

## *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. **What do these proposals do?**

The report sets out proposals which, if accepted, will enable a new depth of relationship, of communion, between the two churches and would make presbyters from each church eligible to serve in the other. These are not proposals for unity or for merger, but are a step in our journey together. They build and rely on decisions and commitments already made by both churches, and particularly on the affirmations and commitments made in *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.

#### 2. **Why now?**

We are already in a covenant relationship with the Church of England and, since the signing of the covenant in 2003, the relationship has continued to develop and much work has been done. Whilst there are many good news stories of what is possible when Methodists and Anglicans work and worship together in their communities, challenges still remain and it is hoped that these proposals, if accepted, would release time and energy for worship and mission. We are doing this for the sake of mission and as a step towards the unity of God's Church. As the *Preface* to the report says, and as both churches have long understood, together these developments will "enhance the churches' common mission to the glory of God."

#### 3. **What is the status of the proposals?**

In 2014 the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England asked the Faith and Order bodies in both churches to develop some proposals, and they have been released for wider consideration and discussion in both churches. It is hoped that, in due course, they will come for formal debate in the Conference and the General Synod. Until then we are in a period of discernment and it is hoped that members of the two churches will read, discuss and reflect on the report.

#### 4. **Is it worth it?**

There is no doubt that these proposals have significant implications for both churches and require some reflection on deeply-held theological understandings. It is also evident that the nature of the relationship between Methodist and Church of England congregations varies in different places. Yet, members of the Methodist Church and the Church of England continue to be committed to being in relationship, particularly mindful that the Church is called to be visibly one, so that its unity in Christ may be seen and the world may believe. In 2014 both churches decided that it was time to address the issues to remove the obstacles to interchangeability of ministry. Whilst commitment to making the changes required to enter the new stage of relationship would be costly, much time and energy has already been given to working through these challenges together. If accepted, it is hoped that these proposals will create many opportunities and release time and energy for worship and mission. The question of whether it is worth it, and questions like it, are for the the Conference and General Synod to decide. Members of both churches are therefore encouraged to engage with the report and together share in prayer and reflection as part of the process of discernment.

#### 5. **What is a Methodist bishop?**

The proposals would see the Methodist Church recognise the office of a President-bishop as expressing in a personal form the Conference's ministry of oversight. A Methodist President-bishop will look different from a Church of England Bishop and would not exercise their episcopal ministry in exactly the same way: for example a Methodist Bishop would not be eligible for a seat in the House of Lords (unless they were serving as a bishop in the Church of England)! Different theologies of the episcopate already exist among Anglican and Methodist churches around the world, and bishops function in different ways. It is usual in ordinations for at least three bishops to be involved in the ordination of a new bishop. As we are seeking deeper communion with the Church of England it would be important that one of these bishops would be from the Church of England and that at

least one of these was a bishop in a church of shared Methodist/Anglican heritage.

**6. What does it mean for the Methodist Church to receive the historic episcopate from another church?**

The historic episcopate is a particular expression of corporate oversight in a personal form and an expression of the visible historical continuity of the Church today with the Church of the apostles.<sup>1</sup> It is not something that a church can bring into existence, but has to be received from another church or churches. If the proposals are accepted then it would be appropriate for the Methodist Church to receive the historic episcopate from the Church of England. The Methodist Church does not accept that the historic episcopate is essential for the faithful exercise of ministry, and in *An Anglican – Methodist Covenant* the Church of England and the Methodist Church affirm each other 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.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, the Methodist Church has repeatedly expressed its willingness to receive the historic episcopate as a sign of Methodism’s continuity with the Church universal and for the sake of greater visible unity.

**7. What happens if the Methodist Church has a President-bishop?**

All new Methodist ministers would be ordained by a bishop i.e. they would be episcopally ordained. Nevertheless, all Methodist presbyters will be eligible to serve in the Church of England, whether episcopally ordained or not.

**8. Will all Methodist presbyters then be classed as Anglican priests?**

No, but they will be eligible to serve in the Church of England. These proposals are permissive and enabling. They make things possible rather than prescribing a particular way of being or doing. Any Methodist presbyter wishing to serve in the Church of England would need to go through the usual discernment and appointment procedures in the Church of England, as would any Church of England priest. And vice versa.

**9. Are women included?**

Women Methodist presbyters in full connexion with the Conference (or Recognised and Regarded as being so) would be included in the dispensation. Like men Methodist presbyters, they would be eligible to serve in Church of England appointments subject to the normal procedures of the Church of England. Parishes have responsibility for choosing their ministers in the Church of England and in some cases they would not be willing to receive a woman – whether Methodist or Anglican.<sup>3</sup> The Methodist stationing process needs to give careful attention to the attitudes towards women’s ministry held by any Anglican priest offering to serve in one of our appointments.

**10. Why are deacons not included in these proposals?**

These proposals would represent a significant step towards a deeper communion between our two churches. They are not the first step, nor will they be the last. The key obstacles to that deeper communion concern ministries of oversight. Presbyteral ministry is a ministry of oversight in a way that diaconal ministry is not. The intention is that resolving the biggest obstacle would provide a positive framework for working on remaining issues concerning our diaconates and lay ministries.

**11. Will Methodists have to swear the oath of allegiance?**

Anyone serving within the Church of England would need to swear the oath of allegiance and would need induction into the Church of England’s ways of working. Any Anglican serving within a Methodist appointment would similarly make a declaration that they would uphold Methodist discipline and they would need

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<sup>1</sup> JIC, 2013, *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness*, chapter 11, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> Affirmation 1, *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Of course this doesn’t just apply to women, some parishes or Bishops might not accept the ministry of someone in a same sex relationship (just as they wouldn’t accept the ministry of a Church of England priest in a same sex relationship) and some parishes or Bishops might not accept the ministry of a Methodist presbyter who has not been episcopally ordained.

appropriate induction into Methodist ways of working.

**12. Will past Presidents be able to continue ordaining Methodist presbyters and deacons?**

Because the Church of England is committed to episcopal ordination a key feature of this proposal is that the Church of England would need to consider as interchangeable Methodist presbyters who are already non-episcopally ordained. The proposal seeks to minimise the time period for which this situation would pertain. If past Presidents who had not been ordained bishop continued to ordain this would perpetuate the situation for longer than might be reasonably asked.

**13. Is ordination as a President-Bishop a re-ordination?**

No. Ordination as a President-Bishop would be a second ordination. The President-Bishop would remain part of the order of presbyters.

**14. What happens after the presidential year?**

Ordination as a President-Bishop would be lifelong. It would be expressed beyond the first year of the presidency by the President-Bishop's continued involvement in ordinations and in the other duties shared by past presidents and vice presidents according to our current standing orders.

**15. Will those Methodists not episcopally ordained become second class Methodist presbyters?**

The status and privileges of all Methodist presbyters - whether episcopally ordained or not – will be identical. Both will be eligible to serve in Church of England appointments subject to invitation. It may be the case that some parishes would not choose to invite those not episcopally ordained (similarly see question 9 above).

**16. Can individual Methodist presbyters who are already ordained receive episcopal ordination?**

The Conference has consistently expressed the view that any proposals for interchangeability would not be acceptable if anything approaching 're-ordination' were required. It will therefore not be possible for individual Methodist presbyters who are already ordained to receive episcopal ordination. It should be noted that it is not individual presbyters who are considered anomalous within the Church of England's understanding, but the situation that is considered anomalous.

**17. How can I understand more about the report better?**

The proposals are written in a particular form as it is envisaged that they will become a formal report to the General Synod and the Conference. They deal with some significant theological themes and the careful language seeks to reflect a shared understanding as succinctly as possible. Many of these themes were explored and then commended for study in the churches through *An Anglican – Methodist Covenant* and the reports from the Joint Implementation Commission. This report builds on that material and members of the churches are encouraged to revisit that material alongside these proposals.