Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolutions	11/1. The Conference adopts the Report as its response to *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission.* 11/2. The Conference commends *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission* to the Methodist people for study and discussion.

Summary of Content and Impact

Subject and aims	A response from the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain to the 2022 report of the international ecumenical dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission, available from https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/god-in-christ-reconciling--on-the-way-to-full-communion-in-faith.html

A response to the report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church: *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission*

1. Introduction and background

1.1 *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission* (Gothenburg, 2022) is the eleventh report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman

Catholic Church.[1] Reports of the International Commission are usually published at five-yearly intervals to coincide with meetings of the World Methodist Conference and are informally named after its location. *God in Christ Reconciling* is an exception due to the COVID-19 pandemic: it was published a year late and is known as 'Gothenburg', the venue of the delayed Conference that took place there in August 2024.[2]

1.2 The Methodist Church in Britain is grateful to the members of the International Commission who produced this thoughtful, careful, and challenging report. It welcomes the way in which the report draws out and affirms common ground and encourages the Churches to build on this and further Christian unity, while also being honest about continuing differences.

1.3 In their Preface to the report, dated Pentecost 2021, the Co-Chairs note that although 'reconciliation is a central theme of the New Testament … it has never previously been the subject of theological dialogue at the world level.' Earlier reports spoke of the need for 'an act of reconciliation' (e.g., Singapore, §94) and sought to prepare for such an act in the spirit of 'unity by stages' (e.g., Seoul, §139-164). The Seoul report also offered an 'envoi' in the form of a scriptural meditation on 2 Corinthians 5:17 – 6:1 (Seoul, §165-171). *God in Christ Reconciling* 'investigates how Catholics and Methodists respectively exercise the Church's ministry of reconciliation and the implications for our bilateral relationship'; as the subtitle reflects, it also addresses 'the missionary imperative that our imperfect communion be reconciled so that our witness may become a more effective sign, instrument, and foretaste of the reconciliation that God wills for all peoples and the whole of creation.'

1.4 In Called to Love and Praise (1999), the British Methodist Church affirmed that 'God's purpose is the reconciliation and renewal of humankind, not solely or primarily the creation of the Church, although the vocation of the Church is to

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1 The text of the report is available here: https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/god-in-christ-reconciling--on-the-way-to-full-communion-in-faith.html (viewed 16 January 2026). Most references to the report are by paragraph number but those using page numbers refer to the online edition rather than the printed one.

2 All eleven reports, most with a 'commentary' by a Roman Catholic, are available here: http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo.html (viewed 16 January 2026). The previous ten reports are listed in Appendix 1. In 2011, the International Commission published *Synthesis: Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue* (*Synthesis*) and in 2025, it published *We believe in one God: Sixty years of Methodists and Catholics walking together* (*We believe in one God*); details of these reports are also provided in Appendix 1.

anticipate that renewal in its life and worship.'[3] It also said, 'As agent of God's mission, the Church is a sign, foretaste and instrument of the kingdom.'[4] The Conference, therefore, rejoices at this resonance and welcomes the subject of this report.[5]

1.5 As the Co-Chairs say, 'reconciliation is a timely subject for dialogue' and 'the need for reconciliation between peoples and between humankind and the planet has never been more urgent than at the present time.' Sadly, there have been further examples of division since they wrote that Preface, including Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the subsequent war, the conflict in Sudan dating from April 2023, and the Hamas assault on Israel on 7 October 2023 followed by Israel's devastating response. As this report is being finalised for the Conference Agenda, the conflict in Iran and the wider Middle East and its destabilising effects across the globe are deeply concerning to the whole world. In this context, the Conference recalls that the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2022 took the theme, 'Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity'.

1.6 In addition to what has already been said about the subtitle of this report, it is important to note that it is also a reference to what the International Dialogue has called 'the ultimate goal of our dialogue' (*Synthesis*, §3; *We believe in one God*, §3) which was first stated in the Nairobi report: 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' (Nairobi, §20 and 38).[6]

1.7 In 2003, the British Methodist Conference received a report on and summary of the work of the International Commission up to and including the Rio report. It also received a summary of the Brighton report and adopted a response to it.[7] In 2007, 2014, and 2018, the Conference adopted responses to the Seoul, Durban, and Houston reports respectively.[8] This response to *God in Christ Reconciling*

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3 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §2.4.12 (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-called-to-love-and-praise-1999_58L8adR.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).
4 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §1.4.1; see also §2.3.19.
5 It is worth noting that the predecessor to Called to Love and Praise (1999), namely The Nature of the Christian Church (1937) has significantly more uses of the word 'reconciliation' (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-nature-of-the-christian-church-1937_NGlQWbC.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).
6 See also Ut Unum Sint (1998), §3 (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-ut-unum-sint-1998_vHTczto.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026). There is no explanation as to the different order in the subtitle of *God in Christ Reconciling*.
7 *Conference Agenda* (2003), p.161-180, which is available here: https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-roman-catholic-methodist-conversations-2003_ur2icr2.pdf (viewed 30 March 2026).
8 See *Conference Agenda* (2007), p.451-462 https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf07_56_Faith_and_Order_pc.doc; viewed 16 January 2026), *Conference Agenda* (2014), p.320-331 https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-2014-35-faith-and-order-committee.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026),

continues this pattern, offering reflections from the British Methodist perspective whilst recognising that our sister Methodist Churches around the world live, believe, worship, and serve in different contexts.

2. Scriptural Meditation: Luke 15:11-32

2.1 The passage for the scriptural meditation is reproduced from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (Anglicised Edition). The meditation helpfully begins by questioning the usual title given to the parable. Since Jesus begins the parable by stating, 'There was a man who had two sons', it is worth asking why it has so often been called the parable of the prodigal son, including by editors of a number of versions of the Bible. The meditation claims that, in many ways, 'it is more appropriate to refer to this story as the parable of the two sons.' Having said that, it also says 'the focus of the story is the father's overflowing love, expressed in mercy and generosity towards his sons.'

2.2 The meditation continues by reflecting on the first part of the parable about the younger son noting that 'the dramatic and otherworldly description of his repentance and restoration' is 'more powerful than [the] vivid picture of [his] rebellion and fall'. Once again, attention is drawn to the father, who 'displays the divine characteristics of love, graciousness, mercy, and forgiveness.'

2.3 'The story is incomplete,' says the meditation, 'without mention of the elder son.' His 'bitterness and envy make him just as lost as the younger son and similarly cut off from sharing joyfully in the life of the family.' He is 'absorbed by expectations of merit and reward' and 'trapped by self-righteousness and resentment, he cannot bring himself to say "my brother" but instead speaks contemptuously [to his father] of "this son of yours".' The meditation highlights the way in which the father, once again, goes out to one of his sons and it affirms, '[t]he unifying character in this story is the father, whose gracious love is extended both to his younger, unrighteous son and to his elder, self-righteous son.'

2.4 The meditation concludes by saying that 'the parable helps us understand that reconciliation is principally a gift of the heavenly Father, who is "rich in mercy" and always ready to forgive', that 'in every person, we can find a mixture of both brothers who stand in need of reconciliation', and that 'the Church's mission of reconciliation is the initiative of the God who is rich in love and mercy to all.' The

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and *Conference Agenda* (2018), p.486-499 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2018-35-Call-to-Holiness-response_jB079lg.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).

Conference agrees with these three statements, it endorses the affirmation that 'each Christian community is challenged to recognise within itself the traits of both sons and those of the father' (§3) and, with Pope Francis on receiving a copy of *God in Christ Reconciling* in October 2022, acknowledges that both Methodists and Catholics need to repent and return to the Father in order for unity to come about because, through their divisions, both have sinned and strayed from the Father.[9]

3. Chapter One: God's Reconciling Work in Christ (§1-30)

3.1 The focus of the first chapter of the report is God's reconciling work in Christ. The chapter explores the theme in six sections:

- 'The Longing for Reconciliation: The Parable of the Two Sons';
- 'The Gift of Creation: God's Original Plan and Humanity's Original Failure';
- 'The Gift of Reconciliation: Christ is our Peace';
- 'The Church: Minister of Reconciliation';
- 'The Church: Pilgrim of Reconciliation'; and
- 'God's Appeal to Methodists and Catholics: Be Reconciled'.

3.2 The first section begins by stating that reconciliation is 'one of the ways in which scripture speaks of God's redemptive mission to the world' and that '[i]n faith we welcome the divine initiative and are brought into right relationship with God' (§1). The report then draws on the increasingly significant *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) and on the World Methodist Council's *Statement of Association* with it (MAJDDJ).[10] The first said: 'By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts whilst equipping and calling us to good works' (JDDJ, §15). The Gothenburg report then reminds us that Paul said that the gifts of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29) and give rise

9 See https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/2022/10/12/methodist-roman-catholic-international-commission-communique-on-the-plenary-meeting-in-october-2022/ (viewed 16 January 2026).

10 The JDDJ was made by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999 (http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-giustificazion/en.html; viewed 16 January 2026). The World Methodist Council associated itself with the JDDJ in 2006 (https://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wmcs-statement-of-assocation-with-the-joint-declaration-of-the-doctrine-of-justification/ (sic); viewed 16 January 2026). (Also see The World Methodist Council and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in *Conference Agenda* (2005), p.189-193 (https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/co_10_fandocomm_0505.doc; viewed 16 January 2026).) In 2016 the Anglican Consultative Council welcomed and affirmed the JDDJ and in 2017 the Communion of Reformed Churches associated itself with the JDDJ.

to a responsibility, a mission in the world (2 Corinthians 5:20); as the MAJDDJ put it: 'By God's grace believers are commissioned and empowered to tell people that God has reconciled the world to himself and to entreat them on behalf of Jesus Christ to be reconciled to God' (MAJDDJ, §4.1). The Conference welcomes the International Commission's references to these two documents and concurs with its view that the Methodist Statement of Association 'provides a theological framework for affirming and developing convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the nature of reconciliation and the Church's ministry of reconciliation' (§144).

3.3 Reflecting on the parable of the two sons, the report continues by emphasising 'the primacy of God's gracious initiative of forgiveness and the need of forgiveness between our Christian communities' (§2). It then challenges each Christian community 'to recognise within itself the traits of both sons and those of the father' and asks a series of pertinent and searching questions for all Methodists and Roman Catholics beginning, 'Have we really discovered and received God's gift of reconciliation?' (§3). These are questions for Methodist Local Churches, Circuits, and Districts, and Roman Catholic parishes and dioceses, as well as national and international dialogues.[11] How, corporately, better attention might be paid to such questions is an enormous challenge but, as the report says, 'God's gift of reconciliation in Christ is given not only that we might live in harmony with each other but also that the credibility of the Church's mission, damaged by division, might be restored' (§3) because 'the need for reconciliation reaches beyond the walls of divided ecclesial communions' (§5).

3.4 The report rightly claims that 'the presence of the Spirit keeps the longing for reconciliation from settling for superficial solutions and premature resolutions' (§6); it also alerts us to the danger of the language of 'reconciliation' being 'co-opted by people in power' and becoming 'synonymous with appeasement'. Later, the report says that forgiveness is the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with human persons, but also in relationships between people' (§17). In recent years, the Methodist Church has reflected on the nature of forgiveness. In 2021, the Conference adopted the report, The Theology of Safeguarding, that stated:

> The idea that forgiveness between two individuals is always possible is unhelpful at best and profoundly damaging in contexts of abuse. The forgiveness which human beings are called to offer is not the same thing as the forgiveness which God offers. When the Church speaks of reconciliation,

11 Cf the conclusion on p.434 of Ut Unum Sint (1998).

> it is reconciliation with God which leads to human flourishing. Reconciliation between individuals may be an aspect of this, but it is not always possible or desirable. God forgives in order to release and bring wholeness. Any Christian understanding of forgiveness has to recognise what makes for wholeness and what does not in different contexts.[12]

3.5 The Conference affirms the Gothenburg report's emphasis that the divine purpose embraces the whole of creation (§7) and that reconciliation, therefore, has 'cosmic dimensions' (§19). In addition to the earlier reference to Called to Love and Praise (1999) (§1.4 above), it should be noted that the Methodist Church's joint work with the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church on Christian discipleship in the context of climate change, makes similar points when it says, 'the reconciliation of all things to God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from God's act of creation (Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 1:9-10).'[13]

3.6 The brief but challenging consideration of the word 'reconciliation' in §15, both as a social and political term and in the New Testament is appreciated. The reminder that God's reconciling work in Christ is not limited to his passion, death, and resurrection but involves the whole Christ event is received with gratitude. In this report the hymns of Charles Wesley are referred to only in the 'Ecumenical Liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation' at its end; the reference to Athanasius in footnote 7, however, prompts a recalling of Charles' great hymn, 'Let earth and heaven combine' with its lines:

> He deigns in flesh to appear,
> widest extremes to join;
> to bring our vileness near,
> and make us all divine:
> and we the life of God shall know,
> for God is manifest below.[14]

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12 The Theology of Safeguarding, §8.8 (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2021-27-the-theology-of-safeguarding_NsSFKxd.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).

13 *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change*, third edition (2020), §1.1 (https://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Hope-in-Gods-Future-3rd-Edition.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026); a further draft Conference Statement is expected to be presented to the Conference in 2027.

14 First published in *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* (London, William Strahan, 1745), no.5; the above version is *Singing the Faith* (London, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 2011), no.208, v.4; cf the first Collect for the first Sunday of Christmas in *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 1999) (*MWB*), p.527 which is a translation of the Collect for the first Mass of Christmas in the Leonine Sacramentary.

In relation to the incarnation, the line, 'God and sinners reconciled' in the more famous hymn, 'Hark! The herald-angels sing' should also be recalled.[15]

3.7 The Conference welcomes the statement that 'God's reconciliation through Christ in the Spirit has social dimensions' (§18) because of the Wesleyan and Methodist emphasis on social holiness. As the report notes in chapter 3, the historic practice of watching over one another in love through the societies, class meetings, and (intimate) bands facilitated reconciliation (§93) and versions of these groups persist today among some Methodists. The term 'social holiness' has, for many Methodists, become a wider concept and some aspects of this are considered in chapter 4 of the report.

3.8 In the section on 'The Church: Minister of Reconciliation' (§22-24) we are hesitant about referring to John 20:21-23 so early in the discussion (§22) because, as the report goes on to show, the ministry of reconciliation is multi-faceted. Moreover, John 20:23 is one of the texts referred to in the section of chapter 3 that is, 'Clarifying Historical Disagreement and Identifying Common Ground' (§105).

4. Chapter Two: The Church: Reconciled with One Another through Faith in Christ (§31-67)

4.1 The focus of chapter two is the Church: it 'investigates the respective means by which Catholics and Methodists each maintain their visible unity in legitimate diversity', recognising that 'the realisation of these structures is often flawed, failing to preserve either unity or sufficient diversity and, to that extent, they are always in need of reform and renewal' and that 'a church in which Methodists and Catholics were united would require renewed structures to reconcile our two communions whilst maintaining the rich diversity of our distinctive spiritual endowments and ecclesial heritage' (§31).

4.2 The chapter has eight sections:

- 'From Estrangement to Friendship';
- 'The Unity We Seek';
- 'Ecclesial Structures in the Service of Reconciliation';
- 'Local Structures of Communion';

15 This 'Hymn for Christmas-Day' was first published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London, William Strahan, 1739) with the opening line, 'Hark how all the welkin rings' and v.1, l.4. 'God and sinners reconcil'd!'; the revised versions of these lines quoted in the main text above are from *Singing the Faith*, no.202, v.1.

- 'Regional Structures of Communion';
- 'Global Structures of Communion';
- 'Papal Primacy: Reconciling Ministry or Obstacle to Reconciliation?'; and
- 'Towards a Conversion of the Papacy in Our Time'.

4.3 The first section of this chapter includes some brief historical reflections on the relationship between Methodism and the Roman Catholic Church (§32-36). Both the quotation from the Denver report of 1971 that Methodist-Catholic relations bear 'none of the historical, emotional problems consequent on a history of schism' (§33)[16] and the warning not to 'exaggerate unduly the significance of irenic texts such as John Wesley's 'Letter to a Roman Catholic' (1749)' (§33) are appreciated. On the other hand, since, as the Commission reminds us, '[how] the past is remembered shapes how the present and future are faced' (§28), there is a concerning lack of nuance in the reference to 'the acrimonious history of relations between Catholics and Methodists' (§33) and the statement, 'Well into the twentieth century, Methodists remained vehemently anti-Catholic, sometimes refusing to regard Catholics as Christians' (§34). The difficulty of writing brief summaries is recognised but since, with the Commission, the Conference hopes and prays that there is to be a 'healing of memories' a more balanced account would be helpful; an example of what is meant can be found in chapter 1 of the Seoul report (especially §11) which acknowledges social, cultural, and political contexts and factors as well as religious ones that shaped Catholic-Methodist relations, both as churches and as individuals.[17]

4.4 The second section is an investigation into how 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' might be attained and made visible in the structures of the Church. The Conference welcomes the 'two important principles' stated in §38, namely:

16 The quotation is from Denver, §6; see also *Synthesis*, §2, *We believe in one God*, §2 and Ut Unum Sint (1998), §8.

17 See also Houston, §174 which acknowledges that 'relations between Methodists and Catholics differ greatly in different parts of the world' and points to 'historical, social, and ecclesiastical reasons' for this situation; cf Called to Love and Praise (1999), §3.1.4 which speaks of 'the rise of denominations, which usually originate out of a complex mixture of theological and non-theological factors.' We recall that *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (2001) included a chapter on the healing of memories in connection with the very different relationship between the British Methodist Church and the Church of England; it, too, pointed to theological and non-theological factors (https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/An-Anglican-Methodist-Covenant-Common-Statement.pdf, p.14-15 (§37-42); viewed 20 January 2026).

> 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' need not and should not imply a form of union whereby distinctive ecclesial identities are absorbed and lost within a homogenising structure

and:

> Nor is visible unity properly envisaged by a merely putative 'reconciled diversity' where churches remain entirely unchanged and independent of each other whilst declaring themselves to be in full communion.

These both resonate with parts of Called to Love and Praise (1999).[18] The link made between 'communion' and 'sharing in the life of the Trinity' (§39) is also helpful.[19]

4.5 The Seoul report of 2006 referenced earlier (§1.3 above) offered some 'general principles' and some 'practical proposals' for 'developing relations between Catholics and Methodists'. The practical proposals were gathered under three headings corresponding to the threefold 'ultimate goal' of the dialogue (Seoul, §146-162). We are grateful for the way in which the Commission investigates in §41-44 'precisely how 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' is attained and made visible in the structures of the Church' (§37).

4.6 The Conference concurs with the view that ecclesial structures are to serve a variety of aspects of the church, including its unity, reconciling mission, and integrity (§45 and 46). The affirmation that '[t]he practice of synodality is essential for the active engagement of the sense of the faith by the whole community of believers' and the recognition that '[for] Methodists, the connexional principle expresses [the] sense of walking together, and synodality is expressed in conferencing' (§46) is much appreciated. It is also the case that some of our structures and practices are shaped by or required by the laws of the countries in which we live; eg, charity laws. It is helpful to know that Pope Francis 'openly acknowledged that the functioning of Catholic structures for governance presently suffer from 'excessive centralisation' and 'monolithic uniformity', making local church communities less responsive to immediate needs for mission (EG §32)' (§46).[20] Called to Love and Praise (1999) offers some challenging reflections on this subject. It begins by saying that Methodism's order and discipline 'were created in the 'missionary' situation of the eighteenth

18 See, for example, Called to Love and Praise (1999), §3.1.3, 3.1.6-3.1.13.
19 Cf Called to Love and Praise (1999), §2.1.9.
20 The abbreviation 'EG' in the quotation refers to *Evangelii Gaudium* (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; viewed 20 January 2026).

century, and the legacy of this has been a tendency to subordinate church order to, and to deploy church resources in response to, the missionary needs of the Church'.[21] It goes on to acknowledge that 'there are challenges to be faced and warnings to be heeded', offering three examples: first, it asks whether the Methodist Church's structures help its members grow in holiness; secondly, it warns against 'becoming ponderous and inflexible', noting 'structures adapted to one missionary situation become perpetuated as hinderances to missionary activity in another'; and thirdly, 'in replacing those structures, there is the danger of being guided exclusively by the pastoral needs of settled congregations turned in on themselves.'[22] Nevertheless, it also says, 'the Methodist Church, pointing to its origins, and to Scripture, holds to the conviction that the Holy Spirit leads the Church to adapt its structures as it faces new situations and challenges. This flexibility is itself an important principle, rooted in Scripture, theology and experience.'[23] Our ecclesiology is essentially one of interdependence and collaboration; and our structures and ways of working and discipline reflect this.

4.7 §1.7 above noted some of the diversities of the World Methodist Council's member churches. In connection with this, in the section of this chapter on 'Local Structures of Communion', although the grouping together of Methodist local churches under the pastoral oversight of superintendents is cited (§50), there is no explicit reference to what British Methodism calls the 'circuit'. Called to Love and Praise (1999) said, 'no local church is an autonomous unit complete in itself. Circuit structures represent interdependence, relatedness, mutual responsibility, and submission to mutual jurisdiction. Indeed, the Circuit, rather than the local church, has been the primary church unit in British Methodism.'[24] One of our Standing Orders states: 'The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.'[25]

4.8 Gothenburg §51 seeks to deal with two very important subjects, both of which require much attention, but unhelpfully implies a particular relationship between them. The opening and concluding sentences are concerned with 'a proper relationship between lay and ordained', a subject also explored in §47. The rest of §51 is concerned with the abuse of power in various ways but suggests

21 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §4.7.9.
22 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §4.7.10.
23 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §4.7.11.
24 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §4.7.4.
25 *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (2025), Vol 2, p.474, Standing Order 500(1) (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/CPD-Vol-2-0825.pdf; viewed 20 January 2026).

that such abuses are almost always by the ordained of lay people; experience demonstrates that the reality is more complex.

4.9 Turning to the section on 'Regional Structures of Communion', the report claims that 'Methodists continue to be led by a desire to reassess the historic episcopate against the horizon of growth in unity with other Christian communions' (§55). Historically, John Wesley accepted bishops as a given in the contemporary Church of England, being more or less respectful to particular individuals, working with some and around others. Later generations saw the growth of the Methodist movement as evidence of God blessing a non-episcopal church and then were alienated by the post-Tractarian reassertion of episcopal exclusivity. More recently, over several decades, the British Conference, its Faith and Order Committee, and those engaged in some ecumenical dialogues have given significant time and effort to a reassessment of the historic episcopate.[26] In 2000, the Conference affirmed its willingness in principle to receive the sign of episcopacy on the basis of the guidelines set out in the report. Nevertheless, it has not yet done so and it is fair to say that outside ecumenical dialogues this is not a priority for most British Methodists. Some of the hesitation relates to what the report calls 'a suspicion of monarchical forms of episcopal oversight' (§50); in relation to this, it is worth noting that one of the guidelines adopted by the Conference in 2000 states that '*episkopé* should be exercised within a collegial or communal context' and another says that 'all ministries, including those of oversight, are exercised within the ministry of the whole people of God and at its service, rather than in isolation from it and supremacy over it'.[27] There are also concerns about the recognition of orders.

4.10 The final two sections of this chapter discuss aspects of the papacy (§60-67). In responding to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, the Conference 'rejoice[d] in the Pope's desire … to have dialogue with other Christians on the nature of the office of the Bishop of Rome' .[28] In 2013, during the first year of his

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26 This work was brought together in two major reports to the Conference in 1998 (Episcopacy (1998): (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-episcopacy-1998_2fidvJH.pdf; viewed 20 January 2026)) and 2000 (Episkopé and Episcopacy (2000): (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-episkope-and-episcopacy-2000_5YFhYOu.pdf; viewed 20 January 2026)). It has been developed further in the context of the Covenant between The Methodist Church and The Church of England (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2018-33-Mission-and-Ministry-in-Covenant_0TLMnhy.pdf; viewed 20 January 2026).

27 See Episkopé and Episcopacy (2000), §114, Guidelines 1(c) and 7 (emphasis original).

28 Ut Unum Sint (1997), seventh point (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/fo-statement-ut-unum-sint-1997_z99n8J0.pdf; viewed 20 January 2026); cf *Ut Unum Sint*, §96 (https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html; viewed 20 January 2026).

pontificate, Pope Francis observed that little progress had been made with regard to Pope John Paul II's desire to heed the request made of him 'to find a way of exercising the primacy which … is … open to a new situation.'[29] The Conference welcomes the reflections offered by the Commission that further the explorations in previous reports, most notably Nairobi and Brighton, and the recognition that further dialogue on these matters is required. Furthermore, the Conference notes the 2024 document *The Bishop of Rome* from the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and hopes that it will be a significant resource for all churches.[30]

5. Chapter Three: Rites and Practices of Reconciliation (§68-115)

5.1 The third chapter reflects on the way that our two communities have developed 'liturgical rites and spiritual practices of reconciliation'. We welcome the clarity and honesty in this chapter (in particular §96-112) and the framing of this material within an affirmation of our common Baptism. The Commission says: 'Catholics and Methodists understand their practices of reconciliation to derive from, correspond to, and participate in Jesus' own actions and practices: the solidarity with sinners which he expressed in his submission to baptism; his teaching and preaching; his calling of sinners to new life; his forgiveness of sins and restoration of persons to their community; his healing of the sick; his dignifying of outcasts and the marginalized; and his ongoing work as physician of souls' (§69).

5.2 The chapter has seven sections:

- 'Our Common Baptism';
- 'Eucharist and Reconciliation';
- 'Reconciliation and Liturgies of Word and Sacrament';
- 'Other Practices of Reconciliation';
- 'Distinctive Methodists Practices of Reconciliation';
- 'Distinctive Catholic Practices of Reconciliation: The Sacraments of Healing'; and
- 'Clarifying Historical Disagreement and Identifying Common Ground'

5.3 The report states that our common baptism and shared profession of faith mean that a 'sacramental bond of unity' already exists between us. Through Baptism, 'the sacrament of unconditional grace' (§71), 'we are reconciled with

29 *Evangelii Gaudium*, §32.
30 *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical* Ut Unum Sint*: A Study Document* (https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/altri-testi/the-bishop-of-rome.html).

God and incorporated into Christ's living body, the Church' (§72), and 'reconciled to each other … and with the Church of every time and place' (§72). Our baptism services certainly emphasise God's freely given love as well as the unconditional grace of God; some, however, may question whether all the various aspects of reconciliation are sufficiently clear.

5.4 The report appeared to lack any reference to confirmation in which 'those who have been baptized declare their faith in Christ and are strengthened by the Holy Spirit for continuing discipleship'[31] which, among other things, is marked by 'witness, by word and deed, to the good news of God in Christ',[32] including the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us.[33]

5.5 The Conference welcomes the positive evaluation of preaching in the third section of this chapter (§78). On what is probably the usual understanding of 'liturgical preaching' (ie, preaching in the context of the eucharist), it is fair to say that it is 'principally an element of ordained ministry'. Nevertheless, in British Methodism, local (lay) preachers may preach in this context as well as in the more frequent 'preaching services', most of which are conducted by Local Preachers. The orders of service for these in *The Methodist Worship Book* are both complete orders of worship and models on which other forms may be based; they provide for the sermon to be an integral part of the service following two or three readings from scripture (between which may be psalms, canticles, hymns or periods of silence) and the readings are often those set in the Revised Common Lectionary.[34] Some years ago, our Faith and Order Committee clarified the distinction between preaching, testimony, and exhortation: it said that preaching often includes the other two, 'but it goes further, by reflecting on and expounding Scripture, in the light of the faith of the Church and the needs of the

31 *MWB*, p.60.

32 *MWB*, p.72, no. 25; cf *Lumen Gentium*, §11 (https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; viewed 20 January 2026): '[The faithful] are more perfectly bound to the Church by the sacrament of Confirmation, and the Holy Spirit endows them with special strength so that they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith, both by word and by deed, as true witnesses of Christ.'

33 2 Corinthians 5:19.

34 See *MWB*, p.31 (no. 9-10) and 41 (no. 8-9); also see Guidance for Ordering a Morning, Afternoon, or Evening Service (*MWB*, p.51). *The Methodist Service Book* (London, Methodist Publishing House, 1975) offered an 'outline' order for a 'preaching service', explaining: 'In many churches of the Reformation tradition it has been the custom, once on a Sunday, for the shape of the service to reflect that of the complete order of Word and Sacrament even when there is no celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the outline that follows is offered as a guide for this purpose. Other outlines may be used for a second service' (p.B18/p.62).

world.'[35] The orders of service and the guidance for preaching services include a prayer of thanksgiving after the sermon in which thanks is offered for 'God's gift of creation and redemption in Christ through the Holy Spirit'[36] with, in some cases, provision for seasonal or other thanksgivings to be included.

5.6 The discussion about the position of the Peace in the eucharist (§83) including the recognition that 'the nature of the action as reconciliatory is lost when instead the peace serves as a gesture of greeting or fellowship' is helpful. It may be appropriate that a word such as 'solely' should be inserted before 'as a gesture of greeting or fellowship.' The Conference agrees with the suggestion that '[b]oth our communions might benefit from deep reflection on the implication of sharing the peace especially when, for whatever reasons, reconciliation is not possible and persons are unable honestly to express 'peace, communion, and charity' to each other'. A relevant example may be found in the story of Henry II's refusal to give the kiss of peace at Mass to Thomas Becket.[37] Reflecting the general pattern in other Methodist churches, most of our authorised liturgical texts locate the Peace prior to the eucharistic prayer, sometimes immediately before the preparation of the gifts and sometimes a little earlier.[38] One exception is Holy Communion in a Home or Hospital in which the Peace is the initial greeting.[39] It is also worth recording that one of our preaching services provides for the Peace: it follows the prayer of confession and declaration of forgiveness, the first element in 'The Response' after 'The Ministry of the Word', and precedes the offering (of gifts other than bread and wine) and prayer of dedication; the words of introduction are, 'Christ is our peace. In the one body we are reconciled to God and to one another.'[40]

5.7 At the start of chapter 3, the Commission says that 'Catholics and Methodists understand their practices of reconciliation to derive from, correspond to, and participate in Jesus's own actions and practices' (§69). While this statement can be affirmed, it is not yet clear whether Methodists do agree with Roman Catholics

35 See https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/superintendents/local-arrangement-services/ (viewed 16 January 2026)
36 *MWB*, p.51.
37 See, for example, Rowan Williams, *The Truce of God* (London, Fount Paperbacks, 1983), p.28f.
38 For the former, see *MWB*, p.215, no.16 and for the latter, see *MWB*, p.189, no.16 where it follows the intercessions and precedes the Creed. The significance of the position of the Peace in worship is briefly explored in guidance issued by our Faith and Order Committee on the practice of sharing the peace in Methodist churches, available at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/governance/faith-and-order/theology-and-practice-of-the-peace/ (viewed 16 January 2026).
39 *MWB*, p.223, no.1.
40 *MWB*, p.43, no.11; cf 'An Ecumenical Liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation' at the end of the Gothenburg report in which the Peace follows the prayer of repentance and reconciliation.

that 'the mission of the Church is to continue Jesus' ministry of forgiving sins' (§105) if, by this, is meant that the Church has the authority to do what God in Christ has already done. Methodists might rather affirm that one aspect of the mission of the Church is to proclaim and declare God's forgiveness, already accomplished in Christ; traditionally, Methodists have expressed a ministry of reconciliation through preaching the Gospel and counselling those who are seeking God's forgiveness. It is to be hoped that the rest of §105, emphasising the declaratory focus of this aspect of the Church's mission, and the section on 'Distinctive Methodist Practices of Reconciliation' (§91-95) will contribute to a clearer understanding of Methodist theology. It is also to be hoped that these clarifications of our different theological interpretations are not seen as divisive (cf §69).

5.8 The two references to *The Methodist Worship Book* in the section on 'Distinctive Methodist Practices of Reconciliation' (§91 and 94) are helpful. Attention is also drawn to two other services. The first, 'for healing and wholeness', focuses on God's desire for 'wholeness of body, mind and spirit for all people'[41] and so uses the term 'healing' in a comprehensive way. The prayer of confession, for example, affirms that Jesus 'came to reconcile us to God and to one another' and heals 'the wounds of sin and division'.[42] The prayers of intercession include petitions that Christ will 'bring healing and peace to all people', 'bring wholeness to all who are broken', and 'give peace to all who face death', 'bring light and life to the world', and 'unite all [Christ's] people in love'.[43] The second, Prayer with the Dying,[44] 'may be part of the process of reconciliation with God'. It is 'a service of readings and prayers which may be used either near or at the point of death' and includes the *Nunc Dimittis* (The Song of Simeon) and, among three options for the commendation, a version of the *Proficiscere* ('Go forth upon your journey') and one clearly influenced by it.[45]

5.9 The Commission acknowledges in the section on 'Clarifying Historical Disagreement and Identifying Common Ground' some Methodist concerns about 'the intermediary role of the Church' (§106). It would have been helpful to say more about this in terms of the classic Protestant (and Methodist) insistence on the individual's direct access to God for reconciliation and renewal, with Christ as

41 *MWB*, p.407.
42 *MWB*, p.409, no.4.
43 *MWB*, p.411f, no.15.
44 *MWB*, p.426-432.
45 The version of *Proficiscere* in *MWB* was included in the Appendix of resources for prayer and meditation in the Houston report. The prayer clearly influenced by *Proficiscere* is from *Uniting in Worship* (Melbourne, Uniting Church Press, 1988).

the only Mediator, and to recognise that the Methodist approach to the gospel of reconciliation does not start with the church.[46]

5.10 It can also be questioned whether John Wesley's distinction between 'sin, properly speaking' and 'sins of infirmity' does approach the Roman Catholic distinction between mortal and venial sin (§109). As the Commission says, 'Wesley rejected what he understood to be the Catholic teaching on the distinction' (§109); indeed, in response to the Mr (Richard) Hill referenced in footnote 52, Wesley said, 'I abhor the distinction.' This is of relevance because the distinction Wesley did make has been the subject of debate among Methodists.

6. Chapter Four: The Church's Ministry of Reconciliation in the World

6.1 The fourth chapter focuses on the reconciling mission of the Church in a world that is divided in a multitude of ways; it explores certain aspects of what Roman Catholics and Methodists can say together about this ministry (§116). The report affirms that 'communion and mission are profoundly related' and that 'the greater the communion, the more effective the mission' (§117); it also speaks of 'the relationship between Christian faith, evangelisation, and social action' (§118). Called to Love and Praise (1999) begins its consideration of 'the whole gospel for the whole world' by saying:

> The unity of the Church and its mission are closely related, since the Triune God who commissions the Church is One, seeking to reconcile and to bring the world itself into a unity in Christ. … This [mission] involves both evangelism and social action, and, in our day especially, engaging with people of differing cultures and religious faiths.[47]

There is much in this chapter that also resonates with a major report adopted by the Conference in 2023, A justice-seeking Church;[48] it includes six 'principles for justice', five 'priorities for justice', and 'practices for justice'.[49]

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46 See, for example, *What we believe: A Catechism for the use of the people called Methodists* (London, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, 1986/2000), Section B: What does God do for us in Christ? Questions 9-20.
47 Called to Love and Praise (1999), §3.2.1; cf Ut Unum Sint (1998), §9.
48 A justice-seeking Church: the report of the Walking with Micah project (https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29385/conf-23-pc-12-walking-with-micah-project.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).
49 See A justice-seeking Church, §108, 164, and 169-207 respectively.

6.2 *God in Christ Reconciling* helpfully draws attention to statements about the Church's mission made by the Second General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1971 and by the World Methodist Council in 1986 (§118). It also acknowledges (§119) that Methodists and Roman Catholics 'lament with one voice' that we have fallen short of our calling to live the Jubilee Year which is the 'year of the Lord's favour' referred to by Jesus in his sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19).

6.3 The chapter has four further sections:

- 'Reconciliation by Building Just Relationships';
- 'Reconciliation by Peace-making';
- 'Reconciliation by Caring for our Common Home'; and
- 'Celebrating God's Gifts'.

6.4 The first of these says that reconciliation between persons is the culmination and fruit of a complicated process which involves repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of relationships, and requires restitution for wrongs committed and the commitment to rebuild relationships with new understandings and insights (§120). This section speaks of concern for those who suffer injustice (§120), the importance of works of mercy (§121), understanding the relationship between the state and society (§122),[50] and the relationship between personal and social sin (§123). It also acknowledges our failure to recognise the equal dignity of every person created in the image of God and emphasises the importance of learning from situations of oppression and injustice, including by hearing the voice of the poor and oppressed (§124).

6.5 The statements 'Christians are called to see the other person with the merciful gaze of Jesus' and 'personal conversion begins with the ability to see in a new way and to open the mind and heart to new realities' (§125) remind us of an illustration in A justice-seeking Church: '[John] Wesley famously visited people struggling against poverty and encouraged his societies not only to give to those in need, but also to befriend those experiencing poverty, to understand their story and to challenge both attitudes and economic structures that keep people in poverty.'[51]

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50 A justice-seeking Church echoes some of this paragraph when, in §102, it refers to the body of Catholic Social Teaching originated in *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 (https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html); it also refers to *Laudato Si'* (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) on the environment and *Fratelli Tutti* (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) on solidarity.

51 A justice-seeking Church, §33.

6.6 The Conference welcomes the examples of those in both our communities who show the way to imitate Christ (§126); this has parallels with the practical examples of holy living included in the Houston report of 2016. The Commission rightly claims that '[h]oly living in the world requires that Christians take action to support reconciliation in the world (§127). In a much wider ecumenical context, the Message of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 2022 included these words:

> We confess that, even as we desire with our whole hearts to serve God and our neighbour, we have found ourselves failing, disagreeing, and sometimes walking in opposite directions. We confess that we need the transformative power of Christ's love to move to a world truly reconciled and united. … Christians, and the structures that we have built, have been complicit in the abuse of others, and we must repent and join in this movement of reconciliation. In the face of war, inequality, and sins against creation today, Christ's love calls us all to repentance, reconciliation, and justice.[52]

6.7 Turning to 'reconciliation by peace-making', attention is drawn to a significant piece of work produced jointly by the British Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church: *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation*.[53] In 2006 the Methodist Conference commended the report to the Methodist people for reflection, study and guidance on action; 20 years on our Joint Public Issues Team says, 'it remains our core resource exploring a Christian perspective on peace and conflict in the context of new challenges.'[54] In 2025, however, the British Methodist Conference directed that theological and pastoral resources be created to support the Methodist people in the light of both the current global context of increasing conflict and insecurity, and the reports and public statements of the Methodist Church relating to issues of war and peace.[55] Just over a year earlier, the Department for International Affairs of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published *Called to be Peacemakers*.[56]

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52 Message of the 11th Assembly: A Call to Act Together, §6-7 (https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/Assembly%20Report_FINAL_WEB.pdf; viewed 21 January 2026).

53 *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation: A resource for the churches produced by a join working group of the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church* (https://jpit.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Peacemaking-Report.pdf; viewed 21 January 2026).

54 https://jpit.org.uk/issues/peacemaking viewed 21 January 2026. The Joint Public Issues Team is a partnership between the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church.

55 Methodist Conference Daily Record (2025), §5/29/2 (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2025-Daily-Record-complete.pdf; viewed 21 January 2026).

56 https://cbcew.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/05/Called-to-be-Peacemakers.pdf (viewed 21 January 2026).

6.8 Although the task of the study group responsible for *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation* was to examine the ethics of war in the, then, current context, in a section concerned with being active in resolving conflicts, the report says, 'this task of peacemaking may be on a small or large scale'; it elaborated:

> It may take the shape of overcoming hurt in order to initiate reconciliation with a close family member, or it may be represented in UN sponsored inter-governmental talks over a border dispute.[57] It is essential to embrace this wide range of understandings of peace-making.

6.9 Earlier (§3.5 above) reference was made to *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* and it is good to see that *God in Christ Reconciling* refers to it in the section on reconciliation by caring for our common home. Rightly, there is a strong emphasis on the need for repentance in the Gothenburg report, as there is in *Hope in God's Future*, as individuals, churches, and nations. In this context, attention is drawn to four prayers of confession in *The Methodist Worship Book*: the first, in the Covenant Service, includes confession for 'the sin that has led us to misuse [God's] gifts, evade our responsibilities, and fail to be good stewards of [God's] creation'; the second, provided for Ash Wednesday, includes confession for 'our misuse and pollution of creation, and our lack of concern for the generations to come'; the third, in Holy Communion During Ordinary Seasons (Second Service), acknowledges that 'we ignore the needs of others and misuse [God's] creation'; and the fourth, in the first of the Morning, Afternoon, and Evening Services, confesses '[o]ur foolishness and our thoughtless use of the gifts of [God's] creation'.[58]

6.10 The Conference welcomes the approach of the Commission in §139 with its acknowledgements that 'by our daily living … we leave a footprint upon creation' and that we need to 'seek God's forgiveness for our continuing part in any misuse of creation's bounty, whilst maintaining our commitment to change.' The recognition that much is being done by Christians around the world to care for 'our common home' is also appreciated. Some Local Churches, Circuits and Districts in the Methodist Church in Britain are involved in the Eco Church scheme run by A Rocha UK and, in 2021, the Conference agreed an aspirational target to become a net zero Church by 2030.[59]

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57 *Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation*, §6.5.
58 *MWB*, p. 286 (no.13), 146 (no.14), 198 (no.3), and 30 (no.5B) respectively.
59 On the latter point, see Section T of the Methodist Council report to the 2022 Conference (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-22-17-methodist-council-2.pdf; viewed 21 January 2026).

7. Chapter Five: Reconciliation and Mutual Recognition: Discerning Communion of Faith in Diverse Structures and Practices

7.1 The final chapter of the report summarises the key points to emerge from each of the earlier chapters. For that reason, little needs to be added at this point because of the detailed comments already made. This chapter, alongside the Scriptural Meditation, might helpfully serve as an introduction to the whole report in the context of study by and conversations among Roman Catholics and Methodists.

7.2 The Conference welcomes the Commission's suggestion that an aspect of what it would mean to 'develop the full consequences of the mutual recognition of Baptism … might include a more generous spirit in practices of sacramental sharing in cases of acute pastoral need' (§145).

7.3 The Conference is grateful for the emphasis in this chapter on the full visible unity of the Church (§143, 147, 151, and 171; cf §38): the dialogues between our communities are but part of the ecumenical pilgrimage to the full visible unity of the Church as the body of Christ.

8. An Ecumenical Liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation

8.1 The Houston report was 'illustrated by reference to the lives of exemplary figures from the Catholic and Methodist traditions' (Houston, Preface) and included an appendix of 'Resources for Prayer and Meditation'. *God in Christ Reconciling* contains 'An Ecumenical Liturgy of Repentance and Reconciliation'. In outline, this consists of an Opening Psalm (133), A Call to Reconciliation including words of Cyprian, Pope Francis, and Bishop Ivan Abrahams (the then General Secretary of the World Methodist Council), a Prayer of Repentance and Reconciliation, the Sharing of Christ's Peace (with *Ubi Caritas* as a sung response), suggested scripture texts to be read and expounded (including 'the parable of the two sons'), The Apostles' Creed, a Baptismal Remembrance, a Musical Offering, Prayers of Intercession, The Lord's Prayer, and a concluding Prayer followed by The Grace. Provision is made for hymns/songs at various points in the liturgy and, in addition to *Ubi Caritas*, the texts of four (three by Charles Wesley) are included.

8.2 Those considering using this liturgy will need to bear in mind a number of factors, including how well those of the two communities know each other and share together. Its use in the context of studying the report together would, for example, be very appropriate. In some other situations, it may be helpful to make more explicit why Christians of different traditions need to be reconciled and for whose benefit and what purpose(s).

8.3 The introductory 'notes' say that it would be appropriate to celebrate the liturgy in Lent but it may be used at any time, that the 'leaders' of the liturgy should come equally from Catholic and Methodist communities and represent the diversities within them, and that the liturgy may conclude with a shared meal.

8.4 The Prayer of Repentance and Reconciliation includes a number of pertinent and evocative petitions relating to a range of subjects, social and individual, global and ecclesial. There is, however, one rather longer petition relating to Methodists and Roman Catholics which could have been set out in two or three petitions instead of marring the balance of the prayer.

8.5 It is unfortunate that, although a text is provided for The Lord's Prayer, that of the ecumenical English Language Liturgical Commission's *Praying Together*, no text is provided for The Apostles' Creed. It would be appropriate for that text also to be taken from *Praying Together*.[60]

8.6 Some British Methodists will be unfamiliar with the second verse of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Love divine, all loves excelling' (ie, 'Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit …'). John Wesley removed it from the version in *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (1780)[61] so, in a report that invokes him as an authority for Methodists in the way that it does, its inclusion is questionable.

8.7 The text of the Baptismal Remembrance says that the participants will 'receive God's gift of water' and a note suggests how this might be done by means of a sprinkler (aspergil) or small evergreen branch dipped in water in the baptismal font. Although The Reaffirmation of Baptismal Faith Including the Use of Water (authorised by the British Conference in 2015) refers to the practice of the Church universal of sprinkling congregations with water in services such as the Easter Vigil,[62] it may be a new experience for many Methodists in Britain. When introduced sensitively, however, the sprinkling as part of a Remembrance or Reaffirmation of Baptism may be seen as having profound significance.

9. Some General Points

9.1 The Conference is pleased to see that the membership of the International Commission shows greater diversity than has sometimes been the case,

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60 English Language Liturgical Consultation, *Praying Together* (Norwich, The Canterbury Press, 1988), p.16.
61 John Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (London, Paramore, 1780)
62 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/liturgy-for-reaffirmation-of-baptismal-faith-0416.pdf (viewed 21 January 2026).

including more lay members, women, and those of the global south. There was, however, no reference to the ordination or leadership of women in the document, both of which of which are very important to the Methodist people. The use of the word 'fraternal' in situations such as §17, where it is not to be taken to refer only to brothers, is unhelpful and the Conference encourages the use of inclusive language.[63]

9.2 The report treats John Wesley as an authority for Methodist belief and practice in ways that British Methodists do not; it may be questioned how many member churches of the World Methodist Council do so in the same or similar ways. The first report of the International Commission recorded:

> Methodists on their side were candid in considering Roman Catholic questions on how far the Wesleys remain a decisive influence in contemporary Methodism.[64]

On the other hand, in its 2018 response to the Houston report, the Conference commented that 'the theology of Charles Wesley, and particularly that contained within his hymns, is a resource that is under-used in this report.'[65]

10. Conclusion

10.1 The Conference warmly welcomes this report. It expresses its gratitude both for the chosen theme and for the ways in which the theme has been explored. That the Commission believes that it has 'yielded an unexpectedly high degree of theological convergence in several areas' (§143) is a sign of hope and source of encouragement. That 'significant differences require further investigation' (§143) is both a challenge and an invitation to continue in open, sensitive, and honest dialogue. The Conference, therefore, joins with the Commission in affirming that 'it is important to acknowledge and celebrate just how far Catholics and Methodists have already walked together as members of the household of God, and the love and service jointly offered for the good of others' (§173); such acknowledgement and celebration includes 'the many small steps that lead to reconciliation' (§141). The Conference also agrees that '[t]o make our witness to

63 §2 uses 'brothers and sisters' at an early point and then 'fraternal' not only of the two brothers in the parable of the two sons, but also of 'Christians and Christian communities'.
64 Denver, §9
65 A Response to *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory* in *Methodist Conference Agenda* (2018), §3.4 (https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/conf-2018-35-Call-to-Holiness-response_jB079Ig.pdf; viewed 16 January 2026).

God's reconciling love in the world through Christ more credible, we must urgently and earnestly repent of our separation, be converted by God's grace, and grow together in holiness, unity and mission' (§173).

10.2 To these ends the Conference encourages Methodists to share and pray together with their Roman Catholic friends. Early in the first chapter of the report, the Commission says that '[t]he parable of the two sons serves as a mirror for the Church' and that it 'poses important questions for all Methodists and Catholics' (§3); further questions arise throughout the report. It is hoped that in sharing and praying together, members of both communities may explore how we are living out God's gift of and seeking reconciliation in practice, as individuals (in the multiple aspects of our lives), in our ecumenical relating (both with each other and in the wider ecumenical context), and as institutions (both 'internally' and in the ways in which we act in and relate to the wider communities and societies we seek to serve).

> Grant that we all, made one in faith,
> in your community may find
> the wholeness that, enriching us,
> shall reach the whole of humankind.
>
> Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)[66]

*****RESOLUTIONS**

11/1. The Conference adopts the Report as its response to *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission*.

11/2. The Conference commends *God in Christ Reconciling: On the Way to Full Communion in Faith, Sacraments, and Mission* to the Methodist people for study and discussion.

66 First published in *Hymns & Songs* (London, Methodist Publishing House, 1969), no.51, v.5; the above version is *Singing the Faith*, no.653, v.5.

Appendix 1

A1.1. The ten reports before *God in Christ Reconciling* are:

Denver, 1971	*The Denver Report*
Dublin, 1976	*The Dublin Report*
Honolulu, 1981	*Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit*
Nairobi, 1986	*Towards a Statement on the Church*
Singapore, 1991	*The Apostolic Tradition*
Rio (de Janeiro), 1996	*The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith*
Brighton, 2001	*Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists*
Seoul, 2006	*The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church*
Durban, 2011	*Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments*
Houston, 2016	*The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory*

A1.2. *Synthesis: Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue*[67] was not intended to replace the original reports but summarises the state of consensus and convergence as recorded in the first eight reports (Denver to Seoul inclusive); it is usually known simply as *Synthesis*.

A1.3. Near the end of 2025, the year in which Christians marked the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, an updated synthesis was published: *We believe in one God: Sixty years of Methodists and Catholics walking together*.[68] It integrates material from the three most recent reports; ie, Durban (2011), Houston (2016), and Gothenburg (2022).

67 https://media.methodist.org.uk/media/documents/roman-catholic-dialogue-synthesis-report_qVYA2pk.pdf (viewed 16 January 2026)

68 https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/consiglio-metodista-mondiale/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/We-believe-in-one-God.html (viewed 16 January 2026)