

13. Ecumenical Report

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Neil A Stubbens, Connexional Ecumenical Officer Email: StubbensN@methodistchurch.org.uk
Subject and Aims	A further update to the 'general' part of the Ecumenical Report received by the Conference in 2013 which outlined the scope of the Methodist Church's ecumenical relationships.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Ecumenical Reports to the 2013 Conference (Agenda, pp. 88-95 and Daily Record, 7/8) and 2014 Conference (Agenda, pp. 86-90 and Daily Record, 8/12).
Consultation	Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The first part of the Ecumenical Report received by the 2013 Conference outlined the scope of the Methodist Church's ecumenical relationships. The Ecumenical Report received by the 2014 Conference updated the 2013 report and this report is offered as a further update.

2. The World Council of Churches (WCC)

- 2.1. At its meeting in July 2014, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches appointed the members of the various consultative bodies, including the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) and the Faith and Order Commission. The Revd Dr Janet Corlett was appointed to the first and Professor Tom Greggs to the second. At the inaugural meeting of the newly constituted CWME in March, authentic discipleship in mission and evangelism, hospitality, justice, and inclusiveness emerged as significant topics; these will influence the theme of the World Mission Conference that is planned to be held in 2018.
- 2.2. In November 2014, six WCC staff met with members of the Connexional Team and others to discuss the programmatic work of the WCC, developments following its 10th Assembly in autumn 2013 (including the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace), possibilities for closer cooperation, and other matters of shared interest.

3. The Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)

- 3.1. The new CEC was launched last December in Brussels and a colloquium on "Challenges and the future of the new CEC" was followed by a public debate on "Churches engaging with a changing Europe: the role of a new Conference of European Churches".
- 3.2. The CCME held an event in December to mark the culmination of its 50th anniversary year celebrations. A symposium on "The Role of Churches in Asylum and Migration politics" was held at the University of East London. Dr Alessia Passarelli of the Methodist Church in Bologna, Italy also reported on the latest research for "Mapping Migration – Churches' Responses", the CCME publication on churches' work among and with migrants across Europe. These critical issues and opportunities are high on the agendas of all our partner churches.

4. The Conference of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)

- 4.1. The CPCE Council has decreed that the 8th General Assembly of the Community shall take place in Basel, Switzerland from 13-18 September 2018. One of the study processes leading up to that assembly will be "Protestant Perspectives on Religious Plurality in Europe".

5. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

- 5.1. This past year, CTBI has provided resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (*The Well is Deep*), for Lent (“Walking and Praying with Christians of the Middle East”) and for the General Election (“Preparing for the General Election: A 2020 vision of the Good Society”). CTBI’s Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group is arranging a conference in June entitled, “Cacophony or Conversation? The Bible and Inter Faith Dialogue”.
- 5.2. CTBI has also produced a study guide for the convergence document produced by the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. The Faith and Order Committee’s proposed response to this very important document can be found elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.

6. Scotland

- 6.1. The referendum in Scotland last September was, as expected, very significant both for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The churches maintained a neutral stance and have sought since to contribute to the healing of relationships, including through a Service of National Reconciliation at St Giles’ Cathedral.
- 6.2. In the past year, the Members’ Meeting of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) has discussed the WCC’s *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* and how the churches in Scotland may best respond to the WCC’s call to engage in a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. It has also looked at how ACTS operates. Its new Ecumenical Development Group, the successor to its Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships, has started meeting with a wide remit to encourage local ecumenical activity.
- 6.3. The Scotland District’s Ecumenical Forum and Church and Society Forum are now both well-established and members of the District have attended the annual Assemblies or Synods of the Baptist Union of Scotland, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, the Congregational Federation in Scotland, and the meeting of the URC’s National Synod of Scotland.
- 6.4. The Episcopal, Methodist, URC (EMU) Partnership is now represented on the Church of Scotland’s Church and Society Council and, now that it is five years since the Statement of Partnership was signed, a review process is in hand.

7. England

- 7.1. Last November, the General Synod of the Church of England discussed a report from the Council for Christian Unity and the final report of the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC), *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness*. Like the 2014 Conference, the Synod strongly supported the recommendations contained in the JIC’s report.
- 7.2. The Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE) has considered a number of significant matters, including Pentecostal and Multicultural relations, the Black and Multicultural Directory, Christian Ethnicity in England, the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), Receptive Ecumenism, funding, new directions for local ecumenism (including LEPs), new unity movements for mission, and membership of CTE.
- 7.3. The triennial CTE Forum takes place on 28-30 September 2015, with a focus on the Orthodox Churches, Pentecostalism, and Young People.

8. **The Free Churches' Group (FCG)**

- 8.1. The Revd Dr Hugh Osgood, President of Churches in Communities International, was appointed Moderator of the Free Churches' Group last September. Discussions about the future role, profile, and governance of the Group are ongoing.

9. **Wales**

- 9.1. The principal work undertaken by the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales has been to analyse the responses from partner churches to the recommendations launched at the Gathering in October 2012. These responses have raised a number of issues, both about the details of the proposals themselves and also about how much support there is for a structural unity scheme at this stage. They have also raised the importance of strengthening the relationship between partner churches and encouraging more local mission initiatives to be undertaken ecumenically. It is envisaged that these are the tasks which will form the basis of the Commission's work for its next five year term (2016-2021) and it is encouraging that this process has already triggered a commitment to more regular meetings of the Bench of Bishops of the Church in Wales with other church leaders from the covenanted partners.
- 9.2. A significant development in the work of Cytûn has been the appointment of a new Policy Officer, the Revd Gethin Rhys. This appointment is already bearing fruit in terms of more regular briefings about the work of the Welsh Government and opening new possibilities of working with other church officers in engaging with the wider public policy issues raised in the Senedd.

10. **The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM)**

- 10.1. MAPUM has been reviewing its agenda and ways of working; in part, this has been done in the light of the Joint Implementation Commission's report to the Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England. Last year's Conference, like the General Synod in November, endorsed Recommendation 2; it then encouraged Methodist churches, Circuits and Districts to put it into effect, and directed the Methodist members of the MAPUM to ensure that appropriate support and advice is provided by that body. Earlier this year it circulated copies of *Being Real about the Anglican-Methodist Covenant* to all Chairs of District, Synod Secretaries, and District Ecumenical Officers, and to Superintendents in the Districts which share the geographical area of Church of England dioceses.
- 10.2. MAPUM's role, however, does not involve relating only with the Church of England; it has due regard for ecumenism in Wales and Scotland as well as for the wider ecumenical landscape in England, and values both the presence and contribution of representatives of the Baptist, Roman Catholic, and URC traditions. At its meeting in March, it continued its discussion about the so-called 'new ecumenism' and identified the need for a refreshed vision for unity in mission in the changing landscape.

11. **The Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group (MURCLG)**

- 11.1. The Liaison Group has continued its work, which is focused on the local and intermediate dimensions of the relationship between the two churches. In particular, it has considered a revised edition of *How to make it work*, resources to assist local leaders' awareness of the two churches' understandings of ministry and ecclesiology, and Welcome/Induction Services. It has also received reports on the Joint Property Strategy Group, ecumenical areas, orientation for and training of those ministers newly appointed to LEPs, the reciprocal arrangement and distinctive matters relating to England, Scotland, and Wales.

12. The British Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission

- 12.1. The Commission continues to reflect on some of the key documents of the Second Vatican Council. In the past year, this has included looking at *Lumen Gentium* (the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964) with a focus on issues relating to ecumenical dialogue alongside *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August, 1964), Methodist ecclesiologies, and the WCC's *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (August, 2012). Regular updates on the International Dialogue and on the Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome are also appreciated.
- 12.2. Next year, the Commission will be looking at "Sacred Scripture – the Word of God", exploring the spiritual reading of the scriptures and theologies of revelation, scripture, and tradition.

13. Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome (MEOR)

- 13.1. The Revd Dr Tim Macquiban became the Minister of Ponte Sant' Angelo Methodist Church and Director of the MEOR last summer. In September 2014, both the Steering Committee of the World Methodist Council and the European Methodist Council expressed their support for the development of the Office. In collaboration with the Italian Methodist Church, terms of reference for a Stakeholders' Group have been developed and invitations given to the World Methodist Council and the United Methodist Church to acknowledge the Office formally. It is hoped that the first meeting of the Group will take place in October 2015.

14. District Ecumenical Officers (DEOs)

- 14.1. Most Districts have one or more Ecumenical Officers who fulfil an invaluable role encouraging and supporting ecumenical work; they also encourage and challenge Local Churches, Circuits, and Districts to work ecumenically. This year's annual meeting of DEOs focussed on ecumenical aspects of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network.
- 14.2. Last November, many of the DEOs attended a conference with ecumenical officers from other churches across Britain to mark the 50th anniversaries of the Faith and Order Conference at Nottingham in 1964 and the promulgation of the Decree on Ecumenism during the Second Vatican Council. With the title, "The Ecumenical Landscape: Changing Seasons – Expanding Horizons", this excellent conference included both an historical dimension and an exploration of the current global and national ecumenical scenes, including from a Pentecostal perspective.

15. The Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum (ESF)

- 15.1. The Forum continues to develop an overview of the Methodist Church's ecumenical activity with the aim of ensuring coherence and consistency in the representation of a Methodist perspective. This past year, it has considered particular aspects of the varying ecumenical situations around the Connexion and in Europe, discussed the role of the Free Churches' Group and the ecumenical instruments, and been consulted about nominations, appointments, and invitations to various bodies.
- 15.2. The Forum has observed that, in some places, there is a lack of vitality in ecumenical relationships; on the other hand, it has rejoiced that, elsewhere, there is a strong commitment to 'unity in mission' and there are encouraging stories to be shared. Like MAPUM and the conference last November that was attended by many of the District Ecumenical Officers (see paragraph 14.2 above), the Forum has noted again the changed and changing ecumenical landscape and hopes to continue to play its part in promoting the Methodist Church's vision

for ecumenical partnership and dialogue, in stimulating action, and in promoting good practice.

*****RESOLUTION**

13/1. The Conference received the Report.