

INTERCHANGEABILITY OF MINISTRY BETWEEN THE CHURCH OF IRELAND AND THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

The 2010 Conference adopted the Agreed Principles from the Methodist and Church of Ireland Working Groups on the Interchangeability of Ministry, which form part of this report, and directed the Covenant Council to bring the necessary legislation to enable their implementation.

1. Response to the Statement from the Covenant Council.

- 1.1 The Conference welcomes the Statement on Interchangeability of Ministry and thanks the Covenant Council for the considerable work that has gone into its preparation. It recognizes that this discussion is taking place against a background of changing religious patterns throughout Ireland. These changes require a fresh look at how we undertake mission and pastoral care. Furthermore the Conference re-affirms its commitment, expressed in the Covenant, to respond to God's call to a fuller relationship between our Denominations.
- 1.2 The opening paragraphs of the Statement helpfully establish an understanding of ordained ministry in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God. This has been a theme which the Methodist Church in Ireland has been seeking to explore and develop for many years, and more particularly as part of our 'Connexions' process.
- 1.3 The Statement underlines once again the Covenant's affirmation which we seek to offer of each other's ministry, namely that we recognise and acknowledge one another's ordained ministries as given by God and instruments of God's grace. We are glad that this recognition has enabled some degree of sharing, including Eucharistic sharing, between our two denominations. It has, in certain circumstances, allowed Church of Ireland clergy to celebrate a Church of Ireland rite in a Methodist setting, and likewise has allowed Methodist clergy to celebrate according to a Methodist rite in a Church of Ireland setting. In particular it has facilitated ministry in churches such as the 'Church of the Good Shepherd'.
- 1.4 It will help both our denominations in their growing understanding of each other if such sharing, including eucharistic sharing, becomes a more regular feature of our life together. However such sharing, where each denomination is confined to using its own liturgies in the presence of the other, underlines the need for us to go further, if a way forward can be found.
- 1.5 We recognise and endorse the statement that oversight in both our denominations is exercised in personal, collegial and communal forms. However the model which Methodism has inherited puts particular emphasis on the communal, so that any personal oversight exercised is at the behest of the communal and answerable to it.

- 1.6 We believe that we sit within and wish fully to embrace the Apostolic tradition of the Church as described in the Lima Document para M34 and quoted in the interim statement.
- 1.7 We further believe that the personal episcopate which is exercised within the Methodist Church meets the requirement of being clearly identifiable. We warmly welcome the conclusion that the structure of personal episcopate within Methodism may differ from that within the Church of Ireland. We see a need to explore further whether those within Methodism who are called to exercise personal episcopate are granted sufficient authority within our regulations to meet the demands which this ministry places on them.

2 Proposals for a way forward

- 2.1 The working party appointed by the General Committee to prepare this response has met on two occasions with the group appointed by the Standing Committee of the General Synod to prepare the response on behalf of the Church of Ireland. These meetings have been marked by a positive spirit and a desire by all to find a way forward.
- 2.2 The Methodist working party acknowledged that our personal expression of episcopate was of particular interest to the Church of Ireland, but appreciated the approach taken by the Church of Ireland which sought to explore how the existing patterns of oversight within the Methodist Church might be in accord with the 'Lambeth Quadrilateral'.
- 2.3 It was felt that the most fruitful route for such exploration was to consider the office and function of the President of the Conference, and of the Methodist Church in Ireland. As a result the following statement was agreed for presentation to both our Churches. We present it in the belief that, should the General Synod and the Conference endorse it, we can enter a new phase in our relationship together which can not only enhance the life of both of our denominations but also offer new and exciting possibilities for mission.

3. Agreed principles from the Methodist and Church of Ireland Working Groups on the Interchangeability of Ministry

We reaffirm that we discern personal, communal, and collegial episcopate in each of our denominations and that all three expressions of episcopate are essential to the polities of our traditions

We have discerned consonance between the office and function of Presidents and Past Presidents of the Methodist Church in Ireland and in the office and function of Bishops in the Church of Ireland based on the current doctrinal understanding and ecclesiology of both Churches.

We affirm the collegial participation of at least three persons, who express the office and function of Episcopal ministry, in the act of dedication of a new President and in the consecration of a Bishop and the communal affirmation of the action by the People of God.

Common features of the act of dedication/consecration in the two Churches are prayer, the laying on of hands, the presentation of the Bible and vesting.

To enable us to recognize more fully the expression of episcopate in each of our Churches it is necessary to embrace the mutual participation of the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland or Past Presidents in the consecration of Bishops in the Church of Ireland and the participation of Bishops of the Church of Ireland in the installation and dedication of a President in the Methodist Church in Ireland.

Accepting the principle of such mutual participation has been the key to achieving substantial agreement on how to bring about the full interchangeability of ministry. Certain practical actions will also be necessary

We recommend that full Proposals be brought forward to the General Synod and to the Methodist Conference in 2011.

These should include a date from which there will be:

- Mutual involvement in the consecration of Bishops and dedication of Presidents.
- Consequential interchangeable ministry.
- Mutual celebration and affirmation of the presbyteral ministry of all of those ordained in both Churches, including those duly ordained in the past

This development does not circumscribe the relationship each of our churches may have with other Christian traditions.

A duly ordained presbyter/priest of either Church may administer Holy Communion in the other Church according to either rite or ceremony.

A presbyter/priest of one covenanting church ministering in the context of the other will be treated as being within the order and discipline of that Church as well as within the order and discipline of their own Church.

Practical implications

Appropriate mutual participation in ordinations to all forms of ministry will be normative.

A practical implication of our learning with each other would be the affirmation and renewal of the diaconate.

Bishops of the Church of Ireland welcome Presidents and Past Presidents of the Methodist Church in Ireland as sharing in their order and ministry.

The Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland will likewise welcome Bishops of the Church of Ireland.