitality to Methodists and all visitors to Rome.

12.2 The work of MEOR is overseen by a Forum, the members of which are the World Methodist Council, the Methodist Church, the European Methodist Council,

the United Methodist Church Office of Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Relationships, OPCEMI (The Methodist Churches in Italy), and The Wesley Rome.

- 12.3 In March 2021 the MEOR Forum met for strategic planning which focused mainly on better integrating MEOR into the World Methodist Council and facilitating MEOR's administrative and legal needs in Italy.
- 12.4 The Revd Matthew A Laferty, a presbyter from The United Methodist Church and a Mission Partner of the Methodist Church in Britain assumed his new role as the first full-time Director of the Methodist Ecumenical Office Rome on 1 September 2020.
- 12.5 MEOR's work in 2020-2021 has focused on relationship-building, renewing ties with ecumenically-focused institutions in Rome and beyond, and planning for the future. In spite of COVID-19, the MEOR director has been able to arrange a number of high-level meetings with Vatican officials in addition to partner organizations in Rome.
- 12.6 Taking advantage of the proliferation of the use of technology during the pandemic, MEOR organised several webinars on the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission and their past and present dialogue. A number of webinars are being planned for 2021-2022 including themes related to the Methodist association with joint declaration on the doctrine of justification and moral discernment.
- 12.7 Due to COVID-19, MEOR guestrooms have been closed to guests. It is anticipated that the situation will not change in the immediate future for the health and safety of MEOR guests. The director is developing plans for the guestrooms and how, and if, guestrooms can be utilized in the future.

### **13. Associate members of the Methodist Conference**

- 13.1 Clause 14 (4) of the Deed of Union makes provision for the appointment of associate members of the Conference as prescribed by Standing Orders. SO 107(1)(i) directs that among the associate members should be six persons appointed by other churches and Christian bodies which are members of an ecumenical body or association in Great Britain of which the Methodist Church is also a member.
- 13.2 Ecumenical Associate members of the Conference have been invited on a rota basis which was modelled on a report to the Conference of 1989 (Conference Agenda pp 558-561). Since that time the membership of the ecumenical bodies of which the Methodist Church is a member has increased significantly and the



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nature and scope of ecumenical work has developed with a broader and more diverse pattern of relationships.

13.3 Since 1990 the pattern has been:

- The Church of England should be invited to send a representative each year and a particular representative to attend for two successive Conferences.
- The Roman Catholic Church should be invited to send a representative for two years in succession and then stand down for two years.
- The Baptist Union of Great Britain should be invited to send a representative for two years in succession and then stand down for two years.
- The URC should be invited to send a representative each year and a particular representative to attend for two successive Conferences.
- The remaining three places to be allocated to other churches and churches from Wales and Scotland to alternate.

13.4 The recognition of particular relationships with the Church of England and the United Reformed Church and a reciprocal arrangement for representation at their governing bodies continues to make it appropriate for those churches to be invited to nominate associate members to the Conference every year. There have been variations from the pattern in the past and it is not a pattern directed by the Conference.

13.5 In the autumn of 2021 the Methodist-Roman Catholic International Commission will publish its tenth report. For this reason the Conference is asked to invite the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales to nominate an associate member to the Conference in 2022. Members of the Conference will have noted that there are changes in the ecumenical structures and relationships in Scotland (section 5 above) and for this reason the Conference is asked to invite the Church of Scotland to nominate an associate member to the Conference in 2022.

13.6 The Conference is asked to confirm that the Ecumenical Officer in consultation with the Ecumenical Stakeholders Forum should nominate to the Council for recommendation to the Conference those churches in addition to the Church of England and the URC who are invited to nominate associate members to the Conference ensuring that there is regular participation by ecumenical partners in Wales and Scotland. This will allow the recommendations to be determined strategically in an ever-changing ecumenical landscape.

### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 19/1. The Conference receives the Report.**
- 19/2. The Conference approves the nominations of the Revd Michaela Youngson and the Revd Dr Jennifer Smith as representatives to the eleventh assembly of the World Council of Churches.**
- 19/3. The Conference agrees that ecumenical associate members of the Conference be invited as set out in section 13.**