

Churches Together in England - Group for Local Unity January 1999

GUIDELINES ON WORSHIP IN A LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP

Worship has to be ordered so as to respect and value the traditions of all the participants in the partnership. The actual content of the worship is one matter for discussion. Other issues are:

- Who chooses?
- What are the areas of choice and freedom?
- Who conducts worship (especially who celebrates Holy Communion)?
- How frequent should Holy Communion be?

The Constitution of the LEP should refer to these matters.

The questions about worship in LEPs are part of the wider debate that all churches are engaged in: formality/ informality, tradition/modernity, eucharistic/non-eucharistic, clerical/lay.

What is meant by respecting the tradition?

It has to be recognised that a minister in an LEP should not be invited to (and cannot be required to) act contrary to his/her conscience or to the discipline of his/her denomination. (For example, a Baptist should not be put in a position where it would be difficult to refuse to baptise an infant.)

It has to be recognised that the practice of one denomination may not be right for a member of another denomination. (For example, lay presidency may be appropriate in the context of a Holy Communion according to the Baptist tradition, but neither appropriate nor possible according to Anglican regulations.)

How do we value the traditions?

One way in which traditions are valued is by the rotating use of each denominational tradition and discipline in turn, week-by-week. Another way is the devising of services which are an amalgam of various denominational traditions (such an amalgam would normally need the agreement of the Sponsoring Body and the denominations in the LEP).

How free is an LEP to arrange its worship?

The various denominations have different disciplines about the conduct and content of worship. In some denominations all decisions can be taken locally, in other denominations national and international regulations apply. An LEP may have to recognise the external constraints upon it of Canons or Standing Orders. The LEP needs to discern the value of the emphases which these constraints enshrine, just as also it may wish to emphasise the value of local autonomy.

Who chooses content?

<i>Roman Catholic</i>	<i>Church of England</i>	<i>United Reformed Church</i>	<i>Methodist</i>	<i>Baptist</i>
The Canons (rules) of the Catholic Church, with options exercised by the parish priest	The Vicar and Parochial Church Council, within the Canons (rules) of the CofE which authorise forms of service	The person or persons leading the worship, normally guided by local custom. The Service Book is seen as a resource and a norm, especially for sacramental worship and particular offices, but its use is not obligatory.	The presiding minister, guided by local custom. Forms of service are recommendations, not obligatory.	The local church. Service books are resources, and are not obligatory.

In all traditions lay people are playing a much larger part, in planning and preparing, and in leading the worship. Increasingly, a variety of skills and talents are being used. In LEPs

especially, there is a need for open discussion and exchange, enabling the affirmation of the breadth of experience within the church and also the early identification of areas of unease and perceived imbalance. A "Worship Group" as a committee of the Church Council/ Church Meeting might be helpful.

Who conducts non-eucharistic worship?

Roman Catholic	Church of England	United Reformed Church	Methodist	Baptist
Non-eucharistic, non-sacramental may be conducted by lay people, deacons and members of religious orders at the request of the parish priest.	A CofE priest or deacon, or a licensed lay reader.	Whoever is invited. The elders' meeting is required to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments duly administered.	The Circuit Superintendent arranges the Plan, which will include ordained ministers and trained local (lay) preachers.	The local church may invite anyone it wishes, normally the minister of the church, whether ordained or a lay pastor.

Who conducts eucharistic worship / Holy Communion?

Roman Catholic	Church of England	United Reformed Church	Methodist	Baptist
A priest of the Roman Catholic Church	A priest of the CofE or a church in communion with it.	An ordained minister, but in cases of pastoral necessity a local church may seek the permission of its district council to allow a United Reformed Church member (normally an elder or lay preacher) to preside.	An ordained minister. A probationer minister may be authorised by Conference to preside within his-her own Circuit. Very occasionally, in case of pastoral necessity or a missionary situation, Conference may authorise a lay person.	Whoever is invited to lead worship will normally preside, though some churches will normally require an ordained minister and some may appoint a deacon or another for the purpose.

What do we call it:

Mass, Eucharist, Holy Communion, Lord's Supper, Sacrament, Breaking of Bread?

Commonly used titles are "Holy Communion" and "Eucharist". The sometimes-used phrase "The Sacrament" is capable of misunderstanding, since it is not the only sacrament. It is preferable to refer to "Holy Communion according to the (e.g., *Methodist*) tradition" rather than to "a (e.g., *Methodist*) Holy Communion."

How frequently is Holy Communion celebrated?

Roman Catholic	Church of England	United Reformed Church	Methodist	Baptist
Normally daily; at least on Sundays and other days of obligation	At least weekly (and sometimes daily) and on major Holy Days within the parish, not necessarily in every church.	Normally monthly but by local decision it may vary from weekly to quarterly.	Varies : monthly or more frequently.	Varies : monthly or more frequently

"Christian faith is deepened by the Lord's Supper. Hence the Eucharist should be celebrated frequently... As the Eucharist celebrates the resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that it should take place at least every Sunday."

¹ Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Lima) paras. 30 & 31.

Who can receive Holy Communion?

The admission of children to Holy Communion, and the relationship between admission to communion and mature profession of faith / confirmation, are subjects currently being debated in all denominations. More local solutions are possible in the non-episcopal churches than in the episcopal.

Roman Catholic	Church of England	United Reformed Church	Methodist	Baptist
Members of the Roman Catholic Church	Confirmed members of the CofE and baptised members who are communicants in good standing in other Trinitarian churches. Those who are ready and desirous in accordance with bishop's guidance.	In most places there is an open invitation and in some places children are included. Occasionally reference is made to church membership. Often those belonging to other Christian traditions are specifically invited.	Methodist members, communicant members of other churches whose discipline permits; other baptised persons, including children.	"All who love the Lord", whether baptised as believers or not.

How is Holy Communion administered?

Customs vary locally, but in general -

Roman Catholic	Church of England	United Reformed Church	Methodist	Baptist
People go forward, and stand (or in some places kneel) to receive the elements in the hand or directly on the tongue.	People go forward, and either stand or kneel to receive in a continuous flow. Frequently authorised lay person/s assist.	Normal practice is that the elders serve the people who remain in their seats.	People normally go forward to receive kneeling, "table (or rail) by table", and frequently an appropriate lay person assists.	The deacons serve the people, who remain in their seats.

What happens to the bread and wine that is left?

Practices differ between denominations, and also within denominations. Sensitivity is needed towards both presiding minister and local custom.

"On the one hand .. the primary intention of reserving the elements is their distribution among the sick and those who are absent and ... on the other hand ... the best way of showing respect for the elements served in the eucharistic celebration is by their consumption."²

How important is local custom?

Many customs and traditions have grown up locally, without people even realising it. They may be more practical than theological; they may not be unchangeable. Who decides what should be changed, and the manner in which the change is handled, may be more important than what is actually changed.

² Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Lima) para. 32. See Section 5 Guidelines for Methods of Administration of Holy Communion and the Disposal of remaining Eucharistic Elements – approved by the Group for Local Unity and circulated December 1999 (2/Eu/1-3)