

MAKING IT WORK

INTRODUCTION

Such is the rate of change and development in ecumenical relationships in Great Britain that guidelines and advice for churches need to be rewritten every few years. The 1990 edition of *Patterns of Sharing and Commitment between Methodists and United Reformed Churches* was the sixth edition to be produced in ten years and became out of date for two main reasons. Firstly, both the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church restructured their central organisation. Secondly, the growing numbers of Local Ecumenical Partnerships, encouraged and overseen by the new ecumenical bodies at national and county level, led to a demand for new guidelines and new terminology. The Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee then produced a new publication entitled *Making It Work* to take the place of *Patterns of Sharing*. The time has come to update this publication.

Making it Work is being presented in a folder with some supplementary leaflets and pamphlets. Among those is a Baptist Union gloss on *Making it Work* prepared by the Baptist Union observer on the Liaison Committee. It is hoped that the Baptist Union will be more fully involved in future revisions. As well as using *Making it Work*, those setting up or working in Methodist/United Reformed Local Ecumenical Partnerships are strongly advised to consult the relevant Churches Together in England publications. In particular *Travelling Together: a handbook for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (2004 edition)* and *Constitutional Guidelines for a Local Ecumenical Partnership (2006)* are key resources. Although produced by Churches Together in England, the Liaison Committee also recommends their usefulness to the Methodist/United Reformed Local Ecumenical Partnerships in Wales and Scotland.

For those United Reformed and Methodist churches who would like to understand the other tradition better (whether they are neighbouring churches or united churches) the Methodist /United Reformed Church Liaison Committee has also produced *Getting to Know You*, an information pack about the two churches. It can be obtained from the United Reformed Church Bookshop.

1.

Membership

- 1.1** Belonging to a locally united church within nationally separated churches creates a number of difficulties of which membership is inevitably one. Through baptism and confirmation/reception into membership all those in a Local Ecumenical Partnership are received into the one Church of Christ but not necessarily placed on the same membership roll. There are several reasons why the question of one roll or two or three is a serious matter.
- 1.2** When two existing congregations come together to form a Local Ecumenical Partnership there are already two membership rolls. Some members from either denomination, on moving into the area, may want to join the united church because it is the local expression of their denomination and so want their names to be put only on their denominational roll.
- 1.3** A Joint Council set up by the Sharing Agreement under the 1969 Sharing of Church Buildings Act is the only legal basis for using one building for two or more denominations and requires separate rolls of members who can take property decisions on behalf of their denomination.

1.4 The Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships do not form a new denomination.

1.5 However, almost all such Local Ecumenical Partnerships have developed ways of dealing with the legal and denominational requirements while still bearing witness to the oneness of the local congregation. Most work mainly with a common roll on which members are placed without distinction. However, being on a Common Roll does not mean being a member of both denominations

If, for legal purposes, a denominational meeting has to be called, that meeting should consist only of those on the relevant roll.

1.6 Those who subsequently transfer their membership from other Methodist or United Reformed local church have their names entered on the common roll and on the appropriate denominational roll. Those who transfer from another denomination have their names entered on the common roll and on the denominational roll of their choice.

1.6a It is now possible for United Reformed Church members who join a Partnership to seek extended membership of the Methodist Church. This must be an individual decision. (For more information see Volume 2 of 'The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church', Book 6, Part 2, Section 13, 'Guidance for the Reception of Christians of Other Communion into the Membership of the Methodist Church and Joint Confirmations', paragraphs 2 – 4.) The United Reformed Church also offers a similar means of membership (General Assembly Annual Reports 2001 paragraph 6.1 page 53).

1.7 Those who, after the Local Ecumenical Partnership has come into being, join on profession of faith may be received into membership of both denominations and their names may appear on both denominational membership rolls as well as on the common roll.

1.8 In the unlikely event of the local church having to deal with a matter of membership status or discipline, the advice of the appropriate authorities in the relevant denominations must be sought.

1.9 Each denomination will require an annual account of the number of members. The committee recommends that the Local Ecumenical Partnership submit three sets of figure:- the numbers on each denominational roll plus the numbers on the common roll. This gives a truer picture of the local church.

2.

The Ministry of Word and Sacrament

2.1 Methodist/United Reformed Local Ecumenical Partnerships vary in terms of size and geographical location. This means there will always be variations in the deployment of ministers of Word and Sacraments.

2.2 There are five main patterns.

Pattern A. Two full-time ministers, one of each denomination, working together in a single church

This is becoming rare, not least because of financial pressures and shortage of ministers.

Pattern B. Two ministers, one of each denomination, in pastoral charge of a Local Ecumenical Partnership but each with other responsibilities in neighbouring churches, either from their own or both denominations.

This is becoming less common partly because of similar financial pressures and the shortage of ministers. Where the membership or mission potential of a united church makes a staff of two ordained ministers advisable, it is essential that there is agreement concerning the division of responsibility and that detailed job specifications are prepared. This is especially the case when there has been a good natural relationship between colleagues with complementary gifts and abilities and so no need was felt for a formal division of workload. Staff changes can create problems. They may also cause difficulty when they occur during the period of negotiation to become a Local Ecumenical Partnership.

Pattern C. One minister in pastoral charge of one Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership, but often with additional pastoral responsibilities elsewhere in the Methodist Circuit or United Reformed Synod.

This, the single minister situation, has increasingly come to be the norm.

The single-minister pattern is often based on an agreement to alternate ministers of each denomination, particularly where the two former congregations were roughly equal size. However, one major difference between the two churches has to be noted from the start. Methodist Ministers move on an agreed date and are appointed initially for five years with the option of an extended invitation. United Reformed ministers are used to being called without a fixed term and only moving in response to a call to another pastorate.. United churches must be sensitive to this difficulty although it has become more common for United Reformed Church ministers in these situations to be willing to accept termed appointments and for the moderators to take that into account as they seek to facilitate the minister's next call.

Where there is considerable disparity in size of membership, there may be situations where, practically speaking, the minister is always likely to be of one denomination. In such cases a great deal of care must be taken to ensure that the interests of the smaller party are safeguarded, and the links with the parent denomination maintained; for example by regular visits by ministers and lay preachers, conscientious representation of the local church on the wider bodies of both churches, and appropriate consultation when ministerial appointments are being considered. Methodist structures more easily ensure this. The United Reformed Church Synod may need to give careful and specific consideration as to how best to support the United Reformed Church ethos and contribution in such a situation.

Pattern D. Shared ministry situations which do not involve any united churches but where one minister has pastoral charge of churches of both denominations.

This pattern has come into being where the efficient use of available ministers has called for this sort of sharing. The grouping of churches is becoming more common within the United Reformed Church and this has perhaps opened the way to reciprocal arrangements for pastoral care between the denominations. This is not strictly speaking a Local Ecumenical Partnership.

Pattern E. A United Methodist/United Reformed Church Area, which constitutes a Methodist Circuit and which also receives delegated authority from the United Reformed Church Synod, where there is a unified strategy of use of ministerial resources – a team of ministers with responsibility for a number of churches.

The United Areas are now long enough established to prove that this pattern offers a viable and valuable form of teamwork between Methodist and United Reformed Church traditions which extends beyond the local united church or a one-off arrangement for a group of churches. They challenge the church structures to adapt to need and respond to the mission potential in a particular locality. They have unlocked resources, smoothed the process of ministerial movements and assured a good balance between breaking new ground for both traditions and yet sustaining the distinctive contributions of each. It is hoped that the variety of patterns of partnership emerging from the United Areas offer experience from which other situations can benefit. However, a United Area is not appropriate where one denomination's presence is much larger than the other's.

2.3 The status of the minister in the other church. The authorised procedures of both denominations permit a minister in a Local Ecumenical Partnership to enjoy full status in both churches.

The United Reformed Church paragraph 2(3)(a) enables a Methodist Minister who is directly working in the service of the United Reformed Church within a particular Synod to be a member of that Synod.

United Reformed Church ministers are expected to seek the status of Authorised Minister from the Methodist Conference. There is a requirement to make a declaration that he or she will not during the period of authorisation so preach or act as to deny or repudiate Methodist doctrinal standards.

Having full status in both churches and obligations within two denominations means that it is advisable for the Circuit and the United Reformed Church Synod, in discussion with the local church/pastorate, to agree on what are reasonable expectations and obligations before the minister is called/appointed. Adjustments can then be made once the minister has settled into his or her style of ministry.

While the benefits of such mutual recognition of ministry far outweigh the disadvantages, the latter must be acknowledged. Being qualified for membership of a double quantity of official meetings is a mixed blessing. Sensitivity and flexibility on the part of the Circuit and Synod as well as the local church(es) and the minister, are needed to decide which must be attended. Ideally, the expectations of the minister in a Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership should be agreed beforehand as part of the terms and conditions of service. The Liaison Committee recommends attendance at Circuit Meeting and the Synods of both Churches as a high priority. The United Reformed Church minister ought to share in the Methodist Circuit Staff meeting. The informal ministers' meetings common in the United Reformed Church, although very valuable, are not equivalent.

2.4 Change of minister Many Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships face problems when changes in ministerial staff are contemplated. The Conference and General Assembly of 1982 both recommended that the procedures used should be those appropriate to the denomination of the incoming minister but with full consultation with the other parties involved. No other legal structures are available. There is a helpful pamphlet *URC Guidelines for Declaring and Filling Vacancies* which describes the normal process in the United Reformed Church. The Methodist procedures for ministers' invitations are set out in Section 54 of Standing Orders and in the guidance notes in the *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church Vol. 2*. The valuable role in the whole process of a Staffing Consultative Group established by the County Ecumenical Council/Sponsoring Body is referred to below, under **Consultation**. The formal procedure remains, however, that of the church to which the incoming minister belongs.

The departure date of a Methodist minister will normally be known one year in advance. If a termination date has not been agreed at the beginning of the ministry, a United Reformed Church minister should, if possible, give notice of leaving well in advance of usual practice in order to give time for a Methodist successor to be invited and stationed. As any change can cause considerable strain on the parties involved, considerable sensitivity and consultation are required. The following procedures are offered to enable a smooth changeover. (It is recognised that the United Areas have procedures for ministerial call/appointment built into their constitutions).

Duration of ministry. In united churches it is generally helpful to have an agreement on the length of ministry, so that everyone knows at what point changes are expected. The denomination and background of the minister is a very strong factor in determining the flavour and ethos of congregational life. An agreement on alternating ministry is common practice. A typical pattern has been an initial term of five to seven years, given that the normal Methodist situation there would be an initial 5-year invitation, while most United Reformed Church

pastorates are “open-ended”. A possible extension of up to three years may be offered, subject to full consultation.

Date of change. It is recommended that, as far as possible, the timing of changes should be in the July/August period to enable Methodist ministers to change at their normal date.

Consultation. As soon as a change of ministerial staff is foreseen, there should be appropriate consultation about the ministerial needs and the opportunities ahead. Both denominations have good practice on preparing a pastoral profile. In all cases this task should involve the local church and representatives of both the Circuit Meeting and the Synod. For many Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships this will also be seen as the responsibility of the County Ecumenical Council/Sponsoring Body through the Staffing Consultative Group. This has the advantage of setting the discussion in a wider framework of strategy for mission in the area, and of bringing different perceptions and experience of ministry to bear on the situation.

This process should continue until those responsible for issuing the invitation have a clear understanding of the particular talents or experience that are desired in the next minister and are agreed on the terms of the appointment. Only then should individuals be approached, remembering that the methods of approach followed should be appropriate to the denomination of the minister being sought.

This consultation process should also be followed when a minister of the same denomination to the one leaving is to be invited and, moreover, when there is a proposal to extend an invitation or significantly adjust a minister’s area of responsibility or manner of working.

It is not sufficient to follow denominational procedures for review and extension and then inform the partner denomination at the stage of the process when all that remains is a final decision.

2.5 The Vacancy Sometimes all efforts to ensure that a United Reformed minister is appointed immediately to follow the departure of a Methodist minister will fail and there may be a vacancy of some months or even a year. This situation is largely unfamiliar to Methodists and has sometimes brought panic and despondency. It is particularly difficult when the appointment includes the care of “ordinary” Methodist churches. The United Reformed Church Synod will normally appoint an Interim Moderator, lay or ministerial, to serve a Methodist/United Reformed Church Partnership during a vacancy. The role of the Interim Moderator is not that of an interim minister, but is intended to guide the church through the process of preparing a pastoral profile and calling another minister. The leadership and pastoral care of the church in a vacancy falls to the Elders’ Meeting or its equivalent. During the vacancy, “ordinary” Methodist churches in the pastorate are usually given pastoral oversight by other members of the Circuit Staff. Appropriate pastoral arrangements will be made in the event of a vacancy in a “single station”.

United Reformed Church experience is that a vacancy can be a liberating experience in the sense that greater lay involvement in leadership and pastoral work can revolutionise a local church. While vacancies are fairly common in the United Reformed Church they have been rare until recently in the Methodist Church. However, the current shortage of ordained ministers has meant that Circuits have often had to do without one member of staff for a year. In a number of cases the experience has been very helpful in compelling the churches involved to formulate a different pattern of pastoral care and to use experience and abilities previously neglected. In the sense that in an ecumenical partnership we encounter each other as we are, Methodists need to be aware that vacancy is a way of life in the United Reformed Church for limited periods, and to look to it as a challenge and opportunity.

2.6 Induction/welcome At the beginning of a new period of partnership it is important that the incoming minister is owned and affirmed by the people of both traditions so that they can feel that he or she is their minister irrespective of denomination. To assist in this the Liaison Committee has prepared a suggested order for *A Service of Induction/Welcome* of a minister for use in Methodist/United Reformed Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Great care was

exercised in trying to strike the right balance of denominational requirement and expectation in such a service. This should be borne in mind when it is, quite properly adapted for local needs. (see also the United Reformed Church paper on *Inductions* in local ecumenical situations).

3.

Other Ministries

- 3.1** Within Methodism there is another order of ministry, alongside that of presbyters. **The Methodist Diaconal Order** is a religious order and its members are ordained. They are called deacons and have a pastoral role within the church, but more particularly within the wider community.
- 3.2 Lay Workers** in the Methodist Church are appointed by and responsible to Circuits or Districts. Their roles include evangelist, pastoral carer, family worker, administrator, college chaplain and worker among children and young people. Lay Workers may be full or part-time, paid or unpaid.
- 3.3** The United Reformed Church trains, formally recognises, and centrally pays a small but growing body of **Church Related Community Workers**. They are not ordained. Although attached to and working with and through a local church in partnership with a local minister, the focus of their ministry is the needy community in which the local church is based.
- 3.4 Elders** In both denominations the leadership of local churches and the care of members has always been a matter of partnership between the ordained minister and leaders in the congregation. This local lay leadership has been expressed in a number of ways.

Within each local church of the United Reformed Church there are elders, a body of people ordained to a ministry of local leadership and pastoral care. The United Reformed Church Basis of Union, paragraph 22 says of elders: *“They share with ministers of the Word and sacraments in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders’ meeting and having each a group of members particularly entrusted to his/her pastoral care. They shall be associated with ministers in all the councils of the church.”*

Elders are ordained for life, but the length of their service on the Elders’ Meeting is determined by the Church Meeting of the local church which elects them. Elders moving to membership of another local church do not serve automatically as members of its Elders’ Meeting but, if subsequently elected, are simply inducted, ordination being a once-only event.

A summary of the United Reformed Church’s expectation of the place of eldership in a Local Ecumenical Partnership states: *“The heart of the matter for us is that there should be a group of people, chosen by the congregation for their Christian maturity, who share with those ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in the leadership of the local church and from whose numbers the representatives of the local church to the wider church are chosen.”*

In Methodism there is no exact equivalent to the office of elder, although some of the functions of **Church Steward, Class Leader and Pastoral Visitor** are all present in the duties of the United Reformed Church elders. Leadership and pastoral responsibility are not necessarily exercised by the same persons in Methodist churches, and members are elected or appointed to serve in various offices without any equivalent ordination.

A summary of the office of elder and steward are given in the leaflet *A Check list for Church Stewards and Elders*.

Within the United Reformed Church, the office of **Church Secretary** carries considerable responsibility for the life of the local church, especially during the time of a vacancy in the pastorate. The Church Secretary is elected by the Church Meeting from among the elders. The nearest equivalent to this office in the Methodist Church is Church Steward and not, as might be imagined, the Secretary of the Church Council. In the United Reformed Church, central or synodical mailings are usually addressed to the Church Secretary. In Methodism, the minister is more frequently the channel of communication. However, the connexional Link Mailing is also sent to a nominated member of each local church.

3.5 Those responsible for drafting constitutions for Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships need to be sensitive to this variety of tradition in lay leadership. Owing to the great differences in the relative strength of the two traditions in the united churches, the *Model Constitutional Guidelines* offered by the Liaison Committee cannot be rigidly followed. For the same reason, it is not possible to give detailed guidance on job titles for local officers or local committees or councils in a united church. However, there should be a group of lay leaders in each united church who have been both elected and formally set apart with prayer in a service of worship to share leadership and pastoral care with the minister. They need not be called elders but the constitution should make it clear whether or not the lay leaders referred to are to be regarded for United Reformed Church purposes as elders.

4.

Constitutions

4.1 The Liaison Committee has produced *Model Constitutional Guidelines for a Joint Methodist and United Reformed Church* and advises all Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships, however longstanding to check their constitutions against them. The 2006 guidelines from Churches Together in England should also be consulted, especially in matters relating to Ministry, Finance and Review.

4.2 The questions which will arise in the preparation of a local constitution will include:

Name?

What is to be the name of the united church?

Intention?

What is the Partnership intended to achieve?

Sponsoring Body?

How will the Partnership relate to the County Sponsoring body?

Baptism and membership?

How will provision be made for infant baptism and believers baptism in accordance with the practice of both denominations?

Who can be members?

How are existing members recorded? (see section 1 above)

How are new members to be prepared and received?

What happens to transfers – in and out?

Will members seek extended membership?

How is pastoral care exercised?

Worship?

Who is responsible for its pattern and leadership?

How will the sacraments be administered?

How are Local/Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders to be involved?

Ministry? (see section 2 above)

Is there to be an alternating ministry of Methodist and United Reformed Church ministers?
Is there to be a normal length of stay written in?
Is there to be an agreed method of dealing with an extension of invitation?
Can ministerial changes relate to the Methodist calendar?
Is there to be a Staffing Consultative Group and will it be set up in consultation with the County Sponsoring Body?
Will the United Reformed Church minister seek Authorised status from the Methodist Conference?
How will the minister be called/invited and paid?
Does anything need saying about a manse?

Church Government?

What will be the functions of the Church Meeting?
How frequently will it meet/
What officers will it appoint?
What will be the functions of the Church Council?
How often will it meet?
Who will be its members?
How is the leadership and pastoral care of the United Reformed Church tradition of eldership to be expressed?
What committees are needed, and what will be their functions and how will they be constituted?
Who will chair the various meetings?

Premises?

Which buildings are to be used?
Is there to be a Sharing Agreement under the 1969 Act?
If not what provisions are made for shared responsibility for running, maintenance etc?

Finance?

Are funds to be pooled as far as legally possible?
What arrangements will be made for paying the Methodist Circuit assessment and the contribution to the United Reformed Church Ministry and Mission Fund?
What arrangements are to be made to deal with the other Methodist funds, such as Methodist Homes, bearing in mind that for the United Reformed Church all giving to the wider mission and service of the church is included in the contribution of the Ministry and Mission Fund?

Participation in the wider church?

How is the representation on the wider councils of both churches to be handled?
How are the national agendas and commitments of the two denominations in terms of mission and social responsibility and youth and children's work to be handled locally?

Review, amendment and termination?

What are the arrangements for periodic review? It is recommended that the United Reformed Church Synod responsibility for a visitation should be combined with the Sponsoring Body's obligation to review all Local Ecumenical Partnerships in its care?
What authority is needed for amendments to the constitution?
What are the procedures for terminating the partnership, if this should be necessary?

5.

The worship of the local church

5.1 The riches of both the Methodist and United Reformed traditions should be part of the regular pattern of worship. The rites and ceremonies of both denominations may be

practised in a building which holds a Sharing Agreement. The work of a Worship Committee is very valuable in the task of preparing for services.

- 5.2** While Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Partnerships are encouraged to share the treasures of both denominational hymn books, practical problems may arise both on the grounds of cost and because the books sometimes use different versions and settings of words and music. Churches can introduce hymns from both denominational traditions and beyond through the provisions of the Christian Copyright Licensing scheme. Preachers and church musicians should certainly be well acquainted with the contents of both *Hymns and Psalms* and *Rejoice and Sing*.
- 5.3** In a Methodist circuit decisions about the leadership of Sunday services are taken by the Superintendent minister, in consultation with colleagues. The Superintendent is legally responsible for the appointment of preachers. A minister in pastoral charge of one or more churches is expected to take services in the other churches in the Circuit. Every Methodist Church, however large, has a proportion of its services conducted by local preachers.
- 5.4** In a local United Reformed Church, the elders' meeting is responsible for ensuring that worship is offered and the sacraments duly celebrated. The local church expects to plan its own pattern of worship, under the leadership of the minister. A Preaching Secretary is usually appointed to arrange invitations to visiting preachers when the minister is not available.
- 5.5** These differences in practice mean that arrangements in a Local Ecumenical Partnership must be carefully agreed by all those involved. The Superintendent minister must accept that in a united church his/her authority cannot automatically extend to include the United Reformed Church element or the United Reformed Church minister. Equally on the United Reformed Church part, it should be accepted that the United Reformed Church minister will not be in "his/her" pulpit in a united church as often as he/she would be in a single denomination church. Where a Methodist Minister has pastoral charge of a united church the Superintendent minister should accept that this colleague will not tour other pulpits as such. Tact, understanding of varying practices, and the "education" of the members of the local church will provide a recipe for healthy development. Particular care should be taken to ensure that when a minister of one denomination is in pastoral charge, ministers and lay preachers of the other denomination conduct worship regularly in the Local Ecumenical Partnership.
- 5.6** It is a good idea for those planning worship in the local church to agree with the Superintendent minister the number of services in each quarter that should be led by the United Reformed Church ministers or accredited Lay Preachers. The local church will then make the arrangements for those services and advise the Superintendent so that the details may be included on the Plan. Where the local church is itself responsible for worship leadership on a particular Sunday, the Superintendent must also be advised. The service will be shown in the Plan as "local arrangements".
- 5.7** It is important to establish a pattern for services of Holy Communion which honours the respective traditions. Most United Reformed congregations use unfermented wine and small individual glasses, but some use the common cup and some serve fermented wine. The Methodist Church stipulates that non-alcoholic wine must be used in its own services and encourages Methodist ministers to notify the congregation where alcoholic wine is being used. In the United Reformed Church it is almost universal practice for the people to be served communion in the places where they sit, the servers normally being elders. In the Methodist Church the most common practice is for the congregation to come forward to kneel at the communion

rail to receive the elements from the presiding minister who may be assisted by others.

- 5.8** As far as Methodist local preachers and accredited United Reformed Church lay preachers are concerned, there is a mutual recognition of status. Methodist practice is governed by SO 567(9). In neither church are lay preachers permitted to preside at the Lord's Supper by virtue of office, but certain individuals may be so authorised by the Methodist Conference or the United Reformed Church Synod where there is "deprivation" (Methodist, see SO 011) or "where pastoral necessity so requires" (United Reformed Church, paragraph 24 of the Basis of Union). It is unhelpful, even offensive, if lay/local preachers who are not authorised to preside at the sacrament in their own church are then invited to do so by the other tradition.

6.

Property

- 6.1** The high costs of maintaining inappropriate buildings can be the spur for two neighbouring congregations to come together. There is often the hope that the proceeds of sale of both sites will provide the money to build modern premises, but, to be realistic, that hope is seldom realised. Initial approaches by property developers can raise false hopes. Minister, Church Council members and elders can be dazzled by schemes of supermarkets and office blocks which rarely leave the drawing board. The Liaison Committee advises a healthy scepticism until contracts for sale are signed.
- 6.2** More often than not, therefore, the two congregations are faced with the choice of retaining one of the existing buildings. The decision as to which is often difficult and a potential cause of division.

The following check list of questions may be helpful.

- (a) Which building will better meet the needs of the joint church in its mission to the community in the future?
- (b) Which building has the greater potential for commercial development?
- (c) Is either building likely to be affected by listing, planning or development proposals?
- (d) To whom can the churches turn for independent, professional advice?
- (e) How will their fees be met at the exploratory stage?
- (f) How can every member be informed and consulted in order to retain good will, remembering there is often the need for confidentiality at the exploratory stage of property negotiations?
- (g) Have the necessary consents been obtained from the denominations?

- 6.3** Advice should be sought at an early stage from the Methodist Property Office, whose consent will in any event be required for proposals to alter, share or sell premises, and from the property and trust officers of the United Reformed Church Synod

- 6.4** Before any property may be sold, the requirement of Section 36 of the Charities Act 1993 will need to be complied with, in particular, the obtaining of a qualified surveyor's report. The Methodist Church Connexional Property Office requires to see a copy of such a report, and to receive Schedule 5 indicating Methodist District approval, before permission to advertise for sale will begin.

- 6.5** Some partnership schemes retain both sets of buildings in the hope that future conditions will make them valuable assets. Such a decision should be taken for good reason and not because of a loss of nerve about upsetting half the constituency. Unused church buildings are a liability, can be almost as expensive as buildings in use and provide constant security problems, as well as complications with insurance. They can also add to the emotional cost of the scheme as former worshippers see them slip into decay.

7.

Sharing Agreements

- 7.1** Once the decisions have been taken about buildings the next step is to establish the legal basis on which the property will be used. Church buildings are held in trusts which define the ways in which they may and may not be used. Legally, it is not possible for a building of one denomination to be used for any religious purposes other than that of that denomination, apart from where specific provisions have been made by the churches in their trust deeds or other governing instruments.
- 7.2** In most Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships there will be a desire to be able to use one building for the purposes of both churches. This only becomes possible where the two churches enter into a Sharing Agreement under the terms of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969. Such an Agreement enables the guest church to use the building as if it were its own, or for a single congregation to use it for the purposes and practices of both/all the sharing churches.
- 7.3** There are other advantages in having a Sharing Agreement. A Sharing Agreement makes it possible for the guest church to contribute capital monies (such as from proceeds of sale or bequests) towards the maintenance, repair, and improvement of the host church building. Such contribution of capital monies might otherwise not be possible, because of the trusts on which such monies are held.
- 7.4** The intention of the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 was to provide an interim legal instrument. It had two purposes. Firstly, making possible the shared use of buildings held on specific denominational trusts and owned by only one of the denominations involved. Secondly, the construction of new church buildings on new sites (in particular in new housing areas) which from the outset would be owned and used by two or more denominations. The expectation was that the 1969 Act would be required for only a comparatively short time as the churches were expected to move into organic union. This hope has not been fulfilled, but the 1969 Act continues to provide the legal basis for many kinds of shared uses and ecumenical partnership. The possibility of "amending legislation" has been considered so that certain anomalies that have become apparent in its application could be removed, but the costs and the unlikelihood of available parliamentary time have forced the churches to accept and use the 1969 Act in its present form for the foreseeable future.
- 7.5** Setting up a Sharing Agreement.

The denomination owning the building to be shared must take the initiative in briefing a solicitor to prepare a draft Sharing Agreement. When the property to be shared is on the Methodist model trusts, the Legal Section of the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes can prepare the Agreement at minimal cost as long as the precedents are followed. A similar system applies in most United Reformed Church Synods.

Do not attempt to cut costs by trying to prepare the draft Sharing Agreement without legal guidance and the advice of the Methodist Church Connexional Property Office and

the Trust Officer of the Synod in question. It is wise to involve them at the earliest possible stage of the negotiations. This will also save time and money. The Methodist Church Connexional Property Office and the relevant United Reformed Church Synod office or committee must approve all Sharing Agreements in draft form. As a Sharing Agreement it itself a type of Local Ecumenical Partnership, the County Ecumenical Council/Sponsoring Body should be kept informed even if asking for formal approval is considered to be too cumbersome. The County Ecumenical Officer will also be a useful source of expertise.

Methodist procedures include completion of an application for a Sharing Agreement on Schedule 3 which has to be submitted to the District Policy Committee and the Committee for Local Ecumenical Development. The Agreement cannot proceed without the approval of CLED. While the CLED meets only two or three times a year, the officers of committee are able to approve sharing schemes between meetings.

Adhere to the precedents. Any departure will cost heavily in terms of time and money. A model form of agreement is available from the Methodist Church Connexional Property Office and the United Reformed Church Synod offices; there may be small differences in the case of some of the Synods.

Do not confuse the Sharing Agreement (a legal document concerned with the use of property) with the Constitution and Declaration of Intent (which concerns the worship, people and the daily life of the united church). The former is a permanent document and can only be altered by a legal and costly process; the latter can be amended as the church grows and changes. It follows that it is most unwise to quote verbatim from the Constitution in any Sharing Agreement.

Since 1969, and taking into the reckoning all denominations involved with the Act, there have not been many terminations. Some have happened because of failures in relationship and understanding. However, more have resulted from the removal of the population from an area, major re-development which changes the whole character of a neighbourhood, or simply, but sadly, because numbers in the united congregation have dwindled to such an extent that they can no longer maintain their worship, work and witness from the shared building.

7.6 Capital contributions towards building schemes.

In 1990 the Methodist Conference and (the then) all twelve Synods of the United Reformed Church adopted the advice of a consultation of representatives of the Provinces (former name for United Reformed Church Synods) and the Methodist Property Division that capital contributions by one church towards a building scheme on a shared chapel owned by the other church should be made as non-returnable grants. The reasons for this were the growing trust between the two denominations and the recognition that, when acting independently the two denominations did not expect to see a "financial return" for investment in church buildings. It was also recognised that the return of an agreed proportion of capital was only practicable if the building was sold and not if the Agreement was terminated. Finally, there was the difficulty of establishing a valuation on many church buildings.

Where large capital sums have been involved, the device of "legal charge" provision has been widely employed. This provides that if a Sharing Agreement is terminated a legal charge should be drawn up for the repayment of a proportion of the proceeds when the building is sold. The delay of repayment until ultimate sale avoids any risk of one denomination putting the other "on the street" merely for the sake of recovering its capital.

There are two exceptions to the 1990 advice that capital contributions should be made as non-returnable grants. These are, firstly, manses where valuation is more straightforward and sale is more likely on termination, and secondly, completely new church buildings.

7.7 Manses

There may advantage in having a Sharing Agreement on a manse, particularly where alternating ministry is practised. The main reason for this is the likelihood that capital funds from the “guest” denomination will be required for the maintenance or improvement of the property over a period of time in addition to contribution to the running costs.

There is no need for a Sharing Agreement merely to enable a Authorised Minister of the United Reformed Church to live in the Methodist manse or to enable a Methodist minister appointed to serve a Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership to live in a United Reformed Church manse.

Where there is no Sharing Agreement on a Methodist manse, since technically a manse is held for the purposes of the denomination that owns it, a full rental must be charged when the manse is used by a Minister from another church. There must also be an Assured Shorthold tenancy Agreement under the Housing act 1988. However, if this is thought to be against the spirit of the partnership then having a Sharing Agreement would overcome the difficulty. Such a minister could occupy the manse on the same basis as an active supernumerary minister, that is, on a Tenancy at Will.

It must be noted that for Methodist manses the Circuit Meeting and not the local Church Council has managing trusteeship.

Joint ownership is possible for newly purchased manses. However, the required Sharing Agreements and Declaration of Trust documents must be in place before either church can make available capital monies held on denominational trusts. There may not be time to prepare and agree the necessary documents while negotiating the purchase of a property. It may well be better to vest the property in the denomination which is contributing the largest amount of the purchase money, with provision for repayment on sale of the “guest” church contribution. Even then, the Sharing Agreement will need to be ready at the time of purchase, if the “guest” church is to make available its share of the purchase costs at that time.

7.8 Further advice

If a building is to be shared by other denominations, as well as by the United Reformed and Methodist Churches, further essential guidance will be found in *Under the Same Roof* a 1994 CCBI publication. This publication had considerable input from the Methodist and United Reformed sources and gives a great deal of advice that is relevant to this section of *Making it Work*.

8.

Finance

- 8.1** This section sets out the broad principles that ought to be followed in arranging the finance of a Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnership. More detail, an outline of how the two denominations differ in organising their finances, and models of good practice will be found in a separate pamphlet under preparation for this pack.
- 8.2** It is very desirable that the joint nature of the fellowship should find expression in shared responsibility for the financial obligations which will fall upon the Local Ecumenical Partnership. In most such united churches the finances of both parties can be merged and a single treasurer appointed
- 8.3** Provided there is a Sharing agreement, there are no problems involving covenants, but detailed enquiries need to be made concerning specific legacies or endowments. The Sharing Agreement itself defines financial responsibility for the upkeep and repair of the shared premises, but the Constitution of the united church ought to set down how other financial commitments will be calculated.

- 8.4** First of these claims is always in respect of payment for ministry. Ministers are usually paid through the mechanism of their own denomination. Contributions for ministerial upkeep may be made either via the Circuit treasurer to the Methodist Church Fund, or via the United Reformed Church Synod treasurer to the United Reformed Church Ministry and Mission Fund. A pattern common in both united local churches and the United Areas is for all assessments to be paid through the circuit system and the Circuit then passes the money on to the two parent churches. The minister is then paid according to the scale determined by the minister's own denomination from the respective central fund accruing from these contributions.
- 8.5** There is a great variety in the patterns of ministry from which Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships benefit. There is an increasing number of cases where there is shared ministry even where there are no united churches. In these circumstances, it is recommended that churches benefiting from shared ministry should be assessed for their contribution to ministerial upkeep according to the practice of their own denomination. There should be no increase or decrease in the assessment of a single denominational church solely because a minister of a different tradition is ministering there.
- 8.6** In a united congregation a formula will need to be agreed for calculating its contribution to the parent denominations for ministerial upkeep. Where there is alternating ministry it is recommended that the amount the congregation is expected to contribute should not vary significantly with a change of the denomination supplying the minister.
- 8.7** Careful consideration needs to be given as to the overall contribution a united church is going to make to the cost of ministry. In the United Reformed Church the principles for calculating congregational contributions varies from Synod to Synod. Some Synods expect any church or group with a minister to contribute the full cost of ministry, while others simply assess each church on its relative strength (usually on a per capita basis) and proportionally allocate part of an overall synodical assessment. The Methodist Church focuses on the Circuit which must, in normal circumstances, fund the full cost of the ministers stationed there.

In many cases, the assessment of a united church or shared ministry situation will represent roughly the true cost of providing a minister, together with an appropriate contribution to wider ministry and mission. In other cases, it will be evident that there will be a significant surplus or shortfall. Local Ecumenical Partnerships often arise in situations where churches are struggling. The wider Church will need to be sympathetic to such difficulties. Can other Circuit churches reasonably be expected to shoulder more of the burden? Can the United Reformed Church Synod, being a larger unit offer some flexibility in the apportionment of the Ministry and Mission Fund contribution? Or is the Local Ecumenical Partnership being "over-ministered"?

- 8.8** It is necessary to take account of the components in any assessment which are intended to provide for wider ministry and mission. Thus while churches receiving ministry will need to make arrangements to pay the bulk of their assessment to the denomination providing the minister, there will be still some contribution to be paid to the other denomination involved in the partnership. In many circumstances, especially where a group of churches is involved, the allocation of contributions might best be administered by the Methodist Circuit and the United Reformed Church Synod Treasurer.
- 8.9** It will be seen that the arrangements set out in *Finance in Methodist/United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Partnerships* take into account the continuing responsibility such partnerships have to support the regional and denominational funds of the parent denominations, and show how that responsibility can be appropriately divided. With careful planning and imagination the appeal and education programme of the various denominational causes can be combined and presented, the actual receipts being divided as appropriate. However, it should be noted that the United Reformed Church embraces all giving within the Mission and Ministry Fund, whereas the Methodist Church expects local churches to support various Methodist causes in addition to the

assessment for ministry and administrative costs. The *Getting to Know You* pack referred to in the Introduction has information on the mission and service of both churches. The Church and Social/Social Responsibility central staff have produced a paper suggesting how Local Ecumenical Partnerships might decide how to share out their support for good work. It is hoped that others might follow suit.

9. Resources

Travelling Together: a handbook for Local Ecumenical Partnerships 2nd edition 2004
By Flora Winfield and Elizabeth Welch £5.95 plus p&p

Together Locally: a handbook for local churches seeking to work together
By Jenny Carpenter £4.95 plus p&p

Constitutional Guidelines for a Local Ecumenical Partnership (2006)- Good Practice-
£5.00 including p&p

Getting to Know You: an information pack for Methodist and United Reformed Church local Churches
£1.25 plus p&p

URC Guidelines for Declaring and Filling Vacancies – 60p plus p&p

Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church- £18.99 plus p&p

The Manual of the United Reformed Church - £5.50p plus p&p

A Harmony of Church Finance by Roger Mead - £4.95 plus p&p

Under the Same Roof: Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 revised edition 1994
£4.95 plus p&p

Reformed Expectations in a Local Ecumenical Partnership – free sheet

Available from one or more of the following:

United Reformed Church Bookshop
86 Tavistock Place, London WC11 9RT
(020 7916 8629)

United Reformed Church House Ecumenical Relations
as above
(020 7916 8652)

Methodist Publishing House
4 John Wesley Road, Peterborough PE4 6ZP
(01733 325002)

Churches Together in England
27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH
(020 7529 8131)

