

THE COVENANT COUNCIL REPORT 2025

The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland

MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE

Church of Ireland

The Rt Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe (Co-Chair) (2/2)

Ms Elva Byrne (2/2)

Very Rev Nigel Dunne (2/2)

Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott (1/2)

Ven Barry Forde (2/2)

Rev Clare Kakuru (1/2)

Methodist Church in Ireland

Rev Canon Dr Heather Morris, General Secretary of the Methodist Church in Ireland (Co-Chair)

Rev Andrew Dougherty

Ms Gillian Kingston

Rev Dr Janet Unsworth (Secretary)

Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu

Presbyterian Observer

To be confirmed

In Attendance

Dr Nicole Gallagher (Synod Officer)

Executive Summary

The Covenant Council continues its work in advocating for the furtherance of the Covenant agreed between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland. We have welcomed the opportunity to gather in a residential format yearly as well as to hold other one-day meetings as helpful to the business before us.

Areas of Current Work

As reported over the past couple of years, the current work of the Council is focused on the various practicalities, opportunities and obstacles faced by both the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland in the realisation of interchangeability of ministry between the two denominations.

The principal areas of discussion continue to be:

1. *Understandings of Ministry and Episcopate within each denomination and the implications of these for those who move to serve in the other denomination*

There is mutual recognition that under the gift of interchangeability any minister that moves with the blessing and permission, and in good standing, of the sending Church, will minister faithfully and fully under the sole authority of the receiving Church. During the past year, we have continued to consider the importance of putting in place some protocols to enable the movement of clergy from one polity to another. The Council has held a number of discussions on the subject of Full Connexion for Methodist ministers who move into ministry in a Church of Ireland context, and how holding office in the Church of Ireland under the authority of a bishop relates to their Connexion with the Methodist Church which is intrinsic to their identity. Work is continuing on this, and the Council is confident that it is nearing a resolution. It is agreed that recommendations on this will be brought to the Methodist Conference in due course.

2. *Covenant Partnerships*

The Covenant Council continues to provide support and guidance to those partnerships and projects that have been enabled by the Covenant, while continuing to review the guidelines and protocols required for such arrangements. The coming together of Methodist and Church of Ireland congregations in Primacy Church in Bangor into a single congregation covenant partnership has provided an opportunity to review and update the regulatory framework of Local Covenant Partnerships. This will ensure that such partnerships will fulfil all constitutional obligations under the respective requirements of both denominations and be compliant with the charity regulator. The Covenant Council is encouraged by the richness of the partnership in Primacy and continues to encourage existing partnerships, along with seeking out new opportunities for congregations to share together in life and ministry.

3. *The nature of co-operation and collaboration at local and Diocesan/District level as well as at a national level (Chaplaincy in further and higher education, prisons and healthcare, formation in ministry, and lay readers/local preachers)*

We continue to look for a wide variety of opportunities for co-operation and collaboration. A long-held aspiration has been the possibility of interchange of Methodist Local Preachers and Diocesan Lay Readers. Given this, we are glad to report that a pilot scheme has been undertaken in the Dublin area by the Diocese of Dublin and Glendalough and the Southern District of the Methodist Church. The feedback from this scheme has been very positive and it is planned to run similar schemes in other parts of the country going forward.

As well as these discussions, a revision of the ‘Guidelines to the Journey’ booklet is still taking place. It is planned that the updated version will be made available in PDF format in the near future. While the booklet provides information on key areas to be borne in mind when working together and when visiting or planning worship in the other polity, it is still hoped that the Council might be in a position to undertake the provision of training sessions. Such training would be of benefit to those engaged in local Covenant partnerships, as well as those who wish to facilitate the more ‘occasional’ expressions of interchangeability of ministry enabled by the decision of the 2023 General Synod. The sessions would provide the opportunity for clerics of both denominations to become more familiar with each other’s liturgy and worship styles.

4. *Pioneer Ministry*

With versions of Pioneer Ministry taking place both in the Church of Ireland and in the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Council feels it is important that each denomination is aware of the Pioneer Ministry taking place in the other to avoid duplications and encourage partnership. This may include the co-option of appropriate persons from each denomination to the support structures in both churches to develop pioneer ministry, along with mutual inclusion and co-operation in pioneer events and gatherings.

Membership

Over recent years, the Council has reduced its membership on several occasions to assist concentrated and fruitful work on specific issues. It has now been noted by the Council that a number of members have been on the Council since its inception and, while experience is certainly greatly valued, it is also important to have new people come on board. A rolling plan has now been put in place to allow some of the longer-serving Church of Ireland members to step down over the course of the next two to three years. However, as people step down from the Council, we will need new members to take their place. Therefore, the Council will actively be identifying potential new members from both the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland so, should you or someone you know be interested in the work of the Covenant Council, please submit an expression of interest in confidence to the Synod Officer, Dr Nicole Gallagher, who will be assembling a panel of names for possible consideration in the year ahead.

Discussions continue with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland regarding the nomination of a Presbyterian Observer.

Motion to Propose at General Synod

The Covenant Council proposes the following motion for the consideration of the General Synod:

That the following be elected as Church of Ireland Representatives on the Covenant Council for the coming year:

The Rt Rev Michael Burrows, Bishop of Tuam, Limerick and Killaloe (Co-Chair)

Ms Elva Byrne

Very Rev Nigel Dunne

Rev Canon Dr Maurice Elliott

Ven Barry Forde

Rev Claire Kakuru