

SCOTTISH CHURCHES' NATIONAL SPONSORING BODY FOR LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS RESOURCE DOCUMENT

Progressing in Partnership

INTRODUCTION: This paper offers a step by step guide for congregations wishing to pursue local partnerships with their ecumenical neighbours.

1. Preliminary Meetings

These meetings can be facilitated by an Ecumenical Officer who can help you avoid the pitfalls that others have found.

First of all office-bearers need to be agreed on the desirability of a Covenant relationship. What is it that is to be done together rather than separately? Is it the bringing together of existing ministry, mission and life? Is it responding together to a new challenge or opportunity e.g. new housing, a publicly recognised need?

2. Mission/Vision Statement

The idea needs to be tested with congregations. This can take some time and more than one meeting may be required, because it is important that people's questions and fears are answered. The process has to be owned by the members of the congregation, though it is likely to be led by the minister and office-bearers. It is important to remember that the different denominations have different ways of relating to the wider church and decision-making processes will differ in length. Discussion should take place with all the other Christian traditions in the locality about joining the partnership.

Once agreement to proceed is reached, a mission/vision statement should be drawn up. This should be more theological principle than practical details and should be short – about 300 words. Here is an example, but it is important to tailor the Statement to each local situation.

For example:

On behalf of the churches within we acknowledge with thankfulness -

- *our common faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;*
- *our common calling to serve in God's mission;*
- *the diversity of our traditions and the different gifts each brings to our common life.*

We believe we are called to deepen our life together in Christ, and to seek to offer to the world a visibly united witness. Therefore, as fellow pilgrims in faith, we commit ourselves to work together –

- *in proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God and nurturing new believers;*
- *in declaring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in ways that are faithful to the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and relevant to the people of*
- *in expressing the love of God through common service;*
- *in sharing gifts and resources for the good of God's Kingdom;*
- *in promoting justice, peace and reconciliation;*
- *in growing towards the unity we believe to be God's will;*
- *in worship together;*
- *in finding other partners with whom we can work.*

We believe that this commitment can be expressed in a variety of ways, for example

We pray that God will lead us, with all our sisters and brothers in Christ, to follow God's way and do God's will.

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3. Developing the relationship

Then outline what more can be done to develop the relationship and deepen the commitment. These will be the development of existing activities and the identification of new ones.

For example:

We commit ourselves and our churches -

- a. *To move through co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service to the world.*
- b. *To engage in joint worship, prayer and study so that we may know and value each other and seek God's will for God's people.*
- c. *To work together in pastoral, social and evangelistic outreach into our community.*
- d. *To publicise and promote our Church life and worship by joint means wherever possible.*
- e. *To develop an Ecumenical Ministry Team for regular prayer, study, consultation and appropriate action.*
- f. *To co-ordinate decision-making and use of resources through a Partnership Enabling Group comprising the Ecumenical Ministry Team and two lay representatives appointed by and from each participating congregation.*
- g. *To ensure that each ordained or lay appointment to the Ecumenical Ministry Team, although made by the appropriate denomination, is made with such consultation with the Ecumenical Ministry Team as is reasonably possible, consonant with denominational procedures.*
- h. *To set specific targets under each of the above headings and review progress annually and to express our achievements and aspirations in a united act of worship and rededication, marking the anniversary of the signing of this covenant.*

4. Timescale

Built into the process is time to allow for the Covenant to be approved by the relevant authorities at local and regional levels. In some denominations approval at national level is also required. In all cases the national ecumenical officer or equivalent should be informed.

5. Signing the Covenant

Signing the Covenant is a significant event in the life of the churches. At this stage it should be signed by those with pastoral responsibility in each congregation.

6. Constitutions

Where a constitution is required, this should be drawn up with the guidance of the various denominational ecumenical officers. This is likely to go through several drafts, but during this period the congregations can be living the partnership. Sample constitutions are available, again to be tailored to the specific context of each LEP. The constitution requires to be approved by the appropriate authority in each denomination.

When the constitution has been approved by all the participating denominations a joint service should be organised at which the covenant is signed by representatives from the regional and/or national level as listed below. This is important because the decision to act together has implication for the wider Church and is a signal to other of what is possible for them.

Baptist Union:	Local Minister
Church of Scotland:	Presbytery Moderator
Congregational Federation:	Local Minister
Methodist Church:	District Chair

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Religious Society of Friends:	Clerk to the Quaker Meeting
Roman Catholic Church:	Bishop of the Diocese
Salvation Army:	Divisional Commander
Scottish Episcopal Church:	Bishop of the Diocese
United Free Church:	Presbytery Moderator
United Reformed Church:	Synod Moderator

7. Review

The congregations now form a recognised Local Ecumenical Partnership. It will be registered with the National Sponsoring Body and will have access to the support of the Regional Advisory Group. Built into this will be a regular review process, usually every five years. This is to encourage a continued momentum in commitment.

8. Check List:

Have you

1. Spoken about the idea with your office-bearers and the clergy of the other churches involved?
2. Set about sharpening the vision together?
3. Shared the developing vision with your congregation?
4. Started to draw up a Covenant?
5. Informed the relevant bodies in your denomination, including the national ecumenical officer?
6. Arranged for an ecumenical signing ceremony?

9. Further sources of help

A number of the member churches of the have Ecumenical Officers who are able to help local churches through the progress of progressing in partnership. The Ecumenical Officers can be contacted through your denominational office.

SCNSBLEP
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