Report of the *Life in Covenant Group* to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England

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Resolutions	38/1. The Conference receives the report. 38/2. Subject to adoption of an equivalent motion by the General Synod of the Church of England, the Conference (a) in accordance with (b) below, appoints the *Life in Covenant Group* for a further period of five years to August 2031, to continue its mandate as detailed at paragraph 34 in line with the Terms of Reference at Appendix C; (b) in order to avoid delay to the group's work, re-appoints the *Life in Covenant Group* as presently constituted in the first instance, but directs that the membership of the group be reviewed and updated as appropriate by August 2027, with a revised membership to be appointed according to the appropriate processes for the Methodist Church and the Church of England respectively; and (c) directs the Faith and Order Committee to work in collaboration with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, with reference to the *Life in Covenant Group*, to continue the work on *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* already begun at the direction of the General Synod in 2019 and the Methodist Council in 2023, as outlined in this report, and to bring specific proposals for the implementation of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* to the Methodist Conference and General Synod by 2031.

Introduction

1. The Covenant between the Church of England and the Methodist Church was signed on All Saints' Day 2003. In a series of mutual affirmations and commitments,[1] the Covenant recognises how much our two Churches have in

1 See the text of the Covenant at appendix A.

common, and commits us to removing further obstacles towards full visible unity. The Covenant represents in part our shared response to the prayer of Jesus, "that they may all be one, that the world may believe".

2. To quote the preamble to the Covenant itself:

> We the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, on the basis of our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity, as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement,[2] hereby make the following Covenant in the form of interdependent Affirmations and Commitments. We do so both in a spirit of penitence for all that human sinfulness and narrowness of vision have contributed to our past divisions, believing that we have been impoverished through our separation and that our witness to the gospel has been weakened accordingly, and in a spirit of thanksgiving and joy for the convergence in faith and collaboration in mission that we have experienced in recent years.

3. In November 2024, our two Churches marked the 21st anniversary of the Covenant with a special re-dedication service at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster followed by evensong at Westminster Abbey. On that occasion both the then-Archbishop of Canterbury and then-President of the Methodist Conference spoke passionately and urgently of the Churches' call to unity, in witnessing hope to a broken world, and of the significance of An Anglican-Methodist Covenant for England in this.

4. The mutual embrace of our Churches under the Covenant has opened the way to new partnerships on the ground between local Church of England and Methodist congregations, ranging from joint worship and sharing church buildings to shared community projects and staff such as youth and family workers. But more than this, the Covenant between us lays the ground for a fuller relationship of communion between our Churches which is yet to be realised, and towards which the Covenant commits us mutually to work.

5. This report outlines the developments in that work over the past five years, and proposes that the work continue. The shape of the following report is this:

2 https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/An-Anglican-Methodist-Covenant-Common-Statement.pdf

- an outline up to 2023 of the history of the processes under the Covenant at national level, that sets the scene for where we are currently;
- a note of the broader ecumenical context in which our work together as the Church of England and the Methodist Church is set;
- some reflection on the end goal of the Covenant as it shapes our work;
- following on from all the above, a brief explanation of the proposals that are currently under exploration, and an outline of the key tasks that are before us;
- a report of the progress on this work since 2023;
- current developments and challenges as we look to continue this work, and to support broadening engagement with it.

History

6. Since its signing in 2003, a series of bilateral bodies have been appointed by the General Synod and the Methodist Conference to take forward or oversee the work of unity – in particular that work which is of a 'faith and order' character – that follows from our Churches' mutual commitments under the Covenant: a Joint Implementation Commission, in two phases, from 2003–2008 and 2008–2014, a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group from 2015–2021, and since 2021 the Life in Covenant Group. Over 23 years to date, and reporting periodically to the General Synod and the Methodist Conference, these bodies – working in tandem with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission (FAOC) and the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee (F&O) – have undertaken very significant work to seek to develop the relationship between our Churches.[3]

7. In parallel to the faith and order focus of these bodies, there has been established since 2009 the Methodist-Anglican Panel on Unity in Mission (MAPUM). The focus of MAPUM is not on Anglican-Methodist relations *per se*, but more broadly on the mission of the Church in Britain, and on how Methodists and Anglicans – together with others – can most effectively share in that enterprise.[4]

8. On the faith and order front, the most substantive development in this work to date is the landmark set of proposals known as *Mission and Ministry in*

3 One of the fruits of this work to date is the establishment of Covenanted Partnerships in Extended Areas: see https://www.churchofengland.org/about/building-relationships/ecumenical-relations/ecumenical-news/covenant-partnerships-extended-areas

4 In addition at national level, under the Covenant our two Churches have established various initiatives of joint working together: this includes the Anglican Methodist Safeguarding Group, which meets regularly to provide mutual support and to share wisdom between our Churches on safeguarding.

Covenant,[5] put forward jointly by FAOC and F&O in 2017, to create a relationship of Full Communion between the Church of England and the Methodist Church, in which the presbyteral ministries of our two Churches are interchangeable. The *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals (*MMiC*) were initially received by the General Synod and the Methodist Conference in 2018, following which the Faith and Order bodies jointly undertook some further work in response to questions that arose. This led to FAOC and F&O publishing the report "Mission and Ministry in Covenant: Areas for further reflection identified by the General Synod of the Church of England and the Methodist Conference"[6] in June 2019.

9. That report on "Areas for further reflection", which includes recommendations for how to take forward the implementation of the *MMiC* proposals, came after the cut-off for the agenda of the 2019 Methodist Conference, but was considered by the General Synod in July 2019, which carried, with overwhelming support, the following motion:

'That the Synod

a) affirm the priority of doing mission together and welcome the work done by the faith and order bodies to respond to issues raised in the initial reception of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, while also recognising that, for some within the Church of England, concerns about the proposals remain;
b) support the recommendations intended to address those issues that are listed in the final paragraph of the report on further work from the faith and order bodies regarding *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*;
c) request the Faith and Order Commission to work with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee on drafting texts for the 'formal declaration', the inaugural service or services and the service of welcome referred to in the recommendations in the final paragraph of the report on further work, and for the guidelines for the practice of presbyters / priests from one church being received to serve in the other referred to in paragraph 142, with full draft texts being made available to the Synod; and
d) request the House of Bishops to report during the next quinquennium on the progress made on the work described in the previous paragraph, together with proposals for implementation.'

10. Having not come to the Methodist Conference, the "Areas for further reflection" report, together with its recommendations and the requests contained in the

5 https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Mission-and-Ministry-in-Covenant.pdf
6 https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Mission-and-Ministry-in-Covenant-areas-for-further-reflection.pdf

General Synod's motion above, were considered by the Methodist Council in October 2019. The Methodist Council was asked at that meeting to decide whether the Faith and Order Committee should undertake (in partnership with FAOC) the work envisaged of it in part c) of the General Synod's motion – and also the production of a draft of an ordination service for a Methodist President-bishop (something which members of both Churches had indicated it would be helpful to see). The Methodist Council took the view that the Faith and Order Committee was being asked to undertake specific tasks on work which the Methodist Church had not yet indicated that it wished to proceed, and before either Church had made final decisions about the *MMiC* proposals. In other words, the Methodist Council felt that the cart was being placed before the horse, and declined to request F&O to carry out the work. Rather, it invited the Faith and Order Committee to pause the work, and to revisit it once the General Synod had begun the legislative process. For this reason, in October 2019, the work of our Churches towards implementation of the *MMiC* proposals stalled.

11. In light of this stalling of progress on *MMiC*, the Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group – in its oversight role for that work – proposed that a new group, under the name *Life in Covenant*, be appointed by the General Synod and the Conference to monitor, advocate and initiate ongoing work as appropriate under the Covenant. This group would have a broader focus than the JCAMG. Beyond advocacy and monitoring, its remit is also intended to focus on encouragement of initiatives that would promote living the Covenant, as well as looking to future development. The constitution of the group was thought through carefully to enable this, including representation from MAPUM and from both of the faith and order bodies. Delayed by Covid-19, the *Life in Covenant Group* was constituted in 2021, with an initial five-year mandate. It is on this basis that the group brings this present report, five years on.

12. In fact, due to the impacts of Covid, the *Life in Covenant Group* did not meet until late 2022. Then shortly after this, in 2023 MAPUM (the Methodist-Anglican Panel on Unity in Mission) asked the Methodist Council to re-consider its decision that F&O pause its work on *MMiC*. MAPUM noted that recent meetings between the senior leadership of both Churches had resulted in a warm and mutual commitment to moving forward with the Covenant relationship. The Church of England's archbishops had both spoken of their deep commitment to ecumenism in general and to our Covenant partnership in particular. In considering this request, the Methodist Council recognised at this time that its earlier expectation, that a legislative process ought to precede any liturgical work, had arisen from a mismatch between the ways in which the Church of England and the Methodist Church are accustomed to work. It was recognised that, in fact, it is in the essence of the Church of England's decision-making polity that the development

of the liturgical shape of a proposal will usually precede any required legislative process. By contrast, the Methodist Church is more accustomed to legislating for a particular thing to happen, and then developing such liturgical provision as may be required to enact it. In other words, the Methodist Council now recognised that the General Synod, in its motion of July 2019, had *not* been seeking to put the cart before the horse after all. On this basis, the Council directed the Faith and Order Committee to explore with FAOC the most suitable next steps in considering *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* and to work with FAOC to draft such liturgical, legislative and other texts as may be needed.

13. The resumption of work on the *MMiC* proposals has therefore become a central focus of the *Life in Covenant Group* since 2023. It is very much work in progress, and this present report outlines the work that has begun and the work that remains to be done. It is proposed that the *Life in Covenant Group*, on reaching the end of its present five-year mandate, be appointed for a further quinquennial period to continue to support this work.

Broader ecumenical context

14. The *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals are to create a relationship of Full Communion, or interchangeability of ministries, between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. In faith and order terms, the kind of relationship proposed is essentially akin to the relationship of Full Communion that is already established between the Church of England (and its Anglican partner churches in Britain and Ireland) with the Lutheran Churches of the Nordic and Baltic region, and of Great Britain, known as the Porvoo Communion.

15. There is an important difference though: that whereas the Churches of the Porvoo Communion are largely present in separate geographical spaces, the Church of England and the Methodist Church inhabit, within England, the same geographical space alongside each other. This means that the relationship of Full Communion proposed by *MMiC* is of a greater order of intensity and closeness in terms of how it would be lived out on the ground than the Church of England's existing Full Communion relationships. This also means that the development of the relationship of Full Communion between the Church of England and the Methodist Church is of preeminent importance, in relation to other potential relationships of Full Communion, or interchangeability of ministries, that the Church of England is exploring: notably with its partner Churches under the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and Protestant Churches in Germany, and under the Reuilly Agreement between the Church of England and the French protestant churches. Such relationships are looking to the relationship

between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Britain to take the lead, in charting a course to enable interchangeability of ministries.

16. It is also important to note that while the Church of England's existing Full Communion relationships are between Churches largely operating in separate geographical spaces, this is by no means exclusively the case. The Church of England is present across continental Europe as the Diocese in Europe, and in this respect it does minister alongside its Porvoo and Old Catholic partner Churches, with which it is in Full Communion, among the same local communities on the ground in many places.[7] And indeed within England, as part of the Porvoo Communion the Church of England is in Full Communion with the Lutheran Church of Great Britain.

17. The Methodist Church in Britain covers also Wales and Scotland, and since 2025 observer representatives from the Anglican Churches in those nations – the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church – have joined the *Life in Covenant Group*. Both the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church observe with interest the development of the Covenant between the Methodist Church and the Church of England as a step on the way to a relationship of Full Communion.

18. The proposals of *MMiC* find precedent in the wider Anglican Communion in the relationship of interchangeability of ministries entered into between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland, by a similar mechanism to that proposed by *MMiC*, in 2014. In our work under the Anglican-Methodist Covenant for England, our two Churches were abreast of the Irish conversations that led to this development, and there has been significant learning from our partners in Ireland. Similar relationships of Full Communion between Anglican and Methodist Churches are also being worked towards in the United States and in New Zealand.

The end goal?

19. One of the concerns expressed in previous debates on the work relating to *MMiC* has been a suggestion that there is a lack of clarity about the goal of the Covenant: about what kind of unity the envisaged end result is. A United Church? Or some sort of halfway house, in which our two Churches perpetually

7 In addition to its Full Communion relationship with the Churches of the Porvoo Communion, the Church of England is also in Full Communion with the Old Catholic churches, under the Bonn Agreement of 1931.

coexist, in a state of "reconciled diversity"? In the view of the *Life in Covenant Group*, the answer to this question is straightforward: we cannot see the end result to which God is leading us. It is beyond our present horizon. But we are called, in obedience to the prayer of Jesus, to take what steps we can in the direction of the greater unity of the Church. Just as with our Churches' well-established intercommunion relationships with other ecumenical partners, the *MMiC* proposals are not proposals for the unification of our two Churches: rather, they are proposals for a relationship of Full Communion between our Churches, nothing more, nothing less. But this is a significant step in the direction in which God demands that we follow. We are not selling ourselves short in this, in this response to our ecumenical calling. It is a step that, in God's providence, might be built on further, as God wills. As St John Henry Newman famously put it: "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, lead Thou me on; The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on. Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me."

The key tasks: what *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposes

20. There are a number of elements to the work that *MMiC* proposes in order to bring about the Full Communion relationship, including work on how the ordained ministries of our Churches – episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal – will interrelate with each other, and on how the broader structures of our Churches will correspond with one another. Underpinning these proposals is a twofold, reciprocal, set of essential principles that our Churches are being asked to adopt in order to enable the proposed relationship of interchangeability of ministries, or Full Communion. Ultimately, to adopt the *MMiC* proposals will be to adopt these reciprocal principles, which will represent for each of our Churches a special step of grace and friendship toward the other:

    a) The Methodist Church in Britain would take into itself the historic threefold ordering of ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons, by receiving the sign of the historic episcopate, in the form of the President of the Methodist Conference henceforth being ordained as a 'President-bishop'. This would mean, in turn, that all presbyters and deacons in the Methodist Church would from that point forward be episcopally ordained – nonetheless under the authority of the Methodist Conference, by whose authority the President-bishop would act. The historic threefold ordering of ordained ministry is fundamental to the Church of England's ecclesial nature. Because of this, for another Church to be thus ordered is essential for the Church of England to be able to be in Full Communion with it, and this is a step that the Methodist

Church would take. In this, the Methodist Church would be receiving a gift from the wider Church; but it would also be offering as a gift, to the Church of England, a distinctive expression of the historic episcopate, by modelling this sign in a distinctive Methodist way that embodies the shared nature of oversight characteristic of British Methodism.[8]

b) *Pro tem* (until such time as all future Methodist ministers will have been episcopally ordained) the Church of England would receive as interchangeable with its own priestly ministry the ministry of the existing already-ordained presbyters of the Methodist Church in Britain. That is to say, Methodist ministers would not be re-ordained, since they are ordained already into the ministry of the universal Church. This would represent a temporary but important variation to the normal basis on which the Church of England receives ordained ministry. In God's grace, the Church of England would gladly embrace this temporary variation, in order to enable our journey together towards the greater unity that Christ wills.

21. Embodying the very essence of Covenant between us, both these steps, by the Methodist Church and the Church of England, would be taken each towards the other out of a spirit of profound grace and mutual generosity, for the sake of the greater flourishing of God's Church and our united witness to Jesus Christ.

22. The work that follows from these principles towards realising this relationship in practice is articulated by the recommendations of the 2017 *MMiC* report, and of the 2019 report on "areas for further reflection", as follows.

23. From *MMiC* (paragraph 95):

If they agree in due course to implement these proposals, our two churches are invited to consider formally implementing the following recommendations:

(a) invite each other's bishops to participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church, and to seek other ways in which bishops from one church may be able to exercise episcopal ministry in the other, by invitation and in accordance with any regulations which may from time to time be in force;
(b) work towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry that will in due course enable the interchangeability of deacons;

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8 This would not imply any change to the Methodist Church's pattern of complementary diaconal and presbyteral ministries: although the Church of England has a largely transitional diaconate, it is already in Full Communion with other Churches which hold varying relationships between diaconal and presbyteral ministries.

(c) consult with one another regarding developments in our understanding of the ministry of all the baptised, including lay as well as ordained ministry;
(d) encourage regular consultation and collaboration among members of our churches at all levels, and facilitate learning and exchange of ideas and information on theological, pastoral, and mission matters;
(e) identify practical ways in which those responsible for oversight in each church may benefit from regular consultation with those responsible for oversight in the other, particularly with regard to situations where there are significant opportunities for shared mission and evangelism;
(f) establish a Joint Commission to nurture our growth in communion, to coordinate the implementation of the Declaration of Communion, and report to the decision-making bodies of both our churches and;
(g) continue to work together for the full visible unity of the whole Church of God.

24. And from "Areas for further reflection" (paragraph 143):

In light of this report, the faith and order bodies invite the Conference and the General Synod to adopt the following recommendations as they take forward the proposals of *MMiC*.

i. The 'formal declaration' envisaged by *MMiC* at §10, referred to as the 'first step' towards a new relationship of communion, should include a commitment to seeking what this document terms the 'reconciliation of structures', to enable our churches to act and speak as one church where this serves the mission of God (paragraphs 10–22).
ii. The planning of an inaugural joint service or services of Holy Communion, to take place following from the acceptance of the proposals in both churches and the ordination of the first President-Bishop, should make appropriate space for repentance for past sins, for the welcoming of one another's gifts and graces and for the commissioning of the churches for mission together, to include a specific episcopal commissioning of all ordained ministers in each church for readiness to serve in and with the other (paragraphs 23–32, 40–50 and 52–54).
iii. Where a minister ordained in one church is accepted to serve also in the other for the first time, a service of welcome should be held, to include prayer and appropriate liturgical action as fitting to the polity of each church (paragraph 51).
iv. A 'Council event' should be arranged to take place soon after the inaugural service, to mark the new stage on the Covenant journey, set it in the context of joint mission and service to the world and advise the churches on how the new relationship between them might best be sustained and deepened (paragraphs 55–56).

v. There should be further exploration of diaconal ministry in the two churches, including current developments, in terms of parallels, contrasts and the potential for mutual learning (paragraphs 94–95).

Progress since 2023

25. Following the Methodist Council's request, in light of all the above, including the General Synod's motion (paragraph 9 above) and noting the points at paragraph 12 above concerning carts and horses, both the *Life in Covenant Group* and our Churches' faith and order bodies have begun to turn their attention to the work necessary to take these proposals forward. In order "to explore the most suitable next steps", it has become apparent that this requires some provisional drafting of what taking forward the *MMiC* proposals would amount to. All three bodies (Life in Covenant, FAOC and F&O) have begun to work with a tentative plan for this work, which in outline is as follows:

- Prepare text of a 'formal declaration' of Full Communion between our Churches.
- Prepare text of an inaugural joint service(s) of Holy Communion (this should be one shared service ideally, but practical constraints may imply more than one).
- Prepare text for the ordination of the first President-bishop (this may very well be part of the foregoing inaugural joint service).
- Prepare text of a service of welcome to be used in local churches.
- Consider and (if appropriate) draft a 'Council event' (see 24 (iv) above).
- Further explore diaconal ministry (but noting that the satisfactory conclusion of such work is not a precondition for mutual acceptance of the *MMiC* proposals).
- Draft guidelines for the practice of presbyters/priests from one church being received in another.
- Respond to other issues raised in the initial reception of *MMiC*, in the broader debates around the proposals. This includes, for instance, the question of how the proposals of *MMiC* relate to current provision in the Methodist Church, in certain limited circumstances, for lay presidency at Holy Communion.

26. For very practical reasons affecting the period since 2023 up to now, progress on this work has been slow. The nature of the task is that it requires engagement, together and in parallel, between the faith and order bodies of our two Churches. However, a particular impediment to this has been that the agenda and workload of FAOC has been overwhelmed by the priority during this period of the Church

of England's *Living in Love and Faith* programme. This has meant that there has been little space thus far to give attention to many other matters, including *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*. It has also meant that there has not yet been the opportunity, since 2023, for FAOC and F&O to come together to work jointly as they have in the past – something which is essential to this work.

27. It is also the case that, due to the hiatus since the earlier stalling of this work in 2019, for several of the individuals tasked with this work who may be coming 'new' to it – both on FAOC and on F&O – there has been a substantial learning curve to acquaint themselves with the detail of *MMiC* and the decades-long developments that have given rise to it under the Covenant, so as to avoid reinventing the wheel.

28. In the past year, in what time they have had, FAOC and F&O have, separately, given some initial consideration to a very provisional draft of a text for a 'formal declaration', modelled on the Porvoo Declaration, with regard to the first bullet point at 25 above. And so, the work required of FAOC and F&O is underway, but it is very much work in progress.

29. In tandem with the work of the faith and order bodies, the *Life in Covenant Group* has undertaken and supported a number of initiatives since 2023, particularly geared towards addressing some of the issues or concerns raised in the initial reception of *MMiC* – as well as encouraging celebration of and engagement with the Covenant more generally. These include the following.

Special issue of academic journal *Ecclesiology*

30. At the suggestion of the *Life in Covenant Group*, in June 2025 the journal *Ecclesiology* published a special issue – following on from the 21st anniversary of the Covenant – of five substantial peer-reviewed articles by Anglican and Methodist authors dedicated to exploring and elucidating our Churches' experience of An Anglican-Methodist Covenant and, in particular, responding to some of the concerns raised in response to *MMiC*:

    - " 'An Intolerable Departure from Order'? Setting *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* in the Context of Anglican Ecumenical Agreements" by Will Adam. This article makes clear the various precedents that exist, from an Anglican perspective, for the kind of temporary variation that would be entailed by the Church of England to its normal basis for receiving ordained ministry, in making interchangeable with its own priestly ministry the ministry of existing (non-episcopally ordained) Methodist presbyters.

- "Presbyter and Priest in Sacramental Perspective" by David Chapman addresses the question, do Church of England priests and Methodist presbyters exercise the same ministry? – and makes the careful theological case that they do.
- "Ecumenism at a Crossroads: 'Critical Factors' in the Reception of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*" by Jeremy Worthen illuminates with great clarity the underlying dynamics that have been at play behind some of the hesitancy towards the *MMiC* proposals – indeed the question, is it worth the effort? – within the General Synod.
- "Rooted in and Routed through Christ: Friendship in *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*" by Ruth Gee explores the theological imperative for our Churches to embrace each other in a spirit of profound and intentional friendship that is rooted in our mutual friendship in Christ, that is fundamental to the basis of the Covenant between us and of the proposals of *MMiC*.
- "The Covenant at Work – A First-hand Cumbrian Case-Study" by Jane Maycock showcases the positive impact that An Anglican-Methodist Covenant has already made to the mission and ministry of the Church in parts of Cumbria.

31. As well as to the above authors, thanks are due to Paul Avis, the editor of *Ecclesiology* for bringing this special issue to fruition. These articles represent a significant contribution to illuminating the work we are seeking to take forward under the Covenant, and addressing some of the concerns associated with it. They have stimulated fruitful reflection within the *Life in Covenant Group*, which has considered them in detail and found them to be highly insightful. Because the journal is subject to copyright, these articles are not freely available. But in order to facilitate broader engagement with this material, a one-day symposium on these articles is planned, with the five authors, on 19 November 2026 in London.

A forum for Methodist and Church of England women

32. Questions have been asked both within the Church of England and the Methodist Church about how the proposed Full Communion relationship would bear upon the place and experience of women within the life of our Churches. In particular, Methodists continue to experience difficulties with the Church of England's provision for ministry to those who cannot receive the ministry of women priests or bishops. And, of course, many within the Church of England share such concerns. In response to this, a gathering of women with a range of perspectives, from both Churches, is arranged for June 2026, to explore these questions, and to consider how these should shape the work on the *MMiC* proposals as it proceeds.

Other challenges

33. As this report demonstrates, taking forward the work of An Anglican-Methodist Covenant is, by its nature, complex. In addition to the various complexities that have already been outlined, there are presently two further areas of complexity, and indeed potential difficulty, that stand out:

    a) The conclusion of the *Living in Love and Faith* process of the Church of England is of concern to many Methodists as they look to support their siblings in the Church of England. By contrast, the Methodist Church's provision since 2021 for two understandings of marriage is of concern to some within the Church of England. Of course, both ways round, these matters remain contested to some degree within each of our Churches, just as they may be between them. For some, these matters present a difficulty to our Churches' Covenant relationship, and it may be necessary to undertake some specific work to take account of these concerns as the work under the Covenant progresses.
    b) At the time of writing, potential proposals are before the Methodist Conference to make lasting provision for online celebrations of Holy Communion. The Methodist Church has consulted with ecumenical partners on this matter, and the responses to this – including from the Church of England – will help inform the decisions that the Conference is to make. As the *Life in Covenant Group* we note that provision of the sort that is proposed therein would present a significant new element of complexity to our Covenant relationship, and to the relationship of Full Communion envisaged in *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*. The proposals potentially have a bearing on the second of the Covenant's core affirmations: "We affirm that in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated." If such provision is made by the Methodist Conference, there will need to be a serious appraisal of what impact this has on the Covenant and on our work on the *MMiC* proposals.

The ongoing work of the Life in Covenant Group

34. *Life in Covenant* is the group that has an overarching handle on the various strands of the Covenant relationship between our Churches. Its purposes are captured in the group's Terms of Reference, which state (as adopted in 2021):

4.1 The new joint group will have three key tasks: to monitor, advocate, and initiate.

i. It will **monitor**:

i. The progress of Faith and Order conversations, including ongoing joint theological reflection.
ii. Further work under the Covenant. The JIC's Final Report (2014) (in paragraphs 37–44, 47, and 49) urges both churches at national and connexional level to give priority to the Covenant commitment 'to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.'[9]
iii. The existence of examples of good practice in cooperation between Anglicans and Methodists. The assistance of MAPUM will be sought in this.

ii. It will **advocate**:

a. Awareness of the Covenant and of the radical implications of its affirmations and commitments. Those who first knew about it are no longer in post, so, coupled with the 'normalising' of better relations, consciousness of the Covenant has gradually ebbed away from the minds of many members of both churches.
b. New ways of demonstrating the value of the two churches working together, whether these highlight the contrasting gifts of the churches or they indicate the benefits of closer cooperation.
c. Giving priority to making full use of what is already possible for the two churches to do together, especially planning for mission, worship, pastoral care, the deployment of ministry, and the use of resources.

iii. It will **initiate** work:

a. To explore and learn from the distinctive gifts of each church.
b. To enhance the possibilities of working together.
c. To explore and disseminate an appropriate spirituality of relationships.

35. This remains an accurate description of the group's remit as it stands today. As it takes these tasks forward, the group is particularly mindful of the need carefully to consider and respond to ongoing concerns.

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9 See https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/about/implementation-commission/

Conclusion

36. The Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England are asked to affirm the work of the *Life in Covenant Group*, and that of the faith and order bodies as reported here. As this report has shown, we are at a point where, notwithstanding the complexities mentioned above, important work is underway, to explore the most appropriate next steps for our two Churches to take in response to the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals to bring about a relationship of Full Communion between our Churches. It is work in progress, and we recommend that a further phase of the *Life in Covenant Group* be appointed for the coming quinquennium, and that FAOC and F&O work together with the help of the *Life in Covenant Group* to take this work forward. On this basis, these bodies will work to present to the General Synod and the Methodist Conference, by 2031, substantive proposals for implementation.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

38/1. The Conference receives the Report.

38/2. Subject to adoption of an equivalent motion by the General Synod of the Church of England, the Conference

(a) in accordance with (b) below, appoints the *Life in Covenant Group* for a further period of five years to August 2031, to continue its mandate as detailed at paragraph 34 in line with the Terms of Reference at Appendix C;

(b) in order to avoid delay to the group's work, re-appoints the *Life in Covenant Group* as presently constituted in the first instance, but directs that the membership of the group be reviewed and updated as appropriate by August 2027, with a revised membership to be appointed according to the appropriate processes for the Methodist Church and the Church of England respectively; and

(c) directs the Faith and Order Committee to work in collaboration with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission, with reference to the *Life in Covenant Group*, to continue the work on *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* already begun at the direction of the General Synod in 2019 and the Methodist Council in 2023, as outlined in this report, and to bring specific proposals for the implementation of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* to the Methodist Conference and General Synod by 2031.

Appendix A

An Anglican-Methodist Covenant

We the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England, on the basis of our shared history, our full agreement in the apostolic faith, our shared theological understandings of the nature and mission of the Church and of its ministry and oversight, and our agreement on the goal of full visible unity, as set out in the previous sections of our Common Statement, hereby make the following Covenant in the form of interdependent Affirmations and Commitments. We do so both in a spirit of penitence for all that human sinfulness and narrowness of vision have contributed to our past divisions, believing that we have been impoverished through our separation and that our witness to the gospel has been weakened accordingly, and in a spirit of thanksgiving and joy for the convergence in faith and collaboration in mission that we have experienced in recent years.

Affirmations

1. We affirm one another's churches as true churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and as truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.
2. We affirm that in both our churches the word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist are duly administered and celebrated.
3. We affirm that both our churches confess in word and life the apostolic faith revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the ecumenical Creeds.
4. We affirm that one another's ordained and lay ministries are given by God as instruments of God's grace, to build up the people of God in faith, hope and love, for the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care and to share in God's mission in the world.
5. We affirm that one another's ordained ministries possess both the inward call of the Holy Spirit and Christ's commission given through the Church.
6. We affirm that both our churches embody the conciliar, connexional nature of the Church and that communal, collegial and personal oversight *(episkope)* is exercised within them in various forms.
7. We affirm that there already exists a basis for agreement on the principles of episcopal oversight as a visible sign and instrument of the communion of the Church in time and space.

Commitments

1. We commit ourselves, as a priority, to work to overcome the remaining obstacles to the organic unity of our two churches, on the way to the full visible unity of Christ's Church. In particular, we look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches makes possible a united, interchangeable ministry.
2. We commit ourselves to realise more deeply our common life and mission and to share the distinctive contributions of our traditions, taking steps to bring about closer collaboration in all areas of witness and service in our needy world.
3. We commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches.
4. We commit ourselves to encourage forms of eucharistic sharing, including eucharistic hospitality, in accordance with the rules of our respective churches.
5. We commit ourselves to listen to each other and to take account of each other's concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches.
6. We commit ourselves to continue to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.

Appendix B

Membership of the Life in Covenant Group

Co-Chairs:	The Rt Revd Matthew Parker (Bishop of Stafford)
	The Revd Ruth Gee (President of the Conference 2013/2014)
Church of England Members:	The Revd Dr Matthias Grebe (since 2025, Co-Secretary)
	The Revd Dr Julie Gittoes (since 2024, FAOC representative)
	Mrs Abigail Ogier (since 2025)
	The Revd Angela Sheard (since 2025)
Methodist Members:	The Revd Steven Cooper (since 2024, Co-Secretary)
	The Revd Dr Martin Wellings (F&O representative)

	The Revd Novette Headley
	The Revd Dr Jonathan Pye (MAPUM representative)
Observers:	The Revd Dr Ainsley Griffiths (since 2025, Church in Wales)
	Ms Miriam Weibye (since 2025, Scottish Episcopal Church)

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Past members – CofE:	The Rt Revd Anderson Jeremiah (to 2024, FAOC representative)
	The Revd Dr Melanie Marshall (to 2024)
	Ms Annika Mathews (to 2024)
	The Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Morris (to 2025, Co-Secretary)
Past member – Methodist:	The Revd Michaela Youngson (to 2024, Co-Secretary)

Appendix C

Terms of Reference for the continuing *Life in Covenant Group*

1. Background

1.1 The Methodist Church and the Church of England entered a covenant on All Saints Day, 1 November 2003. One of the recommendations of the Common Statement[10] was to establish a Joint Implementation Commission 'to carry forward the implementation of the … Covenant Commitments.'[11] The Joint

10 *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant: Common Statement of the Formal Conversations between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England* (Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, and Church House Publishing, London, 2001), paragraph 194; https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/An-Anglican-Methodist-Covenant-Common-Statement.pdf. The report of the informal conversations was published as *Commitment to Mission and Unity: Report of the Informal Conversations between the Methodist Church and the Church of England* (Church House Publishing, London, and Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 1996)

11 *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant*, paragraph 195, no. 6.

Implementation Commission (JIC) worked in two phases, 2003–2008 and 2008–2014, and published a number of reports, a summary of which is provided in its second quinquennial report (2013).[12]

1.2 The Methodist Conference (in July 2014) and the General Synod (in November 2014) approved the three main recommendations of the final report of the Joint Implementation Commission, *The Challenge of the Covenant*.[13] The recommendations set out three streams of work in the next phase of implementation of the Covenant:

i. That the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England and the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Church work together to bring forward proposals for:

   a. the Methodist Church to consider afresh expressing the Conference's ministry of oversight in a personal form of connexional, episcopal ministry and the Church of England to recognise that ministry in the Methodist Church as a sign of continuity in faith, worship and mission in a church that is in the apostolic succession;
   b. the Church of England and the Methodist Church to address the question of reconciling, with integrity, the existing presbyteral and diaconal ministries of our two churches, which would lead to the interchangeability of ministries.[14]

ii. That our churches at local and regional level, supported and advised by the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM),[15] give priority to making full use of what is already possible for them to do together, and

12 *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Second Quinquennial Report of the Joint Implementation Commission (2013)* https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Challenge-of-the-Covenant-Uniting-in-Mission-and-Holiness-2013.pdf. A summary of all the JIC's reports is to be found in section 5 *Behold the Servants of the Lord: Assessing Ten Years of Living in Covenant ANNEX* pp 10–12. Links to those reports themselves are to be found at https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/about/implementation-commission/

13 *THE CHALLENGE OF THE COVENANT: UNITING IN MISSION AND HOLINESS: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014: Joint Implementation Commission.* https://anglican-methodist.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Challenge-of-the-Covenant-Uniting-in-Mission-and-Holiness.pdf

14 *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 46.

15 MAPUM is an outworking of the Covenant. It brings together the national bodies of both churches that previously supported local ecumenism. Its strapline is: *Promoting the unity in mission of the whole church at local level, especially through the Anglican-Methodist Covenant.*

especially to plan together for mission and worship, deployment of ministry and the use of resources.[16]

iii. That a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group, co-chaired by a President or Vice-President of the Methodist Conference and a Diocesan Bishop and including two other Methodist and two other Anglican members should be established, with access to the key policy making bodies of our churches, to replace the Joint Implementation Commission in the next quinquennium. This body will monitor progress of faith and order conversations and other ongoing work under the Covenant and advocate new initiatives; facilitate communication of Anglican-Methodist developments in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland; and report annually to the General Synod and Methodist Conference.[17]

1.3 The third recommendation recognised that the JIC had taken its mandate as far as it could and proposed the establishment of a Joint Covenant Advocacy and Monitoring Group (JCAMG) to carry forward the development of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant into the next quinquennium. JCAMG was duly set up by both the Methodist Conference and the Methodist Conference and General Synod in 2015 to run for five years. Due to conditions as a result of the COVID pandemic five years became six, for the Methodist Church through a decision at Conference and for the General Synod automatically since its life was extended by the deferral of elections by a year. JCAMG's mandate finished, therefore, in the summer of 2021.

2. *Life in Covenant*

2.1 The progress of the Covenant has not always been smooth. From late 2019 until 2023, work on the proposals of *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*, the major piece of work by the Faith and Order bodies of both churches in response to the requests of 2014 (see 1.2.i. above), had been stalled. Yet both churches remain, and have remained, committed to the Covenant. JCAMG proposed therefore in 2021 that a successor body come into existence but with a slightly broadened focus: reflecting that while the advocacy and monitoring of processes remain important, these have needed to be undertaken with a complementary emphasis upon the living experience of the Covenant. To indicate this shift in emphasis it was proposed that the new group be called by the somewhat snappier name: *Life in Covenant*. *Life in Covenant* has therefore been constituted since 2021 with three areas of focus:

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16 *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 48.

17 *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, paragraph 49.

i. A growing understanding and recognition of the distinctiveness of each church, valuing the specific contribution each can make for the promotion of the gospel and the transformation of society. An example of a relationship rooted in distinct contributions may be seen in the work of the churches in the public square as discussed in *The Challenge of the Covenant*.[18] The Methodist Church has a track record of modelling the prophetic stand in the life of the Church, while the Church of England has the opportunity to effect change as an adviser and critical friend to government.
ii. The continuing value of harmonious and cooperative relationships between Anglicans and Methodists, especially where these benefit mission but also where they enhance pastoral and other provision. The current legislation already allows for a great deal of cooperation, but this would be strengthened by coming into closer communion. Examples of this take place throughout the country and often seem so normal as to go virtually unnoticed. They need to be highlighted, valued, and further facilitated.
iii. A deepening appreciation that the heart of ecumenism is in the quality of relationships among the members of different churches. Structures must change in order to facilitate better relationships, but even before they are improved relationships rooted in the shared life of the gospel can be established. The Covenant would be greatly enhanced by an intentional and disciplined spirituality of relationships. This *koinonia* can be translated from a profound theological concept into everyday praxis by discovering and applying the principles of how we relate together in God.

3. Membership

3.1 *Life in Covenant* consists of five members of each church, including the co-chairs and the co-secretaries. Due attention will be given to diversity within the group, including diversity of age, and recognising the need for expertise in the membership. Hence it will be made up of:

i. A Bishop and a former President or Vice-President of the Methodist Conference. (As this as a continuing journey together, the co-chairs should be familiar with the development of the Covenant relationship between the two churches.)
ii. A representative from each church of their Faith and Order bodies. (Faith and Order issues are at the heart of the relationship between the two churches and, while they are not the only things that can lead to difficulty, they are

18 *The Challenge of the Covenant*, section "Joint Consultation and Decision Making", paras 22-26

central to the ongoing challenges. In addition, Faith and Order expertise can assist each church's acceptance of the distinctiveness of the other and its recognition of the gifts that can be received.)

iii. Another two persons from each church (chosen for their expertise or particular gifts). These should include at least one representative from MAPUM. (This both recognises the central importance of living the Covenant in local contexts and MAPUM's special role in promoting the living experience of the Covenant.)

iv. The Church of England's National Ecumenical Adviser and the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer as co-secretaries.

v. In addition to the formal members of the group, ecumenical participant-observers may be invited to attend meetings, including from the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church.

4. The task of the group

4.1 The joint group will continue to have three key tasks: to monitor, advocate, and initiate.

i. It will **monitor**:
   i. The progress of Faith and Order conversations, including ongoing joint theological reflection.
   ii. Further work under the Covenant. The JIC's Final Report (2014) (in paragraphs 37-44, 47, and 49) urges both churches at national and connexional level to give priority to the Covenant commitment 'to develop structures of joint or shared communal, collegial and personal oversight, including shared consultation and decision-making, on the way to a fully united ministry of oversight.'[19]
   iii. The existence of examples of good practice in cooperation between Anglicans and Methodists. The assistance of MAPUM will be sought in this.

ii. It will **advocate**:
   a. Awareness of the Covenant and of the radical implications of its affirmations and commitments. Those who first knew about it are no longer in post, so, coupled with the 'normalising' of better relations, consciousness of the Covenant has gradually ebbed away from the

19 *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, Paragraph 49; cf paragraph 41: 'As a key priority in the next phase of the Covenant journey, the development of structures of joint decision-making, to which we have already committed ourselves in the Covenant Commitments, is crucial.

minds of many members of both churches.

b. New ways of demonstrating the value of the two churches working together, whether these highlight the contrasting gifts of the churches or they indicate the benefits of closer cooperation.

c. Giving priority to making full use of what is already possible for the two churches to do together, especially planning for mission, worship, pastoral care, the deployment of ministry, and the use of resources.

iii. It will **initiate** work:

a. To explore and learn from the distinctive gifts of each church.

b. To enhance the possibilities of working together.

c. To explore and disseminate an appropriate spirituality of relationships.

5. Method

5.1 *Life in Covenant* will

i. meet at least twice per year, with at least one meeting held in person;

ii. consult, as necessary, with key members of the national/connexional bodies, as well as Theological Education Institutions, in the two churches;

iii. conduct business, when the need arises throughout the year, using conference calls and email;

iv. feed into the agendas of the Joint Senior Staff Meeting and the annual meeting of the Methodist Presidency and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York;

v. maintain contact with MAPUM and seek its assistance where necessary in the implementation of its initiatives;

vi. facilitate communication, learning, and mutual understanding of Anglican-Methodist relations in Scotland and Wales of the outworking of the Covenant in England;[20]

vii. consider the implications of Anglican-Methodist relations in Ireland and elsewhere in the world;

viii. report annually to the General Synod and the Methodist Conference;

ix. be reviewed after five years and proposals brought to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod in 2031 to carry on, change, or disband the group.

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20 'The Methodist Church is a church in three nations and has close relations with each of the three Anglican churches. Developments taking place in one nation illuminate and may have an impact on the relations in the other two. We therefore believe that it is important to facilitate the exchange of experience and ideas between these three relationships.' *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness: Report to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in 2014*, Paragraph 12.