

# Help! What do we do with our local Churches Together group?

**T**he pandemic has inevitably affected every area of our lives, and we're also aware of the impact on many Churches Together groups. Whilst the fruit of our unity has been expressed in so many ways, by supporting local communities through food banks, debt relief and so forth, many of our traditional activities have been put on hold.

If "starting again" or "re-imagining" seems daunting, it also provides opportunities for our working together to be even more fruitful. And remember, you are not alone! This process is happening all over the country.

To help your local Churches Together group, we've included here three brief stories of what some local groups are doing, which we hope you will find encouraging. We've also provided some questions that you might find helpful as your group meets up again, perhaps for the first time.

**We are also aware that timing is everything.** In your context, now may not be the right time to introduce any changes, but we would encourage groups to begin thinking, talking, praying and preparing for the future.

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## Minor changes in a rural setting bring a clearer focus

A Churches Together group in a rural setting worried that the structure they had would not enable them, during Covid, to keep going with the work they had been doing. It became apparent that their activities – many of which were about combating loneliness – would have to stop during the pandemic, their traditional Churches Together events could not take place, and the committee would find it difficult to meet in person. Members of the group recognised the importance of keeping connections with people and so adapted how they did things; delivering meals and activities, reaching out for additional volunteers, phoning people and holding meetings and prayers online. There were no radical changes in their structure, but with a few tweaks and by listening to their community, the group has strengthened.

## Restructuring around mission, prayer and relationships in a market town

One Churches Together group in a market town was aware that their traditional structure was no longer fit for purpose. Over the years, a base of strong relationships between the churches had been formed and united activities were happening, but the agenda-led Executive and open meetings didn't have much life in them. After much discussion, prayer and consultation, they are looking to move to three open meetings a year, plus a very short AGM. They will gather to hear short reports (less than five minutes each) about a missional activity in the host church, a local ecumenical missional project and a proposed future united activity, all interspersed with prayer. At the heart of the meetings will be a break for quality cake and puddings, with time for folk to mingle and talk. These events will be organised by a much smaller Executive, meeting three times a year with local church leaders.



### Major reorganisation in a city yields greater fruit

A substantial-sized city had three separate Churches Together groups. They were struggling to find officers and volunteers and realised that the current model was not enabling them to engage with the wide variety of churches across the city. The three groups also all worked separately. Through engagement with the Gather Network, the question was asked: “how could churches coming together transform the city, and what are the biggest issues affecting people here?” After a long consultation, the three separate groups were closed and one city-wide unity movement was formed. They are committed to regular (weekly) prayer amongst the leaders, to meet monthly and to undertake a programme of listening to local people, local leaders and businesses. The group held an event bringing Christians across the city together, and have held a series of workshops on issues identified as important locally. It has enabled them to co-operate on a city-wide food bank, on shared training (on issues such as mental health and domestic abuse) and on a co-ordinated approach to schools work and some shared youth work. This new unity movement connects with both the Gather Network and with Churches Together at county (Intermediate) level.

#### QUESTIONS THAT A LOCAL GROUP MIGHT LIKE TO CONSIDER TOGETHER

- Why do you think unity is important in your context?
- Did you identify with any of the stories in particular? What can you apply from their experience?
- How can you enable relationships between the churches to deepen?
- What hurdles do you need to overcome together?
- Is there anything that you used to do, that now might be the time to lay down?

#### WE HOPE THAT YOU’VE FOUND THIS MATERIAL HELPFUL

Whatever comes next obviously needs to be undergirded by prayer. We’d encourage you to think of this as the start of an ongoing conversation, as together we emerge from the pandemic and engage with the new context in which we find ourselves.

*If you’d like further help, do please contact your County Ecumenical Officer (or equivalent). These can be located [www.cte.org.uk/county-ecumenical-officers](http://www.cte.org.uk/county-ecumenical-officers)*



LUNCH CLUB



BELIEVE EVENT



CHRISTMAS EVENT



CITY-WIDE FOOD BANK