

TRAVELLING TOGETHER

A handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships



Elizabeth Welch
and
Flora Winfield



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A Handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships
with a foreword by Dame Anne Doyle

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Churches Together in England

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FOREWORD

I welcome this revised edition of *Travelling Together*. The original edition proved extremely useful after the 1994 conference on Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). The LEP conference in 2002 was affirming of all varieties of Local Ecumenical Partnership. It recognised the need to encourage and support people working in LEPs, both those that are just starting and those that have been around for many years. Those attending the conference endorsed and supported all categories of LEP and recognised the challenges both new and old that LEPs face.

The ecumenical instruments are there to be used on a journey of faith towards unity. The ecumenical movement is not, and never should be, static, but continually evolving as the Churches grow together in understanding and confidence. Local Ecumenical Partnerships reflect this movement and must continue to be ‘a local sign, symbol and foretaste of the full visible unity of the Church’ as the report on the 1994 Conference stated. Local Ecumenical Partnerships have a truly prophetic role to play in the journey towards unity. By their very commitment to each other and to the ecumenical movement itself they are a living example and encouragement to others. Covenant relationships are growing with new partners such as Black Majority Churches and community churches wishing to commit themselves to the ecumenical movement.

This handbook brings the experience gained over the intervening years, the growth in understanding between the churches, and the new publications, together with the solid research from the previous edition. It makes clear the procedures necessary for forming an LEP as well as providing advice about the challenges ahead. It will prove to be a very useful tool to those starting out on the ecumenical journey as well as enabling those more experienced to update their knowledge and extend their growth.

Anne Doyle DSG

AUTHORS' PREFACE

The Revd Elizabeth Welch

My interest in ecumenism goes back to my childhood days in South Africa. My father was a minister and so I went to Church from an early age and yet, also from an early age, I experienced the deep divisions of apartheid. I began to discover for myself that the reconciliation at the heart of the Christian Gospel stood as a clear challenge to the doctrines which underlay apartheid. From those early days, I have been passionately committed to models of living that brought people together rather than separated people one from another.

Since I was ordained a minister in the United Reformed Church in April 1976, I have worked in two Local Ecumenical Partnerships. For the first seven years of my ministry I served in St Barnabas' United Church and Christian Centre in Langney, Eastbourne, a Baptist/Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership on a new housing estate. From 1983 I worked in the centre of Milton Keynes at the Church of Christ the Cornerstone, which involves five denominations: Anglican/Baptist/Methodist/Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church. From 1991 to 1998 I served on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Since 1996 I have been Moderator for the West Midlands Synod of the United Reformed Church and from 2001 to 2002 I served as National Moderator for our Church. During this year Flora served as my chaplain, the first time a National Moderator had had a chaplain from a different tradition.

The Revd Flora Winfield

I became involved in local ecumenism as an ordinand, working on placements in an Anglican/Baptist/Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership in Gloucester and a United Reformed Church church in Wheatley, Oxfordshire. After ordination as a deacon in the Anglican Church, I went as a curate in the Stantonbury Ecumenical Parish in Milton Keynes, an ecumenical partnership including Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church and The Salvation Army, and I also worked alongside people from Black Majority Churches. The breadth of ecumenical life in Milton Keynes is remarkable, but my experience of being a minister there was not of a group of Christians who were so devoted to ecumenism that there was no space for

mission. Rather, I worked with people who were concerned with the task of building the kingdom and sharing the gospel in that community, and for whom the imperative for ecumenical living was the gospel imperative of that task.

I was then appointed as the first county ecumenical officer to Gloucestershire, where I worked on behalf of eight denominations to encourage ecumenical development and provide support and encouragement for twenty existing Local Ecumenical Partnerships and eighteen local Churches Together groups. In 1994, I was ordained to the priesthood in the Anglican Church, and served as Chaplain to Mansfield College, Oxford, a college of United Reformed Church foundation. I was Local Unity Secretary for the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, before moving in 2002 to my present post as a Canon of Winchester Cathedral.

Together

The experience we have had of working ecumenically, while not without its deep difficulties at times, has been immensely enriching. It has strengthened our understanding and valuing of our own traditions and enabled us to see our traditions as part of a wider spectrum, with which it has been vital to go on developing and deepening relationships.

When discussing our different experiences in local ecumenism, we both felt that it would be good to put some of these experiences in writing in order to clarify for ourselves and others working in local ecumenism the issues and ideas that form the backdrop to our local experience. We wrote this book not as people who have the answers, but as people who have been trying to draw together some of the threads of ecumenism in the hope that our experience may in some small way help others who are at different stages on the same road.

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Local Ecumenical Partnerships

The Cotteridge Church

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Tupsley LEP, Hereford

(Church of England/United Reformed Church)

Radford Road Church, Leamington Spa

(Methodist/United Reformed Church)

Christ Church, Tetbury and Fairford United Church

(Methodist/United Reformed Church)

Emmanuel Church, Redditch

(Methodist/United Reformed Church)

Hodge Hill, Birmingham

(Church of England/United Reformed Church)

Christchurch, Abbeydale

(Church of England/Baptist/Methodist/United Reformed Church)

Union Free Church, Wellington

(Baptist/United Reformed Church)

All Stretton LEP

(Church of England/United Reformed Church)

Fairford Leys LEP (photograph on front cover)

(Church of England/Methodist/Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church)

Regional Sponsoring Bodies

Telford Christian Council

Churches Linked Across Staffordshire and the Potteries (CLASP)

Gloucestershire Churches Together

1 INTRODUCTION

Why write this handbook?

Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) have mushroomed in England and Wales in recent years, something viewed as an exciting phenomenon in the international ecumenical scene. Only in New Zealand and Canada is there anything approaching such a scale of development in local ecumenism, although LEPs are beginning to emerge in a number of other countries. Speakers from England and Wales tell about their experiences and several articles have been written and shared internationally.

However, it does not always seem that this international enthusiasm for local ecumenism is matched within England and Wales. Sometimes LEPs are seen as problem areas that take up too much time and energy, of both the participants and of the denominations involved. Sometimes an LEP feels isolated because it is the only one in its area. Sometimes it seems that there is so much to be considered before entering into an ecumenical partnership that it would be easier to remain within the old, familiar and trusted denominations. Sometimes church leaders are nervous about 'letting go' to allow a new being to emerge.

There is a rich wealth of experience within LEPs, but it is not always simple for it to be shared, often for geographical reasons. When difficulties arise in one area, it may not be easy to discover the solutions reached by people in LEPs in other places. This handbook is an endeavour to bring together some of the insights from people who have been working for many years in local ecumenism. It is offered, not in the sense of giving a blueprint, but to suggest some ways in which particular issues can be tackled in any one area. It is written both to encourage people grappling with the issues involved and to give practical suggestions of possible developments.

One minister in an LEP wrote: *'For much of the time the fact that we are an LEP is not a major issue – I mean that in a good way. The bigger questions of the time are those of our witness and mission e.g. How are we making new disciples? How are we bridging the culture gap between the Church and the world? How are we playing a role in the Shopping Centre? How are we encouraging good Christian-Muslim relationships?'*

Who is this handbook for?

The authors had a variety of people in mind:

- those already working in local ecumenical partnerships who are wondering where LEPs are going;
- those considering entering into a local ecumenical partnership, but who are unsure of the issues involved and how to go about it;
- those working in denominational structures who are keen to promote local ecumenism but are not sure where to start (or even those who do not believe it can be done!);
- Ecumenical Officers who are directly involved in supporting LEPs;
- sponsoring bodies who have to handle issues concerned with LEPs;
- ordinary 'people in the pews' who are interested in knowing what ecumenism is about.

(Note: see bibliography for other useful guides.)

A vision for the future of LEPs

The Consultation of LEPs in March 1994, organised by Churches Together in England, outlined a vision for the future:

'Our vision for the future of Local Ecumenical Partnerships is that they should be a local sign, symbol and foretaste of the full visible unity of the Church. We want them to be places which witness to the depths of our shared Christian heritage expressed in a rich diversity of ethnic, cultural and theological traditions, and thus able to be the Church for the whole community in which each one is set.

They should find their basis and motivation in a desire to glorify God together, to serve their local community, to be instruments of reconciliation, and to carry out their mission in all its aspects. Each partnership should be responsive to the context in which its theology must be worked out, tested and lived. We trust that others, who are not at the moment involved in many such partnerships, will be drawn in (e.g. the Black Majority, Pentecostal, and House or New Churches).

LEPs and their parent denominations or Churches have to work harder at their mutual relationships and responsibilities. LEPs need the denominations and sponsoring bodies to listen to the dilemmas and opportunities facing them and to respond with pastoral sensitivity and support. In turn LEPs are called to challenge the denominations in their

separateness and also to be challenged by them to value their respective traditions.

They are to be examples of good practice and stewardship of economic resources, promoters of a world view and educators of the wider Church. They must provide a continuing ecumenical context in which issues of worship, missionary and community policy and eucharistic sharing can be explored theologically and in other ways on behalf of the participating denominations.

LEPs are grit in the system, irritants capable of producing pearls of reconciliation and renewal.

Reconciliation will express the mutual acceptance of all members, ministries and sacraments in a form we cannot yet see in detail, but we are conscious that, as they are reconciled, the traditions of the Churches will be reshaped by the kingdom to come, and unite the Church in mission.'

By the time of the second Consultation in November 2002, it was clear that some of these hopes had not been realised. Though the number of LEPs continues to grow, it has become hard to maintain that they will, in the foreseeable future, become more than a minority of local exceptions to the divided nature of the Church without some major national breakthrough. Nevertheless, this Consultation affirmed that LEPs are a significant place in which the unity of the Church in reconciled diversity is made visible.

Biblical basis

There are many calls for unity in the Bible. Some of these are directed towards the whole created earth, others are more specifically directed towards the Church. The call to unity is not a discovery of the mid to late 20th century. It is rooted in scripture and in the tradition of the Church. It is rooted above all in the words of our Lord.

Jesus prayed for his followers: 'May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.' (John 17:21 *Revised English Bible*.) This prayer of Jesus, at the heart of the Gospel, underlies the search for Christian unity. If the Church is to be obedient to the will of our Lord, if it is to be a reflection of the life and community of the Holy Trinity, and if it is to have a concern for mission in all the world, then it needs also to look to its own life and what, in its life, it is witnessing to the world. The Church is not witnessing to the reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ when it shows itself to the world

outside to be divided. When the Church grapples with fundamental and historic divisions in an endeavour to be reconciled, then it gains credibility in its witness to the world. In discovering diversity in its life, the Church can develop new models of living with variety in community.

Ecumenical instruments: an introduction to the ecumenical structures

A new phase in ecumenical living in Britain and Ireland was inaugurated in September 1990 when the Inter Church Process *Not Strangers But Pilgrims* bore fruit in the establishment of new ecumenical structures for Britain and Ireland. This process expressed a change in approach to ecumenical theology and practice - a change which 'requires a shift in thinking, feeling and action from ecumenism as an extra which absorbs energy, to ecumenism as a dimension of all that we do, which releases energy through the sharing of resources.' The life of the British Council of Churches came to an end, and it was replaced by the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI), which later became Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and by national bodies in each of the four nations in these islands. In 1990 a number of Churches which had not been full members of the British Council of Churches, joined these new instruments, bringing together a wide variety of Christian traditions in Britain and Ireland.

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland seeks to enable and co-ordinate the life of the Churches which concern all four nations, such as international affairs, and public affairs. For information about the work of CTBI, see www.ctbi.org.uk

The ecumenical bodies exist to facilitate the working and developing ecumenical life of the denominations, as the servants of the denominations, rather than to establish an additional ecumenical layer of church life. The authority of the ecumenical structures lies in the commitment of their Member Churches.

In England

Churches Together in England (CTE) seeks to unite in pilgrimage those Churches in England which 'seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is his body' (*CTE Constitution*). CTE seeks to enable the Churches in England to come to a common mind in their life and work together. The agenda for the work of CTE is shaped by the Churches, reviewed every three years by the Forum, and is overseen and implemented by the Enabling Group which consists of officially appointed representatives of the denominations, together with

regional representatives and those elected by the Forum.

As well as enabling the ecumenical working of the Churches at national level, Churches Together in England also has the task of relating to, and supporting, the life of the Churches at intermediate level in counties, metropolitan areas and new towns. To facilitate this, Churches Together in England has two Field Officers, one for the south of England, and one in the north and midlands.

Intermediate bodies vary in their form and structure, reflecting the different history and context in which they have developed. Their agenda includes the support of all kinds of local ecumenical patterns, and the enabling of the Churches at this intermediate level to think about future planning, deployment and sharing of resources, and decision-making. Intermediate bodies can also provide an opportunity for the Churches to reflect together on the theological implications of their commitment, as well as working at the nuts and bolts of their relationship.

In England, from the beginning of the ecumenical movement, there was an emphasis on the local. The first local Council of Churches were formed in Lancashire in 1917, and numbers grew steadily over the next decades. New ways of working together resulted from the setting up of the new ecumenical instruments in 1990. Today, Churches Together groupings bring together Christians of various denominations in counties and metropolitan areas, cities, towns and villages.

In Wales

The Council of Churches for Wales was established in 1956 and drew on the experience and commitment of The Welsh Ecumenical Society and the Joint Committee for Mutual Co-operation and Understanding between the Christian Communions in Wales (yes, that was its name!).

In the years leading up to 1956 and in the early life of the Council the primary concern was the search for unity in Wales. This led to a national faith and order conference in 1963 on the theme 'The unity we seek', (following the Montreal Conference of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission) which enabled the Churches in Wales to reflect on their priorities in their search for Christian unity locally and nationally and prepared them for the seminal conference in Nottingham in 1964.

A commitment by a number of the member Churches of the Council of Churches for Wales to work together towards a Covenant for union in

Wales led to agreement by five of them in 1974 to covenant together towards visible union. The Churches involved were the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the United Reformed Church and twelve (now eighteen) congregations of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in South Wales. In 1975, the Covenant was launched at an impressive service in Aberystwyth, with the then Archbishop of Wales, G O Williams, as preacher. Expectations were high that Wales would soon have its own version of the United Churches of South and North India.

In 1976 the Commission of the Covenanted Churches was set up to foster the covenant locally and nationally. It has published a range of material to support this work including: a jointly authorised rite of Holy Communion (1981), a report on *Ministry in a Uniting Church* (1986), *Sharing Ministry* (1986), guidelines for LEPs in Wales, a baptismal service (1990), a report on *Christian Baptism and Church Membership* (1990) and a *Service of Affirmation and Reaffirmation of Faith* (1994). (See bibliography for details.)

During the 1990s the Covenanted Churches developed a proposal to consecrate an 'Ecumenical Bishop' to serve the Cardiff East Ecumenical Mission Area and to be a focus for ecumenical work more widely. However, the two largest Churches within the Covenant (the Presbyterian Church of Wales and the Church in Wales) proved unable to support this project. In the light of this disappointment, the working of the Covenant was thoroughly reviewed during 2003-4 and a new structure to enable the Covenanted Churches to work together within CYTÛN is likely to be implemented during 2005.

Through the Council of Churches for Wales the Churches were also able to develop a partnership in church and society issues. The Council made a significant contribution in a number of areas including the future of the Welsh language and culture, the role of the broadcasting media, governance and democracy in Wales, disarmament and peace, awareness-raising and action on apartheid in South Africa, and overseas aid and development. The Council developed considerable expertise in industrial and economic affairs through a series of consultations and publications and a highlight of this commitment was the denominations' joint action, through the council, during the dispute in the mining communities in 1984/5, which was regarded by many as '*the sign of hope*'.

Ecumenical collaboration in evangelism has not always been easy in Wales. In 1970 Wales for Christ was established by all the Churches to develop a

programme of training and evangelism primarily focused on the publication of the New Welsh Bible in three stages: the New Testament in 1975, the Psalms in 1979 and the whole Bible (*Y Beibl Cymraeg Newydd*) in 1988. In 2004 the publication of a revised translation of the whole Welsh Bible again proved instrumental in drawing together a new National Coalition for Evangelisation in Wales, including CYTÛN, the Evangelical Alliance, Bible Society and a number of other Churches and para-church bodies.

From the very beginning Inter-Church Aid and now Christian Aid has played a crucial role in relation to aid and development. In many villages and towns in Wales ecumenism began as a direct result of collaboration on Inter-Church Aid/Christian Aid. CYTÛN is still able to draw on the experience and resources of Christian Aid as well as CAFOD in developing its work on justice and peace, environment and development, and worship and prayer.

CYTÛN: Churches Together in Wales was established in 1990 as a successor to the Council of Churches for Wales (CCW). It shares its Basis and Commitment with the other national bodies and CTBI. It includes among its membership all those Churches and denominations that were in membership of CCW, together with the Roman Catholic Church, the German Speaking Lutheran Church and the Religious Society of Friends. Only the 18 covenanted Churches within the Baptist Union of Great Britain are in membership. The Lutheran Council of Great Britain, the Orthodox Churches, some Black Majority Churches, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Free Church Council of Wales are Observers. Christian Aid, CAFOD, the Churches' National Housing Coalition, the Wales Council on Alcohol and other Drugs, and Christians against Torture are recognised as Agencies, and there are a number of Welsh Bodies in Association in addition to those associated with CYTÛN through CTBI.

Among CYTÛN's aims and priorities are: enabling the member Churches and denominations to reflect together with a view to reaching a common mind and agreeing on common action; fostering local ecumenism (in collaboration with The Commission of the Covenanted Churches, and the Free Church Council of Wales); convening regular meetings of church leaders and chief executives; enabling specialist networks to contribute their experience and expertise, and sharing information among the Churches locally and nationally. CYTÛN functions through *Y Gymanfa* (The Assembly) which meets once every four years, the Council (meeting three times a year) and the *Llywyddiaeth* (the Praesidium), which meets four times a year.

With the devolution of many governmental functions to the National

Assembly for Wales in 1999, the Churches asked CYTÛN to appoint a National Assembly Liaison Officer. The Officer's work on behalf of the Churches has been crucial in developing links between this new governmental body and the Churches, and also with other faith communities in Wales through the Inter-Faith Council for Wales. A regular Newsletter covering developments in the Assembly is sent out to churches, and occasional more substantial books (see bibliography) as well as fuller briefings which are sent to church leaders on a regular basis.

CYTÛN collaborates with other ecumenical agencies to support about 130 local CYTÛN/Churches Together groups and about 100 Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

The intermediate level in Wales

In Wales the situation is different. Whereas in England it is normative for each county or metropolitan area to have some kind of intermediate body, in Wales the pattern varies from region to region:

- In some regions (for example South East and North East Wales), a Regional CYTÛN carries out many of the functions carried out by the intermediate bodies in England, including acting as sponsoring bodies for LEPs within the region.
- Elsewhere, LEPs have either established their own sponsoring bodies with representatives from the denominations involved, or are sponsored directly by the relevant councils of the participating Churches.
- Free Church 'Community Ministry' partnerships (*Gweinidogaethau Bro*) are also a significant part of the Welsh scene. In these areas, all the Welsh-speaking (and occasionally also English-speaking) Free Churches share one minister. Often this leads to sharing other aspects of church life also. These LEPs do not usually have a sponsoring body as the local denominational congregations often remain constitutionally separate. Copies of *Guidelines for Community Ministry* are available from denominational headquarters.

CYTÛN has established a national Forum on Local Ministry and Mission, in order to provide advice and support to LEPs of all kinds and to foster the development of further partnerships.

2 WHAT IS A LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIP?

One of the encouraging aspects of local ecumenism is that all Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) are different, and life in LEPs is always developing. LEPs reflect the character of the human communities in which they are set as much as the Churches which they bring together. This capacity to be truly local expressions of the life of the wider Church is one of their greatest strengths. LEPs exist at the meeting point of different Churches, and yet are not seeking to be a separate Church. This leads to a rich diversity of church life, offering new ways of understanding these Christian traditions and new ways of being the Church. This variety of local ecumenical experience is a matter for great rejoicing.

LEPs had their beginnings during the early 1960s, with the establishment of Areas of Ecumenical experiment, following the British Faith and Order Conference at Nottingham in 1964. These evolved into Local Ecumenical Projects and at the Swanwick Consultation on the future of LEPs in March 1994, it was recommended that the title 'Local Ecumenical Project' be changed to 'Local Ecumenical Partnership'. It was felt that this title gave a clearer indication of what was happening in local ecumenism and highlighted the way in which we were looking to partnerships between different Churches, rather than just between Christians from different traditions. The title 'partnership' also conveys something of the pilgrimage element as the Churches travel together. Partnership is about growing and developing together in the faith while 'project' may convey a more short term, one-off activity that could become separated from the parent Churches.

Definition

A Local Ecumenical Partnership is defined as existing **'where there is a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings, and/or mission projects of more than one denomination; and a recognition of that agreement by the sponsoring body, and by the appropriate denominational authorities.'** (Swanwick LEPs Consultation Report, March 1994.) This agreement is between the congregation(s) involved, participating Churches and sponsoring body.

The many different kinds of LEP, in their diversity of forms and situations, can be gathered under some general descriptions:

A Single Congregation Partnership: there is a shared congregational life, involving worship, common life and witness, decision-making, pastoral care and finance, and also a shared ministry. (For the Church of England, shared sacramental ministry under Canon B44 covers all sacramental services within the LEP, except marriages). (*See Chapter 5 for details on how to set up a Single Congregation Partnership.*)

A Covenant Partnership: a formal and solemn declaration in which Churches commit themselves to serve God together in their local situation. A Covenant Partnership is an agreement between a group of Churches, often including the Roman Catholic Church, to work together, in every way possible, in a particular designated area. These covenants acknowledge the presence of different and separate congregations, which remain distinct but have a commitment to share their faith in worship and other aspects of church life and to work and witness together within the wider community.

Covenant Partnerships often grow out of the life of a Churches Together group, and making a Covenant can enable that group to renew and express their commitment to one another. Where there is a Covenant Partnership, the Churches can also benefit from:

- recognition of their committed relationship from the wider Church and from the community which they serve together.
- continuity for their relationship for the future; the fact that they are an LEP should prompt the parent Churches to consult together over ministerial appointments.
- where the Church of England is a partner, a greater scope for sharing ministry and worship and ministry, under Canon B44.

(See Chapter 5 for details on establishing a Covenant Partnership.)

It should be noted that in Covenant Partnerships a variety of levels of involvement is possible between the different traditions within the Covenant. It is possible within the Covenant Partnership to have Churches which share eucharistic ministry and worship alongside other traditions, in the same covenant, which are not able to participate as fully in the same.

Some county Churches Together bodies support and encourage informal Covenants which are expressions of local goodwill but which are not formally recognised as LEPs. Such areas would not enable Church of England participation under Canon B44.

Shared Building: within the LEP there is at least one shared building, covered by a legal Sharing Agreement, under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969. This is not necessarily a church building; it could be a minister's house, a shop or a drop-in centre.

Variety of local models

The following sets out some examples of the variety of types and situations of Single Church, Shared Building and Covenant Partnerships. Further detailed examples can be found in Chapter 5.

- 1 **One congregation**, for example on a new housing estate, may comprise two or more churches, meeting in one building and sharing worship and ministry. There will thus be one joint congregation in one shared building. In a more established area, where one church building is coming to the end of its life, the congregation may agree to share an existing church building of another tradition. This agreement then moves toward the sharing of congregational life and ministry.
- 2 **Two congregations of different traditions**, may meet in one building and share certain aspects of their weekday life and ministry, but not their Sunday worship, for instance in a Church of England parish church where there is an Anglican service at 9.30am and a Methodist service at 11.00am. Although most Sunday worship is separate, there can be an agreement to work and share together wherever possible during the week. A pattern of regular united worship on agreed Sundays throughout the year may also develop.
- 3 **A group of congregations of different churches in an area**, which commit themselves to working together but continue with their own individual Sunday worship patterns. The shared ministry in such an area can often lead to the development of a team ministry.
- 4 **An ecumenical parish**, where the local churches of different denominations in one parish agree to share worship and ministry while still retaining separate buildings. This can lead to a renewal of the worship life of all the churches in the area, as they come to experience more of the different traditions, and to the development of an ecumenical team ministry.
- 5 **A town centre**, where there can be an agreement amongst all the churches in that area to look again at what town centre ministry is about and to develop this. This can lead to an emphasis on shared projects and weekday ministry, while the worshipping congregations still remain distinct.
- 6 **A rural area** where, for example, there are Church of England churches in three villages and a United Reformed Church church in the fourth, ministry and worship can be shared over the villages so that between the churches, the needs of each village are met.

Putting it in writing

For an LEP to be designated, various written agreements are necessary.

Some of these are legal documents - like a Sharing Agreement or the designation of a partnership with the Church of England by the Bishop. Some shape the agreement

between the churches to work together within the frame work of a Constitution. These are binding on the partners and express commitment to work together, but are not legally binding.

Sometimes people feel that they have been progressing well together without written agreements, and find it hard to believe that such agreements are necessary or helpful. However, they are important because:

- they set out clearly the expectations and obligations of the partners.
- they show that the partnership is not merely expedient but grows from a conviction that God wants the Church to be visibly united in reconciled diversity.
- they offer a yardstick against which the progress and development of work can be measured.
- for some Churches, they provide the framework within which their Canon Law can operate, making joint work possible.

Where one building is shared by more than one denomination, there will be a **Sharing Agreement** under the 1969 Sharing of Church Buildings Act.

Where a group of local churches are working across an area but retaining their separate identities and buildings, the Covenanted Partnership will be expressed in a **Declaration of Intent and a Constitution**. There may also be Sharing Agreements on some of the buildings.

When congregational life and ministry and a building are shared, there will be a **Sharing Agreement and a Declaration of Intent and Constitution**.

In some places, all three agreements will be present, for instance a building that is shared by an Anglican/Methodist congregation and a Roman Catholic congregation will have a **Sharing Agreement** on the building, a **Covenant Partnership** setting out the commitment between the Anglican/Methodist congregation and the Roman Catholic congregation, and a **Constitution** for the joint congregation, defining the way the life of the church works out in practice.

Other forms of Local Ecumenical Partnership

Chaplaincy Partnerships

- 1 **Prisons.** Prison Chaplaincy is often the basis for a good ecumenical team. Appointed by Denominational chaplains are the Church of England, the Methodist

Church and the Roman Catholic Church and it is possible for those so appointed to commit themselves to shared work in any one prison.

- 2 **Universities.** Chaplaincies in institutions of higher and further education can also be formally constituted as LEPs. In these cases, it needs to be clear who is actually entering and agreeing the LEP status at the local level, as the ‘congregational’ element changes year by year. In most cases representatives of the institution, the chaplains and the sponsoring Churches are signatories to the agreement. The intermediate body will normally be the appropriate sponsoring body.
- 3 **Health Care.** All chaplains are expected to embrace ecumenical teamwork. A Chaplaincy Covenant is for those teams where working relationships are already strong, by affirming what has already been achieved and making a commitment to continue and develop this. It also gives a standard of ecumenical co-operation for use when new posts are created and vacancies filled. The Covenant is a personal covenant between the Chaplains, endorsed by the employing NHS/Primary Care Trust, the nominating bodies and the intermediate body. (Nominating bodies are the relevant Anglican and Roman Catholic Diocese, represented by the Bishop, and the Free Churches Group, usually represented by the Free Churches Secretary for Health Care Chaplaincy.)
[Where there are Other Faith members of a chaplaincy team, they may well wish to express support for the spirit of the covenant and its practical application, while not signing up to the theological/doctrinal statement.]
- 4 **Mission Partnerships.** These often express commitment to work together in areas such as **local radio broadcasting, Industrial Mission, Agricultural Chaplaincy.** Joint work in Social Responsibility may also be designated as local ecumenical partnerships.
- 5 **Education Partnerships.** These may involve lay training, ministerial training, joint primary or secondary Church Schools.

Variety of denominational involvement

LEPs are places where two or more Christian traditions share together in some form of life, worship, work and witness and where there is a common agreement to enable this sharing to happen. This means that, denominationally, LEPs can be very varied. They normally include one of the following:

- i) Any combination of the Free Churches on their own;
- ii) A combination of Free Churches and the Church of England;
- iii) A combination of Free Churches, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church;

iv) The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church.

Other Churches that are sometimes also involved include The Salvation Army, the Religious Society of Friends, some of the Black Majority Churches, independent or New Churches, Orthodox Churches, Lutheran Churches and the Moravian Church.

The variety of denominations involved will determine the kind of agreement that is to be entered in to, as different denominations permit different things to happen.

Working in partnership

Where the Church of England is a partner in an LEP, the other Churches in the Partnership must be designated under the Ecumenical Relations Measure (1989) and under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act (1969). Churches which are not designated and which want to be part of an LEP in which the Church of England is a partner, can apply for designation if they subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and are members of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance or the British Evangelical Council (Affinity). As non-sacramental traditions, The Salvation Army and the Religious Society of Friends are covered by Guidelines issued by the Church of England House of Bishops in 1991, which give specific permission for Church of England participation in LEPs where they are partners.

It should be noted that different things are possible as different denominations co-operate together. The following are examples:

When different Free Churches work together, for example the Methodist Church, United Reformed Church or a member church of the Baptist Union, it is possible to have a fully interchangeable ministry. When the Church of England is involved, sacramental sharing is permissible (including joint confirmation) and some shared ministry is allowed under Canon B44), but ministry is not fully interchangeable with other traditions. When the Roman Catholic Church is involved, general eucharistic sharing is not permissible, but there is growing participation of the Roman Catholic Church in Covenant Partnerships, shared buildings and non-eucharistic shared worship.

3 AREAS THAT NEED ADDRESSING

In setting up an LEP there are various areas of wider concern about which it is helpful to be aware. These are not so much matters that relate to the immediate practicalities of setting up an LEP, as underlying issues which, when taken into account, can help the smooth progress towards an LEP.

Sharing our spirituality

Each person and each Church has been shaped by God in a variety of ways over a number of years. While there can be a temptation to think that the way I have been shaped by God or the way my Christian community has been shaped by God is the primary way in which God works, in fact the diversity of ways in which God works is as great as the creation which is God's gift to us. Sharing our experiences of the presence of God, either personally or from our different traditions, can help to enrich the whole Christian community. Such experiences are deep rooted and intensely personal and need sensitivity and space in order to be shared with people from different backgrounds. An initial encounter with a different form of spirituality has the potential to feel alienating as well as renewing.

For an LEP to grow and develop, there needs to be a shared spiritual base. This can involve a variety of ways of praying as well as time for reflection on the way in which God is leading the particular community. Opportunities for exploring different patterns of spirituality can be life-giving and part of the Church's witness to a world which is said to be seeking spirituality, but not always finding it within the institutional Church.

Developing our ecclesiology

i) How do we understand the nature of the Church?

Ecclesiology relates to our understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church. It is helpful in LEPs for ecclesiological questions to be addressed. What is the understanding of the nature of the Church that we each bring from our own traditions?

An example from the wider Church: the Methodist Church emphasises the Connexion, placing a strong emphasis on the national inter-connection of the whole people of God, while the Roman Catholic Church emphasises both the importance of the wider Church internationally through the primacy of the Pope and the importance of the local Church as found in the Diocese.

An example from the local church: in one LEP there was a heated discussion about whether or not to take the offertory during the singing of a hymn. For some people, in traditions in which it was less customary to say a creed regularly, the singing of hymns

was an affirmation of faith and therefore should be respected as such and nothing else should take place at the same time. For other traditions, in which the liturgy in itself was primary, the singing of hymns was secondary and therefore could have other aspects of worship taking place at the same time.

As each tradition looks to its own self-understanding and to the roots of that self-understanding and seeks to share this openly with others, in an atmosphere of giving and receiving, so a richer sense of the nature of the Church across our different traditions can be experienced. As together we look at our roots in scripture and tradition, in reason and experience, so we rediscover for ourselves the purpose and calling of God in the life of the Church. In the different Christian traditions, scripture, tradition, reason and experience have played different roles. When people of different Christian traditions come together, it is important to look again at those areas which have particularly shaped each one so that people may engage in the ecumenical dialogue one with another.

[Note: The self-understanding of each denomination with regard to theology and practice varies. Each denomination has been asked to make a contribution to this handbook about its own self-understanding with regard to theology and practice. (*see Appendix 2*)]

Sharing what are perceived as the treasures from the different traditions can help to enlarge the understanding of the Church in each place. However, it is also important to be aware of the times when one tradition's treasures are perceived as another tradition's burdens!

ii) What is the relationship between the Church and the world?

Working locally on a renewed understanding of the nature of the Church is also helpful when it comes to questions that deal with the relationship between the Church and the world, and between Christianity and other faiths. These are areas of discussion that find a practical focus in an LEP as it seeks to engage in ministry and mission in the community in which it is set. It is good for this practical focus to be undergirded by a shared understanding of the nature of the Church in order to be clear about the kind of mission that can be taken in any one local community and the kind of dialogue that can be engaged in with people of other faiths. For example, does the LEP see its primary task as engaging in mission to a particular local geographical community, or as gathering a like-minded congregation of worshippers?

The area of ecclesiology embraces many aspects of the life of the Church. Sometimes, one or another aspect will have a specific focus at any one time in the life of an LEP. The ecclesiology of a Church is shaped by her historical experience and has an effect on the way in which leadership is understood.

iii) Are LEPs new denominations?

It is sometimes said that Local Ecumenical Partnerships are pre-empting national unity schemes by forming new denominations of their own. Some people fear that traditional denominational patterns are not recognisable in any one LEP. However, within any one denomination, each local congregation develops different styles and patterns of life as appropriate to the local situation. The development of LEPs raises the question, faced by all our traditions, of the appropriate ways in which the local church belongs to the wider Church. In an age in which life is becoming more fragmented, there is a temptation for local congregations to become more independent of each other and of the wider Church.

LEPs belong to their parent denominations. The fact that an LEP is defined by having a written agreement approved by the participating denominations makes it clear that the formal link with the denominations is retained. It is not possible to constitute an LEP without the assent of the denominations involved. The aim of an LEP is to be a forerunner of what might be possible for the Church more widely, not to be another denomination.

It is useful for an LEP to look at itself and see whether it has recognisable elements from its partner traditions readily visible in its life. This does at times mean engaging in study about the recognisable elements in each of the participating traditions. It is also important for the denominations involved and the LEP to establish a good, ongoing, working relationship, in order to sustain the sense of the LEP belonging to the different denominations, and vice versa (*see also Chapter 9 Cutting Edges of Ecumenical Work: Working Towards Unity*). LEPs are not new denominations; they are local experiences of the given unity of the Churches.

Understanding our histories

The life of an LEP is about the present and the future. However there can be hiccups along the way which arise out of our different understandings of history.

We each come with our own particular understanding of history which has shaped us, sometimes unconsciously, over a period of years. For example, the Act of Uniformity in 1662 can be seen by Anglicans as a great leap forward in stabilising the Church, while at the same time be seen by members of those Free Churches which have their root in dissent as a time of persecution and suffering. While this Act took place at a different time in this country's history, its consequences in terms of such aspects as whether or not to use a set liturgical form are still felt in contemporary discussions in LEPs with regard to forms of service.

Historic divisions in the Churches, which have been in place for centuries, are not resolved overnight. It is helpful to have an understanding of the history of our

traditions in order to see some of the tensions that might arise within an LEP. If an LEP is not to become either separated from the historic denominations. Or a new denomination, it has to take seriously the legacies of the past. However, these constraints can be seen as possibilities - and an exploration of perceived constraints can be enriching. In studying and understanding the matters which have traditionally divided the Churches over the centuries, there can be a renewed grasp of those things which are central to the faith and which we can all share. It is also interesting to reflect on the ways in which social, economic and political factors have been bound up with perceived theological differences in the different traditions.

Short courses in the things that are, and have been, significant to our different Christian traditions can be helpful in developing an understanding of these differences.

This can happen in a fairly informal way. A number of people, either lay or ordained, representing different traditions, can speak about what their tradition means to them, and say something about the historic background of the contemporary understanding. Such short courses can be mounted on an informal basis within any one LEP, or can be mounted across a town or a wider area, where resources from existing denominational Churches can be shared for the benefit of all.

Learning about leadership

Differing ecclesiologies and histories have brought the Churches to a position in which there are a variety of understandings about leadership, locally, regionally and nationally.

One difference relates to the weight that is given to a council of the Church and the significance that is given to a person. For Baptist churches, the Church Meeting has a key role to play in giving leadership to the local church. Each local church is regarded as complete in itself. Regional leadership is shared in ministry teams of two or three people, with one person being the team leader. For the Church of England, the 'local' church is the Diocese, with the Bishop as the key person holding together the life of the Diocese.

This varied experience comes to the fore when setting up an LEP. The appropriate leadership of each church needs to be involved at an early stage. For Baptists, this means the meeting of the local congregation; for the Church of England, it means the Diocesan Bishop.

The question of leadership also needs to be addressed when considering the way the LEP will work at the grassroots. What is the relationship between the lay leaders and the ordained ministers? What is the relationship between ordained ministers of different Christian traditions?

Coping with our cultures

People are shaped by the cultures from which they come. This is no less the case in the Church than in the wider life of each country. We need to be able to explore together the cultures which shape us and the contexts in which we find ourselves. Culture takes a variety of forms, such as the ethos of a nation; the difference of class; ‘the way we’ve always done things’.

Relating to the ethos of the nation can be an area in which Christians across different traditions are united. There are similar factors which shape the life of a country. These include growing affluence, post-modernism and concern about education and health. They give common cause for concern to all Churches. But relating to the nation can also be an area of difference, such as between the Established Church and other Churches.

At the local level, differences in such areas as age, class or housing environment need addressing in order for a community to be able to work well together. Bringing together an urban and a suburban congregation or a congregation full of young people with a congregation consisting primarily of retired people, takes a measure of mutual understanding.

Culture for people in the church can also mean ‘the way we’ve always done things’ in any one place. It only needs a couple of years in the life of a congregation for it to be said of any one aspect of the life of the church ‘but this is the way we’ve always done this’. It is important to unpack the reasons for the development of a particular local custom, in order to understand whether it is fundamental to the life of a congregation or could be developed when the next phase in the life of that congregation emerges in an LEP.

Unpacking our psychologies

We also need to take time to look at the psychological factors that have shaped us and continue to influence the way we live and think. What is the threshold of comfort when it comes to change?

Raising questions such as the times of services and differing patterns of worship quickly takes us into the psychological arena. We have been shaped and given security as individuals by customs and practices to which we’ve become accustomed, sometimes from our childhood years. Whether an LEP is formed by a group of individuals coming together in a new housing area or by existing congregations committing themselves to working more closely with one another, there are the same individual psychological factors at work.

We need to understand and address the factors that shape individuals if we are seeking to

come closer together with different communities. An LEP needs to help people to feel ‘at home’ by providing points of recognition and affirmation that balance the areas of unfamiliarity and newness.

Taking time to listen to different people’s stories plays an important role in developing a ‘safe’ place in which people then feel free to take risks. The element of time is itself significant and involves making decisions in a way in which people do not feel under pressure.

Making sense of our organisational structures

Each of our Churches is organised differently. At the congregational level, for example, Baptists have deacons, Methodists have church councils, and Anglicans have a Parochial Church Council. The United Reformed Church has church secretaries who exercise a key local leadership role, Anglicans have church wardens, and Methodists have church stewards.

It is helpful to take time to recognise the different lay leadership roles that there are in our different traditions, as well as the different conciliar structures that exist for decision-making purposes. Bringing together people of two or more different parts of the Church means that the question of the appropriate level of organisation needs to be addressed (*see also Chapter 5 iv and v on the Constitution and ‘is everyone agreed?’*).

The way our Churches are organised can reflect an understanding of where power lies in our different traditions. However it is also important to be attentive to the reality of where power lies in any particular community of people, as this can differ from the stated structure. Being attentive to questions of church government can feel like a secondary matter to the issue of shared mission. However, inattentiveness to this area can lead to people being surprised by unexpected conflicts.

4 ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF LEPS

For many people in LEPS life has positive advantages.

Particular joys

Particular joys are described by two different LEPS (in part of a survey undertaken for this book) as:

- Worship of a good standard and well attended. Our new Communion Service booklet produced by the Ministers, and based on United Reformed Church and Methodist services.
- Ministers have fostered a sense of teamwork and collegueship, enabling each to work in particular areas of church life without being burdened by everything.
- The LEP is a demonstration to the wider ecumenical grouping that Covenanting Together can produce visible unity.
- A wider feeling of 'belonging to the one World Church'.
- Greater openness to the search for unity.
- An awareness of and freedom to experience the rich diversity of the heritage of the different traditions.
- The absence of denominational 'hang-ups' or defence of traditions.
- Proof that the love of God, through Christ, transcends all boundaries.
- Benefiting from the best of both traditions.
- A bigger church family to share and care.
- A united church can make a bigger impact in a local area than separate denominational churches.

Sharing in mission

The search for closer relationships between Christians of different traditions at the grassroots is part of the mission imperative of the Church in the 21st century. Local ecumenism can be seen in a less than positive light as a matter of ecclesiastical tinkering, bailing people out who are in a difficult financial situation, or a diversion from reaching out into the world. However, at its best, it fulfils the mission of the Church, as people reach out together in Christ's name to witness to the Gospel and to serve the local community. In an age in which people are sitting more lightly to denominational differences, and in which new ways of being Church are sought, LEPS speak of the common faith that we share and enable different ways of worship and outreach to be developed.

Deepening faith from an understanding of different traditions

Coming closer to people from different traditions gives an opportunity to deepen our

own Christian faith. As we learn why areas of faith and practice have been important for people in other denominations, it is possible for our own faith to be deepened and our own practice of the Christian life to be broadened. This can happen in a whole variety of ways, to be discovered anew in each LEP:

- Witnessing a baptism by immersion can be a deeply moving experience that evokes a personal renewal of faith.
- Entering into the devotion of the Stations of the Cross can lead to a deepening experience of the reality of our Lord's Passion.
- Sharing together in a weekly Eucharist rather than once a month or once a quarter can be an enriching experience and can give a new opportunity for a deeper reflection on the death of Christ for all the world.
- Freer forms of worship can be seen as a cutting edge of mission, making services more accessible to those who are not used to church-going.
- Different forms of oversight, authority and decision-making can lead to a renewed understanding of both the New Testament Church and the historic tradition of the Church. On the one hand, congregational decision-making can help to deepen understanding of the participation of lay people in the life of the Church. On the other hand, episcopal oversight can foster a growing awareness of the wider unity and continuity of the Church. The Methodist circuit system is sometimes seen as a model for local ecumenical development, when a number of congregations come together in one area to share a common life and to share in a common ministry.

A model for reconciliation

In a world that is perceived as increasingly divided on a national and international scale and in which inter-personal relationships are sometimes seen as increasingly difficult, LEPs offer the possibility of new models of reconciliation. As a local community has to grapple with issues which have been divisive during the history of the Church and yet is able to work positively with these issues to create renewed communities, so LEPs can offer new possibilities of hope. This can happen, for instance, in an LEP which is able to come to a working agreement about such matters as the practice of baptism, or the reservation of the blessed sacrament, where the LEP involves traditions which have a variety of different beliefs and practices in these two areas. This means not only looking at the theological issues involved, but also at ways of working in which strongly held differing views can be drawn together creatively. In many LEPs, what unites is discovered to be much stronger than what has historically divided.

Isolation and networking

When an LEP is established in isolation from other LEPs, problems can arise through the lack of a wider support network for that LEP. Those at the grass roots can feel that

they are on their own facing these questions. It is helpful to be in touch with others who share similar experiences, in order both to gain support and not to re-invent the wheel. Systems of support can be developed through the work of the sponsoring body for the area. There are also, from time to time, opportunities for sharing and training at intermediate, regional and national levels. Churches Together in England have information about gatherings for people coming new to LEPs. Regional sponsoring bodies arrange occasional gatherings for LEPs. Please contact the county ecumenical officer for further information.

More mailings

The greater number of denominations that share together in an LEP, the more will be the mailings that arrive – from the denominations and ecumenically. There will be statistical forms to return, programmes the congregation is invited to join in, papers for commenting on, and so forth. It is important for LEPs to make their voices heard in the wider councils of the participating denominations. However, it is also important for a certain amount of local prioritising to take place so that the LEP doesn't sink beneath the weight of incoming mail. It can be helpful to have a number of people who will receive the different mailings and then meet from time to time with the priest or minister or local lay leader to see in what ways the mailing should be taken forward.

Increasing meetings

It sometimes seems that the growth of ecumenism has more to do with the growth in the number of meetings than anything else. It is true that when embarking on the ecumenical journey, the number of meetings increases in the short term. Inevitably, it takes time to reach agreement and understanding between people of different traditions. It is important to give the time that is needed to build relationships. However this stage does not need to continue forever. As the churches grow in understanding, they should be able to work closely together, and this may well include the replacement of parallel denominational groups and meetings by joint ones.

- In Milton Keynes, the creation of the Mission Partnership across the city has been an attempt to reduce the number of separate denominational meetings at which LEPs need to be represented.
- In the Cirencester Methodist Circuit where there are ministers of the United Reformed and Methodist Churches working together across the Circuit, there is a local agreement that the URC minister will go to the URC meetings and the Methodist minister to the Methodist meetings, instead of both going to all the meetings.

Is being ecumenical only a response to the need to be economical?

Sometimes it seems that it is necessary to be ecumenical for economical reasons; it is cheaper to share church buildings and it saves on person power to share ministry. When building new churches on a new housing estate, it is certainly cheaper to build one than to build three or four. It can be argued that it is a better use of resources, but this will not be the only reason for embarking on this course of action. It is possible that the Holy Spirit works through a lack of available finance or people to encourage new ways of sharing, which are more effective for the overall mission of the Church. Lack of funds in itself can lead to an increased dependence on the God who embraces all our Churches and takes us beyond the barriers we try to erect.

Liberal or evangelical: theological uniformity?

It is argued that the ecumenical movement has over-emphasised catholicity and endeavoured to embrace a wide range of theological perspectives without actually addressing 'truth' questions with regard to the Christian faith. There is instead an emphasis on the need for a growth in mutual understanding, when people of two or more different traditions come together.

Being ecumenical is seen as being at the opposite end of the spectrum to being evangelical, or being Pentecostal, or being independent. There are also times when it feels as if ecumenism works against evangelism, because of the amount of time that needs to be taken in order to develop mutual understanding between different traditions.

However, one of the strands of the ecumenical journey is the renewal of the Churches for mission in its widest sense. Just as LEPs have the possibility of developing new understandings from differing Christian traditions, so they may also draw from different theological perspectives. Thus, it is possible in an LEP for the perceived dividing lines between such perspectives as liberal and evangelical to be crossed to their mutual benefit and new theological insights about the Christian faith to be gained by both. This can, in fact, offer a new model of working to the major Christian traditions where these theological emphases are sometimes just as divisive.

Engaging together in evangelism can often appeal to people outside the Church, who find difficulties with what they perceive as inter-church wrangling. It also gets round the 'escape clause' sometimes used by nominal Christians who claim to belong to another denomination than that of the Christian who visits them.

5 HOW TO SET UP AN LEP

Each Local Ecumenical Partnership represents Churches moving from co-operation to commitment in a particular local context, and partnerships are shaped not only by the participating denominations but by their local situation, by the particular human community which they serve.

An LEP is not the beginning of local commitment, but the expression of local commitment; nor is it the end result of local commitment, as the partnership is there to enable ecumenical relationships to continue to develop, both between those churches that make up the LEP, and with other Christian communities in the area who are not part of the formal relationship at its inauguration. LEPs are called to be ecumenical instruments, enabling all kinds of relationships in their local situation. It is important that LEPs are conscious of the possibility that they may deepen their relationship with one another at the expense of a broader spread of relationships with other churches. The partnership should remain open to the possibility of other churches joining in the future, and be open to working with them in informal ways in the meantime.

Getting started

In the beginning there is a good relationship. This might be between churches, between ministers, between lay people. And someone is brave enough to make the first move with the suggestion that the existing good relationship between Christian communities in a particular place should be recognised in a formal commitment to one another and to God. This first move might be made by anyone locally, or sometimes it might be the county or denominational ecumenical officer who asks whether this might be an appropriate next step. At this point the potential for development needs to be as open as possible, and those involved locally need to get as much information as they can about what is feasible and what is not. It can be helpful to invite the ecumenical officer to come and discuss the situation at this stage, and he or she will be able to suggest other LEPs in similar kinds of contexts. These could be visited by those involved locally, so that they can see how things are on the ground, and hear both the positive and negative sides of the experience. This initial phase of consultation needs to be as wide as possible, and it is important that everyone involved is kept well informed. Those involved locally should talk to the ministers and leaders of other local churches or possible partners in the LEP to find out whether they are interested, making sure that they are kept informed even if they decide not to join at this stage. It is most important initially, and in all subsequent phases in the development of an LEP, that everyone is able to feel that they have the information they need, and that their opinion of what is proposed has been heard.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships in practice

The village

This LEP is a single church in a small rural community and is based on very long-term relationships between two Christian communities. The congregations know one another well and had an expectation of working together which was expressed in a local covenant three years ago. When the Methodist church discovered last year that their building was in need of extensive repairs, it seemed natural for the two communities to move into one building. A sharing agreement was prepared for the parish church, and the local covenant was re-drawn to embrace the new situation; on Easter Day the two communities became one ecumenical congregation. Those from the Methodist church made up one third of the total congregation, and the two communities engaged in a careful discussion about how the worship and life of the new congregation would reflect the contributions of both traditions. The new congregation uses the Methodist hymnbook 'Hymns and Psalms ', and is part of the Methodist Circuit Preaching Plan, so that the vicar gives three appointments a quarter to the circuit and Methodist local preachers come regularly to take part in worship. The Methodist minister who has pastoral charge is involved in leading worship and in the life of the congregation. On the third Sunday in the month, Morning Prayer has become a Methodist morning service, and Holy Communion on the fifth Sunday is a Methodist communion service with distribution in individual cups. There is one church council, and the ecumenical congregation is represented on both the Anglican Deanery Synod and the Methodist Circuit Meeting. Local people describe a renewed sense of purpose in fulfilling their vocation together to be God's people in this village. Questions arise over how they can work with the parish church in the other village within the Anglican benefice, and with Roman Catholics and Baptists who live in the village but travel to the nearby town for their church life.

In Wales

In Wales there will be communities where worship is available in Welsh or English or in a combination of both. This can complicate attempts at collaboration, but a solution has been found to group churches in language families.

The new housing estate

This LEP began not with developed local relationships but with an almost blank sheet of paper. Five years ago, representatives of the churches met with one another and with planning officers and developers and agreed on one building to serve the needs of the new community. This multi-purpose building would be located alongside other community facilities, including First and Middle Schools, shops and a doctors' surgery and situated on a level site. Two years later the first minister, from the United

Reformed Church, was appointed jointly by the denominations. He and his family were among the first people to move in, and he began by gathering a few Christians, whom he met through involvement in the embryonic community, to worship in his house. Among these were three Methodists from an adjoining estate, who had been travelling some distance to worship, but who now committed themselves to support the new church. A constitution was prepared for the new church which was flexible enough to cover them over a period of change and development; gradually people moved in to the new houses, mud became roads, the schools were opened and the growing congregation began to meet for worship in the school hall. Two years later, when there were thirty people meeting regularly, funding arrangements had been agreed and a sharing agreement prepared, the denominations gave the 'go ahead' to begin construction of the new building. It now provides a home for community groups during the week and for a Seventh Day Adventist Church on Saturdays. A Roman Catholic congregation worships in the building at 9am on Sundays, before the ecumenical congregation meets for worship at 10.30am. Sometimes the congregations share coffee between the services and they also have occasional shared worship at festivals and a joint Christmas card which goes to the whole local area with details of all the Christmas services.

The market town

In this market town there was a Council of Churches which flourished for twenty years doing the things that Councils of Churches often do - Christian Aid Week, Lent Groups, a Good Friday March of Witness, social events and visiting speakers. There was sometimes a sense of people coming along just to support the events, but on the whole good relationships were established between the churches. In 1990 the introduction of new national ecumenical instruments meant that Roman Catholics became more deeply involved, and they brought a fresh enthusiasm for the ecumenical task. The Council of Churches became Churches Together and undertook an audit of their resources in people and buildings and of the needs of the town. The audit prompted the churches to begin an after school club and a holiday play scheme. The Churches Together decided to ask the Christian Fellowship and the Anglicans to undertake youth work on behalf of the other churches. The churches found that they experienced a growing sense of commitment as they got to know one another through these shared projects, and two years after the change of structure they decided to make a local covenant, to express their relationship and their hope that it would continue to deepen. This local covenant embraces nine congregations from seven denominations - Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Christian Fellowship, Religious Society of Friends and Salvation Army. The focus of their inter-relationship is on mission and service to the town, and they continue some of the former activities of the Council of Churches. This kind of LEP is repeated in differing forms and with differing combinations of denominations: in Wales it might include the Union of Welsh Independents and the Presbyterian Church of Wales.

Local Ecumenical Partnerships have also been established in Prison and College Chaplaincies, in Industrial Mission Christian Training Courses, in inner city contexts where the Churches might otherwise have had to withdraw from the area, and in a huge range of other community and chaplaincy situations. There are many other possible models for developing LEPs, and from the examples above it can be seen that people begin to set up LEPs in a wide variety of situations. The decision to move from co-operation to commitment is always part of a continuing process, although it is easier to see this process when the formation of the LEP involves existing congregations moving to deepen their relationship. In the example of the new estate, the existing relationship is between the denominations at the level of the intermediate body, acting as sponsoring body, and church leaders.

An LEP is a commitment by the whole Church: not only the local congregation but the rest of their denomination must give approval to the form of local involvement through their structures for decision-making. Whatever form of commitment is proposed, it is important that Churches do not move forward to make a commitment to one another if a large proportion of those involved locally are unsure; it is better to spend more time in preparation for the establishment of the project than to move forward on a limited commitment. The partnership cannot be built only on the enthusiasm of a few people, but must express the vision and hopes of a majority of those involved locally.

Moving on

Those involved in the local situation now move into the next stage of the conversation, in consultation with the denominational authorities who need to think through the implications for ministry, finance, planning, resources, and buildings, and who will help with the theological implications as well as the practical ones. These might arise in the areas of worship, structures for church government, different polity and sources of authority, styles of mission, concepts of the church, membership, sacraments, re-marriage of divorced people and religious language and meaning, to mention only a few. This theological exploration of the ground rules is not a search for problems, but recognizes that there are differences between the denominations, and that the implications for each local situation need to be carefully considered. The next stage in the establishment of the LEP is the preparation of a suitable 'Declaration of Intent' and Constitution.

Declarations of Intent and Constitutions for Local Ecumenical Partnerships

i) Why do we need a Declaration of Intent and Constitution?

The **Declaration of Intent** sets out the shape of the relationship between the churches: who is involved, why they are drawing closer together and becoming committed to one another under God, what is the practical outworking of their developing relationship in

mission and service. As this is a statement of Intent, it does not only describe the present situation, but also looks to the future, and to the ways in which the churches hope their partnership will grow.

There is sometimes resistance to drawing up Constitutions, but this document exists first and foremost to enable the life and work of the LEP. The constitution is designed to accommodate the needs of the partner churches in this local situation. From the definition set out in the Declaration of Intent comes the formulating of appropriate structures to support and enable the life of the project, safeguarding the underlying theological principles of the participating denominations (for example over baptism, initiation and membership). The constitution makes clear the expectations the local church has of the intermediate body or of the sponsoring body, and of the denominations.

ii) Where to go for help and advice

Churches Together in England, relevant church headquarters and county or denominational ecumenical officers will work with the local church and liaise with sponsoring denominations over the initial drafts, so that time and effort are not wasted. Denominational ecumenical officers will also be able to offer any denominationally specific information that is required. It is important to begin with one of the draft outlines agreed by the partner Churches at national level and published by Churches Together in England in order to avoid re-invention of the wheel. For names and addresses of county ecumenical officers, contact denominational ecumenical officers or Churches Together in England.

iii) The Declaration of Intent

The Declaration of Intent is a brief agreed statement which outlines the theological basis for working together, and the nature and purpose of the covenant commitment which is being entered into. Agreed Guidelines for the form of a Declaration of Intent are available from Churches Together in England. The Declaration of Intent often forms the focal point for the act of worship which inaugurates the LEP. If the partnership is in a specialised context, for example in a prison or school chaplaincy, then the Declaration of Intent needs to be drawn up to embrace and describe the particular circumstances.

iv) The Constitution

The Constitution should also be based on the nationally agreed guidelines, available from Churches Together in England, but should reflect the local situation, as this also forms the distinctive character of the LEP.

If partner Churches will be sharing buildings, it is important to make sure that a joint

council, established according to the Constitution, is included in the sharing agreement as specified by the *Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969*. The sharing agreement is a legal document, and is separate from the LEP constitution (see *Under the Same Roof: Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969*, CTBI 1994).

v) **Is everyone agreed?**

- **The Local Church.** The Constitution will probably be drafted by the county and denominational ecumenical officers, working together, and in consultation with the local people and sponsoring Churches. When a Constitution passes through several drafts, it is important to ensure that everyone is working to the most recent version. The Declaration of Intent and Constitution must reflect the intention of the wider congregation, and it is important that those drafting are careful about the process of explanation, working in dialogue with those in the local situation before a final draft is produced. This must be brought to the Church Meeting, PCC or other appropriate church bodies for approval, if the proposed LEP involves the coming together of a number of existing congregations. This is important both for the legal process and so that the partnership begins with as great a sense of unity of purpose as possible.
- **The Sponsoring Body.** In their work of drafting, the county and denominational ecumenical officers will have worked in consultation with the intermediate body or sponsoring body or the sub-group of the intermediate body responsible for this area. This pattern of consultation reduces the chance of the Constitution being rejected at this point, which can be a difficult experience for local churches who may have put a lot of commitment into the draft. Apart from the approval of the representatives on behalf of their denominations, the intermediate body also has to approve the constitution on its own behalf because terms of the Constitution will make demands on the intermediate body in terms of support and review.
- **The Participating Churches.** Although the intermediate body is constituted of representatives of the Churches, the proposed Constitution must still be referred to the appropriate structures for regulating ecumenical relationships in each of the partner Churches. In some denominations this will be a national ecumenical officer, in others it may be the diocesan bishop or a committee at the intermediate level. Sometimes these denominational people, who see many LEP constitutions, are able to make helpful suggestions about any remaining points of difficulty. It is important that the LEP is seen to be established with the proper authority of the sponsoring Churches. This makes the exercise legal or officially approved, and therefore enables inter-church living to develop within the LEP in ways which would not be permissible elsewhere, and also helps those participating in the local commitment to remain part of the wider Church, as represented by their denominations. The local commitment is made in the context of the universality of the Church.

vi) Covenant Partnerships

A similar process is followed for drawing up the documents for a Covenant Partnership.

In situations where the Covenant has developed from a local Churches Together group, there may be quite a large number of member Churches.

vii) Celebrating commitment

Local Ecumenical Partnerships should be inaugurated in a public and celebratory way, at a service jointly planned by the church leaders, ecumenical officers, representatives of the local church and the intermediate or sponsoring body, who are all seen to be committed to the new relationship between the churches set out in the Declaration of Intent and given substance in the Constitution. At such services, the Declaration of Intent is usually signed by the church leaders and representatives of the partnership and of the sponsoring body.

viii) Reviewing and renewing commitment

Procedures for changing and adapting the Constitution will be set out in the Constitution, and changes must be agreed by the intermediate body.

It is usually stated that the Constitution is for a set period, five or seven years, after which the life of the LEP is reviewed, the Constitution may be revised if necessary and the LEP is re-designated by the intermediate body (and in the case of the Church of England by the diocesan bishop) for a further period. The Declaration of Intent can be useful as a measure for development and as a record of the founding vision of the project in this process of review (*see Chapter 8 for more details on reviews of LEPs*).

6 LIFE IN AN LEP

Life in an LEP is experienced in a variety of ways. LEPs are shaped by the different contexts in which they find themselves and the different denominations which are involved. This chapter is by no means an exhaustive list of what can be done together but looks at some of the more complex issues which arise when people of different traditions join together. This means that many areas which make up the life of an LEP are not covered, for instance social and community action, or mission and evangelism.

This is not because these aspects of life are not integral to each LEP, but rather because this chapter looks at areas which are specific to LEPs and are often at the forefront when an LEP is being established or developing its work.

This chapter is particularly looking at LEPs which are already experiencing, or wanting to experience, shared congregational life, team ministries, or shared staffing. It also covers questions about how decisions are reached and touches on some matters to do with the sharing of property. These are all areas where we differ denominationally to a greater or lesser extent. This chapter explores some ways in which it is possible to work together.

Worship

Worship can be a matter in which our differences are most clearly focused and seem to be most hard to reconcile. It can also be the most renewing experience for the life of any one local church and the main way in which people are brought together in a deepening unity.

i) Questions and possibilities

Many questions arise when congregations of two or more traditions first encounter one another and begin to compare notes on their current worship practices. These practices are often sensitive because they have shaped denominational identity. Below are outlined some of the questions which may be raised and an indication of a few of the responses that it is possible to make in an LEP.

Should there be individual cups or one chalice at Communion?

In an LEP it is possible to decide to have one or the other, or to alternate the practice on successive Sundays, or to offer people the choice at the same service.

Should there be alcoholic, de-alcoholised, or non-fermented wine?

In an LEP there can be an interesting discussion on the use of different kinds of wine

and the background to this use. In some LEPs people have decided to use one kind of wine or the other; in other LEPs, both kinds of wine are available.

Should people stay in their seats or come forward to receive Communion?

This question can lead to a useful discussion about the different principles underlying why some traditions remain in their seats and others move forward. In an LEP it is possible to alternate practices or, by common agreement, to decide on one practice or another.

Should wafers or bread be used?

This question opens up the possibility of discussing our different practices and customs and their historical origins before coming to a consensus as to local practice.

Should services of Holy Communion be daily/weekly/monthly/or quarterly?

In differing LEPs it is possible to have differing patterns, depending in part on the different traditions involved. When the Roman Catholic Church is part of a partnership, there would normally be a daily Mass. In LEPs with Anglican involvement there will be more regularly weekday celebrations of Holy Communion. In some LEPs, weekly Sunday services of Holy Communion will be the norm, in others fortnightly. In some there will be an earlier service of Holy Communion service and a later non-eucharistic service each Sunday morning.

What about the hymn book? Should it be of one denomination or another? Should it be a new, modern hymn book? Should it contain more traditional hymns? Should a book be dispensed with and an overhead projector or PowerPoint be used?

Some LEPs opt for a hymn book of another country's Uniting Church, such as *With One Voice* from the Australian Uniting Church. Other LEPs with a more informal approach will use an overhead projector or PowerPoint. For some LEPs the forming of the partnership is an opportunity to buy a new hymn book; for others it is an opportunity to experience alternately the hymn books of the participating traditions.

What about the liturgy? Should it be printed out, the same each week, or not printed out but developed spontaneously?

In LEPs it is possible for the practice to vary. However, it should be noted that the adoption of regular eucharistic or baptismal liturgies can need formal denominational approval.

Should there be a rotation of services from the different traditions or the development of new, ecumenical services?

In some LEPs new work is done on developing patterns of worship. In others there is a rotation week by week of services from the different traditions.

What about musical accompaniment? Organ/piano/guitars/ the voice alone?

In LEPs, as in one-denominational congregations, the answer to this question often depends on the variety of gifts available within the congregation.

What about the length of the sermon? Five, ten or twenty minutes, or half an hour?

A useful discussion can be held in LEPs about the role of the sermon in our different traditions, as well as a review of effective ways of communicating the Gospel. Views on timing will vary, depending on the traditions that are participating in the LEP.

Who will lead the service? Should more than one tradition participate in the leading of worship each Sunday? Should there be leadership by more than one tradition on a rotating basis across several weeks? Is it sufficient for one person, of one tradition, to be authorised to be the regular leader of worship in an ecumenical congregation?

In some LEPs, one person of one tradition will be authorised to be the regular leader of worship. However it is helpful to have people of the other traditions represented in that LEP sharing in the leading of worship, if only from time to time. The formation of local worship teams from members of the congregation can be a helpful asset. The Church of England specifies a certain number of Sundays a year in an LEP where there needs to be a service led by a Church of England priest.

Different issues arise for one-denominational congregations, sharing in partnership with other churches up the road. How do they come to experience the richness and variety of worship that is possible across the traditions?

It is possible to develop a programme of shared worship where on a regular basis visits are made to other churches in the same partnership in the area. These visits can be by groups of people from one congregation, or by whole congregations. There can also be exchanges by those who are the leaders of worship, either leading worship as they would normally do in their own tradition, or leading worship in the style of the congregation they are visiting. Shared worship does not necessarily mean developing new ecumenical services; it can mean sharing as fully as possible in the services offered within one particular denominational tradition.

While some of these questions are specifically ecumenical ones, others are to be found within any one of our Christian traditions. When these questions arise, it is important to take time to consider the views underlying the questions. Often, personal preferences and non-theological factors will be involved in views about appropriate forms of worship. These are not questions to which there is necessarily one answer, and local practice will helpfully vary.

While there are many questions that need discussing in LEPs, it is also true that there are many possibilities of renewed and varying ways of worship that can be enriching to a congregation. As the congregation comes to experience something of the wealth of what each tradition has to offer, so its own worship life can be developed and enhanced.

Worshipping in an LEP can give increased access to the growing variety of worship material that is available across our traditions. Material from any one tradition can be used by a variety of traditions coming together in an LEP, thus enhancing the worship of that LEP. The Liturgical Renewal Movement within the Roman Catholic Church has much to offer. Worship material from places further afield, such as Iona, Spring Harvest, Greenbelt, Taizé, the charismatic renewal movements, and the World Council of Churches, can also be a source of enrichment.

ii) Eucharistic worship

What is permissible with regard to the Eucharist varies, depending on the traditions involved in an ecumenical partnership. If only Free Churches are involved, there is a greater flexibility with regard to interchangeability of ministry and the drawing up of new orders of service.

When the Free Churches and the Church of England are involved together, Canon B44 of the Church of England permits a certain degree of interchangeability of ministry. It is possible to have a shared Anglican/Free Church congregation in which those who are ordained within any of these traditions may preside at Holy Communion in rotation. The question then arises of which liturgy to use. There are three different possibilities here:-

- to use the denominational liturgies in rotation week by week.
- to use internationally agreed liturgies, e.g. Lima or new British liturgies such as those produced by the Iona Community.
- to draw up new local liturgies.

However, if the second or third option is chosen, the appropriate authorisation of each participating denomination and the sponsoring body are needed. Both the drawing up of a new order of service and the gaining of authorisation for it can be a time-

consuming process, but the process itself can help the congregation understand the meaning of the liturgy, and authorisation is necessary for the LEP to continue within the traditions of the separate participating denominations.

The involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in an ecumenical partnership presents other possibilities. Variations in the self-understanding of different traditions mean that sharing the eucharistic elements with Roman Catholics is not permissible. However, there are many other ways to share together. It is possible for Roman Catholics coming to Anglican/Free Church services of Holy Communion, or members of the Church of England and the Free Churches going to Roman Catholic Mass, to go forward to receive a blessing from the presiding minister or priest. The pain caused by our not being able to receive Holy Communion together can encourage and goad people to work harder in the search for unity.

iii) Non-eucharistic worship

There are many possibilities of sharing together across all our traditions in non-eucharistic services. Special occasions, such as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity; celebrations of the work of Christian Aid or CAFOD; or Prayers for Peace can lead to a sharing across the different traditions. It is also possible in a local partnership, such as a local covenant, to have a regular agreed pattern of evening services that are non-eucharistic, enabling a variety of ways of worship to be experienced, such as meditation, bible study, liturgical dance and different forms of music. Regular lunchtime services during the week are also an option as are prayer groups which can be a very enriching experience for the people of different traditions involved.

The appointment of staff to Local Ecumenical Partnerships

The appointment of new staff members in LEPs can be crucial to their well-being and further development, but raises certain questions. A Methodist minister in a United Reformed/Methodist LEP (Worcestershire) writes, *'When I go there will be an interregnum, I expect, before a United Reformed Church minister comes. This will be a challenge for the Methodist folk who are more used to a new minister coming straightaway. A question that sometimes arises is whether an incoming minister could be the superintendent of a Methodist Circuit. That might be asking a lot, but with more LEPs it is a growing issue.'*

It is important that the intermediate body, in its role as sponsoring body, is able to offer support and advice within the various appointment procedures of the denominations involved, through an agreed policy on appointments. Alongside this policy, it is good practice for the intermediate body to establish guidelines for situations where relationships between staff and the LEP or sponsoring denominations break down for

any reason. Normally the denomination which is responsible for making the appointment would expect to follow its usual appointments procedure, with the addition of appropriate ecumenical consultation, as outlined below. In LEPs where a single minister is appointed to work on behalf of all the participating denominations, this consultation is of even greater importance. In such situations, the intermediate body should be prepared to look well ahead in planning new appointments, as making the appointment can prove a lengthy process.

In the early days of LEPs, there would often be more than one ordained person appointed to the LEP. Sometimes these would be full-time and sometimes part-time, representing the level of involvement of the participating denominations. As time has gone by, an increasing number of LEPs with Anglican and Free Church involvement are appointing one minister or priest to represent all the participating denominations. Careful attention needs to be given to the requirements for ministry of the participating denominations that are not directly represented by an ordained person. These appointments can either be of a person from one tradition on a permanent basis representing all the participating denominations, or can be on an agreed pattern of alternation (e.g. in a Methodist/United Reformed Church LEP, agreeing that the Methodist minister will serve for 5 – 7 years and then be succeeded by a United Reformed Church minister). It is important to have a clear written agreement of the terms of appointment and a review of the arrangements at an agreed time before the term of service comes to an end.

Some suggested guidelines for good practice in appointments

- The intermediate body should have an **agreed procedure** for the appointment of clergy and ministers to Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Recognising that a wide range of ecumenical developments will be represented in any area, those responsible for appointments in the denominations and those in local situations are asked to act flexibly within these guidelines, in response to particular local contexts.
- It is vital for the continuing development of LEPs that clergy and ministers appointed to any Church within them are **fully committed** to their aims. The final right of appointment remains with the denomination concerned, and the appointment will be made according to its usual appointments procedure. However, there should be the fullest and earliest co-operation and consultation between those making the appointment and the other partners in the LEP.
- Consultation may take place through the medium of a **staffing consultative group**, established by the intermediate body, the support group, local advisory group or consultant or link-person and the project. The staffing consultative group consists of local lay and ministerial representatives from all the participating denominations, representatives of the intermediate body and the appropriate representatives from the

structures of the denominations, for example circuit stewards and the bishop or his nominee. If a staffing consultative group is appointed, then it should be involved in drawing up or revising the job description, which is then sent to the appointing denomination and to the intermediate body and the other participating denominations. The staffing consultative group does not make the appointment, but is able to offer authoritative advice to those who do. The group should therefore have an opportunity to meet candidates at an early point in the process, so that ecumenical consultation plays a significant part in the final decision.

- If the intermediate body does not use a staffing consultative group, then it is still important that **consultation on the appointment** with existing clergy and ministers, lay representatives from the local congregations, the participating denominations and the intermediate body should take place. When in any particular circumstances the appointing denomination cannot arrange this consultation, that denomination should advise the other partners on these circumstances.
- **Before the search** is undertaken for any new or additional minister, the responsible person in the appointing Church is asked to notify the other Churches involved and the intermediate body. It would be wise also to check that the other members of the LEP team have been told of the impending search.
- Candidates being asked to consider the vacancy should be supplied with a **circuit/parish/pastorate profile** which gives a brief description of the local ecumenical situation with information on the partnership or covenant. Copies of current key documents, such as the covenant and constitution, should also be provided.
- Any candidate likely to be appointed should **meet all the appropriate people** in the Local Ecumenical Partnership before the appointment is decided. This should include the existing clergy and ministers, lay representatives of the churches in the Local Ecumenical Partnership and a representative of the intermediate body. In their advisory capacity, these people should have the opportunity of expressing their opinion to those responsible for the appointment before the appointment is made. Where the Roman Catholic Church is the appointing denomination, the post may be filled quickly, but it is important that there is time for agreed ecumenical processes of consultation to be put into effect.
- As soon as possible after a decision has been made, the senior person involved in the appointing denomination locally should ensure that those who have taken part in this process are **informed of the decision**.

Welcoming the new minister

The newly-appointed minister should be welcomed into the LEP at an appropriate ecumenical service of induction, institution, commissioning or welcome. It is important that this service both meets the normal (and sometimes legal) requirements for initiating a new ministry in the appointing denomination, and makes a public statement about the commitment of the denominations to one another in the local situation. The participating denominations should all be represented at the service by a church leader or equivalent person, and where there is an ecumenical team its members should be given an opportunity to welcome the new minister as a colleague and renew their commitment to one another in the partnership.

It may be appropriate for the Declaration of Intent for the Local Ecumenical Partnership to be accepted by the appointed candidate in a clear expression of personal commitment to ecumenical working during the service.

A sample liturgy for Methodist/United Reformed Church joint churches is given in *Partners in Sharing and Commitment* (see bibliography).

Preparation and training for ministry in an LEP

The county and denominational ecumenical officers should arrange to meet the new minister appointed to the LEP, to discuss the local situation more fully. The county ecumenical officer should also arrange for the new minister to undergo appropriate training for ministry in an LEP. Training courses are run by Churches Together in England for staff recently appointed to LEPs, and information on these courses is available from county ecumenical officers and from the Field Officers of CTE. In Wales, courses are available for those new to ministry, including those coming to work in LEPs. A range of other opportunities for gaining experience of a variety of local ecumenical contexts is available. Information on these and other opportunities can be found from county ecumenical officers.

When a minister or priest is the sole minister or priest in charge of a congregation, particular attention needs to be given as to the ways in which the life of the other participating traditions is to be recognised in the LEP. Each ordained person brings with them the ethos of their own denomination and it is helpful for people of other denominations sharing in the LEP to be able to recognise the distinctive features of their own tradition.

Working in teams

Working in teams enables the insights not only of different individuals to be shared, but of the different traditions represented by those individuals. Working in teams also

provides a model for ecumenical working where both issues and responsibility are shared. Such sharing is a reflection of what the call to be ecumenical is about: not one tradition alone making decisions or taking responsibility on behalf of others, but different traditions coming together to share insights so that the church may be built up.

i) What is a team?

Teams can take many forms. They are at their best when well balanced but this is not always easy to achieve. They can comprise both men and women, ordained and lay, or ordained only. Much of this chapter will look at the questions that arise in teams of ordained staff.

Teams occur in many places in each of the Christian traditions. In the Methodist Church, ministers in any one circuit work together as a team. In the Church of England, the word 'team' has a technical use, as the words 'rector' and 'vicar' are used in a special sense, different from their traditional meanings. The incumbent is always styled 'rector' and the other members of the team 'vicars'. The setting up of Anglican teams relates to the effective deployment of ministry across an area (see *Pastoral Measure 1983* for details). When a group of people work together within one tradition, ways of working and lines of authority are often clearer than in a group of people working together across traditions. For example, in the case of a rector and two vicars, it is clear where authority lies. Again, in a Methodist circuit with a team of Methodist ministers, one of them will have a clearly defined role as superintendent, with specific responsibilities assigned to him or her for the circuit as a whole.

Many one-denominational teams also include lay people in a variety of ways. While in any one-denominational team, some areas of team life are simpler because of the shared tradition of understanding within that denomination, there are also, as in every team, areas that need working on. There can be different theological viewpoints, or difficulties in inter-personal relationships.

Working in an ecumenical team can involve similar challenges to those facing a one-denominational team - difficulties which can seem to outweigh the advantage of the ecumenical nature of the team. On the other hand, it is also possible to have a greater richness and diversity in an ecumenical team.

One-minister LEPs: an LEP in which there is only one minister can present a challenge as the task of representing fairly the different traditions in the LEP falls on the single full-time member of staff. Such ministers can also lack the support which a team can give. Careful attention needs to be given to developing good support networks, both with members of the congregations and with ministers of the same or other traditions from outside the LEP.

Two team LEPs: pressure is put on people when they serve simultaneously in both a denominational team and an ecumenical team, for instance when there is an Anglican team ministry and an ecumenical team within the same LEP, or when a Methodist minister is in an ecumenical team and also part of the circuit staff team. This can lead to conflict in terms of team loyalty and of which team takes priority. It can also lead to a proliferation of team and staff meetings which can be seen as cutting against the underlying work of ministry. The question of working in two teams is one that needs to be carefully addressed when it occurs. Sometimes it is possible to free people from the denominational team in order that they may serve more fully in the ecumenical team.

ii) Identifying aims and objectives

A team needs to take time to identify its aims and objectives and to agree on these. There are varying views of what the Church, a Christian, a minister, actually is in our different traditions. If underlying assumptions are not addressed, disagreements can arise which are unhelpful to the overall life and work of the LEP. The task of setting aims and objectives can in itself be a helpful one, particularly if these aims and objectives concentrate on what is achievable in any one area. It is probably more helpful to have as an aim 'to plan a series of studies on the background of the Christian traditions in the LEP' or 'to engage in a visitation to the neighbourhood' than a more general aim, such as 'to bring in God's kingdom'. The working out of the aims and objectives for the team can be a helpful way of understanding the aims and objectives of the LEP as a whole and the way the team fits in to it.

iii) Sharing worship in a team

The possibilities of shared work can also vary according to the denominations involved. For example, in a Free Church/Anglican team where there is a formal LEP agreement, either minister can celebrate the eucharist. This offering of Eucharistic hospitality is made possible by certain national agreements which have taken place in recent years (*see Canon B44 of the Church of England*). When it comes to an LEP with Roman Catholic involvement, this same arrangement is not possible. However, there are other forms of sharing that are possible, such as for an Anglican or Free Church minister to preach at a Roman Catholic service or for a Roman Catholic priest or sister to preach at an Anglican or Free Church service. These arrangements need to be agreed beforehand with the appropriate authorities.

iv) Understanding different models of leadership

In a one-denominational team, there is usually a clearer understanding of where authority lies in that denomination. Work needs to be done in an ecumenical team in order to understand one another's denominational backgrounds, in particular each

member's understanding of authority. It is easy to make denominational assumptions about leadership which are inappropriate for an ecumenical team. A discussion about decision-making and leadership should take place at an early stage in the life of a team before too many things that need deciding actually occur.

It is important to develop a good process of appointing a team leader, to decide on the length of term of office of this person, and whether the leadership will pass from one member of the team to another at agreed intervals. A variety of models is possible. Each member of the team could be leader for one year, or the role of team leader could be assigned to a member who has particular responsibilities within the team. Whichever model is adopted, the role and responsibilities of the team leader should be mutually agreed.

v) Improving teamwork

The development of the life of any team takes a certain amount of work in itself. This is facilitated by having regular, weekly team meetings; by gathering together regularly to pray; and by participating in away days and retreats. Having a team consultant who will advise on such areas as relationships within the team and the sharing of work can also be a help. A local advisory group can sometimes help in discussions about team responsibilities and relationships.

Teams work on many different levels and help may be required with the emotional, rational, spiritual and organisational aspects of team life. Who should set the Agenda for team meetings? Are Minutes to be taken? Who is responsible for implementing any decisions made? Space must be made for what can be the very differing needs of each team member. It is also important to be clear about who is responsible for what in any one team, particularly when there are overlapping areas of responsibility such as the pastoral care of a congregation, student population or staff.

vi) Freeing people for particular tasks

There can be difficulties in ecumenical teams when people come together with different understandings of the church, personalities, skills and amount of time available. However, there can also be a great sense of being freed for particular tasks and of being able to share in companionship with people who are on the same ecumenical journey. Working ecumenically can enable a greater specialisation than is possible in ordinary parish work. One person can take on responsibility for youth work across the denominations, another for baptism, another for confirmation preparation. It is also then possible to free time for the mission tasks of the church.

When fewer people are available in any one parish or congregation, the maintenance of the church can assume a higher priority; the time and energy of any one ministerial

team member can be absorbed by such things as the new roof. In a larger ecumenical team, it is possible to delegate such areas of responsibility within the team and free more time for the church to play its proper role in reaching out to the wider community. However, if a larger team also has several church buildings in its care, further work needs to be done to free any one team member for a particular task.

vii) Changes in personnel

Change in team personnel is a matter that needs to be addressed very carefully. The arrival of a new member in the team does take a time of adjustment, both for the new member and for the existing team. The same process of adjustment needs to be gone through each time a new team member arrives; the already existing team is changed and due account needs to be taken of this by those already in place. The new team member should also be aware of the already established ways of working and understanding.

viii) Role of lay people

For the development of a wider ministry in an LEP, the involvement of lay people is important. Different traditions are used to involving lay people in different ways. An LEP can provide new and innovative ways for developing a real sense of partnership between lay and ordained.

If lay people are to be fully involved as part of a wider ministry team, careful attention needs to be given to the timing of meetings. Fixing meetings during usual working hours is not conducive to furthering the involvement of lay people. LEPs work best when the ministry of the whole people of God is harnessed together in witness and in service to the community.

There is a particular challenge to the Churches in the 21st century that comes from the diminishing number of ordained people in many Christian traditions. This gives the task of taking the laity seriously a new imperative. It is not only a matter of involving lay people more fully in the internal life of the Church, it is also about equipping members of congregations more fully for their Christian life in the world.

LEPs open up the possibility of developing collaborative, participative models of working in the Church. Participation is enhanced by the spiritual contributions which people from different Christian traditions bring to bear. The involvement of the whole people of God in discussions about the way our traditions have varied across the centuries can lead to new and enriching understandings of faith.

Confirmation and church membership

The different traditions have distinct views about what belonging to the Church means and about what the outward and visible sign of this should be. Once more, in an LEP account needs to be taken of the views of the different traditions involved.

The 1994 LEPs Consultation at Swanwick, in its discussion on church membership, helpfully asserted the following:

We affirm that as people are called to follow Christ they are incorporated into the life of the Church in a variety of ways expressed through our different traditions.

Whatever the process we all recognise incorporation into the Church as being:

- *in the context of a local congregation,*
- *in a wider denomination,*
- *part of the universal Church of Christ.*

Our traditions place the emphasis at different points, but all contain expressions of this three-fold reality.

Whether the emphasis is on the Grace of God or the commitment of the individual, most of our member Churches recognise that such incorporation involves a baptismal initiation process expressing the faith of the Church and of the individual.

Drawing on the report Christian Initiation and Church Membership (BCC 1988) we value the concept of 'belonging' with an emphasis on participation within a Christian community. This has a particular importance for those local communities involving the Roman Catholic Church.

A Faith and Order Consultation on baptism held at Faverges, France, in 1997 emphasised that although there are different understandings of the point in our spiritual pilgrimage when baptism should be received, we are agreed that it is essential that we all live the baptised life.

i) Joint confirmation

Recent years have seen a growing development of joint services of confirmation by the Church of England and the Free Churches. In an LEP it is possible, in some traditions, for a person, having previously been baptised, to be jointly confirmed into the life of the participating denominations.

Joint confirmations need to take account of the practices of the traditions involved. In each case, the primary local minister has responsibility for presiding. However, who

this is varies from tradition to tradition. For the Church of England, the bishop must take part in the act of confirmation. For the other traditions, it is the local ministers and also lay people from the congregation who take part, as people are welcomed into the life of that congregation. Different traditions can be involved in different ways according to the self-understanding of their own tradition. Thus, it is not necessary to have a United Reformed Church Moderator and a Methodist Chairman of District present at confirmations. In the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, the understanding of ministry is, at this point, slightly different from the Anglican understanding. The role of the United Reformed Church Moderator and the Methodist Chairman of District does not include the practice of taking part in confirmations as they are not the primary local ministers. Those who confirm or receive into church membership in these two traditions are the local ministers. Therefore, it is possible to have local Free Church ministers taking part alongside the Anglican bishop and laying hands on each candidate at the same time. It is important to respect the different understandings of each tradition at this point.

Those involved in the confirmation service must be people who are properly authorised in their own traditions. It would be inappropriate for an Anglican priest who is 'recognised and regarded' by the Methodist Church to participate in a service of confirmation in the same way as a Methodist minister.

While all the main Christian traditions allow for the possibility of the baptism of adults, there is a particular opportunity in an LEP with Baptist involvement to combine a service of believer's baptism and an ecumenical confirmation, if the candidate has not been previously baptised. At such services, those who have offered themselves are recognised as members of all the local participating churches whether Baptist, United Reformed, Methodist or Church of England, and are equally entitled to share in all the responsibilities and privileges of membership of the participating traditions.

There have been one or two instances in England where it has proved possible, with the agreement of the appropriate authorities, to hold a parallel confirmation between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches, but in this case joint membership of the Churches is not given.

ii) Multiple and extended membership

Questions arise in LEPs about the difference between those who have been ecumenically confirmed into all the traditions that make up the LEP, and those who, before coming to this particular LEP, have been confirmed or received into church membership in only one tradition. There are times when the latter group of people feel deprived because they are not able to become full members of all the participating traditions. The 1994 Consultation on LEPs at Swanwick helpfully drew out this question as it arises in LEPs.

Where there is shared ministry, congregational and worship life involving combinations of the Church of England and the Free Churches, we believe there is now a new moment of opportunity to build on the sense of belonging. Many of those joining LEPs want to give expression to this by becoming members of more than one tradition. This has been recognised in many of them by what is described as Multiple Membership. This admission is into the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the participating denominations. (If a member moved from an LEP to a church of a single denomination then they retain membership of that denomination to which they transfer.) However, those who, in many instances, founded the LEP and were already members of one tradition have been excluded from this wider joy. We believe this position, which causes unnecessary hurt and pain, should be rectified by enacting appropriate denominational legislation to permit what is often referred to as Extended Membership.

Multiple membership

This occurs in those Local Ecumenical Partnerships where, through a joint Initiation or Confirmation Service, certain denominations can confer full initiation and communicant status on the same candidate simultaneously. (This generally means Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed only but can involve others, though not Roman Catholics.)

Extended membership

Is about Multiple Membership being conferred without any further initiation rite on those communicant members of a Local Ecumenical Partnership whose denominations would permit it.

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:

- 1. That there be opportunity for joint admission to membership/joint confirmation conveying on those so confirmed/admitted what is popularly described as multiple membership.*
- 2. That 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'.*

In 2001, the Methodist Conference amended the Deed of Union (8 (e) (i)) to allow members of other communions, whether or not in an LEP, also to have extended

membership of the Methodist Church. Guidance is published in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, Book VI, Section 13*.

iii) Membership returns

If there is a sharing agreement in place, there is a legal requirement to keep separate membership lists for each denomination. However, many LEPs will keep one list, with a note of each person's denomination. Each denomination has its own requirement regarding membership returns. This is often the only time in the life of an LEP when members have to be identified by their denominations. Work has been done nationally on the shape, content and timing of membership returns, and it is hoped that more progress will be made in shortening the task of filling out denominational returns. A single form was issued in 2003 for single congregation LEPs which satisfied the requirements of the Methodist and United Reformed Churches.

There is a particular need to be clear about what happens when people are confirmed in two or more traditions, and how these figures need to be shown in any annual return. Joint confirmation can confuse denominational statistics. Should they be divided into percentages between each of the denominations involved in that LEP, or returned on a separate list to each denomination, clearly identifying that they are joint confirmations and now belong to all the traditions which have participated in that service? Here is another opportunity to be at the forefront of the life of the Church. Baptism and confirmation are given by God to the Church as a means of incorporation into Christ and the Church. Joint confirmations highlight the faith that we share.

iv) When people move

The question is sometimes raised of where people go to when they move away from an area in which they have been part of an LEP congregation, and go to a new area in which there is no similar LEP congregation. However this question also arises when people leave a one-denominational congregation. Denominational loyalty is not necessarily the only factor taken into account when looking for a church in a new area. Questions of the style and the shape of worship, the friendliness of a community, and the opportunities afforded by the weekday life of the church will shape their decision. Many people spend time searching until they find a congregation in which they feel at home and able to play a part. People who move away from LEPs where they have had a good experience of ecumenical working are sometimes frustrated by not finding the same experience elsewhere. However, those who move away from LEPs to an area where there are none can provide a stimulus for the development of ecumenical work in that part of the country.

Local church decision-making

Different Christian traditions have varying understanding and practices when it comes to local church decision-making. For instance, in the Church of England, the vicar and church wardens have particular responsibilities, as does the Parochial Church Council. For Baptists, authority lies in the Church Meeting, which elects deacons to serve as a leadership body to oversee various areas of the church's life, on its behalf.

Some of the denominations nationally authorise the Ecumenical Council of an LEP to act as the decision-making body in their tradition. For the United Reformed Church, the Ecumenical Council is seen as the equivalent of Elders, for the Methodist Church it is seen as the equivalent of the Church Council. For the Church of England, whilst certain matters may be delegated to the Ecumenical Council, many important decisions are required by statute to be taken by the Parochial Church Council (PCC). This can be achieved by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (formally constituted within the annual meeting of the LEP) reconstituting the PCC each year in such a way that, in simultaneous and united session with the Ecumenical Church Council, any required Church of England business can be conducted by the PCC and minuted as such. Care needs to be taken to understand the differing role of these bodies in each of the different traditions and to develop the role of the Ecumenical Council so that it fulfils the obligations of the local decision-making bodies in each of the traditions.

The role of the regular Church Meeting, at which each member of the congregation is entitled to both speak and vote, is an interesting one in an LEP. It can be used as a forum for discussing key issues and can open up new possibilities for participating in decision-making. However, the lines of authority of all the participating denominations have to be borne in mind in seeing what decisions are appropriate for a Church Meeting to take and what decisions need also to be referred to the wider councils of the Church and those exercising episcopal authority.

Decision-making can be a long and protracted process; but significant ecumenical growth is possible as people learn to be more tolerant of one another and more appreciative of each other's ways of making decisions. Although decision-making can seem at times painfully slow, it can also offer useful models for conflict resolution.

(See also Chapter 9 for further discussion on aspects of authority).

Dealing with contentious issues

When people of different backgrounds and traditions come together, it is possible that there will be issues that prove contentious. The early Church was not immune from disagreements and disputes and so it is not surprising that still today there is the possibility for tough talking between Christians. There are a great variety of matters

that can occasion disagreement. These can vary from the relatively inconsequential question as to whether or not to take the offertory during a hymn, to major discussions over the authority of the Pope versus the authority of a Church Meeting. Designing a new church building, while having the potential for being a fruitful exercise, can also reveal deep-rooted differences of understanding about what is necessary in such a building. Developing patterns of shared evangelism or exploring views on the work of the Holy Spirit can lead to a robust exchange of different views.

It is helpful to establish a process for dealing with contentious issues. This can involve inviting the county ecumenical officer or a group from the county ecumenical body to work with the congregation. Another possibility is to invite representatives of the wider councils of the participating denominations to help out. A neutral outside facilitator can help a congregation or leadership team to work through difficult matters. It is important to give space to hear the different views being expressed and to give time to develop an understanding of what underlies such different views. Sometimes it may be necessary to put a discussion on hold, for a period of weeks or months, in order to give time for prayer and reflection before trying to move forward.

Property in Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Detailed information on the provisions and application of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 can be found in *Under the Same Roof: Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969* (CTBI 1994).

The Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 provides an agreed legal framework for ecumenical living at the local level, expressed in a sharing agreement. The Act is a piece of enabling legislation, providing a means for Churches to share buildings, to share and transfer funding, and give security of tenure to congregations moving in with one another. The Act also enables the shared construction of new buildings and allows marriage services according to the rites and ceremonies of the appropriate denominations. The Act permits in a shared building whatever would normally be allowed in a building belonging to participating denominations. It therefore enables a sharing of ministry and congregational life.

Sharing agreements can take time to prepare, although long experience since the Act was passed has established forms and precedents so that the process should now be easier. Sharing agreements should be fairly standard documents, and do not have to reflect the local variety of situations to the same extent as constitutions. Extensive consultation on sharing agreements can lead to excessive legal fees.

Sharing Agreements include the setting up of Joint Councils. These are separate bodies from local congregational or parish councils and are constituted between representatives of the participating denominations in order to resolve disputes and deal

with property and finance matters where these need wider attention than that which is within the remit of the congregation/parish. Joint Councils need to meet formally once a year and can be asked to meet more often if there are particular questions such as the redevelopment of the building, or major financial issues.

The Sharing of Church Buildings Act was originally envisaged as covering situations in which congregations using the same building wished to retain their own separate denominational identity. However, almost from the beginning it was used for new buildings, jointly owned by two or more denominations, with one united congregation, and there are relatively few situations remaining where congregations sharing the same building lead separate lives. In circumstances in which one congregation is a 'lodger' in a building owned by another this has often led to developing co-operation, even if they are unable fully to share their main worship service on a regular basis, as where one of the participating Churches is Roman Catholic.

Some problems have arisen between Christian communities in large towns and cities with multi-ethnic populations, where informal arrangements for sharing church premises are made without the benefit of a sharing agreement, or a commitment to developing partnership by the congregations involved. Problems might arise when, for example, an independent Black Majority Church congregation rents space and time in a building owned by one of the mainstream denominations. Often the initial approach is handled by the church hall booking secretary on the same basis as a request from the badminton club. A landlord and tenant relationship is established and resentment and misunderstanding can develop, leading to the 'tenant' church feeling hurt and rejected. *The Sharing and Sale of Church Buildings and Sharers, Guests or Tenants* provide useful guidelines on this (*see bibliography*).

The Sharing of Church Buildings Act does not automatically apply to all Christian Churches, but those not named under the Act can be parties to sharing agreements if they apply to be 'gazetted' under the terms of the Act. Further information on this process is available through county ecumenical officers and Field Officers of CTE.

In England the Churches Group for Local Unity, a co-ordinating group of Churches Together in England, has particular responsibility for advising on sharing agreements; the secretary can be contacted care of CTE. In Wales advice and information can be obtained from CYTŪN.

7 MATURE LEPs

When LEPs first started, they were seen as exciting and experimental. The original title ‘Areas of Ecumenical Experiment’ had a sense of the provisional about it. Some people thought that LEPs would not last very long, because denominations as a whole would move closer together and do away with the need for separate ecumenical areas at the grassroots. While there has been a growth in ecumenical co-operation in a variety of areas, the denominations are still very much in existence and many questions have been raised about the possibility of denominations uniting nationally. Meanwhile, LEPs have not only continued in existence but in many cases have settled down in a permanent way of living. This has not always been the case. In some instances, the initial enthusiasm has waned, denominational support has diminished or members of one of the participating traditions have all but disappeared.

Positive aspects of maturity

Long-standing LEPs can have a clear sense of purpose and direction. They have settled down and become the church in a particular community. The members of different traditions feel at home with one another. There is a sense of mutual belonging in Christ that is felt to transcend particular denominational differences. There is a regular programme of worship and outreach and service which is recognised and affirmed by the people who belong to the LEP and by the wider community around the LEP. Differences are seen as a positive stimulus for theological exploration, on the basis of a trust that has built up over many years.

These LEPs can be a source of advice and a stimulus for those who are at an earlier point on the journey and act as a challenge to the denominations in their separation. Such LEPs can be impatient with what they perceive as the denominational constraints that are laid upon them.

Renewing the vision

LEPs that have been in existence for twenty or thirty years face the challenge of sustaining and developing the vision that originally fired them. Just as in any one-denominational congregation, people can settle down, take life for granted and begin to think ‘we’ve always done things this way, why should it be any different?’ The changing times in which we live with regard to church-going also have their impact on LEPs. Ageing congregations and lack of young people can affect an LEP just as much as a one-denominational congregation. Re-visiting the early vision in order to see in what new ways the Holy Spirit might be leading the people can be a helpful move.

The review of the LEP initiated by the sponsoring body (usually every 5–7 years) can be a stimulus for re-visiting the early vision and seeing what new steps it would be

helpful to take in order to keep moving forward.

The role of the leaders in renewing the vision is vital. One Anglican/United Reformed Church LEP (Hereford) wrote: *'It is vital that the enthusiasm of the congregations is continually reinforced by the ordained ministers. Any lack of enthusiasm on the part of the clergy is so easily picked up by the congregations and we have to face the fact the congregations do take their lead from the leaders.'*

Expectations of LEPs

LEPs can be expected to deliver more than is possible.

The congregation involved can think that it is able to go beyond what is possible in any one participating denomination and begin to sit lightly to denominational practice. Memories of the days of being an 'experiment' can fire people up with enthusiasm to go on experimenting with different ways of being Church. However, it is important to keep in regular contact with the parent Churches in order that the 'experiment' doesn't bring a congregation to a point of unhelpful conflict with the parent denomination. This can particularly come to the fore over the appointment of a new minister when expectations can be raised of being able to move beyond the normal appointment process of one of the participating denominations.

The parent denominations can also have expectations of LEPs in terms of 'being successful' - demonstrating new possibilities of being Church, growing in numbers, engaging fruitfully in witness and service. However, LEPs are not immune from those factors which can affect a one-denominational congregation, e.g. the struggles of inner-city or housing estate ministry, a pattern of rising and falling church attendance, lack of children, inter-personal struggles. When an LEP is going through the same difficulties that a one-denominational parish might go through, it is helpful if the parent Churches think in terms of the normal support that might be given, rather than moving immediately to judgement and closure.

Keeping in touch with the parent denominations

There is a temptation for an LEP to become strong in itself and then to sit lightly to the parent Churches. One United Reformed Church/Methodist LEP (Gloucestershire) says, *'There is a problem in the difficulties and complexities of having to relate to more than one denominational organization and engaging with different denominational policies and ruling'*.

Another United Reformed Church/Methodist LEP (Warwickshire) in referring to this issue says, *'We were not conscious of problems from within but sometimes felt frustrated by not being masters of our own destiny; in other words, not every decision*

or project or event that comes from a Methodist Circuit or United Reformed Church District is going to be appropriate to the life of the LEP. Sometimes we have to appear rude to safeguard our right to be an LEP'

There is also a temptation for the parent Churches to regard the LEP as an anomaly and to sit lightly to addressing its particular needs. If LEPs are not to become separated Churches and if denominations are to take their oversight responsibilities seriously, work needs to be done on continuing to develop the links between the parent Churches and the LEPs.

This can happen in the regular reviews of an LEP that are undertaken by the sponsoring body, the involvement of a local advisory group or equivalent on behalf of the sponsoring Churches, or in the participation of the LEP in the normal structures of the parent Churches. However, pressure to attend meetings of a variety of denominations can be seen as taking people away from their local responsibilities. It is helpful to come to an understanding about the level of participation that is possible by representatives of LEPs in the councils of their parent denominations.

People of one denomination disappearing

In some LEPs, people from one or another of the original participating traditions gradually disappear. This can be through death, or movement out of the area, or people feeling that their tradition is not being sufficiently valued and so going to another one-denominational church in the area. An LEP can be left with hardly any representatives in it of a particularly tradition of the Church.

A decision then has to be made as to whether the LEP can continue as an LEP or whether it should revert to being a church of only one tradition. In one church where this happened, the decision was taken to replace the LEP with a *Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment* made by the remaining denomination in consultation with the others (see chapter 2).

In discussion of this issue, attention needs to be paid to those who have been ecumenically confirmed in the LEP and thus are fully part of all the participating traditions and to the ethos of the LEP and whether, even though it might not at this stage have many people of a particular tradition present, the life of the LEP still represents that tradition and would welcome people in the future who came from that background. The question also needs to be asked as to whether there has been sufficient wider denominational support given to the LEP.

LEPs disappearing

There are occasionally places where the LEP itself has declined over the years. Sometimes on a new housing estate, when there have been thriving churches in the vicinity, people have continued to travel from the housing estate to the already existing churches. When the generation who set up the new church in the first place has moved on, there have not been enough people left to continue the work. A decision then needs to be made as to whether the mission of the Church is best helped by a struggling congregation who find it difficult to continue in regular worship and outreach. This decision is no different from that made about a one-denominational congregation and whether its life has come to a natural end.

If this question is being raised, it is helpful for the sponsoring body to set up a review, in which the wider representatives of the participating denominations as well as the people of the LEP can be consulted in order to come to a common mind about the way forward. A constitution can have advice in this area. A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of the LEP might be appropriate, together with a discussion in the sponsoring body of lessons learned from the experience.

8 SUPPORT, OVERSIGHT AND REVIEW

Intermediate bodies in England and Wales have responsibility as sponsoring bodies of LEPs, to provide support and oversight, evaluation and review. This chapter outlines the role of the intermediate bodies in both countries and looks in detail at how they carry out key tasks in connection with LEPs.

The role of intermediate bodies in England

In England there are now fifty-four intermediate bodies, many of which cover regions which are co-terminus with counties or metropolitan areas. The form and structure of the intermediate bodies varies from place to place, and they may be referred to by a variety of names - Sponsoring Body, Ecumenical Council, Churches Together in..., Church Leaders Meeting - which often reflect their origins and local development. That the intermediate bodies work in differing ways reflects the needs of their local contexts, and also the level of financial and other resources available; but the importance of all the intermediate bodies lies in their role as the 'filling' in the English ecumenical sandwich.

As with the other ecumenical instruments, the source of authority for intermediate bodies lies in the commitment of the participating denominations to each other. For some denominations, the imperative to participate in ecumenical relationships at the intermediate level comes from the commitment of their Church to the ecumenical process at the national level; for other Churches the imperative lies in the fact that individual congregations are committed to ecumenical working in local situations. Because of these differences in polity, the representatives of the denominations come to the intermediate body from Churches with differing concepts of authority and structures for decision-making, so not all have the same authority to speak and act on behalf of the denomination they represent.

The intermediate bodies enable contact and communication between those involved in local ecumenism and those working at the national level through Churches Together in England, give support to local ecumenism in all its forms, and encourage working together at the intermediate level on a wide range of concerns.

i) The intermediate body as the sponsoring body

In most instances the intermediate body acts as the sponsoring body for Local Ecumenical Partnerships and is responsible for enabling their establishment, supporting their life and overseeing a regular process of review or evaluation.

In this connection, intermediate bodies:

- facilitate relationships between LEPs and their parent denominations;
- ensure that fair agreement is reached on the financial commitment of the denominations to the LEP and the LEP to the denominations;
- ensure that the project is neither swamped by the expectations of the parent denominations nor ignored by them;
- maintain relationships with LEPs through support groups, local advisory groups, consultants or other appropriate structures;
- bring the contribution and insights of the LEP to the wider Church, and enable the LEP to feel part of that Church;
- oversee policy decisions with respect to LEPs;
- ensure good practice in framing constitutions, making appointments and resourcing staff;
- set procedures for when staff are withdrawn or replaced;
- advise on worship and liturgy, and authorise forms of service;
- offer guidance in matters of discipline and law;
- resource the theological reflection of LEPs, especially in faith and order matters.

ii) Representation on intermediate bodies

The composition of the intermediate bodies is varied, some having only the church leaders, ecumenical officers and other denominational representatives, while others include representatives from those involved in local ecumenism. The frequency of meetings varies from once a year to six times a year, and their funding and resources also differ widely.

iii) County ecumenical officers

Most intermediate bodies are serviced by an officer or secretary who is appointed jointly by the Churches. This 'county ecumenical officer' works across the area covered by the intermediate body to support and foster local ecumenical development of all kinds. Some county ecumenical officers or secretaries are full-time, some part-time and some 'spare-time'. In some places they also work on behalf of one or more of the partner Churches as their denomination's ecumenical officer.

iv) Other work of the intermediate body

Intermediate bodies co-ordinate the denominations in working together at the county or metropolitan area level: this might focus on initiating work in specific areas such as local broadcasting or industrial chaplaincy, or it might be aimed at encouraging commitment and integration in working together for mission, education, social responsibility or youth work. The intermediate body works to put the ecumenical

question ‘*could we be doing this together?*’ on the agenda in every area of the Church’s life, and encourages sharing between the denominations in planning for the future and for the deployment of ministerial and other resources.

The intermediate body is also responsible for the support and encouragement of other kinds of local ecumenical development, in Councils of Churches, Churches Together and local ecumenical groups. It represents the Churches in negotiations with local authorities and development corporations over ecumenical projects, and oversees the continuing relationship between the Churches and these bodies. Increasingly, intermediate bodies are involved with planning authorities when the creation of new communities is part of a County Structure Plan.

v) Other ways of working together

The denominations have developed various models for working together at the intermediate level, reflecting the view that the Churches Together structures should not establish a cumbersome additional layer of ecumenical activity, but should enable committed relationships and the sharing of resources between the denominations:

- **Joint work:** two or more denominations share resources in a particular task or appointment; for example, denominational staff involved in local broadcasting or industrial mission do work on that issue for the participating Churches within the area covered by the intermediate body.
- **Co-ordinated work:** the Churches share information about present working and future planning to avoid duplication of effort and expenditure.
- **Representative work:** one denomination works on behalf of all the partner Churches as the lead agency in a particular area of work such as social responsibility.

The intermediate level in Wales

In Wales the situation is different. Whereas in England it is normative for each county or metropolitan area to have some kind of intermediate body, in Wales the emerging pattern is of a few regional bodies (each covering more than one unitary authority). The principal aim of these regional bodies is to sponsor the existing LEPs in their area, and to identify potential LEPs. By the mid 1990s, more than 60 LEPs had been registered in the whole of Wales, involving covenanted and non-covenanted Churches in various combinations. Further information on LEPs in Wales, including a current copy of the *List of Inter-Church Initiatives in Wales* can be had from CYTŪN (*see Appendix 3: useful addresses*).

Free Church partnerships are also a significant part of the Welsh scene. A Welsh language Consultative Committee on Ministry exists at the national level, under the auspices of the Free Church Council of Wales, in order to provide advice and support. It has its own network of regional committees. A particular feature of many of these arrangements is the concept of community ministries, where, in a given locality, a minister from one of the Free Church traditions will be recognised and funded to serve them all. Copies of *Guidelines for Community Ministry* are available from denominational headquarters.

Further information on working at the intermediate level in England and Wales may be found in the handbook, *This Growing Unity*, CTE 1995 (see bibliography).

Support and oversight for Local Ecumenical Partnerships

The support of Local Ecumenical Partnerships is the responsibility of the intermediate body, which acts on behalf of the participating denominations as the sponsoring body. In offering support for local ecumenism, the intermediate body works to enable the developing life of LEPs in both theological and practical ways, helping them to reflect on their experience of ecumenical living and providing suitable resource people to encourage the further development of the partnership. The support structure also exists to ensure that the development of the LEP remains within the bounds agreed by the parent denominations, and may act as an arbitrator in situations where conflict arises between the LEP and the parent denominations, or within the partnership.

The parent denominations delegate the responsibility for the support of LEPs to the intermediate body, partly to avoid overburdening the LEP with multiple layers of relationship with ecumenical and denominational structures. However, LEPs need to be in active and continuing relationship with the parent denominations, for example through representation on appropriate denominational bodies, so that they retain a sense of being part of the wider Church and so that the wider Church is able to benefit from their experience. The task of initiating and continuing relationships should not be the responsibility of the LEP, but of the participating denominations and the intermediate body.

The support structures also exist to help LEPs to raise potentially difficult issues with the denominational and ecumenical structures, and to enable a proper consultation in decision-making processes about the future of a partnership. In some areas, each LEP sends an annual report to the intermediate body, and the support structures may help with the formulation of this report.

Models for support and oversight

The intermediate body may exercise support and oversight for LEPs in various ways.

i) Support groups or local advisory groups

The establishment of a support group for each LEP has the advantage of providing continuity in relating to the project and maintaining a good level of communications with the ecumenical and denominational structures. Relationships of trust and understanding can be built up through support groups, facilitating the process of consultation and follow-up when the partnership is reviewed or when staff members are appointed. The disadvantages of this model for support are that if the intermediate body is responsible for many LEPs, it can be a problem to find suitable people to serve in such groups; the support group may also feel like a burden to the LEP, as yet another group of people that the project has to relate to. It is sometimes helpful to appoint a support group for a particular period in the life of an LEP, for example when it is just beginning, or when undergoing a change in its life, or when it is undertaking a major building project or accepting another denomination into membership.

ii) Visits

In some areas, support for LEPs is provided through formal visits by the county ecumenical officer and a small group of representatives from the sponsoring body. These visits may take place annually, and provide an opportunity to maintain communications, although perhaps not on a profound level. This may be a more sustainable model of support where an intermediate body is stretched to provide support for a large number of partnerships, and can be used to alert the intermediate body to the need for the provision of a support group if the partnership is undergoing difficulties or in a period of transition. Sometimes the responsibility for visiting LEPs and providing support for them is left entirely to the county ecumenical officer; this is not a satisfactory model for support, particularly since many ecumenical officers work part-time.

iii) Consultants

The intermediate body may choose to appoint one or more consultants to support the developing life of each LEP; the consultants maintain frequent contact with the partnership and report to the intermediate body at regular intervals.

iv) Twinning

The intermediate body may enable mutual support and encouragement between LEPs by establishing twinning relationships between partnerships in similar situations. This approach is sometimes used in asking two LEPs to review one another's partnerships, and has the advantage of enabling the cross-fertilisation of ideas between partnerships.

v) Support and review

Support structures can play an important part in helping the review of an LEP to be an effective and positive process, through helping the LEP to prepare for the review and to reflect on the experience and the implementation of the recommendations. To avoid burdening the LEP with a complex and energy-consuming network of relationships, it is good practice if denominational and ecumenical support and review can be linked.

Evaluation and review

It is the responsibility of the intermediate body, in its capacity as the sponsoring body, to establish and resource a process of evaluation and review for Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Such reviews normally take place every five to seven years, as laid down in the constitution of the LEP.

As the ultimate purpose of a review is the extension of God's Kingdom, it is important that everyone involved approaches the review process prayerfully. Members, ministers and reviewers need to be clear about the positive aim and purpose of the review, and all those involved locally must be encouraged to participate in the process.

The review process is dependent on openness and a genuine wish to listen to what the reviewers have to say, and to develop the life of the partnership. This openness can be fostered by thorough preparation, with preliminary visits to share ideas and information about the review process with the LEP, so that everyone knows what to expect. Those involved locally should have the chance to question and shape the review process, so that it is suitable for their context. Practical issues are also important, such as ensuring that the venues for review meetings are suitable, and that appropriate hospitality can be provided for the reviewers.

How the review process is carried out will vary between intermediate bodies:

- There may be self-evaluation, with the county ecumenical officer, LEP consultant or support group working with those involved locally to review the work of the partnership, and reflect on future possibilities for its development.
- The sponsoring body may appoint a review team of around three people, to meet with members and ministers of the churches for worship and for other activities. They will get to know those involved, and to build up a picture of local church life. The review team will want to meet individuals and small groups, as well as attending events; they may also want to meet people in the community beyond the church, so that they can build up a picture of the LEP in its local context.
- A review may be conducted over an extended weekend, or over a period of several weeks or several months according to the needs of the area and the

availability of the reviewers.

- The review process may be undertaken in co-operation between the intermediate body and one or more of the sponsoring denominations, and may be accepted as a review in denominational as well as ecumenical terms.

The local context gives to every partnership a distinctive flavour, and that context is formed by many things - geography, demography, history - quite apart from the issues around inter-church relationships. Because of this variety of local factors, it is difficult to set a blueprint for reviews, and the intermediate body may wish to ask that the review examine a particular area in the life of a partnership. However, it is always the task of a review to listen to what is said, and what is unsaid; to understand the LEP in its context and to reflect with people in the LEP on future vision and development.

The review should examine the following areas:

- What is the story of the LEP?
- What is the context of the LEP?
- Have the supporting documents (Constitution etc), helped the life of the partnership, and do they need re-writing to reflect recent development?
- What has been positive in the life of the partnership?
- What has been negative in the life of the partnership?
- What difference has the partnership made to inter-church relationships?
- What difference has the partnership made to the engagement of the churches with the life of the local community?
- Where have points for conflict or growth arisen?
- How do the structures of power operate within the LEP?
- Is the liturgical and spiritual life of the LEP sustaining and supporting the lives of its members in their ministry?
- What provision is there for learning together?
- What are relationships like between church leaders or clergy?
- Have appointments been made with appropriate ecumenical consultation?
- What is the financial position of the LEP?
- What about relationships with other churches in the area, and with the structures of the sponsoring denominations?
- What vision or dreams do the churches have for their future together?

Not all these questions will be relevant to all LEPs, and some LEPs will want to reflect on other areas. It is important that reviewers are flexible in their approach, so that they are able to listen, understand and reflect the LEP in its context. The review should look for growth both within the LEP and beyond it; growth both in extent and depth.

At the end of the process a review report will be compiled which might include some

points of encouragement and recommendations for the LEP, for the intermediate body or for the sponsoring denominations. The county ecumenical officer, support group or consultant will meet with those involved to reflect on the reception and implementation of any recommendations.

(See also Revised Guidelines for the Review of LEPs, CTE April 2002.)

9 CUTTING EDGES OF ECUMENICAL WORK

One Anglican/Methodist/United Reformed Church LEP (Birmingham) writes: *'We are aware that there is a degree of questioning the value of LEPs and, in particular, a suggestion that they are no longer at the cutting edge of ecumenism. I think we would want to say very clearly that we would not subscribe to such a view.*

'We continue to value highly the benefits of working together and believe that LEPs remain at the forefront of grassroots ecumenism, which we see as perhaps the most important place for ecumenism to work. In particular we value the fact that we are not forcing people to make a denominational choice, an option which despite our "pick and mix" culture, seems to be seen as increasingly irrelevant; the advantages of team working and its associated mutual support; and the fact that we can enjoy each other's riches.'

This handbook has looked at some of the practical issues to do with developing local ecumenical ways of working. While the main aim of the handbook is to help those who are specifically dealing with questions of local ecumenism, it has also endeavoured to place these questions within their national context and within some of the broader questions that working ecumenically raises.

Questions of principle as well as of practice arise: questions about the traditions' differing theological understandings, and of the holding together of a vision of unity that embraces not only our existing Christian traditions but the whole of God's created earth. The wider aspects of ecumenical working begin to touch on such areas as interfaith dialogue and the church's care for and relation to the whole of creation.

This final chapter focuses on some of the particular issues that are in front of the Churches at present. The chapter ends with a reflection on the wider goal of the unity towards which we work, and of the role of LEPs in relation to this wider goal.

New partners

Particularly, but not exclusively, in urban areas new possibilities of partnership have emerged. A wider range of streams of Christianity are involved in regional ecumenical work, including The Salvation Army, the Friends, Orthodox Churches, Black Majority Churches and a variety of 'New' Churches. Shared work with these Churches can also be possible in a given locality. This can vary between sharing a building, while still continuing with separate services, to sharing a particular local project, piece of mission work or youth activity. Local Covenants can fruitfully be entered into, with a commitment to particular pieces of shared work.

From structures to spirituality

An emerging trend is the focus on spirituality rather than on structures. While establishing the right structures gives a good framework for the life of an LEP, giving an equal emphasis to the spirituality which undergirds the structures helps the LEP to grow and develop. Sharing regularly in prayer and meditation and exploring different patterns of spirituality can both bring people closer to each other as they come closer to God, and be a form of outreach into a world seeking spirituality. Taking congregations or congregational leaders away for retreats can help people to grow together into a deeper understanding of what it means to be the body of Christ in a given locality.

Building bridges within a denomination

There are times when the challenge before the Church is to build bridges between people of the same denomination. The post-modern culture encourages a sense of diversity which can lead to fragmentation and people at different ends of the theological spectrum feeling that they want to separate from one another. At their best, LEPs can be a demonstration of the possibility of holding diversity together.

Lay presidency

The role of lay people in the life of the Church is understood differently in our different Christian traditions. For instance in some traditions, lay people are fully involved at every level in the decision-making processes of the Church whilst in other traditions decision-making is seen as the particular role of the ordained.

One of the many ways in which these differences can focus in an LEP is that of lay presidency at Holy Communion. In the Baptist tradition, it is understood that a person duly appointed by the Church Meeting may preside at Holy Communion. In the United Reformed Church the District Council can, in the case of a pastoral necessity, authorise lay presidency at Holy Communion by an elder; and the Methodist Conference very occasionally authorises a particular lay person for the same reason. However, this practice is not permitted in Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches.

The issue of lay presidency at Holy Communion and the way it is resolved in an LEP illustrates one of the cutting edges of ecumenical working. Here is a matter which is accepted as a 'norm' in some traditions and yet is unheard of in other traditions. When people of these differing traditions come together there is a question about developing a policy which acknowledges both their practices and theologies.

One possible solution is that if lay presidency is authorised to occur within an LEP, it is made clear that the service being held is of that one particular tradition rather than an

ecumenical service approved by the whole LEP. Only lay people of the traditions that authorise lay people to do so may preside at Holy Communion and only in the way that is duly authorised by those traditions.

Authority and decision-making

Each of the major Christian traditions has a different approach to authority and decision-making. It is important for the LEP to find out what is required by the participating denominations before making decisions. It may be necessary to have meetings to decide who decides!

In some traditions, authority is focused in the Church Meeting (for instance, of the local congregation in the Baptist Church). In some it is focused in a council of the Church (such as the Methodist Church Council or United Reformed Church District Council); in some, in the priest or the bishop (Roman Catholic Church). Authority is a complex matter in the Christian tradition. It is important to take careful account of the differing appreciations of where authority is to be found, and who is required to make decisions on which matters.

In an LEP, decision-making can be a prolonged process as each denomination's method of operating comes into play. Decision-making may also vary with regard to the kind of issue involved. For example:

- 1 If it is a matter of making a major alteration to a building, this needs to be referred to the relevant authorities in the Anglican and Catholic Dioceses, the United Reformed Church District Council, the Methodist Circuit Meeting, and to the Church Meeting as far as Baptists are concerned, as well as any other decision-making bodies within the LEP itself such as, in a shared building, the Joint Council.
- 2 When it comes to matters of faith or doctrine, such as the question of baptism and the baptism of those previously baptised in infancy, or the question of inter-communion between different Christian traditions, authority can more often be seen to lie at a national or international level, with the various agreements that are arrived at in the appropriate councils of the Churches.

The exploration of the processes of decision-making can lead to a renewed understanding of the appropriate role of authority in the life of the Church. Each tradition acknowledges that it looks to that authority which comes from the triune God. The grappling with questions to do with authority and decision-making can lead to a renewed understanding of the ways in which authority is received from God.

Questions about baptism

There are sensitive questions raised in our different traditions with regard to baptism. While for some of our traditions the baptism of infants is the norm, for other of our traditions baptism can only actually happen for believers. This can lead to a variety of views with regard to baptism. For some people, infant baptism is not regarded as valid. For others, baptism of believers who have already been baptised in infancy is re-baptism, apparently denying the effectiveness of baptism in infancy.

While the World Council of Churches report called *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has brought about a considerable convergence in mutual recognition of baptism, there is still a significant difference between some traditions when it comes to the question of the baptism of those previously baptised in infancy. The question is raised in particular by Churches which believe that baptism needs to follow a profession of faith by the one being baptised. The issue surfaces in LEPs when individuals come to faith as adults, having been baptised much earlier in life, and then feel they want to make a public affirmation of their faith which finds its natural focus in baptism by immersion. In LEPs where traditions with differing views on baptism are represented, the question of re-baptism can be quite sharply felt. It is important that LEPs which include both Churches which baptise infants and those which baptise only on a personal profession of faith should have an agreement in advance on what to do should the need arise.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Methodist Church have published guidelines for procedures to follow when this happens (*see bibliography*). This document outlines the possibility of baptism being administered a second time in an LEP, with the person who has then been so baptised being transferred onto the Baptist membership roll rather than being on the joint membership roll. The guidelines go some way towards alleviating the differences, but do not overcome the fundamental disagreement.

The 1994 LEPs consultation in Swanwick affirmed that 'Baptism and Re-baptism' was a topic of particular sensitivity and an urgent subject for agreement. It was subsequently agreed by the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England that a high-level group should be set up to look further at this issue, to take account of the bi-lateral agreements and discussion between Churches on this issue. This led to the report *Baptism and Church Membership with particular reference to LEPs* (*see bibliography*).

The future of LEPs

Local ecumenical working has developed in a variety of ways. Some ecumenical partnerships have been made possible because of particular contexts, for example, new

housing estates. The danger then is that local ecumenical working becomes identified with specific situations and is seen as being limited to them. However, the growth of village ecumenism and covenants in suburban areas illustrates that various different models of working are possible.

Are LEPs possible in every area? LEPs are possible wherever people choose to make a commitment to join with people of other Christian traditions in worship, or prayer, or study, or mission, or community action. With the increasing variety of models of local ecumenical working that are available, people in different areas of the country can look at their own area and tradition to see what it is that God is calling them to do with one another in that place.

When there are clusters of LEPs working together, a further question arises about the way in which the denominational structures themselves can come closer together. If there is a large concentration of LEPs within a particular geographical area, they may find the pressure of relating to several different denominations all at once quite daunting. Is it then possible to develop new ways of structural working, at Methodist Circuit, Deanery, United Reformed Church District level?

The regional development of ecumenical structures is encouraging. But questions still remain about what powers the denominations are actually willing to hand over to regional structures to enable them to be more effective. The other side of this question is how regional structures should be constituted to be accountable to the denominations for the powers entrusted to them.

LEPs provide a challenge to those who say 'it won't work' or 'it can't be done'. Much of the life in LEPs is about saying that it **can** work and it **can** be done, that it **will** work and it **will** be done. This insight from LEPs, that things are possible and do happen when Christians of different traditions come and share together, offers an insight to the main Christian traditions regionally and nationally. If it can be done locally, this gives a sign of hope for working towards national reconciliation between different traditions. The fact that it can be done locally provides a challenge to think again about what the Holy Spirit is moving the Churches to become.

Working towards unity

The visible unity of all God's people is the larger backdrop to the work that goes on in local ecumenism. LEPs at their best are a foretaste of what might be when the main Christian traditions come together.

However, even in an LEP it is not always easy to capture that vision of belonging to the wider whole. The innovative work that is done ecumenically in an LEP at the

forefront of the life of the Church can lead to its own feeling of isolation from the denominations involved in the LEP. When this is added to people's natural parochialism, there are times when those involved in an LEP, especially if they are new Christians, cannot perceive the importance of being strongly related to the wider Christian denominations.

Are LEPs in danger of becoming a new Church, with a life of their own that is not rooted within the life of the main Christian traditions? In fact, the way in which diversity is experienced and held together in an LEP can be a sign of possibility for the main Christian traditions. The way in which the Holy Spirit can free us from inessentials to a new awareness of those things that lie at the heart of our faith can be a sign of hope for the ecumenical pilgrimage nationally.

The shape of visible unity and its acknowledgement of the rich diversity of all God's people is a major focus for discussion, both nationally and internationally (in England the *Called To Be One* process, and internationally, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the 1993 Faith and Order Conference at Santiago, are some examples of the discussions taking place).

Whatever our vision of unity, there is a need for the experience of LEPs to be fed back into the denominations and for the experience of the denominations to be communicated to the LEPs. There is a sense in which the status of LEPs is always 'provisional'. They are on the frontiers of ecumenical ministry. They do not happen in one fixed pattern. They are not immune from the difficulties which can affect any one-denominational church, such as lack of resources, inter-personal conflicts, concentration on maintenance rather than mission; but they can form the ground for much experimentation and much rich development of the Christian life.

While LEPs, at their best, are a foretaste of the unity of all God's people, they provide hints of what is possible rather than a grand blueprint for a future united Church.

- At their best, LEPs provide models of reconciliation for the wider community of the Church and the world. In LEPs it is possible to look again at the way in which disputes are handled and resolved.
- The diversity of shared lifestyle demonstrates once more that Christianity is not a monochrome religion but embraces the wide variety of life reflected in God's gift of creation.
- LEPs can be a model for a renewed human community as they engage in the issues of the place in which they are set and embrace the people of that place.

- Learning not just tolerance of differences, but how to celebrate legitimate diversity can bring about an openness that causes people outside the Church to feel welcomed and accepted.
- In LEPs it is possible to learn and experience again what it means to be inclusive, an inclusiveness based on the kind of inclusive love that God has for all his people.

Jesus prayed that all his people might be one. LEPs seek to live in the spirit and the power of that prayer, relying not on their own strength but on the strength of the God whose gift is unity.

APPENDIX 1

LEPs in Changing Times, 2002 Consultation

by Bill Snelson

The Consultation affirmed that Local Ecumenical Partnerships have a continuing important part to play in the life of the Church in England in the first decade of the 21st Century. They are to be 'fruitful in the service of our common calling to mission'. As 'kingdom-driven', they are witnesses in their life to reconciliation, forgiveness and renewal. They have been created by the Churches to be a more effective witness to the Gospel in a community than the Churches would have been in their separateness. They are a place where unity and mission meet each other.

The 1964 BCC Faith and Order Conference, Nottingham, spoke of 'Areas of ecumenical experiment'; by 1973 the language was of 'project'. In 1995 'partnership' became the accepted terminology, as the Churches wanted to affirm that LEPs were a significant part of the landscape; but in so doing there was a loss of emphasis on experiment, exploration, and the provisionality of the structures of any Church which is always in need of being reformed.

The Consultation wanted to restate the importance of LEPs as situations in which innovative and creative mission-thinking happens, in which issues of growing in unity are felt and heeded, and where identity, loyalty and practicality are tested. The call, therefore, was for better communication between denominations and LEPs; and for a listening so careful that the Churches are open to being challenged, changed and renewed. The need was recognised for penitence, spiritual conversion, prayer, self-sacrifice among all concerned.

The variety of forms of local ecumenical partnership was affirmed by the Consultation which did not want to limit its discussion or conclusions to a particular type. Within the accepted 'categories' there is tremendous variety. In particular, the Consultation noted that some single congregations had come together through adversity or decline, while others had been planted in new housing estates. Among local covenants there are those where a substantial part of the life of the constituent congregations is shared, and others where the rationale and enthusiasm has long-since faded; their history is different, and different intermediate bodies in various parts of the country have interpreted them differently

There are, too, varieties of intermediate bodies and sponsoring mechanisms - some well thought-out and organised, others struggling. In this unevenness, Churches Together in England and the Churches Group for Local Unity may advise, co-ordinate and resource, but cannot regulate or dictate.

Since the 1994 LEP Consultation some of the changes in Church and society may be summarised thus:

- Society is more mobile
- People are more individualistic
- Loyalty is to causes but not to traditions
- People are less likely to commit themselves to membership of organisations
- The Church is perceived as weaker in finance and people, if not in faith
- People are less denominational
- Society is more plural
- Congregations have become more individualist and autonomous
- People have more experience and consciousness of other world faiths
- There is a slowing down of creation of LEPs
- More people have been born and grown up in LEPs
- *Called To Be One*
- Search for alternative solutions – reconciled diversity/co-ordinated diversity
- Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment
- Conversations on the way to unity (Anglican/Methodist/URC)
- An Anglican-Methodist Covenant
- The fall of the proposal for an Ecumenical Bishop in Cardiff East
- Uncertainty about the future of the Scottish Church Initiative for Union

There is a nervousness about schemes for organic or visible unity, and a greater focus on confessing the faith together in closer, deeper relationships ('faith unites, order divides', said some). The model of the Single Congregation is therefore less attractive to some than the Local Covenant: but a Local Covenant which is fully to express interdependence and mutuality will at some point encounter the same issues of 'order' as a single congregation LEP – initiation and membership, inter-changeability of ministry, decision-making and accountability.

Above all, the Consultation affirmed the primacy of relationships over structure. LEPs may create a context within which relationships will develop; but they cannot create the relationships. Structures may aid continuity and clarity, but they cannot guarantee the permanence of the founding vision. LEPs are one way forward, and remain an important way forward, in the realisation of communion with one another and with God, the *koinonia* which is God's gift and our calling.

APPENDIX 2

SECTION 1: The Baptist Union of Great Britain

by Gethin Abraham-Williams and Graham Sparkes

1 Decision-making

Baptists understand the Church to be the local gathered community of believers, and this community meets under the Lordship of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit to make decisions. Such a gathering is known as a Church Meeting, and takes place regularly (usually every month or two months) either on a weekday evening or after a Sunday service. All those on the membership roll are eligible to attend and vote, and all major decisions are taken at such a meeting. The Church Meeting will elect deacons and/or elders who, with the minister, have responsibility for the pastoral and spiritual oversight of the church, and for the good ordering and management of its affairs. Where buildings are involved, a Baptist church will also be regulated by its Trust Deed, and the Church Meeting will need to act in accordance with its stipulations.

Baptists believe in interdependency rather than independency as some might imagine. Each local church is normally in membership with a Regional Association, of which there are thirteen covering England and Wales. Each Regional Association has a staff, and this normally includes Regional Ministers responsible for the care and settlement of churches and ministers, and for mission strategy within the Association. They are there to offer help, advice and guidance as requested.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain is a union of all member churches, together with the Regional Associations and the five Baptist colleges that train men and women for the ordained ministry. It meets as an assembly once a year, to which each church, Association and college may send delegates. The ongoing life of the denomination is regulated by the Baptist Union Council that meets twice a year. The role of the General Secretary has greater importance than that of the annually elected President.

Churches choose to belong to the Association and to the Union, and while some can be in one and not the other, they usually join both. Neither the Association nor the Union has authority over the local church, but membership implies acceptance of covenant responsibility to share in mutual support and encouragement, and to work together in mission and witness.

Some larger Associations and the Baptist Union are incorporated as Trust Bodies for local churches and therefore have a significant role to play in the decisions made about sale and purchase of property, legal matters and adherence to the Trust Deed.

2 Ministry

There is a Register of Covenanted Persons Accredited for Ministry, and this is controlled by the Ministerial Recognition Committee acting on behalf of Baptist Union Council and in accordance with the Ministerial Recognition Rules. This register indicates those whom the Baptist Union recognises as called and qualified to serve as ministers.

It is the Church Meeting that calls a man or woman to be its minister, normally without time limit. It may also terminate a call. Normally, a Baptist church meets the full costs of the minister's salary, housing and working expenses. However, there is also a national Home Mission fund to which all Baptist churches are asked to contribute on a voluntary basis, and this fund enables smaller churches to apply for help in meeting the costs of employing a minister, as well as providing funding for others such as those engaged in sector ministry.

There is a wide variety of dress amongst Baptist ministers. The practice of wearing a clerical collar is not widespread, and very few wear a gown or cassock to lead services.

3 Worship

Two Sunday services are normal. It is usual for the morning service to be for all ages, with children and young people leaving part way through for separate group teaching. Evening services will take a variety of forms, sometimes seeking to be responsive to the young people who are part of the church. Services consist of prayers, hymns and songs, scripture readings and a sermon. The preaching tradition continues to be given prominence. Where a church has a minister, he or she will often conduct the worship and preach. However, many also involve members of the congregation, and churches without a minister rely on lay pastors and preachers. The degree to which a church has been affected by liturgical and charismatic renewal will often depend on its minister.

A wide variety of resources are used for worship, and increasingly churches make use of projected material and make their own collections of songs and prayers. *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* is the Baptist worship manual used by many ministers, and a successor to this is currently being prepared.

4 Baptism and church membership

Baptists believe that Christian Baptism is for believers. There is no particular age when a candidate is expected to be ready for Believers' Baptism, though most would probably be in their mid-teens. The criterion is an ability to make a declaration of personal faith in, and commitment to, Jesus Christ.

Baptismal services occur as the need arises after suitable preparation by the minister, or by other members appointed by the deacons and/or elders. It usually takes place in a church baptistry, though swimming pools, rivers and the sea have sometimes been used! Prior to the act of baptism, the minister will normally publicly question each candidate: 'Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?' ('I do') 'Do you promise with the help of the Holy Spirit to serve him in the church and in the world unto your life's end?' ('I do'). The minister then goes into the water and the candidates follow one at a time. There is a tradition of wearing white, though this is not always followed.

In the water, the minister will say to each candidate: '(Christian name), upon profession of your faith and at your own request I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.' The candidate is then immersed, either from standing up or kneeling, until the water momentarily covers the head. As each candidate is baptised, it is customary for the congregation to sing a verse of an appropriate hymn, or scripture song, often chosen by the candidate.

Those baptised are received into membership of the church with the right hand of fellowship and/or by the laying on of hands at communion, which occurs either following baptism or on a succeeding Sunday. Baptism and Church Membership are held together, in the conviction that no one can be a solitary Christian and that faith always has to be lived out in community.

Many churches also allow Church Membership on the basis of a public declaration without baptism, i.e. on 'profession of faith'. This allows those from other traditions to share fully in the life of the church. Every application for membership must be approved by the Church Meeting.

5 Communion

Baptist churches usually celebrate Communion (sometimes referred to as 'The Lord's Supper', twice a month, once in the morning and once in the evening. A few celebrate either less frequently or more often. There is either a common loaf or small pieces of bread, and while some churches use a single chalice for the wine, many use the

individual small cups. The wine is generally non-alcoholic.

Communion is normally conducted by the minister, though a senior deacon or visiting preacher, lay or ordained, may preside in his or her absence. At the communion table the deacons are seated on either side of the minister and assist in the administration, taking the elements to the people in their places. These are received in silence, or to the accompaniment of a suitable voluntary. Usually the bread is eaten as it is received and the cup retained so that all may drink it together. In common with other Free Church people, Baptists are not used to going forward to take communion and to receive from a common cup. However, this now appears less strange than was once so!

There is no set form of liturgy, but the pattern and wording of I Corinthians 11 is normally adhered to, with the Prayer of Thanksgiving offered by the minister or an elder or deacon.

It is usual in all but closed membership churches (i.e. open only to those baptised as believers) for an invitation to be given at the beginning of the service that 'the Table is open to all who love the Lord'. Such an invitation extends to all, whether or not any public profession of faith leading to membership (of any tradition) has been made.

6 Sensitivities

Baptists place great emphasis on freedom of conscience and religious liberty. This can create difficulties for other denominations when those baptised in infancy request Believers' Baptism, for most Baptists want to uphold the significance of their own tradition.

Mission and evangelism is a strong and vibrant strand within the life and activity of Baptist communities. Evangelism is regarded as normative, and has resulted in the encouragement and development of many forms of youth and missionary work.

A recently published document, *Five Core Values for a Gospel People* (BUGB Publications) offers a clear statement of core Baptist convictions and how these are to be lived out in faithful discipleship.

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Email: info@baptist.org.uk Website: www.baptist.org.uk

SECTION 2: The Church of England

by Donald Reece and John Cole

1 Decision-making

The Church of England is organised into parishes, deaneries, forty-four dioceses and the provinces of Canterbury and York.

In the parish, policy is made by the Vicar (or Rector), churchwardens and the Parochial Church Council acting together. In some matters the approval of the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (all on the Church Electoral Roll) is required. This must meet before the end of April to adopt the reports and accounts of the year ending December 31st. The Church Representation Rules provide for baptised members of other trinitarian churches, without discarding existing membership, to belong to the Church Electoral Roll of their parish, stand for election to the PCC; and stand for election to the Deanery Synod.

The deanery is a grouping of parishes presided over by the Rural (or Area) Dean, who is usually one of the parish clergy. Appointment procedures vary for this honorary position. A lay co-chairperson is elected by lay members of the synod. The deanery synod has few executive powers, and functions primarily in advisory and co-ordinating capacities - although in some dioceses it has a growing responsibility for strategic planning.

All the clergy of the deanery, together with the parochially elected lay representatives on the Deanery Synod, are the respective electors for members of the Houses of Laity and of Clergy in both the Diocesan and General Synods. The latter, which also includes the House of Bishops, deals with major doctrinal and legislative matters. In some cases the approval of Parliament is also required. The bishop of the diocese, along with his Diocesan Synod and its committees (such as Pastoral and Finance), form the diocesan policy-making, financial and administrative executive. This is where agreement is reached about the parochial assessments ('quota' or 'share') payable by parishes to the diocese to cover the costs of stipendiary ministry.

The Archdeacon, as well as supporting the bishop in pastoral oversight and clergy appointments, has responsibility for the structure and furnishing of church buildings. This is governed by the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules, which require advice from the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the issue of a faculty by the senior legal officer of the diocese, the Chancellor. The Archdeacon in his annual visitation of parishes is sometimes assisted by the Rural Deans. He also admits churchwardens as officers of

the bishop, as well as of the parish.

Although parishes have considerable autonomy (e.g. freehold incumbents cannot easily be removed from office), it remains the case that in the Church of England 'the local church' is properly understood to be the diocese under the bishop's oversight. It is at this level that most major decisions are taken and resources deployed.

2 Ministry

The ordained ministry of the bishop, the priests and deacons, whether paid or non-stipendiary, is an integral part of the life of the church and the diocese. Each parish has a priest as incumbent (Vicar or Rector) - although in cases where re-organisation of parishes is planned, the bishop may appoint a 'Priest-in-Charge'.

The current increase in lay ministries illustrates the emerging collaborative style involving both clergy and laity. Licensed Readers are unpaid, fully trained lay ministers, while Church Army Sisters and Captains are deployed alongside other stipendiary lay ministers and community workers. Some dioceses create systems for training lay pastoral assistants, and some of these receive a certificate at the end of their course. An increasing number of dioceses also have Local Ministry Schemes involving trained teams of local ministers, some of whom may eventually be ordained.

A diocese will also provide a part-time or full-time lay or ordained team of resource personnel in various aspects of church life, such as mission, ministry, education, unity and social responsibility. Specialists are often also deployed outside the parish system in Industrial and Rural Mission and as chaplains in hospitals, colleges, prisons, etc. Often these posts are set up jointly with other denominations.

In rural areas it is usual for an incumbent to be responsible for more than one parish, in some cases as many as seven or eight.

Other patterns for the deployment of clergy include 'group ministry' - where the clergy in a number of adjacent parishes remain independent, but commit themselves voluntarily to mutual sharing of ministry - and 'team ministry', which involves a legal commitment amongst the clergy concerned. Team Vicars and other licensed clergy and laity are committed to one another, under the leadership of the Team Rector - often working in a single parish which may have a number of parish centres of worship. Specialist ministries may also be allocated within a team ministry.

Much of the time of parish clergy is spent in the ministry of baptisms, marriages and

funerals. Increasingly, lay people share in the pastoral aspects of this work. This illustrates the Church of England's sense of pastoral responsibility for everyone resident within the parish. Parish boundaries are statutory, and so a correct and courteous approach is required, either in ministry to residents of another parish, or if wider new ministry is being considered. The Church of England is, however, increasingly recognising that our more mobile society requires more flexible patterns of missionary engagement, and is looking for appropriate ways of making these boundaries more 'permeable'.

3 Worship

The incumbent and the PCC will decide (under the terms of Canon B3) how to effect the required provision (under Canon B14) of the weekly Sunday services of Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion. They may choose to use either the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662) or *Common Worship* (2000) for these services, and for baptisms, weddings and funerals. Provisions for preaching, music etc. are in the last resort the responsibility of the 'minister having the cure of souls' - although the agreement of the PCC is needed for the appointment and removal of organists and directors of music.

The *Ecumenical Relations Measure (1989)* introduced two new permissive canons which supplement the normal canonical disciplines for Church of England worship. *Canon B43* ('Of Relations with Other Churches') is applicable in every Church of England place of worship and allows for a considerable measure of shared ministry and worship with churches designated by the Archbishops under the measure. This may also include both lay or ordained ministers of other churches leading their worship in an Anglican Church, and also Anglican clergy participating in the worship of another church. *Canon B44* ('Of Local Ecumenical Projects') makes possible a more comprehensive sharing of ministry and church life and mission with these other churches through the formation of Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The Diocesan Ecumenical Officer will advise, and the *Ecumenical Relations Code of Practice 1989*, with its 1997 supplement, is an essential guide.

Weekday activities, including small groups for bible study and nurture, are widespread and are increasingly becoming a focus for worship, often including celebrations of the Eucharist. There is often an ecumenical dimension. There is a requirement for Morning and Evening Prayer to be said daily in every parish. Alongside what is required by canon, patterns of worship are becoming increasingly flexible.

4 Baptism and confirmation

The baptism of adults and of infants is provided for. The *Book of Common Prayer*

urges parents not to defer bringing their new-born infants for baptism, and to see that they are brought to the bishop to be confirmed.

Common Worship provides an integrated set of services. Currently, a growing proportion of those seeking confirmation have not been baptised in infancy. Parishes vary in their preparation of and expectations for the professed faith of parents who seek baptism for their infants; but godparents must themselves have been baptised, and are expected to have been confirmed. An increasing number of parishes administer baptism at the main Sunday service of worship.

Admission to Holy Communion generally follows confirmation by the bishop. In some dioceses parishes may seek permission from their bishop to admit children to Holy Communion prior to their confirmation. Each diocese publishes guidelines for the minimum age of candidates for confirmation. The limited availability of the bishops to come to the parishes means that increasingly congregations are grouped together for confirmations on an annual basis.

Where there is a Local Ecumenical Partnership, under Canon B44, the House of Bishops has made provision for a joint confirmation, at which each candidate receives the laying on of hands from the bishop and also from the confirming minister of other partner churches. Such Christians will then locally exercise a dual or multiple church membership.

5 Holy Communion, Eucharist or Lord's Supper

Holy Communion, whether according to *The Book of Common Prayer*, *Common Worship* or other authorised rite, must be presided over by a priest of the Church of England, or by one episcopally ordained in orders accepted by the Church of England. The distribution of the sacrament may be undertaken by deacons, readers or other lay people authorised within the diocese or, under the provisions of Canon B43, by appropriate members of other churches. Both the sacrament of Christ's Body and of Christ's Blood are administered to each person. Either wafers or bread may be used; the wine used should be alcoholic. There is one cup (chalice) for the wine, but for reasons of hygiene individual communicants may choose to receive the wine by the intinction (dipping) of the bread.

In some parishes consecrated bread and wine are reserved in an aumbry (a wall safe in the sanctuary) and later taken to the sick. Extended Communion would describe the extension of one celebration of Holy Communion by the taking of the consecrated elements by a deacon, reader or authorised lay minister to another congregation meeting on the same day in a separate church, usually within the same group or team

The Eucharist may also be celebrated in the homes of the housebound.

Parishes in a Local Ecumenical Partnership may, under Canon B44, have an agreement to share ministry, in which a minister of another church ordained for word and sacraments may preside at a Eucharist in a parish church using a customary rite of that church, or a rite authorised by the Church of England. Such a service, however, should not be held to be a celebration of the Holy Communion according to the use of the Church of England.

Canon B15A permits the admission to Holy Communion of baptised members who are communicants in good standing of other churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

6 Sensitivities

It is helpful for members of other Churches to understand Anglican sacramental practices.

The baptism of an infant is effective, even if the faith of sponsors, and consequent Christian nurture is deficient. If someone baptised in infancy comes to personal faith as an adult, then it is not appropriate for the outward rite of baptism to be repeated.

At Holy Communion, Canon B44 does not envisage anyone presiding other than one ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Also, when the people have received the sacraments, what is left over should be consumed, so that no consecrated bread or wine is returned to storage or thrown away.

Where there is ecumenical ministry, forethought is helpful, and guidelines on such matters may be worked out amongst the partner churches.

Further information is available from the Ecumenical Adviser for your diocese, or from the National Adviser (Unity-in-Mission), Council for Christian Unity, Church House, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ. Tel: 020 7898 1479.

SECTION 3: The Methodist Church

by Peter Sulston

1 Decision-making

The annual Conference meeting for nine days in June/July is the supreme authority. The majority of its members are elected by the District Synods. At least one-third must be ministers and at least one-third lay people, and a small number of places must go to those ordained as deacons. Methodists use the term ‘the Connexion’ to refer to the Methodist Church in general and its national network. All ministers are ‘received into full connexion’ at the Conference and ordained by its authority usually on the same day, at services associated with the Conference. The Methodist Council acts on behalf of Conference during the year.

There is a Connexional Team under the direction of the Conference. It provides appropriate support for the whole connexion and acts on its behalf, in relation to the wider life of society and ecumenical partners, when that cannot be done more locally.

The Church in Great Britain is divided into 33 districts each with a chairman, and each holding a Synod, usually twice a year. The districts are a link between the Conference and the circuits. Every local church is part of a circuit under the care of a Superintendent minister. The Superintendent has considerable authority and can do much to promote or to thwart the progress of an LEP. The Circuit Meeting elects representatives to the District Synod, invites ministers, and co-ordinates the work of local churches, each of which is represented on it.

The life of the local church, including the management of property, is ordered by a Church Council, which appoints a Pastoral Committee and other committees which may be required. In local ecumenical partnerships, an ecumenical church council may serve as the church council with certain conditions. In ecumenical areas, the meeting responsible for the general management of the area may act as the Circuit Meeting. The financial year ends on 31 August.

2 Ministry

All ministers are in the last resort under the direction of the Stationing Committee, which presents its recommendations for the ‘stations’ for the year beginning in September for approval by the Conference. Since all ministers move at that time, there are vacancies in the circuits only in cases of emergency or because of a shortage of ministers. A minister is appointed to the circuit and not to an individual church and,

after consultation, can be redeployed within the circuit under the direction of the Superintendent. In ecumenical areas, the initial invitation is normally for seven years instead of the usual five years, and a minister is expected to preach in other churches in the circuit besides his or her own.

A minister usually has pastoral charge of a number of churches. The conduct of worship is therefore considerably dependent on 10,000 trained and accredited Local Preachers, and the Circuit Plan is an indispensable feature of Methodist life. It indicates who is planned to take Sunday services in each church, and may include a circuit directory with other information.

A probationer minister (i.e. an ordinand but still technically a lay person) can only celebrate Holy Communion by authorisation of the Conference. Other lay persons may also be authorised to celebrate. In all cases, such authorisation is given only in circumstances where there would otherwise be deprivation.

The Methodist Church was the first to make constitutional provision for ministers of other denominations to serve as Methodist ministers. The Conference by a Standing Vote each year accords them 'Recognised and Regarded', which gives them the privileges and responsibilities of the Methodist ministry and places them under Methodist discipline. Another group of ministers serving in the circuits are 'authorised to serve.'

3 'Our Calling'

The Church is at present engaged in a process, 'Our Calling', which is focused on four main themes:

- **Worship:** The Church exists to increase awareness of God's presence and to celebrate God's love;
- **Learning and caring:** The Church exists to help people to grow and learn as Christians through mutual support and care;
- **Service:** The Church exists to be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice;
- **Evangelism:** The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ.

'Our Calling' came out of a wide process of consultation and was endorsed by the Conference in 2000. It has been taken up with enthusiasm in many districts, circuits and local churches, notably as a way of helping to shape plans and strategies for the future.

4 **Worship**

The minister or local preacher has considerable freedom in devising the shape and content of a service. ‘Methodism was born in song’, and hymnody continues to be a vital element in worship and a foremost means by which Methodists express their faith and experience. Within any particular act of worship there are often local conventions to be followed, for example the place of children in the service, and the involvement of members of the congregation in the reading of lessons. Many churches and preachers now use the Revised Common Lectionary and the sermon is still given priority. The Lectionary is printed in full in *The Methodist Worship Book*, which provides much other resource material for those leading worship.

There are no regulations regarding the dress of ministers or local preachers. Ministers may wear cassock and gown, some with hood or scarf, but a preaching gown or a plain suit are still common.

5. **Baptism and confirmation**

Christian parents are regarded as being under solemn obligation to present their children for baptism, which is regarded as an unrepeatable act. Baptism is normally administered in the context of public worship, following the rite in *The Methodist Worship Book*. The baptism, as a declaration of the grace of God, and in the faith of the Church, precedes the promises made by the parents and the congregation; godparents are not essential, but when present are asked to promise to ‘help these parents to nurture their children in the Christian faith’. A candle is often presented after a baptism.

For those of mature age, usually confirmation or reception into membership follows, and may include one or both of two symbolic acts derived from the New Testament - the laying on of hands and the right hand of fellowship. The local minister usually presides and confirms. The names of those confirmed are placed on the church membership roll and are transferred to another church on removal to another area. An annual ticket of membership is provided.

The annual Covenant Service is a prized treasure initiated by John Wesley, providing a means for rededication and renewal of membership pledges.

6 Eucharist

In urban churches, Holy Communion may be celebrated on one Sunday morning and one Sunday evening each month, but less often in rural areas. There has been a noticeable revival of eucharistic worship in recent years, and it is now no longer added to the 'main' service. The tradition of the 'open table' is still valued. *The Methodist Worship Book* contains those services authorised by the Conference. It is widely used, but some churches prefer a non-liturgical service on occasions. The minister may decide how the service is to be conducted, position at the Communion table, etc., but he or she will be sensitive to local traditions. It is usual for a whole row or 'table' of communicants to wait and to be dismissed together before returning to their seats. Bread and 'the juice of the grape' are used, and individual glasses are still the general rule. Any remaining elements are 'reverently consumed, or otherwise reverently disposed of'.

7 Sensitivities

Recent consultations about leadership in the Church, and reactions to a report about possible ways of having 'Methodist bishops', made very clear the real suspicions that still exist in some quarters in Methodism of hierarchical forms of leadership. 'Bishop', 'priest' and 'altar' continue to be terms that are held in suspicion by some. 'Minister' is preferred to 'clergyman'.

Methodists remain proud of their own form of democratic process and their Connexional system, enabling the strong to help the weak.

The social conscience characteristic of earlier Methodism continues to be reflected in attitudes towards alcohol and gambling on Methodist premises, and an active concern about a wide range of social and political issues.

Methodists do not always take kindly to being described as a gathered church; something of the spirit of John Wesley, who said 'I look upon the world as my parish', continues to be expressed in an active concern for the whole community, in which each church is called to be a missionary presence.

Where Methodists are in minority partnerships with Anglicans, the latter need to be aware of the fear of absorption which is often present, as Methodists may need to be in the case of United Reformed Church or Baptist partners.

Further information from the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development - The Rev Peter Sulston, 25 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5JR- Tel: 020 767 5141

SECTION 4: The Catholic Church

by Andrew J Faley

1 Decision-making

The basic administrative unit of the Catholic Church throughout the world is the diocese an area presided over by a bishop, sometimes with auxiliary bishops to help him. In England and Wales we have 22 territorial dioceses. These are divided into parishes, the local communities of Catholics. Catholic dioceses in England cover several counties and so are generally much larger in area than, for example, Anglican dioceses.

All the Catholic bishops meet together twice a year to decide policies for the Church at national level. This gathering, which occurs for a week soon after Easter (Low Week) and for a week in November each year, is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales. Catholic bishops also form a world-wide college of bishops, whose head is the Pope. Some of the decisions of the English and Welsh Catholic bishops are taken in consultation with the Pope and his officers in the Vatican.

The laws and disciplines which promote order and support growth in the Catholic Church are encoded in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. This provides a general law for the Catholic Church throughout the world. In it there is provision for certain decisions to be made by a local bishop and by a bishops' conference. Dioceses, deaneries and parishes have pastoral councils which are consultative rather than decision-making. Decision-making lies with the bishop or the parish priest, who is his local delegate. It is important to know this, for instance, broaching the question of a local covenant.

There is an ecumenical directory, produced in 1993, which gives directives for the ecumenical activities of the Catholic Church throughout the world. This also makes provision for certain decisions to be taken locally. In 2002 the Catholic bishops in England and Wales produced a popular version of the ecumenical directory called *The Search for Christian Unity*. It is particularly useful for clergy and laity at 'grassroots' level, and tries to present the 1993 directory in a readily accessible way.

Individual Catholic bishops are appointed as representatives of the Bishops' Conference to CTE and CTBI. The bishops also appoint a national ecumenical officer to represent the Church in England and Wales at international, national, intermediate and local levels. Bishops are also involved in various local sponsoring bodies or ecumenical councils and they appoint ecumenical advisers to assist them. Each Catholic diocese has an ecumenical commission or ecumenical advisers.

2 Ministry

The Catholic Church believes that, firstly, people are baptised into Christian ministry. It also believes that there is an ordained ministry which is given as a special grace to individuals for service in the Church. There have been significant developments in the Catholic Church's approach to the ministry of lay people, who are now much more involved in the lives of their parishes, both sacramentally and pastorally. Some lay people are commissioned by their diocesan bishop as ministers to assist in the administration of Holy Communion both during the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass), and to the sick in their homes or in hospital. Others are trained as catechists and work in the faith formation of adults and children in parishes. An increasing number of lay people are now appointed as parish administrators, especially where there is no longer a residential priest in their parish. There has also been a significant development in the ministry of the permanent diaconate. Catholics certainly understand ministry to be wider than the ministry of the clergy.

3 Worship

For Catholics, worship is centred on the celebration of the Sacraments and other forms of liturgy such as the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass. Private and public acts of prayer such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross continue to be popular in parishes.

(For) the liturgy, through which the work of our redemption is accomplished, most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. (Vatican II, *Document on the Liturgy*, Paragraph 2)

Over recent years there have been a number of developments in the prayer and devotional life of Catholics, especially based on Scripture. These developments have opened up possibilities for greater ecumenical sharing in prayer and there are good examples of ecumenical prayer groups around the countries. Although some traditional Catholic devotional practices have declined, pilgrim and prayer centres such as Walsingham in England and the shrine of Our Lady of Cardigan in Wales attract many people throughout the year and enrich the devotional and prayer lives of those who visit them. There is also a strong ecumenical dimension to these and other places of pilgrimage, which often focus on the life and witness of a particular saint such as Lindisfarne in Northumberland (St Aidan and St Cuthbert) and Canterbury Cathedral in Kent (St Thomas á Becket).

In many Catholic parishes the Divine Office, which is the universal prayer of the Church, is celebrated. This form of prayer is based on the psalms and readings from the Scriptures. It used to be thought of as the prayer of priests, monks and nuns but over recent years all Catholics are encouraged to use it. It has the same roots as Matins and Evensong in the Anglican tradition and much the same shape.

4 Baptism and confirmation

The Catholic Church regards Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist as the three Sacraments of Initiation. A person's membership of the Church is incomplete until all three sacraments have been received. The Catholic Church baptises adults and infants. Adult initiation, which is a staged formation that includes worship, prayer and catechesis, culminates in the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist usually during the Easter Vigil. Children who were baptised as infants receive the Eucharist usually around the age of eight. Confirmation is usually celebrated during the teens. The Catholic Church recognises Baptism when administered with the pouring of water and the invocation of the Holy Trinity.

5 Eucharist

The Eucharist lies at the heart of worship in the Catholic Church. Catholics hold it to be the source and summit of the Church's life, especially celebrated within the local parish. It is the centre of gravity for Catholic life, worship and prayer. Every Catholic is obliged to participate in the celebration of Mass on a Sunday as the day of the Lord's Resurrection, and on other feast days during the year, such as Christmas Day (when it does not fall on a Sunday) and the feast of the Ascension of the Lord (Ascension Thursday). For many Catholics, daily attendance at Mass is part of their life.

Catholic teaching emphasises the close connection between Eucharist and Church:

Catholic faith in the Eucharist and Catholic faith in the Church are two essential dimensions of one and the same Mystery of Faith, rooted first and foremost in the awesome mystery of God in his saving love, reconciling the world to himself in Jesus Christ.

(Catholics) believe that when a person receives Communion at a Eucharistic celebration, he or she should be expressing a deep unity of faith and love with that particular community, and with the wider communion to which that community belongs. Normally when people receive Holy Communion at a

Catholic celebration of Mass, they should be saying: 'We are in full communion with the Catholic Church, united with the bishop of this local community and with the Pope.' This aspect of the Eucharist is deeply rooted in the life of Catholics in Britain and Ireland. (*One Bread One Body*, Paragraphs 10 & 62, Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland)

Catholics are not allowed to receive communion at the eucharistic celebrations of most of their fellow Christians, nor are they allowed, as a general rule, to admit to Holy Communion people who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. There are exceptions, of course, but most of these concern individuals and do not affect local ecumenical situations. The document *One Bread One Body*, quoted above, gives a fuller exploration of these issues.

6 Sensitivities

On worship:

The official worship of the Catholic Church is based on the liturgical year. This begins with the season of Advent and includes reflection and preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. This leads into the Christmas season and the celebration of the Lord's Incarnation and Birth. The liturgical year continues with the seasons of Lent and Easter during which the Church prepares for and focuses on the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. The sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost marks the end of the Easter season. The rest of the year reflects on and celebrates Jesus' ministry, especially on each of the Sundays in what is called 'Ordinary Time'. Into this framework are built many other feasts, notably expressing the Catholic Church's sense of the communion of saints and the special place in it of Mary the Mother of Jesus. Statues, candles, the Stations of the Cross and the crucifix are visual features of Catholic churches.

In shared buildings, difficulties can be raised by the presence or absence of some of these objects and images. Great respect, plus a little imagination, can help overcome some of the difficulties.

On doctrine:

Catholics have a high regard for doctrine and theology as traditionally taught in the Catholic Church. They see no gap between 'faith' and 'life' issues. What and how they believe informs life and vice versa. This has been endorsed over the past years especially with the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1994. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says:

The Church's Magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes truths contained in divine Revelation or also when it proposes in a definitive way truths having a

necessary connection with them.

There is an organic connection between our spiritual life and the dogmas. Dogmas are lights along the path of faith; they illuminate it and make it secure. Conversely, if our life is upright, our intellect and heart will be open to welcome the light shed by the dogmas of faith.

The mutual connections between dogmas, and their coherence, can be found in the whole of the Revelation of the mystery of Christ. In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith. (*Catechism*, Articles 88-90)

Catholics believe that 'faith and order' divisions must be overcome if the unity of the Church is to be achieved. Much work has been done in this area, for example the agreed statements that have been produced by the Joint Anglican and Roman Catholic Committee (ARCIC).

Resourcing ecumenism:

The Catholic Church in England and Wales is a full member of both Churches Together in England (CTE) and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). Catholics are fully committed to ecumenism. The Catholic Church's ecumenical experience continues to develop, especially at the local level in cities, towns, villages and districts.

I always say that the road on which we are embarked namely, the road of ecumenism whose end is unity, is one way – there is no exit, only completion. But we know that the road is yet long, and that we must keep on travelling patiently and in good faith, never letting perfection become the enemy of the good of which we are capable. Today is an occasion for giving thanks that we have come as far as we have. But it is also an occasion to ask the prayers of St John Fisher and all our Christian martyrs to keep us moving forward.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor's address at the Dedication of a plaque in honour of St John Fisher, Tower of London, 19 January 2004.

The Catholic Church may be a large community in England and Wales but it is not a wealthy community. Resources are drawn mostly from parishes and dioceses for the work of the Church. Every parish contributes to its local diocesan central development fund as well as to the work of the Church at national and international levels. The Catholic bishops frequently review their commitment to ecumenism, not just in financial terms, but more importantly in terms of the relationships that exist between the Churches and increasingly between the whole Church and other faith communities.

Mixed marriages:

In the last thirty years there has been some change in the attitude of the Catholic Church towards marriages between Catholics and other Christians and between Catholics and people of other faiths. Some 70% of marriages involving Catholics in England are 'mixed marriages' – mostly with Anglicans and Methodists, but not exclusively. The current attitude, as expressed in the Directory on Mixed Marriages (1990), is positive and ecumenical. The commitment of the Catholic to preserve and promote the Catholic faith remains, together with a promise (made by the Catholic), 'I sincerely undertake that I will do all that I can within the unity of our partnership to have all the children of our marriage baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church.'

The issues concerning Holy Communion remain at their most poignant in this setting, especially in those marriages where the spouses have a strong commitment to their faith.

Further information; contact your local Catholic parish priest who should be able to tell you the name of the diocesan adviser for ecumenism. Also contact the Catholic Bishops' Conference Department of Mission and Unity at 39 Eccleston Square, London SW1V 1PD. Tel: 02027 901 4802 or 4811. Web site: www.cbcew.org.uk.

SECTION 5: The United Reformed Church

by Peter Poulter

1 Decision-making

The United Reformed Church is a recent union of four Churches with distinct patterns of structure and practice: the Congregational Church and Presbyterian Church of England in 1972, with the Churches of Christ in 1981 and with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000. Local congregations frequently share some of the experience of LEPs in that individual members will have grown up with an unequal mix of the traditions and sensibilities of those Churches. Thus the variety of expectation and approach may well be greater than in most other Churches.

Oversight beyond the local is exercised by the General Assembly, the thirteen synods and the 80 district/area councils. The District Council has the responsibility to enquire pastorally into the situation of each local church under its oversight at least every five years. In the case of LEPs, the district council is encouraged to combine this with the sponsoring body's review.

In each local church, elders share responsibility with the minister for regular pastoral care of the membership and, in conjunction with the church meeting, lead and direct the life of the congregation. Elders are lay people, elected by the church meeting and ordained for life by the local minister to specific pastoral and managerial responsibilities in the local congregation and in the councils of the church. Among all United Reformed Church members, there is a strong expectation of lay involvement in decision-making at all levels.

2 Ministry

The United Reformed Church ordains both men and women to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Most ministers are full-time stipendiary ministers but an increasing number of non-stipendiary ministers are now serving in local churches, chaplaincies and a variety of less formally structured pastoral settings.

3 Worship

Worship in the United Reformed Church combines a proud insistence on freedom from the restrictions of a set order, printed and prescribed, with a fairly restricted expectation of the structure and content of the normal service. This normal service is

basically the read and preached word set in the context of hymns and prayers with great emphasis laid on biblical proclamation. The response of the people is usually expressed through the hymns. There is a strong tradition of metrical psalms especially in the former Presbyterian strand of the Church, but little of sung psalms or canticles. Many members of most congregations will be happy with a service entirely conducted by the minister, but there is an increasing acceptance and expectation of opportunity for congregational participation and response that is more than token or ritual. Ministerial dress may vary from lounge suit and tie to cassock, bands, hood, gown and even occasionally coloured stole. Generally it involves clerical collar and gown with either suit or cassock. Some ministers may wear an alb for Holy Communion, but this is rare.

4 Baptism and confirmation

Baptism in the United Reformed Church was originally infant baptism, frequently observing the Reformed tradition of baptising only the children of church members. Since 1981 and the union with the Churches of Christ, differing theological convictions about infant and believer's baptism have been held together within the Basis of Union. All traditions in the United Reformed Church regard baptism as an unrepeatable act but special provisions are contained in the Scheme of Union for pastoral reconciliation where 'differences of conviction within the one Church result in personal conflict of conscience'. No-one is required to administer or submit to a form of baptism to which he/she has a conscientious objection.

Church membership/confirmation usually involves people of mature age - rarely under about 16. Reception is usually by a local minister or a senior elder in the church. The emphasis is on profession of faith and commitment recognised and celebrated in a local relationship.

5 Communion

Holy Communion is central to the life of the Church, but this is expressed in different ways. The Presbyterian tradition is of quarterly communion, the Churches of Christ of weekly and the Congregationalists somewhere in between. Presidency is normally by an ordained minister or an elder authorised to officiate in case of pastoral necessity. Communion is in both kinds, using leavened bread and (usually) unfermented wine of various sorts. The elements are taken to the seated members by the elders. Generally wine is served in small glasses, but in LEPs and in a few local United Reformed churches one may find the use of both glasses and chalice, or chalice alone.

There is a traditional invitation to the table to 'all who love and acknowledge the

lordship of Christ'. In practice this generally means people of a mature age and often only church members participate; there is, however, a growing and animated discussion in the United Reformed Church about the place of children at communion. The bread and wine may be consumed by each person as and when it is distributed or by all together when the whole company has been served; local patterns vary. In most churches the method of disposal of the elements after the service is not considered an important matter.

Further information from Revd Richard Mortimer, United Reformed Church,
86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT. Tel: 020 7916 2020.

APPENDIX 3: USEFUL ADDRESSES

Churches Together in England (CTE) (London Office, Field Officer for the South)

27 Tavistock Square

London WC1H 9HH

Tel: 020 7529 8141 Fax: 020 7529 8134

Website: www.churches-together.org.uk

Note: A list of county ecumenical officers' names and addresses is available from the Churches Together in England's London office.

Churches Together in England (Field Officer for the North and Midlands)

Luther King House

Brighton Grove

Manchester M14 5JP

Tel: 0161 249 2515 Fax: 0870 121 5613

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

Bastille Court

2 Paris Garden

London SE1 8ND

Tel: 020 7654 7254 Fax: 020 7654 7222 Website: www.ctbi.org.uk

CYTŪN: Churches Together in Wales

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At the time of publication, the Covenanted Churches in Wales have a separate website: www.enfys.org

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“Local Ecumenical Partnerships have a truly prophetic role to play in the journey towards unity. By their very commitment to each other and to the ecumenical movement itself they are a living example and encouragement to others.

I welcome this revised edition of *Travelling Together*. It will prove to be a very useful tool to those starting out on the ecumenical journey as well as enabling those more experienced to update their knowledge and extend their growth.”

Anne Doyle DSG
Chair of the Churches Group for Local Unity

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