

A Checklist

For all those United Reformed Church people involved in the setting up of a Single Congregation Shared Building Local Ecumenical Partnership

There is considerable variety of practice across the United Reformed Church. One major difference lies in who the key individual is in such a process: in some synods it is the Trust Officer, in others the Synod Ecumenical Officer, in yet others the District Ecumenical Officer. Another major difference is where the main weight of the authority shared between the local, the District and the Synod lies in this particular matter: this varies from synod to synod. A minor difference is in the names of the relevant committees. An attempt has been made to cover the situation in Wales, but not in Scotland.

The following checklist has the broad agreement of all the synods:

A First steps to be initiated by the key person

1. There will, of necessity, be several exploratory meetings and it will be a matter of careful judgement as to which people to involve at which point in this series of meetings. Explore the proposals with the District Pastoral Committee, on which both the Synod Moderator and often the District Ecumenical Officer sits. If the DEO does not, he or she should be invited for this business. It may also be appropriate to invite the Trust Officer. The County Ecumenical Officer (in Wales, the secretary for the CYTUN region) and representatives of the other proposed partners in the LEP should be invited. United Reformed Church strategy and deployment policy, together with the LEP's long-term intentions, and the partner churches' wider strategy must be discussed. The United Reformed Church's commitment in terms of money and ministry must be made clear.
2. Notify the District and the Synod Finance and Property Committees and the Trustees of the buildings involved about what is being proposed.
3. Ensure that all proposals and resolutions relating to the intention to establish a new LEP proceed through the local Church Meeting and are fully minuted.

B The Declaration (or Statement) of Intent

The representatives of the proposed LEP, meeting with the key person(s) and using the model offered by Churches Together in England, should draw up a Declaration of Intent, outlining in general terms what the LEP hopes for. District and Synod should be able to agree to this quite easily..

C The Constitution

Use either CTE's Constitutional Guidelines for a Single Congregation Partnership, or the Methodist/URC Model Constitutional Guidelines as pro formas

1. The key person(s), meeting with a group from the proposed LEP, and with the key people from the constituent churches (see the Anglican/ Methodist checklist) and with the County Ecumenical Officer (in Wales, the Secretary to the CYTUN region), draft a constitution tailored to the particular situation. References to trust and property issues should be checked with the Trust Officer.
2. Successive drafts, having been checked locally, are presented through the District or Synod ecumenical officers to the appropriate synod committee. At the same time they are being presented to the appropriate bodies in the other partner churches (see the Anglican/ Methodist checklist.) Through the County Ecumenical Officer (or the Secretary to the CYTUN region) the sponsoring body is also consulted. Only if there are difficult issues is the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations consulted.
3. The District Council and the Synod give formal approval and the approved version is submitted to the Sponsoring Body for its approval. The constitution is then signed at the LEP's inauguration.

Note: the United Reformed Church representatives, both locally and at district and synod level, should be satisfied with the constitution before entering into a sharing agreement.

D The Sharing Agreement

As this is a checklist only, it does not deal with the legal significance of a sharing agreement which, as well as permitting the shared use of the buildings can also be worded so as to protect capital moneys introduced by some or all of the sharing churches in order to improve or develop those buildings. The Trust Officer and, where appropriate, the synod's legal adviser, will be able to offer more detailed guidance on those issues.

As a sharing agreement is a legal matter it is important to stick as closely as possible to the recognised pro formas. If the sharing is with the Methodist Church alone, the latest pro forma should be obtained from the Methodist Property Committee. Otherwise, use the pro forma to be found in *Under the Same Roof: Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969*, which can be obtained from our bookshop.

1. If the building is vested in United Reformed Church trustees the key person(s) (Trust Officer, Synod or District Ecumenical Officer) meets with representatives of the proposed LEP to explain the nature, purpose and content of a Sharing Agreement. The necessary local information for the pro forma is elicited from the local representatives.
2. The resulting draft, drawn up in consultation with the legal adviser in the synod (if the Trust Officer is not the key person) is checked for factual accuracy by the representatives of the proposed LEP. It is then sent to the appropriate legal body or person in the other partner churches (see Anglican/Methodist checklist) for approval.
3. The final version is approved by an agreed group of synod officers, normally the Trust Officer, the Ecumenical Officer and the Synod Moderator. (this varies from synod to synod)
4. Lastly, the key person arranges for completion of the Sharing Agreement, taking legal advice if necessary.
5. If the building is not vested in United Reformed Church trustees, then it would be expected that the above steps, 1 – 4, would still take place but at the instigation of the key person of the church which owns the building and that the United Reformed Church Synod Trust Officer/legal adviser would be sent an early draft for comment.
6. If the proposed LEP involves a new building, consultation will be required between the legal advisers of all the participating churches in order to determine the nature of the sharing e.g. joint ownership? Declaration of Trust? Given the great variety of situations under this heading, this document does not attempt to cover new buildings.

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