

# IN THE SPIRIT OF THE COVENANT

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This summer the Anglican General Synod and the Methodist Conference reaffirmed their commitment to the Covenant. Our task is to explore ways in which the Covenant can help to revitalize our churches.

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Chair  
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## Why bother with the Covenant?

The Anglican-Methodist Common Statement defines its aim as 'to harvest our diversity, to share our treasures and to remedy our shortcomings'.

The Incarnation reveals God's love for humankind, and it is imperative for us to focus on the needs of the world, rather than the differences within the Church [John 1:14].

We are part of the one Body of Christ because there is one Spirit, 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' [Ephesians 4:1-6] and this has to be expressed in our worship and discipleship.

Unity is necessary for mission because a disunited church cannot proclaim God's love with unblemished credibility. Jesus prayed: 'May all be one ... so that the world may believe' [John 17:21].

By being united we can share the rich variety of gifts that God has bestowed on the whole Church and so share our resources, free up our structures, and release the energy we need for God's work [1 Corinthians 12:24b-26].

The Covenant reminds us of God's covenant with us, mutually binding and self-sacrificing, the basis for all our relationships within the Church [Philippians 2:5-11].

The Covenant is a step on the road to the reconciliation of all creation under God when all our hopes will be fulfilled [Romans 8:19-25].

## Ways to make the Covenant work

In a quarter of Lincolnshire communities there is a Methodist Church and an Anglican Church, and both could be primarily served by one ordained minister, thus helping to focus the mission of the church on the community. The Covenant has opened up new possibilities of shared ministry allowing a strategic approach to deployment.

Methodist and Anglican leaders in Lincolnshire are committed to a generous and flexible approach to our respective ecumenical regulations, allowing local churches to share in worship in new ways. Deaneries and Circuits are strongly encouraged to explore how they might apply Anglican Canon B43 and the Methodist "Authorised to Minister" status. Details about how much is now possible can be obtained from the Ecumenical Coordinator for Mission and are contained in the advice paper 'New Ways to Worship'.

Anglican Readers and Methodists Local Preachers in one area can meet for training and fellowship, and so begin to serve a group of churches as a team, supporting one another.

A deanery and circuit in considering the needs of their area can plan new work using their joint resources and so attract extra funding from the diocese and district. A youth missionary or a community chaplain for example could be jointly appointed and supported.

The Methodists and Anglicans of one community can look at their church buildings and decide on imaginative ways to use them, perhaps keeping both because they serve different needs or investing in one improved building.

The diocese and the district can cooperate, along with other churches, in the provision of sector ministers, so that every college and large school, and every significant work place, has a chaplain complementing the mission of the local churches.

The local training of lay people becomes more viable when the churches at the local level pool their efforts and have access to the resources of both diocese and district.

In new housing areas, which are becoming a feature of much of Lincolnshire, the churches can plan together to meet the needs of a growing population and so have a stake in an emerging community.

Methodists who live in a village without their own church can be officially welcomed into their local congregation so that the riches of their tradition can be recognised. And where Anglicans find themselves in the same situation they will also be welcomed.

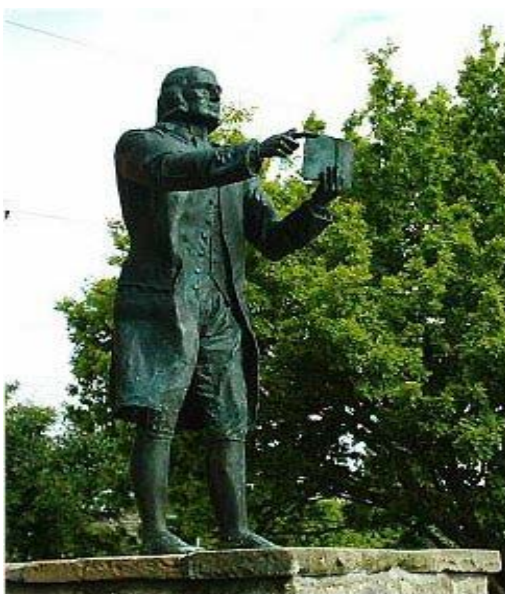
The deanery synod and the circuit meeting can invite participant observers from the other church to add a different view and to share their mission and ministry insights. Further still, a deanery and circuit could decide to have all their meetings together and only meet separately when necessary, thus cutting out duplication. In this way they can devise a joint approach to the mission of their area. There will be mutual representation on the Archidiaconal Pastoral Committees and District Policy Committee to encourage such joint planning.



**The Covenant  
is about  
building  
bridges and  
breaking down  
barriers for the  
sake of God's  
Kingdom**

## Looking to the Future

A joint synod has been planned for 18 March 2006 when Anglican and Methodists will come together to study the Bible and seek God's guidance as to how we seek and build the Kingdom in our communities. The Covenant is there to bring us out of ourselves and look at the world, the focus of God's love.



Revd John Wesley of Lincolnshire  
Lifelong Anglican and Founder of  
Methodism

### Funding for new ways of working together

The Diocesan Mission Initiatives Fund and the District Advance Fund can give financial support for new ventures, and any applications that show the cooperation of Anglicans and Methodists in new work will be favourably received.

Further details from:

**Diocesan Mission Initiatives Fund**

Bishops House, Eastgate, Lincoln,  
LN2 1QQ

**District Advance Fund**

c/o Rev C Martin, 2 Coggles Causeway,  
Bourne, PE10 9LN

**The Covenant  
is about  
realising new  
energy and  
freeing us  
from  
ecclesiastical  
bondage**

## What the Covenant is not!

It is not about creating new Local Ecumenical Partnerships everywhere.

It is not about making us all worship in the same way.

It is not about getting rid of Methodist chapels.

It is not about avoiding hard issues such as lay presidency and women bishops.

It is not about propping up an old system even if it doesn't work.

It is not about ignoring other churches.

It is not about carrying on in the same old way.

It is not a takeover bid.

[www.lincoln.anglican.org](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org)

[www.lgmethodistdistrict.org.uk](http://www.lgmethodistdistrict.org.uk)

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The **Methodist Church**



For advice and support in using the Covenant please contact John Tomlinson, **Ecumenical Coordinator for Mission**, at Church House, who can put you in touch with diocesan and district resources and funding.

## A GUIDE TO COVENANT LIVING

*Vows are for living.* Making a covenant is similar to getting married, and it marks the beginning of a new life within a committed relationship. We are not called simply to 'implement' an Anglican-Methodist Covenant, but to learn what it means to *live* it.

*Covenanting is deeply rewarding – but costly!* Partners in a covenant know that sometimes there will be difficulties and misunderstandings, but the final gain will lie beyond them all. If there was no cost questions would be asked about the integrity of the commitment.

*We are in it for the long term.* Any 'quick fix' merger between our two Churches is not what our Covenant is about. Change will be slow, but there is no going back. *Covenant living involves*

*dynamic tension.* The 'now but not yet' provisionality is at the heart of living in the 'between times' – between Pentecost and the consummation of all God's purposes at the end of time. In St Paul's language, throughout his epistles, we already are '*in Christ*' (now and eternally) that which '*through Christ*' we have yet to become. All our Christian life is lived within this tension.

*Patience is essential.* The more deeply we get to know each other, the more we will need to be honest both about the spiritual riches and the faults and flaws in ourselves, and in others!

*Change is inevitable:* Covenants may or may not have immediate structural implications but any significant mutual giving and receiving will lead to changes.

*We must cherish an appropriate diversity.* Convergence of understanding does not necessarily mean greater uniformity, and it may lead us to cherish an enriching diversity.

*Our covenant will be shaped by a purpose beyond itself.* Only God can make a covenant with an ultimate or 'eschatological' purpose, the unity of all creation in Christ. Because it will always point to the purpose beyond itself, a mutual covenant commitment will be neither self-righteous nor inward-looking.

