

BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

with particular reference to
LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS



A report of a working party to
Churches Together in England

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CONTENTS

	Page
ORIGIN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING PARTY	
Baptism and so-called 're-baptism'	3
So-called 'extended' membership	4
Admission of children to communion	5
WHAT IS HAPPENING IN LEPs ON THESE ISSUES	6
THE CHURCHES' UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	10
AN EXAMINATION OF SOME FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES	
(i) BAPTISM	11
(ii) BAPTISM AND FAITH	14
(iii) THE PLACE OF CHILDREN IN THE CHURCH	16
Children & Membership of the Church	16
Chrismation & Confirmation of children	19
Admission to Communion	20
(iv) THE CHURCH AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	21

WAYS FORWARD	24
(i) SO-CALLED 'RE-BAPTISM'	26
(ii) 'EXTENDED' MEMBERSHIP	30
(iii) ADMISSION TO COMMUNION	34
CONCLUSION	35
A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	36
APPENDIX 1 Requirements for Church Membership	38
APPENDIX 2 Different patterns of Christian Initiation	46
APPENDIX 3	
a) Baptist-Methodist Agreement	48
b) Baptist-United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines	50
c) Swanwick LEP Consultation Proposal	54
MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY	55
BOOKS QUOTED	56

ORIGIN AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE WORKING PARTY

1. From 21 – 23 March 1994 Churches Together in England held a Consultation at Swanwick on what were then called 'Local Ecumenical Projects' (LEPs). There were over 700 LEPs and some of them had existed for over twenty years. They traced their origin to the 1964 Nottingham Faith and Order Conference which asked churches to make it possible for the sharing of buildings and for the establishment of Areas of Ecumenical Experiment, later called LEPs. There was a need to review the ways LEPs were working and to consider some of the issues they were facing. A number of issues were addressed and each issue was tackled by a separate group.

2. The first major issue tackled at the Consultation was the different practice of those churches which baptised only believers and those which also baptised infants when they participated in an LEP, and in particular what should be done when someone who had been baptised as an infant asked for baptism as a believer.

3. The group which tackled this issue made the following recommendations:

We recommend that churches should strive for a more developed and disciplined catechumenate to ensure nurture in the Christian faith and to complete the whole process of initiation.

We recommend that there should be means and rites to enable serious and public affirmation of the Christian faith throughout life. (We note that such affirmation may be enhanced by symbols, but we consider that the use of water, by sprinkling or immersion, may be unhelpful and confusing).

Whilst taking account of the *Called To Be One* process, we recommend that those churches which have a substantial involvement in LEPs should commission a high level group to explore a deeper understanding of baptism and to search with urgency for more comprehensive guidelines, and that extensive use should be

made of the considerable experience – often painful, sometimes profound – within LEPs.

4. The second major issue tackled at the Consultation was the request coming from a number of LEPs for what was called ‘extended’ membership. Since the late 1970s joint services of confirmation had been held in a number of LEPs, and those so confirmed had been entered on the church membership roll of the Anglican and Free Churches who had participated in such joint services (mostly Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed churches, but also Baptist and others in some places). Those so confirmed were said to have ‘multiple’ church membership, because they had fulfilled the requirements for membership in all the participating churches, and so they were entered on a common membership roll, and were free to transfer their membership to a church of any of the denominations, which had participated in their confirmation, when they moved away from the LEP to a church of a single denomination.

5. For some time there had been pressure for a similar status of joint church membership for anyone who was already a communicant in a church of one of the participating denominations before moving into a united congregation LEP. The Bristol Synod had asked the Methodist Conference in 1992 ‘to explore the implications of offering ‘extended membership’ of all participating denominations to communicant members in LEPs who do not have multiple membership through Joint Confirmation... The Conference referred the issue to ‘the appropriate working parties within Churches Together in England to undertake further work on the theology and practice of church membership and the question of Extended Membership’. Such joint membership was termed ‘extended membership’ in order to distinguish it from the ‘multiple membership’ of those jointly confirmed within the LEP. What was proposed was that ‘extended membership’ would give most of the privileges and responsibilities of multiple membership while a person remained within the LEP, although these would cease when he or she left the LEP. (Such extended membership, for example, would permit a

person to represent the LEP in the wider Councils of any of the participating churches. It would not necessarily entitle a person to candidate for the ministry in any other church than that of which he or she was already a communicant member).

6. The group which tackled this issue at the LEP Consultation in 1994 made the following recommendations:

Within our definition of LEPs, which we understand to include so-called single church LEPs as well as LEPs involving two or more traditions we recommend that:—

i) there be opportunity for joint admission to membership/joint confirmation conveying on those so confirmed/admitted what is popularly described as multiple membership.

ii) the decision-making bodies of the major Free Churches be invited to consult together with the Church of England with a view to the enacting of denominational legislation to permit LEPs to have so-called 'Extended Membership'.

iii) the denominations be invited to develop a joint resource (book/video/pack) to prepare people for membership of LEPs which will involve a positive dialogue drawing on the riches of the traditions participating in an LEP.

7. The Consultation therefore asked Churches Together in England to establish a working party to consider the issues both of so-called 're-baptism' and of so-called 'extended' membership.

8. After the working party had begun its work the Regional Sponsoring Body of the Merseyside and Region Churches' Ecumenical Assembly (MARCEA) asked the Group for Local Unity of Churches Together in England to consider the admission of children to communion in LEPs. The issue had arisen in Skelmersdale LEP where it was discovered that the authorities of the participating denominations had differing policies on this issue. The Group for Local Unity, therefore, asked the Working Party also to consider this third issue.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN LEPs ON THESE ISSUES

9. The member churches of Churches Together in England nominated members of the Working Party which met three times in 1995 and three times in 1996. It had before it the results of a questionnaire sent by the Local Unity Secretary of the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England to the ecumenical officers in each of its 43 dioceses in September 1993 enquiring about the incidence in LEPs of the celebration of baptism as believers of those already baptised as infants. There were replies from 28 dioceses. (It is likely that a high proportion of dioceses which did not reply had no Anglican/Baptist LEPs). Five dioceses reported such baptisms. Fourteen dioceses reported no such baptisms, although one diocese explained that candidates left an LEP in order to have such a baptism. Nine dioceses reported that they had no LEPs with Baptists.

10. The Working Party itself later wrote to twenty LEPs that included Baptist churches asking particularly for their experience in dealing with requests for baptism as believers by candidates who had already been baptised as infants. Replies were received from sixteen LEPs. Ten had had no such baptisms. Three had had several. One had had one. Of the sixteen responses seven indicated that their policy on these matters was either newly created or under review. Of the rest which had a settled policy, several indicated that requests for baptism as a believer by those who had been baptised as an infant remained an extremely delicate pastoral issue. One Anglican minister recorded that the incidence of several such baptisms had been a contributory cause to the withdrawal of an Anglican and a Methodist church from the LEP; but, despite this, the remaining churches in the LEP had not been able to agree to put anything into the constitution of the LEP about this issue. Two Baptist ministers recorded that there had been no such baptisms in their LEPs partly because they had personally discouraged them, but they expressed some anxiety about their position in doing this.

11. Two LEPs used a service of the re-affirmation of baptismal promises for those already baptised as infants, making clear in the wording of the service that this was not a 're-baptism', but nevertheless taking the candidate 'through the waters of baptism'. A minister in a third LEP said that he would like to adopt a similar policy.

12. Seven of the thirteen replies indicated that their LEP had an agreement that, should someone be baptised as a believer who had already been baptised as an infant, their name should be transferred to the Baptist church membership roll only. Another indicated that the name should be transferred to the Baptist and to the common membership roll but withdrawn from the roll of the church of which they had previously been a member. Several LEPs applied the Baptist-Methodist Agreement according to which no baptised Methodist should be baptised as a believer unless his or her membership were transferred to the Baptist roll. (See Appendix 3). Only one LEP mentioned the Baptist Union-United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines which were agreed only in 1996 (Appendix 3).

13. Eight LEPs mentioned that their policy, which many had written into their constitution, was not to allow baptism as a believer to someone already baptised as an infant without considerable pastoral discussion with the candidate. The extent of this discussion varied. Five mentioned discussion within the LEP only. One required that before such a baptism were permitted, the matter should be taken to the Sponsoring Body; one to the Local Support Group for the LEP; one to the appropriate regional officers of the churches participating in the LEP (Methodist Chairman, URC Moderator etc).

14. Although differences between the denominations were clearly in the forefront of the issues raised by most respondents, another difference in approach could also be detected which cut across denominations. Some emphasised the significance of baptism for the candidate, and some its significance for the church as a whole. Another way of expressing it might be that those LEPs in a charismatic or a certain evangelical tradition were more ready to allow such baptisms than others.

15. A Baptist respondent from an LEP which had allowed some candidates to be baptised as believers after infant baptism noted that in every case their parents had been at best nominal Christians. He observed that the issue could not be settled unless churches which baptised infants (he referred particularly to the Church of England) were prepared to review their policy on infant baptism.

16. From the responses of the LEPs it was clear that most of them maintained separate denominational membership rolls as well as a united roll of those jointly confirmed within the LEP. They were not specifically asked about 'extended' church membership, but one respondent urged the working party to deal with this as an important issue. Another LEP (it seems partly as a response to the difficult issue of how to record the membership of those baptised as believers who had already been baptised as infants) had recently instituted a category of 'non-denominational' membership. 'Under this broader umbrella we will baptise believers on request, irrespective of childhood history or denominational allegiance'. 'This more relaxed approach has resulted in a number of worshippers who were not members at all, now joining denominational rolls'.

17. Another respondent also spontaneously raised the issue of the admission of children to communion. In the LEP a nine year old had recently been baptised upon a profession of faith and admitted to communion. This young person's Anglican peers, who had been baptised as infants, were not yet judged to be old enough for confirmation and were therefore not eligible to receive communion. Although it appeared not to have created problems in the LEP, it could easily do so.

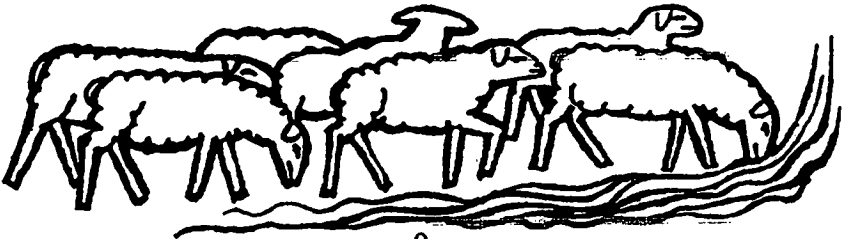
18. The intention of these two surveys of LEPs was to discover what is happening, and how seriously these issues are for the ecumenical movement locally. The working party would have liked to send a questionnaire to all LEPs which included both churches which baptise only believers and those which baptise infants also, but resources for this were not available within the time-scale of what were regarded as urgent practical issues. No reliable statistical conclusions can be drawn from the two limited surveys, although it

is interesting that in both surveys one quarter of the responses recorded that they had baptised as adults some who had already been baptised as infants.

19. Our description of the responses to the two surveys should not at this point be interpreted as an endorsement of any particular policy described. Indeed our group had grave misgivings about the establishment of a non-denominational membership roll, lest it should encourage the growth of another totally independent church.

20. There can be no doubt, however, that the issues, and particularly the issue of baptism, are extremely sensitive and are, to a certain extent and in some places, a barrier to ecumenical development. There is clearly an awareness, particularly among Anglican and Baptist ministers, that they are operating on the edge of the rules of their churches. At least one Baptist and one Anglican minister asked that what they were doing be not identified. One Anglican described a policy being pursued in the LEP which the Anglican bishop had asked not to be invited to participate in! Because of the Baptist-Methodist Agreement and the Baptist-United Reformed Church Guidelines this anxiety about the rules was less evident in LEPs which did not include Anglicans. This suggests to us that the Baptist Union and the Church of England should also produce agreed guidelines on this issue.

21. The responses from the LEPs also revealed the tension between the need to do justice to the self-understanding of the churches, their ecclesiology, and the need to be pastorally sensitive in situations in which many Christians already sit very lightly to denominational allegiance. More than one of the respondents indicated that where this tension became a clash, they would give priority to the pastoral need of the candidate concerned.



THE CHURCHES' UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF BAPTISM AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

22. As we tried to find practical ways forward amid the problems presented to LEPs by so-called 're-baptism' and 'extended' membership, we recognised that the churches have differing understandings and practices of baptism and church membership. The World Council of Churches has produced *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* to mark theological convergences and continuing divergences. It is sometimes falsely assumed that all the churches which participated in the process which led to the publication of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* agreed with all its findings. They did not. The publication was part of an ongoing process. Attention should be given also to the Churches' responses (*Churches Respond to BEM*. Vols. 1-6). Special attention should be given to the response of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (Vol. 1 p.70). A summary of the issues raised in the responses of the British & Irish Churches can be found in *British and Irish Churches respond to BEM*, BCC, 1988, pp 9-21. A reflection on the issues is published in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982-1990*, WCC pp 39-55. The various Churches' understandings of Baptism are therefore well documented, even if they are not universally understood.

23. The same is not true of church membership. In 1972 following an extensive enquiry into the theology and practice of baptism in the United Kingdom, a common certificate of baptism was produced in response to the need for evidence in one church that baptism with water in the name of the Trinity had taken place in another church. The Baptist Union and Orthodox Churches were not party to this agreement, but most other major Churches were. A proposal by the BCC Assembly in 1979 to consider the possibility of a common certificate of church membership, however, met with demurs from the Baptist Union, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. The BCC set up a working party to consider the matter

further and this published *One Body, Many Members* in 1986 and *Christian Initiation and Church Membership* in 1988. It is perhaps significant that the authors of the earlier report had intended to include an appendix on each member church's understanding of initiation and membership, but this plan was aborted when some member churches found it difficult to agree the wording of their own reports. This signified that some Churches are passing through a period of uncertainty and change on their own practices and understanding of initiation and membership, and especially on the meaning of confirmation.

24. Because of this, as part of the current *Called To Be One* process, Churches Together in England consulted its member churches and prepared a paper on this issue. Appendix 1, on what churches require of those seeking to move into membership of their church from another church, is based on this work and helps to supply the gap of printed material on this issue.

25. A deeper study of so-called 're-baptism' and 'extended' membership shows that there are fundamental issues hindering ways forward on these matters. These issues include the doctrine of baptism, baptism and faith, the place of children in the church, and the understanding of church and church membership.

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

(i) BAPTISM

26. 'Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12); a washing away of sin (1 Cor. 6:11); a new birth (John 3:5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27); a renewal by the Spirit (Titus 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Peter 3:20-21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor. 10:1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 12:13).'

This convergence on the meaning of baptism recorded in *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* (Baptism para 2) is very significant. However it has been said that it marks a convergence on the theology but not on the practice of baptism.

27. It may surprise many in the more traditional churches that both the Religious Society of Friends and the Salvation Army responded to *BEM*. (*Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol IV pp 214–257). Neither church accepts or uses the water rite of baptism, but both in their different ways recognise the transforming power of God’s Spirit in the lives of their members and in their communities. ‘Salvationists consider the experience rather than the symbol as “the gift of God”’ and point to such texts as ‘He shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit’. However the issue of ‘re-baptism’ does not concern either of these churches.

28. The churches which baptise only believers had great difficulty in accepting parts of the baptismal section of *BEM*. The key point of their disagreement for our present purpose, as expressed in the response of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (*Churches Respond to BEM*, vol 1 pp. 70–77), centres upon that report’s admonition that ‘any practice which might be interpreted as ‘re-baptism’ must be avoided.’ Although Baptists agree with other Christians that baptism cannot be repeated, the Baptist Union replied that it could not accept the form in which this prohibition was expressed, since infant baptism might not be followed by the nurturing and growth in faith that the report itself described as being part of initiation. The implication of this response was that to baptise someone as a believer in this situation would not be re-baptism, but true baptism for the first time. It must be added that many Baptists would not in fact regard infant baptism in any circumstances as ‘baptism’, although this does not necessarily mean that they would require those baptised as infants to be baptised as believers.

29. On the other hand the Baptist Union was willing, in its response to *BEM*, to consider that the baptism of infants, when seen as part of a total process of initiation, might offer the most promising way forward to mutual recognition on the baptismal issue. There might

be progress towards understanding where believing parents brought an infant to baptism, where that infant was nurtured in the church community, and where as a believer he or she eventually made their own profession of faith and commitment to Christ and his mission. Such an initiation process might be accepted by Baptists as an alternative to believer's baptism, although at best it would be considered as having validity only as deriving from what Baptists believe to be the norm, which is believer's baptism. The water rite of infant baptism on its own would not be considered as baptism by Baptists (*Believing and Being Baptised* – a discussion document prepared by the Doctrine & Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain), but perhaps infant baptism within a believing community, followed by Christian nurture, personal faith and communion might be regarded as a total process of initiation alternative to the Baptist process of Christian nurture, personal faith, believer's baptism, reception into membership and communion. The recognition that infant baptism is derived from the baptism of believers may prove a bridge between churches who baptise only believers and those who also baptise infants.

30. The Working Party noted that at least from the third century until the fifth century AD the two practices co-existed in the early church within Christian households. Infant baptism was certainly common during this period. However Ambrose, Augustine and Basil the Great were all born into devout Christian households (except that Augustine's father was not baptised until Augustine was in his teens) and yet none of them was baptised until well into adulthood. Ambrose was 41 years old when he was baptised, though he had been a catechumen for some time. Augustine was about 33 years old, though as a boy he was sealed with the mark of the cross and salted with salt. Basil the Great was about 27 years old when he was baptised. That this was not unusual is suggested by Basil's sermons in the late 4th century when he says of his congregation 'many of you are not initiated'. In this period baptism was taken so seriously that many followers of Jesus delayed it until they reached maturity and were really certain that they would not backslide in their youth!

This shows that a single theology of baptism could result in different practices, and raises the question as to whether we might not profitably consider the possibility of recognising the co-existence of the two whole processes of initiation including infant baptism or believer baptism as valid alternatives for Christian households today.

31. One way of holding together both forms of baptism within one church is demonstrated by the United Reformed Church, whose Basis of Union (14) includes the following:

‘The URC includes within its membership both persons whose conviction it is that baptism can only be appropriately administered to a believer and those whose conviction it is that infant baptism is also in harmony with the mind of Christ. Both convictions are honoured by the Church and both forms are understood to be used by God in the upbuilding of faith’.

(ii) BAPTISM & FAITH :

32. It should be recognised at the outset that the question of baptism and faith involves deeply held convictions which may affect a person’s whole understanding of his or her relationship to God and the Church. Pain may be caused when, for whatever reasons, the genuineness of a person’s baptism is, or appears to be, called into question.

33. All churches agree that baptism is not a magical ceremony that brings salvation apart from faith. The doctrine that a sacrament works ‘ex opere operato’ was developed not to affirm a sacrament over against faith, but to assure that a sacrament was not nullified by the unworthiness of the minister.

34. Those who baptise infants claim that the infant is brought to baptism in the context of faith ideally by believing parents, but at least by sponsors/godparents who believe, and who undertake to nurture the child in faith. The baptism also takes place normally within the believing community of the church. In the old Roman Catholic baptism rite the response to the priest’s question to the godparents ‘What do you seek from the Church of God?’ was ‘Faith!’. Moreover those who baptise infants would claim that very

young children, brought up in a Christian household, can display signs of faith from a very early age, long before the normal time of confirmation or baptism as a believer.

35. Both those who baptise infants and those who baptise only believers recognise that salvation and therefore baptism is grounded in the prevenient grace of God. The response of faith is itself a gift of God's grace. The difference occurs in the answer to the questions 'whose faith?' and 'at what stage should the personal faith and commitment of the candidate be expressed?'. For the believer-baptist it must be the personal faith of the candidates. Those who baptise infants hope that infant candidates will eventually appropriate the faith and profess it for themselves, but allow godparents/sponsors and parents to affirm this faith at the baptism. These churches vary on whose behalf this faith is expressed. In the Orthodox Church only the sponsor expresses the faith of the candidate. In the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England the faith was expressed by the godparents (not the parents) vicariously on behalf of the child. In the *Alternative Service Book* the parents and godparents are asked to 'answer for yourselves and for these children'. In the Roman Catholic and most Free Churches it is the faith of the parents and godparents expressed on their own behalf, but also affirming that this is the faith in which they intend to bring up the child. Those who baptise infants however also need to hear the testimony of a Baptist minister in an LEP who reported that of all those baptised as infants in the LEP during the previous seven years only one family was interested in continuing the promises made at the time of the baptism.

36. Both those who baptise infants and those who baptise only believers recognise that baptism is unrepeatable, not because we cannot repent and begin again, but because it signifies the unique action of salvation in Jesus Christ and our rebirth in him. Both also recognise that it marks the beginning of a process of life-long growth into Christ (*BEM*. Baptism, para 9). Those who baptise only believers, however, believe that repentance and personal faith should precede the baptismal rite. Those who baptise infants believe that

baptism emphasises the prevenient grace of God for the infant, and is properly followed and completed by other elements of initiation including (in the East) chrismation and communion or (in the West) confirmation (including a personal profession of faith) and communion (see Appendix 2). The believer-baptist is particularly critical of 'apparently indiscriminate baptism' (see *BEM* Baptism para 16). – that is to say when an infant is baptised whose parents and godparents are not demonstrably committed to nurturing the child in the faith, and where the church's faith is not effectively demonstrated by a nurturing process that is capable of supplying at least something that is lacking in the faith of the parents and godparents.

37. It is important to recognise that there are two distinct points behind the objections, briefly outlined in paragraphs 35 and 36 above, of those who baptise only believers.

(i) The first applies to all infant baptisms, and it is that while grace and faith are involved in the baptism of infants, the kind of relationship with God open to an infant is different from that open to an older person; the infant is not able to engage in a conscious covenant with God, which for a Baptist is the key element of membership in Christ and his Church. For the Baptist it is faith, not the outward rite of baptism, that is ultimately essential for membership of the church (*Believing & Being Baptised* paras 27 & 28. For comments on the baptism of those with severe learning disabilities see also para 39).

(ii) The second applies only in those situations where there is effectively no faith evident on the part of the parents or godparents who bring the infant to baptism, and where it appears that the church is not given an opportunity to share its faith through the nurture of the child. In these circumstances the believer-baptist asks where the essential element of faith is to be found.

(iii) THE PLACE OF CHILDREN IN THE CHURCH

Children and Membership of the church

38. All churches are placing more emphasis on the role of children in the church. In fact the Baptist Union is once again looking at the

place of the child in the church (*Believing & Being Baptised*, pp 39–43), and the Church of England, for example, has been facing the issue of infant baptism, and the educational policy needed to deal with it (*Christian Initiation – A Policy for the Church of England*, GS Misc. 365, 1991; and *On The Way*, GS Misc 444, 1995).

39. We recommend that this renewed concern about the place of the child in the church, with the Christian nurture of children and the whole catechetical process, should be tackled by churches working together. Those who baptise infants will want to ask those who do not why they think infant baptism inappropriate, since both groups believe in the prevenient grace of God. Those who baptise only believers will want to ask those who baptise infants why they think such baptisms to be necessary and appropriate. Because of their understanding of the character of faith and church membership, Baptists do not consider it appropriate to baptise infants, but that does not mean that they regard the children of believers as being outside the household of God. Baptists believe that their ceremony of infant presentation and blessing signifies that such children belong in the church. However Baptists conceive of different ways of belonging to the community of the church. The image of a member of the Body, for a Baptist, implies 'active co-ordination with other members, seeking together (especially in the Church Meeting) the mind of Christ who is the head of the Body' (*Believing and Being Baptised* para 36); and Baptists do not believe that very young children are able to share this responsibility.

40. On the other hand those who baptise infants will argue that the church includes the whole body of those who belong to Christ including the little children, that baptism is the sign and sacrament of entry into the church, and therefore it is entirely appropriate that baptism should be administered to the children of those who genuinely desire it.

41. Both groups believe that the Christian life is a journey of faith. What is disputed is the stage on the journey at which baptism should be administered. What is also clear is that the social situation has changed radically during the century that is coming to an end, so that

similarities to the missionary context of the early church are becoming more apparent (see paragraph 30 above). It can no longer be assumed that infants baptised in the church will almost inevitably be brought to Sunday School and then to confirmation. It is being realised that the church needs to enter into a new kind of partnership with those who bring infants to baptism. This partnership will require the parents at least to be serious in their desire that their children be nurtured within the church. It will also require the church to ensure that both the will and the resources are available to ensure that local churches are genuinely able to provide such nurture.

42. There is little difference in practice between the education and nurture of a young child within a baptist kind of church community and that of a baptised infant within other church communities since the understandings of faith development and nurture are similar in both traditions.

43. Underlying all these issues are the differing understandings of church and church membership in the various denominations. For the Baptist Union the primary expression of church is the local, covenanted community of believers. To enter into membership of the church therefore means to enter into covenant with Christ and with the other members of the local church to fulfil the mission to which Christ has called his church. The concept of membership implies the active taking on of the responsibilities and privileges of the church community. This is why it is inappropriate for a young child to be a member, although he or she can belong in other ways. However, despite the emphasis on the local, it is understood that the church member is received into the universal Church of Christ of which the local is the manifestation.

44. Some churches that baptise infants have a similar understanding of the local church, but they accept that baptised children are members of the church, albeit their membership demands only what they are able to perform. Such Free Churches have a rite through which a person makes a profession of faith and takes upon himself or herself the full privileges and responsibilities of church membership. This rite in these churches often involves confirmation and

therefore includes a prayer for strengthening by the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands. The United Reformed and Methodist Churches consciously now avoid all reference to 'full' membership. Baptism gives membership of the church. In confirmation a person enters into the 'privileges and responsibilities' of membership; and reception into membership includes admission into the local church. It is in the local church that decisions are taken on the admission of new members, and in such Free Churches members have specific responsibilities for the life and government of the church alongside the minister (on the understanding of 'church' see also *Called To Be One*, chapter 2). It is also in the local church that the local minister confirms new members.

Chrismation and confirmation of children

45. In Eastern Orthodox practice the priest chrismates the newly baptised immediately after the triple immersion using the holy oil or myron that he has received from the bishop. This myron is consecrated from time to time in a series of extremely complicated ceremonies, which last over several days, by the Patriarch or the chief Hierarch of the Church in question. Some of the old myron is mixed with the new, there is thus a continuity with the Church in time, across the centuries, as well as in space. For the Orthodox, then, the chrism expresses the sign of unity between the candidate and the chief minister of the diocese, the bishop, representing the wider church. In the Byzantine rite there is in fact no specific laying on of hands nor is there any later service of confirmation.

46. In the Western Church the rite of confirmation in different traditions has comprised various elements over the years, notably:

- i) a personal profession of faith;
- ii) a prayer for strengthening by the Holy Spirit;
- iii) a laying on of hands by an appropriate minister, sometimes accompanied by chrismation with oil blessed by the bishop;
- iv) reception into church membership often expressed through the 'right hand of fellowship'.

47. In the Anglican and Roman Catholic tradition the third element is among other things, a sign of unity between the candidate and the chief minister of the diocese, the bishop, representing the wider church. In the Anglican tradition there is no formal reception into church membership apart from baptism itself, but those Anglicans who wish to play a part in being elected or in electing other people to represent them in the councils of the church may put their names on an electoral roll.

48. In most Free Churches the appropriate minister of confirmation is the one who has pastoral charge of the local church or circuit. Baptists have not normally had a separate service of confirmation, but the laying on of hands has been for some associated with baptism and reception into membership. In some LEPs Baptists have sometimes been confirmed alongside other Christians immediately after being baptised as believers.

49. Since 1975, following a resolution in the House of Bishops of the Church of England, joint confirmations of Anglican and Free Church candidates have been permitted, and this practice has become widespread in LEPs, where it has led to multiple church membership. Joint confirmations have not included Roman Catholics whose understanding of the church does not permit it, but there have been parallel confirmations in one or two places where Anglican and Free Church candidates have been confirmed by their appropriate ministers jointly, and in the same service Roman Catholic candidates have been confirmed by their bishop separately. Such parallel confirmations, of course, have not led to multiple church membership involving Roman Catholic candidates.

50. It should be noted that a number of children of interchurch parents (one partner a Roman Catholic and the other belonging to the Church of England or a Free Church) are now asking for a joint confirmation which would include the participation of a Roman Catholic bishop.

Admission to communion

51. Virtually all Western churches have been reviewing their

practice recently. Traditionally Anglicans have been admitted to communion only after confirmation, but recently the Church of England has, at the discretion of the diocesan bishop, and with certain safeguards, permitted baptised children to be admitted to communion before confirmation.

52. During this century it has become normal for Roman Catholics to be admitted to communion following preparation, confession and first communion at about the age of seven years, and confirmation has followed some years later, but the Roman Catholic diocese of Salford now confirms children at about seven years of age and admits them to communion only afterwards.

53. The Methodist Conference encourages local Methodist Churches to admit baptised children to communion before confirmation, and provides guidelines for this. Each Church Council makes a policy decision on the presence of children at Holy Communion and on whether they receive bread and wine or a blessing. The United Reformed Church has also encouraged local congregations to consider the admission of baptised children to communion before confirmation and to determine their policy. A significant number of URC congregations do admit baptised children to communion. The Baptist Union has made no guidelines on this, but the decision is entirely with the local churches. A few Baptist churches do admit young children to communion, and where this happens it is, of course, before they are baptised.

54. The Orthodox have always admitted young children to communion from the time of their baptism and chrismation. From about the age of seven communion should be preceded by confession.

(iv) THE UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH & CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

55. The distinctions in the concepts of membership are related to the different understandings of church which have developed over centuries in the various churches or denominations. In the Middle Ages in most of Europe virtually the whole community was, at least nominally, Christian. The governance of the church was in the hands

of the clergy. Where there was lay influence it was normally that of an individual landowner and not that of the whole congregation of a parish. Every baptised resident of the parish was therefore considered to be a member of Christ and of his universal church, but had little or no hand in the management of the local church.

56. In reaction to this concept the more radical of the Reformers emphasised the role of the whole people of God and the gathered congregation of covenanted believers. Baptist, Congregational and United Reformed churches retain a structure in which the church meeting has a central role. Although these Free Churches generally also understand baptism as the mark of entry into Christ and his universal church, the concept of church membership in the forefront of their minds has tended to be that of membership of the local church, in which every covenanted believer exercises responsibility.

57. At the Reformation the Church of England retained the parish system. Church wardens were given some responsibility for the governance of the local church in England, but all those living in the parish had responsibility for appointing them. There was no specific church meeting or council. It was only after the Enabling Act of 1919 that Parochial Church Councils were formed and a roll of electors entitled to appoint the Council drawn up. The Church of England therefore is still divided into parishes and has no local church membership or regular church meetings like those of most Free Churches.

58. The local parish church is reminded that it is not self-sufficient, but belongs to a wider unit, in that the bishop of the diocese confirms candidates who have been baptised and introduces new ministers into the parish.

59. All who are baptised, who live in the parish, and who consider themselves as members of the Church of England are formally so regarded. However in order to administer the church each parish establishes an electoral roll of those members who live in the parish or who attend worship and ask to be entered on the roll. Entry on the roll entitles them to elect or be elected on to the councils of the

Church of England. In 1995 the Church of England altered its Church Representation Rules so as to enable anyone who was able to make the following declaration to be entered on the electoral roll of the parish:

'I am baptised and am 16 or over. I am a member in good standing of a church not in communion with the Church of England, which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and also am a member of the Church of England and I have habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment'.

60. Although the concept of the local church as the covenanted community of believers is foreign to most Anglicans, nevertheless many Church of England parishes are adopting a stronger sense of belonging to the local congregation and also conciliar structures appropriate to a synodical church.

61. In the 18th century membership in Methodism was concerned solely with belonging to a local 'society', linked to other such 'societies', under the supervision of John Wesley and within the Church of England. As Methodism evolved into a distinct church, its understanding of membership broadened to include not only local membership but also that of the whole denomination. Baptism is seen as incorporation into Christ and the Church; but reception into (denominational) membership is required before a person can hold office or exercise certain voting rights. Confirmation and Reception into Membership occur within the one service, after the reception of the candidates has been approved by the Church Council. There is considerable emphasis on 'connexionalism', the system whereby every local church is 'connected', via circuits and districts, to the Methodist Conference and, through the Conference, to every other local church.

62. Membership of the Orthodox Church is understood as membership of the universal church and is defined by baptism, chrismation and communion in one ceremony. Membership of the Roman Catholic Church is thought of as membership of the universal church

and is defined by baptism and is completed by confirmation and communion. Baptism for Orthodox and Roman Catholics is into the whole mystery of the church 'present in the local church' and expressed in the world-wide church which consists in and arises out of these local churches. For Orthodox and Roman Catholics the local church means the diocese, that is all baptised believers in communion with their bishop; and a similar teaching is also found in the Church of England. Membership therefore is thought of both as belonging to the local and to the universal church. The Roman Catholic diocese is organised into parishes, as in the Church of England, but in the Roman Catholic Church there is no parish or diocesan membership roll of the local church (not even an electoral roll). As is the the case with many Anglicans, many Roman Catholics cross parish boundaries to go to the local church where they feel most at home.

63. The Orthodox Church is also organised in dioceses and parishes, although where the church is not strong in numbers the boundaries of parishes can be somewhat hypothetical. The Orthodox Church also has electoral rolls for administrative purposes. Membership of such a roll gives a person the right to vote at parish meetings, elect lay officers, and stand for the office of church warden. The individual has a baptism certificate, and marriages and ordinations are entered on the diocesan baptismal register.

WAYS FORWARD

64. In paragraphs 2–8 above we have set out three issues which are presenting problems within LEPs which include both churches which baptise infants and those which baptise only believers:

- i. The question of so-called 're-baptism'.
- ii. The possibility of so-called 'extended' membership.
- iii. The clash of different policies on the admission of children to communion.

We now turn from an examination of these three issues, and from a

consideration of some of the fundamental theological questions which underlie them, and we look for ways forward. We recognise that there is no immediate and complete solution to these issues in LEPs, as if they could be isolated from the life of their churches as a whole. We attempt in the paragraphs which follow to make recommendations for ways forward in the short-term for LEPs, but the churches are asked to recognise that such short-term recommendations cannot succeed unless the denominations are prepared to commit themselves to a long-term, joint examination of the fundamental questions that underlie them, some of which are beginning to be tackled in the *Called To Be One* process. It is only such a mutual commitment that will give our churches the confidence to reach agreements for LEPs in the short-term.

We therefore recommend that the detailed recommendations about LEPs that follow are undergirded by a mutual commitment by the churches to consider together the fundamental issues that underlie them, including those on the nature of faith, sacrament and church.

65. Before dealing with the issues respectively of so-called 're-baptism', 'extended' membership and admission to communion separately we recommend three principles which we believe to be important for any satisfactory arrangement in an LEP:

a) We recommend that before the constitutions of new LEPs are drawn up (that is LEPs which include both churches which baptise infants and those which baptise only believers) there should be discussion of these three issues (so-called 're-baptism', 'extended membership' and the admission of children to communion) and that clear agreements should be established on how these issues will be handled.

b) We recommend that the same should happen when existing LEPs are reviewed.

c) We recommend that pastoral sensitivity and a measure of flexibility should always be exercised in difficult cases in consultation with the Sponsoring Body or its appropriate

representatives; and where necessary rules and agreements laid down in constitutions should be amended to include this.

i. So-called 'Re-baptism'

66. We have observed that the request for baptism as a believer of someone who has already been baptised as an infant (and in a few cases also confirmed as a teenager) appears to have occurred only in a minority of LEPs where churches which baptise infants and those which baptise only believers participate together. It appears to arise in a context where there has been particular emphasis on a biblical pattern of believer-baptism and the tradition of baptism by immersion following a personal decision for Christ. It also often occurs in situations where the candidate has arrived at a decision on the basis of deep conviction to request baptism. It is therefore important that the candidate should be presented as clearly as possible with the theological significance both of baptism following a personal profession of faith by the candidate and of the baptism of an infant within a process of Christian initiation.

67. If the enquirer persists in requesting believer-baptism, three ways of handling this issue have emerged (See Appendix 3).

(i) *The Baptist-Methodist Agreement* requires that, should a Methodist member decide to be 're-baptised', his or her name should be removed from the Methodist membership roll and transferred to the Baptist roll. This approach to the issue safeguards the theological positions of both churches, but it requires the Methodist to separate from the denomination in which he or she came to faith.

68. (ii) The 1996 *Baptist-United Reformed Church Agreed Guidelines* present something similar to the *Baptist-Methodist Agreement* as 'the simplest baptismal policy' for LEPs which have separate Baptist and United Reformed Church membership rolls. However it also presents an alternative pastoral policy for those who wish to go a stage further. It underlines the exceptional nature of 're-baptism' and involves the ministers and the church meetings in making the decision (and not just the individual candidate). This is expressed in the following extract:

'Believers' baptism would not be administered to those baptised as infants, except in the circumstances set out in the paragraph below.

In exceptional cases when an individual who has been baptised as an infant maintains a conviction about wishing to be baptised as a believer, a pastoral consultation shall take place between the candidate and the minister(s) and church meeting(s). The possibility of meeting the individual's convictions by a service for the renewal of baptismal vows and/or a personal confession of faith should be thoroughly explored. If, however, that is not acceptable, the individual's request may be granted provided that the minister(s) and church meeting(s) are in agreement and that the person concerned is willing to have his/her membership entered on the Baptist roll. If there is disagreement, help and advice should be sought from the Intermediate Ecumenical Bodies and particularly from both the Baptist Union General Superintendent of the area and the United Reformed Church Provincial Moderator concerned.'

This agreed guideline allows recourse to outside persons and bodies where the candidate, minister(s) and church meeting(s) cannot agree.

69. (iii) The Consultation on the future of LEPs held at Swanwick in March 1994 proposed a third way forward:

'Meanwhile, in the case of LEPs with a single shared congregational life and where there is Baptist participation, it would be inappropriate to re-baptise those who were baptised in infancy and who have already made a personal and public profession of faith in confirmation or formal admission to church membership. Those baptised in infancy who have not completed the process of Christian initiation and who, out of an instructed conscience, request baptism as believers should be placed under Baptist discipline and practice prior to baptism as believers and to reception into Baptist membership.'

This guideline makes a distinction between those baptised only and those also confirmed (in which latter case it would never be permitted).

70. Our Working Party has not thought of any other sort of track, apart from these three, which might provide a way forward agreed

both by those who baptise infants and those who baptise only believers. In considering these three ways of handling the issue the following factors should be taken into account:

a) Many local Baptist churches do not insist on believer baptism by immersion when someone who believes in Christ seeks membership of the Baptist church. This Baptist procedure has often been misunderstood by other Christians (and sometimes by Baptists) as meaning that Baptists regard baptism as unimportant. What it really means is that many Baptists have been willing to accept into membership on a personal profession of faith someone who was baptised as an infant and who is already a member of another church. In line with this *Believing and Being Baptised* (pp25 and 29) urges Baptist churches not to accept without baptism those “who have not as yet been initiated in any way into membership of the Church of Christ”.

b) Because of the general Free Church understanding of local church membership and its practice of transferring members from the roll of one local church to another, and because of the existence of the Baptist-Methodist Agreement and the Baptist-URC Agreed Guidelines, there appears to be less tension between Free Churches on this issue than between Anglicans and Baptists. There are, moreover, a much larger number of infant baptisms in Anglican than in Free churches.

We recommend Anglicans and Baptists to try to agree bilateral national guidelines on the issue of so-called ‘re-baptism’, taking into account the three kinds of approach listed above (paragraphs 67–69). We further recommend as a short-term measure that LEPs, in agreement with their church authorities, should be given the freedom to decide upon which of the three kinds of approaches listed above will best serve their particular situation (see paragraph 65).

71. None of these three options will fully satisfy the theological position of the participating churches. **We therefore recommend that national Churches whose local congregations participate in**

LEPs should commit themselves to finding together a long-term way forward on the issue of so-called 're-baptism'.

72. Such a way forward will need to include:

i) an agreed policy of education and nurture both for parents and for their infants whom they bring for baptism. This will include some kind of catechetical process involving a partnership between parents and local churches and will require the provision of considerable educational resources;

ii) a willingness for churches, whenever they are considering developing their own policies, to consult other churches;

iii) a readiness on the part of those churches which baptise infants and of those which baptise only believers to respect the integrity and acceptability of each other's process of Christian initiation *as a whole*; and this will require a careful consideration of the place in the church of those not yet baptised and a re-consideration of the valuable, ancient practice of the catechumenate (see *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* Baptism p.5, commentary on para 12; also *Called To Be One* p68 paras B6 and B7 = see Appendix 2 in this report);

iv) a general recognition by all Christians, who practise water baptism, of its importance and centrality in the life and belief of the whole church as the 'rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people' (*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, Baptism, p2 para 1; see also *Christian Initiation – A Policy for the Church of England* by Martin Reardon, paras 131 & 132);

v) a much more explicit and actual welcoming of the newly baptised into the local and universal Christian community than occurs in some churches;

vi) an increasing willingness to seek opportunities to baptise candidates in joint, public celebrations, thus witnessing to the ecumenical implications of our belief in the one baptism.

vii) a commitment to an ongoing discussion about whether the

acceptance of the various processes of initiation (see iii above) is a permanent solution, or a highly significant staging post on the way to the adoption of one process rather than the others.

73. We have received testimony from more than one minister in an LEP that one of the factors encouraging 're-baptism' is the sharp contrast between the often formal and low-key character of celebrations of infant baptism and the high drama of the baptism of believers by immersion. Sacraments are of their very nature drama and should affect the emotions, though in an orderly way and within the meaning of the rites.

74. Many churches are making their baptismal services more central to the life of their worshipping congregations and are experimenting with services re-affirming baptismal promises. The Working Party was very clear that such services of re-affirmation should not make use of water in such a way that they could be confused with baptism. However there is a case for reviewing these rites to make their meaning clearer and perhaps more dramatic.

75. We recommend the holding of ecumenical services which include both infant and believer baptism, and also the re-affirmation of baptismal promises. If water is used in the context of the re-affirmation of promises it should not lead to its confusion with baptism. (See *Confirmation and Re-affirmation of Baptismal Faith*, Joint Liturgical Group, 1992, Canterbury Press).

ii. 'Extended' Membership

76. We have already noted that it is common in many LEPs for Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed and some other candidates to be confirmed jointly by all the appropriate ministers and to fulfil the requirements for membership of all the participating churches and thus to be recognised as having 'multiple membership' of them all. We recognise that this practice is creating problems in some places, not least because of the heavy demand it makes on Anglican bishops who have a large number of such LEPs in their diocese. We also note that it is not at present possible for Roman Catholics (but see paragraph 49).

We commend the practice of joint confirmation and recommend that it be extended particularly to other single congregation LEPs, but suggest that attention be given to the problems it creates in some places and a way be sought to solve them.

77. The request for 'extended' membership in LEPs has come particularly from those lay people who have helped to inaugurate and lead LEPs in which there is a single worshipping congregation which includes members of different denominations, mostly Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed. Many of these have seen young people and newcomers entered on a common membership roll of the local congregation through baptism and joint confirmation, and they have asked why they too cannot extend their membership to include that of all the participating denominations in the LEP so long as they remain within the LEP.

78. There is a sense in which this is the logical outcome of what is already happening. Several of the denominations nationally recognise such LEPs themselves as local churches in membership of their Church or Union of Churches. Many such LEPs do in fact keep a common membership roll already, and some include not only those jointly confirmed, but also others who have asked to be put on it as 'extended' members, or in some cases all members.

79. However this raises the issue of what is understood by a common membership roll. It could mean one of two things. It could mean that those inscribed on it were recognised by the LEP as belonging to the local congregation. Alternatively it could be understood as meaning that those inscribed on it were recognised as having membership status also of all the churches/denominations participating in the LEP. The former is within the power of the LEP to decide. The latter is the responsibility of the national church/denomination or union to decide. Until now the denominations have insisted that LEPs also keep separate denominational membership lists.

80. The difficulties facing the denominations in giving formal agreement to 'extended' membership are considerable.

i) First of all such dual or multiple membership is not formally permissible in the Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches. For them there is only one church, and even if the Roman Catholic Church recognises elements of the one Church of Christ within other denominations, to accept 'extended' membership would run counter to its present understanding of the unity of the church.

ii) Secondly the concepts of church membership are different in different churches (see above and Appendix 1). To accept a common membership roll including 'extended' members would tend towards a single understanding of church membership which would fail to do justice to the differing emphases which exist.

iii) Thirdly there are differences over who is eligible for formal membership in different churches. As we have seen there are significant differences between churches which baptise infants and those which do not over the membership status of children, and over the possibility of the unbaptised being accepted into local church membership.

iv) Fourthly there are practical difficulties because most churches take membership of local churches into account in their financial and other planning. Joint confirmations have already caused difficulties here. 'Extended' membership would increase them. This difficulty should not be shrugged off on the grounds that it is merely a practical problem and not one of principle. However quite a number of LEPs have found ways of surmounting this difficulty. Suggestions are published in *A Harmony of Church Finance* by Basil Hazledine pp 35f. If some scheme of 'extended' membership were formally to be agreed by some of the churches, care would need to be taken that there were national agreements about recording and accounting procedures.

81. The third difficulty is likely to focus on eligibility for membership and raises at least two concerns:

a. Could a person be accepted into membership without baptism (as has happened in a few 'open' membership Baptist churches)? Most other churches would say 'no!', and *Believing and Being*

Baptised has also deprecated this.

b. Could a child or someone who has not made a personal profession of faith be accepted into membership? Baptists would say 'no!', but affirm that the children of baptised and believing parents are, in some way, part of the church.

82. We recommend that the churches explore these issues related to 'extended' membership together, and in particular look at the ancient tradition of the catechumenate in the church. The catechumenate allowed for a step by step approach to membership of the church, and a catechumen already had certain rights of membership (eg of burial with other Christians). Some Free Churches have also developed a concept of associate membership. It might also be worth exploring whether some such form of membership might be open and helpful to the partners in interchurch families.

83. LEPs were created precisely to experiment and to forge new ways of churches working together. There is nothing to hinder each LEP examining its understanding of local church membership, and, if it so decides, to form a common roll locally. However it cannot expect simply by that act to define membership also for its participating denominations. That is why until now they have required LEPs also to maintain a list of those recognised as members by their respective participating denominations.

84. Most of the Free Churches are already able to receive members from each others' churches by transfer. 'Extended membership' would require them also to permit appropriate candidates to belong to more than one denomination. As has already been noted, in January 1995 the Church of England changed its Church Representation Rules and Electoral Roll Form so as to enable anyone who was baptised, 16 years old or over, and a member in good standing of another Trinitarian church to declare that they were also a member of the Church of England, and so to be placed on the church electoral roll of the parish, and to vote in elections of church officers and to be elected to represent the Church of England on its various

councils.

85. We recommend that a Church/denomination, some of whose local churches participate in LEPs and which is willing to consider the possibility of permitting 'extended membership', should, in consultation with other such denominations, find ways of permitting it which are compatible with its own understanding and practice of church membership. This would achieve most of what has been proposed by 'extended membership' without compelling all churches to agree first on one concept of membership and a single set of rules on eligibility for such membership.

86. In the long term it is to be hoped that different churches will come to understand one another's theology and practice of membership, to learn from one another, and to grow closer together in both understanding and practice..

iii. Admission to Communion

87. Problems arise, particularly in LEPs with a single worshipping congregation, where some traditions participate who are accustomed to admitting children to communion before confirmation and others do not. In fact it becomes even more complicated when different traditions in the congregation are used to admitting children at different ages, some from a very early age. There is the added problem where Baptists and some others are prepared to admit the unbaptised to communion, whilst others are not.

88. Because Roman Catholics and Orthodox do not normally admit members of other churches to communion, this problem does not normally affect them.

89. Decisions on the admission of unconfirmed children to communion are taken in most Free Churches locally. The Church of England has recently changed its rules over admission of children to communion before confirmation, and the House of Bishops have agreed new guidelines. (See paragraph 51. above).

We invite all churches to take the situation of LEPs into account

as they come to a mind on the admission of young children to communion.

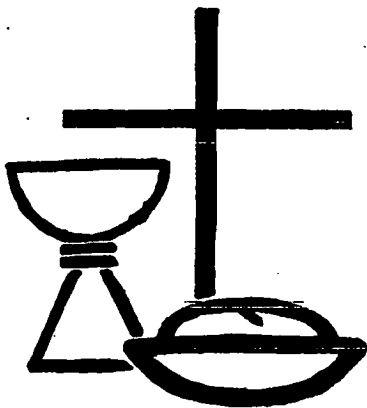
90. We recommend that normally only those who have been baptised should be admitted to communion.

91. Meanwhile decisions on this issue have to be taken by the local churches and the Sponsoring Body acting together.

CONCLUSION

92. Churches are unlikely to find agreements on the immediate way forward on these three issues in LEPs, unless they are committed to tackling together the more substantial issues that underlie them, including those on the nature of faith, sacrament and church.

93. This commitment is necessary not just for the unity of the churches concerned, but so that they can engage together in an agreed policy for the initiation and nurture of new Christians in England today. We regard this to be a priority for all churches generally and not simply in LEPs and we therefore ask the churches to take this report and Appendix B of *Called To Be One* very seriously.



A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

On the child in the church

39. We recommend that this renewed concern about the place of the child in the church, with the Christian nurture of children and the whole catechetical process, should be tackled by churches working together.

On the fundamental issues

64. We therefore recommend that the detailed recommendations about LEPs that follow are undergirded by a mutual commitment by the churches to consider together the fundamental issues that underlie them, including those on the nature of faith, sacrament and church.

Three principles for all LEPs

65. a) We recommend that before the constitutions of new LEPs are drawn up (that is LEPs which include both churches which baptise infants and those which baptise only believers) there should be discussion of these three issues (so-called 're-baptism', 'extended' membership, and admission of children to communion) and that clear agreements should be established on how these issues will be handled.

b) We recommend that the same should happen when existing LEPs are reviewed.

c) We recommend that pastoral sensitivity and a measure of flexibility should always be exercised in difficult cases in consultation with the Sponsoring Body or its appropriate representatives; and where necessary rules and agreements laid down in constitutions should be amended to include this.

On so-called 're-baptism'

70. We recommend Anglicans and Baptists to try to agree bilateral national guidelines on the issue of so-called 're-baptism', taking into account the three kinds of approach listed above (paragraphs 67-69). We further recommend as a short-term measure that LEPs, in agreement with their church authorities, should be given the freedom to decide upon which of the three kinds of approaches listed above will best serve their

particular situation (see paragraph 65).

71. We therefore recommend that national Churches whose local congregations participate in LEPs should commit themselves to finding together a long-term way forward on the issue of so-called 're-baptism'.

75. We recommend the holding of ecumenical services which include both infant and believer baptism, and also the re-affirmation of baptismal promises. If water is used in the context of the re-affirmation of promises it should not lead to its confusion with baptism.

76. We commend the practice of joint confirmation and recommend that it be extended particularly to other single congregation LEPs, but suggest that attention be given to the problems it creates in some places and a way be sought to solve them.

On so-called 'extended' membership

82. We recommend that the churches explore these issues related to 'extended' membership together, and in particular look at the ancient tradition of the catechumenate in the church. The catechumenate allowed for a step by step approach to membership of the church, and a catechumen already had certain rights of membership (eg of burial with other Christians). Some Free Churches have also developed a concept of associate membership. It might also be worth exploring whether some such form of membership might be open and helpful to the partners in interchurch families.

85. We recommend that a Church/denomination, some of whose local churches participate in LEPs and which is willing to consider the possibility of permitting 'extended' membership, should, in consultation with other such denominations, find ways of permitting it which are compatible with its own understanding and practice of church membership.

On the admission of children to communion

89. We invite all churches to take the situation of LEPs into account as they come to a mind on the admission of young children to communion.

90. We recommend that normally only those who have been baptised should be admitted to communion.

APPENDIX 1

Requirements of various churches for church membership

a) The Baptists

Baptist churches may either be open membership or closed membership. There is a different practice in each. Open membership Baptist churches are generally willing to accept letters of transfer from other Free Churches within the Free Church Federal Council. It is recognised that people cannot transfer in the same way from the Church of England and certainly not from the Roman Catholic or Orthodox churches. In such instances people coming from other traditions would be expected to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and to accept the general life and ethos of the receiving church. While enquiry would certainly be made as to whether the person seeking such a transfer had been baptised, in open membership churches baptism is not an inevitable requirement of church membership. Closed membership Baptist churches are unable to accept into full membership of the church anyone who has not been baptised as a believer, normally by immersion. However, many such closed membership Baptist churches are open to wider expressions of Christianity and often have a category of associate membership which conveys to people from other traditions virtually all the advantages of membership save that they cannot normally vote at a church meeting on matters which are stated within the Trust Deed. It would be true to say that an increasing minority of Baptist churches no longer accept anyone by transfer alone, even from other Baptist churches, but insist on a short course of orientation/nurture together with interview before recommending anyone to a church meeting for membership. Most Baptist churches will accept the members for transfer at a church meeting. Many would appoint two church members to visit and interview them before bringing a recommendation. On the whole any interview is designed to enable a

report to be made to the full church meeting regarding the faith of the person applying for membership, their church experience and their understanding of discipleship. The report would also include the comments about the need for any further instruction in the faith.

b) The Church of England

In 1972 the General Synod agreed to Canon B. 15a as follows:

'i. There shall be admitted to the holy communion: (a) members of the Church of England who had been confirmed in accordance with the rites of that church or are ready and desirous to be so confirmed or have been otherwise episcopally confirmed with unction or with the laying on of hands except as provided by the next following Canon: (b) Baptised persons who are communicant members of other churches who subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: and who are in good standing in their own churches: (c) Any other baptised persons authorised to be admitted under regulations of the General Synod; and (d) any baptised person in immediate danger of death.

ii. If any person by virtue of sub paragraph (b) above regularly receive 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 in that church' (That is what is set out in sub-paragraph (a) above). From 1st January 1995 the General Synod also changed its Church Representation Rules. Someone who is a baptised and communicant member of another Trinitarian church, who is willing to state that he or she is also a member of the Church of England and regularly worships there, may be placed on the electoral roll and enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of membership of the Church of England.

c. Congregational Federation

The Congregational Federation has its decision making processes responsibly located in the local congregation. While the practice in the matter of transfer may differ from church to church in general the following is the usual practice. Two forms of acceptance into church

membership are traditionally followed. First is admission by confession of faith (for people coming into membership for the first time). This will involve a person being asked for a confession of faith and will normally be preceded by some form of instruction about congregationalism. The second form is by transfer from another church. In many cases if people are moving from one church to another a letter from the previous church would be sought not simply as a matter of courtesy but as an assurance that the members were in good standing. Whether the people coming into membership by confession of faith for the first time are to be challenged concerning the necessity of baptism and whether (in the case of those coming by transfer) a check is made that they have been baptised will be a question decided by each local congregation.

d) The Methodist Church

The paragraphs from the Methodist Service Book of 1975 set out the methods of reception into the church. These read as follows:

i. Persons being received from other Christian communions, if they have not been previously baptised, should be baptised.

ii. If they have not been confirmed or full members of another Christian communion and now wish to be full members of the Methodist church, they should be confirmed and received into full membership.

iii. If they have already been confirmed or full members of another Christian communion from which they can be received by transfer, they should be received into full membership of the Methodist church by being admitted into full membership of a local society without any public service like members being received by transfer from another Methodist Society.

iv. If they are confirmed or full members of another Christian communion from which they cannot be received by transfer, then the minister shall ascertain that, after due consideration of the teaching and practice of the Methodist church, they desire to take up its duties and privileges, and the Church Council shall admit them into full membership; and then, if pastoral reasons so require,

they may be publicly received ... at a service which is to include the Lord's Supper.'

These regulations, however, raised issues in practice which required to be dealt with by further clarifications with the result that another document was issued for the Methodist Service Book entitled *A Clarification 1981*. This reads as follows: 'The intention (of the document quoted above) was to separate potential members into three groups:

(a) those who, for whatsoever reason, have not previously been confirmed members of a Christian Church. This includes both those not previously committed to the Faith and those who have pursued their discipleship with a Christian body that does not practise baptism and confirmation. The word 'confirmed' relates to some ceremony or procedure, subsequent to baptism, whereby the persons concerned were admitted to the full rights and privileges of membership including to holy communion. The words 'or full' explain the word 'confirmed': they do not suggest an alternative category of member. The word 'communion' refers to a Christian body making use of the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.

(b) those who have previously belonged to a Christian communion possessing a membership list, and normally providing notes of transfer when members transfer to the Methodist church. These bodies are usually close to us in doctrine and polity.

(c) those who have previously belonged to a Christian communion that does not have a membership list and so does not provide notes of transfer. The polity of these bodies is less like that of Methodism.'

Since 1993 Methodist candidates for membership are approved by the Church Council, but received into membership in an act of worship. This means in turn that all who are transferring or being received from other Christian Communion are received and welcomed into (Methodist) membership during an act of worship.

e) The Moravian Church

The Moravian Church receives into membership by 'the right hand of fellowship' those who come to it as members in good standing of other churches. The order of service for such a reception quite simply states a welcome to one 'who has already confessed the faith of Christ before his people and has been received into full communion with the church, and now desires to join our congregation'.

f) The Orthodox Church

For those seeking to join the Orthodox Church from a confession in which Baptism is administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, there are a number of offices for their reception, all of which presuppose that the candidate has already been instructed in the Orthodox Faith and has sincerely accepted its tenets. Orthodox Canon Law strictly prohibits one of its members from practising intercommunion or being jointly a member of another church. Anyone so acting would automatically be considered as having separated themselves from the Church and therefore as excommunicated. A subsequent reconciliation – even of a person who had originally been baptised and chrismated as Orthodox – would normally be effected through Chrismation.

g) The Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church has an order for *Reception of Baptised Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church*. The order opens with this statement: 'This is the liturgical rite by which a person born and baptised in a separate ecclesial community is received, according to the Latin rite, into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The rite is so arranged that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity'. It goes on to say 'in the case of Eastern Christians who enter into the fulness of Catholic communion, no liturgical rite is required but simply a profession of Catholic Faith, even if such persons are permitted in virtue of recourse to the Apostolic See to transfer to the Latin rite.' Within the order there is a

specific emphasis that the sacrament of baptism cannot be repeated and that it is not permitted to confer it again conditionally, unless there is a reasonable doubt about the fact or validity of the baptism already conferred. Neither, so the rite says, is there to be 'any appearance of triumphalism'. The baptised Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirement, for reception into the full communion of the Roman Catholic Church. So far as confirmation is concerned, the order reads: 'It is the office of the bishop to receive baptised Christians into the full communion of the Catholic Church. But a priest to whom the bishop entrusts the celebration of the rite has the faculty of confirming the candidate within the rite of reception unless the person received has already been validly confirmed'. The final clause refers to Eastern Churches whose episcopal ministry and confirmation is recognised as valid by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church believes that baptism, confirmation and orders are unrepeatable sacraments.

h) United Reformed Church

The United Reformed Church requires all who come into membership to have been baptised. While there is no set form of enquiry when a transfer from another church tradition takes place, the assumption is made that transferring members have been baptised. If there is any question at all about that, enquiry would be made and if someone transferring had not been baptised, baptism would certainly be required of that person. The 'Manual' of the URC gives it as a function of church meeting 'to admit and transfer members, to maintain standards of membership, and to suspend or remove names from the membership roll, always on advice from the Elders' meeting'. Corresponding to this, it is the function of the Elders' meeting 'to keep the roll of members ... and on consultation with the Church Meeting to maintain standards of membership and to advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer, on a suspension of members, and on the removal of names from the roll'. In practice the person concerned would normally attend worship at the 'new' church for a period. With the agreement of

Elders and Church Meetings the secretary of the receiving church asks for a letter of commendation from the former church. There should always be a service of reception into membership which normally takes place at holy communion.

i) Salvation Army

The Salvation Army does not practise water baptism. It is 'impressed by John the Baptist's prophetic testimony that water baptism would be superseded by Jesus who would baptise with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8)' (*Churches Respond to BEM* Volume IV, WCC, 1987). Those seeking to become a soldier in the Salvation Army would be required to affirm and sign the Army's 'Articles of War' (Soldiers' Covenant). This is a statement of beliefs and promises which every intending soldier is required to sign before enrolment. The basic tenets to which the soldier testifies is that they worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that they have accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, that they desire to fulfil their membership of his church on earth as a soldier of the Salvation Army, that they affirm their belief in the Bible as word of God and their acceptance of the Salvation Army's Articles of Faith. There would be a further requirement to confirm the promises in public under the flag and to be accepted by the Corps Census Board which is the group established in a Corps responsible for the addition of names to, and the removal of names from, rolls. There would also be a requirement of a transfer note where possible from the transferring church confirming that the applicant is a member in good standing prior to transfer.

j) Religious Society of Friends

The Religious Society of Friends acknowledges 'that the grace of God is experienced by many through the outward rite of baptism, but no ritual, however carefully prepared for, can be guaranteed to lead to growth in the Spirit... Our understanding of baptism is that it is not a single act of initiation, but a continuing growth in the Holy Spirit... It is this process which draws us into a fellowship with those who acknowledge the same power at work in their lives, those

whom Christ is calling to be his body on earth'. (*Churches Respond to BEM* Volume IV, p.219, WCC 1987). Whether a member of another church is accepted into membership of the Religious Society of Friends depends upon the monthly meeting – a group of half a dozen or so local meetings in a particular area which has the responsibility for membership matters. Membership does not require great moral or spiritual achievement but it does require a sincerity of purpose and a commitment to Quaker values and practice. It is a way of saying that the candidate accepts at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker – the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the Meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. A small and possibly increasing number of Friends have dual membership belonging both to the Religious Society and to another church. Not all Friends are happy with this trend feeling that it is inconsistent with the testimonies which Friends are called to make. Such Friends would offer attender status to those applicants who wish to remain members of another tradition ie. they would become one who is associated with Friends without a commitment of membership.



APPENDIX 2

Different patterns of Christian initiation

There are at least four different patterns of entry into the church, the Body of Christ, and at least one of these patterns has alternative orders of procedure:

(i) Baptism of candidates upon a personal profession of faith. This is the Baptist pattern, and it is also normal in many other churches, particularly in Pentecostal churches. (Some Pentecostal churches also look for evidence of a baptism in the spirit). Amongst Baptists, baptism is followed by reception into church membership which may include a ceremony of laying on of hands and certainly would include the right hand of fellowship. Baptists also have a ceremony of the presentation and blessing of infants which is sometimes only loosely connected with the whole pattern of Christian initiation. (In addition to the regular practice of believer-baptist churches, churches which baptise infants will also baptise older people, who have not been baptised as infants, upon a personal profession of faith. In these circumstances the baptism is followed by confirmation or reception into church membership and admission to communion).

(ii) Baptism and Chrismation, usually of infants, followed immediately by communion – the Eastern Orthodox pattern. When the infant is grown up he or she would join in the corporate profession of faith in the liturgy, but there is no special rite in which such an individual would make a personal profession of faith.

(iii) Baptism of candidates, usually infants, accompanied by a profession of faith made by godparents/parents. Confirmation/reception into membership is then delayed until the candidate is prepared to make a personal profession of faith. This is the position of the Church of England, some Free Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. There are alternative orders of procedure here:

- Some churches admit to communion before confirmation.
- Others normally give communion only after confirmation (these alternative orders of procedure sometimes exist within churches of the same communion eg. in Anglican and Roman Catholic churches).

(iv) The experience of transformation by the Spirit is not marked by an outward rite of water baptism in the Religious Society of Friends or the Salvation Army.

Baptism signifies the rebirth of a person as a Christian by the grace of God. It is therefore a once-for-all event. But salvation is a process, and so is Christian initiation. It begins and ends in the activity of God, to which the candidate responds in faith. Christian initiation is also a process. All the patterns listed above involve a process of initiation which includes different elements (God's call to faith, preparation, nurture, prayer for the gift of the Spirit, profession of faith, baptism, reception into membership of the church, admission to communion). Each process has its own sequence and coherence. The elements in the different patterns are not simply interchangeable. What is required is for the churches to discuss one another's patterns of initiation, and to consider whether they can be mutually recognised. If not, what changes would enable them to be recognised?

(extracted from *Called To Be One* p 68)

APPENDIX 3

a) BAPTIST-METHODIST AGREEMENT ON BAPTISMAL POLICY WITHIN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PROJECTS (PARTNERSHIPS)

Finalised after long consultation between the Baptist Union Advisory Committee on Church Relations and the Methodist Church Ecumenical Committee.

A We recognise the necessity of:

- i) Maintaining the integrity of both Methodist and Baptist understandings and practice of baptism;
- ii) Having a flexible and sensitive approach in this very delicate area;
- iii) Maintaining and developing good relationships and unity within the congregations of the sharing churches.

B We note that:

- i) It is the practice of the Methodist Church to baptise infants and to confirm them on confession of faith or, when infant baptism has not occurred, to baptise and confirm believers. In both cases these services make provision for pouring, sprinkling or immersion in water.
- ii) It is the practice in Baptist churches to hold a service for infants and their parents (variously known as 'The Dedication Service', 'The Service of Infant Presentation and Blessing', 'The Blessing of Infants', etc) and to administer believer's baptism on the candidate's personal profession of faith in Christ.
- iii) Standing Order 800 of 'The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church' makes clear that 'it is contrary to the principles and usage of the Methodist Church to confer what purports to be baptism on any person known to have been already baptised at any time'.

iv) Whilst welcoming *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (the so-called Lima Document) as a 'notable milestone in the search for sufficient theological consensus', the Baptist Union of Great Britain Council in November 1984 dismissed as wholly unacceptable in its present form the statement that, 'Any practice which might be interpreted as 're-baptism' must be avoided'. In this way the Council sought to protect the freedom of an individual's 'informed conscience' in matters concerning baptism and to allow for the possibility of a change of conviction here.

v) Whereas 'Recognised and Regarded' (Methodist) ministers are expected to administer infant baptism in appropriate circumstances those with 'Authorised' (Methodist) status have greater flexibility here. This latter category may accordingly be more acceptable to (most) Baptist ministers in Local Ecumenical Projects (Partnerships).

C. Procedures

1. Since baptism, whether of believers or infants, is such an important step, any persons involved (candidates or parents of infants) should proceed with the full knowledge of all the options that are available to them. Candidates for believer's baptism and confirmation shall, wherever possible be trained together and shall thus be made aware of the teaching of both churches.

2. It shall be left to the discretion of the Baptist membership to baptise as believers any who have previously been baptised as infants in other churches. In the interests of the unity of the congregation this should not be applied to Methodist members except as provided under 4 below.

3. Whenever a Methodist member wishes to make a public confession of faith (other than through those opportunities normally provided by the services of the Methodist Church) then the Methodist Church Council shall arrange an appropriate opportunity such as The Service for the Celebration of Christian Renewal.

4. If, despite the above provision, any Methodist maintains a conviction about being baptised as a believer, this shall only be after

a full consultation between (1) the candidate AND (2) the Baptist minister and Church Meeting and the Superintendent Minister and Church Council. This consultation will, of course, be pastoral in nature and not in the way of a tribunal. In view of SO 800 such a service should not take place unless the Methodist member is willing to have his/her membership transferred to the Baptist roll.

b) BAPTIST-UNITED REFORMED CHURCH AGREED GUIDELINES

Where we are

1 We recognise that Local Ecumenical Partnerships bring Christians together from different traditions without having reached agreement on all the theological issues which have divided those traditions in the past. It is, therefore, important that the policies framed for such LEPs embody mutual respect for one another's convictions and a pastoral sensitivity to the consequences of those policies for all those involved locally. In relation to baptism and associated rites of Christian initiation, we recognise the necessity of maintaining the integrity of the understandings and practice of baptism in Baptist and United Reformed churches and of building up the fellowship of the congregations of the sharing churches.

2 The Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church (paragraph 14) requires:

a) that baptism is the sacrament of entry into the Church and is, therefore, administered once only to any person;

b) that baptism may be administered in infancy or at an age of responsibility and that both forms of baptism shall be made available in the life of every worshipping congregation;

c) that baptism is always administered on profession of faith, either by the person being baptised or by his/her parent(s);

d) that the profession of faith made prior to baptism by a believer or at an age of responsibility by one baptised in infancy is a necessary part of the process of initiation and whenever possible it should be made at a celebration of the Lord's Supper;

e) that the convictions both of those who believe that baptism can only be appropriately administered to a believer and those who believe that infant baptism also is in harmony with the mind of Christ are honoured by the church;

f) that baptism, whether infants or believers, whether by pouring or immersion, should not be such to which conscientious objection is taken either by the person administering baptism, or by the person seeking it, or by the parent(s) requesting it for an infant.

3 The Declaration of Principle in the Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain states that "Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again on the third day". Furthermore, in responding to the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission's Statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the Baptist Union commented that the affirmation in the document that "any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided" was "wholly unacceptable in its present form since, on some interpretations, nothing could pass through so restrictive a sieve. In cases of infant baptism which are neither accompanied nor followed by any of the significant features of the initiatory process to which the report amply draws attention and where the individual involved is convinced out of an instructed conscience that Christian obedience requires believers baptism, we cannot agree that an *a priori* universal bar should operate."

4 Therefore, although the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union agree in recognising those whose conviction it is that baptism can only be administered to believers, they disagree over the recognition of those whose conviction it is that infant baptism is also in harmony with the mind of Christ and over whether someone who has received infant baptism may also receive believers' baptism.

5 LEPs involving Baptist and United Reformed churches will make available both infant and believer's baptism, by immersion, pouring

or sprinkling with water. They will also make available the services of thanksgiving, dedication and blessing (whether for the children of church members or of those not in church membership). These will normally take place within the congregation's regular services of worship.

One way forward

6 The simplest baptismal policy for such LEPs is that Baptist ministers and members will act in accordance with the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle and United Reformed ministers and members will act in accordance with the URC's Basis of Union. A consequence of this is that it will be necessary to distinguish between those on the Baptist, United Reformed and Common membership rolls. Where such a congregation has only one minister, it will be necessary for such a minister to be especially sensitive to the possible conflict of convictions over baptism. If, therefore, someone who has been baptised as an infant requests believers' baptism, such a person would be regarded as wishing to become a Baptist. Any such service of believers' baptism should not be administered by a URC minister, and the person concerned would subsequently be entered upon the Baptist roll.

Another way forward

7 a) Some LEPs may decide to seek a pastoral policy which does not distinguish between members of different denominations within the local congregation. While separate rolls will still need to be maintained, it may be decided to follow a common policy for all members of the congregation. This would involve recognising the need to refrain from appealing to either the Baptist Union Declaration of Principle or the URC Basis of Union as an ultimate sanction either for or against a particular approach. Such a policy might take the following form:

b) Infant baptism would be available to children whose parent(s) or guardian(s) are able to make a confession of faith, are able to bring the children up in the faith and are members or regular worshippers and part of the church fellowship. Believers' baptism would be

available to those who are able to confess their faith and commit their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Before either infant or believers' baptism a course of preparation for parent(s) or candidate would precede the baptism. Believers' baptism would not be administered to those baptised as infants, except in the circumstances set out in paragraph 7(d) below.

c) Such a policy requires careful consideration of all requests for baptism. The minister and one or more elders/deacons/church officers or appointed visitors should visit the individual concerned or the parents of the child:

i) to ensure that those concerned have a sufficient understanding of the commitment involved;

ii) to ascertain that baptism is an appropriate step;

iii) if baptism is not considered appropriate, to explore alternative steps such as a service of thanksgiving, dedication and blessing in the case of a request for infant baptism, or the renewal of baptismal vows and/or a personal confession of faith in the case of a request for believers' baptism.

d) In exceptional cases when an individual who has been baptised as an infant maintains a conviction about wishing to be baptised as a believer, a pastoral consultation shall take place between the candidate and the minister(s) and church meeting(s). The possibility of meeting the individual's convictions by a service for the renewal of baptismal vows and/or a personal confession of faith should be thoroughly explored. If, however, that is not acceptable, the individual's request may be granted provided that the minister(s) and church meeting(s) are in agreement and that the person concerned is willing to have his/her membership entered on the Baptist roll. If there is disagreement, help and advice should be sought from the Intermediate Ecumenical Bodies and particularly from both the Baptist Union General Superintendent of the area and the United Reformed Church Provincial Moderator concerned.

c) PROPOSAL made at the CONSULTATION ON LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS held at Swanwick in 1994

Provisional guidelines

In the case of LEPs with a single shared congregational life and where there is Baptist participation, it would be inappropriate to re-baptise those who were baptised in infancy and who have already made a personal and public profession of faith in confirmation or formal admission to church membership. Those baptised in infancy who have not completed the process of Christian initiation and who, out of an instructed conscience, request baptism as believers should be placed under Baptist discipline and practice prior to baptism as believers and to reception into Baptist membership.

Those LEPs where congregations worship separately should be encouraged to use the Baptist/Methodist Concordat (see a) above) as a framework for their baptismal policy and practice.



MEMBERS OF THE WORKING PARTY

The Rev Neil Dixon (Methodist)

The Rev Christopher Ellis (Baptist)

The Rev Robert Esdaile (Roman Catholic)*

The Rev Dr Paul Fiddes (Baptist)

The Rt Rev John Finney (Church of England)

The Very Rev Archimandrite Ephrem Lash (Greek Orthodox)

The Rev Canon Martin Reardon (Convenor and Secretary)

Dr David Thompson (United Reformed Church)

The Rev Dr Morris West (Consultant)

***Fr Esdaile resigned from the Working Party half way through its deliberations because of pressure of work, and was not replaced.**

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Because of the problems encountered in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) in England the Churches appointed a small working party to consider three issues:

- (i) What to do if someone already baptised as an infant asks to be baptised as a believer?
- (ii) Is it permissible for people in a Local Ecumenical Partnership to extend their membership from that of their own church/denomination to include that of all the churches/denominations in the LEP?
- (iii) Should young children be admitted to communion in LEPs?

In attempting to suggest immediate ways forward for the churches on these issues, the working party points to the underlying differences in understanding over such matters as the significance of baptism and its relation to faith, the place of children in the church, and differing understandings of church and church membership.

The working party makes recommendations on ways forward on the three issues raised in LEPs. It also appeals to the churches to commit themselves to tackling together the differences which underlie them. This commitment is necessary not just for the unity of the churches concerned, but so that they can engage together in an agreed policy for the initiation and nurture of new Christians in England today.

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