

***The Church: Common Vision, Common Mission?***  
**Report on Anglican-Pentecostal consultation organized by the Church of England's  
Council for Christian Unity and Churches Together in England,  
5 November 2015**

### Background to the consultation

1. In 2014, the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission released *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, as a 'convergence text' for consideration and response around the world. This provided a potentially significant opportunity for churches to talk with one another about their understanding of the church in relation to key themes, including mission and unity.
2. Following its debate on the text at the July sessions of General Synod, the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity (CCU) approached Churches Together in England (CTE) to help set up a consultation event for representatives from the Church of England to meet with representatives from Pentecostal churches. The broad aim was to discuss how the document might help to deepen mutual understanding and theological dialogue as part of growth in unity in mission in this country between the Church of England and Pentecostal churches, building on the strong relationships that already exist at many levels, expressed for instance in the message of greeting sent by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Elim regional centenary celebration in London in October.
3. At the start of the consultation, three particular questions were noted:
  - (i) How useful is the document for Anglicans and Pentecostals seeking to grow closer together?
  - (ii) How do we bring together focus on practical collaboration with attention to theological issues?
  - (iii) Do we have a 'common vision' of the church, and how much does it matter?

### Churches/agencies represented at the consultation

4. The following churches/agencies were represented at the consultation:

Apostolic Pastoral Congress; Church of England; Churches in Communities International; Churches Together in England; Council of African and Caribbean Churches UK; Elim; Ground Level Network; Ichthus Christian Fellowship; International Ministerial Council of Great Britain; Pioneer; TAPAC (Trans-Atlantic Pacific Alliance of Churches); Woolwich Central Baptist Church; Word of Faith Mission & Apostolic Pastoral Congress.

### Presentations

5. The following presentations were given at the consultation:

- ‘Why do we need a common vision of the church?’ Archbishop Fedilia Onyuku-Opukiri and the Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen
- ‘Mission: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,’ Bishop Collin Maloney and the Revd Dr David Hilborn
- ‘Partnership in mission: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,’ Dave Newton and the Revd Margaret Cave
- ‘Unity and diversity: Pentecostal and Anglican perspectives,’ Revd Dr Hugh Osgood and the Revd Canon Dr Jeremy Worthen

## Issues discussed

6. What kind of **unity** is it that God has given to the church and that we should we seeking to express fully in our life together, including our structures and institutions? This emerged as a critical question from the day. For some of the Pentecostal participants, the approach represented by *The Church* and the faith and order tradition of ecumenism from which it springs – in which Anglicans have played a key role – implies an unhelpful ideal of uniformity, despite the place given to diversity in relation to unity e.g. at paragraphs 28-30 of the document. Why the need to ‘order’ the diversity that flows from the renewing power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church? Even to pair together ‘faith and order’ sounded wrong to some Pentecostal ears: surely faith is what fundamentally unites us, with church order being very much a secondary matter.
7. This point also relates to a wider concern about how the Pentecostal story fits – or does not fit – in the history of the faith and order movement, and how this relates in turn to the development of Christianity globally. The overwhelming predominance of white Europeans and Americans at the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, when the modern Ecumenical Movement began to take its distinctive shape, was noted. Global Christianity began to burst its European wine skins from the mid-twentieth century onwards, and it was agreed that the diversity that has flowed from that – including the variety within Pentecostalism itself – needs to be affirmed. There are questions here about inclusion and prejudice, but also about the need to take seriously the difference of Pentecostal perspectives on e.g. ecclesiology, rather than presuming they can be inserted into an already settled form of theological discourse shaped only by the historic denominations.
8. Nonetheless, participants were agreed that unity matters. Division makes the church look ridiculous in the eyes of the world. We need to be able to accept one another’s baptisms as baptisms into the one church of Jesus Christ, welcome one another to our celebrations of the Lord’s Supper and respect and receive from one another’s ministers. The Holy Spirit breaks down the barriers between us so that we can witness to the world together. Yet questions remain about how that unity is best expressed at the level of church structures and institutional frameworks. Ephesians and Acts 15 were discussed as key biblical texts for thinking about the unity of the church as well as John 17. The question was raised of how far Israel in the Old Testament provides a continuing model for what it means to be one as the people of God, and whether there is insufficient emphasis on our oneness in Christ.
9. How might seeking unity change us? It was argued that all churches needed to be open to the possibility of challenge, repentance and transformation as part of what it means to be committed to growing in love and fellowship. The example of Daniel was mentioned as

someone prepared to learn a new language and a different way of doing things as part of being faithful to God, not as a departure from it.

10. There was some lively discussion around the theme of **mission**. The historical depth of the Church of England's engagement in mission was stressed, as well as the inclusive understanding of mission expressed in the Anglican Communion's 'five marks of mission' and its theological grounding in the widely accepted idea of the *missio dei*. Such an understanding coheres well with the presentation of mission in *The Church*. Pentecostal participants could also affirm that mission belongs to God and not to any particular church. They might also want to say that because of that, we should not seek to control it too closely or overdo strategy and organization.
11. While Pentecostals are, like Anglicans, concerned with care for the needy, social justice and the well-being of creation, there would be differing emphases as to how this relates to 'mission'. Some, for instance, would want to stress very strongly the primacy of evangelism and discipleship in mission, as indeed would some Anglicans. Expectations of the imminent return of the Lord help to generate a powerful sense of urgency for Pentecostal Christians regarding the task of sharing the gospel. Pentecostal evangelism flows from an experience of the living God and seeks to invite others to experience God for themselves. *The Church* seemed to be rather weak on this, and also on sin, evil, atonement and spiritual warfare – points affirmed by some Anglican participants as well.
12. At various points, questions about **theological method** were raised. A number of Pentecostal participants urged that we begin with relevant passages from the Bible rather than from the kind of theological synthesis found in *The Church*. There was also concern that theological dialogue be grounded both in relationships of fellowship, hospitality and prayer and in common action for the sake of the kingdom of God.
13. Serious reservations were expressed by some present about what it might mean to invite Pentecostal churches to participate in theological dialogue based on the model of seeking 'convergence', as proposed by *The Church*. There was concern about the possibility of apparent agreement coming only at the price of trading on the ambiguity of key terms, and about the scope for lack of honesty in that regard. There was also a wish to ensure that serious disagreement is actually faced: one set of participants in theological dialogue may want to tell another that they believe them to be mistaken about fundamental Christian teaching and therefore urge them to reconsider their views. Dialogue needs to have space for that to happen and for such a message to be received with respect.
14. Some very positive stories of **partnership in action** were shared, by both Pentecostal and Anglican participants. There are sometimes significant barriers still to be overcome in bringing together historic denominations (and the structures they have developed) with Pentecostal churches, and participants wanted to be realistic about the challenges here. Nonetheless, through giving time to the building up of relations between church leaders to establish trust, and through identifying concrete projects for collaboration that express common purpose, partnership can flourish. One participant also wanted to stress alongside these things the importance of praying together, of passionate commitment to serving the local community and of acknowledging and respecting differences.

15. A number of possible areas of exploration for **deepening partnership** were considered. Could the 'mixed economy' of mission in the Church of England include scope for sharing resources (including buildings) with Pentecostals seeking to plant new churches? Pastoral care was suggested as another area where sharing in ministry could be very beneficial. Many Anglican churches continue to have a strong focus on serving the whole community in their parish – a focus that may in fact be shared with a local Pentecostal church, as noted above. Sharing church buildings is a practical way of supporting one another, yet it was also agreed that such arrangements do not necessarily lead to relationships of fellowship between the congregations involved. There are useful guidelines for good practice on the Church of England website, at <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/resources/sharing-church-buildings.aspx>.

## Conclusion

16. As noted above, at the start of the consultation, three **questions** were noted:

- (i) How useful is the document for Anglicans and Pentecostals seeking to grow closer together?
- (ii) How do we bring together focus on practical collaboration and attention to theological issues?
- (iii) Do we have a 'common vision' of the church, and how much does it matter?

At the end of discussions, it was suggested that regarding (i), the document helped to raise important questions, but probably did not provide the best framework for answering them. As *The Church* begins with the theology of mission, so Anglicans and Pentecostals perhaps need to start by working on where they agree in this area, where they disagree, and where they have different terminology and frameworks of reference that may make it hard to know whether they actually disagree or not. On (ii), the need for theological work to be grounded in secure relations and partnership in the gospel had emerged strongly during the day. So far as (iii) was concerned, more conversation would be required before a clear answer could be given, but a common vision was most likely to be found through prayerful study of the Scriptures together, while apparently contrary theological instincts around the oneness/unity of the church would need to be squarely faced.

17. The consultation made space for a wide range of views to be expressed and heard with respect. It raised a number of important issues for further consideration and possibilities for growth in relations. There was a strong sense of the importance of encouraging and sustaining the conversations that are happening at all kinds of levels between the Church of England and the Pentecostal family of churches,<sup>1</sup> for the sake of God's mission in our land.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthy of note that Pentecostalism and Charismaticism are heterogeneous and this consultation consisted of the Church of England on the one hand, and on the other, several umbrella or ecumenical bodies themselves consisting of many different Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and organisations.