

The Covenanted Churches in Wales 2010 - 2015



Covenanting for Mission

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published by Cytûn for
The Covenanted Churches in Wales
58 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3UR

<http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenantedchurches.html>

January 2012

Translation by Geirda Language Services
Designed and produced by Ritchie Craven, Church in Wales Publications

2012 – 2015 Covenanting for Mission

Our 1975 Covenant* stated that:

*'We do not yet know the form union will take.
We approach our task with openness to the Spirit'*

Today, we, leaders in the Covenanted Churches of Wales, invite the members of our churches, pastors and people, to prepare, in a spirit of prayer and enquiry, for the Gathering in Aberystwyth in October 2012, where the reports of Commission panels outlined in this booklet to further the goals of Covenanting will be launched.

The Most Reverend Dr Barry Morgan, Archbishop of Wales

The Reverend Bryn Williams, General Secretary, Presbyterian Church of Wales

The Reverend Dr Stephen Wigley, Wales Synod Chair, the Methodist Church in Wales

The Reverend Peter Noble, Moderator, Wales Synod, United Reformed Church

*The Reverend Dr Marc Dummer, Chair, Covenanted Baptist Churches
of the Baptist Union of Great Britain*

1964

The Nottingham Conference called for churches 'to covenant together'.

1968

'Covenanting in Wales' published.

1975

Archbishop Gwilym Owen Williams preached at the inauguration of the Covenant at Seilo, Aberystwyth.

Mission or Unity?

In a post-denominational culture, which comes first?

Today's mission thinkers are urging us to prioritise mission as the forerunner of unity. Both approaches are necessary.

This little booklet has been produced to pick up the story of where we are now and where we want to be next, whilst reminding us at the same time of where we've been, and why.

The Covenanted Churches are not an exclusive club! Already there are a number of instances in which the Covenanted Churches, either separately or together, are in collaboration locally or through chaplaincies or shared initiatives like *Gweini (the Voice of the Christian Voluntary Sector in Wales)* with other churches and associations of churches.

As such sharing continues (with and through Cytûn) it may lead to an even wider understanding, and a deepening of the original aim of covenanting.



Between 1975 and now, the world has changed, and the churches have changed in response to those changes.

Helped by the experience of others

In 1972 proposals for unity between the Church of England and the Methodist Church foundered for the second time.

In 1982 Proposals for a Covenant in England (Anglican, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Moravian, United Reformed) also fell by the wayside.

1995 John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* on commitment to unity was published.

Attempts in 2000 to revive an earlier proposal to unite four of Wales' free-church traditions (Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Reformed) failed to inspire, and were taken no further.

In 2001 a *Charta Oecumenica* was signed in Strasbourg to provide guidelines for the growing cooperation among the Churches in Europe: Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic.

In 2002, a Covenant was signed between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain. As the Methodist Church is now a partner in both Covenants, developments in one are already proving to be of mutual benefit to both.

Covenanting is, therefore, the enduring success of inter-church relations in Wales, and though it too has clocked up its fair share of disappointments, it remains a beacon of hope for a more collaborative ministry and mission in our nation today.

'that they may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.'

John 17. 21



2004

The Trefeca Declaration

Reaffirming the five churches' commitment to the goal of the visible unity of the Church in the way that Christ wills it.

A fuller sharing

As partners, within the family of Cytûn, the five covenanted church traditions have already committed themselves to:

- a fuller sharing in one another's ministries, making the best possible use of the provisions of each church;
- always undertaking new work jointly, except where in conscience they must do so separately;
- pooling resources in order to provide a united witness to Wales;
- listening to what the nation is saying to the Church.

*'The saints, our oldest ancestors,
... built Wales on the foundation
of the Crib, the Cross and the Empty Tomb.'*

Gwenallt



The five pillars of Covenanting

How to be different together

‘Covenanting is a concept of visible unity that seeks to respond to the diversity of traditions within the unity Christ gives to and wills for the church.

‘As a modified expression of organic union, it calls the churches to unite in “sacred things” (*communio in sacris*):

- faith
- baptism
- eucharist
- ministry
- mission

without organizational unity.’

World Council of Churches
Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement

Both editions of the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement (1991 & 2002) devote five and a half column inches to the Welsh Covenant. Representatives of Welsh Churches at international ecumenical gatherings are still approached by delegates anxious to know what progress we are making.



Current agenda ...

... to identify areas where a Local Ecumenical Partnership might be established;

... to engage in conversations with congregations in those areas to explain the terms of the covenant and to encourage the setting up of a Local Ecumenical Partnership;

... to consider whether there are specific communities which could act as experimental models for ecumenical ministerial deployment.

Mission and Service in Local Partnerships

Covenanting is for local mission. It's about properly agreed and properly supported inter-denominational partnerships on the ground that has practical outcomes in local situations, rural and urban.

All five Covenanted Churches (and the law of the land) now provide the way for local churches to share resources, liturgies and sacraments.

There are already a number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) and Neighbourhood Ministries in existence across Wales. Over the next five years the challenge is to add to the list*.

One question that arises is how ministers of one tradition are recognised and received by those of other traditions.

In the Methodist Church this is addressed by ministers being 'authorised to serve' by the Conference; in the Church in Wales through the *Ecumenical Canons*; in the Presbyterian Church of Wales by the authority of the General Assembly through the Association and Presbyteries; in the United Reformed Church by the Synod in partnership with the local church; and for Baptist churches by following the Union's Faith and Order recommendations.

There are areas in Wales, mainly rural, but some urban, where a re-deployment of existing clergy and ministers into an ecumenical team could transform the experience of being and doing church.

'The more that churches truly mirror the community of love at the heart of the universe – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the more people will want to go on belonging.'

*Philip Richter & Leslie J. Francis
(‘Gone but not forgotten’ DLT 1998)*

*For a list of which churches and denominations are involved:
<http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenantedchurches.html>

Signing a Covenant - Cardiff Bay LEP



Current agenda ...

... to revise the Eucharistic rites

'For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.'

1 Corinthians 11. 26

A commonly agreed rite for Holy Communion

In 1981 the Covenanted Churches produced an *Order of Service for Holy Communion*, which was enormously important in providing a commonly agreed Eucharistic text for use in ecumenical partnerships and on other suitable inter-church occasions.

Since then some of the existing rites of member churches have been recognised for use in this way.

Nevertheless, there is still a strong demand for a commonly agreed Covenanted rite drawing on the latest liturgical insights.

At the October 2012 Gathering, a new Covenanted Eucharistic rite will be used for the first time.

'For twenty centuries there has not been one single week in which this act of remembrance was not made, one generation reminding another.'

C H Dodd



Current agenda ...

... to draw up, after Biblical and theological reflection, a document jointly agreed by all five member churches encapsulating their understanding of pastoral oversight and stating clearly what model would be acceptable to them all.

Shared Oversight

For ministerial deployment to serve the best interests of local partnerships, perceptions of 'oversight' need further work.

In 1986 the Covenanted Churches in Wales drew on the insights of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order paper '*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*' (1982), and on responses from the Welsh churches in '*Principles of Visible Unity*' (1980), to produce an inspirational 'green paper' on what '*Ministry in a Uniting Church*' in Wales would look like. It would be about moving 'from recognition to reconciliation'.

It was one of the early disappointments of covenanting in Wales that while none of the churches rejected it, there was insufficient consensus to move from turning that 'green paper' into a definite 'bill' to be put to each church. It did, however, have a lasting outcome in that it identified oversight as a critical component in reconciling inter-denominational differences in the service of mission.

Twelve years later the Covenanted Churches in Wales revisited the challenge of shared ministerial oversight with their more modest 1998 proposal: *'Towards the making of an Ecumenical Bishop in Wales'*. Then the ministry of such a bishop was to be centred on a Local Ecumenical Partnership in Cardiff East. But again there was insufficient consensus to expect a positive outcome if put to the vote in all five traditions.

In a renewed effort to give expression to a mutually acceptable model of oversight that is 'personal, collegial and communal', the Covenanted Churches in Wales are working towards a new approach, to be launched at the October 2012 Gathering.



Current agenda ...

... to explore a shared mode of church governance, with a particular focus on the similarities between the existing denominational arrangements;

... to draw up a document jointly agreed by all five member denominations stating clearly what model of church governance would be acceptable to them all.

The Church Uniting in Wales

In the long term, there would need to be one governing body for a Uniting Church. A possible model is offered by the forthcoming October 2012 Gathering which could evolve into the Gathering of the Uniting Church, meeting twice each year.

Can you imagine what that Church might look like?

To move from our present differing structures of governance would take a real change in attitude; one that begins with thinking of ourselves as "The Church Uniting in Wales", a Church that incorporates all our historic churches and denominations and preserves and celebrates all their unique traditions. One that builds on all we have done in the past and takes a decisive step forward.

'For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another.'

Romans 12. 4-5



Current agenda ...

... to provide a joint confirmation rite for use within Local Ecumenical Partnerships;

... to consider shared ordination services, where possible.

What next?

In 1990 and in 1994 the Covenanted Churches produced two volumes on '*Christian Baptism and Christian Membership*', including a '*Rite of Baptism*', and an example of '*A Service of Affirmation and Re-Affirmation*'. What is needed now is a liturgy that builds on this earlier work, but shapes it for today's expectations and understanding,

A new generation of disciples wants an agreed rite that gives expression to their mutual belonging to all the traditions that make up the covenanted family, through acts of joint confirmation.

In the meantime each church / denomination has an agreed procedure to enable the establishment of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Neighbourhood Ministries.*

Long-term

To achieve visible unity, and to establish organic union through:

- a Uniting Church *of* Wales that shares one faith, one structure, one ministry and one governance *but*
- that honours and celebrates the different theological emphases and worship traditions that constitute and enrich the greater whole.

God, help us to change.

To change ourselves and to change our world.

To know the need for it.

To deal with the pain of it.

To feel the joy of it.

To undertake the journey without understanding the destination.

The art of gentle revolution.

Leuing, Australia



'In covenanting, each church maintains, *for the present* and as long as each church shall decide, its ecclesial structures, traditions, forms of worship and systems of ministerial placement.'

Paul A Crow, by tradition a Disciple of Christ, one-time Associate Professor of Church History, Lexington, Kentucky, and one of the leading authorities on covenanting.

For the present ... *

'That little phrase "for the present", can so easily slip over into "for the foreseeable future". It can become an engagement that never results in marriage; relationships cooling, or even souring, caught in a time warp that neither releases nor fulfils. Because doesn't even "a modified expression of organic union" have to produce some tangible results, however modified, if it is to be more than "churches together"?'

'Cytûn is a big loose family: sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins: first, second and once removed! Bound by common ties and shared stories: recognising a common ancestry, a shared DNA.'

'The covenanted quintet in this big, loose family, on the other hand, is after something more. To set up house together. A particular household of faith. To create a new, deeper kind of associating. To give up some independence in order to explore a richer way of living, of being.'

'Covenanting may initially be a modified expression of organic union, nevertheless, to quote Professor Crow: *"in a solemn act the churches ask God through the Holy Spirit to create out of their separated lives a new ecclesial community committed to common mission in the world."* '

*from a paper by the Reverend Gethin Abraham-Williams, current chair of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales, at a meeting of Covenanted Church Leaders, 9th December 2009.

(For full text see:
<http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenantedchurches.html>)

'Therefore, as opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially members of the household of faith.' Galatians 6. 10



The whole Covenanting process has grown out of, and continues to be dependent on, serious theological study, which has been given liturgical expression at certain key points.

The following is a list of principal Covenanting publications (some of which are now out of print, but available for study at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth).

Scriptural basis & theological underpinning

- 1968** Covenanting In Wales.
- 1971** Covenanting for Union in Wales Part I.
Covenanting for Union in Wales Part II.
- 1980** Principles of Visible Unity in Wales.
- 1981** The Holy Communion; Order of Service.
- 1986** Ministry in a Uniting Church: From Recognition to Reconciliation.
- 1987** The Inauguration of a Uniting Church in Wales; Draft Services.
- 1990** Christian Baptism and Church Membership Vol I. Baptism Order of Service.
- 1993** The Holy Communion Supplement.
- 1994** Christian Baptism and Church Membership Vol II. A Service of Affirmation and of Reaffirmation of Faith.
- 1998** Towards the Making of an Ecumenical Bishop in Wales.

For further information or a large print copy of this booklet please contact:

The Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales:

Cytûn

58 Richmond Road, Cardiff CF24 3UR

029 2046 4204

<http://www.cytun.org.uk/covenantedchurches.html>



The Church in Wales

39 Cathedral Road

Cardiff CF11 9XF

029 2034 8252

www.churchinwales.org.uk

The Covenanted Baptist Churches of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

c/o 54 Richmond Road

Cardiff CF24 3UR

www.swbabugb.org.uk

The United Reformed Church Wales Synod

Minster Road

Roath, Cardiff CF23 5AS

029 2019 5728

www.urc-wales.org.uk

The Presbyterian Church of Wales

Tabernacle Chapel

81 Merthyr Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1DD

029 2062 7465

www.ebcpcw.org.uk

The Methodist Church in Wales

Wales Synod Office

Cyncoed Methodist Church

Westminster Crescent

Cardiff CF23 6SE

029 2076 1515

www.methodistwales.org.uk



Questions...

What does all this mean for me and for my parish /congregation?

What are the implications for our mission?

How might all this affect the way our Church works?

...what would your questions be?

