

Response to *Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission*

By the Faith and Order Board of the Scottish Episcopal Church

May 2016

Common Calling

Member churches of the World Council of Churches have committed themselves to:

call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe. (reaffirmed in Unity Statement of 2013)

It is, therefore, a matter of great joy when fellow members of the Body of Christ take steps to express more fully that unity to which we are all called. It is all the more significant when the churches involved are among our closest partners in our own geographical context. The Church of Scotland, with whom we share common origins from the reforming movements of the 16th and 17th centuries, and the Church of England, from the same origins and with whom we also share membership of the Anglican Communion, have taken a significant symbolic step towards closer unity in *Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission*. The Scottish Episcopal Church was pleased to take an active part in this process. We share not only common roots but, more pressingly, a common context for the faithful living of the Christian Gospel with these two churches and we welcome their commitment to addressing that rapidly changing context with a greater degree of common purpose.

Our Common Context

We fully recognise the challenges outlined in *Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission* and affirm its insight that the interconnected nature of our political, cultural and social life demands a more unified response from the churches. There are particular issues relating to the political alignment of our nations that are evolving very quickly, not least the referendum on our continued membership of the EU, and it is necessary for churches to consider together how these shifting realities affect the lives of our communities, especially the lives of those who are most vulnerable. Conscious that St Paul's teaching radically unsettles our notions of our primary identities and loyalties (1 Cor. 9:19-23, Gal. 3:28), placing the demands of charity and Christian service in the forefront, we welcome any approach to our global challenges that moves beyond narrow self-interest.

Shared Journey

The SEC has been pleased to be part of the many strands of shared ecumenical work over many decades that form the background to this report and celebrates the strong relationships it enjoys with the Church of England and Church of Scotland. We are also pleased that conversations between Christians of Reformed and Anglican churches continue through local, regional and international dialogues. Of particular note is the new International Anglican – Reformed Dialogue, which picks

up the work that led to *God's Reign and Our Unity* (1984). It is our hope that, building on the work of the present report and the ongoing International dialogue, the Anglican and Reformed churches of these islands will continue to work towards closer unity. To that end, the SEC welcomes the invitation to continue its observer role in this ongoing process through the work of the contact group established in this agreement. Furthermore, the SEC and Church of Scotland have begun the process of establishing a new conversation aimed at deepening our unity and common mission in Scotland.

A Shared Calling

We recognise the distinctive character of the Church of Scotland and Church of England as national churches, albeit with differing legal frameworks, and affirm our support for their joint work on areas of common concern that arise from this distinctive position in relation to their respective nations. We expect that this would include such issues as leadership of the community of churches and other faith communities; particular church/state concerns; implications of constitutional change for the position of national and established churches.

We also commend the report for its recognition of the interconnection of our ecumenical and communion relationships. These interconnections exist on international levels but are perhaps most clearly evident locally. We commit ourselves, therefore, to an ecumenism that is constantly mindful of the impact of decisions on partners who are not directly involved in a given initiative and consults with these partners wherever possible.

Formal Agreement, Mutual Recognition and Fellowship in the Gospel

The SEC commends the Church of Scotland and the Church of England for the historic mutual recognition of churches expressed in this report.

Agreement in Faith

We acknowledge the success of the ecumenical movement in fostering convergence on such historically contentious issues as church order and sacramental theology. We recognise the significant level of theological agreement in the report as consistent with the ecumenical agreements to which the SEC is a signatory (the Porvoo agreement with Nordic and Baltic Lutherans of 1992 and the Reuilly agreement with French Reformed and Lutheran churches of 1999) and with our own canonical statements. We commend the report on its respectful approach to the unresolved issues concerning *episcopate*, apostolicity and the historic episcopate and commit ourselves, with the two signatory churches, to a continued exploration of this matter.

Sharing Across our Borders

We recognise that many members of all our churches move freely between churches of different traditions and we have benefitted from the commitment and insights brought to the SEC by Christians whose origins are in another church. Likewise, we recognise that many Episcopalians choose, for many different reasons, to make their

home in other churches and we support their choice to continue their Christian journey with sisters and brothers from other traditions. We do not regard this phenomenon in competitive terms, but are nonetheless grateful that the report makes it clear that the agreement between the two churches is not intended to encourage Christians to change their tradition when crossing the border.

We also recognise that the report simply affirms the current provisions for the occasional participation of ordained ministers of one tradition in the liturgies of the other such as marriages and baptisms. We understand that arrangements for more permanent sharing of ministries refers to local ecumenical contexts where the Church of England's Ecumenical Relations Measure is operative, namely in England and the Diocese in Europe. We understand that it would be the role of the contact group to keep a watching brief on this and any developments in this area. We would expect that the usual courtesies would be observed by Anglican clerics undertaking activities pertaining to their office in another diocese or province.

The SEC's own canonical provision for shared ministry in local ecumenical contexts has enabled us to benefit greatly from a level of ecumenical exchange unknown in previous generations. Our canon dealing with Local Ecumenical Partnerships is appended to this paper.

Mutual recognition and Reconciliation of Ministries

The SEC shares the same position regarding the historic episcopate as the other churches of the Anglican Communion. We are also committed to the full visible unity of the Church and recognise the significant issues that arise for churches that do not accept the necessity of this ministry for the wellbeing of the church. We are, therefore, pleased that the report articulates a commitment to the continued exploration of this issue and a willingness to consider new ways of addressing both the expression of *episcopate* and the closer unity of episcopal and non-episcopal churches. It would be our expectation that this would form part of the contact group's ongoing theological work as well as forming a major part of the work of other national and international Reformed-Anglican dialogues. We would, therefore, encourage a close sharing of the outcomes of such explorations as they progress.

Nation, Country, Government and Church

We affirm the approach of this report to matters of national identity and constitutional change and share its concerns about the potential for self-protective or insular responses to global challenges. The SEC would wish to continue working on such issues through our involvement in the contact group and in other Scottish and UK contexts.

Mission and Ecclesiology

The SEC fully recognises the challenges posed by the changing place of Christian faith in our current social contexts and, indeed, in the prevailing worldview of many of

our fellow citizens. We express our support to the two national churches as they respond to the particular questions this raises for their distinctive roles and are willing, with other ecumenical partners, to share in the kind of theological and missiological work proposed by the report. The two recent WCC reports cited there provide an excellent framework for exploring the relationship between mission and unity as our churches seek to respond together to God's call to serve the world in humble service, in constant prayer and in the joyful proclamation of a liberating Gospel.

Growth in Communion, Partnership in Mission

The Process of Receiving and Responding to the Report

It is a matter of deep regret to all those involved in the process that led to the production of this report that its public release did not take place in the way that was intended. The Scottish Episcopal Church has received full and gracious apologies for the difficulties caused by the unplanned early release of the Columba Declaration at Christmas 2015. We are happy to accept these apologies.

When the SEC received a copy of the final text of the report in January 2016, we sought clarification from the Church of England and Church of Scotland on the following areas:

1. The nature of any 'new initiatives' envisaged between the partner churches.
2. Clarification on the language of 'crossing borders'.
3. The nature of response expected from the SEC and URC.
4. The provisions of the C of E's Ecumenical Relations Measure relating to the C of S.
5. Questions of the transfer of membership between churches
6. Practical considerations about the exercise of ministry by clergy who move between traditions
7. Any future work that might be undertaken to allow a fuller recognition of ministries.
8. The contexts envisaged for congregational partnerships.
9. The overlap between conversations with different traditions regarding the sharing of ministries.

We received detailed clarifications on each of these areas which, in summary, confirmed that:

- There are no specific proposals for new initiatives. Any new work would arise from the ongoing conversations of the contact group.
- The focus of the agreement is on each church's ministry in its own context and on the addressing of common challenges. The report 'neither conceives of nor advocates the crossing of boundaries or borders by churches.'
- The C of E's arrangements for welcoming ministry of a C of S minister relate only to its territorial contexts in England and the Diocese in Europe. The same is true for congregational partnerships between them and the C of S.
- Fuller interchangeability of ministries is a goal for all churches committed to full visible unity. Progress in this area depends on wider ecumenical convergence.

The Faith and Order Board was satisfied with the reassurances given in these clarifications.

Some within the SEC have also questioned the underlying principle of an ecumenical agreement that involves one Anglican province relating to a church which is located in the territory of another province. The SEC will continue to address any intra-Anglican issues raised by such an agreement through its usual channels within the Communion.