

Welcoming Christians of Other Churches

Suggestions and Guidelines

1. There are circumstances when we wish to welcome members of other churches into our congregation and, at the same time, affirm their membership of their original denomination. This happens most often in villages where there is only one church building, usually Church of England, when Christians of other churches seek to combine loyalty to a different denomination with a desire to worship and witness in their local community.

2. Those already worshipping in the Church of England parish will naturally want to make members of other denominations feel at home in the local parish, while at the same time valuing and encouraging their loyalty to their other denomination. Parochial Church Councils and clergy have a particular duty to try to ensure a warm welcome.

3. This welcome is helped by the *Church Representation Rules* which say that members of another denomination are eligible to take part in running the church. They can be members of the PCC, for instance. All that is asked is that they be members in good standing of a denomination that believes in the Holy Trinity, that they have attended public worship in the parish for six months, and that they can declare themselves to be also members of the Church of England. Should it be that the rules of a person's denomination, or any other reason, mean they cannot make this declaration, they are still welcome to join in the worship and life of the parish.

4. The clergy and people of the Church of England parish, for their part, may wish to affirm the *Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment* as set out below. According to this declaration, the parish remains subject to the jurisdiction of the Church of England and guardian of its tradition, but seeks also to enable the insights, strengths, gifts and graces of other denominations to flourish and to be incorporated into the whole life of the congregation. This will enrich the mission and service offered together to the local community.

5. There may be occasions, however, when those of another denomination worshipping in the parish church will wish to express in a particular way their belonging to the local parish community in addition to their other denomination. This could be, for example, when the tradition they are familiar with has a more sharply defined membership structure than the Church of England. Their additional belonging could be expressed through a short welcome, prayer, and the right hand of fellowship which could take place, for instance, at the Peace.

5. In making a *Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome*, a congregation of the parish church will need to be especially aware of its responsibility to be broad, flexible, and open, and to affirm a diversity of religious experience and expression. This breadth and openness could be affirmed through:

- The choice of hymns, tunes, and hymn books
- Prayers for other churches and their leaders
- Invitations to ministers of other traditions to participate in leading worship or preaching (as allowed by Canon B43)
- Use where possible of other denominations' forms of prayer
- Occasional use of other practices in administering Holy Communion
- Careful use of language that includes and is not specific to one denomination
- Offering occasional (or regular) use of church buildings by other Christian traditions
- Use of non-eucharistic services to bridge the divide of eucharistic hospitality between Roman Catholics and other churches
- Consultation between those with pastoral oversight in the area about the responsibility of care, initiation, nurture, spiritual development, and mission.

7. Before a parish church publicly affirms such a *Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment*, it should seek advice from relevant ecumenical officers and authorities, which could be the 'Intermediate Body' or its Ecumenical Officer, as to which other denominations should be consulted, and at what level.¹ Care needs to be taken over the real or imagined effect on the congregational strength of these churches, so that this may not in any sense be a form of 'poaching'. Sensitivity is needed by parishes where there are small groups of Christians meeting for worship in houses or other localities, so that this initiative is not perceived as Anglican imperialism.

8. A copy of the *Declaration* should be displayed in the church.

¹ E.g., for the Methodist Church, this would be the Circuit Superintendent and Circuit Stewards, for the United Reformed Church, the Church Secretary and the relevant Synod, and for the Roman Catholic Church the parish priest and the bishop of the diocese.

A DECLARATION OF ECUMENICAL WELCOME AND COMMITMENT

1. We, the *Vicar* and people of *St CC's* are aware that there may be Christians of traditions different from our own who wish, while remaining loyal to a particular denomination, to worship and witness with us. We wish to declare formally that we welcome them into our life and fellowship as fully as they are able and that we commit ourselves to honouring their belonging to a different Christian tradition.
2. We invite those of Christian traditions other than our own
 - to share in the ministry and mission of the Church in the community we serve;
 - to worship and, if baptized and communicant members of other churches, to receive Holy Communion at *St CC's*;¹
 - to be part of the decision-making of *St CC's* and to contribute to a common fund for the mission and ministry of the wider Church in so far as their continued giving to another church will allow.²
3. We undertake
 - to respect the membership and seek to learn from the experience of Christians of traditions other than our own;
 - to give pastoral care to all those who desire it;
 - to invite ministers or lay members of other churches to take part in leading worship;³
 - to incorporate the riches of worship of other traditions as appropriate into our own;
 - to consult with neighbouring churches concerning the mission of the Church in *Aford*;
 - to include this ecumenical declaration as an integral part of the parish profile.
4. We have sought and followed the advice of ecumenical officers and authorities of our partner churches as to which churches should first be consulted, and those churches mentioned below have given us their blessing and encouragement.

For *St CC's, Aford, Vicar*

Church Wardens:

For other churches:

signature:

on behalf of

NOTES

¹ Canon B15a enables the admission to Holy Communion of 'baptized persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and who are in good standing in their own Church.' If anyone by virtue of this provision 'regularly receives the Holy Communion over a long period which appears likely to continue indefinitely, the minister shall set before him the normal requirements of the Church of England for communicant status of that Church.'

² The Church Representation Rules enable a person to go on the electoral role if he or she is baptized, sixteen years or upwards and is – 'a member in good standing of a Church which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ... and also prepared to declare himself to be a member of the Church of England having habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment.' Making this declaration also confers eligibility to stand for election to the decision-making bodies of the Church of England.

³ Canon B43 (1) says:

'(1) A person who is a minister or lay member of a designated Church, and who is baptised, may be invited to perform any relevant duty in a parish church or other place of worship in a parish or in a cathedral church.

(2) Each of the following is a "relevant duty"—
(a) saying or singing Morning or Evening Prayer or the Litany or officiating at a Service of the Word,

(b) reading the Holy Scriptures;

(c) preaching at a service;

(d) leading the Intercessions at the Holy Communion or leading prayers;

(e) assisting at Baptism or the Solemnization of Matrimony or conducting a Funeral Service;

(f) assisting in the distribution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people at the Holy Communion.'

With reference to this list, Canon B43, in paragraphs (1) (3) & (1) (4), goes on to say that a person who is not baptised or who is not a member of a designated church:

'may be invited to perform any relevant duty under sub-paragraph (2)(b) or (d)', i.e., reading the Holy Scriptures and leading the Intercessions at the Holy Communion or leading prayers.