

## EXTENDED MEMBERSHIP (1992)

The Conference of 1991 referred the following Suggestion (S.1) to the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ecumenical Committee for consideration and report to the Conference of 1992:

The Bristol Synod (R) (Present 252. Vote: 249 for, 2 against, 1 neutral) draws the attention of Conference to an anomaly in Local Ecumenical Projects, especially those which are long established. Those who become members through joint Confirmation receive multiple membership of all participating denominations. Those who transfer in, or were members of the participating churches before the formation of the LEP, have to retain their one denominational membership only. The Bristol Synod requests the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee, in conjunction with the Ecumenical Committee, to explore the implications of offering 'extended membership' of all participating denominations to communicant members in LEPs who do not have multiple membership through Joint Confirmation, on the understanding that such 'extended membership' would terminate when the member left the LEP.

As directed by the Conference, the Faith and Order Committee and the Ecumenical Committee have considered both the desirability and the practicability of introducing Extended Membership into Local Ecumenical Projects.

### 1 *Definitions*

**Communicant Membership** generally implies that through baptism and a subsequent rite of or equivalent to confirmation a Christian is expected and permitted to receive Holy Communion in his or her own denomination. (This procedure is slightly confused by communion before confirmation, by the practice of the 'open table', and by those churches which practise only believers' baptism.)

**Common Membership** can exist between Methodist and United Reformed congregations because they have very similar procedures for making and recording full church members.

**Statistical Membership** involves the returning of national membership figures, often for assessment purposes, and no two denominations adopt the same procedure. The main point is that in joint churches no members are recorded more than once! (The Methodist-URC statistical forms have varying degrees of success.)

**Multiple Membership** occurs in those Local Ecumenical Projects 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, Methodist and 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 Project whose denominations would permit it. (It is not clear whether this extended membership would be permanent or temporary.)

## 2 *Difficulties*

- a) Multiple Membership involving Anglicans requires that all candidates are episcopally confirmed. In the case of Extended Membership this would not be the case.
- b) The Church of England has no equivalent to the membership roll in the Free Churches (the Electoral Roll is something different) and so it would not be clear which Anglicans were enjoying Extended Membership in a Local Ecumenical Project.
- c) There would be little point in the Methodist Church offering the possibility of Extended Membership in a Local Ecumenical Project unless several other denominations had agreed nationally to do the same.
- d) In practice Local Ecumenical Projects differ enormously in their make-up, from the covenant variety (which may be quite loose in structure and may include Roman Catholics who could not participate in either Multiple or Extended Membership) to the fully integrated and long-standing congregations. It would be difficult to decide when a particular Local Ecumenical Project could implement Extended Membership.
- e) If, for example, a person enjoying Anglican membership in the form of Extended Membership wished to be ordained in the Church of England, episcopal confirmation would be first required. This raises a serious question about what reality Extended Membership would actually have.

## 3 *Benefits*

- a) Eligibility for election to the local, regional and national governing bodies of the participating denominations would be open to every church member of a Local Ecumenical Project on the same basis. (The situation regarding eligibility for office across the denominations is better than it used to be but is still not mutually or uniformly satisfactory.)
- b) In Local Ecumenical Projects of long-standing which practise Multiple Membership those having Multiple Membership may well be in the majority. Extended Membership would remove the anomaly of two categories of member in one congregation or group of congregations,
- c) Communicant Members arriving in a Local Ecumenical Project, where many or a majority of whose congregation had Multiple Membership, would be accorded the same Multiple Membership upon their joining the congregation.

d) Similarly, those Communicant Members whose congregation joined an existing Local Ecumenical Project would be afforded the same Multiple Membership as those who had participated in a joint confirmation or initiation service.

#### *4 Recommendations*

Recognizing both the difficulties in implementing Extended Membership and the benefits it could bring, the Faith and Order Committee and the Ecumenical Committee recommend that the Conference

invite the appropriate denominational and inter-church executives and working parties within Churches Together in England to undertake further work on the theology and practice of church membership and the question of Extended Membership.

direct the Ecumenical Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to monitor the progress of the above invitation and to report to the Conference of 1994.

#### **RESOLUTIONS**

The Conference adopts the Report on Extended Membership in Local Ecumenical Projects as its reply to Suggestion S.1 (1991).

The Conference, through the Ecumenical Committee, invites the appropriate denominational and inter-church executives and working parties within Churches Together in England to undertake further work on the theology and practice of church membership and the question of Extended Membership.

The Conference directs the Ecumenical Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee, to monitor the progress of the above invitation and to report to the Conference of 1994.

*(Agenda 1992, pp.125-128)*