

WHEN THE METHODIST CHURCH IS THE ONLY CHURCH IN A VILLAGE¹

1. In many villages there is only one church building and worshipping community. In some villages this will be a Methodist Church. Within the village there may be Christians of different traditions, some of whom try to combine loyalty to a particular denomination with their desire to worship and witness in their local community. Sometimes a church of another denomination has been closed, sometimes people from another denomination have moved into the village, sometimes those who previously commuted to a church outside the village are prevented from doing so through infirmity or poor public transport.

2. While the local church will belong within a Circuit and be part of the wider Methodist connexion, it is able in a variety of ways to make members of other churches feel that they belong to the Christian community in that village. This sense of belonging may not be the same as becoming a member of that local church. Some churches do not permit their members to become members of another church and some individuals may feel that their sense of denominational identity is such that they are unable or unwilling to become members of the Methodist Church.

They may, however, be willing to be on the community roll of the church and take as full a part as possible in its worship and life.

3. The local church will want to welcome all who wish to be part of its fellowship and enable their insights, strengths, gifts and graces to be incorporated into the whole life of the congregation. That life will include worship, mission and service, as well as the administrative and decision-making process.

4. The minister and congregation of the Methodist Church will want to be especially aware of their responsibility to be broad, flexible and open, and to affirm a diversity of religious experience and expression. Breadth and openness could be affirmed through:

- choice of hymns, tunes and hymn books
- prayers for other churches and their leaders
- invitations to ministers/preachers/readers of other traditions to lead worship
- occasional use of other denomination's liturgies and ways of administering Holy Communion
- careful use of language which includes and is not specific to one denomination
- offering use of church buildings to other Christian traditions
- consultation between those with pastoral oversight in the area about matters of mutual concern and responsibility
- involvement in the life of the wider church through Church Together groupings

5. The local church may wish to formalise and ensure the continuity of this ecumenically enriched life by agreeing a 'Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome'. Before doing so it should seek advice from the Intermediate Body or the District Ecumenical Officer as to which other denominations should be consulted, and at what level. The Declaration must be endorsed by the neighbouring churches and care needs to be taken over the real or imagined effect on the congregational strength of these churches so that this is not seen as 'poaching'. A copy of the Declaration should be displayed in the church.

¹ Guidance from the Methodist Church, agreed 1998

A DECLARATION OF ECUMENICAL WELCOME

We, the minister and members of Aford Methodist Church, are aware that we are the only church offering regular public worship in Aford: and therefore we invite all Christians in Aford to be as fully a part of our life and fellowship as they are able.

We invite those of Christian traditions other than our own

- to share in the ministry and mission of the Church in this community
- to worship and, if baptised and communicant members of other Churches, to receive Holy Communion with us
- to share in the decision-making and leadership of the church²
- to contribute financially to Aford Methodist Church in so far as their continued giving to another church will allow.

We undertake

- to give pastoral care to all who desire it
- to incorporate the riches of worship of other traditions as appropriate
- to invite ministers and lay preachers of other churches to take part in leading worship
- to consult with neighbouring churches concerning the mission of the Church in Aford

Following the decision made by Churches Together in Ashire (our Intermediate Body) on 200x that such declarations may be made in the area which they serve, we have sought and followed their advice as to which churches should first be consulted, and those mentioned below have given us their blessing and encouragement.

For Aford Methodist Church Minister

Church Stewards

For the other churches

On behalf of

² Standing Order 6IO(3) says 'The Church Council may invite other members of the Local Church and non-members who are active in the life of the church to attend meetings of the Church Council and shall in particular, wherever possible, encourage young people to do so. Those who thus attend are not members of the council; they are entitled to speak but not to vote nor to propose or second any resolution.'