

**ECUMENICAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE MAY 2021****Proposed Deliverance****The General Assembly:**

1. Receive the Report.
2. Instruct the Committee to engage with the reformed Presbyteries of the Church and report to a future General Assembly. (*Section 1*)
3. Instruct the Committee to facilitate a conference to explore the establishing of a cooperative partnership to enable Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland. (*Section 1.6-1.9*)
4. Note the establishing of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and welcome the development of an effective ecumenical forum during the Covid-19 pandemic. (*Section 2*)
5.
  - a) Approve the Saint Andrew Declaration, consisting of mutual Acknowledgements and Commitments between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church.
  - b) Instruct the Committee, in partnership with the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church, to oversee the implementation of the Commitments in the Saint Andrew Declaration and to set up the Working Group proposed by it. (*Section 3.6*)
6. Agree to the participation of the Church of Scotland in the Scottish Christian Forum and recognise it as the national ecumenical body in Scotland and note the proposal to dissolve Action of Churches Together in Scotland once the Scottish Christian Forum has been formed. (*Section 5*)
7. Welcome the appointment of the Very Rev Dr Russell Barr as Co-Chair of the Columba Declaration Contact Group on behalf of the Church of Scotland and the Rt Rev James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle as Co-Chair on behalf of the Church of England. (*Section 6.1*)

**Report****EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It is now two years since the Ecumenical Relations Committee reported to the General Assembly. The Report, therefore, covers work which has taken place since May 2019. Like every part of the Church, the Committee has had to contend with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has impacted its ability to work as efficiently as usual. The Committee would like to record its gratitude to the Ecumenical Officer who has done an enormous amount to facilitate effective ecumenical responses to the challenges we have all faced. The fact that the leadership of so many of the churches in Scotland have worked so well and so supportively together is testament to his skills and dedication, as well as to the benefit of building up ecumenical relations over many years.

The Report covers the following topics:

1. The centenary of the Church of Scotland Act 1921, formulated in the context of preparation for union between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland; the commitment to seeking further union which is at the centre of the Church of Scotland's identity; the call to respond, and continue to respond, to the challenges faced by the Church as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the opportunities presented by doing this in collaboration with other churches. The General Assembly will be asked to note the opportunities for developing ecumenical co-operation offered by reform of Presbyteries and support the delivery of a conference of all the Scottish Churches to explore the establishing of a cooperative partnership to enable Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland;
2. The initiation and development of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum;
3. The Saint Andrew Declaration between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Declaration sets out the basis of our recognition of one another and lays the foundation for closer co-operation in the future. The General Assembly will be asked to adopt the Declaration, as will the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church, whereupon the Moderator and the Primus will sign the Declaration on behalf of our two churches;
4. An examination of the concept of ecumenical Mission Communities, as developed within the Covenant Partnership in Cumbria, with a view to learning what may be applicable to the Church in Scotland;
5. A report on progress made towards transitioning from Action of Churches Together in Scotland to the Scottish Christian Forum as Scotland's ecumenical instrument. The General Assembly will be asked to recognise the Scottish Christian Forum as the national ecumenical body in Scotland; to agree to the participation of the Church of Scotland in the Scottish Christian Forum; to grant powers to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations to give final approval to the creation of the Scottish Christian Forum on the basis of such constitutional arrangements as shall be agreed by all members; and to note the proposal, in due course, to dissolve Action of Churches Together in Scotland.
6. A report on the continuing co-operation with the Church of England, including the *Thy Kingdom Come* Global Prayer Initiative;
7. A report on the Church of Scotland's membership of Ecumenical bodies.

## 1. THE CALL TO RESPOND: LIVING OUT OUR RESPONSE

**1.1** In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays for all who those who have come to believe in him “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe” that he has been sent by the Father. (John 17: 20-21) The times in which we have lived through during the past year and more are ones that will shape our society for decades to come and in ways that we cannot yet fully comprehend. In the midst of such times, the Church of Christ is called to reflect on how it should live out its response to the prayer of Jesus.

**1.2** 2021 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Church of Scotland Act 1921<sup>[i]</sup>. It established the constitution under which the Church of Scotland currently operates. The purpose of the Act is to “declare the lawfulness of certain Articles declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in matters spiritual prepared with the authority of the General Assembly of the Church”, specifically “to facilitate the union of other Churches with the Church of Scotland.” The *Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland*<sup>[ii]</sup> are set out as a Schedule to the Act. Much has changed over the last century, but the Committee believes that this is a good moment in the life of our Church to recall the core principles of our calling to be a church of Christ in Scotland.

**1.3** Living out our response in the light of our calling is integral to the self-understanding of the Church of Scotland. This is expressed, in part, in the following terms:

As a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people it acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry. (Article III)

**1.4** This is the first of three elements in the identity of the Church of Scotland which are integral to our self-understanding, namely the call to a territorial ministry to the whole of Scotland. In 2010, the Church of Scotland reaffirmed “its commitment to be a national church with a distinctive evangelical and pastoral concern for the people and nation of Scotland” in terms of Article III.<sup>[iii]</sup>

**1.5** The second element integral to the identity of the Church of Scotland is that:

This Church [has] the right and power, subject to no civil authority, to legislate, and to adjudicate finally, in all matters of doctrine, worship, government, and discipline in the Church. (Article IV)

With respect to the government of the Church, we affirm that it is Presbyterian (Article II) and the governance of the Church is integral to the living out of our response at this present time. The significance of this is seen in the ongoing task of Presbytery Reform and engagement with the process of Presbytery Reform is a crucial element in the Local Ecumenical Strategy of the Church of Scotland (GA 2019). On the basis of that Strategy the Committee affirmed that it would “make engagement with the renewed presbyteries of the Church an integral part of its ongoing work”.

**1.6** The commitment to engage with the emerging Presbyteries and to explore the ecumenical dimension of their future work points to the third element in the identity of the Church, which is:

The Church of Scotland, believing it to be the will of Christ that His disciples should be all one in the Father and in Him, that the world may believe that the Father has sent Him, recognises the obligation to seek and promote union with other Churches in which it finds the Word to be purely preached, the sacraments administered according to Christ’s ordinance, and discipline rightly exercised; and it has the right to unite with any such Church without loss of its identity on terms which this Church finds to be consistent with these Articles. (Article VII)

The Articles Declaratory were prepared in the context of discussions which led to the union of the Church of Scotland with the United Free Church of Scotland. It is therefore no surprise that the imperative of unity is so prominent within them and it should be remembered that the ‘union’ of which the Church of Scotland Act 1921 speaks was by no means intended to be limited just to the union which occurred in 1929. The legacy of that work a century and more ago is one we should continue to celebrate, namely that the prayer of Jesus that all his disciples “should be one in the Father and in him that the world may believe” remains integral to our self-understanding and identity as a church.

**1.7** When, in 2010, the General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to Article III, it also affirmed that:

[T]he Church of Scotland remains committed to the ecumenical vision set out in the seventh Article Declaratory and, in pursuit of that vision, stands eager to share with other churches in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland.

That is, the future shape of ministry and mission in Scotland ought to be undertaken on the basis of cooperative partnership as a response to the challenges facing the church.

**1.8** In more recent times, the General Assembly of 2019 acknowledged that, with respect to our self-understanding in terms of Article III:

[We] need to question seriously whether the Church of Scotland has the ability or resources to fulfil this in the ways that we have historically. Coming to terms with this reality is fundamental to shaping the future of the Church.<sup>[iv]</sup>

**1.9** If that was held to be true in 2019, it is even more so in 2021 as we consider how to live out our response in the face of the challenges of these times. As this report will demonstrate, there are encouraging signs that the church in Scotland is coming to terms with the reality of the situation that it now faces and that it is embracing some of the opportunities that, in the providence of God, have emerged. In accepting the Radical Action Plan in 2019, the General Assembly proposed initiating a conference of all the Scottish Churches to explore the establishing of a cooperative partnership to enable Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland. The Committee is ready to take a lead on organising this conference when it becomes safe and possible to do so.

**1.10** The vision embedded in the Articles Declaratory opens our horizons to the ever-present opportunity of sharing “in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland”. In the times in which we live, the commitment to living out our response in cooperative partnership is an indispensable element in our response to the prayer of Jesus and to the challenges we face. There is no future for the Church of Scotland that does not embed cooperative partnership as an integral element of its ongoing identity. The Committee has engaged with and will continue to engage with other churches in Scotland and beyond, with the emerging Presbyteries and with local congregations in order to enable this.

## 2. THE CALL TO RESPOND: SCOTTISH CHURCH LEADERS' FORUM

**2.1** On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the United Kingdom entered into a lockdown as a result of the increasing threat posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The church across Scotland found itself having to respond to the greatest challenge we have faced as a society since the end of the Second World War. The nature of the challenge faced is virtually unprecedented in living memory.

**2.2** The response of the Church of Scotland to the pandemic will be a recurring theme of the Reports to the General Assembly of 2021. The purpose of this section of the report is to focus on part of the collective response of the churches in Scotland, principally through the initiation and development of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum (SCLF).

**2.3** The concept of a SCLF is one that had previously been considered in the context of discussions on the potential development of a Scottish Christian Forum. (5.2) The catalyst for its initiation and development, and the transformation of the theoretical into the practical, was the onset of the pandemic. On the initiative of the Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland, and in anticipation of the Lockdown, an invitation was extended to senior representatives of the Church of Scotland, the Catholic Church in Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Salvation Army, the Congregational Federation and the Baptist Union of Scotland to form the SCLF, with the Moderator of the General Assembly representing the Church of Scotland. Since March 2020, the SCLF has become one of the principal expressions of cooperative partnership between the churches in Scotland.

**2.4** Initially, the invitation was to join a WhatsApp group in order that Church leaders might communicate and share information as the Churches collectively responded to the pandemic. As a result, Church leaders began to interact in a way that had not previously been a feature of Scottish church life. From this simple beginning, the SCLF began to meet online and has continued to do so approximately every 4-6 weeks since. The SCLF has been convened by the Rev Mark Slaney, District Chair of the Methodist Church in Scotland, and we are indebted to him for his leadership throughout this period, with the Rev Dr John L McPake serving as Secretary.

**2.5** Significantly, the first public act of the SCLF was to offer a Call to Prayer on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020, as part of a Call across the United Kingdom to light a candle and offer prayer:

For all that is good in life, thank you,  
For the love of family and friends, thank you,  
For the kindness of good neighbour and Samaritan stranger,  
thank you.

May those who are vulnerable, hungry or homeless,  
experience support,  
May those who are sick, know healing,  
May those who are anxious or bereaved, sense comfort.

Bless and guide political leaders and decision-makers, with wisdom,  
Bless and guide health workers and key workers, with strength and well-being,  
Bless and guide each one of us, as we adapt to a new way of living.

And may the light shining from our windows,  
across road and wynd, glen and ben, kyle and isle,  
be reflected in our hearts and hands and hopes.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Thereafter, the Call to Prayer has been sustained Sunday by Sunday and a Gaelic translation has been provided. The collective offering of a weekly prayer, actively endorsed by the members of the Forum, along with the Evangelical

Alliance (Scotland), the Church of the Nazarene, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, and Minority Ethnic Churches Together in Scotland (MECTIS), has been at the heart of the Forum and has been widely appreciated by members and congregations across Scotland.

**2.6** The SCLF has engaged across a range of issues, with the initial focus of its work being on the immediate response of the churches to Lockdown and the sharing of resources with respect to this. The Forum, either as a full Forum or through representatives of the Forum, has engaged in discussions with the Scottish Government, principally senior representatives of the Civil Service in the Local Government and Communities Directorate, and with Professor Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director of Healthcare Quality and Strategy; with Steve Carson, Director, BBC Scotland, and other senior BBC Scotland staff, as well as making representation to the United Kingdom Government in respect of the Internal Market Bill.

**2.7** While the catalyst for the initiation and development of the SCLF has been the Covid-19 pandemic, nevertheless the Committee is of the view that the Forum, as it now stands, has the potential to continue as one of the principal expressions of cooperative engagement between the churches in Scotland.

**2.8** The SCLF requested and supported research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the life of the Church in Scotland and the research has been undertaken by Brendan Research and funded by Action of Churches Together in Scotland. The Report, "Adapt and be Flexible – the Mission Doesn't Stop: The Scottish Church and the COVID-19 Pandemic" was published in March 2021 and is based on a data gathered, through an online questionnaire, between October and December 2020. The invitation to participate in the research produced some 369 responses from ministers, clergy and congregational leaders of 27 Christian denominations in Scotland.<sup>[v]</sup>

**2.9** The Report offers the first detailed snapshot of the response of the Churches to the pandemic. It includes findings on how congregations have continued ministry and mission during the pandemic, often developing new patterns; on the growth in online worship and social media activity; on the challenges of continuing some previous mission initiatives and new opportunities developed; and on the strength of faith of ministers and clergy during the pandemic.

**2.10** With respect to the recommendations of the Report, we see, in summary, some of the challenges and opportunities that face the Church in Scotland as we move through but continue still to be shaped by the pandemic. It seems clear that online worship is here to stay and so needs to be reflected upon theologically as it develops further. As the Scottish Churches move forward from the pandemic, it will be important not simply try to revert to pre-lockdown ministry and mission practices but to learn from the experience of these times and build on developments made. Cross-denominational partnership in mission will be key to this, as will further research into the social capital generated by the Churches. Our response to these challenges and opportunities will undoubtedly shape the Church for decades to come and we shall better face them if they are addressed through cooperative partnership.

**2.11** In the response to the pandemic, it should be noted that the SCLF, and the churches represented, essentially became part of a network of resource sharing across the United Kingdom. A significant factor in this extended network is the Roundtable initiated by Churches Together in England (CTE) (of which the Church of Scotland is a member). At the onset of the pandemic, this became a major point of exchange of resources and information. In particular, the resources generated by the United Reformed Church provided models that became the template for the dissemination of information to the Church of Scotland in

the early stages of the pandemic. The Committee wishes the General Assembly to place on record our indebtedness to the United Reformed Church and to CTE. That wider network also enabled insight into the work of the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting as well as with Churches Together in Wales (Cytûn). Woven into this network has been the contribution of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), which has played an important role in enabling the churches across Britain and Ireland to speak collectively and to share collaboratively. At CTBI's behest, a number of meetings of senior British and Irish Church leaders took place and those proved to be significant opportunities to exchange views and insights. The Committee wishes to thank Rev Dr Paul Goodliff, CTE General Secretary, Mr Bob Fyffe, CTBI General Secretary, Dr Nicola Brady, ICC General Secretary, Rev Aled Edwards OBE, Chief Executive of Cytûn, and especially Jenny Bond, CTE Principal Officer, for all their support at this time.

### 3. THE CALL TO RESPOND: *OUR COMMON CALLING WITH THE SCOTTISH EPISCOPAL CHURCH*

**3.1** Over the course of 2019 and 2020, the Committee has continued to engage constructively with the Scottish Episcopal Church through the Our Common Calling process. The process is predicated on the conviction that both denominations share a distinctive calling to minister to the whole of Scotland. That conviction provides a powerful imperative to minister together.

**3.2** The task of the Our Common Calling Working Group has been guided, in part, by an approach to developing unity used by the Anglican Communion. It understands the development of unity as a process, beginning with regional or national churches recognising each other as sharing the same faith and hence being a "true Church[es] of the Gospel". It would seem self-evident that this first step has long since been realised by the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church and, in practice, this is true. However, our two churches have never formally adopted a statement to this effect so, to that end, the Committee is offering the Saint Andrew Declaration, prepared by the Our Common Calling Working Group, for adoption by the General Assembly. It will also be offered for adoption at the forthcoming General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

**3.3** Having achieved and declared mutual recognition, the participating churches can then develop ways of expressing the degree of unity so far achieved and of promoting further growth. This can include eucharistic sharing; regular meetings of church leaders; invitations to speak at each other's synods and assemblies; creating common agencies; joint theological education and mission programmes; limited interchange of ministers; and the twinning of congregations. Evidence that the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church have been doing these things is not hard to find. Eucharistic sharing is at the heart of the work of the Our Common Calling process, and communicants of both denominations have long been welcomed at the celebrations within one another's congregations. Equally, our respective church leaders meet regularly in a variety of contexts, not least in the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum. The Working Group has learned of innovative sharing of ministry and congregational life, particularly in rural areas of Scotland, and is convinced that there is potential for greater development of this, with the active support of dioceses and presbyteries.

**3.4** As and when it is felt appropriate, participating churches can then explore changing particular practices with respect to ecclesial oversight (episkope) and the full recognition of ministries. The Our Common Calling Working Group has learned that considerable work is being undertaken on the nature of episkope within the Anglican Communion, and this has informed its reflections. There is a

recognition that authority in the church is exercised in different ways: in the Scottish Episcopal Church by bishops in synod, and in the Church of Scotland by presbyteries. There is an acknowledgement by both churches that the expression of communal oversight within each church is consonant with the tradition which they each represent.

**3.5** The Saint Andrew Declaration acknowledges and commits our two churches to one another within the terms of reference expressed in 3.2 and 3.3 above, whilst anticipating further reflection on matters raised in

**3.6** The Saint Andrew Declaration reads:

#### ***SAINT ANDREW DECLARATION***

##### *Preamble*

*The Church of Jesus Christ has been present in Scotland for over 1,600 years. For over a century following the Reformation, the church in Scotland, and Scotland's monarch, wrestled over the order of the church: was it to be Presbyterian or Episcopalian? Presbyterianism was suppressed after the restoration during the reigns of Charles II and James VII, but the Presbyterian ordering of the Church of Scotland was confirmed under William and Mary in 1690. Episcopalianism was suppressed, particularly after the Jacobite uprisings in 1715 and 1745; a small Episcopalian church survived in Scotland, and English immigration saw the establishment of Qualified Chapels which used the English liturgy. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Church of Scotland was racked by division, focused on questions of patronage and the relationship between church and state, while the nineteenth century saw a gradual consolidation of the small Episcopal Church in Scotland.*

*Whilst the ecclesiastical, social and political landscape has been shaped and reshaped on innumerable occasions, the calling of the Church to serve the people of Scotland in ministry and mission has remained a constant. The Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church have now established a bilateral conversation expressed in the Our Common Calling Working Group. In the course of our discussions we have acknowledged our shared history and have named past conflicts, divisions and hurts. In so doing, we have learned from one another and have asked forgiveness of each other where we have caused pain by our words and actions. Within the context of these discussions, we have acknowledged that the theological, sacramental and liturgical emphases within our respective churches are consonant with the tradition which each represents. Alongside this, we have sought to acknowledge that our churches belong together as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. In so acknowledging, we seek to explore ways in which we may better work together as partners in ministry and mission, to serve Christ by serving the people of Scotland.*

##### *Declaration*

*In the light of our common calling within the life of the Church of Jesus Christ in Scotland, shaped by our understanding of the mission of God, our agreement in faith and the opportunities to share in ministry and mission, we make the following Declaration:*

*We, the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church, make the following acknowledgements and commitments, which are interrelated.*

##### *A) Acknowledgements:*

*i. We acknowledge one another's churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.*

*ii. We acknowledge that our churches share in the common confession of the Apostolic Faith.*

*iii. We acknowledge that in our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion are faithfully administered.*

iv. We acknowledge one another's ordained ministries as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit but also Christ's commission through the Church and are given by God as instruments of grace for the mission and unity of the Church.

v. We acknowledge that personal, collegial and communal oversight (episkope) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, ministry and mission.

vi. We acknowledge that our unity is as yet imperfect and look forward to the time when the fuller visible unity of our churches may be realised.

#### B) Commitments:

We commit ourselves to respond together to our common calling to proclaim the reign of God to all the people of Scotland by strengthening our partnership in ministry and mission. Through this commitment, we hope to enrich our continuing relationships locally, nationally and internationally with the churches of Scotland and throughout the world, that we may deepen our individual faith and serve God's whole creation. We will welcome opportunities to draw other churches into the activities and initiatives that we share.

As part of that commitment to seek appropriate ways to respond to our common calling within the life of the Church of Jesus Christ, we will continue:

i. To pray for and with one another; to work towards the fuller sharing of ministry, and of spiritual, human, financial and physical resources;

ii. To encourage, affirm and support local expressions of our common calling within the life of the Church as it participates in the mission of God, and to explore opportunities for new partnerships in the communities in which we serve;

iii. To welcome one another's members to worship and participate in the congregational life of each other's churches;

iv. To stimulate theological discussions between our churches, including on the outstanding issues hindering fuller communion;

v. To work together in practical and prophetic ways on the social, political and ethical issues arising from our shared participation in public life;

vi. To ensure that these commitments are followed through at every level of our church life; to allocate resources to joint initiatives, and to hold one another to account on what we have agreed to do.

In order to assist our churches in living out the Acknowledgements and Commitments of the Saint Andrew Declaration, we will appoint Co-Chairs and members of a Church of Scotland – Scottish Episcopal Church Working Group, whose purpose will be to encourage the development of our common calling within the Church of Jesus Christ in Scotland. The Working Group will report annually to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations of the Church of Scotland and to the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Joint meetings of church leaders will be held regularly, and we will welcome opportunities to draw other churches into the activities and initiatives that we share.

We see this as living out our response to the prayer of Jesus that we "may all be one . . . so that the world may believe" (John 17: 21). In faithfulness, we commit to remain open to wherever the Holy Spirit may be leading our churches.

## 4. THE CALL TO RESPOND: COVENANT PARTNERSHIP

**4.1** The Local Ecumenical Strategy agreed by the General Assembly in 2019 envisages that the Committee will engage with the emerging presbyteries of the Church as they work towards reform and that it will make such engagement

an integral part of its ongoing work. The Committee has done so, through the Ecumenical Officer, who presented to the Presbytery Clerks' Forum a model founded on the concept of the local Mission Community set within the context of a regional Covenant Partnership, as developed within the context of Cumbria.

**4.2** The Cumbria model is one that has proven to be of considerable interest. It offers a vision for the renewal of the Church through mission; integral to that model is the affirmation that concern for mission is an ecumenical concern and effective mission can only be achieved in partnership. Early indications are that the model has proved resilient during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**4.3** The Church of Scotland actively participates in this through the Border Kirk being part of a Mission Community in Carlisle. Further, it is of interest because Cumbria has witnessed the growth and development of a significant number of Fresh Expressions of church within the context of the Covenant Partnership, and that growth and development have been the subject of significant statistical research. For all of these reasons, the Committee believes that the model, evolving and developing in a context akin to many parts of Scotland, is one that ought to be given active consideration.

**4.4** To that end, it is helpful to sketch something of the background to the development of the Covenant Partnership in Cumbria and the Mission Community model. The Covenant Partnership was initially adopted in 2011 and extended in 2016 and embraces the Church of England, Methodist Church, Salvation Army and United Reformed Church as full Covenant members. The Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptist Union and the Religious Society of Friends signed a Letter of Companionship in November 2016 and this has enabled active participation within the arrangements at an appropriate level.

**4.5** The basis for the Covenant Partnership is found in the concept of Covenant Partnerships in Extended Areas (CPEA). The concept grew out of the ongoing Anglican-Methodist dialogue.<sup>[vi]</sup> The intention of the CPEA is to support initiatives, such as the formation of Mission Communities, that allow local partnerships to flourish in ways that serve the wider mission of the Church. Further, it is intended to enable Covenant partners to share ministry across the whole area of the Covenant Partnership and to develop joint strategies for the deployment of ministry for the sake of mission. The CPEA concept was intended initially to enable Anglican and Methodist cooperation but has been extended to embrace churches of other traditions including the Church of Scotland.

**4.6** Within the Cumbria Covenant Partnership, a coherent vision had been developed under the heading *God for All* and it is instructive to note the content of that vision:

By 2020, every person in Cumbria of all ages and backgrounds will have had an opportunity to discover more of God and God's purpose for their lives, so that they will discover more of Jesus and the Good News and become followers of Jesus within a Christian community.

**4.7** The vision is complemented by a strategy through which that vision can be realised. Integral to that strategy is the Mission Community:

A Mission Community is a cluster of ecumenical churches who commit to working together to make *God for All* a reality in their community. This includes how to use their combined resources (buildings, people, established connections) for mission and outreach. Each mission community has mission at its heart. That is reflected in the role of the mission community leader, local church leaders and everyone in the church.<sup>[vii]</sup>

**4.8** The vision expressed in *God for All* is embodied in the local Mission Community, with this in turn being

complemented by appropriate resources for mission. A generic template, "Archways", for the establishing of a Mission Community has been developed. This offers a comprehensive description of the basis upon which a Mission Community can be realised in terms of a 4-stage model: Explore – Launch – Transition – Commission. Integral to the process of establishing a Community is the provision of support and accompaniment through Strategic Development Officers and the offer of what is termed a "Constructive Coach and Friend". Equally, there is a significant stress on the need for Mission Community leadership and an exploration of appropriate models of leadership within particular contexts and community settings. The exploration of the context and of the particular nature of the community in which the mission of the Community is to be lived out is an integral feature of planning towards its establishment. In terms of undergirding the establishment of a Mission Community, there is a focus on establishing a sustainable budget and an appropriate buildings strategy. That is, the approach to the establishment of a Mission Community is intentional, leadership-focused and contextualised. In summary, a shared vision, complemented by a strategy that, in turn, is realised through a Mission Community which is enabled through appropriate leadership and resourcing, has enabled a network to develop within specific geographical areas through an overarching Covenant Partnership.

**4.9** The Convener of the Committee and the Ecumenical Officer, along with representatives of other traditions of the church within Scotland, have actively engaged with the experience of the church in Cumbria and met with representatives of those involved in a Mission Community in their local context. At the time of writing, there were thirty-five Mission Communities across Cumbria covering the entire county, albeit that they are not uniform in nature and are at different stages of development. The consensus is that there is, as yet, no discernible pattern as to the factors that enable the success, or otherwise, of a particular Mission Community. However, the key themes to emerge from this initial engagement were that:

- a) a focus on a unifying strategy (*God for All*);
- b) initiated by and delivered through the Covenant Partnership; and
- c) enabled through intentional leadership at a regional level

have been integral to the renewal of the life of the Church to the extent that this has been evident. The group which visited Cumbria recognises that it saw a snapshot of what was happening. Mission Communities have the potential to be dynamic and change and develop rapidly.

**4.10** A reading of this section of the Report might give the impression that the Covenant Partnership is primarily about the renewal and sustaining of traditional patterns of church life. However, this is not so. Rather, it is of particular significance that, within the context of the Covenant Partnership, the growth of Fresh Expressions of the life of the Church has been a highly significant feature. In this regard, *An Audit of Fresh Expressions of Church: Diocese of Carlisle*, carried out by the Church Army Research Unit in 2019, presents a review of the growth of Fresh Expressions within the Diocese of Carlisle and its findings are worthy of note. In particular, it is demonstrated that a quarter of church attendance in the diocesan area is associated with attendance at Fresh Expressions. The significance of these findings should not be overstated. Neither should their significance be understated. In summary, an approach to the life of the Church that enables the renewal of traditional patterns of church life *and* the growth of Fresh Expressions of the life of the Church is one that we ought not to ignore and should actively embrace.<sup>[viii]</sup>

**4.11** The Covenant Partnership is essentially a vehicle through which churches are enabled to create a shared

approach to their life within an extended area in a way that has created a synergy and generated a vision and a strategy. The *God for All* vision and strategy have, in turn, been resourced in order to equip the whole people of God for the task of mission. That vision and strategy have enabled a re-imagining of the life of the Church that has proven itself capable of embracing traditional and fresh expressions of what it is to be the Church of Jesus Christ. An integral element of the Covenant Partnership has been the role of shared senior leadership in initiating the vision and developing the strategy. It is the contention of the Committee that we ought to consider more fully what particular lessons can be derived from the Cumbrian experience and to engage in a potentially fruitful exercise in cross-border exchange.

**4.12** The Covenant Partnership within Cumbria is, in one sense, unique to that particular locality. Nevertheless, the experience of the Cumbrian churches in facing the challenges of mission is, in a very real sense, identical to that faced by the churches in Scotland. Equally, the physical proximity of Cumbria to Scotland, as well as many shared similarities in context, suggests that certain parts of the experience would be potentially applicable. Whatever the case, it is clear that a highly significant feature of the shared life of the church in Cumbria is expressed in the life of the Mission Community network initiated and developed on the basis of a Covenant Partnership.

## 5. THE CALL TO RESPOND: SCOTTISH CHRISTIAN FORUM

**5.1** The Committee reported to the General Assembly in 2018 that the Trustees of Action Together in Scotland (ACTS) had commissioned an external review: *Action of Churches Together in Scotland: A Review*.<sup>[ix]</sup> In 2018, The Committee placed on record its appreciation of that which ACTS had accomplished up until that point and stated:

We note and conditionally concur with the relative consensus that ACTS ought to be retained, albeit that it ought to be comprehensively reformed, restructured and renewed.

**5.2** Thereafter, the Committee reported to GA 2019 that, in November 2018, the ACTS Members' Meeting had agreed to explore the establishing of a Scottish Christian Forum (SCF) as the successor to ACTS, and set out the basis upon which this was being considered.<sup>[x]</sup> The vision for the new body is that it will create a space for participation of a much broader range of churches in Scotland. The SCF will be an umbrella organisation with a lighter structure than ACTS, supporting a wide variety of projects on which the Scottish Churches choose to work together. A new Ecumenical Officers' Forum is already active and meets on a regular basis. It was noted that the SCF is intended to be in continuity with the charitable purposes of ACTS and to include the establishing of "a Scottish Church Leaders' Forum within the framework of a prospective SCF".<sup>[xi]</sup>

**5.3** Since then, the Committee has sought with other churches to work towards that goal. The member churches of ACTS have come to the view that the best way to achieve it is to establish the SCF as a new charity. The intention is that the funds currently held by ACTS would then be transferred to the SCF as a body with the same charitable aims and objectives and that ACTS would subsequently be dissolved. Therefore, in October 2020 the ACTS Members' Meeting unanimously appointed an Implementation Group to take forward the establishing of the SCF and granted it powers to call a Members' Meeting in due course to implement the dissolution of ACTS.

**5.4** The Church of Scotland formally agreed to participate in ACTS, as the national ecumenical body in Scotland, at the General Assembly of 1989 and thereafter we have remained in full membership of, and financially supported, ACTS.<sup>[xii]</sup> Alongside this, it should be noted that

no financial payments have been made to ACTS since 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. The Committee invites the General Assembly to note the proposal to dissolve ACTS. Further, the Committee invites the General Assembly to agree to the participation of the Church of Scotland in the SCF and to recognise it as the national ecumenical body in Scotland, in continuity with the charitable purposes of ACTS.

## 6. OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

**6.1** The partnership between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland is expressed in the terms of the *Columba Declaration* contained within *Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission*, as agreed by the General Synod of the Church of England and the General Assembly in 2016.<sup>[xiii]</sup> In the *Declaration*, we acknowledge “one another’s churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic ministry and mission of the whole people of God”. Equally, we “commit ourselves to grow together in communion and to strengthen our partnership in mission”. The partnership is expressed on an ongoing basis through the work of the *Columba Declaration* Contact Group; the Very Rev Dr Russell Barr was appointed Co-Chair of the Contact Group on behalf of the Church of Scotland early in 2020 along with the Rt Rev James Newcome, Bishop of Carlisle, on behalf of the Church of England. The remit of the Contact Group includes facilitating the agenda for the annual meeting between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Moderator and enabling a biennial meeting of the senior leadership of our two churches.

**6.2** Discussions within the Contact Group cover a wide range of topics, including:

- the *Our Common Calling* process between the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland;
- the Covenant Partnership in Cumbria;
- the Radical Action Plan and the reform of presbyteries within the Church of Scotland;
- the Renewal and Reform process within the Church of England;
- the Church of Scotland’s participation in *Thy Kingdom Come*;
- the work of ecumenical bodies (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and Churches Together in England (CTE));
- the “Living in Love and Faith” project within the Church of England;<sup>[xiv]</sup>
- the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries process between the Church of England and the Methodist Church;
- The Bishop of Truro’s *Independent Review for the Foreign Secretary of Foreign and Commonwealth Office Support for Persecuted Christians*;
- the report: *Doing Mission Together: How Partnership Promotes Gospel Growth* (2019) from the Church of England.

**6.3** The Co-Chairs were united in commending the Bishop of Truro’s report to our respective churches and in seeking a means to engage with the United Kingdom Government with respect to the complex and challenging issues which it raises.<sup>[xv]</sup>

**6.4** The report *Doing Mission Together* seems to the Contact Group to be of particular interest insofar as it offers an analysis of the impact of ‘missional ecumenism’ in urban centres within England, with ‘missional ecumenism’ being defined in the following terms:

Missional ecumenism takes many forms. For the purposes of this study the Five Marks of Mission helped provide a working definition of what we mean by missional ecumenism: it is when churches from different denominations cooperate in activities relating to any of the Five Marks.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

**6.5** The Five Marks of Mission offer a framework for understanding mission that was developed by the Anglican Consultative Council. They are as follows:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom;
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers;
3. To respond to human need by loving service;
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation;
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.<sup>[xvii]</sup>

**6.6** In taking the Five Marks of Mission as the working definition for missional ecumenism, the authors note a movement away from “institutional” ecumenism towards a shared approach to cooperative partnership that is “changing the Christian landscape in this country”.<sup>[xviii]</sup> The Five Marks of Mission were integral to the theological basis of the Ecumenical Policy of the Church of Scotland<sup>[xix]</sup> and have become an important guide to the Assembly Trustees and others in setting priorities and strategy for the Church of Scotland. In stating their conclusion, the authors suggest that:

[T]he scale of missional ecumenism indicated by the research evidence assembled here strongly suggests that this is a mainstream dimension of contemporary urban mission that must be taken into account by those with responsibility for supporting it – through initial ministerial education, diocesan mission planning and national church policy, including the distribution of project funding.<sup>[xx]</sup>

The lessons identified in relation to ‘missional ecumenism’ are one that will bear reflection upon in the context of the Church of Scotland.

**6.7** The participation of the Church of Scotland in the *Thy Kingdom Come* Global Prayer Initiative has been of particular value in the strengthening of the relationship between our two churches. *Thy Kingdom Come* was initiated within the Church of England in 2016 and thereafter developed ecumenically and internationally as an expression of the unity we share through the power of collective prayer, and the Church of Scotland entered into partnership with *Thy Kingdom Come* from 2018 onwards. In 2020, *Thy Kingdom Come* took place in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resources were adapted to enable churches, families and individuals to pray and worship in their homes in line with social distancing guidelines. In 2021, *Thy Kingdom Come* takes place from Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May (Ascension Day) until 23<sup>rd</sup> May (Pentecost Sunday) and it is anticipated that the Church of Scotland will actively participate once more. In our engagement with *Thy Kingdom Come*, we are indebted to Emma Buchan, the *Thy Kingdom Come* Project Director, and her team.

**6.8** The range of matters referenced above indicates something of the range of issues in which our two churches have a mutual interest. In this regard, we recall the words of *Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission* (l. b), 3):

What unites us as churches immeasurably transcends the boundaries of our two particular nations and reminds us of the imperative of responding to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ that we ‘may all be one’ (John 17:21).

## 7. THE CALL TO RESPOND: OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH ECUMENICAL BODIES

**7.1** The Committee on Ecumenical Relations is responsible for nurturing the Church of Scotland's membership of the following ecumenical bodies:

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)  
 Churches Together in England (CTE)  
 Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)  
 Conference of European Churches (CEC)  
 World Council of Churches (WCC)  
 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)

**7.2** The Church of Scotland has a long and productive history of engagement with other denominations through membership of Ecumenical bodies and is, in many cases, counted as a founder member. We contribute in many ways, not least through the involvement of many members of the Church of Scotland over many years who have been valued for the gifts of organisation and leadership they bring, not least our finely-honed skills in moderating everything from committees to large assemblies. The Church of Scotland is sometimes deemed to be punching above its weight in ecumenical bodies, particularly the international ones. We have a reputation for sound theology and are trusted, partly because of our productive working relationships with churches in former colonial areas. The Church of Scotland is by no means a lightweight or undervalued member of these bodies.

**7.3** Membership and participation in these bodies allows the Church of Scotland to share in the mission of God around the world in ways it could never do on its own. The life of the whole Church of Scotland is enriched by our membership of these bodies and God's work in our own country and the wider world is supported, encouraged and facilitated by our close working with so many of our sisters and brothers in the Church Universal.

**7.4** The overall benefits of active membership of ecumenical bodies can be summarised as:

- support for our contribution to God's mission in the world, and our purpose including delivery on our commitment to the five marks of mission;
- access to resources and expertise that we are too small to manage entirely on our own (e.g. work with refugees, human rights, inter-religious dialogue, peace and justice);
- learning from others, particularly from churches in the Global South who are experiencing growth;
- a stronger voice in Government and the public sphere;
- discipleship opportunities for members, particularly for young people.

Membership of the ecumenical bodies contributes to the delivery of the Church's Faith Action Plan in the following ways:

- The Church of Scotland's membership of such bodies has a positive impact on the lives of churches and Christians, and non-Christians, worldwide;
- We are respected and valued, and our contribution is notable for a relatively small church.

- The Church of Scotland is favourably impacted by our membership:
  - we gain from the experience and expertise of other churches in theology, mission and ecclesiology;
  - our horizons are widened by this exposure to world affairs;
  - we can make a contribution to political dialogue in Europe;
  - we are enriched by fellowship with the world church, including in areas where the Church of Scotland has not traditionally been active.
  - we can accompany, listen to and share with the world church.
- Membership helps address the objectives of seeking justice, dealing with poverty, accompaniment, developing relationships and fostering mutual learning. <sup>[xxi]</sup>
- Worship: Our membership of ecumenical bodies also helps us nurture enthusiastic worship and witness through exposure to the rich worship of so many other church traditions.
- Our witness to the world is strengthened by our partnership with over 500 million Christians.
- We are encouraged by thriving churches elsewhere to continue our staunch witness to Christ.
- The people who are most involved with the ecumenical bodies, particularly the young people whose opportunities for service are increased by our membership, turn into effective leaders, bringing back to Scotland their vision for what the Church could be, their enthusiasm and their renewed energy.

**7.5** The Committee believes that belonging to ecumenical bodies is something to celebrate as a tangible expression that we are all one in Christ. However, in recognition of the financial challenges facing the Church, it has undertaken to enter into discussions with the secretariat of those bodies to which we make the largest financial contributions with a view to ensuring that our level of financial contribution is appropriate. The Committee believes that the Church of Scotland, which historically has been very generous, cannot continue to contribute above a fair level, but neither should it renege on any of its responsibilities. Shifting the financial burden unfairly onto other member churches would be unethical.

**7.6** As always, when considering questions of policy and strategy, the primary question is: what does the Church of Scotland want to be? The Committee believes that the Church of Scotland wants to look outward and share with others in God's mission to the world, that this is true to the gospel, that it will inspire the commitment of our members and command the respect of those outwith the Church. The Committee wishes to stress again that active ecumenism cannot be viewed as a choice for a Christian church, nor a mere matter of expediency. It is rather an imperative, at the core of our fidelity to the prayer of Christ that his disciples should all be one in the Father and in him.

## 8. CONCLUSION

**8.1** As stated in the opening section of the Report, the vision embedded in the Articles Declaratory, our fundamental constitution, commits us, as it has for a century, to seeking union with other Churches and opens our horizons to the ever-present opportunity of sharing "in Christian mission and service to the people of Scotland". In 2021, the vision of the Church renewed and seeking renewal through Christian unity is as relevant as it has ever been, if not more so, not least through the challenges faced and the innovations made during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is not our



vision alone. Rather, it is a vision shared within the wider community of the Church in Scotland of which we are a part.

**8.2** Therefore, it follows that the living out of this vision cannot be undertaken in isolation from our neighbours who, within their own traditions, share a vocation to mission and service. The Report has sought to demonstrate that this is so. Equally, it has sought to offer the possibility of partnership in mission and service a) through learning from the experience of the Church in Cumbria; b) through affirming our common calling with the Scottish Episcopal Church; c) through the continuing development of our relationship with the Church of England; and d) through working with our sister churches in Scotland to increase our effectiveness through the establishment of the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum and the work towards the establishment of the Scottish Christian Forum. The extent to which the living out of the vision can be realised is dependent on it being embodied in the context of the local Church, encouraged regionally and resourced nationally. It is also dependent on the commitment of the whole church, expressed so eloquently in the Articles Declaratory a century ago, to embrace fully its identity as a Church which seeks unity with others for the sake of the Gospel. As we do so in partnership with our neighbours, we respond to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ that we "may all be one" (John 17:21), and nothing witnesses better to the saving grace of Christ than that.

*In the name of the Committee*

ALEXANDER G. HORSBURGH, *Convener*  
EILEEN MILLER, *Vice Convener*  
JOHN L. MCPAKE, *Secretary*

### Addendum

The Rev Kevin Mackenzie was appointed to serve as Vice Convener of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations in 2017. Kevin brought to the Committee his breadth of experience as a parish minister committed to working in cooperative partnership with neighbours representing the complementary traditions of the life of the Church. During his term of service until May 2020, the Committee actively sought to develop a strategy focusing on local ecumenism and Kevin has played an important role in relation to this. His contributions to that strategy were drawn from the practical experience of working with his neighbouring churches in the parish of Westwood in East Kilbride and, in particular, the Roman Catholic parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. The insights generated there enriched Kevin's approach and, in turn, enriched the Committee's and we are grateful to him for his contribution.

*In the name of the Committee*

ALEXANDER G. HORSBURGH, *Convener*  
EILEEN MILLER, *Vice Convener*  
JOHN L. MCPAKE, *Secretary*

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