

Suggestions and Guidelines

1. There are circumstances which bring about the opportunity to welcome members of other churches into a local United Reformed Church, whilst also affirming the membership of their original denomination. This may be in a locality where there is only one church building, when Christians of other churches seek to combine loyalty to a different denomination with a desire to worship and witness in their local community. Sometimes a church of another denomination has been closed; sometimes people from another denomination have moved into the area; sometimes those who previously commuted to a church outside the area are prevented from doing so, perhaps as a result of infirmity or poor public transport.

2. While the local church remains subject to the jurisdiction of the United Reformed Church and will want to bear witness to the riches of its traditions, it is able in a variety of ways to make members of other churches feel they belong to the Christian community in that place. This sense of belonging may not be the same as becoming a member of that local church. Some churches do not permit their members to become members of another church and some individuals may feel their sense of denominational identity is such that they are unable or unwilling to make the necessary promises and commitments required by the United Reformed Church. They may, however, be willing to be on the community roll of the church and take as full a part as possible in its worship and life.

3. The local United Reformed Church will want to welcome all who wish to be part of its community and enable their insights, strengths, gifts and graces to be incorporated into the whole life of the congregation. That life will include worship, fellowship, mission and service, as well as the administrative and decision-making process.

4. The minister, elders and congregation of the local United Reformed Church will want to be especially aware of their responsibility to demonstrate a willingness to affirm a diversity of religious experience. Breadth and openness of expression could be affirmed through:

- choice of hymns, music, hymn books
- prayers for the other churches
- careful use of language which does not exclude
- offering the use of the church buildings to the other traditions
- inviting ministers, local or lay preachers and readers of the other churches to lead worship
- occasional use of the other churches' liturgies and ways of celebrating communion
- consultation between those with pastoral oversight in the area about matters of mutual concern and responsibility
- involvement in the life of the wider church through Churches Together groupings

5. To underline this commitment to ecumenical welcome and mutual enrichment, it is good practice for the local United Reformed Church to agree a 'Formal Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome'. Before doing so, it should consult with the Synod and its Ecumenical Officer and where applicable the Intermediate Body. This is to ensure other denominations are consulted. 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.

Here is an example of such a Declaration:

Formal Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome

We, the congregation of Aford United Reformed Church, are aware that we are the only church offering regular public worship in Aford: and therefore we invite all Christians in Aford to play as full a part as they are able in our life and witness.

We invite those of Christian traditions other than our own

- to worship and share in Holy Communion with us
- to share in the ministry and mission of the Church in this community
- to share in the decision-making and leadership of the church¹
- to contribute financially to Aford URC in so far as their continued giving to another church will allow.

We undertake

- to give pastoral care to all those who desire it
- to include and celebrate the riches of the other traditions
- to invite ministers and lay preachers of other churches to take part in leading worship
- to consult with neighbouring churches concerning the mission of the church in Aford
- to include this Ecumenical Declaration in the pastorate profile of this church.

Following the decision made by Churches Together in Ashire (our 'Intermediate Body') on.....20XX 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 Aford United Reformed Church Minister or Elder

Church Secretary

For the other churches:

.....

On behalf of:

.....

¹ The Church Meeting may invite other persons who regularly worship with the local church but whose names are not on the membership roll to attend and speak at its meetings but no such person shall have the right to vote.