Orientation for Incoming Clergy to Local Ecumenical Partnerships

Introduction
LEPs can be among the most exciting churches in which to serve as clergy. At their best, they are growing and developing situations that enable congregations and community to see the church fulfilling Christ’s prayer “that they might be one.” However, each LEP has a different constitution that almost invariably takes precedence over “normal” denominational practice, and allows for creative development. It is therefore necessary for incoming clergy of any denomination to understand the practice of the specific LEP to which they have been called, stationed or appointed. This means that it is necessary to understand:

- the differences between the LEP, and its constituent parent denominations;
- the expectations of the wider church structures on the LEP;
- how and why the original Constitution and Sharing Agreement are now implemented.

The orientation process
This document provides an orientation process that seeks to enable clergy to gain this understanding. The process involves the support of a colleague from another denomination in the LEP, together with a person appointed by the local congregation, and reading essential documents.

A colleague from “another” denomination who has no ongoing or previous involvement in the LEP, will be identified by the Ecumenical Development Group in consultation with the appropriate church leader¹.

The colleague from “another” denomination will be active in ministry, be in touch with developments in his /her denomination and understand the theology, tradition and practice of his/her own church. His / her role will be to help you:

¹ The church leaders will be as follows:
Church of Scotland: Presbytery Clerk
Congregational Federation: the Area Secretary
Methodist Church: normally the Circuit Superintendent
Religious Society of Friends: Clerk to the General Meeting
Roman Catholic Church: Diocesan Bishop
Salvation Army: Divisional Commander
Scottish Episcopal Church: Diocesan Bishop
United Free Church of Scotland: General Secretary
United Reformed Church: Synod Moderator
• explore the areas of difference between your home denomination and the other constituent denominations in the LEP
• reflect on the way the theology, tradition and practice of all the parent bodies, have or have not, been incorporated into the LEP;
• make decisions about your wider involvement in church structures.

His / her role is not to make value judgements about the LEP and it does not matter whether or not s/he has exercised ministry in a similar LEP.

It would be helpful to meet regularly (perhaps quarterly) during the first year. It is hoped that the relationship might provide you with an ongoing sounding board, but in subsequent years, meetings could be less frequent.

Reading essential documents. The LEP’s leadership should provide you with these before your arrival. They include:
• The Constitution or Declaration of Intent.
• The Sharing Agreement where one exists. (NB: They are legal documents and might not appear to reflect the dreams and hopes in local situations for equality and goodwill.)
• Practice Documents. Where these exist they might include terms of reference for committees, processes for electing Elders / Stewards etc.
• Annual Reports
• Minutes of meetings with powers of governance such as Elders and Church Meeting, Church Council, and Joint Councils.
• Ecumenical Review or denominational equivalents which predate the agreement to conduct Ecumenical Reviews.
• Where Methodist or United Reformed Churches are involved “How to Make it Work” is a pack of advice, produced by the Methodist / United Reformed Church Liaison Committee, for locally united Methodist and United Reformed Churches. This is available on the Methodist and United Reformed Church’s Websites: www.urc.org.uk and www.methodist.org.uk

A person appointed by the congregation to help orientate you (e.g. the Church Secretary, Senior Steward, Session Clerk, member of the Vestry). You may need to ask for someone to be appointed! S/he should help you to understand the LEP and how local practice has evolved. You should meet with him / her regularly in the first year, probably monthly initially, but reducing in frequency as seems appropriate.
Understanding the practice of the “other” denominations.

If you are to move beyond stereotypes and learn to value the other traditions as much as your own, it is essential to have an understanding of the nature of the church that underlies the normal practice of the other denominations. This will enable you to establish the extent to which the local practice of the LEP has developed from the practice of its constituent denominations.

Identify the ecclesiology and practices of your own tradition that you particularly value, and with your colleague from the other denomination, seek to understand the practice of the other denominations. Ask for an explanation of how and why the church works as it does at all levels. The major areas of difference between the Churches are in relation to:

1. The deployment of ordained ministry

2. The different roles and understandings of leaders and clergy at congregational, regional and Scottish level.

3. The different understandings of local church governance and authority in relation to decision-making, pastoral care and worship.

4. Different accounting and church years have implications for local decision-making and the relationship of the local church to wider denominational structures.

5. Different rules, practices and laws concerning property.

6. Worship, including the sacraments, particularly Communion and the practise of Baptism, and transfer of membership. It would be helpful to explore the use of “set forms of worship”, the status of hymn and service books and the clergy’s role in leading worship.

7. The relationship between the local church and the wider structures and the different roles, status and authority of leaders.

You might also find it helpful to attend any training events run for clergy new to LEPs.
Understanding the practice of the LEP

The following should be set out in the Constitution and Sharing Agreement, should one exist.

- Church Governance / Decision Making and the roles of church leaders and meetings
- Ministry including deployment practise
- Worship
- Finance noting particularly the national agreement in Scotland on contributions to ministry costs
- Property
- The relationships between the LEP and its minister and the wider structures of the denominations
- The relationship with Ecumenical Development Group

Churches with Constitutions may have negotiated them carefully and they therefore require sensitive and careful attention. Some follow more closely the pattern of one of their constituent parent denominations but churches differ in the extent to which these are adhered to and it is likely that constitutions will have been adapted with time. For each of these areas you will need to understand:

1. **What was originally agreed and why.**
   a) Read the documentation.
   b) If it is possible, develop an understanding of the history of the LEP by talking with people who were members in the churches that came together to form the LEP.

2. **Current practice.**
   a) Observe.
   b) Read current documents.
   c) Ask the person appointed by the church what they understand current practice to be.

3. **How and why practice has developed from the original intention.**
   a) If possible, talk with those who have been involved in making the changes, especially local church leaders, past and present.
   b) Ask what were the primary reasons for the change? Were they practical or ecclesiological?
   c) Find out who / what were the most significant influences on these changes (e.g. previous clergy, previous or current members, changes in the theological emphasis of the church, positive or negative interactions with the constituent parent denominations or local “Churches Together” group)?
4. **The distance of the LEP from its constituent denominations.**

The intention of this exploration is not to re-establish the forms that originally existed, but to understand what was originally agreed and how far the LEP had developed from the ecclesiology and practices of constituent parent denominations. This should enable you, at least in the early stages to understand what expectations the LEP has of you, and to adapt their own practices accordingly.

a) Reflect on your findings in the light of what you know about the constituent parent denominations.

b) What are the advantages / disadvantages of the practice of this LEP.

c) Identify the issues raised by the different expectations for you as a member of the clergy in your own tradition.

**The expectations of the wider church structures on the minister of the LEP**

The expectations of the wider church are also varied and normally depend on factors such as the membership and original make up of the LEP, the extent of clergy responsibilities (e.g. other churches, responsibilities, hours worked. etc), and the previous history of relationships with both denominations.

1. Ensure you have developed an understanding of the ecclesiology and practice of the “other” denominations so that you are aware of normal practice. The areas that frequently cause tension are:
   - Leading worship: the effect of team, group, and shared models of leading worship versus models where a single person is responsible for worship each week.
   - The number of meetings: getting a good balance that reflects the size of the job in relation to the “other” denomination and enables useful participation.
   - Attendance at meetings.
   - Administration requirements including the different funding and financial practices and church years and the differences in who is legally responsible for managing property.

2. Establish an understanding of the LEP’s expectations of the clergy’s relationships with other church structures. The Constitution may have some information about how the relationship between minister and the wider church structures was envisaged. If this is the case, establish whether or not this is the current position, or seek to understand what the church’s current thinking and expectations are.
3. Establish an understanding of the wider church’s expectations of the clergy’s relationships with them.

a) During the deployment process there should have been some conversation about the expectations of the incoming clergy. These should normally have included the appropriate church leaders\(^2\) and sometimes representatives of the Sponsoring Body.

b) If these are not clear, or appear to be unreasonable, you may wish to discuss this with clergy in other LEPS, and if / when appropriate, with the leaders in the local congregation. If it is believed that changes are necessary, these will require further discussion with the appropriate church leaders\(^3\).

This document is produced by the ACTS Ecumenical Development Group and draws substantially from the document, ‘Orientation for Incoming Ministers to Methodist and United Reformed LEPs’ produced by the Methodist / United Reformed Church Liaison Committee in March 2007. The Group would like to express its thanks to the Liaison Committee for permission to develop its work in this way.

\(^2\) The church leaders will be as follows:
Church of Scotland: Presbytery Clerk
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United Free Church of Scotland: General Secretary
United Reformed Church: Synod Moderator; Convener of Synod Pastoral Committee

\(^3\) The church leaders as listed in footnote 2 above.
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