

GENERAL SYNOD

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

A report by the Council for Christian Unity, to which is appended

HEALING THE PAST – BUILDING THE FUTURE:

REPORT OF

A CHURCH OF ENGLAND – UNITED REFORMED CHURCH STUDY GROUP

1. The report is the fruit of three separate series of informal conversations between our two churches in the past two decades, but it deals with unfinished business that goes back to the English Civil War and the Restoration in the mid-seventeenth century. In the view of the Council for Christian Unity, the report and the actions that it proposes will contribute to the healing of the historic divisions between our two churches and will draw them closer together for the future. The United Reformed Church has welcomed the report and approved its recommendations.
2. The report summarises the history of the relations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church and its historic predecessor churches and outlines areas of theological convergence, together with areas where differences remain.
3. The report concludes (paragraph 144) with the following recommendations, which have been endorsed by the CCU and the Faith and Order Commission:
 - a) That representatives of the two churches should join together in an act of worship in 2012, that would mark both the 350th anniversary of the Great Ejection of nonconforming ministers following the Act of Uniformity 1662 and the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Reformed Church. The service should contain an expression of penitence for our part in perpetuating the divisions of the past, a desire for the healing of memories and an act of commitment to work more closely together in the future.
 - b) That in the new climate created by the joint act of reconciliation and commitment, further joint work should be undertaken on certain topics, mainly concerning ministry and authority in the church.
4. The report will be introduced by the Bishop of Guildford as Chairman of the Council for Christian Unity. The Synod will be invited to approve the two recommendations of the report outlined in 4 above.

On behalf of the Council

✠ CHRISTOPHER GUILDFORD

Chairman

HEALING THE PAST – BUILDING THE FUTURE

The report of the Church of England – United Reformed Church Joint Study Group.

Introduction by the co-convenors

Jesus prayed ‘may they all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.’ John 17.21 NRSV

The Church of England and United Reformed Church agreed to explore their shared ecumenical commitment through the study of the international Anglican Reformed document, God’s Reign and our Unity. A group of seven people, three Church of England, three United Reformed and one Methodist, met on seven occasions over the period 2007 – 2010.

This study group built on the insights of various conversations, both multi-lateral and bi-lateral, over the last seventy years, including most recently, an Anglican/United Reformed Church dialogue and a trilateral informal conversation between the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

The shared commitment to unity was re-visited through looking at the Church of England’s Thirty-nine Articles and the United Reformed Church’s Basis of Union. Scripture, the tradition of the church and God’s mission imperative in a changing world are all drivers in the search for unity.

Within each of our two churches, there is a varied understanding of the role that Scripture plays in the Christian life. However, there is common agreement about the centrality of scripture in shaping the Christian life.

Our two churches have historically diverged from one another, as we have each sought to be shaped by the Holy Spirit, but discovered that our discernment of the Spirit was leading us in different directions. However, we each affirm the activity of the Spirit in the life of the church and share a common desire to be shaped by the mind of Christ. We also gathered aware of the influence that the discrepancy in size of membership between our two churches has to play.

The context of the conversations undertaken by this study group has been one of challenge and change, in the church and in the world which the church seeks to witness to and to serve. Society has become more plural in terms of faith, whether in the major faith traditions, more contemporary outcrops of spirituality, or in the rise of atheism. Spirituality has become a watchword, but has not necessarily been interpreted within a Christian context. The post-Enlightenment rise of individualism has led to a point where each individual feels free to determine his or her own beliefs without need of a wider reference point.

In the main, church-going has been declining, apart from areas blessed by immigration and the rise of Pentecostalism. Mainstream churches have been faced with ageing congregations and reducing resources. External pressures have turned churches inwards in terms of their priority being their own renewal. Internal divisions have led to questions about unity being more widely debated within, rather than between, churches.

In this context, responding to Jesus' prayer that his followers might be one, has become more of a challenge. However, the study group believes that it is an essential challenge for the churches to respond to and a key part of the churches witness to a fragmented world.

The setting up of a Church of England/United Reformed study group, rather than formal conversations, has been a reflection of the diminution of the emphasis on unity across the churches.

However, the life of a study group has meant that discussion could happen more freely and under less pressure, than in a formal conversation which needed to lead to a specific agreement. The study group would like to offer this ecumenical methodology as a way forward in building relationships and reflecting on difficult issues between churches. This process has allowed nettles to be grasped without the pressure of decisions needing to be made.

It is our hope and our prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to open up new possibilities of conversation with one another, conversations that lead us more closely to the mind of Christ and equip us better to engage in the wider mission conversations that lie before us in the world.

We have been grateful to the work of the two co-secretaries in drafting an extensive and valuable report, outlining the conversations that have already taken place over the last century, the particular issues that arise today and the setting of these issues within the context of other international agreements, such as Reuilly and Leuenberg and through the work of the World Council of Churches.

The Venerable Dr Joy Tetley, Church of England co-convenor
The Reverend Elizabeth Welch, United Reformed Church co-convenor

The shape of the report

The report is in three sections.

Section 1 (pages 3-16) explains the background to the meetings of the study group in the history of the relationship between the Church of England, the United Reformed Church and the Christian traditions out of which it was formed.

Section 2 (pages 17-32) describes the meetings of the study group and sets out the key areas of convergence and divergence between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church that emerged during these meetings.

Section 3 (pages 32-33) contains the study group's conclusions and recommendations. The key conclusions are that the two churches can and should take steps towards a closer relationship and the key recommendation is that there should be a joint service of recognition, penitence and mutual commitment at Westminster Abbey in 2012, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the United Reformed Church and the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662, as a way of formally inaugurating this closer relationship.

Section 1. The background to the study group

1. During the period of the Civil War and the Commonwealth a series of Acts of Parliament abolished episcopacy, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Thirty Nine Articles* and the traditional liturgical calendar from the life of the Church in England. Those who remained loyal to the Church of England as it had been before the Civil War looked for the day when all these changes could be reversed and those clergy who had lost their livings because of their loyalty to the bishops and the king could have their livings restored.

2. Their opportunity came with the failure of the Commonwealth and the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 and their sense of bitterness over what had happened in the preceding years meant that they were not inclined to compromise with those who thought differently from them. The result was that when the Savoy Conference of 1661 failed to achieve agreement on the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* between those representing the newly restored bishops and those representing a Presbyterian approach to church polity, those clergy who were unwilling to promise to use only the rites and ceremonies of the Prayer Book or to receive episcopal ordination were given a choice of either conforming or being deprived of their livings on St Bartholomew's day, 24 August 1662. Many of those who felt they could not conform held to an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in worship which set them against a restriction to prescribed forms. Freedom of worship, an antipathy to prelacy and a rejection of Establishment were all theological issues involved in the early history of Dissent which continue to be alive today.ⁱ

3. Nearly two thousand clergy were deprived and this 'Great Ejection' led to a division within English Christianity that has remained unhealed to this day. Many of these clergy formed their own separate 'nonconformist' or 'dissenting' churchesⁱⁱ and in the course of time some of these churches, or churches descended from them, became the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Union.

4. Over the next two and a half centuries the Church of England and the churches in the Congregationalist and Presbyterian traditions maintained a separate existence, working and

witnessing for Christ, sometimes in opposition and sometimes in co-operation, against the background of inter alia, the growth of deism, the Evangelical Revival, the rise of Methodism, the Oxford Movement and the Missionary Societies and the social and intellectual challenges of the Victorian era. During this time Congregationalism increased greatly as a result of the Evangelical Revival, whilst Presbyterianism moved in the direction of Unitarianism but was revived in Southern England and spiced up and enhanced in the North of England by migration from Scotland.

5. By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, although the Church of England remained the established church, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, along with the members of the other Protestant Free Churches, had come to play a very important part in the religious, cultural and political life of England. The civic penalties which had been imposed on dissenters after the restoration had largely been abolished and in cities like Birmingham the Free Churches played a dominant role in civic life. In the latter half of the nineteenth century it was said that the affairs of Birmingham were decided in the vestry of Carr's Lane Congregational Chapel whose minister, R. W. Dale, played a leading part in the political as well as the religious life of the city. There were continuing tensions between the Church of England and the Free Churches over issues such as tithes and the role of the Church of England in the education system, but overall relations between them were improving. However, the divisions between the churches remained.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Lambeth Appeal of 1920

6. The beginnings of modern attempts to heal the divisions between Anglicans, Congregationalists and Presbyterians resulting from the Civil War, the Great Ejection and the history that then followed go back to 1920. In that year the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops issued 'An Appeal to all Christian People.' This appeal declared that the 'the time has come...for all separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out to the goal of a reunited Catholic Church'^{iv} and further stated that:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all who 'profess and call themselves Christians', within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage of the past to the present, shall be possessed in common and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ.^v

7. The appeal also suggested that a visibly united Church would need to involve the 'whole hearted acceptance' of the Holy Scriptures, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and what it described as:

A ministry acknowledged by every part of the church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.^{vi}

8. The report then went on to contend that the episcopate 'is the one means of providing such a ministry' and that:

...we eagerly look forward to the day when through its acceptance in a united Church we may all share in that grace which is pledged to the members of the whole body in the apostolic rite of laying-on of hands, and in the joy and fellowship of a Eucharist in which as one Family we may together, without any doubtfulness of mind, offer to the one Lord our worship and service.^{vii}

9. Perhaps conscious that this stress on the significance of the episcopate would look to the other churches like a simple call for them to accept bishops and episcopal ordination, the appeal noted

that ‘the truly equitable approach to union is by the way of mutual deference to each other’s consciences.’^{viii} To this end it emphasised that no one should be seen as repudiating his past ministry and proposed that while ministers who were not episcopally ordained would ‘accept a commission through episcopal ordination,’ Anglican bishops would also accept from the authorities of other churches ‘a form of commission or recognition which would commend our ministry to their congregations, as having its place in the one family life.’^{ix}

The 1938 Outline Reunion Scheme

10. In response to this appeal and its further endorsement by the Lambeth Conference of 1930 there were a series of conversations between representatives of the Church of England and representatives of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, including the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Union, that eventually resulted in the publication in 1938 of the *Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Free Churches in England*.

11. This *Outline* proposed the coming together of the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches belonging to the Federal Council in a single united church along the lines set out in the 1920 appeal. Under this re-union scheme the existing ministers of the re-uniting churches would have retained their status in the new church without re-ordination and all presbyters, whether episcopally ordained or not, would have been able to celebrate Holy Communion in all churches, subject to the provisions of a pledge that no-one would have to accept ministry against their conscience. All existing Church of England bishops would have become bishops of the new united church and presbyters from the former Free Churches would have been consecrated as bishops through the laying on of hands by a combination of three Church of England bishops and those ministers who would formerly have administered ordination in the Free Churches.^x

12. The Convocations of Canterbury and York in the Church of England commended the report for the ‘careful attention’ of those in the Church of England in 1938^{xi} and in 1941 the response of the Free Church Federal Council noted the hesitations about a number of aspects of the proposed re-union scheme from the Free Churches, hesitations that included, but were not limited to, the proposal that the re-united church should be episcopal in nature.^{xii}

13. There does not seem, however, to have been any attempt from either side to try to take forward work on the outline scheme or to think how it might be turned into reality, and the scheme was quietly shelved. The most plausible explanation for this is that the Second World War radically changed the focus to simple survival, local hospitality to the bombed out and displaced, and the effort to maintain contact with and support for continental Christian brothers and sisters. Significantly the two inter-Church matters which are referred to at length in the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England from the war years are United Presbyterian-Congregational Churches and the process leading to the formation of the British Council of Churches.

Archbishop Fisher’s 1946 Sermon and the Free Church Response

14. After the Second World War, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, re-opened the issue of the steps that would be needed to move towards a re-united church in England in a sermon entitled ‘A Step Forward in Church Relations.’ This sermon was preached before the University of Cambridge on 3 November 1946. It suggested that as a step towards unity the Free Churches might adopt episcopacy into their own systems of ministry prior to re-union with the Church of England.^{xiii} The sermon led to conversations between representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives of the English Free Churches which resulted in the 1950 report

Church Relations in England. This report surveyed the implications of the Archbishop's sermon and what would be involved in putting its suggestions into practice.

15. The report did not propose a re-union scheme along the lines suggested in 1938. It suggested instead that there should be negotiations for the establishment of intercommunion between individual Free Churches and the Church of England. It also suggested that there were six points that would need to be involved in the establishment of intercommunion. (1) Assurances with respect to doctrinal standards leading to a declaration that both churches maintained the apostolic faith and proclaimed the apostolic gospel. (2) The acceptance of the historic episcopate by the Free Church involved and a resolution of the status of the ministers of the Free church who had not been episcopally ordained. (3) Admission to Holy Communion by the Church of England of communicant members of the Free Church and the authorization of communicant members of the Church of England to receive Holy Communion from the ministers of the Free Church. (4) The hope by the Church of England that episcopal confirmation would come to be generally used in the Free Church. (5) The maintenance by the Free Church of its existing relationships with non-episcopal churches. (6) The acceptance by both churches that intercommunion 'ought not to be regarded as being more than a temporary stage on the road to full unity.'^{xiv}

Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations 1954-1966

16. The 1950 report did not lead to negotiations for intercommunion between the Church of England and either the Presbyterian Church of England or the Congregational Union. However, from 1954-1957 the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England were involved in quadrilateral conversations involving the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church that eventually resulted in the 1957 report *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*.^{xv} This report proposed a 'new approach toward unity through mutual adaptation' that would eventually lead to unity between Anglicans and Presbyterians in England and Scotland.

17. This approach would have meant that in the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of England:

Bishops, chosen by each Presbytery, from its own membership or otherwise, would initially be consecrated by prayer with the laying on of hands by Bishops from one or more of the Episcopal churches and by the Presbytery acting through appointed representatives. Thus consecrated each Bishop would be within the apostolic succession as acknowledged by Anglicans on the one hand and as required by Presbyterians on the other. He would be the President of the Presbytery and would act as its principal minister in every ordination, and in the consecration of other Bishops. He would exercise pastoral oversight over his fellow-ministers in the Presbytery, and act as its spokesman to the community...The Presbytery would still retain its full and essential place in the life and government of the Church, except that a permanent Bishop-in-Presbytery would take the place of the changing Moderator. The General Assembly would retain its full existing authority in doctrine, administration, legislation, and judicature.^{xvi}

Conversely, in the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church:

Lay persons would be solemnly "set apart" for some measure of pastoral responsibility towards their fellow-Christians, in an office akin to the Presbyterian eldership. Lay people would be given appropriate participation in the government of the Church at all levels: parochial, diocesan, provincial, and national.^{xvii}

18. The report recognised that other ‘fundamental modifications’ to the life of the churches involved would also be required, but it stated that these would come about ‘as the Churches grow in spiritual fellowship together’.

19. There was strong criticism of the 1957 report within the Church of Scotland. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the conversations should continue and that they should address four questions that reflected the concerns expressed by the Church of Scotland. These questions were:

(a)...the meaning of unity as distinct from uniformity in Church order; (b) the meaning of “validity” as applied to ministerial orders; (c) the doctrine of Holy Communion; and (d) the meaning of “the Apostolic Succession” as related to all these matters.^{xviii}

20. In 1962 the conversations between the four churches resumed, this time with observers from the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. The agenda for the conversations was provided by the four questions identified by the Church of Scotland plus three additional issues suggested by the Church of England that were seen as arising out of, and relevant to, the discussion of the four previous questions. These issues were: the Church as Royal Priesthood, the Place of the Laity in the Church, and the Relations between Church, State and Society.

21. The conversations, which lasted from 1962-66, took place in four regional groups made up of representatives from each of the four participating churches. Each panel considered the first six topics on the agenda, with a special group being convened to consider the topic of the relations between Church, state and society. Two general conferences of members of all the regional groups were also held.

22. The report of the conversations was published in 1966 as *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations*.^{xix} It covered the seven topics on the agenda of the conversations, but it also contained a proposal for bilateral conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church and between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England with the aim of creating united churches in Scotland and England that would be in full communion with each other.

23. After the publication of the report, bilateral conversations continued in Scotland between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church until 1974, but continuing concerns about episcopacy in the Church of Scotland meant they did not ultimately prove fruitful in terms of producing a union between the two churches. In England, meanwhile, the Church of England focussed on an ultimately unsuccessful scheme for unity with the Methodist Church while the Presbyterian Church of England focussed on the discussions with the Congregational Union that led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972.^{xx}

24. Underlying this formation was a stream of work which had been picked up after the Second World War in response to the petition of the Presbyterian Layman’s Conference of 1943 to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England asking for it to re-commence conversations with the Congregational Union. Choosing the path of closer co-operation, a Joint Advisory Council was established in 1951. Against a wider background of deepening ecumenical relations, on which the impact of the pontificate of John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council should not be underestimated, the Joint Committee of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians met for the first time on New Year’s Day 1964. Both churches voted in favour of the Union Scheme in 1971, the United Reformed Church Bill was passed in June 1972, and the new Church came into being on the 5th of October in that year. At the time the formation of the United Reformed Church was seen more widely as a first step to wider unity in England, as shown by the presence of the

Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster at the inaugural service in Westminster Abbey.

25. Congregational churches had to vote on whether or not to be part of the United Reformed Church, whilst Presbyterian churches automatically became part of the new church unless they specifically voted not to be. This was because at this critical moment the decisive discernment of the mind of Christ was deemed to be in the individual Congregationalist Church Meetings and in the Presbyterian General Assembly. These very different ecclesiologies were reconciled more by reference to the experience of tradition rather than seeing tradition as a fixed yardstick against which all change had to be measured. Experience, leading to conviction, had taught Congregationalists that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer they gathered under the Word in local fellowship in a Church Meeting. In that Meeting the togetherness of all Church members in seeking to discern God's will was an expression of Catholicity. Experience, leading to conviction, had taught Presbyterians that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer their representatives gathered under the Word in General Assembly. From all this experience was developed a conciliar church in which there is dispersed authority. That means that the authority to discern the mind of Christ is dispersed between the various councils of the church, depending on the nature of the matter to be determined. As part of its journey, the Congregational Union of England and Wales became prior to the formation of the United Reformed Church the Congregational Church in England and Wales, emphasising the acknowledgement of mutual interdependence and the conciliar nature of the whole church.

26. After the initial union of 1972 the United Reformed Church has expanded twice. In 1981 a union took place between the United Reformed Church and the Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ and in 2000 a union took place with the Congregational Union of Scotland.

27. It should be admitted that there has been a price to pay for the unions described in the previous three paragraphs. At each union there have been those who have felt unable on grounds of good conscience to join in. In 1972 Presbyterian congregations in Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Channel Islands joined the Church of Scotland and significant numbers of Congregational churches found homes in the Congregational Federation and the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches or asserted thorough going Independency. Following the unions in 1981 and 2000 there remains a Fellowship of Churches of Christ and there are continuing Congregational churches in Scotland.

Covenanting for Unity

28. From 1978-1980 the Church of England and the United Reformed Church were involved alongside the Churches of Christ, the Methodist Church and the Moravian Church in the development of the multilateral *Covenanting for Unity* proposals. These proposals were intended to enable the churches concerned 'to demonstrate their unity, and thus to share more effectively in the one mission of Christ in the world.'^{xxi} The proposals involved these churches entering into a covenant with each other on the basis of which they would:

...be able to acknowledge one another as true Churches within the One Church of Christ, and to recognise and accept one another's sacraments, membership and ministries.^{xxii}

29. Issues about the mutual recognition of ministry had been one of the reasons why previous proposals for moving towards unity had come to nothing and in order to address this problem the intention was that the covenant would provide:

...an unambiguous way in which the ministries of all our churches may be incorporated in a new relationship within the historic ministry of the catholic Church to their mutual enrichment. Consecration to the historic episcopate by episcopal ordination and the joint ordination of presbyters according to a Common Ordinal will become the practice of all our Churches from the point of Covenant onwards, and this intention is sealed by the ordination of bishops and presbyters in the Covenant Service itself.^{xxiii}

30. The *Covenanting for Unity* proposals eventually came to nothing after they narrowly failed to achieve the necessary two thirds majority in the House of Clergy of the Church of England's General Synod in 1982. As in the case of the previous Anglican-Methodist unity scheme, the major reason for the failure of the Covenant proposals in the Church of England was a fear amongst a number of those on the Church of England's Catholic wing that the proposals would undermine the Church of England's Catholic character by leading to the acceptance of ministers who had not been episcopally ordained.

31. Although the failures of the Anglican-Methodist scheme and the *Covenanting for Unity* proposals were major setbacks for the Church of England's ecumenical endeavours, the Church of England persisted in seeking to move towards unity with other churches and the result has been a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements from 1988 onwards with the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, the Moravian Church in Great Britain, the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches and the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

32. Although the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church had voted in favour of the *Covenanting for Unity* proposals by 434 to 196, the matter caused some division and might have led to resignations and secessions had it gone forward. Some held that bishops were not in themselves foreign to the Reformed tradition, nor did they have to conform to the then current Church of England pattern, and that unity was an over-riding imperative, not only for its own sake but also for the sake of mission. Others argued that hierarchy of any sort was foreign to the United Reformed Church and its uniting traditions, that the same was true of any authority given to individuals rather than councils, and that principle should not be sacrificed for the sake of unity. In truth, a sizeable minority was deeply relieved when the proposal faltered elsewhere.

33. In the years that followed the failure of the Covenant proposals commitment to unity between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church was given expression through an emphasis on local ecumenism and a burgeoning number of Local Ecumenical Projects, renamed Local Ecumenical Partnerships from 1994.

34. A Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) is a relationship between two or more denominations at the local level which affects their ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects. It involves a formal written agreement, is recognised by the 'sponsoring body' (Churches Together in a county or other local area) and is authorised by the appropriate denominational authorities. Six types of LEP are now recognised by Churches Together in England – shared building agreements, covenanted partnerships, single congregation partnerships, chaplaincy partnerships, mission partnerships and education partnerships. There are currently 308 LEPs in which the United Reformed Church and the Church of England are partners. They cover all six types of LEP. Seventy seven of them are bilateral and two hundred and thirty one of them involve at least one other denomination.

35. In addition to the development of LEPs, Regional and County ecumenical bodies were developed to give oversight to LEPs and ecumenical work more generally in the counties and regions. These bodies have also provided a meeting point for church leaders across different traditions.

The Church of England-United Reformed Church informal conversations 1995-1997

36. From 1995-1997 informal conversations took place between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.^{xxiv} They arose out of a common desire to explore the implications of respective European commitments for the United Kingdom ecumenical scene, issues raised by Local Ecumenical Partnerships, a sense of unfinished business around the *God's Reign and Our Unity* report, and a desire to reconcile memories relating to 1662. The report of these conversations is divided in eight sections.

37. The first section describes how the two churches fit into the growing network of ecumenical relationships in Europe and around the world and concludes that:

The Church of England and the United Reformed Church are challenged now to bring this growing experience of unity at a local, national, European and international level together with the theological convergence expressed in the theological dialogues, in order to discuss what next steps our churches might take officially on the way to visible unity.^{xxv}

38. The second describes the practical and theological issues raised by the involvement of the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in two hundred and twelve Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

39. The third looks at the 1984 Anglican-Reformed report *God's Reign and Our Unity* and its reception by the two churches. It notes that the report 'clearly sets before our two churches questions that should be explored together.'

40. The fourth explains the need for the reconciliation of memories between the two churches in order to overcome the memory of the Great Ejection of 1662 and subsequent tensions between the two traditions.

41. The fifth considers the issue of 'Apostolicity, Continuity and *Episkopé*' with reference to the Church of England, the United Reformed Church and developing patterns of ecumenical oversight.

42. The sixth contains reflections from a United Reformed Church and a Church of England perspective on the issue of the relationship between 'Church and Nation.'

43. The seventh summarises the discussions that have taken place between the two sides and declares:

In the light of all this we could see the promise of formulating together a common statement of our understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church, our existing agreements in faith and what sort of diversity would belong to a visibly united Church. This common statement could form the basis on which a declaration might be made, entailing the mutual recognition of each other as churches belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God. From this might follow commitments to take further steps to visible unity.

The formulation of such a common statement would help Anglicans and reformed in this country to contribute to the pilgrimage to the visible unity of all Christians. While it would be appropriate to work on a common statement in a bilateral conversation close contact should be kept and cross representation ensured, with any bilateral formal conversations either church is engaged in or may enter.^{xxvi}

44. The eighth recommends to the Ecumenical Committee of the United Reformed Church and the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England ‘that informal conversations be continued to explore the formulation of a common statement.’

Conversations on the Way to Unity

45. The recommendations in section 8 of the 1997 report were never acted upon because by then the Church of England had decided to focus its ecumenical efforts on the formal conversations about closer unity with the Methodist Church that had already been proposed in the 1996 Anglican-Methodist report *Commitment to Mission and Unity* and that led to the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* of 2001.

46. Although the United Reformed Church would have liked to have been part of these formal conversations, the Church of England and the Methodist Church decided this would not be appropriate because there was a specific agenda between the two churches which they felt could best be dealt with bilaterally. They agreed instead to include the United Reformed Church in informal tri-lateral conversations running alongside the formal Anglican-Methodist conversations. *Conversations on the Way to Unity*^{xxvii} is the report of these informal trilateral conversations.

47. This report covers the topics of conciliarity, eldership, the goal of visible unity and membership and sets out the responses of those involved in the conversations to the Church of England report *Bishops in Communion* and to the Methodist reports *Called to Love and Praise* and *Episkope and Episcopacy*.

48. The report notes three areas of convergence. All three churches shared a common commitment to the full visible unity of the Church and recognised that they were facing the same urgent missionary situation. All three churches were ‘conciliar’ and ‘connexional’ but in different ways. All three churches ‘were able to identify with the various pastoral and ecclesiological principles for local church leadership which had emerged from the discussion on eldership.’

49. The report also notes five areas requiring further work:

(i). More work is needed to examine together how far the different ways in which personal *episkope* relates to apostolicity are contingent and how far they are a matter of theological principle.

(ii). More work is needed on the place of ordination and authorisation [in relation to] ...eldership and the many forms of lay leadership in the three churches.

(iii). More work is needed on a shared understanding of the nature of the Church. More work is also needed on the different understandings of the path to full visible unity.

(iv). Further work is needed on the ways in which personal episkope is officially understood and actually practised in the three churches. Because the Methodist and United Reformed Churches are committed to Christian unity in three nations, it would be useful to include the episcopal churches in Scotland and Wales in this work.

(v). More work is needed on the question of the relationship of baptism to membership, and membership to the ministry of the whole people of God.^{xxviii}

50. The report concludes by declaring that all three churches believe that ‘the calling of the Church to be one is a gospel imperative’ and by recommending that further work should be undertaken on the outstanding ecclesiological issues noted and that the three churches should explore together ‘what further steps would be necessary to make an English covenantal relationship between them.’ That work was taken forward into the first Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant. However the members of that body found that the sheer volume of Faith and Order matters which they had to cover necessitated giving priority to consolidation of the Covenant itself. As a result, the recommendation for further tri-partite work has never been followed up.^{xxix}

Areas of Ecumenical Overlap

51. Alongside this history of direct ecumenical relationships between the Church of England and the churches that became the United Reformed Church and then between the Church of England and United Reformed Church itself, there is also considerable overlap between the ecumenical commitments of the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.

52. Both churches are members of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Churches Together in England, The Council of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.

53. The Church of England has ecumenical agreements with the Evangelical Church in Germany under the *Meissen Agreement* of 1988, with the Church of Norway under the *Porvoo Common Statement* of 1993, with the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches under the *Reuilly Common Statement* of 1999^{xxx} and with the Methodist Church under the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.

54. The United Reformed Church also has strong ecumenical relationships with these same churches through its membership of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its participation in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe under the terms of the *Leuenberg Agreement* of 1973. In addition, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church are linked together through their joint participation in a large number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

55. The United Reformed Church and the Church of England are also jointly involved, alongside the Methodist Church and other churches as well, in training people for ministry through their participation in colleges, part-time courses and Regional Training Partnerships. In March 2010, the latest date for which figures are available, twenty seven United Reformed Church students were studying for ministry alongside students from the Church of England.

God’s Reign and Our Unity

56. *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, which was published in 1984,^{xxxi} was the report of an International Commission of Anglican and Reformed theologians from around the world that included representatives of both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The purpose of the report was to encourage Anglican and Reformed churches to take local steps towards the unity of the Church as a whole. It was written against the background of sixty years of involvement by theologians of both traditions in ecumenical discussion of Faith and Order matters and the achievement of united churches in North and South India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also against the background of the failure or stalling of unity proposals in other parts of the world.

57. This report remains the most detailed agreed statement by Anglican and Reformed theologians on the issues of unity, ecclesiology, sacramental theology and the Church’s ministry. Its key emphases are the inseparable connection between unity and mission, the connection between the unity of the Church and the unity of the wider human community and the fact that right theology

needs to result in right practice ('orthodoxy' needs to lead to 'orthopraxis') not just in terms of Faith and Order, but in terms of social and political attitudes and actions. It consists of six chapters.

58. Chapter 1, 'Our Task,' sets out the origins of the report and then looks at what keeps Anglican and Reformed Christians apart before finishing by considering the relationship between the unity of the Church and the unity of the human race.

59. Chapter 2, 'The Church: God's Apostolic People,' describes how the grace of the Triune God has called the Church into being in order to bear witness to God's purpose of reconciling humanity and all creation to Himself.

60. Chapter 3, 'Life in the Church,' begins by looking at the integral relationship between right belief, right worship and right practice (what it calls 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxis') and then goes on to explore the nature of Baptism and the Eucharist and how they point us to the imperative of working for reconciliation and unity in both the Church and the world.

61. Chapter 4, 'Ministry in the Church,' looks at the relationship between the ministry of the Church as a whole and of individual ministers within it, the issues of ordination, authority and continuity in relation to the ministry, the patterns of ministry in the Anglican and Reformed traditions and the question of the ordination of women.

62. Chapter 5, 'Our Goal,' draws on material from the New Delhi, Uppsala and Vancouver assemblies of the World Council of Churches to set out a vision of a single visibly united worldwide Church, and then puts forward a series of practical suggestions about how the Anglican and Reformed traditions might become united as part of the achievement of this wider goal.

63. Chapter 6, 'Recommendations,' contains nine recommendations from the Commission, with the last recommendation being the study by both traditions (in joint groups if possible) of a series of questions arising from the report.

64. At the heart of *God's Reign and Our Unity* is the conviction, widely shared in contemporary theology, that the basis for the unity of the Church is the unity that exists within the life of God:

The goal of church unity is the reconciliation of humanity and the whole universe to God, and the source and impetus for that unity are to be found in God himself; for the Gospels testify to the unity between Jesus Christ and the Father (John 10.30; Matt. 11.27), and between the Father and the Spirit (John 15.26), and Jesus prays that his disciples may be drawn into that unity (John 17.21). The pattern of unity in diversity is thus in the Godhead. The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son's love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another. This is grace, and to reject one another is to reject God's grace.^{xxxii}

65. As a result:

The reason why we can never rest content in our separation is the unlimited grace of God the Father, who has accepted us in the beloved Son and bound us together in his own life by the power of the Holy Spirit - a life in which we are called to reflect both the unity and diversity of the Godhead. If then we refuse to accept one another in Christ we flout the grace by which he has accepted us and by which we live.^{xxxiii}

66. The report notes the concerns of those who see the search for unity as a distraction from evangelism or work for peace and justice, but it insists that it is a mistake to set these concerns over and against one another:

Too often the concern for evangelism, social justice and church unity are set against each other, different groups demanding that primary or exclusive attention be given to one or another of these concerns. The Father, however, sent his Son to preach the gospel, to proclaim justice for the oppressed and to draw together all his disciples into the unity of the Godhead. He has enlisted us to participate in his work through the power of the Spirit. He gives gifts so that all his disciples may perform their distinctive work as different members of his one body. Evangelism, social justice and church unity are not conflicting concerns, but are complementary aspects of the one mission of God in which we participate as accountable stewards. To restrict our concern to any one of them would be to abridge the gospel.^{xxxiv}

67. The specific form of unity that is recommended by the report is the coming together of the Anglican and Reformed traditions in a 'family or fellowship' of local^{xxxv} churches, each of which would:

...exhibit in each place the fullness of ministerial order, Eucharistic fellowship, pastoral care, and missionary commitment and which, through mutual communion and commitment, bear witness on the regional, national and even international levels.^{xxxvi}

68. These local churches would each have a bishop-in-presbytery who would be called to provide 'ministerial leadership in the whole life of the Church in his area'^{xxxvii} and at the congregational level the Anglican diaconate and the Reformed Eldership would be brought together through the appointment of:

...a number of elders in every congregation, normally non-stipendiary and not intending to serve later as priests, sharing with the priest in the pastoral care of the congregation in a manner which might follow in large measure the pattern offered by the present Reformed eldership.^{xxxviii}

69. *God's Reign and Our Unity* was welcomed by the United Reformed Church although Assembly Records indicate that the focus of ecumenical theological thinking in the denomination at the time was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the formal response to *God's Reign and Our Unity* had a strong lens on that other document.

70. The Church of England's General Synod debated *God's Reign and Our Unity*, together with reports from the Anglican-Lutheran and Anglican-Orthodox dialogues, in July 1985. A motion was passed inviting the dioceses to commend all three reports for 'study in appropriate situations' and inviting the Church's Faith and Order Advisory Group to study the report and 'bring back to the General Synod any recommendations they may decide which might lead to a change in relationship between the Churches.'^{xxxix} This motion does not seem to have resulted in any specific action, but, as we have seen, *God's Reign and Our Unity* fed into the informal conversations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in 1995-1997 and the report has entered into the Church of England's ecumenical bloodstream, being regularly drawn upon in subsequent ecumenical reports and agreements to which the Church of England has been party.

Section 2. The Meetings of the study group

(I) The origins, membership and meetings of the Study Group

71. As far back as the informal conversations of 1995 – 97 there was a sense that *God's Reign and Our Unity* represented unfinished business that needed to be explored more fully. Against this background, and as part of a desire to think further about its ecclesiology and ecumenical relations, the United Reformed Church asked the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity in 2006 whether representatives of the Church of England would be willing to join with representatives of the United Reformed Church for a joint study group on *God's Reign and Our Unity*.

72. The Council for Christian Unity accepted this invitation and six meetings of the study group were held. The meetings took place alternately at United Reformed Church House and at Church House, Westminster and took place on 5 March 2007, 13 September 2007, 19 February 2008, 4 September 2008, 18 March 2009 and 5 October 2009. A final meeting to sign off the study group's report was held at URC Church House on 8 June, 2010.

73. Those who took part were, from the Church of England, The Venerable Dr. Joy Tetley (co-convenor), The Revd Jonathan Baker and Dr Martin Davie (co-secretary) and, from the United Reformed Church, The Revd Elizabeth Welch (co-convenor), the Revd Richard Mortimer (co-secretary) and The Revd Dr David Peel. The Revd Dr John Emmett joined the group from its third meeting as a participant observer from the Methodist Church.

74. At the first meeting of the study group the participants shared their initial impressions of *God's Reign and Our Unity*. At the second meeting each side responded to paragraph 7 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* by presenting material relevant to its own understanding of its identity as a church. The United Reformed Church presented its *Basis of Union* and the report of its 2006 consultation on Eldership and the Church of England presented extracts from the *Articles of Religion*, the 1662 and *Common Worship* Ordinals and the Canons. The 1920 *Lambeth Appeal* and the 1938 *Outline Reunion Scheme* were also made available to the meeting.

75. These presentations led to a wide ranging discussion of the theology, ethos and organisation of the two churches, and the social context in which they were operating and this discussion led in turn to the discussion of three specific topics at subsequent meetings. These topics, which were explored on the basis of papers from the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, were 'The form of the ministry and its relation to God's will and calling,' 'Pneumatology and discernment' and Dr David Cornick's study of Reformed spirituality *Letting God be God*.

76. The consideration of these topics resulted in a wide ranging and creative exploration of both the topics themselves and a series of related theological and ecclesiological issues. As noted in the Introduction to this report, the members of the group found this free ranging approach to ecumenical conversations to be very stimulating and fruitful and want to commend it for the consideration of other ecumenical conversations in the future.

77. At its final meetings, the members of the study group also considered what they had learned from the conversations in terms of the current state of the two churches, the points of theological and ecclesiological convergence and divergence between them and how the relationship between them might now go forward.

(II) The key points of convergence and divergence that emerged from the meetings of the Study Group

78. As a result of the discussions outlined above, the members of the study group came to the conclusion that there is a large degree of convergence between the United Reformed Church and the Church of England. This convergence finds expression in agreement between them on a number of key issues. The ways in which they agree on these issues are set out in the main text below with reference to what has been said about the topics in question in *God's Reign and Our Unity* and in a number of other ecumenical statements.

79 The members of the Study Group also recognised that there are still genuine and important differences between the two churches that need to be acknowledged alongside the points of agreement. These differences are set out below in text boxes.

a.) Agreement on the unity of the Church

80. During the discussions in the Study Group it became clear that everyone agreed that while the context in both Church and society had changed since *God's Reign and Our Unity* was published what it said about the importance of the visible unity of the Church remained relevant today. In particular, it was noted that there is still a commitment to the unity of the Church in both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The Church of England's commitment to seeking the unity of the Church is laid out in Canon A8, which states:

Forasmuch as the Church of Christ has for a long time past been distressed by separations and schisms among Christian men, so that the unity for which our Lord prayed is impaired and the witness to his gospel is grievously hindered, it is the duty of clergy and people to do their utmost not only to avoid occasions of strife but also to seek in penitence and brotherly charity to heal such divisions.

81. A similar commitment to unity is contained in Article 8 of the United Reformed Church's Basis of Union, which declares:

The United Reformed Church has been formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled. It sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

82. Examples of how what is said in these statements is reflected in the actual lives of both churches are the way in which the Church of England continues to give a significant amount of its time and resources to the development of good bilateral and multilateral ecumenical relationships at the international, national and local levels and the placing of the question "What are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?" above agendas for meetings throughout the United Reformed Church.

83. Furthermore, for both churches the unity to which they are committed does not consist simply in the development of improved relations between individual Christians or in a form of reconciled diversity in which different churches continue to exist side by side in friendly co-operation. Rather, it consists in the development of a single visibly united Church and the ecumenical agreements entered into by both churches that are detailed above have been attempts to move towards this ultimate goal.

84. The members of the study group believe that both churches can echo what is said about the theological basis for unity in paragraph 25 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

In spite of all the factors which continue to keep our two traditions apart, we join with the whole Christian family in confessing one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The goal of church unity is the reconciliation of humanity and the whole universe to God, and the source and impetus for that unity are to be found in God himself; for the Gospels testify to the unity between Jesus Christ and the Father (John 10.30; Matt. 11.27), and between the Father and the Spirit (John 15.26), and Jesus prays that his disciples may be drawn into that unity (John 17.21). The pattern of unity in diversity is thus in the Godhead. The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son's love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another. This is grace, and to reject one another is to reject God's grace. The reason why we can never rest content in our separation is the unlimited grace of God the Father, who has accepted us in the beloved Son and bound us together in his own life by the power of the Holy Spirit - a life in which we are called to reflect both the unity and diversity of the Godhead. If then we refuse to accept one another in Christ we flout the grace by which he has accepted us and by which we live.

85. They also believe that both churches accept the portrait of visible unity produced by the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 that is contained in paragraph 107 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his People

Difference on the Episcopate and the unity of the Church

86. The Church of England does not hold that the episcopate is of the essence of the Church in the sense that it believes that a body that does not possess the historic episcopate can nevertheless still be part of the one Church of Jesus Christ. That is why the Church of England has been able to give formal acknowledgement to non-episcopal churches in its ecumenical agreements. It is true, however, (as these same agreements make clear) that the Church of England believes that the existence of the historic episcopate is a necessary part of the visible unity of the Church. The United Reformed Church, on the other hand, in common with other Reformed churches, does not see the existence of any particular form of ministry as necessary for the Church's visible unity. This is an important difference that needs to be acknowledged, but it does not negate the agreement about the unity of the Church that has just been noted.

b) Agreement on appropriate diversity

87. In the course of the discussions of the study group it also became clear not only that there was diversity within the United Reformed Church and the Church of England as well as between them,

but that both churches saw an appropriate degree of diversity within and between churches as something that was compatible with their commitment to the unity of the Church.

88. Accordingly, the members of the study group believe that both churches agree with the statement in paragraph 105 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* that:

...the Church –like the human family as a whole – is and always will be characterized by great diversity. People differ according to national and political allegiance, ethnic and cultural character, and the thought forms embodied in their various languages. These differences will always be present among Christians, both within denominations and between them. Because the Church is called to be a sign and the first-fruits of God's purpose to reconcile all things in Christ, its provisional character will only be truly represented if these diversities are also present in its life, and yet are at the same time held within a unity which bears witness to God's final purpose.

89. They also believe that they agree with what is said about the nature and limits of diversity in the following statement from the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991:

Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts, are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13.8); and salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community. In communion diversities are brought together in harmony as gifts of the Holy Spirit, contributing to the richness and fullness of the church of God.^{xl}

c) Agreement on Scripture

90. It also became apparent in the course of the discussions that both churches share a common commitment to the theological authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This commitment is expressed in Articles VI and XX of the Church of England's *Thirty Nine Articles* and Paragraph 12 of the United Reformed Church's *Basis of Union*.

91. Article VI states that: 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.' Article XX declares: 'although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ: yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.' Paragraph 12 of the *Basis of Union* states that the United Reformed Church: 'acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for faith and conduct of all God's people.'

92. It was noted that in both churches there were a variety of different views concerning the precise nature of the authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted, but in spite of this variety the members of the study group consider that both churches are able to affirm the statement about Scripture contained in paragraph 31 of the *Reuilly* statement:

We accept the authority of the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We read the Scriptures liturgically in the course of the Church's year. We believe that through the gospel. God offers eternal life to all humanity, and that the Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation.^{xli}

Whilst the United Reformed Church would not necessarily use the language of ‘canonical scriptures’ or ‘reading liturgically,’ the members of the study group felt that it could endorse the substance of what is said in this quotation.

93. The members of the study group also consider that both churches are able to affirm the statement in paragraph 13 of the *Leuenberg Agreement*:

The fundamental witness to the Gospel is the testimony of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is the task of the Church to spread this Gospel by the spoken word in preaching, by individual counselling, and by Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. Justification in Christ is thus imparted to men and in this way the Lord gathers his people.^{xlii}

94. It was noted during the course of the study group's discussions that there was a desire in both churches to encourage a greater knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures and a shared view of both the importance and the difficulty of ensuring that there was a regular provision of high quality preaching based on the exposition and application of the biblical text.

95. It was further observed that the academic study and interpretation of the Bible was a shared ecumenical enterprise to which both Anglican and Reformed scholars such as, for example, Richard Bauckham, N T Wright, George Caird and Graham Stanton had made, and continued to make, a significant contribution.

d) Agreement in faith

96. It was also agreed in the course of the discussions that there was a common understanding of the apostolic faith that was shared by both churches on the basis of their common commitment to the theological authority of the Scriptures.

97. In the case of the Church of England this faith is most authoritatively expressed in the ‘historic formularies’ referred to in Canons A5 and C15, *The Thirty Nine Articles*, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the 1662 *Ordinal*. In the case of the United Reformed Church it is most authoritatively expressed in the section of the *Basis of Union* on The Faith of the United Reformed Church.

98. On the basis of what is said in this material the members of the Study Group believe that both churches subscribe to the basic doctrinal beliefs of the Christian Church as set out in the following statements taken from the *Reuilly* and *Leuenberg* agreements:

99. *Concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ*

We accept the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and Apostles' Creed and confess the basic Trinitarian and Christological dogmas to which these creeds testify. That is, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is true God and true Man, and that God is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This faith of the Church through the ages is borne witness to in the historic formularies of our churches. This faith has to be proclaimed afresh in each generation.^{xliii}

100. *Concerning justification by grace through faith*

Through his Word, God by his Holy Spirit calls all men to repent and believe, and assures the believing sinner of his righteousness in Jesus Christ. Whoever puts his trust in the Gospel is justified in God's sight for the sake of Jesus Christ and set free from the accusation of the law. In daily repentance and renewal he lives within the fellowship in praise of God and service to others, in the assurance that God will bring his kingdom in all its fullness. In this way God creates new life and plants in the midst of the world the seed of a new humanity.

This message sets Christians free for responsible service in the world and makes them ready to suffer in this service. They know that God's will, as demand and succour, embraces the whole world. They stand up for temporal justice and peace between individuals and nations. To do this they have to join with others in seeking rational and appropriate criteria and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in the confidence that God sustains the world and as those who are accountable to him.^{xliv}

101. *Concerning the nature of the Church*

We believe that the Church is constituted and sustained by the Triune God through God's saving action in word and sacraments and is not the creation of individual believers. We believe that the church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God. The Church is a divine reality, holy and transcending present finite reality. At the same time, being also a human institution, it shares all the ambiguity and frailty of the human condition and is always called to repentance, reform and renewal.^{xlv}

102. *Concerning eschatology and the mission of the Church*

We share a common hope in the final consummation of the kingdom of God, and believe that in this eschatological perspective we are called to engage now in mission and to work for the furtherance of justice and peace. The obligations of the kingdom are to govern our life in the church and our concern for the world. In this way that Church witnesses to the new humanity that has its origin and fulfilment in Christ.^{xlvi}

Difference on the use of the ecumenical creeds

103. The Church of England regularly recites the Apostles and Nicene Creeds in its services of Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion. By contrast, the United Reformed Church does not regularly recite these creeds in its public worship. However the United Reformed Church accepts the faith to which these creeds bear witness. As schedule D of the *Basis of Union* puts it 'The United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.'

e) Agreement on the Sacraments

104. Another area in which there was seen to be agreement between the two churches was the area of the sacraments. It was accepted that there was a diversity of views about the theology of the sacraments in both churches. However, in spite of this diversity it was noted that both churches were united in their use of the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper and that there was a shared understanding of the basic nature of these sacraments reflected in the *Articles and Prayer Book* on the one hand and the *Basis of Union* on the other.

105. On the basis of this shared understanding it seems to the members of the study group that the two churches can affirm together what is said about baptism in paragraphs 3, 5 and 6 of the World Council of Churches' 'Lima Statement', *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus went down into the river Jordan and was baptized in solidarity with sinners in order to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). This baptism led Jesus along the way of the Suffering Servant, made manifest in his sufferings, death and resurrection (Mark 10:38-40, 45). By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the "old Adam" is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken. Thus those baptized are no longer slaves to sin, but free. Fully identified with the death of Christ, they are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:13,3:1; Eph. 2:5-6).

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. It is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mark 1:10-11) and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2). God bestows upon all baptized persons the anointing and the promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit nurtures the life of faith in their hearts until the final deliverance when they will enter into its full possession, to the praise of the glory of God (II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).

Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world.^{xlvii}

106. The members of the study group believe that the two churches can also affirm together what is said in paragraph 61 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* about the 'practical consequences' of this shared understanding of baptism:

If we are as realistic about baptism as the apostolic writers are, then we are already by our baptism one body, and the continuing separation of our two communions is a public denial of what we are already in Christ. Moreover, there are consequences beyond these ecclesiastical ones. In the one man Jesus we see our common humanity taken up, redeemed and given back to us so that we can share it together- Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free, white and black. Fidelity to our baptism commits us to affirm in word and practice the full, equal and God-given humanity of every person, to embody that affirmation in our public and political life, and to oppose all that denies this shared humanity. Our baptism commits us to follow Jesus on the way of the cross, in warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil, until everything will be subject to the Father and own Jesus as Lord.^{xlviii}

Difference on infant and believers' baptism

107. It was acknowledged in the course of the discussions that one of the differences between the two churches is their official stance towards the issue whether baptism should be administered to infants or believers.

108. The United Reformed Church explicitly describes itself as a church which includes supporters of both approaches. In the words of the *Basis of Union*, 'The United Reformed Church includes within its membership both those whose conviction is that baptism can only be appropriately administered to a believer and those whose conviction it is that infant baptism also is in harmony with the mind of Christ.'^{xlix} It is also a church that seeks to give both these convictions an equally honoured place within it.

109. The formularies of the Church of England do not contain any statement parallel to the statement just quoted from the *Basis of Union*. As Article XXVII indicates, at the time of the Reformation the Church of England rejected the arguments of those who called for infant baptism to be replaced by believers' baptism and in the centuries since then infant baptism has remained the most normal form of baptism within the Church of England. The Church of England has also tended to see infant baptism as the norm theologically. The differences between the two churches in this respect need to be acknowledged. However, there are a number of considerations which lessen this difference:

(i) The Church of England has made official liturgical provision for adult baptism since the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1662.

(ii) As the report of the informal conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Pushing at the boundaries of unity*, suggests, from a Church of England point of view it is possible to view both the infant baptism and the believer's baptism approaches as equally 'authentic' alternatives within an overall pattern of Christian initiation involving, in addition to baptism itself, 'instruction in the faith and formation for discipleship in some kind of catechumenate,' 'a liturgical opportunity for the individual to profess the faith for themselves,' 'the laying on of hands with prayer for the confirming and strengthening power of the Holy Spirit' and 'participation in the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion.'¹ A pattern of Christian initiation containing all these elements exists within the United Reformed Churchⁱⁱ and on this basis there seems to be no reason why the Church of England should have difficulties with recognising the authenticity of the believers' baptism strand of tradition within the United Reformed Church.

(iii) The recent decline in the number of infant baptisms in the Church of England has been matched by a relative increase in the number of teenagers and adults being baptised and so believer's baptism is in fact becoming an increasingly normal part of the Church of England's life.

110. As well as being able to make a shared affirmation about baptism, the members of the study group also consider that both churches can affirm what is said about the Eucharist/Lord's Supper in first the *Leuenberg* and second the *Reuilly* agreements:

In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness

of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all men.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us we await his future coming in glory.^{lii}

We believe that the celebration of the Lord's Supper (the eucharist) is the feast of the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, in which the word of God is proclaimed and in which Christ crucified and risen gives his body and blood to the community under the visible signs of bread and wine. 'In the action of the Eucharist Christ is truly present in his self-offering to the Father, the one full, perfect and all sufficient sacrifice which he alone can offer and has offered once for all.' In this celebration we experience the love of God and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again and brings his kingdom to completion. The eucharistic memorial is no mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the Church's efficacious proclamation of God's mighty acts. Celebrating the eucharist, the Church is reconstituted and nourished, strengthened in

Faith and hope and sent out for witness and service in daily life. Here we already have a foretaste of the eternal joy of God's kingdom.^{liii}

111. In addition, both churches should also to be able to affirm what is said about the implications of participation in the Eucharist in paragraph 70 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

The Eucharist which unites us with Christ and feeds us with his own life in his body and blood, unites us at the same time with one another and with the whole company of Christ's people in every age and place. It is therefore a condition for participation in the Eucharist that we have forgiven one another and are in love and charity with our neighbours.

Participation in the Eucharist commits us to the ceaseless search for reconciliation among all for whom Christ died, and is incompatible with the exclusion of any person on grounds of race, sex, social distinction or culture as well as with the refusal to share material resources given by God for the benefit of all.^{liv}

Difference on the theology of the Eucharist

112. During the course of the discussions in the study group it was noted that there was a range of views of about the theology of the Eucharist in both the Church of

England and the United Reformed Church. This range extends from the views of those in the Church of England who emphasise the real presence of Christ in the consecrated elements and who view the Eucharist as a re-offering of the sacrifice of Christ to the views of those in the United Reformed Church who see the Eucharist in purely memorialist terms. It was also felt that the issue of the reception of ecumenical statements needed to be noted as it was not necessarily the case that everyone in either church would accept the Eucharistic theology contained in ecumenical agreements signed by their church. Nevertheless, the members of the study group felt that overall there was a convergence in the Eucharistic theology of the two churches which could be expressed in the language of *Leuenberg*, *Reuilly* and *God's Reign and Our Unity*.

f) Agreement on ministry

113. It also became clear in the course of the study group's discussions that there was substantial agreement about the issue of ministry between the two churches. In the view of the members of the study group this agreement means both churches are able to affirm together the following statements concerning the Church's ministry in paragraph 31 of the *Reuilly* statement:

We believe all members of the Church are called to participate in its apostolic mission. They are therefore given various ministries by the Holy Spirit. They are called to offer themselves as 'a living sacrifice' and to intercede for the Church and the salvation of the world. This is the corporate priesthood of the whole people of God, called to ministry and service (1 Peter 2:5). Within the community of the Church the ordained ministry exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God. For that purpose the ordained ministry of word and sacraments is a gift of God to his church and may therefore be described as an office of divine institution.

We believe that a ministry of oversight (episcopate) exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways, at all levels of the Church's life, is necessary to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the Church.^{lv}

114. In discussion in the study group it was acknowledged that a ministry of oversight was exercised in both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The difference between them was that in the Church of England the key focus for the exercise of this ministry was the diocese and the key person exercising this ministry was the diocesan bishop in consultation with the diocesan synod and with the assistance of the suffragan bishop (or bishops), the archdeacons and other members of his senior staff, whereas for the United Reformed Church, regional oversight takes place in the Synod, through its meetings and committees, and it often becomes focussed in the ministry of the Moderator. Meanwhile, oversight of the local church is entrusted to the Elders' meeting, where Elders with Ministers work collaboratively among and beyond the congregation.

115. It was also noted that in addition to agreeing with what is said about ministry in the *Reuilly* statement both churches would also be able to agree with two key points about the character of Christian ministry made in *God's Reign and Our Unity*. The first point is that the primary ministry in the Church:

... is that of the risen Christ himself, and we are enabled to participate in it by the power of the Spirit. His ministry is entrusted to sinful men and women and it is only as debtors to grace that we can fulfil it. The mission of the Church is an overflow of the grace of God. It is only as those whose sins have been freely forgiven that we can be the bearers to others of God's gift of forgiveness. This ministry is exercised by and through the entire membership of the Church in the course of their daily work in the world. Every member of the Church, therefore, abiding in Christ, shares in this ministry.^{lvi}

116. The second point is that, in line with the pattern that can be seen in the lives of those disciples of Jesus who subsequently became apostles, leadership within the Church:

... means leading others into the company of Jesus so that - in him and by working of the Spirit - their lives may be offered to the Father, and also leading others into the world to challenge the dominion of evil in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. This double calling finds unity in the cross which was at the same time Jesus' total offering of himself to the Father on behalf of humankind, and the decisive victory of God's Kingdom over the dominion of evil. Ministerial leadership in the Church may therefore be defined as

following Jesus in the way of the cross so that others in turn may be enabled to follow in the same way.^{lvii}

Difference with regard to the ministry

117. Alongside these areas of convergence with regard to the ministry there are also areas of divergence.

118. Firstly, there are two distinct patterns of ministerial order. The Church of England has retained the traditional threefold order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons whereas the United Reformed Church's pattern of ministry, which has its roots in the pattern established by John Calvin in Geneva at the Reformation, is based on the existence of ordained Ministers of word and sacrament and ordained Elders who share with them in 'pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches.'^{lviii}

119 The continuing existence of these two distinct patterns of ministry reflects the fact that the Church of England has not followed up the suggestion made in earlier rounds of Anglican-Reformed dialogue that it should consider adopting some form of Eldership along Reformed lines.^{lix} It also reflects the fact that although, in connection with the Covenanting for Unity proposals and the proposal for an ecumenical bishop in Cardiff, the United Reformed Church has affirmed in principle its willingness to consider the adoption of episcopacy in a form consonant with its own traditions it has never actually adopted it and many in the United Reformed Church continue to have reservations about it doing so.

120. Furthermore, not only are there different patterns of ministerial order in the two churches, but there are also significant differences of practice with regard to who ordains and who is allowed to preside at the Eucharist/Lord's Supper.

121. In the Church of England it is Bishops who ordain. In the United Reformed Church Elders are ordained by the Minister acting on behalf of the congregation while ministers are ordained by the local Synod. In the case of the ordination of ministers it is the responsibility of a Synod Moderator to preside at an Ordination Service (or appoint such other person to preside as shall be appropriate) and to share with others, as shall be locally determined, in the laying on of hands and prayer for the person to be ordained.

122. In the Church of England only those who have been ordained Priest may preside at the Eucharist. In the United Reformed Church Ministers normally preside, but, Elders and Accredited Lay Preachers are permitted to preside at services of Baptism and Communion 'where pastoral necessity so requires' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 25). What exactly constitutes 'pastoral necessity' is debated within the United Reformed Church.

123. Underlying these differences of practice there are also important differences of theological principle over the issues of whether a single unified pattern of ministry can be discerned in the Bible and the life of the Early Church (and, if so, what this pattern is) and whether particular patterns of ministry are God given, and therefore necessary and immutable, or whether they have emerged in response to contingent historical circumstances and therefore can and should be changed under the guidance of the Spirit as new circumstances arise.

124. The importance of these differences of principle and practice should not be underestimated, particularly as their distinctive patterns of ministerial order are an important part of the identity of both churches. However, in the opinion of the members of the study group they do not negate the agreements between the two churches about the basic nature of Christian ministry previously outlined.

g) Convergence on discernment

125. Two further areas of convergence that were identified by the study group were the areas of discernment and spirituality.

126. The issue of discernment is the issue of how a church discerns the will of God for God's people. Discussion of this issue in the study group made it clear that in both churches the process of discernment involves the Spirit guided study of the teaching of Scripture in the light of biblical scholarship, the Tradition of the Church down the centuries, and contemporary thought and experience (including, where appropriate, the witness of natural theology). It would perhaps be true to say that the United Reformed Church gives relatively greater weight to the contemporary guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Word and that the Church of England gives relatively greater weight to the witness of the Holy Spirit through Tradition, but Tradition and the contemporary guidance of the Spirit are nonetheless important for both churches.

127. The ways in which discernment takes place vary in detail between the two churches because of their different structures of Church government. However, in both churches discernment is a conciliar process that involves the whole people of God, both clergy and laity alike (although with those who have the ministry of oversight having a particular responsibility for giving leadership to it) and in both churches it is something that takes place at all levels of the church's life from the parochial or congregational to the national.

128. As the Study Group considered the issue of discernment, it was noted that a key question raised in the process of discernment was how to decide whether a new development in the life of the Church was or was not legitimate. Underlying this question there was seen to be a further and more fundamental issue, relating to the character of God. God is revealed to us as unchanging (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) and yet also as the God who does new things (Is. 43:18-19; Rev. 21:5 – and focally, in the adventure of the Incarnation). As the Group engaged with this apparent paradox, it began to sense that perhaps central to this mystery is the creativity of divine love. Therein lies God's constancy – ever creative in the expression of absolute love. What might be the implications of this for the life and mission of the Church? The Study Group felt that this is a vital area, not least for both the Anglican and the Reformed traditions, and one, therefore, that theologians from both churches might fruitfully explore together.

h) Convergence in spirituality

129. Spirituality is concerned with what have been called the disciplines of the Christian life. That is to say, it is concerned with the ways in which Christians develop their understanding of and relationship to God and how these are reflected in the way they live their lives as individuals and as members of Christian communities.

130. In the course of its discussions the Study Group looked at *Letting God be God*, the recently published study of Reformed spirituality by the United Reformed Church theologian Dr David Cornick.^{lx} In this book Dr Cornick considers preaching, prayer, the influence of belief in divine election, the development of church architecture, Christian social and political involvement and a

growing awareness amongst Reformed Christians of the importance of the catholicity and unity of the Church. In all these areas it was noted that there were striking parallels between Dr Cornick's account of the development of the Reformed spirituality and the way in which Anglicanism had developed during the same period. For example, the doctrine of election had been important within Anglicanism as well as within the Reformed tradition, the development of a concern for the aesthetics of worship and a belief in the religious significance of art had taken a parallel course in both traditions and both traditions had shared a conviction that the glory of God should be reflected in the social and political spheres. The recognition of these common elements in the development of Anglican and Reformed spirituality reinforced the conviction within the study group that the two traditions were on convergent rather than divergent trajectories and that this fact needed to be reflected in closer relations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.

131. The study group felt that further joint exploration of the spiritualities of the two traditions would be a fruitful way of helping to develop these closer relations.

i) Difference on establishment

132 It was recognised in the course of the study group's discussions that the issue of establishment was an unresolved point of difference between the two churches.

133. After the Great Ejection of 1662 the established Church of England with the monarch as its supreme Governor was the sole legal church in England. In the case of Trinitarian Protestant churches outside the Church of England this situation was eased by the Toleration Act of 1689 which gave them legal existence, but their members were still subject to legal disabilities with regard to matters such as participation in the political system or taking degrees at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

134. As was noted in paragraph 5, these legal disabilities were largely abolished by the end of the nineteenth century. However, the Church of England, with the monarch as its supreme governor, has remained the established church in England, a position that carries with it legal privileges, such as the right to crown the monarch and automatic representation in the House of Lords and responsibilities, the most important of which is that it has spiritual responsibility for every place and to every person in England and that parish priests have the legal obligation to baptize, marry^{lxi} and to inter the body or ashes of those resident in their parishes when requested to do so.

135. It was agreed in the study group that objections to establishment in the United Reformed Church are partly due to perceptions of the wealth and privilege of the Church of England which for the most part no longer correspond to reality. However, they are also due to conscientious theological objections to the existence of established churches, objections that would apply as much to the establishment of a Reformed church such as the Church of Scotland as to the establishment of the Church of England. The key objections to the establishment of the Church of England are that the role of the monarch as supreme governor negates the sole headship of Christ over the Church, that it compromises the mission of the Church by leading Christians to identify too strongly with the existing political and social order and that it is inappropriate in a multi-faith society such as England is today.

136. It was acknowledged in the study group that there are those in the Church of England who also have problems with establishment. However, the view of the Church of England as a whole is that its established status is theologically defensible and is beneficial to its mission. From a Church of England view point the role of the monarch as supreme governor does not negate the sole headship of Christ, but reflects the belief that rulers have a God given authority which extends over all areas of society, ecclesiastical as well civil (see Article XXXVII). In addition the Church of England feels

that its established status provides it with pastoral and prophetic opportunities that would otherwise be lost and enables it to represent in the public sphere not only its own interests, but also the interests of other churches and the members of other faiths.

137. Establishment is an important issue and one that requires further discussion between the two churches. However, in the view of the members of the study group

difference over this issue should not prevent the two churches moving towards a closer relationship with each other, especially given that both churches already have existing ecumenical agreements with both established and non-established churches.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

138. As a result of its discussions the study group unanimously came to four conclusions.

139. First, as has already been noted, the members of the study group felt that the free and wide ranging nature of their discussions and their willingness to share with and learn from each other in a spirit of 'receptive ecumenism' provided a good example of ecumenical methodology which they wanted to offer to others engaged in ecumenical dialogue.

140. Secondly, in spite of the continuing differences between the two churches, the importance of which should not be minimised, there are large and significant areas of agreement and convergence between them as outlined above.

141. Thirdly, these areas of agreement and convergence mean that the Church of England and the United Reformed Church should each be able to acknowledge formally and reciprocally the existence of the one Church of Jesus Christ in the other church.

142. Fourthly, given that this is the case, given that both churches are committed to the furtherance of the visible unity of the Church, and given the inseparable link between unity and mission that has been accepted since the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, it is important that the Church of England and the United Reformed Church should formally develop closer relations with each other. The study group recognised that there is a waning of ecumenical energy and enthusiasm in both churches at the moment. However this does not mean that we can avoid the obligation to give clearer expression to our unity in Christ.

Recommendations

143. On the basis of these conclusions the members of the study group make the following recommendations:

a. The formal development of closer relations between the two churches should involve a statement of mutual recognition and commitment similar to those made between the Church of England and Reformed churches in Germany and France under the *Meissen* and *Reuilly* agreements. It also needs to involve both a celebration of what God has done in the lives of our two churches and what God has given to us and expressions of mutual penitence for those past failures of wisdom and charity which have contributed to the continuing division of the Church of Christ.

b. 2012 marks both the 350th anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662 and the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Reformed Church, an inauguration which took place at Westminster Abbey and at which the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, was a guest of honour. This would therefore be an appropriate symbolic date for an event which would enable the Church of England and the United Reformed Church to express publicly their penitence for the divisions of the past, their mutual recognition of each other in the present as churches belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ and their commitment to working together to develop a closer relationship between them in the future.

c. Following on from this event there should be discussion by representatives of the two churches on how the two churches can co-operate more effectively together for mission at the local level.

d. There should also be further work on the range of topics for continuing study identified by this study group, the 1997 report and *Conversations on the Way to Unity*, namely, the reconciliation of memories, the structures of Church government, the forms of lay and ordained ministry, relations between Church and state, the relationship between Baptism and Church membership, the development of doctrine and practice in the Church and how this is related to the constancy and originality of God, the nature of discernment in our two churches and the exploration of the spiritualities of the Anglican and Reformed traditions.

e. The covenantal relationship that exists between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the close and developing relationship between the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church of Great Britain mean that there needs to be appropriate Methodist involvement in the development of closer relations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. There needs to be the development of a tri-lateral rather than simply a bi-lateral relationship.

144 a. The joint Church of England-United Reformed Church Study Group on God's Reign and Our Unity therefore recommends to the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England and the Mission Council of the United Reformed Church that the necessary steps should be taken by both churches in order to bring about a joint event in 2012, marking both the 350th anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662 and the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Reformed Church, which would involve a public declaration of their penitence for the divisions of the past, and their mutual recognition of each other in the present as churches belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ

b It also recommends that, building on this service, further work should be undertaken on the range of topics for continuing study identified in 143 (d) above, namely, the reconciliation of memories, the structures of Church government, the forms of lay and ordained ministry, relations between Church and state, the relationship between Baptism and Church membership, the development of doctrine and practice in the Church and how this is related to the constancy and originality of God, the nature of discernment in our two churches and the exploration of the spiritualities of the Anglican and Reformed traditions.

Endnotes

ⁱ It should be noted, however, that, although opposition to Establishment became an important part of the Dissenting tradition, not all those who were ejected in 1662 were opposed in principle to Establishment. The Presbyterians and at least some of the Independents, such as John Owen, wanted the establishment of their own polity; they were not against Establishment as such. The anti-establishment strand within Dissent came mainly from the Separatists of the 16th century who fed into the Baptists and thus eventually into the broad Dissenting tradition. The issues that led to the ejection of 1662 were concerned with episcopacy and the Prayer Book rather than the issue of Establishment.

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- ⁱⁱ For details about the ministers who were deprived in 1662 see A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. It was estimated by Richard Baxter that some 1,800 ministers who had been deprived continued to act as ministers of religion of some kind.
- ⁱⁱⁱ The combination of increasingly cordial personal relations in the context of continuing division is encapsulated in the account of the relationship between Dale and the first Bishop of Birmingham, Charles Gore, in the biography of the latter. ‘Dr Dale noticed one day that a friend betrayed some surprise on hearing that Gore was about to be his guest. ‘Oh,’ he replied, ‘I very much like entertaining him. We are very good friends. ‘You see, he knows I am wrong, and I know he is wrong; so we get on very well together.’ (G. L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore*, London: William Heinemann, 1935, p. 142.).
- ^{iv} G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity*, Oxford: OUP, 1930, p.1.
- ^v *Ibid.*, p.3.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*, p.3.
- ^{vii} *Ibid.*, p.4.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, p.4
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.
- ^x Details in G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity 3rd series 1930-1948*, Oxford: OUP, 1948, pp. 71-101.
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*, pp.102-119.
- ^{xiii} G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity 4th series 1948-1957*, Oxford: OUP, 1958, pp.46-50.
- ^{xiv} For these points see *Ibid.*, pp.58-60.
- ^{xv} *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*, London: SPCK, 1957.
- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, p.15.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.*, p.16.
- ^{xviii} *General Assembly Reports*, p. 77.
- ^{xix} *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations*, Edinburgh & London: The St Andrew Press/SPCK, 1966.
- ^{xx} The United Reformed Church has subsequently also been joined by the Churches of Christ and the Scottish Congregational Union.
- ^{xxi} *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant*, London: Churches’ Council for Covenanting, 1980 p.10.
- ^{xxii} *Ibid.*, p.9.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid.*, p.9.
- ^{xxiv} *Report of the Church of England United Reformed Church informal conversations 1995-1997*, CCU/FO/97/9.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid.*, p.4.
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, pp.13-14
- ^{xxvii} *Conversations on the Way to Unity*, London: URC, 2001.
- ^{xxviii} *Ibid.*, pp.23-24.
- ^{xxix} *Ibid.*, p.24. The Anglican Co-Chairman of the talks, Bishop Colin Buchanan added a ‘personal proposal’ as an alternative to the proposal for further tri-partite conversations in the main report. He proposed that United Reformed Church be asked to give a response to the report of the Anglican-Methodist conversations on the same timetable as the other two churches so that if it accepted the report the United Reformed Church would be able to join with them ‘to pursue the next practical steps’ in the implementation of the report (*Ibid* p.26). Like the recommendations of the main report, this proposal was not followed up.
- ^{xxx} Both the Meissen and the Porvoo relationships involve Church of England people in many different spheres of activity. Their most important expression is in the many parish, diocesan and individual links which these agreements encourage, and the opportunity to engage with issues of life and faith, European and global, with Christians from other countries. A network of diocesan European Officers sustains this work. At the national level, the agreements bring together church leaders, ordained and lay, in bishops’ meetings, delegation visits, specialist consultations and theological conferences. Details of these activities are available via the website of the Church of England’s Council for Christian Unity and the monthly European bulletin issued by the Council. Because of the small size of the French Lutheran and Reformed churches it has not proved possible to develop the Reuilly relationship to the same extent, but regular meetings are held between the Church of England and these churches to seek ways in which the relationship can be developed and lived out.
- ^{xxxi} *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, London and Edinburgh: SPCK/St Andrew’s Press, 1984.
- ^{xxxii} *Ibid.*, p.16.
- ^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*, p.16.
- ^{xxxiv} *Ibid.*, p.22.
- ^{xxxv} While noting there is no simple definition of what the term ‘local’ means, GROU commends the definition of ‘local church’ produced by the WCC in 1977. This declared that ‘the term refers to an area where Christians can easily meet and form one committed fellowship in witness and service’ which will ‘normally gather in one eucharistic service.’ The area it serves ‘should not be so large that the Christian community loses coherence, not yet so small that its homogeneity favours separatism in the human community. The area should be so chosen that the power of the Gospel to cross human barriers will be made manifest.’ (*Ibid.*, p.71)

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- xxxvi Ibid., p.70.
- xxxvii Ibid., p.74.
- xxxviii Ibid., p.76.
- xxxix *General Synod Proceedings*, Vol 16/2, July 1985, p.754. The report was also commended for ‘study and synodical reception’ by resolution 7 of the Lambeth Conference of 1988.
- ^{xi} Text in M. Kinnamon and B. Cope (eds.) *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva & Grand Rapids: WCC/Eerdmans, 1997, p.125.
- ^{xli} Ibid., p.25
- ^{xlii} *Leuenberg Agreement*, p. 39.
- ^{xliii} *The Reuilly Common Statement in Called to Witness and Service*, London: CHP, 1999, p.26.
- ^{xliv} *The Leuenberg Agreement*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck. 1993, p.38.
- ^{xlvi} *Reuilly Common Statement*, pp.26-27.
- ^{xlvi} Ibid., p.29
- ^{xlvi} *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: WCC, 1982, pp.2-3.
- ^{xlvi} *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, p.39
- ^{xlix} *Basis of Union*, para. 14.
- ⁱ *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, London: CHP, 2005, p.31.
- ⁱⁱ See paragraph 14 of the *Basis of Union*
- ⁱⁱⁱ *The Leuenberg Agreement*, pp.39-40.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Called to Witness and Service*, p.28.
- ^{iv} *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, p.44.
- ^{iv} *Called to Witness and Service*, pp.28-29.
- ^{vi} *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, p.47.
- ^{vi} Ibid., pp.47-48.
- ^{vi} *Basis of Union* 23.
- ^{lix} Elders had been introduced into the life of the Church of England in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, but this was an experiment that had not lasted and was in any case the exception that proved the rule.
- ^{lx} D. Cornick, *Letting God be God*, London: DLT, 2008.
- ^{lxi} Except in the case of divorced people whose former partner is still living, who clergy may decline to marry.