

## GENERAL SYNOD

## The Church of England's Ecumenical Relationships: Annual Report 2018

**Summary**

The 2018 annual report on the Church of England's ecumenical relations from the Council for Christian Unity and Lambeth Palace is now available at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/work-other-christian-churches/council-christian-unity>. Members of General Synod are encouraged to read the full report, the introduction to which is reproduced below.

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1. A watershed moment may well be how the year 2018 comes to be seen for the Council for Christian Unity. Like new life growing quietly underground, something new is coming to be.
2. This is the year that the General Synod of the Church of England and the Methodist Conference voted for further reflection on the proposals of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*. Who knows? Maybe there is a realistic possibility for the interchangeability of ministries between Anglicans and Methodists.
3. This is the year also when the Church of England completed the updating of its ecumenical legislation. Not to many minds, perhaps, the most exciting thing happening in the church. But it has real significance. Legislation is the skeleton supporting the living body of relationships, so the rules matter: they allow life to flourish. The amendments to the Ecumenical Relations Measure 1988 and the creation of a single Canon B 43 replacing former Canons provide the frame for a living unity.
4. This is the year too when the first document was published from the third phase of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. *Walking Together on the Way* challenges both Anglicans and Roman Catholics to learn and grow together in their institutional life. It uses Receptive Ecumenism as a creative discipline, at once practical and deeply spiritual.
5. This is the year, furthermore, when the European dimensions of the Church of England, including its ecumenical relations, have come into a new and sharper focus as the country prepares for Brexit. Whatever comes to be the final settlement between the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, perhaps we are beginning to grasp the possible impact of Christian unity on society around us.
6. Human interactions have been central at every level. They are the context of the following report, the music that gives the tone for understanding the text.
7. Taking the further reflections upon *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* first. They could seem to be merely picking over well-chewed-upon issues. Indeed, is any of it necessary, given so much is possible already? And yet, our unity in Christ will remain incomplete and be obscured in the eyes of the world unless a way is found to reconcile the ministries of different churches. This goal has proved particularly difficult to achieve where one church has been episcopally ordered and one has not – as with the Church of England and the Methodist Church. Can we find a way to break through this impasse? The reflections of the two churches as they face the challenges of the inevitably untidy time, as two ecclesiastical structures mesh together, may yet prove

crucial. Redolent of the grace at work beyond human organization, this time could make it possible for Anglicans in England to have the joy of sharing in the sign of apostolic Christianity with another church.

8. The beauty of the amended ecumenical legislation is undoubtedly the support it gives to life together in God's mission in this country. This, however, is not the only thing it does. It adapts the Church of England's ecumenical behaviour to the current realities of Christian life. To do this, it offers a lighter touch in setting up ecumenical arrangements; shows what can be done with Trinitarian churches not yet recognized as churches to which ecumenical provisions apply; makes clear the special provisions for the Salvation Army; extends the range of churches with which relations can benefit from the permissions given by Canon, and removes barriers to co-operation with the new churches alive within specific communities, perhaps only within a single diocese.
9. *Walking Together on the Way* takes Anglicans and Roman Catholics into a deeper appreciation of each other's traditions and signals a shift towards Receptive Ecumenism. The modesty of one tradition saying to the other: what can I learn from you? has rich consequences. Learning from the gifts of the other leads to conversion – repenting of past failings certainly, but still more making discoveries of how to live out the reality of the Church we are called to be.
10. Then there is Brexit. We cannot know what will happen. Yet when there are social and political fractures, Christians offer renewed and reconciling relationships. The work done this year has shown that the Church of England has a role to play together with its ecumenical partners on the Continent in deepening those relationships. It is ecumenism with a social pay-off.
11. Quietly, and without drawing attention to itself, something new is indeed happening.

The Rt Revd Tim Thornton, Bishop at Lambeth

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The Rt Revd Dr Martin Warner, Chair, Council for Christian Unity

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