

15. Ecumenical Report

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Subject and aims	To report on areas of ecumenical engagement.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Methodist Church continues to be committed to working with ecumenical partners from a wide variety of Christian traditions. We continue to encourage flexible ways of working together wherever possible as we engage in God's mission. The call to unity is a gospel imperative and a mission imperative and we continue to be challenged by the "Lund Principle"¹ that we should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately." The challenge is not only to seek to act together but to articulate, understand and seek ultimately to resolve or to hold together those deep differences which divide us.
- 1.2. This report includes updates on the work of some of the ecumenical bodies and accounts of some significant developments in other areas. The Conference has reason to be grateful to all those who represent the Methodist Church on a wide variety of committees, commissions and working groups thus enabling connexional, district, circuit and local initiatives.
- 1.3. The last year has seen the deepening of ecumenical relationships as churches have continued to respond to the global pandemic and, now, to the war being waged against Ukraine. We have continued to share experience and expertise as we support one another. National Ecumenical Officers have participated in regular virtual meetings hosted by Churches Together in England (CTE) but including representatives of the three nations and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). The round-table meetings continue to meet each month for information sharing on a wide range of subjects including our response to issues of COVID-19, the conflict in Ukraine and injustice. This building of relationships through prayer and fellowship lies at the root of our relationships and strengthens them. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland continues to enable the sharing of resources across the four nations.
- 1.4. Globally our ecumenical relationships in Europe and through the World Council of Churches are more vital than ever in the face of rising populism, anti-Semitism and increasing pressure on established political alliances. Members of the European Methodist Council and the Conference of European Churches are working closely together in response to the conflict in Ukraine along with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe, Mediterranean Hope, and other faith based partners.

The Methodist Church in Britain continues to work with our concordat partners, the United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Concordat group has met to share news and to identify and study areas of work where we are stronger together, such as our response to climate change, our understanding of faith, and our shared Wesleyan identity. This relationship has been particularly significant this year in the light of the much-publicized challenges the UMC faces following its General Conference in 2016.

- 1.5. Continuing restrictions on travel and social gathering have been challenging in an area of work where the building and sustaining of relationships is of central importance. An advantage of online meetings has been an increased attendance at business meetings and webinars attracting larger numbers than would attend if travel were involved,

¹ The Lund principle is derived from a question raised by the 1952 Faith and Order Conference of the World Council of Churches, held at Lund, Sweden. "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?"

however, the ability to deepen relationships in a less 'agenda-based' context and the possibilities for serendipitous conversations that lead to new ideas is diminished by not meeting in person. We continue to work to find the appropriate balance of physical and online meetings.

2. The World Council of Churches (WCC)

2.1. The 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches is due take place in Karlsruhe, Germany from 31 August to 8 September 2022. The theme of the assembly is 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity'. The assembly normally meets every eight years and is the highest legislative body of the WCC. It reviews programmes, determines the overall policies of the WCC, elects presidents and appoints a Central Committee, which serves as the chief governing body of the WCC until the next assembly. The Revd Michaela Youngson and the Revd Dr Jennifer Smith are our Conference-appointed representatives to the Assembly. The Conference of European Churches (CEC) organised a pre-Assembly meeting for delegates to the WCC Assembly, which took place the day after Russia invaded Ukraine. CEC changed the online meeting agenda at twenty-four-hour's notice and those who attended were privileged and moved to hear from a Professor of Religion at Kyiv University speaking live as Russian tanks arrived at the outskirts of his city. The meeting also heard from the Methodist Superintendent in Poland, Andrzej Malicki, who left the call early to travel to the border with Ukraine to help organise the Church response to the influx of refugees fleeing the conflict. It was a sharp reminder of our connectedness and of the difference that church and faith groups can make in a world of fear and need.

2.2. The Revd Dr Janet Corlett was Moderator for the WCC Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) which met online from 9-11 November 2021 for their last Commission Meeting before the WCC General Assembly. The sessions included preparations for the General Assembly and a book launch for the publication "Called to Discipleship: Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace." A digital version of the book can be accessed at <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/call-to-discipleship-mission-in-the-pilgrimage-of-justice-and-peace-newly-released-by-wcc>

A theme emerging in the discussions was the embedded nature of racism and the need for a decolonizing perspective and a dissident discipleship. This is explored in the working group paper: 'Converting Discipleship: Dissidence and Metanoia', A summary of the work of the Commission can be found at <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-commission-on-world-mission-and-evangelism-evaluates-its-work-on-the-way-to-wcc-11th-assembly>

A new group of Commissioners will be appointed for the next term of the Commission however a 'Core Group' of six members (including Dr Corlett) was elected from the outgoing Commission to continue for a second term.

Other resources are to be found on the WCC website and churches and individuals are encouraged to explore them.

3. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

3.1. CTBI has welcomed a new General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady this year, and has promoted, as usual, resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 'We Saw His Star in the East', prepared by the churches of the Middle East), Lent ('Following Christ in the Footsteps of the Saints'), and many others. CTBI continues to offer resources supporting churches to explore issues of justice such as racial justice, work on asylum, economics, the environment, etc, and continues to work to its aim of serving the churches of Britain and Ireland on the shared journey towards full visible unity in

Christ. Information about the scope of this work can be found on the CTBI website.²

4. Scotland

- 4.1. The newly formed Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, born out of a commitment to call the churches in Scotland to prayer each week throughout the pandemic period, continues to meet less frequently and whilst deliberately relational, focuses on common goals, needs and facing Church communities in that nation.
- 4.2. The EMU (Episcopal, Methodist, United Reformed) partnership continues to work towards models of ecumenical sharing in times of decreasing resource and missional opportunity.

5. England

- 5.1. Churches Together in England (CTE) continues to increase in membership and at its Forum meeting in March this year 52 member churches were represented as well as an increasing number of bodies in association. The theme of the Forum was 'Reconciling Hope – a broken Church for a broken world.' The Forum Moderator is Dionne Gravesande, a senior manager at Christian Aid and member of the New Testament Church of God. The Deputy Moderator is Anton Muller, County Ecumenical Officer for Lancashire and a parish priest (Church of England). The Methodist Church in Britain sent 12 delegates to the Forum and other Methodists attended by dint of roles they hold or at their own expense.
- 5.2. CTE has constituted a Racial Justice Working Group which is working in collaboration with CTBI. The Methodist Church is represented in this group by the Equalities and Diversity Adviser, Bevan Powell. CTE's contribution includes its wide range of member churches and the prioritisation of addressing these issues by the historic churches.

6. Wales

- 6.1. Cytûn (Eglwysi ynghyd yng Nghymru /Churches Together in Wales) has continued to offer support to the churches in Wales in issues relating to church and society, faith and witness, and Wales and Europe. Additionally this year there has been close working with the devolved administration in relation to response to the pandemic in Wales.
- 6.2. The Commission of Covenanted Churches is continuing to work towards further development of the covenant relationship with an emphasis on shared ministry.

7. The Free Churches Group (FCG)

- 7.1. The Free Churches Group comprises 26 churches promoting working together where possible while recognising that each member fulfils its own distinctive witness and mission.
- 7.2. The Free Churches Group has appointed the Revd Helen Cameron (Chair of the Northampton District) as its Moderator and she was inducted at a service hosted by Wesley's Chapel on 3 April. Helen also now serves as one of the six Presidents of Churches Together in England.

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

- 8.1. The aims of MAPUM are to:
 - Affirm and uphold the inseparability of Unity and Mission with the conviction that either can be fully addressed in isolation.

² <https://ctbi.org.uk>

- Promote working together in mission under the Covenant.
 - Share insights, address issues, and develop resources in local units in mission for both churches.
- 8.2. The work of MAPUM has been affected by the impact of COVID-19 on local ecumenism. The co-chairs intend to make personal visitations to specific ecumenical projects as soon as circumstances allow.
- 8.3. The Annual MAPUM Residential did not take place this year in respect to the limited Anglican participation, the Anglican Co-Chairperson would be unable to attend it as well as the Anglican Co-Secretary would be absent as the post of an Ecumenical Officer was vacant.
- 8.4. MAPUM has asked the Methodist Council to address again its position in relation to the request from the Church of England for liturgy to be written for a possible ceremony of mutual recognition of ministries.

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

- 9.1. The Liaison Group continues to work on the production of model constitutions for Methodist and URC United areas. This work has been ongoing for a number of years but it is hoped that a way forward can be found to the approval of the model constitution by the Charity Commission. Legal advice is being sought by both Churches.
- 9.2. Following the appreciation of the 'Introduction to the Methodist Church' for URC ministers and others appointed to LEPs with the Methodist Church another event is planned for the autumn of 2022.

10 **The British Methodist–Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission**

- 10.1 This year the Commission has explored the theme 'The Hierarchy of Truths'. It was a joy to meet in person this year and to share together in worship, learning and fellowship. The Commission keeps constantly in mind the question of how best to share the fruit of its meetings and conversations more widely and effectively.

11 **Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome (MEOR)**

- 11.1 The Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome is a presence for the World Methodist Council:
- To be a channel of dialogue with other churches in the search for a deeper unity.
 - To foster relationships with other agencies and faith communities in order to promote better understanding and joint action for justice and peace.
 - To offer a ministry of prayer and reflection, of learning and growth.
 - to be a place of open hospitality to Methodists and all visitors to Rome.
- 11.2 The work of MEOR is overseen by a Forum, the members of which are the World Methodist Council, the Methodist Church of Great Britain, the European Methodist Council, the United Methodist Church Office of Christian Unity and Inter-Religious Relationships and OPCEMI (The Methodist Churches in Italy).
- 11.3 The Revd Matthew A Laferty, a presbyter from the United Methodist Church and a Mission Partner of the Methodist Church in Britain has now been in role for almost two years and has made extraordinary progress in developing and deepening relationships with a range of churches and projects, this despite the context of the global pandemic.
- 11.4 MEOR's work in 2021-2022 has continued to focus on relationship building, as well as engaging with the Pope's call of the Roman Catholic Church to a season of 'synodality.'

*****RESOLUTION**

15/1. The Conference received the Report.