

MANCHESTER & STOCKPORT METHODIST DISTRICT

ECUMENICAL OFFICER



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Guidance Notes on Ecumenical Relationships

1. In line with Methodist Church priorities, the Manchester & Stockport Methodist District seeks to work in partnership with other Christian organizations and bodies in the common Christian mission to the world, which is firstly God's mission. The District encourages Circuits and local churches to place ecumenical thinking and planning at the heart of their missionary purpose and practice of ministry. This is all the more significant in the light of developing expressions of ecumenical relationships between the Methodist Church and our partners of all traditions, particularly in the area of new or fresh expressions of Christian discipleship.

2. There are a wide variety of ecumenical relationships, from the completely informal through to the formalized and legal. Local "Churches Together" groups can be thought of as a mid-way point on this continuum. Ecumenical relationships are overseen in varying ways by CTE (usually through intermediate bodies such as Greater Manchester [or other "County"] Churches Together (Intermediate Body)).

2a. As long as the local Methodist Church is in membership, it is permissible for Churches Together (CT) events and services to be held on Methodist premises. However, Methodist Insurance plc advises that the CT group should hold its own insurance cover.

3. Where local churches have developed a relationship and are increasingly working together, a helpful step can be the signing of a "Declaration of Intent". This may but need not be a step on the way to a more formal Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP). Declarations of Intent (DoI) are usually approved by the "County" Intermediate Body. Circuits should always consent to the signing of a DoI. The District Ecumenical Officer (DEO) represents Circuits at the Intermediate Body - DoI should be submitted to her/him for tabling to the Intermediate Body.

4. LEPs come about where there is significant joint work, shared ministry and/or shared premises above and beyond a Statement of Intent. A LEP needs to be governed by a constitution (pro-forma models are available) which is approved by the Intermediate Body and participating denominational authorities. Circuits should always consent to the formation (or winding-up) of a LEP. The DEO represents Circuits at the Intermediate Body and is also the conduit for passing constitutions through the Connexional Ecumenical structures. Constitutions should be submitted to her/him for tabling.

5. It is possible for non-Methodist Churches and congregations to use Methodist premises. If this is to be on more than a one off (annually) basis then such use should be regulated either by a Sharing Agreement or a Schedule 14a Licence to Use.

5a. The Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969 regulates the local relationship and responsibilities of partners in shared churches. A formal agreement has to be entered into which makes the "guest" denomination/congregation a stakeholder in the premises and gives them rights as well as responsibilities. The sharing agreement also sets out how the shared premises will be overseen,

managed and funded. Sharing Agreements cover property with single and/or multiple congregation use. Pro-forma model Sharing Agreements are available and the DEO should be involved in the development process of the local application.

5b. In some cases Sharing Agreements are required for non-Methodist ministers to occupy a Methodist owned Manse.

5c. Where a church is not gazetted as a signatory to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act, it cannot enter in to a sharing agreement but may be licensed to use Methodist premises on an annual basis. This is done by means of a schedule 14a license. Consult the DEO for the appropriate requirements/documentation.

6. Note: the Charities Act 2006 has raised some interesting challenges for LEPs. As and when it is implemented LEPs may be required to register as distinct charities in their own right. Guidance on this is currently being established.

7. Ministers of non-Methodist Churches can be authorized as Methodists when working in LEPs. Below are the headline statements from the fuller Methodist statement:

- The Methodist Church in Great Britain welcomes those who are ordained by and currently in good standing with Other Churches to work formally on its behalf.
- The Conference of the British Methodist Church is ultimately responsible for all decisions about who may serve it in this way, and where.
- There are three formal ways in which those exercising ordained ministry in other Churches may serve the Conference of the British Methodist Church
 - **Recognised and Regarded:** for use where ministers (presbyters) or deacons are seconded by their own Church to work wholly or primarily for the British Conference and (for the period of their secondment) are fully under its discipline and at its disposal
 - **Authorised to Serve:** for use where ministers (presbyters) or deacons are partially seconded by their own Church to work for the British Conference, often in local situations where there are shared governance arrangements between different Churches (denominations) for the joint oversight of mission and ministry
 - **Associate:** for use in ecumenical situations where there are not shared governance arrangements between different Churches (denominations) for the joint oversight of mission and ministry, and where ministers (presbyters) and deacons work primarily for their own Churches but the Conference affirms and owns their work in particular circumstances as if it were done on its behalf.

The fuller Connexional statement is available and if it cannot be located on the Methodist Church website, it can be obtained (either electronically or in hard copy) from the DEO.

Circuits make application on the appropriate form and submit it via the DEO for District Synod approval and forwarding to Conference. Intermediate applications can be made and approved through the Conference Office. Applications need to be annually renewed and presented to the District Synod.

8. The DEO and “County” Ecumenical Officer for the relevant Intermediate Body are always useful points of reference and should be consulted as early as possible in any ecumenical developments in order that their experience may be used in shaping our shared Christian pilgrimage as individuals and institutions.