

## **WHAT REFORMED ELEMENTS DOES THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH EXPECT TO FIND IN SINGLE CONGREGATION LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS?<sup>1</sup>**

1. We expect something equivalent to Church Meeting which expresses our belief in the common priestly ministry of all Christians and where the corporate discernment of God's will takes place. It is much more than an AGM (and more frequent) and should demonstrate our conviction about the privileges and responsibilities of membership. For effective congregational participation in this priestly ministry the United Reformed Church would expect at least four meetings a year. They may, of course, take various forms and be called by various names.
2. We expect something equivalent to an Elders' Meeting which expresses the fruitful sharing of ministry between the ordained clergy and certain chosen members of the local church. The heart of the matter for us is that there should be a team of people, chosen by the congregation for their Christian maturity, who share with those ordained to Word and Sacrament in the leadership of the local church and from whose number the representatives of the local church to the wider church are chosen. They must serve for at least three years and be eligible for re-election. They need not be the pastoral visitors but the group must be responsible for overseeing the pastoral care. It would be good if such people, when first elected, were set apart/commissioned during worship.
3. We expect that both understandings of baptism will be held together in mutual respect: the convinced practice of infant baptism and the conviction that infant dedication followed, years later, by baptism on personal confession of faith is also a faithful interpretation of the meaning of baptism. This is an important offering coming from our 1981 union with the Churches of Christ. A financial commitment to providing a baptistry in any new shared church might make that offering more of a reality.
4. We expect that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments will be both heard and expounded in Sunday worship and that the Lord's Supper will be regularly celebrated, presided over by an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament or, if necessary, a duly authorised lay person.
5. The formal links to the wider United Reformed Church (as also to the wider councils of the other churches involved) must be clear - at best, through representation on District Council and Provincial Synod by a minister and an elder, and at the very least through a Local Advisory Group set up by the sponsoring body and containing a United Reformed Church member. Links to world-wide bodies of which the United Reformed Church is a member, such as the Council for World Mission and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, should not be forgotten.

---

<sup>1</sup> URC Reformed Expectations in LEPs; Guidance from URC Ecumenical Committee, Jan 1998. A checklist, for all those URC people involved in the setting up of a single congregation shared building LEP, is available from the Secretary, Ecumenical Relations, United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT.