

The Church of Scotland and the Church of England have reached an historic agreement that recognises their longstanding ecumenical partnership and lays the groundwork for future joint projects.

The agreement called The Columba Declaration is set out in a 15-page report by the Joint Study Group "Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission".

Rev Dr John McPake, co-chair of the study group and one of the authors of the report, said "The Columba Declaration recognises the strong partnership that already exists and will help encourage and support new initiatives.

"We believe that approval of the Columba Declaration by our two churches will represent a significant step in the long history of their relationship, one that affirms the place we have come to and opens up new possibilities for the future."

Arranged into four chapters, the report sets out the history of partnership between the two churches and the shared beliefs that allow for close cooperation between the churches, before exploring how the partnership could grow.

This year the churches established the Churches' Mutual Credit Union as a response to concerns that low-income families needed access to low - cost banking and loans. And that's just one of the areas where the two churches already are collaborating.

The Church of Scotland's Church and Society Council and the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs talk regularly about everything from poverty to refugees. As well as recognising one another's ministers, the churches exchange views on ministry and come together for example on initiatives such as Fresh Expressions. The Church of Scotland also sends a representative to the General Synod while the Church of England sends a representative to the General Assembly.

In a joint statement prefacing the report, joint study group co-chairs Rev Dr John McPake and Rt Rev Peter Forster, Bishop of Chester write:

"Our hope is that joint affirmation by our two churches of the Columba Declaration would:

- Affirm and strengthen our relationship at a time when it is likely to be particularly critical in the life of the United Kingdom;
- Provide an effective framework for coordinating present partnership activities and for fostering new initiatives;
- Enable us to speak and act together more effectively in the face of the missionary challenges of our generation."

The report emphasises that joint ecumenical work should also include other churches and especially the Episcopal Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church. At the same time it acknowledges the "distinctive partnership in the gospel to which our two Churches are called within the United Kingdom, rooted in our shared history and in our parallel and overlapping roles as the churches of our respective nations."

The report will now go to the Church of England's Synod in February and by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May for approval.

A debate is scheduled at the Synod on 16 Feb 2016.

The Columba Declaration

38. In the light of our common mission and context (chapter 1), our agreement in faith (chapter 2) and our significant opportunities for growing in partnership in mission (chapter 3), we recommend that our churches make the following Declaration.

We, the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, make the following acknowledgements and commitments, which are interrelated.

a) Acknowledgements

- i. We acknowledge one another's churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic ministry and mission of the whole people of God.
- ii. We acknowledge that in both our churches the word of God is truly preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are rightly administered.
- iii. We acknowledge that both our churches share in the common confession of the apostolic faith.
- iv. We acknowledge that one another's ordained ministries of word and sacraments are given by God as instruments of grace and we look forward to a time when growth in communion can be expressed in fuller unity that makes possible the interchangeability of ministers.
- v. We acknowledge that personal, collegial and communal oversight (episkope) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry.

b) Commitments

We commit ourselves to grow together in communion and to strengthen our partnership in mission. Through this commitment, we hope to enrich our continuing relationships with other churches in the United Kingdom and around the world. We will welcome opportunities to draw other churches into the activities and initiatives that we share.

As part of that commitment, we will continue to:

- i. pray for and with one another;
- ii. welcome one another's members to each other's worship as guests and receive one another's members into the congregational life of each other's churches where that is their desire;
- iii. explore opportunities for congregational partnership, formal as well as informal, in those cases where there are churches in close

geographical proximity;

- iv. enable ordained ministers from one of our churches to exercise ministry in the other church, in accordance with the discipline of each church;
- v. identify theological issues that arise from growth towards fuller communion and be prepared to allocate resources to addressing them;
- vi. work together on social, political and ethical issues that arise from our participation in public life and be prepared to allocate resources to joint initiatives for addressing them.

In order to assist our churches in living out the acknowledgements and commitments of the Columba Declaration, we will appoint Co-Chairs and members of a Church of Scotland - Church of England Contact Group, whose purpose will be to coordinate the different activities that make up our rich relationship and develop new initiatives where these may be needed. The Contact Group will meet at least annually and will report annually to the Council for Christian Unity in the Church of England and the Committee on Ecumenical Relations in the Church of Scotland.

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