

The General Synod has given its backing to further steps towards bringing the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great Britain into communion with each other.

Members voted in favour of starting work on drafting a series of texts including a formal declaration of a new relationship of communion between the two churches.

The texts would include inaugural services to mark this new relationship and practical guidelines on how ministers from each church could serve in the other.

The Synod backed a request for the House of Bishops to report back on progress on drawing up the draft texts, after the elections to the new General Synod which are due to take place next year.

The Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth, who led the General Synod debate, told members that they had a “historic opportunity” before them.

He said: “My prayer is that we will make a clear and well-informed decision with full awareness of its implications not only for our relationship with the Methodist Church, our close historical cousin and covenant partner, but also for the credibility of the commitments of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion have made for 100 years to restore the unity of the Body of Christ.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, told the General Synod: “I for one am profoundly committed to moving forward in this matter, for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of the Church and for the sake of the world we are sent to serve.”

General Synod heard from members in dioceses already working closely with the Methodist Church and other denominations.

The Revd Canon Cameron Butland, from the Diocese of Carlisle, said: “We have been an ecumenical county for eight years. In that time we have seen dramatic growth in *Fresh Expressions*, *Messy Church* and *Network Youth Church* and in a whole variety of ways. One out of every four members of the churches in Cumbria has come since we made that declaration. That is what doing mission together looks like.”

The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcome, told the General Synod: “This is all about mission, visible unity, that the world may believe is quite simply a gospel imperative.”

The Revd Joyce Jones, from the Diocese of Leeds, said: “Our unity is vital for our mission. If people see our two churches separately then they won’t see Christ easily. If they see us loving one another and working together to serve Christ, they are more likely to be drawn to faith.”

This followed a joint report published in 2017, *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, which set out proposals on how clergy from each church could become eligible to serve in the other.

# More information

Here is the text of the motion as amended by the General Synod:

The Bishop of Coventry to move: That this Synod:

- a. Affirm the priority of doing mission together and welcome the work done by the faith and order bodies to respond to issues raised in the initial reception of Mission and Ministry in Covenant, while also recognising that, for some within the Church of England, concerns about the proposals remain;
- b. support the recommendations intended to address those issues that are listed in the final paragraph of the report on further work from the faith and order bodies regarding Mission and Ministry in Covenant;
- c. request the Faith and Order Commission to work with the Methodist Church’s Faith and Order Committee on drafting texts for the ‘formal declaration’, the inaugural service or services and the service of welcome referred to in the recommendations in the final paragraph of the report on further work, and for the guidelines for the practice of presbyters / priests from one church being received to serve in the other referred to in paragraph 142, with full draft texts being made available to the Synod
- d. Request the House of Bishops to report during the next quinquennium on the progress made on the work described in the previous paragraph, together with proposals for implementation.

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