

WORSHIP IN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS (1999)

Introduction

In 1996, Bristol District Synod sent the following Memorial to the Conference:

The Bristol Synod (R) (Present 267. Vote 254 for, 5 Ag, 8 Neut) recognises that Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) have peculiar pressures, regarding the ordering of worship, that sometimes requires them to go beyond current denominational practices. In recognising this, the Bristol Synod invites Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee to provide guidelines for use by LEPs and Sponsoring Bodies, that clearly state the essentials of 'Methodist Worship' which need to be considered when drawing up and approving Orders of Service for use within LEPs that have Methodist involvement. Such guidelines to be available for approval of Conference in 1997 and to include the whole range of services currently approved for use by Conference.

The Conference replied as follows:

The Conference shares the Bristol District Synod's concern about the pressures sometimes faced by LEPs in respect of the ordering of worship. In some LEPs it is customary for the authorised rites (where applicable) of all the participating churches to be used in turn. In others, locally-prepared orders, often drawing upon a number of denominational rites, are drafted. The Conference understands that the Faith and Order Committee is often invited to offer advice on such local orders and is glad to do so.

Though the Bristol District Synod's suggestion that guidelines be prepared is attractive, the precise terms of the Memorial are not without difficulty. Guidelines about 'essentials' could lead to 'minimalist' rites, where acts of worship were reduced to their 'essentials'. Equally seriously, there would be a danger of introducing denominational considerations unnecessarily: the Conference understands that the Faith and Order Committee's comments on and criticisms of 'local liturgies' submitted to it have rarely been 'denominational' in nature. For these reasons, the Conference does not feel able to direct the Faith and Order Committee to produce guidelines in the precise terms suggested by the Bristol District Synod.

Nevertheless, the Conference believes that the idea of guidelines for LEPs on 'local liturgies' deserves further exploration and therefore refers paragraph 1 of the Memorial to the Faith and Order Committee for consideration and report to the Conference of 1997.

The Faith and Order Committee reported as follows to the 1998 Conference:

The Faith and Order Committee felt that, while it would be possible for Committee to produce some guidelines on good practice in the development of local liturgies, it would be much better if some ecumenical work could be undertaken in this area. The Committee therefore referred the matter to the Joint Liturgical Group, which in turn consulted the CTE Group for Local Unity. These two bodies resolved to set up a joint working party. For a variety of reasons, it proved impossible for the working party to meet before March 1998.

The Faith and Order Committee has now been informed that the joint JLG/GLU working party does not believe that it would be possible, given the great variety that exists within LEPs, to produce the sort of ecumenical guidelines that have been suggested. JLG has resolved that those of its member churches who wish to produce their own guidelines should be encouraged to do so, in consultation, if they so wish, with other churches.

The Faith and Order Committee has therefore resolved to draw up some guidelines, which will eventually be available to Methodists involved in LEPs. The Committee regrets the delay which the ecumenical explorations have caused, but believes that it was proper to make those explorations.

Report to the 1999 Conference

The Committee has now drawn up the following guidelines, drawing heavily upon *The Methodist Worship Book*, and invites the Conference to approve them.

WORSHIP IN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS GUIDELINES

Introduction

In 1996, in response to a Memorial from the Bristol Synod, the Methodist Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to consider the production of liturgical guidelines for Methodists involved in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) and Sponsoring Bodies, with particular reference to 'local liturgies'.

In many LEPs, the authorized forms of service of each of the participating churches are used in turn. If a denomination has no authorized form of service, its 'week' reflects the liturgical traditions and usage of that denomination. So, for example, in a Partnership involving Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists, and having a weekly celebration of Holy Communion, *The Alternative Service Book* may be used on one Sunday each month; *The Methodist Worship Book* may be used on another Sunday; and the service on another Sunday may be in accordance with the usage of Baptists.

The advantage of such rotation is that the tradition of each participating church is honoured and shared. LEPs are not distinct denominations; they are partnerships of churches of two or more denominations.

Other LEPs, however, have felt that to use the authorized services (or their equivalents) of the participating denominations in turn perpetuates a sense of division. They argue that, since the denominational liturgies or usages have much in common, and since the members of the LEP worship as one body, they should be able to use forms of service which they can all 'own'. For this reason, ecumenical liturgies from such sources as the Church of South India have been used or 'local liturgies' have been produced.

The constitutions of most LEPs allow for all the possibilities described above, but indicate that forms of service other than those already approved by the participating denominations should be approved by the Sponsoring Body. Some denominations also insist that an appropriate person or body from within the denomination must approve such 'local liturgies'. Although the Methodist Church does not require this, the Faith and Order Committee is glad to be consulted and willing to offer advice.

The Faith and Order Committee has prepared the following guidelines on 'local liturgies' in respect of Holy Communion, of Baptism and Confirmation and of Services of the Word (Preaching Services), which are the services for which 'local liturgies' are most frequently prepared.

HOLY COMMUNION

The role of the presiding minister should be clearly indicated in the text of a service of Holy Communion. According to *The Methodist Worship Book*:

The term 'presiding minister' . . . means a presbyter or a person with an authorisation from the Conference to preside at the Lord's Supper. The presiding minister should begin and end the service. She/he should also greet the people at the Peace and preside over the fourfold Eucharistic action by taking the bread and wine, leading the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, breaking the bread, and presiding over the sharing of the bread and wine. Other people may be invited to share in other parts of the service.

The Methodist Worship Book provides Guidelines for Ordering A Service of Holy Communion, as follows:

The Gathering of the People of God

The presiding minister and the people gather in God's name.

Notices may be given and news items may be shared.

Acts of approach and praise are offered in song and prayer.

A prayer of penitence is followed by an assurance of God's forgiveness.

There may be a brief introduction to the service.

A short prayer reflecting the season or festival is offered.

The Ministry of the Word

The scriptures are read, concluding with a passage from the Gospels.

God's word is proclaimed and shared in songs, hymns, music, dance and other art forms, in a sermon, or in comment, discussion and in silence.

Prayers are offered for the Church, for the world and for those in need; a remembrance is made of those who have died; and the Lord's Prayer may be said.

The Lord's Supper

The Peace is introduced by an appropriate sentence of scripture and may be shared by the presiding minister and the people.

The offerings of the people may be placed on the Lord's table.

The presiding minister takes the bread and wine and prepares them for use.

The presiding minister leads the great prayer of thanksgiving:

The people are invited to offer praise to God.

There is thanksgiving for creation,
for God's self-revelation,
for the salvation of the world through Christ,
and for the gift of the Holy Spirit,
with special reference to the season or festival.

God's glory may be proclaimed in a version of 'Holy, holy, holy'.

The story of the institution of the Lord's Supper is told.
Christ's death and resurrection are recalled.

God is asked to receive the worshippers' sacrifice of praise.

There is prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit that the gifts of bread and wine may be, for those participating, the body and blood of Christ.

The worshippers, offering themselves in service to God, ask to be united in communion with all God's people on earth and in heaven.

The prayer concludes with all honour and glory being given to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the people responding with a loud '**Amen**'.

The Lord's Prayer is said, if it has not been said earlier.

The presiding minister breaks the bread in silence, or saying an appropriate sentence.

The presiding minister and people receive communion, after which the elements that remain are covered.

Prayers and Dismissal

A short prayer is offered in which the worshippers thank God for the communion and look forward to the final feast in God's kingdom.

There may be a time of praise.

The presiding minister says a blessing and sends the people out to live to God's praise and glory.

Particular attention should be given to the following points:

- 1 The Ministry of the Word should provide for the reading and proclamation of Scripture, and a reading from the Gospels should invariably be included.
- 2 The Lord's Supper should invariably include the four actions of 'taking, giving thanks, breaking and sharing'.
- 3 The 'great prayer of thanksgiving', sometimes called the 'eucharistic prayer', should invariably include all the elements shown above, though not necessarily in the order indicated.

BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION

Baptism

According to *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*:

Normally baptism shall be administered by a minister, or by a ministerial probationer appointed to the Circuit. However, where local considerations so require, it may be administered, with the approval of the Superintendent, by a deacon or diaconal probationer appointed (in either case) to the Circuit, or by a local preacher. In an emergency baptism may be administered by any person.

Baptism may, in Methodist usage, be administered to young children or to people 'able to answer for themselves' (who have not previously been baptized). In *The Methodist Worship Book*, four services which include Baptism are provided, to allow for the different circumstances that may be encountered: young children and 'adults' together; 'adults' only; young children only; the Baptism of young children only with the confirmation of adults. But a great deal of text is common to all these services. This is very important, because it should be clear, in Baptismal liturgies, that Baptism is Baptism, whatever the age of the recipient.

- 1 In any service of Baptism, one would expect to find:

A declaration, setting out the meaning of Baptism and including appropriate passages from the scriptures

A request for Baptism

A prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts of water and the Holy Spirit

The Apostles' Creed (or other Affirmation of Faith)

The candidate(s) [or parent(s)] declaring the names of those to be baptized

The pouring of water over the head of each candidate, or the dipping of the candidate in water, accompanied by the words 'N, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' [This pouring or dipping and the words which accompany the action are the irreducible minimum requirement for a Baptism.]

The making of the sign of the Cross on the forehead of those newly-baptized

Promises, in which the newly-baptized commit themselves to the Christian life, or parent(s) undertake to give newly-baptized children a Christian upbringing, and the congregation promises to maintain the Church's life of worship and service.

The liturgical usage of other denominations is similar, though the order in which the above elements appear varies.

2 The Baptism of those who are able to answer for themselves should normally be followed immediately by their Confirmation and Reception into Membership. The liturgy needs to provide for this.

Confirmation, as practised by Methodists, is always accompanied by Reception into Membership.

When Confirmation and Reception immediately follow Baptism, the service should contain the following elements:

A request for Confirmation

A prayer asking that God will strengthen the candidates to live as faithful disciples of Jesus and fill them with the Holy Spirit, which concludes with the minister laying a hand on the head of each candidate while words such as the following are said:

'Lord, confirm your servant *N* by your Holy Spirit that *she/he* may continue yours for ever. **Amen.**'

Reception into Membership with the words:

'*N and N (N)*, we receive and welcome you as *members* of the Methodist Church and of the church in this place.'

followed by the offering of the hand of fellowship

The post-Baptismal promises should come at this point in respect of those able to answer for themselves, even if they have already been made in respect of young children.

When the Confirmation is of persons baptized on a previous occasion, all the above elements are included, and the Apostles' Creed is said after the request for Confirmation.

SERVICES OF THE WORD

The Methodist Worship Book provides the following Guidelines for ordering a Service of the Word, or Preaching Service:

The Preparation

The leader and people gather in God's name.

Notices may be given and news items may be shared.

Acts of approach and praise are offered in song and prayer.

A prayer of penitence is followed by an assurance of God's forgiveness.

There may be a brief introduction to the service or a short prayer reflecting the season or festival.

The Ministry of the Word

The scriptures are read, including a passage from the New Testament. God's word is proclaimed and shared in songs, hymns, music, dance and other art forms, in a sermon, or in comment, discussion and in silence.

The Peace may be shared and introduced with an appropriate sentence of scripture.

The Response

Prayers of thanksgiving are offered for God's gift of creation and redemption in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Prayers are offered for the Church, for the world and for those in need, and a remembrance may be made of those who have died.

The Lord's Prayer is said, unless it has been said earlier.

The leader and people dedicate themselves to God in prayer.

The offerings of the people may be placed on the Lord's table.

The Dismissal

A final act of praise is followed by words of blessing and dismissal, or 'The Grace' is said.

RESOLUTION

The Conference adopts the Guidelines on Worship in Local Ecumenical Partnerships and authorizes their publication.

(Agenda 1999, pp.215-221)