

GENERAL SYNOD**The Church of England's National Ecumenical Relations:
Introduction to Annual Report for 2014***Lambeth Palace and the Council for Christian Unity*

1. The Church of England's engagement with ecumenical relations is varied, strong and inseparable at all levels of church life from its commitment to sharing in God's mission. That is very evident to anyone participating in the annual gathering at Lambeth Palace of lead bishops for ecumenical relations, to review what has been happening, identify emerging issues and plan for the future. The reports of all the areas covered by the bishops have for many years provided a comprehensive and valuable review of our ecumenical activities. At the 2014 meeting it was therefore decided to adapt them for wider distribution. We believe they deserve careful attention from all those with an interest in the Church of England's ecumenical work.
2. The full report, which has now been published on the Church of England's website at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches.aspx>, is divided into three sections. The first, relations with churches in the United Kingdom, focuses on bilateral partnerships with churches that have a presence in this country – although in some cases in particular, the local and the global are clearly inseparable, and that may become increasingly the reality for others too. The second section focuses on European relations, which while of special interest to those in the Diocese in Europe also touch the lives of many parishes, cathedrals and dioceses in England and have the potential to enrich us all. The final section has the title 'Ecumenical Instruments' – the bodies which bring all kinds of churches together and provide vital frameworks for sharing in witness and discipleship. Reports of these multilateral bodies are included here because the Church of England has a significant commitment to each of them, and there is a strong interaction between the Church of England's relationships with other churches nurtured through the Ecumenical Instruments and the new areas of work reported in the other sections of this report. This is especially true of the local unity in mission agenda and Pentecostal and multi-cultural relations within England, and in our relations with churches in Europe.
3. To introduce the full report, we offer brief outlines of three topics by way of an overview and orientation. We begin with a review of what have been identified as priority areas for the Church of England's national ecumenical relations. Next, we identify some significant themes that link together the various components of the report. Finally, we look at likely priorities for ecumenical relations over the next three years.

Review of priority areas

4. In 2013, the Council for Christian Unity and the meeting of ecumenical lead bishops identified three particular relationships as priorities for progress: the Methodist Church; Black Led and Pentecostal Churches; and the Roman Catholic Church. All have seen positive and encouraging developments, as the more detailed individual reports show.

5. 2014 saw the submission of the final report from the Joint Implementation Commission for the Anglican-Methodist Covenant to the Methodist Conference and to the Church of England's General Synod. It was warmly received in both and its recommendations approved with strong support, witnessed not least by powerful speeches in favour from the floor. The report set out a clear framework for how our churches move forward under the Covenant, including a way of addressing the issue of interchangeability of ministries that has been a continual subject of discussion yet without so far making substantial progress. This is a very significant step and represents the outcome of a huge amount of work by the Joint Implementation Commission over the decade of its existence.
6. In April, a theological consultation was held between representatives of the Church of England and of the Pentecostal Churches affiliated to Churches Together in England. The consultation enabled us to grow in mutual understanding and also identify areas for future work. We expect to build on this in 2015. The event also helped to clarify the importance of relating to the Pentecostal Churches as such, and not simply merging this with the category of Black Led or Black Majority Churches. Moreover, the broader area of what might be termed multi-ethnic relations is also growing in importance for ecumenical work, as analysis of government census data indicates very clearly. Working out a strategy for how to address the distinctive issues and the overlapping concerns between these three has been an important piece of work this year.
7. The visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Rome, the launching of the Global Freedom Foundation and the Passiontide call to prayer by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster have all helped to raise the profile of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations and to give renewed energy to those at all levels who seek to sustain and deepen them. The English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee is contributing to that through, amongst other things, its leaflet encouraging prayer for unity and its project on the shared reception of Pope Francis' remarkable text, *Evangelii gaudium*.

Themes emerging from the report

8. It is not only in relations with the Roman Catholic Church that mission and evangelism continue to be a major theme and focus for the Church of England's ecumenical activities. Constitutionally, this is central to the work of the Methodist-Anglican Panel on Unity and Mission, but it also features in the reviews of what has been happening in the Meissen and Porvoo relationships and is likely to be a leading dimension of the reports emerging from the Conversations with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and with the United Reformed Church.
9. Ecumenical relations do not happen in a separate sphere to social developments and political events. That has been very evident in our dialogue with the Church of Scotland, where the referendum on Scottish independence and its aftermath have thrown into sharp relief the importance of church relationships in a rapidly changing political climate. This is part of the context of the current exploration of whether our relationship with the Church of Scotland might be placed on a more formal and public footing. Another example of the intersection of the political and social with the ecumenical and theological would be in our relationship with the Oriental Orthodox Churches, whose roots are in many cases in parts of the world that are rarely out of the news. Moreover, a sharp division between 'international' and 'national' ecumenical relationships cannot be sustained in cases like this, as the debate on Christians in the

Middle East at the November sessions of Synod demonstrated. The major international achievement of the formal signing in Cairo of an agreement on Christology between representatives of the Anglican Communion and the Oriental Orthodox Churches both addresses issues that have vexed church relationships for a millennium and a half and takes a great step towards building trust and fellowship in the face of current crises.

10. With regard to much of what follows, it might also be observed that working with other churches inevitably and properly raises underlying questions about how we understand ourselves as churches. Finally, then, we might mention the significance of the convergence text from the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Ecclesiology is not perhaps regarded as the most arresting of theological subjects, and for that reason alone the text is unlikely to provoke the same level of interest as its famous predecessor, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Yet serious attempts to worship and witness, learn and minister with other churches will always send us back to ecclesiological questions sooner or later. The WCC text has been carefully considered by the Faith and Order Commission and the Council for Christian Unity, and we hope that its further reception in 2015 can make a significant contribution to our journey towards fuller communion with all the Churches named in this report.

Likely priorities for the next three years

11. The activities already referred to commit us to action in a number of key areas. We are committed to putting in place a Covenant Advocacy Group as part of the new framework for Anglican-Methodist Covenant, and to beginning the demanding task of the two churches' faith and order bodies jointly addressing the issue of the interchangeability of ministries – work unlikely to conclude before 2017. We hope to set up a formal dialogue process with the Pentecostal Churches over perhaps a two-year period and help facilitate a Memorandum of Understanding with some of the major Black Led Churches that can underpin and enable further collaboration there. This coming year we aim to promote local engagement with *Evangelii gaudium* by Anglicans, with their Roman Catholic neighbours where possible but also as something they might do by themselves because it so directly touches on matters relevant to all Christians. In 2015, we will also be seeking to make a formal response to the WCC Commission on Faith and Order regarding *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.
12. There are many other things we could mention in terms of future work in ecumenical relations, but there are perhaps two in particular that deserve highlighting. The first is the likely completion of the project of revising the formal arrangements for Local Ecumenical Partnerships. While Churches Together in England is properly taking the lead on that, we are closely involved through the work of our National Ecumenical Officer for England, Dr Roger Paul, and as that project nears its end will need to look in earnest at how we revise our own guidelines for parishes, deaneries and dioceses seeking to make best use of the ecumenical canons. There will also be a major opportunity here to look at the whole picture of local ecumenism and to seek a renewal of vision and energy that can draw in those who have up until now stood aside from it.
13. The second area worth highlighting in terms of priorities for the next three years is the 1517-2017 Reformation Anniversary. The significance of this for the German Protestant Church (the EKD), our partner in the Meissen Agreement, can scarcely be overestimated, while Lutherans around the world, including those in the Porvoo Communion of Churches and the Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain, will

be marking the occasion, which will also draw in our French partners through the Reuilly Agreement. We need to attend to how we might use this anniversary to affirm and build on our existing relationships here. We might also want to ponder our own relation to the chain of events in church history for which Luther's publication of the 95 Theses in 1517 has traditionally been seen as the catalyst. Finally, as we mark close to 500 years of ecclesial divisions associated with those events, 2017 could also be a significant moment for the ecumenical movement globally, and for the Church of England to consider its own ecumenical vocation within that.

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