

## WHEN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IS THE ONLY CHURCH IN A VILLAGE

1. In many villages there is only one church and worshipping community. In a few instances this will be a Roman Catholic Church. Within the village there may be Christians of different traditions, some of whom try to combine loyalty to a particular denomination with their desire to worship and witness in their local community. Sometimes a church of another denomination has closed, sometimes those who previously commuted to a church outside the village are prevented from doing so through infirmity or lack of transport.
2. While the local Catholic church may be part of a wider parish, it is able in a variety of ways to make members of other churches feel that they belong to the Christian community of that village. This sense of belonging will not, of course, be the same as becoming members of that local church, but they will be able to take as full a part as is possible in its worship and life.
3. The local Catholic community will want to welcome all who wish to be part of its fellowship and enable their insights, strengths, gifts and graces to enrich, as far as possible, the life of the congregation. That life will include worship, mission and service, as well as a growing participation, where appropriate, in the administrative and decision-making processes.
4. The priest and congregation may seek, with the Bishop's permission, to introduce elements from other traditions into their worship and life. They may also wish to offer the use of the church to other traditions. The Parish Priest should consult with those from the other churches in the area who have pastoral oversight and responsibility for pastoral care. The Christian community in the village will also need encouragement to share in the life of the wider church through Churches Together groupings.
5. At the Mass members of other churches may be invited to
  - Read the lessons and psalm
  - Lead or take part in the Bidding (intercessory) Prayers
  - Receive a blessing at Communion
  - Choose hymns and prayers from their tradition.

The use of inclusive language is recommended.

6. The celebration of non-eucharistic services, so that all may take part fully, should be encouraged. Members of other churches may then participate in the planning and leading of worship and the community experience the riches of many traditions.
7. The local church may seek to formalise and ensure the continuity of this ecumenically enriched life by agreeing a "Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment". Before doing so it should ask permission of the Bishop and Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and then seek advice from the Intermediate Body or its Ecumenical Officer as to which other denominations should be consulted and at what level. The Declaration must be endorsed by the neighbouring churches and care needs to be taken over the real or imagined effect on the congregational strength of these churches so that this is not seen as 'poaching'.

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

**A DECLARATION OF ECUMENICAL WELCOME AND COMMITMENT**  
**by a Roman Catholic Parish**

We, the parish priest and people of St CCC, Aford, are aware that we are the only church offering regular worship in Aford; and therefore we invite all Christians in Aford to play as full a part as they are able in the life and fellowship of this church.

We invite those of all Christian traditions

- to worship with us (1)
- to share in the ministry and mission of the Church in this community
- to share, in an appropriate manner, in the decision-making and leadership of the church
- to contribute financially to St.CCC's parish so far as their continued giving to another church will allow.

We undertake

- to give pastoral care to all who desire it (2)
- to incorporate the riches from the worship of other traditions as appropriate
- to invite ministers and lay preachers of other churches to take part in leading non-eucharistic worship (3)
- to invite ministers of other churches to preside at Eucharistic services of their tradition if desired (4)
- to consult with other churches in the area concerning the mission of the Church in Aford
- to include this Ecumenical Declaration in any description of the activities in the Parish, especially when a new priest is appointed..

Following the decision made by Churches Together in Ashire (our Intermediate Body) on .....200x and with the agreement of the Bishop and Diocesan Ecumenical Commission that such declarations may be made in the area which they serve, we have sought and followed their advice as to which churches should first be consulted, and those mentioned below have given us their blessing and encouragement.

for St CCCC's Parish

Parish Priest  
Chairman, Parish Council

For the other churches

- (1) Since it is the Catholic understanding that “Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression” (*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 129) other Christians may not normally be invited to receive communion at a Roman Catholic Mass. However, other Christians are invited to receive a blessing from the celebrant.

“Even though some may not receive *sacramental* communion, all are united in some way with the Holy Spirit. The traditional idea of *spiritual* communion is an important one to remember and reaffirm. The invitation often given at Mass to those who may not receive *sacramental* communion - for example, children before their First Communion and adults who are not Catholics - to receive a ‘blessing’ at the moment of Communion emphasises that a deep spiritual communion is possible even when we do not share together the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ”. *One Bread, One Body* 43.

“Blessing confirms the grace of unity received and is an expression of hope. It is an acknowledgement of what exists and an acknowledgement that in division we are called to a repentance that is full of hope. It is an expression of real but partial communion. It recognises the partial communion in which the churches are.”  
*Blessing at the Time of Communion, L’Arche Communities*

- (2) As Catholic Bishops, we gladly echo the words of Pope John Paul II: ‘It is a source of great joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular circumstances, to administer the sacraments of Eucharist, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely request them and manifest the faith which the Catholic Church professes with regard to these sacraments’.  
*One Bread, One Body* 100, 102 -115 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 129-131.

- (3) “Representatives of the Churches, ecclesial communities and other groups should co-operate and prepare together such prayer. They should decide among themselves the way in which each is to take part, choose the themes and select the readings, hymns and prayers”.

From Section entitled Prayer in Common *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 111

- (4) “Catholic churches are consecrated or blessed buildings which have an important theological and liturgical significance for the Catholic community. They are therefore generally reserved for Catholic worship. However, if priests, ministers or communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church do not have a place or the liturgical objects necessary for celebrating worthily their religious ceremonies, the diocesan Bishop may allow them the use of a church or a Catholic building and also lend them what may be necessary for their services. Under similar circumstances, permission may be given to them for interment or for the celebration of services at Catholic cemeteries.”  
*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 137.