

REPORT OF THE ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2009

INTRODUCTION

Since last Assembly your committee has continued to exercise its oversight of the church's involvement in ecumenical matters. The following report highlights various areas of progress and change that have taken place in ecumenical relations.

THE COVENANT MONITORING GROUP

The group has had two meetings since our last General Assembly including the biennial review of the Covenant. There is a need to ensure we make progress in implementing the covenant and re-assert its purpose and the commitments which have been made. The committee is keen to encourage congregations to continue to consider the Covenant with the Church of Scotland and to think about what further steps might be taken to implement it in local areas.

A DVD of the very successful partnership at Canonbie has been produced and will be available as a resource to encourage further co-operation in other parts of the country.

Protocol: The Church of Scotland General Assembly had agreed a protocol should be prepared to deal with procedures when ministers and /or congregations seek to transfer from one denomination to the other. The protocol is as follows:

1. The Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland agree the following Protocol, which shall be regarded as a statement of good practice and implemented as far as possible by both Churches.
2. The Protocol shall be reviewed along with the Covenant, in terms of Commitment 7 of the Covenant document.
3. **Transfer of Congregations**
 - a. Where a congregation seeks to be admitted to membership of either party to the Covenant ("the receiving denomination"), and its current or last known denomination was the other party ("the releasing denomination"), this Protocol shall apply.
 - b. The Ecumenical Officer and the relevant Presbytery Clerks of both Churches shall confer together, and consult where necessary with the Solicitors, Principal Clerks or other relevant officials of either denomination.
 - c. The releasing denomination shall advise the receiving denomination whether any matters of Church law and discipline, or of civil law, remain to be resolved in respect of the congregation, and shall undertake to inform the receiving denomination when such resolution has been reached.
 - d. The receiving denomination shall not recognise the congregation in its membership until it has considered the advice received in terms of 3(c) above, and should explain to the releasing denomination its reasons if it decides to admit the congregation before the resolution of those matters.
4. For the avoidance of doubt, with the agreement of both denominations, a Congregation of the releasing denomination may be admitted to membership of the receiving denomination notwithstanding issues relating to ownership of heritable property remaining unresolved between the Congregation and the releasing denomination.
5. **Transfer of Ministers**
 - a. The transfer of ministers between the Churches shall be subject to the law of each Church.

- b. Where a congregation transfers its membership from one denomination to the other, as described in 3 above, and there is a sitting minister (or other member of a ministry team) in place, the normal rules of transfer of ministry shall apply, subject to the provisions of 5(c).
 - c. In the circumstances referred to in 5(b) the receiving denomination shall take particular care to discover whether any disciplinary or other legal processes are in process to which the minister or other individual is a party. In the event of such proceedings the normal rules of transfer shall not apply until the releasing denomination has informed the receiving denomination of the individual's good standing.
- 6. Interpretation of Protocol:** If the Ecumenical Officer and the Principal Clerks of the two Churches disagree on the interpretation and implementation of this Protocol in any case, the Covenant Monitoring Group shall advise on the matter and each denomination shall implement its own interpretation of the Protocol, so far as possible in the spirit of the advice received and of the original Covenant.

It is the intention of the two Churches to continue the process of biennial review of the Covenant with alterations being put into practice as soon as practical and being incorporated into the reworking of the Covenant every five years. The renewed Covenant would be signed by the Moderators of the General Assemblies, alternating between the Churches, thus also ensuring that the Covenant is given a high profile within both Churches.

ACTION OF CHURCHES TOGETHER IN SCOTLAND (ACTS)

The Scottish Churches Forum has just completed a period of transition. Articles of association have now been agreed and implemented to enable ACTS to be a company limited by guarantee. The Churches Forum has now become the Members' Meeting. There is also a group of trustees who will be non-voting participants in the Members' Meeting. The protocol is that each of the 9 member Churches will have one vote at that meeting but may have more than one representative present. ACTS will be a separate legal entity from Scottish Churches House. A procedure had been agreed for appointing trustees through an electoral college. The Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic Church, and the Episcopal Church will always have one trustee with the other denominations appointing a trustee on a rotational basis. The committee has appointed Rev A McMillan to be the voting member, with Rev M Collin as alternate, and Rev I Boa, our nominee to the Electoral College, has now been elected as a trustee.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HOUSE

The newly appointed Director of Scottish Churches House is Carol Scobie. Her vision of the House is as a place where relationships and hospitality would be strengthened. There would also be possibilities for a child friendly House. She hoped the network of people who know about SCH would be extended. The refurbishment of the Main House is ongoing, with people now able to use some of the en-suite facilities. Leighton House remains as it is at present offering a self-catering option to groups. Governance of Scottish Churches House, a new Company, will have a Board of Trustees, external to ACTS. If changes are made to the building these changes or enhancement will become ACTS property and if there are conditions of grant awards to the House i.e. payback clauses, then these will have to be agreed with ACTS in advance.

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Three members of the Panel on Doctrine have been identified to take part in the group to consider doctrine with representatives appointed by the Free Church of Scotland. It had been suggested the focus might be around the theme of the gospel providing a common

basis for our cooperation. We as a committee are keen to follow the progress that the Panel on Doctrine makes, with its implication for our committee and the wider church. However, no meeting has taken place so far.

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND (CTBI)

It is clear that the National Ecumenical Instruments did not have capacity to act in a way envisaged within the ecumenical architecture process and therefore a more direct relationship with member churches was required. The new model for CTBI focuses upon re-engaging with the churches, with a much smaller staff team, focussed upon core tasks. It will be a largely virtual organisation with staff working from home and with systems in place to enable work in London. Use will be made of video and telephone conferencing and the organisation's carbon footprint will be significantly reduced. CTBI will become small and refocused, reacting to specific requests. The structures will be stripped down so that relationships can take prime place. The hope is that the reduction in the CTBI budget will sustain the budget levels for the national instruments for the 2009 - 2011 periods.

THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (WCC)

We invited Mr Graham McGeoch to our January meeting. He is a member of the Central Committee and Executive Committees as well as on the search committee for the new General Secretary of WCC. He drew attention the range of work being done by WCC.

- A significant event will be the WCC Peace Convocation in Jamaica in 2011. It will meet under the theme "Glory to God and peace on earth" and will be the culmination of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence, which has sought to network and bring attention to the peacemaking initiatives of its various member churches.
- The document 'To be one Church' was agreed by the Assembly at Porto Alegre. ACTS is involved in preparing a resource for use in local churches and this will be fed into the Faith and Order Commission.
- 2010 Process – As planning for the 2010 "Witnessing to Christ" Conference, an event celebrating a century of missionary activity since the 1910 World Missionary Conference, also held in Edinburgh, gathers momentum, a number of Scottish churches have become actively involved in local arrangement of the event. As the main conference will be limited as to the numbers it can accommodate, the "fringe" events arranged by the Scottish churches, will benefit people who want to participate in the historic moment of world mission. (Also see paragraph below).
- The WCC is now involved in advocacy work in the Middle East. Promoting inter-faith dialogue has a focus in the Middle East and there was a recent conference in London shared with Christian Aid. These areas were core to the work of WCC

EDINBURGH 2010 'WITNESSING TO CHRIST' 2-6 JUNE 2010

After numerous attempts at facilitating hosting arrangements for the large number of delegates attending the "Witnessing to Christ" Conference, the University of Edinburgh through its department of Lifelong Learning, has agreed to host it. A liaison group, representing different role players, have begun arranging conference management. Young people from the Scottish Co-ordinating Team (SCoT) for 2010, convened by Stephen Smythe, will attend a WCC meeting in September 2009 to be trained as stewards for the 2010 event.

It is hoped that the conference will not be an event overshadowed with academic input where only professional theologians are represented, but an event that represents both laity and clergy.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES NATIONAL SPONSORING BODY FOR LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

The National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships, convened by Rev C Brown, held a day event, 'Threads – weaving a pattern of a church for today', in Paisley. This was an opportunity to learn more about ecumenical cooperation around Scotland and the attendance was encouraging with good participation. Plans are being made for a similar event in Edinburgh in March 2010.

Advisory Groups exist at regional level to:

- assist local congregations in setting up Local Ecumenical partnerships (LEP's) using the guidelines agreed by the National Sponsoring Body;
- work with all the LEPs in a defined geographical area; bring together those responsible for overseeing ministry and mission at regional level;
- ensure that the requirements of the denominations are met
- act as a mediating body in areas of dispute or over-burdening.

The Sponsoring Body's membership comprises the nine member churches of ACTS together with the Baptist Union of Scotland, and its work is facilitated by ACTS through the staff support of the Assistant General Secretary.

WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WARC)

In what has been heralded as a "major step for unity" within the Reformed family, WARC leaders along with a team of leaders from the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC), recommended in February 2006 that a new global body named the World Communion of Reformed Churches be formed to represent over 80 million Reformed Christians worldwide. This recommendation will have to be processed by the governing bodies of both WARC and REC. REC has 12 million members in 39 churches in 25 countries while WARC has over 75 million members in 214 Churches in 107 countries.

The uniting General Council for WCRC will meet in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in June 2010 under the theme, "Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace." It was agreed by the committee to send Rev Ian Boa as our representative to this significant conference.

VISITS TO OTHER CHURCHES

The Committee wishes to acknowledge the visits undertaken by the Moderator, Dr Donald Macdonald to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Scotland and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland. Dr Macdonald also took part in a meeting of Church leaders with the First Minister, Mr Alex Salmond MSP. Rev I Boa represented the denomination at the Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Rev J D Neil attended Scottish Area Assembly of the Congregation Federation and Rev A McMillan represented denomination at the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland and the National Assembly of the United Reformed Church held in Edinburgh.

CONCLUSION

The Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation for the time and effort expended by so many at both local and national levels in the development and maintenance of inter-church understanding and activities. We are grateful to all those who, in this ecumenical journey, strengthen our faith, nurture our reflection, support our actions and enrich our service.

In the name of the Committee

ANDREW McMILLAN

IAN A BOA

JOHN O FULTON

Convener

Vice Convener

Secretary

Appendix 1

The Scottish Churches' National Sponsoring Body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) Annual Review 2008.

The National Sponsoring Body, which is facilitated by ACTS exists

- 1) to provide a means whereby those involved in LEPs across Scotland can share their stories and learn from each other
- 2) to act as a reference and support body providing advice and guidance to those who seek to develop as LEPs in Scotland.
- 3) to act as a bridge builder between national and local expressions of ecumenism

During the course of the year the Sponsoring Body has worked to these aims focussing on developing a number of support tools for use in LEP and hosting the second LEP Gathering. It has met twice in 2008, once in Dunblane and once at Rosyth Local Ecumenical Partnership when the Sponsoring Body valued the opportunity to hear Rosyth's journey as an LEP.

'Threads – weaving a pattern of church for today' took place on All Saints Day in the Wynd Centre, Oakshaw Trinity Church, Paisley. Around 80 people gathered to share stories, worship and workshops which all focused on topics requested by participants at the first LEP Gathering held in 2005. LEP stories from North (Kinlochranoch), South (Dumfries), East (Murrayfield) and West (Mosspark) were shared. Though each LEP was very different the common thread running through the presentations was for the need to develop trusting relationships before formal partnerships were established and often this took a considerable length of time. Participants shared their own experiences of life in an LEP adding their threads to make our pattern of church for today. In the afternoon workshops were held allowing people to explore, Working with Children and Young People, Working in Teams, Ecumenical Review and What holds us Back and Pushes us Forward. Shirley Murray's hymn used at the closing worship fitted the day so well, **'Christ is the theme, the pattern you have given, Come, work with us, And weave us into one.** Shirley Erena Murray © Hope Publishing Co. Our thanks to everyone who contributed and participated in Threads. A review of the day is available from the ACTS office.

The **Ecumenical Review** document has gone through the pilot stage and revision and is ready for use in LEPs (both single congregation and covenanted partnerships) We are grateful to the folk in Rosyth who provided valuable insights into the use of the material and to the working group for developing the materials. Further discussion with denominations will take place to enable the material to be widely used. The **Orientation process** for clergy moving into LEP situations is also completed and available and during the year the Sponsoring Body has also developed a **model shared building agreement** for two or more congregations who share the same premises. Conscious that a number of Churches Together Groups have been in touch seeking advise on revising their constitutions, work will be undertaken in 2009 on a model **Churches Together constitution**.

The Sponsoring Body is conscious that the experience of **Regional Advisory Groups** around Scotland has been mixed and that the 'one size fits all' approach is not working. Therefore it has identified working on a regional basis as a priority for the forthcoming year. A consultation is planned for early in 2009 to hear experiences from around the country so that more appropriate ways of working regionally may be developed. The NSB is also seeking to raise its profile with regional church councils and structures.

Further information about the Scottish Churches' National Sponsoring Body may be obtained from denominational Ecumenical Officers or their equivalents, or by contacting Revd. Lindsey Sanderson, Assistant General Secretary, ACTS, Inglewood House, Alloa FK10 2HU. Tel. 01592 222361 E-mail: lindseysanderson@acts-scotland.org

Appendix 2

LIST OF ORGANISATIONS ON WHICH OUR CHURCH IS REPRESENTED

ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)

Members Meeting.....	Rev A McMillan
Trustee.....	Rev I A Boa
Churches Agency for Inter-Faith Relations in Scotland	Rev C McAulay
Church Life Network.....	Rev M Collin
Church & Society Network.....	Dr I Smith
Faith Studies Network.....	Rev A Ritchie
Mission Network	Rev J O Fulton
National Sponsoring Body.....	Rev G B Armstrong Rev J O Fulton
Network of Ecumenical Women in Scotland	Mrs N Cowan
Christian Aid Scottish Churches Committee.....	Rev R Thomson
Church of Scotland Committee on Ecumenical Relations.....	Rev I A Boa
Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Assembly.....	Rev A McMillan
Church Hymnary Trust.....	Mrs. R Jackson
Churches Parliamentary Office Support Group.....	Dr D Macdonald
Churches World Exchange.....	Rev J D Neil
David Livingstone Memorial Centre.....	Rev G B Armstrong
Pollock Memorial Missionary Trust.....	Rev J G Marshall
Scottish Bible Society	Rev J O Fulton
Scottish Churches Agency for Racial Justice.....	Rev P de Villiers
Scottish Churches Committee.....	Rev J O Fulton
Scottish Churches China Group.....	Mr G Banks
Scottish Churches Community Trust.....	Rev R Owens
Scottish Churches Europe Network.....	Mr J F Henderson
Scottish Churches Housing Agency.....	Rev R Thomson

Scottish Churches Industrial Mission.....	Mr G Banks
Scottish Joint Committee on Religious and Moral Education.....	Rev A D Scrimgeour
World Day of Prayer Scottish National Committee.....	Mrs. A McFie