

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission

Updating the documents

It is over three years since the initial draft of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* was presented to the Churches and began to be used within England. The work it outlined had already started and since then its principles have since yielded great fruit.

The work continues and our framework is no longer 'new'. It has therefore been renamed *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission* and the associated documentation reworked.

Jenny Bond
9 May 2019

The story of *A Flexible Framework*

March 2016: Preface

1. At its meeting on 11 and 12 March 2016, the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE) commended *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* to the Member Churches for detailed consideration.
2. The framework is about the parameters in which churches work co-operatively at local level. The churches are all faced with immense challenges: of serving and transforming communities, making new disciples and growing in holiness and worship within our nation today. The task is too great for one church to do on its own – it is a task for the whole people of God. To proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God with integrity, the churches must be seen to be living it. Unity speaks to a divided world.
3. Working co-operatively can bring added value and benefits to all partners, by
 - a. Deepening our discernment of God's call to participate in mission – each partner church has perspectives which can be brought into the process of discernment for mission – it is like being tuned in to a wider frequency, or having more eyes to give a deeper view of the landscape.
 - b. Enabling the sharing of gifts to equip us for the task – churches bring a range of spiritual and ministerial gifts into a partnership, which are made available to the whole work, energising all who involved.
 - c. Enabling the sharing of resources to multiply the work – churches are limited by the resources they have for the task. It makes sense to resource the work together, including buildings, people, and financial contributions.
4. Working co-operatively is a demonstration of Christian unity. It is not about adding extra tasks and projects and so burdening churches with more than they can do; it is about co-operating on the things a church would do anyway: its core actions, integral to its planning for mission.

5. A further question that needs to be asked is why is a framework needed by the member churches of CTE? The framework is intended to raise the level of mutual understanding between the member churches of CTE and to facilitate the participation of the wider membership. To do so it does three things.
 - a. First it sets out the parameters in which churches may co-operate with one another – the different sorts of agreement they are able to make with each other and what is expected about oversight and support of the work.
 - b. Second, it sets out the wide range of possibilities that there are for working co-operatively.
 - c. Third, it provides a tool for discerning the what, the how and the where of particular actions.
6. The churches are being asked to consider the framework in detail in their own governing bodies, to see whether they would be able to operate with this framework. There may be aspects of the framework which a church would be unable or unwilling to work with but would recognise as ways in which other churches may work; it is not unanimity we are seeking but sufficient common ground and mutual understanding to enable work to flourish. There may also be aspects of the framework which challenge a church to change its regulations so as to enable it to participate more fully. There are also a small number of recommendations made in the report reproduced below. Some apply to Churches Together in England and Intermediate Bodies, others will require the consent of member churches – this is indicated in each of the recommendations.

March 2016: Recommendations to the churches

7. We present the ideas and proposals in this report for refreshing the framework in which churches work together. We encourage the member churches of CTE to:
 - a. be open to the possibilities of the new framework, and be prepared to be bold in grasping mission opportunities;
 - b. encourage local churches to draw on the resources and expertise of Bodies in Association of CTE for local ecumenical work;
 - c. appreciate that this new framework is born of wrestling with the complexity of relationships that we have inherited from the history of Churches and Christians working together in England, and be prepared to honour and support those patterns of co-operation which in some places are deeply embedded;
 - d. agree the recommendations and authorise the work needed to implement each of them as follows
 - a. that they initiate through CTE a key stream of work to explore our visions of unity in mission, holiness and worship;
 - b. that the denominations involved in specific instances of local co-operative working (including existing local ecumenical partnerships) take responsibility for the oversight of that work and that if they look to a sponsoring body to facilitate this they should nevertheless continue to hold that responsibility (Section 2:1(a));
 - c. that agreements supporting local co-operative working should be approved solely by denominational authorities (Section 2:1(b));

- d. that CTE staff working with County Ecumenical Officers work out a new system of registering/listing agreements (Section 2:1 (c));
- e. that the member churches consider the use of Charitable Incorporated Organisation models for local co-operative working when a single governance structure is required (Section 3:9);
- f. that the appropriate officers and specialists within CTE's member churches take responsibility for issuing guidance for the churches collectively and for their own denominations about the three sorts of Agreement (Working Agreement, Partnership Agreement and Constitutional Agreement) which we have identified.

March 2016: Consultation

- 8. So as to enable Churches Together in England to keep track of the responses of its member churches, please would your church indicate where it has got to in responding to the following questions by 6 February 2017?
 - a. Does the framework provide acceptable parameters for the member churches of CTE to work co-operatively at local level?
 - b. Are there aspects of the framework in which your church cannot participate?

Please send your replies before 6 February 2017 by e-mail to David Cornick, CTE's General Secretary with the subject line 'A new framework for local unity in mission' so that they can be collated and a progress report made to the March 2017 Enabling Group of Churches Together in England.

March 2017: The end of the Consultation process

The responses of Member Churches and Intermediate Bodies were presented to the March 2017 Enabling Group meeting which accepted the following resolutions:

- A. We instruct the staff of CTE, in consultation with the Working Party and other appropriate colleagues, to prepare and publish guidance for Member Churches on the implementation of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*. That should include further consideration of the nature of oversight and the provision of some working examples. The Board is asked to oversee this process, to authorise the circulation of the document when it is ready, and to report back to the next meeting. UPDATE: On 15 February 2018, the Board approved 'A guide to understanding...' which can be downloaded below.
- B. We request the Board to consider the need for the following pieces of work:
 - a. Furthering the support of existing LEPs, including a theological reflection which clarifies their identity and provides a satisfactory basis for all partner denominations to relate to them.
 - b. Initiating a review of ecumenical hospitality, with a view to commending a strengthened process as an important component of the ecumenical future.
 - c. Drawing to the attention of denominations the need for properly resourced Denominational Ecumenical Officers at Intermediate level in the light of the adoption of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, and consider the ways in which they can be best supported and resourced.

- d. Reflecting further on the consequences for Intermediate Bodies of the introduction of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, and to amend CTE's advice accordingly.
- e. Considering the initiation at an appropriate time (in the light of Theos' current work) of a review of the visions of unity in mission, holiness and worship which exist amongst CTE's members and to report back to the next meeting with recommendations about a process.
- f. Reflecting further on the purpose and utility of keeping a Register of Ecumenical Agreements, in consultation with the National Ecumenical Officers, and implementing a system once agreement has been reached about its scope.

After this meeting the final text of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* was circulated throughout England with an encouragement for its use at local level. CTE's General Secretary, David Cornick, suggested that *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission* 'may well prove to be one of the most significant practical ecumenical documents of our time'. He adds: 'The future is exciting. God has not finished with us yet!'

A very helpful accompanying document *A New Framework in brief* was also published and provided a good entry point to the full text.

February 2018: A guide to understanding *A New Framework*

The guidance requested in March 2017 (#A above) was published in February 2018 together with the following explanatory note:

- a. The March 2017 Enabling Group meeting asked the Board to consider the need for various pieces of work but also requested a report to the September 2017 meeting:

We instruct the staff of CTE, in consultation with the Working Party and other appropriate colleagues, to prepare and publish guidance for Member Churches on the implementation of *A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission*. That should include further consideration of the nature of oversight and the provision of some working examples. The Board is asked to oversee this process, to authorise the circulation of the document when it is ready, and to report back to the next meeting.

- b. The guidance requested by the Enabling Group is a work in progress and the *Guide to understanding...* addresses only the first part of *A New Framework*, the vision part. (The second part is about consequences.) The *Guide* has been approved by the National Ecumenical Officers involved in drafting *A New Framework*.
- c. The Board requested further consideration of the nature of oversight and the provision of some working examples. Paragraphs 9 and 10 address this briefly but if the Board wishes further consideration, we suggest that this needs to be done in a further document as we are keen that this *Guide to understanding* remains within two sides of A4.
- d. The National Ecumenical Officers also question whether working examples would, in fact, be helpful, or whether headings would be better, things that should be included in each type of agreement.

April 2019: Towards *A Flexible Framework*

A meeting of National and County Ecumenical Officers on 4 April pointed out that the *Framework* was no longer 'new' and, reflecting the image which had been used to illustrate it, should be renamed *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission* and the associated documentation edited accordingly.