

APPENDIX G

**GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS
FOR LOCAL COVENANT PARTNERSHIPS**

The Standing Committee in June last appointed a working group to prepare a preliminary response to the Guidelines and Protocols for Local Covenant Partnerships for consideration by the Standing Committee at its meeting on 20 September 2005. This document was referred back to the Standing Committee by the General Synod of 2005. (See pages 162 to 188 of the Book of Reports 2005 for the text of this document).

A meeting of the Protocols Working Group was held on Friday 2nd September 2005 in Church of Ireland House, Rathmines, Dublin.

Present: The Most Rev JRW Neil, Ven GA McCamley and Revd TS Forster.

The members present were provided with expert advice which was sought on certain legal aspects.

A PRELIMINARY RESPONSE

In the Preface (p162) it is acknowledged that these Guidelines are “based on the Guidelines approved by Churches Together in England for use in Local Ecumenical Partnerships”. To use this as the basis for an Irish model for Local Partnership Covenants creates a problem from the very start. The Church of England ecumenical Canons B43 and B44 are much more extensive and nearly ten times the length of the equivalent Church of Ireland ecumenical Canons 10 and 11. Therefore some of the proposals and suggestions within the document are contrary to the Constitution of the Church of Ireland and so the General Synod would be unable to give its blessing to the Guidelines and Protocols. It is suggested that more time is required by the Covenant Council to experiment with the “Guidelines”. The Church of Ireland ecumenical Canons (10 and 11) would also need to be re-examined. This could be done in conjunction with the Committee for Christian Unity and it is suggested that comparison should be made with the ecumenical Canons of the Church in Wales, as well as those of the Church of England.

Concept and Definition of a Local Covenantal Partnership (p163)

This states that “for an LCP to exist there must be...formal recognition, ongoing liaison, support and review by the Covenant Council and local Diocesan/District Covenant Facilitators”. Although it states here that Diocesan approval would be required, it would also have to be consistent with the Constitution of the Church of Ireland, and this is where the real difficulty arises.

Exploratory Stage

1. This goes beyond the current remit of a Select Vestry as laid down in the Constitution of the Church of Ireland.
4. This would require an amendment to the C of I Safeguarding Trust policy so as to approve Methodist leaders.

Standing Committee – Report 2006

8. In the Republic of Ireland in schools and hospitals the civic authorities deal directly with the individual churches and no mechanism exists for ecumenical chaplaincies. The differences in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland legislation would create a problem for the General Synod in giving approval to this section. Local agreement would be agreeable but not a flat agreement for the whole island.

Categories of LCP (p165)

1. How is a Single Congregation Partnership dealt with under Canon law? Legislation does not exist for this.
2. Congregations in Covenanted Partnership – some formal and some non-formal arrangements already exist. The Church in Wales has already addressed this issue. There are no canonical problems with this category.
3. A Shared Building will require a change in legislation.

Single Congregation Partnership (p166)

Provision will be required in the Church of Ireland Constitution for a Partnership Constitution. Inter-changeability of ministry is mentioned here – this is not what the Covenant said. This is more like the Methodist/Presbyterian relationship with an absence of the episcopacy. How would a common purse affect the minimum approved stipend for Church of Ireland clergy? In the case of a Single Congregation Partnership, would the Church of Ireland cleric only be seconded to it and thus be able to stay within the Church of Ireland pension fund? The Church of Ireland would have to give recognition to clergy working within this scenario.

This is a good concept overall but would be impossible in practice without a change in legislation. As members of the Church of Ireland, we would not want to be seen as saying no to the concept, indeed it may be welcomed, but at present Canon law prevents it. There are many theological and ecclesiological problems in this model e.g. ministry, funding etc.

Methodists in Ireland have a problem with episcopacy unlike Methodists in England. Due to Ireland's history, Methodists here have become more aligned to the Presbyterian Church than to the Church of Ireland unlike other parts of the world where Anglicanism and Methodism are closely linked.

Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships (p167)

Clause 3 in this section stating that “..only ministers ready and able to work ecumenically should be appointed” is illegal under Chapter IV of the Constitution. It can be part of the criteria but no undertaking has to be made. This creates legal and practical problems. Methodists cannot have power of veto. The Constitution of the Church of Ireland as it stands at present rules out this provision.

Shared Building Partnerships (p168)

In the sharing of buildings issues such as child protection and the Church of Ireland Safeguarding Trust policy needed to be addressed along with adequate insurance cover for the relevant buildings and those who would use them.

Standing Committee – Report 2006

Times of services are a matter for the Ordinary but in practice they are normally agreed locally and then approved by the Ordinary.

Chaplaincy Partnerships (p169)

University and Prison Authorities make the ultimate decision on chaplaincy arrangements. Hospital Chaplains in Northern Ireland have a contract from the local health board. University and Hospital Chaplains once appointed cannot be removed by the bishop.

This section is mainly guidelines and does not require General Synod approval.

Education Partnerships (p170)

At least one of the examples stated here is situated in very different surroundings and situation to anything which could be undertaken in Ireland at this time.

Guidelines for a constitution for a Single Congregation Partnership (p173)

If you are a member of this single congregation what is your denomination? Is it a third and unique denomination made up of part Methodist, part Church of Ireland?

This section gives what membership implies e.g. regular attendance at worship, regular sacrificial giving etc. In the Church of Ireland membership is not defined – normally it is understood as someone who is a baptised Christian who claims to be a member of the Church of Ireland. The concept of membership as defined here is contrary to Canon law and foreign to the Church of Ireland.

Use of non-alcoholic wine would require a change in the Canons.

Throughout this section of the document there is a contradiction in the use of the terms “minister” and “clergy”.

Chapter VIII of the Constitution with regard to discipline would need to be re-examined and altered. The legal framework for working conditions and disciplinary action needs to be very tight.

Alternating Ministry – there is no provision for this within the Church of Ireland Constitution.

P176 What is the relationship of LCP to a diocese and local bishop etc? – it is not clearly defined.

At a Special General Meeting those eligible to vote shall be those on the Common Roll. What is the nature of membership here and how is it defined?

P177 With regard to Finance, the Church of Ireland minimum agreed stipend needs to be borne in mind and the role of contracts.

It was felt by the Working Group that this model might be better described as a Joint rather than a Single Congregation. A Joint Congregation would be easier to manage than a Single Congregation. A Single Congregation would be very much out on its own.

Guidelines for the Recognition of a Local Covenant as a LCP (p178)

6. According to this guideline a Board of Nomination would have to consult with the Methodist Church before an appointment could be made – again this requires a change in Canon law.
7. “...unless that discipline is redefined through LCP status”. Does this mean that LCP would mutate?

A Model Declaration of Intent/Covenant for Congregations in Covenanted Partnership (p179)

- 4e. In this section the Joint Ministry Team should be a reference to a wider team of personnel, not just clergy.

Constitutional Guidelines for Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships (p180)

P181 Baptism and Membership: Confirmation and the equivalent Methodist Service of Welcome are very different forms of service with different theological emphasis. More clarity and definition is needed in this section.

Conclusions

Overall the Protocols Working Group would wish to congratulate and indeed encourage the Covenant Council in its work. The question arises, is it appropriate for a document like this (Guidelines and Protocols for Local Covenant Partnerships) to be approved by the General Synod at this present time? A re-examination of the Canons of the Church of Ireland in conjunction with this document will need to take place and a number of changes in the Constitution will be required. This document has been based on Canon law as it relates to the Church of England - it now needs to be reviewed within an Irish context. The role of the Covenant Council also requires more definition. The use of the term “church leadership” at various stages creates ambiguity. Is leadership to be understood as local, diocesan or central?

Local level work and a review of the Canons of the Church of Ireland should go forward in tandem. Although the Guidelines document states that the models are not to become straightjackets, this Group was of the opinion that having so much detail on paper is and could be a constraint. Experience and practice over a set time period of time would give a clearer definition of the relationship between the two denominations in the different models.

Ecumenical experience has shown again and again that any move forward before all canonical and ecclesiological issues are clarified ends in hurt and prolonged division. This was seen in previous English Anglican/Methodist schemes which were rejected causing great damage. The scheme in Wales for an “ecumenical bishop” foundered on significant canonical issues.

The Working Group would under no circumstance want to give the impression to outsiders that the Church of Ireland is stalling in the furtherance of the Covenant relationship between itself and the Methodist Church. More work simply needs to be done on the legal side of the practical applications of the document before it could be brought again before the General Synod of the Church of Ireland.