**Definition of a Local Ecumenical Partnership**

A Local Ecumenical Partnership is defined as existing where there is a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects of more than one denomination: and a recognition of that agreement by the ACTS Ecumenical Development Group, and authorisation by the appropriate denominational authorities.

For an LEP to exist there must be:
- a formal written agreement which is entered locally
- formal written authorisation by the appropriate denominational bodies in line with their provisions and procedures
- formal recognition, ongoing liaison, support and review by the National Sponsoring Body.

**Categories of Ecumenical Partnership**

There are many categories of informal, local ecumenical co-operation only some of which will go on to develop their commitment to become Local Ecumenical Partnerships. When this happens there are three useful working categories identified by the National Sponsoring Body.

1. **Single Congregation Partnerships**

There is usually one joint congregation with shared sacramental ministry, a common purse and an Ecumenical Church Council formalised through a Constitution. Orthodox and Roman Catholic congregations cannot fully embrace this type of partnership, if it involves shared sacramental ministry.

There may be a ministerial team, drawn from all or some of the partner denominations. Some of the ministers may have pastoral responsibility for other congregations (whether Partnerships or not), and others may serve full time in the LEP. In many cases, however, ordained ministry will be provided primarily by one of the partner denominations, often in an agreed alternating pattern.

Aspects of the life and worship of each tradition should be reflected in the Constitution. The mix of partners will have an influence on the style of the Partnership. It is important to remember that churches evolve, so a mix of recognisable denominational worship and ecumenically inspired forms will be appropriate.

The Partnership must be recognised by each of the partner denominations. Local decision-making will focus in an Ecumenical Church Council and, where appropriate, the Church Meeting.

Single Congregation Partnerships may come into being by the formal coming together of two or more congregations. Others may take the form of ecumenical church plants – where in a new housing development several denominations combine to ‘grow’ a congregation.

Formal approval for a Single Congregation Partnership must be sought from the appropriate denominational authorities. The national Ecumenical Officers or other appropriate person should be consulted and the documentation agreed by the participating denominations and the National Sponsoring Body.

2. **Churches in Covenanted Partnership**

Most Covenanted Partnerships are a development of a local Churches Together group, or a local ecumenical mission project where a level of trust, commitment and inter-dependence has been reached which warrants a formal covenant.
The local congregations involved in such Partnerships remain as distinct worshipping congregations, with their own government and finances, and with ordained ministry from their own denomination and their own buildings or through the sharing of a minister in a Ecumenical pastorate.

This category of Partnership is one in which all denominations can play a full part. It is important that every attempt is made to include the widest possible spectrum of churches present in the locality when forming a Covenanted Partnership. No-one's understanding of the nature of the church need be threatened. There must be a conviction that the deeper commitment to unity represented by a covenanted relationship is a response to Christ’s call and the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

A local covenant is a significant mutual commitment under God and between congregations, local churches and parishes in a particular locality for mutually discerned and agreed purposes. To use the language of covenant for anything less than this is to debase a powerful Biblical concept. Like marriage, it is not to be entered into lightly. Those thinking about forming a Covenanted Partnership must consider prayerfully if what they discern to be the purpose and the level of mutual commitment between the congregations warrants a covenant relationship.

A Local Covenant should state its purpose clearly – in terms of both a faithful response to God and the specific ways in which the covenant relationship will become effective and remain open to further developments.

The business of developing a Local Covenant is the responsibility of all God’s people in the congregations involved and must not be the work of ministers and clergy only. This implies discussion, prayer and action within and between congregations.

A Local Covenant is of such significance that it cannot be a matter of purely local concern. In order that proper support may be given by the denominations involved and that commitments are not entered into which go beyond the competence of a congregation, local church or parish, concurrence must be sought from the appropriate denominational authorities. The national Ecumenical Officers or other appropriate person should be consulted and the documentation agreed by the participating denominations and the National Sponsoring Body.

3. **Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment**
In some areas - mainly rural – there may be only one place of worship (usually the Church of Scotland) and which recognises that among its regular worshippers are people from sister churches. The ecumenical nature of the congregation can now be recognised by means of a ‘Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment’.

4. **Shared Building Partnership**
Where there is at least one shared building and the congregations do not fall into categories 1 and 2 above, a legal Sharing Agreement is required. This happens where two or more congregations of different denominations share one building but where there is the minimum of integration of worship, congregational life and ministerial oversight.

**Circumstances in which constitutional documentation is necessary**
- A Constitution for a Single Congregational Partnership
  - a. basic
  - b. union
- A Covenant for a Covenanted Partnership
- A Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment
- A Shared Buildings Agreement where categories 1 and 2 do not apply.