

Foreword

In the little booklet *Covenanting for Mission*, widely circulated in preparation for the 2012 Gathering, the Commission of the Covenanted Churches invited us to imagine what a Church Uniting in Wales might look like.

It acknowledged that to move from our present structures of governance was likely to take a real change of attitude. It would mean beginning to think of ourselves as already to some extent The Church Uniting in Wales!

Such a Church would incorporate all our covenanted churches and denominations, it would preserve all our unique traditions, and it would build on all we'd done in the past while taking a decisive step forward. In short, it would make visible in our time and place the Apostle Paul's vision, that 'as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another' (Romans 12.4-5).

This paper, therefore, needs to be discussed alongside the Commission's other paper on Pastoral Oversight, which spells out the Biblical and theological principles and insights shaping these practical recommendations.

Think of what you are about to read more as an artist's impression, or a series of impressions, of what the Covenanting Household of Faith here in Wales might look like, rather than the actual plans. It is our hope that, at the end of the consultation period, the recommendations made in this document – perhaps refined by our combined wisdom – may become proposals for the future.

When our predecessors covenanted together 'to work and pray in common obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ', it was 'in order that by the Holy Spirit we may be brought into one visible Church to serve together in mission'.

One of their stated intentions was 'to seek a mode of Church government which will preserve the positive values for which each has stood.' And the purpose was clearly stated: 'so that the common mind of the Church may be formed and carried to action through constitutional organs of corporate decision at every level of responsibility'.

Forty years on we might be getting close to seeing that prayer answered. The hope is that by the 2015 Gathering we'll no longer be imagining what a Church Uniting in Wales might look like, and of how we might fit into it, but actually instructing the architects to get on with it, and to start producing the plans!

Gethin Abraham-Williams

Chair of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales
2010 - 2012

1. Terms of Reference

1.1 The Group was asked:

- to explore a shared mode of church governance, with a particular focus on the similarities between the existing denominational arrangements;
- to draw up a document jointly agreed by all five member churches stating clearly what mode of governance would be acceptable to us all.

1.2 The Group was aware of the need to address this issue:

- in the medium term: if the Covenanted Churches agree to the Commission's invitation to think of themselves as 'the Church Uniting in Wales', what changes, if any, will be necessary to their present modes of governance?
- in the long term: if the Covenanted Churches in Wales achieve organic union, what model of governance will be acceptable to the new Church?
- in the short term: what model of church governance is acceptable and practicable in the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships?

2. Present Structures

2.1 The Group began its work by summarising the present position.

2.2 The Church in Wales

- 2.2.1 The Church in Wales is divided into six **dioceses**, Bangor, St Asaph, St Davids, Swansea and Brecon, Llandaff and Monmouth. Each diocese is administered by a **Bishop**, to whom the Church has delegated specific responsibility for matters of faith, mission and ministry and **for ordaining new ministers**. Each diocese is divided into two or three **archdeaconries**, which are sub-divided into a number of **deaneries**.
- 2.2.2 The basic administrative unit is the **parish**, under the care of an **Incumbent**, assisted sometimes by an **Assistant Curate** and/or by one or more **Lay Readers** and always by two **Church Wardens**. There are some 900 parishes, most of them grouped into livings, cared for by more than 500 ordained ministers.
- 2.2.3 The Church's supreme legislative council is the **Governing Body**, which meets twice a year. It is made up of three Orders: Bishops (6), Clergy (51) and Laity (86), making a total of 143. Most of the Clergy and Lay representatives are elected by the dioceses. Controversial issues need a majority in each of the three Orders.
- 2.2.4 Each diocese has its own **Diocesan Conference**, which is responsible for the life of the diocese. It organises the pastoral arrangements within the diocese, receives reports from various diocesan boards and committees and receives the diocese's financial accounts. Its members are elected by the deaneries.
- 2.2.5 There is also a **Deanery Conference**, charged with promoting the Church's mission in the deanery. Its members are elected by the **Parochial Church Councils**, each of which assists the Incumbent and the Wardens with the Church's work in the parish. Their members are elected at the annual Vestry meeting.

2.2.6 **The Representative Body** holds assets (at present some 1,500 churches, 650 parsonages and investments of some £370m) in trust for the Church. The income from its investments is used to support the Church's work. It has 26 members, nearly half of whom are elected by the dioceses.

2.3 **Covenanting Baptist Churches**

2.3.1 Each **local congregation** of Baptists orders its own life. It may affiliate voluntarily to a regional **Association** and to larger groupings, e.g. the **Baptist Union of Great Britain**, which, in turn, may affiliate to the **Baptist World Alliance**. *A church may ordain any person it wishes*, irrespective of any Baptist Union backing. Some congregations prefer to remain independent. For the majority, however, the Union, and also their local Association, are very important. **The normal pattern is for ordinations to take place in the sending (i.e. home) church**. An induction service will take place subsequently in the calling church. At present, there are 14 Covenanting Baptist Churches in Wales, served by 6 ordained Baptist ministers.

2.3.2a The **Baptist Union** is divided into **13 Associations**. The Associations employ a team of **Regional Ministers** and administration staff that support the local church pastorally, advise on mission and practical matters and organise training events. **The President of the Baptist Union** is elected annually, each of the churches and each minister in pastoral charge having a vote. Members of the **Baptist Union Council** are chosen by the local Associations and other related bodies. Probably the single biggest area that the Council deals with is finance, particularly the Union's Mission Grants.

2.3.2b As well as the Council, the Baptist Union now has a **Trustees Board** which oversees the work of the Union itself. The Council itself tends to debate significant issues facing the Baptist family, and to oversee the work of the various departments and staff of the Union. The committees of Council oversee issues such as the register of accredited ministers or the preparation of programmes. Likewise the annual **Assembly** is organised by a sub-committee jointly with the Baptist Missionary Society. While the lack of authority over local churches is a characteristic of the Baptist Union, the majority of ministers are accredited, and act in ways of which the Union approves.

2.3.3 Most Baptist churches have **Deacons**, elected (like the Ministers) by a ballot of church members. The Diaconate, along with the Minister (when there is one), are the managing trustees of the church, they seek to administer the life of the church under the overall direction of the church members meeting, where together they seek to determine the mind of Christ.

2.4 **The Methodist Church**

2.4.1 The Methodist Church in Britain is a **connexion** of churches, circuits and districts. The **local church** is the congregational place of worship. A **circuit** is a group of local churches, served by a team of local preachers and ministers including the superintendent minister. The **district** serves a group of circuits and is led by the district chair.

- 2.4.2 In Wales, there are two Methodist districts – the **Wales Synod**, which works mainly in the English language, and **Synod Cymru**, which works mainly in the Welsh language. The two Synods come together through **Y Cyngor/The Council** on matters of common interest and to share resources. The District Synods and the Council are oversight bodies. They set district policy and may bring matters to the Conference. They also hold a ministerial synod for presbyters and deacons, which is an opportunity for ministerial training as well as for debating issues. Final authority resides with the **Methodist Conference**.
- 2.4.3 The annual **Methodist Conference** meets in different places in Great Britain and is the supreme decision making body of the Church. The **President** and **Vice-President** are elected to preside at the Conference, embody its authority and represent Methodism in the wider world.
- 2.4.4 **The Methodist Conference ordains ministers** and deploys them to particular circuits (not individual churches). The **Wales Synod** consists of 16 circuits and some 200 churches served by some 70 active ministers (including ministers from other traditions). **Synod Cymru** consists of 1 circuit in some 12 areas (or *ardal*) served by 15 ministers (including ministers from other traditions).

2.5 The Presbyterian Church of Wales

- 2.5.1 Each church within the Presbyterian Church of Wales is accountable to a **presbytery**, a regional body which meets on a quarterly basis. There are 14 presbyteries, and each is responsible for planning the ministerial and missionary work within its boundaries. Presbyteries may also supervise calls to ministers, ordain elders and supervise the work of the Sunday School and young people. The Church has 44 full-time ministers, 12 part-time ministers and over 300 elders.
- 2.5.2 The presbyteries are divided into three **associations: the Association in the South, the Association in the East and the Association in the North**. These meet twice a year to supervise and endorse the work of the presbyteries. **They are also responsible for ordaining ministers**.
- 2.5.3 The annual focal point is the **General Assembly**, which is held for three days in July. The General Assembly has a **Moderator**, who is elected annually. There are three boards of the General Assembly: **the General Assembly Board** (incorporating the Church and Society and Pension Board Departments and the following Panels: Audit, Office Monitoring, Publicity and Publishing, Worship and Doctrine, Nominations, Ecumenical, Historical Society, Davies Lecture Board), the **Life and Witness Board** (incorporating the Departments of Candidates and Training, Youth and Children, Ministries, Women, Spirituality, the Worldwide Church) and the **Resources Board** (incorporating the Coleg y Bala, Coleg Trefeca, Applications and Policy and Performance Departments).
- 2.5.4 The **Central Office** is in Cardiff. The Office Staff are responsible for the administration of the Church. The office is managed by the **General Secretary**, who is accountable to the General Assembly.

2.6 The United Reformed Church (URC)

- 2.6.1 The Wales Synod is one of 13 Synods of the URC in the UK and, along with Scotland, one of the two National Synods. It has about 110 churches across Wales. It is part of the branch of Christianity known as 'reformed,' and through a series of unions over the past 39 years, has brought together English Presbyterians, English, Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists and members of the Churches of Christ.
- 2.6.2 The URC in Wales supports 26 ministers, and each church is led by a number of ordained elders who share with the minister the spiritual and pastoral oversight of the church. Over a third of churches are in ecumenical partnerships with the Anglican, Covenanting Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches in Wales. Each **Local Church** is governed by a Church Meeting consisting of all its members. Its function is 'to further the Church's mission in the locality'. The Wales Synod is divided into **8 Regions** and churches may, from time to time, gather in – or send representatives to – regional events. Regions act in this way for effective communication and for the furthering of fellowship. No such gathering has any role in governance of the local church or of the denomination.
- 2.6.3 The Wales National **Synod** is served by **Synod Officers** and **Synod Council**, which develop vision and set priorities. **Boards**, accessed directly by Local Churches, implement policies in specified areas, such as mission, property and finance, and leadership, and leadership development. **Networks** provide information and connect interested people. **Synod Elders** are called to encourage and represent the life of the Synod in **8 Regions**. The structures of Synod are designed to enhance and enable the life and mission of the **Local Church**. *The Synod Moderator normally presides at the ordination and induction of ministers.*
- 2.6.4 The URC has a UK-wide **General Assembly** which brings together representatives biennially. The Assembly is presided over by two **Moderators**, one an ordained minister of Word and Sacraments and the other a non-ministerially ordained URC Elder. They are elected by the General Assembly preceding the one over which they will preside. General Assembly is advised by its **Mission Council**, it plans the Church's activity across Britain, appoints central staff, receives reports from national committees, and deals with substantial reports and initiatives. The General Assembly is intended to embody the unity of the URC and therefore is the final authority in matters of doctrine and order and all other concerns of its common life.

3. Observations

3.1 The Working Group noted that ordinations are performed in different ways in different traditions:

- In the Church in Wales, the bishop is responsible for ordination, seeking and commissioning those called by God; he ordains both deacons and priests.
- In Baptist churches, most ordinations take place in the sending church (i.e. the home church), and visiting ministers usually take part. Ordination may include the laying on of hands, but none of the visiting ministers has an automatic right to do this. It all happens at the behest of the local congregation.
- In the Methodist Church, ministers are ordained on behalf of the Connexion as part of the annual meeting of the Conference. The person who presides at the Service of Ordination is the President of Conference or a Past President of Conference.
- In the Presbyterian Church of Wales, ministers are ordained by the Association in the three Provinces to serve the whole denomination. The Moderator of the Association presides at the Ordination Service. The Moderator, who is elected annually, may be an ordained minister or an ordained elder.
- In the United Reformed Church, it is the church – local and catholic – gathered in council which ordains ministers of Word and Sacrament. The service usually takes place in the first pastorate to which the minister has been called, and it is usually the Synod Moderator who presides. The URC also ordains men and women to eldership. Elders are only ordained once and are subsequently inducted to serve. Eldership is recognised throughout the church but exercised locally following election by a Church Meeting. The church minister normally presides at services of ordination to eldership.

3.2 It was noted also that the structures of governance differ substantially in that:

3.2.1 The Anglican and Presbyterian Churches operate on a national level within Wales, whereas the Methodist and United Reformed Churches operate on a British basis.

3.2.2 Covenanting Baptist churches have no authoritative national court.

3.2.3 There is considerable variation in where authority lies:

- In the Anglican Church it lies formally with the Governing Body, but the Dioceses are autonomous to a considerable extent; the Church in Wales is, in a very real sense, a gathering of six separate churches based on its six Dioceses.
- In Baptist churches the Local Congregation is entirely autonomous.
- In the Methodist Church authority is shared between churches, circuits and districts and ultimate authority lies with the Conference.
- In the Presbyterian Church it lies formally with the General Assembly, but in practice the Association and Presbyteries are powerful.
- In the United Reformed Church it lies with the Councils of the Church – the Church Meeting, the Synod and the General Assembly.

- 3.2.4 Several Churches have structures that broadly correspond to each other in geographical terms, e.g. the 15 Anglican archdeaonries correspond very broadly to the 16 Methodist circuits, the 14 Presbyterian presbyteries and the 12 URC regions, but an Anglican archdeaconry or URC region do not have the authority of a Methodist circuit or a Presbyterian presbytery.
- 3.3 The Working Group's deliberations were informed by the following considerations:
- 3.3.1 that the Commission's long-term ambition is to establish
- a Church of Wales that shares one faith, one structure, one ministry and one governance, but
 - that honours and celebrates the different theological emphases and worship traditions that constitute and enrich the greater whole;
- 3.3.2. that the Church in Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales have embarked on a Review of their denominational structures;
- 3.3.3 that the Commission is inviting the Covenanted Churches to think of themselves in terms of the Church Uniting in Wales, which would consist of nine jurisdictions (the six existing Anglican dioceses plus three others – a Methodist jurisdiction, a Presbyterian jurisdiction and a URC/Covenanting Baptist jurisdiction, each of which would appoint its own bishop). The Working Group took the view that this is an essential first step towards full visible union, and has based its recommendations on the assumption that the invitation is accepted by member Churches.

4. Medium-term Recommendations

- 4.1 The Working Group **recommends** that the Methodist, Presbyterian, URC/Covenanting Baptist jurisdictions need not be called 'dioceses', even though they will operate as dioceses within the Church Uniting in Wales. Following the principle of 'unity in diversity', there is nothing to prevent there being, say, a Methodist *District*, a Presbyterian *Association* and a URC/Covenanting Baptist *Region* corresponding to the Anglican *dioceses* within the Uniting Church.
- 4.2 The Working Group **recommends** that, following acceptance of the Commission's invitation outlined in 3.3.3, all member jurisdictions will, in the short term, continue to operate their existing ecclesiastical polity, with the exception, of course, that once a bishop has been elected, all ordinations within that bishop's jurisdiction are performed by the bishop.
- 4.3 While the Working Group does not foresee that any immediate changes will be required to the mode of governance of any member jurisdiction, it is obvious that some over-arching body will be needed where all nine jurisdictions can meet to consult with each other. A possible model for such a body is the Gathering of the Covenanted Churches, the first of which is to be held in Aberystwyth in 2012. At present, this is envisaged as a triennial gathering. The Working Group **recommends** that, following acceptance by the Churches of the Commission's invitation outlined in 3.3.3, the Gathering be held annually.

5. Long-term Recommendations

- 5.1 The Working Group feels that many of the legal and financial obligations of church unity are beyond its remit and **recommends** that, following acceptance of the Commission's invitation outlined in 3.3.3, leaders, lawyers and administrators representing all five member Churches be asked to draw up, within a period of five years following the acceptance, a Scheme and Constitution, including voting procedures, based on the following recommendations.
- 5.2 The Working Group **recommends** that, in the long term, there will be one Governing Body for the nine jurisdictions in the United Church. A possible model is the Gathering of the Covenanted Churches (see 4.3 above) which could evolve into the Gathering of the Uniting Church of Wales. That Gathering will meet twice a year.
- 5.2.1 The Gathering will adopt a Constitution for the Uniting Church that will be binding on all members. It will also authorise the forms of service now in use by all member Churches.
- 5.2.2 Only the Gathering will be able to amend the Constitution, make doctrinal statements, commission new forms of service or amend existing ones and make or amend provisions for faith and discipline.
- 5.3 The Working Group **recommends** that there will be nine jurisdictions, six of which will be known as 'dioceses' and three of which may adopt another title (e.g. district, association, region). Each of these jurisdictions will hold its own annual Conference.
- 5.3.1 In consultation with the Gathering, each Conference will manage its own affairs, its own finance and its own property.
- 5.3.2 Each Conference will elect members to the Gathering, which will have 240 members. Each of the six Anglican dioceses will elect 20 members, making a total of 120; each of the other three jurisdictions will elect 40 members, making a total of 120.
- 5.4 The Working Group **recommends** that, following the principle of unity in diversity, the members of each Conference are elected according to present denominational practice.
- 5.5 The Working Group **recommends** that, in order to ensure that the Church has a continuous presence in all parts of Wales, the United Church adopts a **parochial** system, whereby churches originating in different denominations will be able to relate to each other locally and co-operate for mission.
- 5.5.1 The aim would be that each parish will be cared for by a minister. Large parishes may have several ministers.
- 5.5.2 Each parish will have a Parish Council representing all the churches within the parish. Its task will be to promote the mission of the Church in the parish.
- 5.5.3 In order to ensure continuity of tradition, each church within the parish will continue to relate to the jurisdiction to which it originally belonged.
- 5.5.4 Where all the churches within a parish belong to the same jurisdiction, the Parish Council will also care for the finances and property of the parish. The Parish Council will implement any provisions made by the Gathering or the jurisdiction, make representations to these bodies and elect representatives to the jurisdiction's Conference according to the practice of the jurisdiction.

- 5.5.5 Where churches within a parish belong to different jurisdictions, each one will have its own local Church Council to care for finances and property. In such instances, the local Church Council will elect representatives to the jurisdiction's Conference according to the practice of the jurisdiction. The task of implementing any provisions made by the Gathering or the jurisdiction and making representations to these bodies will be shared between the Church Council and the Parish Council, the two working in co-operation with each other in order to further the Church's mission in the parish.
- 5.5.6 Members of the Parish Council will be elected at an Annual General Meeting of all the churches in the parish.
- 5.5.7 A situation could arise where a minister of a parish relates to a different tradition to that of one or more churches within the parish. In such instances the minister may continue to relate to the jurisdiction most appropriate for her/him, but will seek to ensure that the churches (through their local Church Councils) continue to relate to their jurisdiction in an appropriate way and one which does not hinder the mission of the parish (through the Parish Council). This ministry will be exercised in light of the recommendation in 6.2 (below).
- 5.6 The Working Group **recommends** that the local Church be given as much autonomy as is practicably possible within the proposed structure.
- 5.7 The Working Group **recommends** that careful arrangements be made for all the assets of the Uniting Church be managed by one body, but that the assets of each former Covenanted Church be reserved for use by the jurisdiction representing that Church (e.g. the assets of the present Presbyterian Church of Wales would not be used outside the Presbyterian jurisdiction).

6. Short-term Recommendations

- 6.1 The Working Group was aware of the difficulties within Local Ecumenical Partnerships when the minister is expected to report to more than one denominational structure and attend several denominational courts. This is an unnecessary burden.
- 6.2 The Working Group **recommends** that Local Ecumenical Partnerships adopt the principles:
- that ministers be encouraged but not required to attend a denominational court other than that of the denomination to which they belong; and
 - that churches within a Local Ecumenical Partnership entrust the administration of the Partnership to a Sponsoring Body selected from members of the Commission of Covenanted Churches or Cytûn.

ANNEX 1

MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON CHURCH GOVERNANCE

The Reverend Gwynn ap Gwilym	The Church in Wales
The Reverend Dr Bernard Sixtus	The Church in Wales
The Reverend John Henson	The Covenanting Baptist Churches
The Reverend Gordon Sollis	The Methodist Church in Wales
The Reverend Ifan Roberts	The Presbyterian Church of Wales
The Reverend Bryn Williams	The Presbyterian Church of Wales
The Reverend Dr Robert Pope	The United Reformed Church
Ms Rhian Linecar	Cytûn Faith, Order & Witness Officer

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION 2012

The Reverend Dr Marc Dummer	
The Reverend John Garland	
Mr John Thorne	The Covenanting Baptist Churches
The Right Reverend Wyn Evans, Bishop of St Davids	
The Reverend Gwynn ap Gwilym	
The Reverend Canon Sue Huyton	
The Reverend Steve Wilson	The Church in Wales
The Reverend Cathy Gale*	
The Reverend Delyth Liddell	
The Reverend Gordon Sollis	The Methodist Church in Wales
The Reverend Bryn Williams	
The Reverend Brian Matthews	
Mrs Nia Higginbotham	
The Reverend Marcus Robinson	The Presbyterian Church of Wales
The Reverend Peter Noble	
The Reverend Stuart Jackson	
Mrs Ann Shillaker	The United Reformed Church
The Reverend Gethin Abraham-Williams (Chair)	
The Reverend Aled Edwards (Chief Executive, Cytûn)	
The Reverend Anthony Gregory (Hon Treasurer)	
Ms Rhian Linecar (Cytûn Faith, Order & Witness Officer)	Ex Officio
The Reverend Dr Sarah Rogers	
<i>(member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches)</i>	
The Reverend Dr Bernard Sixtus	
<i>(Church in Wales observer on the Joint Implementation Commission for the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England.....)</i>	Observers
The Reverend Dr Siôn Aled Owen	Simultaneous Translator

**also a Methodist representative on the Joint Implementation Commission for the Covenant between the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England.*

ANNEX 2

PRESENT CHURCH GOVERNANCE IN THE COVENANTED CHURCHES IN WALES

Anglican	Baptist	Methodist	Presbyterian	United Reformed
Governing Body	Baptist Union Assembly UK	Methodist Conference UK	General Assembly	General Assembly UK
Diocesan Conference (6)	Baptist Union Assembly Council	District (2)	Association (3)	National Synod
Archdeaconry (15)		Circuit (16)	Presbytery (14)	Region (12)
Deanery Conference (75)	Area Association		Area Meeting	District / Area Group
Parochial Church Council	Local Church	Local Church	Local Church	Pastorate

Authoritative bodies are highlighted

ANNEX 3

PROPOSED CHURCH GOVERNANCE IN A UNITING CHURCH OF WALES

