

**THE CHURCH OF IRELAND AND THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND**

**REPORT OF THE COVENANT COUNCIL TO THE CHURCHES 2005**

**MEMBERSHIP**

**Church of Ireland**

Rt Rev Harold Miller (co-Chair)	Rev Canon Adrian Empey
Mr David Brown	Rev Dr Maurice Elliott
Ms Elva Byrne	Rev Canon Ginnie Kennerley
Rev Nigel Dunne	Mr Cyril McElhinney
Mr Stephen Edgar	Rev Peter Thompson

**Methodist Church**

Rev David Kerr (co-Chair)	Rev Brian Griffin
The Secretary of Conference	Rev Don Ker
Mrs Sandra Dickson	Rev David Rock
Rev Andrew Dougherty	Mr Kenneth Twyble
Rev Geraldine Gracie	Ms Gillian Kingston (Secretary)

The Covenant Council has met in two residential sessions during this year and plans to meet again in late June, 2005. There has been a small turnover in membership, and the Council is glad to welcome Ms Sandra Dickson of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Rev Nigel Dunne of the Church of Ireland, subject to approval.

The Council welcomes the emerging trend of consultation on a variety of local partnership schemes. We believe that this process will help to learn from each other and will ultimately contribute to consistency in practice.

Three major agenda items have occupied the Council during the year:-

**THE LOCAL COVENANT PARTNERSHIP DOCUMENT**

In view of the number of places where Church of Ireland and Methodist people are anxious to come into closer relationship, it is important that guidelines be produced to facilitate this. We believe such guidelines to be vital both in encouraging new relationships to proceed appropriately and in facilitating a tidy winding down when a partnership, for whatever reason, comes to an end. To this end, a booklet, *Local Covenant Partnerships*, has been produced, based on the experience of our sister churches and others in Great Britain. We are particularly grateful to one of our number, the Rev Peter Thompson, for the immense amount of time he has put into the revision of material received. We are also grateful to those from each church who have read and commented on the document. We commend it to the General Synod and to the Conference for use in local Covenant partnerships for an initial experimental period of three years. We suggested that it then be reviewed in the light of experience.

### **THE FACILITATORS' SCHEME**

It is of the essence that the Covenant operates at local level. To this end, a scheme of Diocesan and District Covenant facilitators has been implemented. The facilitators are appointed by their respective Synods, with a brief to report to the Synod on how relationships between the two churches are proceeding – or not – at local level. Early in the New Year, a successful briefing meeting was convened in Dublin.

### **A STUDY OF EPISCOPE**

Fundamental theological issues continually face the Covenant Council in its work. Foremost among these is the issue of episcopate, with the attendant implications for interchangeability of ministries. Various papers have been received on different perspectives of the issues and we have listened to personal experience of the unity schemes in South and North India. We have looked again at the report of the Methodist/Anglican International Commission, *Sharing in the Apostolic Communion*. We are concerned that the monitoring group, proposed at the 1998 Lambeth Conference of Bishops, has not yet got underway.

Following considerable discussion, it was agreed that an interim report on the episcopate study should be presented to the General Synod and to the Conference.

We have reached substantial agreement on the points outlined below and we present these as the starting point for a major discussion on the issues:-

1. In New Testament times, *episkopoi* (usually translated 'overseers' or 'bishops') and *presbyteroi* (usually translated 'elders') were essentially the same (see, for instance, Acts 20:17 and 28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-2).
2. However, there are clear signs of the presence of a wider apostolic ministry for example; Timothy and Titus are given broader responsibility for oversight in Ephesus and Crete respectively.
3. A three-fold expression of overseeing, leadership and service is accepted by both our churches and exercised in a variety of ways.
4. All these ministries are necessary for the life and mission of the church.
5. The development of a three-fold ministry widely present in the church today is a development consistent with scripture.
6. A personal oversight exercised faithfully within the context of a communal and collegial oversight contributes significantly to the well-being of the church.
7. Any Episcopal ministry should always function in the context of a team of presbyters.

#### The Covenant Council – Report 2005

8. Although particular gifts and calling are necessary for the ministry of oversight, those who exercise this ministry need not exercise it for life.
9. Taking Timothy and Titus as examples, an overseer has a particular role in relation to the discernment, pastoring, discipline and nurture of the ordained ministry.
10. The essential meaning of apostolic succession is the faithful passing on from one generation to another of the teaching of the gospel in continuity with the apostles. Any continuity of ministry or oversight is to be understood within the continuity of the apostolic life and mission of the whole church.

#### **MOVING THE COVENANT FORWARD**

In 2003, the Covenant proposals were unanimously affirmed by the General Synod of the Church of Ireland and overwhelmingly so by the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland. That our two churches should move forward in a closer relationship and in the cause of mission on this island was clearly the wish of those charged with that level of decision-making in the churches. As a Council, we urge all those in leadership positions in the two churches to embrace, in word *and* spirit, the opportunities offered by this very special relationship.

#### **RESOLUTIONS**

- 1 That the General Synod receives the Report of the Covenant Council.
- 2 The General Synod accepts the protocols laid out in *Local Covenant Partnerships*, and commends their use for an initial experimental period of three years. (See Appendix A of the Standing Committee Report to the General Synod).
- 3 That the General Synod appoints the Rev NK Dunne to represent the Church of Ireland on the Covenant Council for the period ending 31 May 2006.