



25 August 2016

With joy I write these few words in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as we celebrate 25 years of the signing of the Meissen Agreement in 1991.

Since the call of Archbishop Robert Runcie in 1983 for reconciliation between the German churches and the Church of England, substantial progress has been made to strengthen relationships between our two churches. Let me briefly recall: Archbishop Runcie's visit in the year that commemorated the five hundredth birthday of Martin Luther was to the separated churches of East and West Germany.

On the day set aside to mourn the destruction caused in Dresden by the Allied Forces, Archbishop Runcie also called to memory the destruction by the German Luftwaffe to the city of Coventry. All the more was he moved by the friendship, hospitality as well as the yearning for peace in the hearts and minds of the German people. On his return to England he initiated official discussions between our churches on a journey towards reconciliation and mutual recognition.

The intense and hope-filled exchange that followed finally led to the signing of the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland in 1991. One of the goals of Meissen is the full visible unity between our churches. This goal has allowed the development of significant relationships between our two churches at every level and remains a model for other ecumenical agreements. The remembrance of that initiative which led to the signing of the Agreement is an important reminder that the churches are at times called to set the agenda and take the lead in matters of unity and reconciliation.

Over the years parishes and dioceses have created vibrant partnerships, and exchanges between them have proved fruitful. Our churches and individuals have learned to look at their faith and the life of their parish through different eyes. What is currently being experienced between our churches is a programme which could be called 'Mission Interchange'. Our churches have therefore come a long way, and I am grateful to God for his continuing mercies on this journey.

It is recognised that the Meissen Commission has produced some significant theological work in the past. It has focussed on the missionary dimension of ecclesiology with the goal of finding common approaches for Christian witness in Europe's process of transformation. Its most recent theological conference on the theme *Reformation Then and Now – Anglican and Protestant Perspectives* is to be published soon, and I am indeed grateful for this valuable resource as a Meissen launch into the Reformation commemoration year 2017. It is a valuable resource, reflecting on how our memory of the past can positively influence and creatively shape the future.

As I have mentioned before, the agenda of this ecumenical relationship would fall short of meeting the challenges of our day if its concerns remain limited to the status of our churches in relation to each other. And I know that in the work of the Meissen Commission, and especially its theological reflections this has not been the case.

Today, in the face of severe crises in our world, causing dire suffering to untold human lives, we need to seek, more than ever, a common voice and an agreed strategy of action.

First and foremost we are confronted with the plight of huge numbers of refugees fleeing regions of conflict, repression and dire economic privation. The contribution of the German Church and society in this connection has and continues to be one of great compassion, service and witness. It does not leave us unmoved and has been an inspiration to many of us in the work for peace and reconciliation between peoples and nations.

As we celebrate 25 years of Meissen and plan the 500th anniversary of the Reformation I pray that we continue in our efforts to build a confident church in a pluralistic and troubled Europe across all barriers. I thank all those who have contributed to the development and success of the relationship between our two churches. In particular I thank the two Co-Secretaries, the Revd Canon Dr Leslie Nathaniel and OKR Revd Christoph Ernst for their tireless work.

I wish the Meissen Commission and its Co-Chairs, the Rt Revd Nick Baines, the Bishop of Leeds and Landesbischof Ralf Meister every success as they continue to lead the Commission.

May the presence and the love of Christ be with you all, and may His Spirit guide you.

*The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby*

*Archbishop of Canterbury*

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