

THE CHALLENGE OF THE COVENANT: UNITING IN MISSION AND HOLINESS

Draft report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014

1. In 2008 the Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant began its second phase (JIC2). It was charged to report back to the General Synod and Methodist Conference at the end of the quinquennium. To that end we have published our work in full in the quinquennium report *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness*.¹ We have also produced this shorter paper to accompany the full report. It is not a summary of the full report, but has been produced in order for us to consult with appropriate bodies in our two churches about our assessment of the challenges of the Covenant going into the next phase and our proposals for future work. We aim to bring a revised version of this paper to the General Synod and the Methodist Conference in July 2014, with appropriate resolutions. The revisions to it will be informed by the period of consultation on this paper in particular, and by responses to the full report in general. Our full report and this paper are therefore closely related. The latter is meant to be read in the light of the former. We have therefore cross referenced (with electronic links in footnotes) from this paper to relevant passages in the full report and strongly recommend that the full report is studied alongside this paper.
2. The full report sets out all our thinking in detail. This one deals with particular issues. In it, we present the main challenges which face our churches in embodying the Covenant and in realising the interdependent Affirmations and Commitments of the Covenant Statement. Much has yet to be done in removing obstacles to growing together. Some of those obstacles are cultural, practical and ecclesiological. Others are rooted in the inertia of institutions. Our churches are being challenged to dig deep and to listen to what each is saying to the other in the name of Christ. In listening we must be ready to receive, to take risks and so move forward together. In doing so we shall be responding to the grace of the Gospel in our time in line with the way that the earliest communities of the Church (as described in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles) did in theirs.
3. We also make some concrete proposals for continuing the work of implementing the Covenant as we move into the next phase. We contend that advocacy for and promotion of the Covenant at all levels of our churches' lives is necessary for the sake of mission in our communities and in the nation at large. As St Paul might have said "We have been entrusted with the gospel of reconciliation. But how can we be reconcilers if we are not ourselves reconciled? And how can we be reconciled to each other if we do not relate to each other?"².

What difference has the Anglican-Methodist Covenant made?³

4. When the Covenant was signed in 2003 there was a range of expectations. It was seen by some in both churches as the rekindling of hope that real progress could be made towards removing the obstacles which so far had defied resolution. For others it appeared to be an 'emperor with no clothes'. Some saw it as consolidating what was already happening to a great extent between our churches. For others, it brought the possibility of making progress in terms of working together, particularly at local level.

¹ See *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness* 2013. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/cotc4.doc

² 2 Corinthians 5:16ff; Romans 10:14ff

³ See the full report, chapter entitled [Behold the Servants of the Lord](#).

5. It is not surprising that measured against such disparate expectations the Covenant glass can appear to be both half full and half empty. For example, for many in our churches the litmus test of progress in the Covenant is that we move nearer to the interchangeability of lay, diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries⁴. The lack of progress here is a serious disappointment, which continues to strain the relationship between our churches, and severely restricts joint working.
6. By contrast, in other areas, the Covenant has provided a context and a framework of expectation for a significant amount of shared ministry⁵ and worship, and of effective consultation and collaboration in mission. There is convincing evidence that at least some of the initiatives that have been made between our churches could only have taken place because of the Covenant. Here are three examples.
 - i. Much of the joint working which has developed between our churches at national/connexional level has happened because the Covenant provides a framework of understanding and commitment: there is consistency across most of the national and connexional bodies.⁶
 - ii. The greater experience of shared eucharistic worship and of shared lay and ordained ministry, has been made possible because of the context of agreement, affirmation and commitment created by the Covenant.⁷
 - iii. The proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas relies on the Covenant affirmations and the mutual commitment to the full visible unity of Christ's Church: without the Covenant the proposal would not have been possible.⁸
 - iv. From its inception in 2004, the Fresh Expressions organisation has been a partnership between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. A range of other partners has joined the organisation as this work has developed. Together, the Methodist Church and the Church of England, under the Covenant, have been planning and guiding new forms of community and new patterns of ministry.
7. It needs to be said, however, that there is so much more which can be done. Our churches have hardly begun to realise the institutional implications of the Covenant commitments. The

⁴ "Interchangeable ministry" is where one church recognises that those validly holding ministerial office in another church would formally be capable of exercising the same ministry in itself or on its behalf without any further ordination or other act that appears to impart the office itself as if for the first time. See further *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005) 7.3. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

⁵ "Shared ministry" is where one church welcomes those validly holding ministerial office in another church to offer their gifts and perform some of the functions of that office in its own life, but without in any way implying that they are its own ministers. The range of functions that they may offer is therefore limited. They can include officiating at services of the word, and taking a role in the eucharist of the host church at which an ordained minister of the host church presides, but they do not include presiding at a eucharist in the host church or exercising oversight on its behalf. See further *In the Spirit of the Covenant* (2005) 7.4. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

⁶ See the full report, chapter entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#).

⁷ Covenant Affirmation 2. *We affirm that in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated.* Commitment 4. *We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.*

⁸ *Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report of the JIC in its second phase* (MPH: Peterborough) 2011 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf; full report chapter entitled [Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas](#).

processes of consultation and partnership working, where they happen, are often too cumbersome, time consuming and long winded to meet the needs of making decisions and taking action in fast moving contexts. As long as our churches hold back from establishing joint decision making structures, the scope for working together at any level is going to be limited.

8. The Covenant affirmations themselves do not alter the legal status of and the institutional relationship between our churches and in a sense represent the furthest we can go without making significant ecclesiological and legal changes, and without addressing key institutional challenges. At some stage the question will arise as to when and how those challenges are going to be faced.
9. The effectiveness of the Joint Implementation Commission's work is dependent on its reception by our churches at all levels. The JIC is not an executive body. While our reports have been well received in both the General Synod and the Methodist Conference, if our recommendations are to be effective they have to be championed, adopted and acted upon in the life of our churches locally within dioceses, districts and circuits and in other national and connexional bodies. The JIC has provided some tools for others to take up and use in their own areas. But for this to happen, the encouragement and advocacy of church leaders are essential.

Challenges Ahead

Affirming the Goal of Visible Unity⁹

10. The Covenant Statement commits our churches to work for the visible unity of our churches on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church.¹⁰ The mission of God includes reconciling all things together in Christ, and breaking down the walls of hostility which divide human beings. The unity of the Church is both a fruit of God's mission of reconciliation and also a means of that mission. It therefore needs to be visible in order to witness to the effects of God's reconciling love, and to bear witness against divisions which are only too visible. A divided Church is less effective in proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom simply because the Good News is a gospel of reconciliation.
11. The Covenant Common Statement and successive JIC reports have used the language of stepwise progress into visible unity.¹¹ Knowing that past attempts to offer a blueprint or a scheme for unity have run into great difficulties, the JIC has thus far been reluctant to present what the shape of our churches may look like as a result of taking any particular steps. Yet it is hard to judge what are the most appropriate steps to take if we do not have some ideas about where we might be heading. That in turn could easily lead to us not taking any intermediate steps of working together. At this stage of our journey, therefore, the JIC is keen to encourage imaginative thinking about what the possible shape of things might be as we grow into visible unity.
12. With over 60 years of ecumenical dialogue behind us, the General Synod and the Methodist Conference will be under no illusion that reconciling the fracture between our two churches is an easy or straightforward task. Enthusiasm and passion for Christian unity are important and need

⁹ See the full report, chapter entitled [Overseeing the Way of Uniting in Mission](#).

¹⁰Covenant Commitment 1. *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.*

¹¹JIC Quinquennial Report: *Embracing the Covenant* (MPH: Peterborough) 2008, p 33. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

to be inspired and nurtured, but of their own they are not sufficient. It seems that the two key concepts of the Covenant - mutual affirmation and mutual commitment - are both essential in our Covenant journey: affirmation provides encouragement; commitment is necessary to tackle the cultural, theological and ecclesiological differences that still divide us as well as the institutional inertia that makes progress so slow. As we dig deeper into each others' identity, we find that in some ways we are very similar, but equally in others very different. After ten years since the signing of the Covenant, we are still in that place of ecumenical hard graft: on one hand, a place of realism about what has been and can be achieved; and on the other, a sense of getting down to brass tacks, of dealing with the detail and the implications of growing closer together, and of getting inside each others' skins.

13. **The JIC commends to our churches the biblical imperative of our common calling into visible unity to serve joyfully together the mission of the Kingdom. We therefore challenge our churches to re-affirm their commitment to the goal of the visible unity of our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church.**

Taking incremental steps into greater communion

14. The JIC has considered whether there are smaller incremental steps which could be taken to enable some progress to be made, before the major step of resolving the issue of united oversight is taken. The JIC challenges our churches to explore ways in which the degree of communion between our churches may be increased by taking some incremental steps into greater communion, as tangible signs of the good intent and seriousness of the commitments we have made. In the chapter in the full report on *Developing Bonds of Communion* we make a number of suggestions which would make a substantial difference in the relationship between our churches. In particular the JIC commends the following incremental steps, presented more fully in that chapter, for consideration by our churches.¹²

- **We urge the Church of England to consider its assessment of confirmation in the Methodist Church in order to allow a fuller recognition of each others' members, a step that would significantly change the basis of the relationship between our churches.**¹³
- **We urge each of our churches to work towards recognising how particular bodies and functions in the other church exercise oversight.** As the supreme authority governing the Methodist Connexion, Anglicans might be able to understand the Methodist Conference being somewhat analogous to a corporate "Bishop-in-Synod".
- **We encourage the Church of England to consider recognising the Methodist Conference as having preserved the continuity of Methodism with the tradition from which it emerged, and having ensured the continuity of the Methodist Church in the apostolic faith and mission.**
- **We encourage the Methodist Church to consider how it can relate more closely to a church that is ordered with bishops in the historic episcopate,** and in particular to recognise formally that some of those who represent the Conference are the personal embodiments of the Conference's *episkope* in a particularly intensive way and are charged with ensuring that the Methodist Church continues in faithful continuity with apostolic teaching and apostolic mission. **The Methodist Church might then consider inviting bishops in the historic**

¹²See the chapter in the full report entitled [Developing Bonds of Communion](#).

¹³This recommendation has been made in successive JIC Reports: *Living God's Covenant* (2007) Chapter 4 para. 52 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-living-gods-covenant-100811.pdf; *Embracing the Covenant* Chapter 1 page 21 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch1-250609.pdf.

episcopate to take part in their installation or 'making' as the Methodist Church orders its life.

15. **We urge both our churches to renew our commitment to the goal of visible unity between them. But commitment to this goal can only be sustained if some movement towards it is felt and experienced by individuals and communities, and there are foretastes of some of its fruits. This is why, at the same time as we advocate this goal, we urge our two churches at all levels of our life not only to grow deeper into the communion that we already share within existing structures, but also to grasp the opportunities for taking incremental steps which will introduce significant ecclesiological and legal changes.**

*Unity in oversight*¹⁴

16. One of the central themes running through the work of the JIC over ten years has been that of oversight, or *episkope*, and the various forms in which it is expressed in our two churches. Both churches make provision for the exercise of oversight. They see those ways of exercising oversight as being "in intentional continuity with the ministry of the Apostles"¹⁵. In other words, they are the means of ensuring the continuity of their churches in the apostolic faith and mission.
17. There is much work to be done about how the two ways in which our churches exercise oversight might be brought together into visible unity in such a way that each of our churches is enriched by the other. This applies in all sorts of aspects of their lives, including joint discernment and decision-making to which we turn below. But in the past the conversation has tended to be dominated in both our churches by one particular, if fundamental, difference in the ways that oversight is exercised. That difference is that the Church of England is a church ordered within the framework of the historic episcopate, with bishops playing leading roles as signs of continuity in the exercise of oversight; whereas the Methodist Church is ordered with the Methodist Conference as the collective body exercising corporate *episkope* as a sign of that continuity.
18. The interim report *Moving Forward in Covenant (2011)* stated that *the Covenant is premised on agreement in principle about the historic episcopate*.¹⁶ However, the substantial amount of work done by the JIC on this issue has not yet taken us to a place where the churches can move forward. An immense, and as yet intractable, challenge remains for our churches to move incrementally beyond the mutual affirmation made in the Covenant, that

*both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight is exercised within them in various forms.*¹⁷

19. As *Moving Forward in Covenant* suggested, the many Conference statements about the Methodist Church being willing to receive the historic episcopate from the wider Church were accepted by the Church of England at face value. On the basis of these statements and a common understanding of *episkope* the JIC made its proposal in *Embracing the Covenant* about the President of the Conference being ordained in the historic episcopate, as a way of Methodism

¹⁴ See the chapter in the full report entitled [Signs of Continuity in Faith, Worship and Mission](#).

¹⁵ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement* (MPH: Peterborough; CHP: London) 2001 para 158 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

¹⁶ *Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report of the JIC in its second phase* (MPH: Peterborough) 2011, para 40 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

¹⁷ Covenant Affirmation 6.

- receiving episcopacy into its own system on its own terms.¹⁸ However, making progress with this proposal has proved very difficult.
20. It is clear that in the last five years, the Methodist Church has resisted considering this issue. The reasons for the resistance of Methodism to the historic episcopate lie just as much in the issues being faced by the Church of England as those faced by the Methodist Church. Four main issues have led to this resistance.
- **The first is that of women in positions of leadership.** In the Methodist Church, all posts are open equally to women and men, as a matter of policy based on theological conviction. The failure, in General Synod in November 2012, of the measure to introduce women in the episcopate, while not undermining in any way the Covenant, means that this is still a major obstacle to making progress towards unity in oversight, and highlights the challenge for the Church of England of accepting change in the model of episcopacy.
 - **The second is the need for reciprocity in proposals that are made under the Covenant.** If the Methodist Church is being asked to receive the historic episcopate into its own system, it has not been altogether clear how the Church of England might respond to its doing so, or how the Church of England might be enriched by Methodist practices and understandings in a wider sense.
 - **The third is to do with the lack of clarity about the form of visible unity which may result** from this development, and whether there are smaller incremental steps that can be made by each church which will bring our structures of oversight closer together, in order to prepare the way for the journey ahead.
 - **The fourth is an apparent failure in both our churches to act as if the ordering of our churches and our ways of exercising oversight are for the sake of offering worship and sharing in God's mission.** Any conversations about bringing the ordering and the oversight of our churches together must therefore not be for their own sake, but for the sake of worship and mission.
21. The JIC has aimed to set the challenge of developing unity of oversight within the wider context of the unity of our churches and of our growing into visible unity. However, our two churches' different and distinctive expressions of oversight remain and there is a basic asymmetry between the Covenant churches concerning the nature and relative importance of the issues involved.
22. The JIC has produced material in a succession of reports on this subject,¹⁹ but we have received very little feedback on this material from our churches. There are particular reasons for this reticence – the process in the Church of England to introduce women into the episcopate and the

¹⁸ JIC Quinquennial Report: Embracing the Covenant (MPH: Peterborough) 2008, pp 105 – 108. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

¹⁹ *In the Spirit of the Covenant*: First Interim report of the JIC (2005) *Towards Interchangeability of Ordained Ministries* www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc; *Embracing the Covenant*: Quinquennial Report of the JIC (2008) *Chapter 5: Episkope and Episcopacy and our Churches in Covenant* www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch5-250609.pdf; *Moving Forward in Covenant*: Interim Report of the JIC in its second phase (2011) Part 1: How far have we travelled in Covenant? www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

tensions about bishops in the Methodist Church that were revealed by the responses to the report *What sort of bishops?*²⁰ have both been factors.

23. In order to make progress towards unity in oversight, and towards the interchangeability of the ministries of our churches, the JIC recognises that both churches have challenges to address. One of the dangers has been that for some Methodists the challenge of taking episcopacy into their system, in whatever form, without consideration of how that will be received by the Church of England or how the Church of England will be enriched more generally by Methodist practices and understandings looks like the Methodist Church being asked to jump through an Anglican hoop. However, it is important to recognise there will also be significant challenges for the Church of England if and when the Methodist Church agrees to make such a move.
- Would the Church of England be prepared to indicate that if the Methodist Church were to take the step of taking episcopacy into its system, perhaps through a succession of president bishops, the Methodist Church would be recognised and accepted as a church ordered in the historic episcopate?
 - Would the Church of England be able to agree with the Methodist Church on a process of reconciling existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries, which would lead to interchangeability of ministry?
24. It is unlikely that the Methodist Church would move towards embracing episcopacy without an assurance of such recognition from the Church of England and without an agreement on the reconciliation of ministries. This underlines the importance of both churches recognising that growing together in Covenant involves the transformation of both churches.
25. **The JIC urges our churches to study the material we have produced on *episkope* and episcopacy. Specifically, we urge our two Faith and Order bodies jointly and separately to study this material in depth together with any relevant material from the international Anglican-Methodist dialogue, AMICUM; and to respond to the Council for Christian Unity, the Methodist Council and the JIC's successor body, indicating any further areas of work that are needed, and making an assessment of how our churches' systems of oversight might be brought together in a way that enriches them both.**

*Growing together in three nations*²¹

26. The present JIC includes representatives from the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church as well as Methodist members from Wales and Scotland.²² This has focussed our attention on how the Anglican churches in each of the three nations relate separately and together to the Methodist Church, which is one church in three nations. It has also focussed our attention on how developing ecumenical partnerships in each of the nations affects the Methodist Church's sense of being a single Connexion across those nations. We have been especially concerned about how these relationships might develop within a framework in which the identity of each church, Methodist and Anglican, might be affirmed.²³

²⁰ The debate on *What sort of bishops?: Models of episcopacy and British Methodism* took place at the Methodist Conference 2005.

²¹ See the chapter in the full report entitled [Models for Unity in Oversight](#).

²² JIC Quinquennial Report: *Embracing the Covenant* (MPH: Peterborough) 2008, p 22 – 23 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/embracing-the-covenant-0813.pdf

²³ See the chapter in the full report entitled [Models for Uniting in Oversight](#).

27. **The JIC therefore recommends that the participation of representatives from Scotland and Wales be continued and extended by establishing regular informal meetings of representatives from each of the ecumenical partnerships in the nations of England, Scotland and Wales , together with the relevant ecumenical officers.**
28. The JIC has constantly argued for a vision of unity which allows the traditions and distinctive gifts of each church to thrive alongside each other in a dynamic relationship, and which at the same time allows each church to be transformed as it receives gifts from the other. We need to find new ways of envisioning how we might develop visible unity between our churches as a step towards the full visible unity of the whole of Christ's Church. **To that end, the JIC challenges both our churches to think creatively about practical routes to the achievement of that aim.**

*Sharing of Ministry*²⁴

29. In the light of the continuing challenges facing our churches in moving towards the interchangeability of ministry, the opportunities for shared ministry within current ecclesiological and legal frameworks is significant. Work done by the JIC on developing the understanding of the difference between interchangeable ministry and shared ministry and our churches' eucharistic practice has laid the theological foundations for the practical initiatives which the JIC and the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), have promoted. This work has given shape and impetus to commitments three and four of the Covenant to
- *commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.*
 - *commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.*
30. The sharing of lay ministry is particularly important. It is significant that local training of lay ministry has recently been delivered jointly in an increasing number of places. Under the Church of England's Ecumenical Canons and Methodist Standing Orders, a high level of sharing of the ministries of licensed readers and local preachers may take place between our churches (see chapter 4 of the 2007 JIC report and appendix III of the 2008 JIC report). The JIC has not been able to gather statistics on the number of readers who are 'authorised to serve as a local preacher', or of local preachers who regularly perform duties in Church of England churches under Canon B 43, but the anecdotal evidence from Diocesan and District Ecumenical Officers suggests that this is an important and growing area of sharing between our two churches.
31. The Covenant Affirmations have provided the all important context in which the sharing of presbyteral ministries may take place. One of the most effective pieces of work produced by the JIC has been to show how Canon B 43 can be applied in the context of the Covenant,²⁵ to allow for joint eucharistic worship at which a Methodist presbyter presides to take place on a regular basis in Church of England churches. In response to this work, fourteen diocesan bishops have indicated that they give general approval for invitations to be made by incumbents and PCCs for such joint services to take place. Joint eucharistic worship midweek and in some places as part of the Sunday pattern of worship is now well established in these dioceses.

²⁴ See the chapter in the full report, entitled [Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas](#).

²⁵ *In the Spirit of the Covenant*: First Interim report of the JIC (2005), Appendix A: Applying Canon B 43 in the context of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/JICreport.doc

32. The proposals made by the Joint Implementation Commission in its interim report *Moving Forward in Covenant* (2011) for a form of Covenant Partnership in Extended Areas – areas comprising a number of parishes and a number of circuits or parts of circuits - have fired imaginations both locally and nationally.²⁶ Using the existing legal frameworks of our churches this proposal is intended to stimulate strategic planning and joint mission in dioceses and parishes, districts and circuits. As experience is already showing, it has the potential to raise local relationships between our churches to a new level.
33. There are key lessons to be learnt from this proposal for Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas.
- It connects with the aspirations and needs of people locally.
 - It is not so much a challenge to the churches, but is more to do with giving a solution to a problem – how to overcome some of the obstacles to closer working, without being over bureaucratic.
 - It therefore is not meant to bludgeon our churches or their leaders with the guilt of not doing enough, but aims to be energising, by offering a focus for imaginative thinking.
 - It emphasises what is possible now, in making a strategic difference to the effectiveness of mission.
34. A further significant feature of this proposal is that it is built on other key pieces of work of the JIC, for example concerning the difference between interchangeable and shared ministry, the sharing of lay ministries, the analysis of decision making and oversight bodies in each church and guidelines on the sharing of the eucharist. The detailed work of the JIC and MAPUM is offered as a tool for use by our churches, but it is only when these tools are imaginatively applied that their full capabilities are revealed. **We urge more dioceses and parishes, districts, circuits and local churches to explore the potential of this proposal for their parishes and circuits.**

*Working together in practical ways*²⁷

35. The practical challenges of decision making and working together are crucial to the next phase of the Covenant journey.
36. The spiritual, relational and institutional aspects of what it is to be the Church and therefore of visible unity are inter-related. The spiritual unity of Christ's body, means that we have to deal with how that unity is embodied and, therefore, with matters of visible unity in an institutional sense. The Covenant binds us in relational, spiritual and institutional ways. Therefore, in order to move towards a greater degree of visible unity, our churches must realise the institutional as well as the relational and spiritual implications of the Covenant. The 2008 Quinquennial Report noted that *it is fair to say that the institutional implications of the Covenant have not yet been discerned by either church, or by the JIC.*²⁸
37. Where progress has been made, for example in developing Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas, and in some collaborative projects at national and connexional level, there is strong evidence of real benefits to both our churches. However, the institutions of our churches display a distinct inertia, which continues to reflect the view of the JIC in 2008 that *we wonder whether the*

²⁶ *Moving Forward in Covenant*: Interim Report of the JIC in its second phase (2011), Part 2: A major development in shared ministry. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/conf2011-pc-moving-forward-in-covenant-0511.pdf

²⁷ See the chapter in the full report entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#).

²⁸ *Embracing the Covenant*: Quinquennial Report of the JIC (2008), Chapter 2: The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek p 35 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

*churches have either the energy or the will to adapt institutionally to each other in any significant way*²⁹.

38. The asymmetry of decision making bodies of our two churches³⁰ and the incompatibility of boundaries at diocesan/deanery and district/circuit³¹ are two obstacles to developing structures of joint oversight and decision making at intermediate and local level. It is remarkable, in view of these obstacles, how much progress is being made in some dioceses, districts and circuits towards genuine partnership in the key areas of joint mission, the sharing of resources, including transforming buildings as centres for community, and the sharing of ministry and worship.
39. At national and connexional level, in spite of extensive consultation between our churches, the JIC recognises that our two churches are a long way from being able to establish structures of joint oversight and decision making to which we are committed in the Covenant. The practical challenges of decision making and working together will be central to the next phase of the Covenant journey. As Churches in Covenant, we have hardly begun to work out the implications of the Lund Principle, formulated in the Third World Faith and Order Conference in Lund in 1952:

*A faith in the one Church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead. There are truths about the nature of God and His Church which will remain for ever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours We would, therefore, earnestly request our churches to consider whether they are doing all they ought to do to manifest the oneness of the people of God. Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?*³²

40. Within the Covenant this principle applies in a general sense to the whole life, worship and mission of our churches. But the JIC also challenges our churches to apply it now in particular situations in which we are responding to specific challenges of mission and of resourcing mission. By applying this principle to specific contexts, such as the deployment of ministry and resourcing new initiatives for mission, so much more may be done together than separately, as demonstrated in the initiatives which are developing in some dioceses and districts/circuits.
41. The question posed in the Lund Principle should also be applied specifically to the case of those who are being appointed to exercise office within our churches at all levels. At the very least, job descriptions could include joint consultation with the nearest equivalent office or officers in the Covenant partner to affirm the expectation of mutual communication and co-operation. Furthermore, the JIC recommends that the terms of reference of boards, committees and panels should include the expectation that there will be consultation with the nearest equivalent body or bodies in the Covenant partner, and where appropriate, the appointment of observers from that partner. Mutual observership is more than simply 'observing'. It means having representatives

²⁹ *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the JIC (2008), Chapter 2: The Unity We Have and the Unity We Seek* p 35 www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch2-250609.pdf

³⁰ *Embracing the Covenant: Quinquennial Report of the JIC (2008), Chapter 4: How Can Decision-Making Be Shared?* www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/ec-embr-covenant-ch4-250609.pdf

³¹ For an interactive map superimposing diocesan, district, deanery and circuit boundaries, see: www.methodist.org.uk/links/church-webmap-advanced-version

³² World Council of Churches. Commission on Faith and Order, Faith and order: the report of the Third World Conference at Lund, Sweden, August 15-18, 1952 (SCM Press: London) 1952 www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/vi-church-and-world/churchandworldtextonly.pdf/view

embedded in the structures of the other church, empowered with knowledge of their own church, and carrying the responsibility of reporting back and assisting in developing ideas and strategy.³³

42. **Joint decision making relies not only on good communication and collaboration, but also on good processes and structures. As a key priority in the next phase of the Covenant journey, the JIC commends the development of structures of joint decision making, to which we have already committed ourselves in the Covenant Commitments. The acid test of moving from joint consultation to joint decision making and action will be whether the work we do together more effectively furthers the mission of the Kingdom, and whether it is leading us to the visible unity of our two churches. We recommend it because we are convinced that it will achieve exactly that: furthering the work of the Kingdom for which we pray each day in the Lord's Prayer.**

Advocating the Covenant in the Next Phase³⁴

43. In the General Synod and the Methodist Conference debates on *Embracing the Covenant* in July 2008, many speakers spoke of their enthusiasm and passion for the unity of the Church, inspired by the inseparable biblical imperatives of unity and mission, and by the hopes of Christian unity nurtured in ecumenical encounters. However, many also spoke about how they were filled with a heaviness of heart, with the realisation that there was still a long way to go. One speaker in the General Synod spoke of the *'two ecumenical imperatives given historically to the Church of England: one, the fracture between Rome and Canterbury, and the other, our relationship with the people called Methodists, [first] within the Church of England, and then sadly separated, mostly because of our own fault.'* So, although, there didn't seem to be wild enthusiasm at the time, there is an imperative laid upon us to renew commitment: *'There is an ecumenical virtue in slogging on, in being patient, in knowing that this is an imperative, whatever other issues may distract and be placed in front of either of our churches.'*³⁵
44. We are under no illusion that there are significant difficulties to overcome on the way to the visible unity of our two churches. Yet we share common roots, proclaim the same faith, hear the one call to share in the mission of the Kingdom, bound in Covenant. Now, therefore, as a Commission charged with the task of facilitating the Covenant's implementation, we call our churches back to the solemn promises that we have made to God and each other in the Covenant, to be obedient to God's call to work and pray for the unity of his Church.
45. **The immediate challenge is to motivate people to use the opportunities that we already have and to encourage us to work strategically for mission. In the next phase of the Covenant, we maintain that there is a need for advocacy in the implementation of the Covenant.**
46. The JIC has thus far focussed very much on the theological priorities given right at the beginning in 2003, especially removing obstacles to interchangeability of ministry.³⁶ However, we recognise that there are other reasons why things do not happen, and these also need to be addressed. We believe that a realignment of focus is needed for the third phase of the implementation of the Covenant, one which places greater emphasis on how the life and work can be developed together and achieve greater clarity of purpose.

³³ For further discussion on this, see full report, chapter entitled [Joint Consultation and Decision Making](#) paras 45 and 46.

³⁴ See the chapter in the full report entitled [Let it be according to your will: the Challenge to our Churches](#).

³⁵ The Bishop of Guildford speaking in the debate on the Quinquennial Report of the JIC in the General Synod on Monday 7 July 2008.

³⁶ An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement (MPH: Peterborough; GHP: London) 2001 Recommendations p 62. www.anglican-methodist.org.uk/common_statement0506.pdf

- **First we urge the bodies and institutions of our 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.’** We recommend that this work should be encouraged by a body mandated to act as an advocate for the Covenant with and in the national and connexional institutions of our churches, and charged to report to the General Synod and Methodist Conference. This body should be led by a Methodist co-chair who has been a President or Vice-President of the Conference and an Anglican co chair who is a diocesan bishop.
 - **Second we urge our churches at local and regional level to give priority to making full use of what is already possible for them to do together, and especially to planning together for mission and worship, deployment of ministry and the use of resources.** It is important to enthuse people at the grass roots by the release of imagination and energy which comes through realising the magnitude of what is possible. The place where this work is already being done is the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), and we recommend that this group be given a stronger mandate to encourage, resource and challenge our churches to do this at local and regional level.
 - **Third we urge our churches to give priority to carrying forward the ecclesiological task of moving towards visible unity.** We recommend that our churches should undertake serious study of the theological work the JIC has done in its succession of reports. In particular we recommend that the Faith and Order Commission and the Faith and Order Committee, give full attention to the issues of the goal of visible unity, *episkope* and episcopacy, interchangeability of ministry, and of the recognition of confirmation, and to make particular proposals for taking incremental steps towards visible unity. We suggest that this work could be undertaken by a joint working party of our churches’ faith and order bodies.
47. These three areas of work, with their particular emphases, interact with one another and will therefore need to be co-ordinated. One way of achieving this would be through an annual joint meeting of the groups, or of representatives of the groups, responsible for each of the three areas of work.
48. The key question in taking implementation of the Covenant into the next phase is where does the responsibility and accountability for implementing the Covenant lie? In the broad sense our churches as a whole carry this responsibility. But the implementation of the Covenant needs to be championed by bodies which consciously hold this responsibility and which can be held accountable. As we move into the next phase of the implementation of the Covenant, the re-alignment of priorities will require a different approach to the implementation of the Covenant in both its first and second phases. We recommend that the bodies which take the implementation forward (outlined in paragraph 46 above) should have a clear mandate to act as an advocate for the Covenant in both our churches and that they should relate to the key policy making bodies of our churches.
49. The Anglican-Methodist Covenant is at a decisive moment. The JIC has kept in sight the crucial question as to whether there is evidence that the Covenant is making a difference. We have suggested that the criteria in this are the flourishing of the Kingdom and the greater unity of the Church, which are ultimately intrinsically intertwined. If the Covenant is to make a difference it must honour diversity, be purpose led, and place a high value on the realisation of the Kingdom of God. It must assist in the discernment of the movement of the Kingdom and the dynamics of God’s grace; and it must combine the energy and resources of our churches for the sake of mission.

50. We have also stressed throughout this report that growing into visible unity will not be gained through proposing a master plan of institutional merger or through the absorption of one church by another, with the loss of the distinctiveness and charism of either tradition. We have however stressed the vision of each church embracing change, and being open to transformation as we each encounter the other in Christ and receive each other's gifts. Growing into visible unity is thus a transformative process of dying and rising again. As Christ the Good Shepherd laid down his life to give abundant life to his sheep and to unite his flock (John 10:10-11; 15-17), so our churches are called to die in order to live, and in living fully to God we grow into a deeper unity. The Christian calling is to live a life of discipleship in which we lose our lives to gain eternal life (Mark 8:35-36). The covenantal challenge is to apply this calling of dying so as to live at one in Christ to the institutional life of our churches.