

Consideration of Embracing the Covenant

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Gareth J Powell powellg@methodistchurch.org.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	The Council is asked to approve this course of action.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	This is to fulfil a Conference resolution.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To implement Resolution 46/3 requiring the Council to consider the report and ensure that it is studied in appropriate ways in Districts, Circuits and Local Churches
Main Points	The Council is invited to undertake consideration of Embracing the Covenant at its meeting in October 2009 and approve plans for wider Connexional consultation.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Methodist-Anglican Covenant <i>Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report (2008) of the Joint Implementation Commission.</i>
Consultations	Faith and Order Committee Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	N/A
Faith and Order	The Committee is preparing a response as required by SO 330
Financial	None
Personnel	None
Legal	None
Wider Connexional	A requirement of the Conference resolution.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Our Covenant partners have been informed of this course of action.
Risk	None

Recommendations concerning the study of Embracing the Covenant.

The background

The Joint Implementation Commission(JIC) (2003-8) for an Anglican-Methodist Covenant published its quinquennial report in June 2008, entitled *Embracing the Covenant*. Both the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England commended the report for study, action and response in their churches.

The General Synod on 7th July 2008 specifically requested “that Bishops’ Councils consider the report and refer it for study by other appropriate bodies in the dioceses and that responses be sent to the Council for Christian Unity by 31 December 2009”.

The Methodist Conference on 8th July 2008 requested “that the Methodist Council consider the report and ensure that it is studied in appropriate ways in Districts, Circuits and Local Churches, and that responses be sent to the Assistant Secretary of the Conference by 31st December 2009”.

This paper therefore seeks to offer in section A some recommendations about how key areas of the report might be considered by the Methodist Council itself and also studied throughout the Connexion. In section B are some suggestions about possible ways to ensure that this study is taken forward connexionally.

A. How to approach key areas of the report.

It is proposed that the Methodist Council undertakes a detailed consideration of the Report at its meeting in October 2009. This consideration would be resourced by the Ecumenical Officer and the Methodist Co-Chair of JIC. The following Chapters will require particular attention;

Chapter 2, *The Unity we have and the Unity we seek*, deals with something which is fundamental to the rest of the report. In this chapter the JIC laid out its vision of “full visible unity/communion”. It is important to note that this is not a scheme for structural unity, for two churches becoming one, but is a pilgrimage or journey where by being faithful to the Spirit the outcome should be “full visible communion”. To achieve this, the JIC believed, would be an enormous step forward for ecumenism.

Chapter 4 *How can Decision-making be shared?* contains several recommendations about:

- Boundaries (section 6.1, pp. 74-75);
- Deployment of clergy/ministers (6.2, pp. 75-76);
- Mission Initiatives (6.3, p. 77);
- Training for Ministry (6.4, p. 79);
- Public Affairs (6.5 p. 80).

These are properly the concern of the Methodist Council to consider and advise upon, referring where appropriate to relevant connexional bodies such as the Connexional Leaders’ Forum and the Stationing Committee.

The Comparative Table of the Churches’ Structures shows how authority for different areas of our life is distributed in our two churches (pp. 56-73).

In Chapter 5, *Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant*, the JIC was seeking to be true to its mandate. The chapter makes clear that under an Anglican-Methodist Covenant the JIC was expected to continue to explore how oversight is expressed in our churches and how episkope,

including personal episkope or episcopacy, is expressed. The Conference of 2007 encouraged the JIC to offer some specific proposals in its quinquennial (and final) report. Hence the present proposals in chapter 5. The JIC recognised that both churches have difficult issues to face regarding bishops: the Church of England in ordaining women to the episcopate and the Methodist Church in having bishops at all. In either church there are those who do not wish to see such changes. The JIC urges all, however, to consider carefully its proposals in this chapter. Clearly they have enormous implications for the Methodist Church, but are offered faithfully in the search for that fuller visible communion between our two churches which is an important stage on the ecumenical pilgrimage.

B. Ensuring study and response throughout the Connexion

The Connexional Team will shortly embark upon a connexional consultation in order to gain observations on and responses to the report. In order to enable this to happen the Council is asked to invite the Scotland and Wales Synods, as well as 6 other Synods (including an Island District) to respond. It should also invite 10-12 Circuits from different areas to respond. A further 10-12 Superintendents should be invited to suggest a local church from their Circuit to be a responding partner in the consultation.

Questions are being formulated to facilitate the discussions in these groups.

As well as the Council itself, it would be very helpful if other connexional bodies were in a position to respond in areas relevant to their work, particularly with reference to the recommendations in chapter 4 about joint decision-making. These might include, for example, the Chairs' Meeting, Stationing Committee, the newly formed Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission, Fresh Ways Working Group.

The Faith and Order Committee is already in the process of making a considered response. The Council may wish to invite the Law and Polity Committee to respond as there are clearly matters of polity in chapters 4 and 5 where the a Law and Polity view would be relevant.

Steps are also in hand to ensure that the individual chapters of the report be made available on the Covenant web site.

The Council is asked to approve this course of action.