

10. Ecumenical Report

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Subject and aims	To outline the range of the Methodist Church's ecumenical activity and relationships.
Consultation	Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum

1. Introduction

- 1.1. "The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ."¹ The range of the Methodist Church's ecumenical activity and relationships is, therefore, very wide. The majority are at local and circuit level and the sharing of stories about them, including through *The Buzz*, can be an inspiration to others to fulfil 'our ecumenical calling', 'making a difference together in the twenty-first century', often in practical ways by seeking opportunities to share with other Christians in worship, learning and caring, serving, and evangelism. The Methodist Church's ecumenical Vision Statement also talks of supporting our ecumenical partners in our common mission and of celebrating our unique identity.
- 1.2. This report outlines ecumenical activities and relationships which relate to, interact with, and resource those at local and circuit level. It would be impossible for the report to be comprehensive but it is hoped that it, too, can be an inspiration to fulfil our ecumenical calling.

2. The World Council of Churches (WCC)

- 2.1. "The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."² It was formally inaugurated in 1948, the Methodist Church having decided to join the proposed Council in 1939.
- 2.2. The World Council of Churches continues to encourage Christians and its more than 340 member churches to be involved in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace that was launched at the Busan Assembly in 2013. The Pilgrimage website is intended to be "a place where pilgrims can explore together what it means to embark on a pilgrimage, how it deepens spirituality, and out of the experience causes one to reach out to fellow pilgrims to join the movement toward justice and peace." It is hoped that congregations, classes, and other groups can use the website as a resource to discern their particular path in the pilgrimage.³

3. The Conference of European Churches (CEC)

- 3.1. The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is an ecumenical fellowship of churches in Europe which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to Scripture, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

¹ Deed of Union, clause 4 (www.methodist.org.uk/media/1841903/2483_conf_2015_cpd_vol_2.pdf, p.213).

² www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us

³ www.wccpilgrimage.org/en

- 3.2. Last summer, and following on from its Assembly in 2013, CEC published *Conference of European Churches Roadmap 2015-2018: Forging Our Future*;⁴ it calls CEC member churches, organisations in partnership, and national councils of churches to an open dialogue addressing contemporary European issues to strengthen our common efforts for advocacy, bridge-building, peace and justice in a European society increasingly torn by the economic crisis, conflicts, and aggression.

4. The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)

- 4.1. This past year, the desperate situation of hundreds of thousands of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers has rarely been far from the news headlines. Churches have responded in a variety of ways and at all levels, often in partnership with other churches and agencies.⁵ Among these has been the work of the CCME, which was founded in 1964 and is "an ecumenical organisation that serves the churches in their commitment to promote the vision of an inclusive community through advocating for an adequate policy for migrants, refugees and minority groups at European and national level. In the fulfilment of this mandate it is responding to the message of the Bible which insists on the dignity of every human being and to the understanding of unity as devoid of any distinction between strangers and natives."⁶
- 4.2. CCME's work includes the Safe Passage project that responds to the ongoing migration and refugee situation in the Mediterranean. Last year's Ecumenical Report referred to a presentation by Dr Alessia Passarelli of the Methodist Church in Bologna, Italy, on research for *Mapping Migration – Churches' Responses*. In January of this year, the CCME and WCC published a revised and updated edition of that joint study.⁷

5. The Conference of Protestant Churches in Europe

- 5.1. The Leuenberg Agreement was signed on 16 March 1973. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) is an umbrella organisation of Protestant churches; representing around 50 million Protestants from over thirty countries in Europe and South America
- 5.2. Last October CPCE held a forum on education in Europe entitled Focal points of Protestant education in Europe. Four focal points were explored during the consultation: Protestant-run schools, voluntary work in churches and society, religious education in the face of dissipating traditions, and teaching for the community. The forum was attended by the Methodist Church's Director of Education, Barbara Easton. Reports on the forum and an interview with Barbara Easton are available in the 26th edition of CPCE's publication *focus*.⁸

6. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

- 6.1. This past year, CTBI has provided, as usual, resources for Racial Justice Sunday (*Hospitality and Sanctuary for All*), the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (*Salt of the Earth*, which was adapted from the material prepared for worldwide use by Christians in Latvia) and Lent (*Pilgrimage*). Racial Justice Sunday has now moved to the second Sunday in February and Education Sunday, which has been observed in England and Wales for more than 100 years, has moved to the second Sunday in September, close to the start of the academic year.

⁴ http://ceceurope.org/fileadmin/filer/cec/CEC_Roadmap_01.pdf

⁵ For some examples, see <https://ctbi.org.uk/how-the-churches-are-responding-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

⁶ The quotation is from the CCME Mission Statement; see www.ccme.be/who-we-are/.

⁷ Darrell Jackson and Alessia Passarelli, *Mapping Migration, Mapping Churches' responses in Europe: Belonging, Community, and Integration: the Witness and Service of Churches in Europe* (www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/70_DOWNLOADS/20_Publications/2016-01-08-Mapping_Migration_2015_Online_lo-res_2_.pdf).

⁸ www.leuenberg.net/focus

- 6.2. This report had to be written well before CTBI's AGM on 11 May. The draft agenda, however, was available and it was good to see that significant time was to be given to a presentation of CTBI's work plan and work going forward. It is hoped that this will provide an opportunity for representatives of the member churches to engage more fully in a conversation with CTBI's trustees and staff about its role.

7. Scotland

- 7.1. The Scotland District has, once again, been represented at the Assemblies or Synods of partner churches in Scotland. The District's Ecumenical Forum in January was attended by the General Secretary of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and the Connexional Ecumenical Officer; it shared in a wide-ranging conversation on ecumenism in Scotland, including the role of ACTS.
- 7.2. The Episcopal, Methodist, URC (EMU) Partnership has now received the five-year review set down in the Partnership Agreement; the Review Group's report was presented to and discussed by the EMU Steering Group in January. It was agreed that this report should be sent to the appropriate denominational committees during 2016 and proposals brought to the three synods in the spring of 2017. The three partner churches' committees have been asked to consider several possible outcomes: (a) to disband the EMU Partnership; (b) to continue seeking to further the aims and intentions of the Partnership; (c) to move to exploring something new, possibly through ACTS or with other partners; (d) consider other options. The extended timetable was considered important to enable wider participation in the process and the involvement of all the church leaders.

8. England

- 8.1. The triennial Forum of Churches Together in England (CTE) took place last September, focusing on the Orthodox Churches, Pentecostalism, and Young People. The Methodist Church appointed twelve representatives but many other Methodists attended in other capacities. It is generally agreed that it was a very good Forum.
- 8.2. CTE continues to grow and now has 44 member churches with six Presidents; it relates to 49 Intermediate Bodies, 2,600 local groups, and 900 local partnerships. Its Enabling Group has reviewed the 2015 Forum and looked forward to the one in 2018 when the Revd Ruth Gee will be the Moderator. It has received presentations about two member churches, the Church Census, and the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation,⁹ and has considered matters relating to membership (which involved a consultation with member churches to which the Methodist Council responded) and a new framework for local mission in unity. The latter has been sent to the member churches and MAPUM (see below) has started to work with it. In March, the Enabling Group was informed of a major cut (just under 20%) to CTE's income for 2017; the Board has accepted that, in the short term, this can be met out of reserves. The Enabling Group supported the proposal for a wide and open consultation, primarily of a theological and spiritual nature, to discern what the shape of ecumenical engagement should be in England from 2018 onwards.

9. The Free Churches Group (FCG)

- 9.1. In addition to its ongoing work in the areas of education and of healthcare and prison chaplaincy, the Free Churches Group has continued to discuss its future role and update its

⁹ See the Statement from Presidents of CTE who represent the Western traditions of the Church at www.cte.org.uk/Articles/462002/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Commemorating_Reformation_1517.asp
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governance arrangements. The Revd Paul Rochester of the Church of God of Prophecy has been appointed General Secretary of the Free Churches Group.

10. Wales

- 10.1. In the autumn of last year, following its consideration of the responses to the recommendations launched at the Gathering in October 2012, the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales offered a presentation to the Synods or Diocesan Conferences of partner churches. A key challenge is how to continue to address serious theological issues whilst looking to strengthen ecumenical relationships and encourage working together in local mission.
- 10.2. Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales continues to play a key role in coordinating the Churches' response to public issues in Wales, including those of refugees, planning policy on historic buildings, and witness and events. Resources were produced in conjunction with CTBI and JPIT for the Assembly elections in May.

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

- 11.1. The Rt Revd John Wraw (Bishop of Bradwell) was welcomed as the new Church of England Co-Chair at the Panel's meeting in April. This followed on from a meeting of the Co-Chairs of both MAPUM and the Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group during which MAPUM's contribution to advocating the Covenant in Dioceses, Districts, and Circuits was considered; the subject was then explored further in the meeting of the Panel.
- 11.2. One aspect of MAPUM's work is to support and advise the Methodist Church and the Church of England at local and regional level in giving priority to making full use of what is already possible for them to do together, and especially to plan together for mission and worship, deployment of ministry and the use of resources. In this, and more widely, MAPUM recognises the importance of ensuring that people are aware of the opportunities and tools that are already available (ie, refreshing the corporate memory) as well as encouraging their use.
- 11.3. Another aspect of MAPUM's work has been the new framework for local unity in mission, which seeks to respond to the increasingly diverse ecumenical landscape. One key task is shared theological reflection on visions of unity in mission, holiness, and worship; the Panel gave some time to this in both of its meetings this year. Another key task is to discern the opportunities the new framework offers and the challenges it raises; the Panel has begun to identify some of these and shall need to work with others to respond fully. Some denominations, for example, are encouraging the use of a relatively new type of charity called a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and would like to see it being used in ecumenical settings, such as single congregation local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs); it would be helpful if the Methodist Church were to consider their use for various ecumenical purposes.

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

- 12.1. The Liaison Group focuses on the local and intermediate dimensions of the relationship between the Methodist Church and the URC. During the past year, it has considered the report made to the 2015 Conference on *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21st Century* and awaits the reflections on it by the URC's Faith and Order Committee. The Group has held a consultation with ecumenical (united) areas in Wales and England and considered the new framework for local unity in mission, a number of matters about single congregation LEPs (including alternating and shared ministry, termed appointments for URC ministers, and finance), and items relating distinctly to England, Scotland, and Wales. The Revd Nicola Furley-

Smith (Moderator of the Southern Synod) was welcomed as the new URC Co-Chair at the Group's meeting in March.

13. The British Methodist-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission

- 13.1. This past year, the Commission has focused on *Sacred Scripture – the Word of God*. It has explored theologies of revelation, Scripture, and tradition as well as the use of Scripture in Methodist hymnody. The members have been led in the exercise of *lectio divina* and discussed this and other approaches to reading Scripture. Last autumn's Synod of Bishops on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World was clearly very significant for the Roman Catholic Church and the Commission has been able to hear reflections from two of its members who were present.
- 13.2. This summer, the tenth report of the International Commission for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council will be published entitled *The Call to Holiness*.

14. Methodist Ecumenical Office, Rome (MEOR)

- 14.1. Just before the 2015 Conference, there was a meeting of stakeholders of the MEOR and the past year has witnessed many significant events and developments for the Office.¹⁰ The Revd Dr Tim Macquiban, its Director, represented the World Methodist Council as a Fraternal Delegate at the Synod of Bishops on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World; he has also fulfilled a number of teaching invitations, contributed to conferences, and attended, led, or preached at a variety of special services. An apartment has now been refurbished and equipped for the Office and a part-time secretary appointed. In Holy Week, the Vice-President of the Conference visited Rome and, in addition to focusing on mission and heritage, attended the service to inaugurate the 50th anniversary year of the Anglican Centre.
- 14.2. In April, an enlarged Stakeholders' Forum met in Rome with representatives of the British Methodist Church, L'Opera per le Chiese Evangeliche Metodiste in Italia (OPCEMI), the World Methodist Council, the European Methodist Council, the United Methodist Church, and The Wesley (Rome). They were joined for a service of dedication and the official launch of the MEOR by representatives of the Vatican and the Anglican Communion, and members of the diplomatic corps and churches in Rome. Following their meeting, members of the Forum were received by Pope Francis in a private audience and then met with members of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU).

15. District Ecumenical Officers (DEOs)

- 15.1. Most Districts have one or more District Ecumenical Officers who, with others, fulfil an invaluable role encouraging and supporting ecumenical relationships and activities; they also encourage and challenge Local Churches, Circuits, and Districts to work ecumenically. This year's annual meeting of DEOs focused on ecumenical partnerships in extended areas and, like MAPUM and the MURCLG, the new framework for local unity in mission.
- 15.2. Last November, the Anglican-Methodist Ecumenical Officers' Consultation took the opportunity to explore the 2014 report of the Anglican-Methodist International Commission for Unity in Mission called, *Into All the World: Being and Becoming Apostolic Churches*.¹¹ The three tool kits at the end of the report were helpful, one of which is for churches at the local level. The consultation also received the presentation of the Commission of the Covenanted

¹⁰ Further information and reports from the Director are available at www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/relationships-with-other-denominations/ecumenism-in-europe/the-methodist-ecumenical-office-rome

¹¹ www.anglicancommunion.org/media/102827/Into-All-The-World-AMICUM-Report-2014.pdf

Churches in Wales (see above) and looked at some of the ongoing work under the Covenant with the Church of England. The consultation then returned to the global picture: acknowledging the significance of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the visit of the Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, to the Archbishop of Canterbury earlier that week, and the then imminent COP21 Climate Change Summit. The ecumenical officers engaged in a session on climate change with Steve Hucklesby of the Joint Public Issues Team.

16. The Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church: 18-27 June 2016 in Crete

- 16.1. It is appropriate that this report draws attention to the long-awaited Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church in June because it is such a historic event. The issues to be reviewed focus primarily on matters relating to the internal operation and life of the Orthodox Church; nevertheless, there are also issues pertaining to the relations of Orthodoxy with the rest of the Christian world, as well as the mission of the Orthodox Church.

17. 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation

- 17.1. The Council of Lutheran Churches and others are planning a number of events in 2017 to mark the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. Arrangements are in hand for a Lutheran/Moravian/Methodist event on 20 May 2017 on hymnody in the life of the Church. It is to be called *My Heart Strangely Warmed*, include an academic conference as part of the larger event, and be hosted by the Moravian School, Fulneck, Pudsey.
- 17.2. In 2017, the Kirchentag in Germany is also marking the anniversary; the theme is *You see me* (Genesis 16:13) and is to be held in Berlin and Wittenberg from 24-28 May. On 16-18 October 2017, a conference for ecumenical officers is being arranged at Swanwick on the theme of living with the legacy of the Reformation.

18. The Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum (ESF)

- 18.1. The Forum has continued to develop an overview of the Methodist Church's ecumenical activity and relationships in order to help in their evaluation and to ensure coherence and consistency in the representation of a Methodist perspective. It has considered the report *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, the consultation paper on the new framework for local unity in mission referred to above, and emerging ecumenical issues within and beyond the Connexion, including those relating to ecumenical instruments. The Forum has been consulted about nominations and invitations to various bodies.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 10/1. The Conference received the Report.**