

GENERAL SYNOD

Appointment of Body to oversee the next stage of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant

Summary

1. This paper offers a way of continuing to develop the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.
2. In 2015 the General Synod established the Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group (JCAMG) to promote the Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Britain. It was mandated for the following quinquennium, and this period has now come to an end. JCAMG's proposal is for a successor body that reflects what has been learned, and the changes that have taken place, in the last five years.
3. The motion placed before the General Synod to establish this body can be found in the Introduction below (paragraph 4).
4. The paper has two parts:
 - The work of JCAMG and its thinking in favour of continued support for the Church of England's commitment undertaken in 2003 when signing the Covenant with the Methodist Church of Britain
 - Terms of Reference for the proposed new body to be called *Life in Covenant*

PART ONE

Introduction

5. The following motion seeks General Synod's approval:

The General Synod thanks the members of the Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group for their work during the General Synod's last quinquennium. It directs that a new body, called 'Life in Covenant', should be established to carry that work forward. This body will work according to the terms of reference laid out in GS 2210 (i.e. in Part Two of this paper).

Overview of the work of JCAMG in the past year

6. The Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group (JCAMG) has met on three occasions this year. Whilst the main task has been to develop and bring proposals for the continuing support of the Covenant to the Conference and the General Synod the group has continued its work of encouraging and enabling both churches to live and grow in their covenant relationship. The group continues to advocate the important opportunities for mission already afforded by the Covenant and affirm the work of the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM) in identifying and sharing these.

Background to proposals for continuing support of the Covenant

7. The Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church was signed on All Saints Day 2003. In the introduction to the *Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England*, which led to the Covenant between the two churches, the joint Chairs wrote:

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The language of Covenant is important. As we have already suggested, it picks up the many covenantal relationships at the local and regional level between Anglicans and Methodists, and indeed with other Christians too. It is also a profoundly biblical term. In Scripture, God's covenant with his people is made by grace. It involves forgiveness and healing. It survives the ups and downs of human nature and human experience, for it is God who calls and enables and God keeps faith.

8. As we consider our relationship in Covenant, we do so in the context of a commitment made by the grace of God and knowing that through all the ups and downs of the relationship God calls and enables us and keeps faith with us as we have covenanted to keep faith with one another.
9. We should not underestimate what has been achieved in God's grace in the 18 years of this formal relationship. The first **affirmation** of the Covenant is:

We affirm one another's churches as true churches belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

10. Reinforcing this primary affirmation, and reminding our churches of its existence, is at the heart of our ongoing work. It is hard now to remember that this was the first time that this affirmation was made and it is followed by further affirmations and commitments which have enabled us to work together more closely over the years. On the basis of the Covenant churches have worked more closely together in mission, ecumenical areas have come into being, an ecumenical county has been assisted in its development, and there is regular consultation and sharing among office holders and leaders. Much has already been achieved but there is much more that can be done as we grow together as faithful partners in mission.
11. The progress of the covenant has not always been smooth and there have been times when forgiveness and healing have been needed, offered, and accepted. The Covenant is primarily and fundamentally about relationship: with God and with one another in the grace of God. This means that, however much we might wish to fulfil all the commitments of the Covenant within a certain timespan, this is not the nature or the ultimate aim of growth in partnership. The Covenant commitment is not one that can be measured by goals achieved or cast aside when the way is hard and slow. These are commitments to be lived, and in living them we grow in our understanding of one another, our understanding of God and our understanding of the commitments themselves.
12. The first **commitment** of the Covenant is:

We commit ourselves, as a priority, to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.
13. *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* offered a possible way forward to full interchangeability of ministry, but for a number of reasons, documented in previous reports, the churches have not yet felt themselves able to move to a point of agreement. Some have inaccurately interpreted this to mean that the Covenant

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has failed or has no future. This is a profound misunderstanding; the direction of travel remains clear, and progress remains possible. Both churches are still in a covenant relationship, and the relationship continues to live and to grow. The task is not to give up on the relationship but to discern the ways in which it can be nourished and continue to thrive. It is this task of discernment that has been undertaken by JCMAG this year.

The Next Steps

14. The five-year mandate of JCMAG, extended by twelve months on account of the COVID pandemic, comes to an end this summer. This raises the question of what is to follow. Is another group to oversee the Covenant needed? JCMAG believes that if the Covenant relationship is to continue to develop a change of emphasis is necessary. This can best be achieved with the help and support of a successor group to JCMAG, though with new Terms of Reference and a slightly broadened membership. The co-chairs of JCMAG wish to emphasise their belief in the continuing importance and urgency of this work, and to express their hope that any successor body will enable the covenant relationship to develop in significant ways within the next five years.
15. The advocacy and monitoring of processes remain important but, in a climate where the value of ecumenical relations often need to explain their value, it would be more fruitful to give greater importance to the living experience of the Covenant. This not only shows that there is still life in the Covenant but also that when it is lived out the Covenant brings life to the churches. This leads to what the *Terms of Reference* call 'the somewhat snappier name: *Life in Covenant*' (paragraph 14, below). There are three aspects to *Life in Covenant's* changed emphasis:
 - a) A growing understanding and recognition of the distinctiveness of each church, valuing the specific contribution each can make for the promotion of the gospel and the transformation of society.
 - b) The continuing value of harmonious and cooperative relationships between Anglicans and Methodists, especially where these benefit mission but also where they enhance pastoral and other provision.
 - c) A deepening appreciation that the heart of ecumenism is in the quality of relationships among the members of different churches.

Life in Covenant

16. JCMAG was directed by the Methodist Conference to bring proposals for the continuing support of the Covenant to the Conference and the General Synod in 2021. We suggest that any new group to encourage and facilitate the continuing relationship between the two churches should be, as JCMAG was, mandated for five years until the summer of 2026. After that we suggest a review and, if needed, a clear process by which new directions can be sought.
17. JCMAG proposes the following Terms of Reference for *Life in Covenant*.

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PART TWO

Terms of Reference for *Life in Covenant*

Introduction

18. The Methodist Church and the Church of England entered a covenant on All Saints Day, 1 November 2003. One of the recommendations of the Common Statement¹ was to establish a Joint Implementation Commission ‘to carry forward the implementation of the ... Covenant Commitments.’² The Joint Implementation Commission (JIC) worked in two phases, 2003-2008 and 2008-2014, and published a number of reports, a summary of which is provided in its second quinquennial report (2013).³
19. The Methodist Conference (in July 2014) and the General Synod (in November 2014) approved the three main recommendations of the final report of the Joint Implementation Commission, *The Challenge of the Covenant*.⁴ The recommendations set out three streams of work in the next phase of implementation of the Covenant:
- a) That the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England and the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church work together to bring forward proposals for:
 - the Methodist Church to consider afresh expressing the Conference’s ministry of oversight in a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry and the Church of England to recognise that ministry in the Methodist Church as a sign of continuity in faith, worship and mission in a church that is in the apostolic succession;
 - the Church of England and the Methodist Church to address the question of reconciling, with integrity, the existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries of our two churches, which would lead to the interchangeability of ministries.⁵
 - b) That our churches at local and regional level, supported and advised by the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM),⁶ give priority to

¹ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, and Church House Publishing, London, 2001), paragraph 194; http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf. The report of the informal conversations was published as *Commitment to Mission and Unity: Report of the Informal Conversations between the Methodist Church and the Church of England* (Church House Publishing, London, and Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 1996)

² *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, paragraph 195, no. 6.

³ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Second Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission* (2013) <http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/cotc.doc>. A summary of and links to the JIC’s reports are to be found in Chapter 5 *Behold the Servants of the Lord: Assessing Ten Years of Living in Covenant ANNEX pp 10 – 12*. <http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/cotc5.doc>

⁴ *THE CHALLENGE OF THE COVENANT: UNITING IN MISSION AND HOLINESS: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014: Joint Implementation Commission*. <http://www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JIC-14-09-Report-to-GS-and-Conf-July-2014.doc>

⁵ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 46.

⁶ MAPUM is an outworking of the Covenant. It brings together the national bodies of both churches that previously supported local ecumenism. Its strapline is: *Promoting the unity in mission of the whole church at local level, especially through the Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.

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making full use of what is already possible for them to do together, and especially to plan together for mission and worship, deployment of ministry and the use of resources.⁷

- c) That a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group, co-chaired by a President or Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and a Diocesan Bishop and including two other Methodist and two other Anglican members should be established, with access to the key policy making bodies of our churches, to replace the Joint Implementation Commission in the next quinquennium. This body will monitor progress of faith and order conversations and other ongoing work under the Covenant and advocate new initiatives; facilitate communication of Anglican–Methodist developments in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland; and report annually to the General Synod and Methodist Conference.⁸
20. The third recommendation recognised that the JIC had taken its mandate as far as it could and proposed the establishment of a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group (JCAMG) to carry forward the development of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant into the next quinquennium. JCAMG was duly set up by both the Methodist Conference and the Methodist Conference and General Synod in 2015 to run for five years. Due to conditions as a result of the covid pandemic five years became six, for the Methodist Church through a decision at Conference and for the General Synod automatically since its life was extended by the deferral of elections by a year. JCAMG’s mandate finishes, therefore, in the summer of 2021.

A successor body: *Life in Covenant*

21. The progress of the Covenant has not always been smooth and, since late 2019, work on the proposals of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, the major piece of work by the Faith and Order bodies of both churches in response to the requests of 2014 (see 12.i. above), has been stalled. Yet both churches remain committed to the Covenant. JCAMG proposes therefore that a successor body come into existence but with a slight change of direction. The advocacy and monitoring of processes remain important but these need to be undertaken with a greater emphasis upon the living experience of the Covenant. To indicate this shift in emphasis it is proposed that the new group be called by the somewhat snappier name: *Life in Covenant*. *Life in Covenant* would have three areas of focus:
- a. A growing understanding and recognition of the distinctiveness of each church, valuing the specific contribution each can make for the promotion of the gospel and the transformation of society. An example of a relationship rooted in distinct contributions may be seen in the work of the churches in the public square as discussed in *The Challenge of the Covenant*.⁹ The Methodist Church has a track record of modelling the prophetic stand in the life of the

⁷ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 48.

⁸ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 49.

⁹ “The Challenge of the Covenant”, section “Joint Consultation and Decision Making”, paras 22-26

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Church, while the Church of England has the opportunity to effect change as an adviser and critical friend to government.

- b. The continuing value of harmonious and cooperative relationships between Anglicans and Methodists, especially where these benefit mission but also where they enhance pastoral and other provision. The current legislation already allows for a great deal of cooperation, but this would be strengthened by coming into closer communion. Examples of this take place throughout the country and often seem so normal as to go virtually unnoticed. They need to be highlighted, valued, and further facilitated.
- c. A deepening appreciation that the heart of ecumenism is in the quality of relationships among the members of different churches. Structures must change in order to facilitate better relationships, but even before they are improved relationships rooted in the shared life of the gospel can be established. The Covenant would be greatly enhanced by an intentional and disciplined spirituality of relationships. This *koinonia* can be translated from a profound theological concept into everyday praxis by discovering and applying the principles of how we relate together in God.

Membership

22. *Life in Covenant* will have five members of each church, including the co-chairs and the co-secretaries. Due attention will be given to diversity within the group, including diversity of age, and recognising the need for expertise in the membership. Hence it will be made up of:
 - a) A Bishop and a former President or Vice-President of the Methodist Church. (As this as a continuing journey together, the co-chairs should be familiar with the development of the Covenant relationship between the two churches.)
 - b) A representative from each church of their Faith and Order bodies. (Faith and Order issues are at the heart of the relationship between the two churches and, while they are not the only things that can lead to difficulty, they are central to the ongoing challenges. In addition, Faith and Order expertise can assist each church's acceptance of the distinctiveness of the other and its recognition of the gifts that can be received.)
 - c) If possible, a member from each church drawn from MAPUM. (This both recognises the central importance of living the Covenant in local contexts and MAPUM's special role in promoting the living experience of the Covenant.)
 - d) Another two people, one from each church (chosen for their expertise or particular gifts).
 - e) The Church of England's National Ecumenical Officer and the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer as co-secretaries.

The task of the group

23. The new joint group will have three key tasks: to monitor, advocate, and initiate.
 - a) It will **monitor**:
 - The progress of Faith and Order conversations, including ongoing joint theological reflection.

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- Further work under the Covenant. The JIC's Final Report (2014) (in paragraphs 37-44, 47, and 49) urges both churches at national and connexional level to give priority to the Covenant commitment 'to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.'¹⁰
- The existence of examples of good practice in cooperation between Anglicans and Methodists. The assistance of MAPUM will be sought in this.

b) It will **advocate**:

- Awareness of the Covenant and of the radical implications of its affirmations and commitments. Those who first knew about it are no longer in post, so, coupled with the 'normalising' of better relations, consciousness of the Covenant has gradually ebbed away from the minds of many members of both churches.
- New ways of demonstrating the value of the two churches working together, whether these highlight the contrasting gifts of the churches or they indicate the benefits of closer cooperation.
- Giving priority to making full use of what is already possible for the two churches to do together, especially planning for mission, worship, pastoral care, the deployment of ministry, and the use of resources.

c) It will **initiate** work:

- To explore and learn from the distinctive gifts of each church.
- To enhance the possibilities of working together.
- To explore and disseminate an appropriate spirituality of relationships.

Method24. *Life in Covenant* will

- a) meet at least twice per year, with at least one meeting held in person;
- b) consult, as necessary, with key members of the national/connexional bodies, as well as Theological Education Institutions, in the two churches;
- c) conduct business, when the need arises throughout the year, using conference calls and email;
- d) feed into the agendas of the Joint Senior Staff Meeting and the annual meeting of the Methodist Presidency and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York;

¹⁰ *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, Paragraph 49; cf paragraph 41: 'As a key priority in the next phase of the Covenant journey, the development of structures of joint decision-making, to which we have already committed ourselves in the Covenant Commitments, is crucial.'

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- e) maintain contact with MAPUM and seek its assistance where necessary in the implementation of its initiatives;
- f) facilitate communication, learning, and mutual understanding of Anglican-Methodist relations in Scotland and Wales of the outworking of the Covenant in England;¹¹
- g) consider the implications of Anglican-Methodist relations in Ireland and elsewhere in the world;
- h) report annually to the General Synod and the Methodist Conference;
- i) be reviewed after five years and proposals brought to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod in 2026 to carry on, change, or disband the group.

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¹¹ 'The Methodist Church is a church in three nations and has close relations with each of the three Anglican churches. Developments taking place in one nation illuminate and may have an impact on the relations in the other two. We therefore believe that it is important to facilitate the exchange of experience and ideas between these three relationships.' *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, Paragraph 12