

An Anglican-Uniting Church Covenant of Association

Anglican Church of Australia-Uniting Church in Australia Joint Working Group

Background:

This proposal for a Covenant of Association emerges out of many years of dialogue on a variety of issues relating to Church, Baptism and Ministry. In particular this Covenant builds upon *An Agreed Statement on Baptism* (1985) and the more comprehensive report *For the Sake of the Gospel: Mutual Recognition of Ordained Ministries in the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia* (2001). Following *For the Sake of the Gospel*, further comments, resolutions and recommendations were received from both the Anglican General Synod and the Uniting Church Assembly, including the Church Law Commission and the Doctrine Commission of the Anglican General Synod. The report was discussed at length in national trilateral meetings between the Uniting, Anglican and Lutheran churches. In 2007, detailed comments were received from the Inter-Anglican Commission on Ecumenical Relations (IASCER). These responses to *For the Sake of the Gospel* from both national and international bodies have enabled the Joint Working Group to develop and clarify earlier deliberations regarding ministry.¹

For Anglicans there remain serious constitutional and theological difficulties in receiving, as deacons or priests in the Anglican Church, ministers of the Uniting Church in Australia who are not episcopally ordained. As a result the interchangeability of ordained ministries is not possible at present.

Despite this difficulty, the Working Group has been encouraged to build upon existing forms of cooperation by proposing a formal *Covenant of Association*.² The Joint Working Group believes that such a Covenant would provide for a limited exchange of ministries consonant with the legal and constitutional provisions of our respective churches. Both churches continue to work together in formally constituted Cooperating Parishes and in many other ways, and may continue to explore further forms of cooperation in mission and service.³ They have both made formal commitments to significant levels of cooperation under the National Council of Churches in Australia's covenanting process.⁴ On the Eucharist, *For the Sake of the Gospel* established in a number of points a high degree of agreement. There is substantive agreement on the sacrament of baptism;⁵ the two churches recognise each other's baptism and extend eucharistic hospitality to members of the other church.⁶

The Joint Working Group recognises that important unresolved matters remain.⁷ These need not hinder the establishment of a Covenant of Association. Indeed such a Covenant will create what the Anglican-Methodist Covenant of New Zealand describes as an 'ecumenical space', in which these issues can be explored together:

Ecumenical space offers us a way forward. In such a space we affirm our common Christian identity and have the possibility for a new discourse as we talk to one another in a new way. This provides a greater opportunity to discern together Christ's will for the church in ways that are not possible in isolation from each other. In this way ecumenical space brings the churches into living encounter with one another.⁸

The Present Proposal

The proposed Covenant is important for both our churches as it states clearly and unambiguously at the national level what our two churches wish to encourage at the local level ‘for the sake of the Gospel’. It offers a formal framework for cooperation and growing together through shared ministry and service, including what is already permitted and occurring at the local level in parishes and other cooperative arrangements. It is vital that such local arrangements be duly recognised by their national church bodies. A formal Covenant of Association between the two Churches is an appropriate way for the national bodies of each Church to recognise and encourage ecumenical endeavour in ministry and mission.

In the words of leading Anglican ecumenist Paul Avis, ‘formal synodical acknowledgements’ are necessary as well as ‘informal, tacit modes of acknowledgement’ because the latter

can still leave lingering doubts about how one church really regards another. It still gives scope for individuals to assume that one church enjoys (or thinks it enjoys) advantages that the other lacks. It allows prejudiced personal opinions to undermine ecumenical goodwill. A formal synodical act of acknowledgement is intended to lay all such fears, doubts, prejudices and assumptions to rest by a considered, objective declaration of the ecclesial status of the churches concerned.⁹

This Anglican-Uniting Church Covenant of Association points the way forward; it gathers the past, confirms the present and enables future work to be undertaken on the path to shared life in the gospel.

¹ *For the Sake of the Gospel* is available online:

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/unity/dialogues.html> and
<http://www.anglican.org.au/governance.cfm?SID=21&SSID=43&PID=127>

² The term ‘Covenant of Association’ is used in the General Synod July 2001, resolution 41/01: ‘That the General Synod... (3) resolves to explore a formal Covenant of Association with the Uniting Church in Australia...’

³ As outlined, for example, in *Steps to Unity*, Anglican Church of Australia (1999) Para. 6.3 (c) 1-17. This includes working together to better align levels and regions of leadership and decision-making; annual preaching exchanges; ways of cooperating in relation to selection, training and preparing for ordination of clergy; regular heads of churches’ meetings to explore ways of enhancing cooperation; joint participation in mission activities (religious education in schools, chaplaincy, community events); exploring possibilities for joint branding of enterprises and activities where cooperative arrangements are in place.

⁴ See ‘Australian Churches Covenanting Together’, National Council of Churches in Australia, 2004.

⁵ *An Agreed Statement on Baptism* was formally adopted by both Churches in 1985. *An Agreed Statement on the Eucharist* including *A Proposal for an Interim Eucharistic Sharing* between the two Churches was adopted by the Assembly of the Uniting Church in 1991. It was approved as a ‘basis for further discussion’ by the Anglican General Synod of 1992. The 2001 report, *For the Sake of the Gospel*, included an important paragraph identifying common agreement on the Eucharist which may be compared to the agreed statement on the Eucharist in the *Anglican and Lutheran Covenant for Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation*, 2001.

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- ⁶ See the *Agreed Statement on Baptism* (1985), Responsibilities of the Baptised (b): ‘The union with Christ which we share through baptism requires the baptised to seek for unity among all Christians. Our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship (Gal. 3:27-28).’ In Raymond K. Williamson (ed.) *Stages on the Way* (1994) p.147. For detail on Anglican rules in regard to eucharistic hospitality see General Synod 1985, Canon 74/85 on reception of Holy Communion in other churches and Canon 14/73 concerning non-Anglicans receiving Holy Communion in Anglican Churches.
- The practice of the Uniting Church and its predecessor churches varied. Both Presbyterian and Methodist practice involved a supervision of church rolls and the distribution of communion tokens or membership tickets, but other Christians present would be welcomed to communion. In recent times, many ministers have simply invited ‘all those who love the Lord.’ *Uniting in Worship-2* (2005), spells out the implications of that invitation: ‘Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.’ Some Christians may feel unable to accept this invitation due to restrictions of their own tradition, but Anglicans (by the canons quoted) are free to receive holy communion in a Uniting Church, and are fully welcome to do so.
- ⁷ For example, the difference between personal and conciliar forms of episcopate, lay participation in the laying-on of hands in ordination, differences in understanding of the nature of the diaconate, lay presidency at the Eucharist, and the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships.
- ⁸ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant 2007* (Aotearoa-New Zealand).
- ⁹ Paul Avis, in an internal paper for the Council for Christian Unity (UK), ‘Seeking Unity by Stages,’ but developed in his book, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology: The Church Made Whole* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), chapter 3: ‘New Paths in Ecumenical Method.’

Participants in the Joint Working Group

The Anglican Church of Australia: The Rt Rev’d Dr Stephen Pickard (co-chair from 2008), the Rev’d Dr David Powys (co-chair till 2008), the Ven. Philip Muston, the Rev’d Canon Dr Colleen O’Reilly and the Rev’d Tim Gibson.

The Uniting Church in Australia: The Rev’d Prof. Christiaan Mostert (co-chair), the Rev’d Prof. Robert Gribben, the Rev’d Graham Perry, the Rev’d (Deacon) Pamela White, Ms Janet Wood (till 2008) and Ms Maureen Postma (from 2008).

Recommendations to our Churches

1. That this report and the following proposal for a Covenant of Association be received and endorsed by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia and the National Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia.
2. That the governing bodies of both churches take such steps as are necessary to enter into this Covenant of Association.
3. That the two churches establish, as soon as practicable, a joint committee to carry forward the implementation of the commitments of this Covenant.

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Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, heeding the Lord Jesus' prayer that his disciples might be one, for the sake of the gospel and as the fruit of three decades of mutual dialogue, the Anglican Church of Australia and the Uniting Church in Australia make the following affirmations and commitments:

Affirmations

1. We affirm that each of our churches stands in the continuity of the apostolic faith, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the ecumenical creeds.
2. Despite our failures and brokenness in discipleship, we see in each church a genuine desire to witness faithfully to the Gospel and to be engaged in God's mission in the world. We recognise that each of our churches is a part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.
3. We affirm that in both our churches the word of God is truly preached and the sacraments of baptism and holy communion are faithfully administered.
4. We affirm that both the ordained ministries and other ministries of our churches are given by God as instruments of grace, to build up the people of God in faith, hope and love, and to share in God's mission in the world.
5. We affirm that ordained ministers in both churches have received the inward call of the Holy Spirit, and the commission of Jesus Christ given through the church, to provide for a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight.
6. We affirm that personal, communal and collegial oversight (episcopate) is embodied and exercised in both churches in different and complementary forms, personal and conciliar, to serve the Church's faithfulness to the Gospel.

Commitments

1. Building upon our common confession of the apostolic faith, our common baptism and our participation in God's mission, we commit ourselves to advance the visible unity of the Anglican and Uniting Churches in Australia at every level, as a contribution to the full visible unity of the Church of Christ.
2. We commit ourselves to continue to welcome each other's baptised members to participate in the fellowship, worship and mission of our churches, and to offer eucharistic hospitality to members of each other's churches.
3. We commit ourselves to develop shared resources, to cooperate in mission, evangelism and our public witness to the apostolic faith.
4. We commit ourselves to listen to each other and to take account of each other's concerns, especially in areas that affect our relationship as churches, and to develop ways by which our churches may regularly consult one another on significant matters of faith and order and life and work.
5. We commit ourselves to overcome the remaining obstacles to a fuller visible unity, looking forward to the time when our life together will make possible a reconciled and interchangeable ordered ministry.
6. We will take all possible steps to a closer fellowship in as many areas of Christian life and witness as possible.
7. We make these commitments for the sake of the Gospel.