GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUP IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD OR SMALL TOWN.

CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUPS IN SCOTLAND.

Throughout Scotland there are many local churches together groups (some of which use the title Council of Churches). In 1990, the churches in Britain and Ireland decided to use a churches together model to work together ecumenically. At the heart of this model, is the fact that the churches keep their identities, share their joys and concerns and from the sharing of their individual agendas, discern a common agenda to work on with their ecumenical partners. The role of the ecumenical instruments (Action of Churches Together in Scotland at a national level and Churches Together Groups at a local level) is to facilitate and enable the churches acting together rather than having a voice which is distinct from the churches.

Although often there are good working relationships between ACTS and local Churches Together Groups there is no structural or governance relationship between them. Membership of local Churches Together Groups is not bound by membership of ACTS.

This document provides guidelines and is not definitive. Comments on its usefulness are welcomed. The Secretary of the Ecumenical Development Group is available as a further resource to Churches Together Groups. You are encouraged to send copies of any founding documents to the Ecumenical Development Group c/o ACTS so that these may be a further resource for others. Please send contact information for the Churches Together Group to ACTS so that the group may receive mailings, notices of events etc.

The following sections cover headings you may wish to consider. Much of the language is adapted from that which the member churches of ACTS agreed to in establishing the ecumenical instrument.
1. BASIS (suggested text)

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ....... unites in pilgrimage those Churches in ...... which, acknowledging God’s revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and, in obedience to God’s will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves

- to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is His body; and
- to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2. AIMS (suggested text)

The aims of Churches Together in .... shall be -

(a) to enable the churches, as pilgrims together, to explore the Christian faith together, to develop mutual relationships, to seek a common mind, and to make decisions together

(b) to encourage churches to worship, pray and reflect together on the nature and purpose of the church in the light of its mission - each church sharing with others the treasures of its tradition

(c) to enable the churches to live and share the Gospel, to evangelise together and to take further steps towards fuller unity

(d) to enable the churches to respond to the needs of society and to witness to the Gospel together.

(e) any specific aims for the particular Churches Together Group.

3. AREA

You may wish to specify the geographical area in which you are going to work. This could simply be the name of a town or community. You could also identify this by referring to specific parishes or map references.
4. WIDER RELATIONSHIPS

If there is a city-wide Churches Together Group, i.e. in Edinburgh or Glasgow then a neighbourhood Churches Together group may have the opportunity of engaging that Group.

5. MEMBERSHIP (suggested text)

Membership of Churches Together in .... shall be open to -

(a) any local church in the area which is affiliated to a church which is a full member of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (see Note 1) and

(b) any other local church in the area which affirms the Basis and commits itself to promote the aims of Churches Together in .... and

(c) any local church which on principle has no credal statements in its tradition and therefore cannot formally subscribe to the statement of faith in the Basis, provided that it satisfies 75% in number of those full Member Churches which subscribe to the Basis, that it manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures and it is committed to the aims and purposes of Churches Together in .... and that it will work in the spirit of the Basis.

6. OFFICERS

The Churches Together Group may decide to elect Office Bearers. In doing so the Churches Together Group is reminded that wherever possible balances of denomination, gender and lay/ordained should be observed. It is suggested that all Office bearers serve for termed appointments. The Group may decide whether these are renewable.

7. REPRESENTATION TO THE CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUP.

(a) The Churches Together Group should decide how many representatives each Member Church may send to the Group, It would be usual that this would allow for ordained and lay representatives.

(b) The Churches Together Group may decided to co-opt others onto the Group. It may set limits on the number of co-options and the time period of their co-option.

This document has been adapted from the CTE Group for Local Unity document of 1996, with amendments June 2002 and June 2008.
8. MEETINGS OF THE CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUP.

The Churches Together Group may decide:

1) how often it wishes to meet

2) in what style it wishes to meet

3) how meetings may be called.

It would be usual for there to be an Annual General Meeting at which any appointments are made, reports submitted, accounts presented, membership fees set.

9. FINANCE

The Churches Together Group may decide that each Member Church/ body should/shall pay an annual sum to the Group. This should be agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Group.

10. CONSTITUTION

The Group will need to decide the mechanism for amending its constitution and any requirements regarding voting percentages for any decisions to take affect. Local Churches Together Groups are strongly advised not to seek charitable status.

11. REVIEW

It is intended that Churches Together Groups reflect the developing life of the Christian Churches as they continue their pilgrimage together. From time to time the Churches Together Group is encouraged to review its life and work. Information about review models is available from the Ecumenical Development Group.

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Note 1.

The Member Churches of Action of Churches Together in Scotland are:

Congregational Federation
Church of Scotland
Methodist Church
Religious Society of Friends
Roman Catholic Church
Salvation Army
Scottish Episcopal Church
United Free Church of Scotland
United Reformed Church