

General Synod 2022

Covenant Council Report

Proposer: The Very Revd Nigel Dune

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Archbishop,

Whilst the pandemic has to some extent slowed down the work of the Covenant Council we now find ourselves with four key areas of work, two of which are relatively urgent.

The working out of the realities of the interchangeability of ministry, so carefully framed over a long period of time and enacted in 2014, has brought to the fore some issues around the need for clear understandings of Ministry and Episcopate within each of our denominations. Questions around awareness of personal episcopate in the office of former, current and future Methodist Presidents and the interchangeability of Church of Ireland priests and Methodist presbyters at local level, beyond those who wish to take up parishes or circuits have arisen. For example questions are being asked about Methodist Ministers taking services in Church of Ireland churches, doing holiday duty and suchlike. In our polity, being as it is far more legalistic than the Methodist system, these matters can raise questions about licensing by Bishops, permissions to officiate and so on.

One important point of reference for all houses of this Synod is, I believe, some words from the Explanatory Memorandum of the 2014 Bill:

‘... what is provided for is that, having recognised the validity of the other, an ordained minister in either denomination may come under the discipline and oversight of the other for the exercise of ministry. This will allow participation, subject to the appropriate permissions required by the existing polities of either church, in the liturgies and rites of the other church. For example, a Church of Ireland priest might administer sacraments in a Methodist Church according to the Methodist rite through invitation and with permission, but without becoming a circuit minister in connexion with Conference or for the purpose of District Synod.’

Such questions demand clarity about the range and scope of interchangeability as defined in the historic agreement reached in 2014.

Recent changes in charities regulation in both jurisdictions have meant the need for an urgent review of the regulations regarding Local Covenant Partnerships. Questions arise as to how both denominations can be recognised as trustees or as a single governing body for purposes of charities registration. The Council will soon be dedicating a full one day meeting to work on these and will be working in close consultation with existing projects to frame new guidelines and protocols to address these issues and to facilitate the smoother formation and operation of such joint projects in the future.

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Both of these key areas call for more work to be done on the nature of future co-operation and collaboration at both local and Diocesan/District levels. The Council will continue to seek ways to raise awareness of the Covenant and seek to raise better awareness of the deep relationship we now share and the opportunities that presents for joint witness to the Gospel.

The fourth key area of our work currently under way is an exploration of the rites of ordination, Eucharist, marriage, and confirmation in both polities. It is hoped that this will further our work on key issues I have already mentioned. This is particularly important for us in the Church of Ireland since so much of our doctrine is contained in the Book of Common Prayer.

Archbishop, I have pleasure in proposing that the report of the Covenant Council be received.