

**Church Unity Commission**

**Statement of the CUC to the Covenanting Churches and Observer Bodies**

**March 24<sup>th</sup> 2011**

**WHEREAS** the Church Unity Commission (CUC) was established some 40 years ago to facilitate the processes towards union between the Anglicans, Congregationalists Methodists and Presbyterians for the sake of the mission of God in the world;

**WHEREAS** these churches covenanted together to move towards union and have journeyed together for the last 40 years and others have joined the process as observers;

**WHEREAS** over the intervening years the CUC has grappled with significant challenges and obstacles in moving towards union between the covenanting churches;

**WHEREAS** the Doctrine Committee of the CUC in 2009 presented a proposal to move this process forward and this was circulated to the covenanting churches for comment;

**WHEREAS** the covenanting churches have now presented their responses to the Central Committee;

The Central Committee of the CUC concedes that the desired goal of organic union is inaccessible in the foreseeable future and that the intermediate goal of Full Communion is unlikely given the lack of consensus on the theology, history and practice of the ministry of oversight. While the CUC continues to call on the covenanting churches to commit themselves to seek Full Communion, it recognizes and acknowledges that Full Communion at present is unattainable unless and until there is agreement on the ministry of oversight. In view of this the CUC presents the following for discussion and decision by the covenanting churches and observer bodies.

1. The CUC affirms that the quest for unity during the 40 years of its history has been driven by a desire to give expression to Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:21 that we might be one in order that the world may believe that Christ is the one sent by the Father. Unity then, as the CUC's goal, continues to be driven by a response to the systematic unfolding and developing understanding of the *missio dei*. However, the CUC is acutely aware of the shift in paradigm from modernity, with its inherent sense of optimism and its emphasis on order, structure, uniformity and conformity to post modernity with its sense of process and its emphasis on relationship, interconnectedness, diversity and variety.
2. The CUC calls on the covenanting denominations to celebrate the degree of Communion that already exists between the denominations which is currently expressed in the following ways: mutual Eucharistic hospitality (the open table), the free transfer of members between congregations among the covenanting churches; the mutual acceptance of ministries; the freedom of ministers from one covenanting church to minister in Word and Sacrament in any of the other covenanting churches; the almost 30 united congregations that exist in many parts of the country and the opportunities that we have had to make collective representation to the governing authorities on a number of important issues.

3. The CUC while accepting that all the covenanting churches exercise godly and Scripturally recognizable forms of oversight that all the other covenanting churches honour and respect, commits itself, via its Doctrine Committee, to explore the various ways in which the ministry of oversight is defined theologically, understood, and practiced in the covenanting churches to determine the similarities and differences in the understanding of this ministry between the covenanting churches.
4. The CUC commits itself, taking advice from the Doctrine Committee and the covenanting churches, to develop an integrated and ecumenical understanding of the ministry of oversight to assist the covenanting churches to appreciate, affirm and fully accept the Scriptural integrity and historical validity of this ministry both for the covenanting church itself and all the others.
5. The CUC commits itself to convene a Consultative Synod once every five years to track the progress toward deeper expressions on unity along the following five trajectories:
  - a. Promoting further co-operation in ministry and mission at local level including the examination and development of models of local ecumenism and united congregations;
  - b. Developing common preaching and liturgical resources;
  - c. Co-operating in the training of students for the ministry and the post-ordination training of ministers;
  - d. Developing and strengthening of Centres of Hope, in consultation with the SACC and other bodies, that will focus on, amongst others, the alleviation of poverty, a commitment to education, the eradication of violence against women and children and respect for the environment;
  - e. Seeking consensus on the ministry of oversight.

The first meeting of the Consultative Synod should take place by not later the end of 2016.

6. The CUC continues to give thanks for the presence of the observer bodies and for the invaluable assistance the observer bodies have given to the CUC's journey over the years. The CUC sincerely desires that other denominations and Christian bodies will take on observer status with the CUC and continue to help guide the process towards deeper expressions of our unity. The CUC hopes that those who come on as observers will go on to become full covenanting partners.
7. The Central Committee of the CUC shall operate as the executive of the Consultative Synod to make all arrangements and undertake all the planning for the meetings of the Consultative Synod and to track these five trajectories in between meetings of the Consultative Synod