

## A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission: Response to Churches Together in England (CTE)

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Approval
<b>Resolutions</b>	20/1. The Council receives the report. 20/2. The Council adopts the responses to the recommendations as set out in section two of the report in order that implementation of the new framework can begin in those districts that relate to Churches Together in England. 20/3. The Council adopts section three of the report as its response to 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission' and directs that it be sent to the General Secretary of Churches Together in England.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	To respond to CTE regarding 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission'.
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An outline of the background to 'A New Framework' from the perspectives of CTE and the Methodist Church.</li> <li>• The recommendations to the churches with statements related to them.</li> <li>• A response to CTE.</li> </ul>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'A New Framework for Local Ecumenism' [available from <a href="http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/435745/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx">http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/435745/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx</a>]</li> <li>• 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission' [available from <a href="http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx">http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx</a>]</li> <li>• 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission: A brief introduction' [included as Appendix A and available from <a href="http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx">http://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/257506/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx</a>]</li> </ul>
<b>Consultations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Districts in general and District Ecumenical Officers in particular</li> <li>• Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum</li> <li>• Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group</li> <li>• Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission</li> <li>• The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee</li> </ul>

### Summary of Impact

<b>Standing Orders</b>	MAPUM needs to consider whether any amendments to Standing Orders may be required.
<b>Faith and Order</b>	Work to explore visions of unity in mission, holiness and worship ( <i>possible</i> )
<b>Wider Connexional</b>	MAPUM needs to continue to consider the impact of 'A New Framework' on the whole connexion.
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	Growth in local co-operative working with wider range of partners ( <i>likely</i> )

## A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission: Response to Churches Together in England

### 1. Introduction

1.1. In March 2016, the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE) commended 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission' to its member churches for detailed consideration.<sup>1</sup> Section 5 of the report includes a number of recommendations to the churches and CTE has asked each member church to indicate before 6 February 2017 what progress it is making by answering the following two questions:

- a. Does the framework provide acceptable parameters for the member churches of CTE to work co-operatively at local level?
- b. Are there aspects of the framework in which your church cannot participate?

1.2. Following an introduction, this report lists the 'recommendations to the churches' and invites the Council to approve a series of statements related to them. It then offers a draft response to the above two questions for the Council to send to the General Secretary of CTE, The Revd Dr David Cornick.

1.3. The Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), a panel of both the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity and the Methodist Council, is the key body for the Methodist Church regarding local unity in mission. It has, therefore, spent a significant amount of time considering 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission' and the earlier consultation document. It recognises that such a framework could not have been developed by one or a few of CTE's member churches/denominations and is grateful that there has been a widespread consultation with them and the Intermediate Bodies in England. The report has also been discussed by the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group, the Methodist Church's Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum, some of the Districts, and the Methodist District Ecumenical Officers, both in their own meeting and with the Church of England's Diocesan Ecumenical Officers.

1.4. In his letter to the member churches, Dr Cornick wrote about the background to the report as follows:

We have been very conscious that the Christian landscape has changed almost beyond recognition in the last twenty years, and that the structure inherited from previous generations were proving less and less useful. We hope that this suggested new framework will provide a light yet dependable structure for co-operation together between the many churches in England, that it will be stimulus to creative thought about how best to serve our communities in Christ's name, and that it will enable the discovery of our common discipleship in Jesus Christ.

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[http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/435745/Home/Resources/Local\\_Ecumenism/A\\_new\\_framework/A\\_new\\_framework.aspx](http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/435745/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenism/A_new_framework/A_new_framework.aspx)

- 1.5. MAPUM, mindful of the current Christian landscape and the various visions and understandings of mission and unity among the churches, found the following from the Conference Statement, *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) Para 3.1.2 very helpful:

we must begin from the premise that the prayer of Jesus has been heard. So his prayer creates unity: Churches are already one in Christ, and their unity is the gift of God, not the end-product of human effort. Yet the responsibility remains of responding to the prayer of Jesus ...

It also noted that the First British Conference on Faith and Order, held in Nottingham in 1964, was clear that 'unity, mission and renewal are inseparable'.<sup>2</sup>

- 1.6. On a number of occasions over the last decade or so, the Conference has considered reports that have pointed to the growing diversity of the Christian landscape. The General Secretary's report of 2007, for example, referred to a wider ecumenism that is to be pursued, to the rapid change of the make-up of churches in Britain, to the need for the Methodist Church to develop, with confidence, new relationships with the churches in the Pentecostal tradition, and to the need for it to work more flexibly and speedily if it is to connect into, learn from, and add to, what the black-majority churches are doing to bear their social witness, especially in the areas of justice, non-discrimination, and social cohesion.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.7. In 2009, the Conference received the report, 'Our Ecumenical Calling: Making a difference together in the twenty-first century'.<sup>4</sup> That report also noted the changing Christian landscape and that, among the themes that emerged from a workshop at the 2008 Conference were the need for local ecumenism to focus on mission, the need for greater flexibility to make local partnerships work, and the need for unnecessary bureaucracy to be removed.
- 1.8. MAPUM thinks that the suggested new framework offers a helpful approach to the points, opportunities, and challenges outlined above. MAPUM is mindful of the importance of having due regard for ecumenism throughout the connexion and will continue to consider the impact of ecumenical developments in one part of the connexion on the whole.

## **2. The recommendations to the churches**

- 2.1. The recommendations to the churches are reproduced below in bold. The Methodist Council is invited to approve the statement below each recommendation in order that implementation of the new framework can begin in those districts that relate to CTE.

**We present the ideas and proposals in this report for refreshing the framework in which churches work together. We encourage the member churches of CTE to:**

- 1. be open to the possibilities of the new framework, and be prepared to be bold in grasping mission opportunities;**

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<sup>2</sup> *Unity Begins at Home: A Report from the First British conference on Faith and Order Nottingham 1964* (SCM Press Ltd, London, 1964), p.78.

<sup>3</sup> 'General Secretary's Report' in *Conference Agenda* (2007), pp.17-29, §2.5 (the report can be accessed from <http://www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2007-reports>).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-45-our-ecu-calling-241109.pdf> (Note: there was an amendment to the text of the Vision Statement and the final version of that statement is available at: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/2136601/ec-Vision%20-%20Our%20Ecumenical%20Calling.pdf>).

The Methodist Council hopes that the churches, circuits, and districts of the Methodist Church will recognise how the new framework affirms the diverse Christian landscape in Britain, emphasises the need for discernment and development, opens up possibilities for different and more flexible ways of being and sharing in God's mission together, and encourages new initiatives for the sake of the kingdom.

**2. encourage local churches to draw on the resources and expertise of Bodies in Association of CTE for local ecumenical work;**

The Methodist Council encourages not only local churches but also circuits, districts, and the Connexional Team to draw on the resources and expertise of the Bodies in Association of CTE, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), and CTBI, and similar organisations belonging to Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales for both local and wider ecumenical work.

**3. appreciate that this new framework is born of wrestling with the complexity of relationships that we have inherited from the history of Churches and Christians working together in England, and be prepared to honour and support those patterns of co-operation which in some places are deeply embedded;**

The Methodist Council appreciates the background to the new framework and believes it is vital to honour and support those patterns of co-operation which in some places are deeply embedded. Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) are an important feature of the life and mission of the Methodist Church and part of the purpose of MAPUM is to nurture LEPs, reflecting on their experience and significance for the wider Church, theologically and strategically. The Methodist Council also recognise that, as 'A New Framework' says, some LEPs need to be helped to move into a different form of agreement.

**4. agree the following recommendations and authorise the work needed to implement them:**

**a. that they initiate through CTE a key stream of work to explore our visions of unity in mission, holiness and worship;**

The Methodist Council thinks that an exploration of this sort could be a very substantial piece of work. It would be helpful for CTE to explore a few approaches to it with a consideration of the scope, method, and resources required for each so that it is clearer to the 45 member churches of CTE what could be involved. It would also be helpful for CTE to consider what role the Churches' Theology and Unity Group might have in this work.

**b. that the denominations involved in specific instances of local co-operative working (including existing local ecumenical partnerships) take responsibility for the oversight of that work and that if they look to a sponsoring body to facilitate this they should nevertheless continue to hold that responsibility (Section 2:1(a));**

In accepting this recommendation, the Methodist Council records its appreciation that 'A New Framework' recognises that different partners have different ways of delivering oversight. Given the role church councils

and circuit meetings have in the Methodist Church, much of the oversight of local unity in mission will involve one or more church councils and/or circuit meetings. In practice, church stewards, circuit stewards, presbyters, presbyteral probationers, and others specifically appointed by a church council or circuit meeting to act on its behalf will be the key people sharing in oversight of local co-operative working.

- c. **that agreements supporting local co-operative working should be approved solely by denominational authorities (Section 2:1(b));**

The Methodist Council accepts this recommendation, recognising that further work needs to be done, in the first instance by MAPUM, regarding what, if any, consents, approvals, or consultations should be required for various agreements. Such work may clarify whether the three forms of written agreement set out in 'A New Framework' are adequate.

- d. **that CTE staff working with County Ecumenical Officers work out a new system of registering/listing agreements (Section 2:1 (c));**

The Methodist Council accepts this recommendation and recognises that appropriate people in the member churches will need to help maintain such registers/lists. They can, for example, enable the sharing of experience and good practice among those engaged in similar forms of local co-operative working. Consideration needs to be given to what types of agreement are included: 'Declarations of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment', for example, are not currently recorded by the Methodist Church or CTE; if they were, the information could be used on web-pages such as 'Find a church'.

- e. **that the member churches consider the use of Charitable Incorporated Organisation models for local co-operative working when a single governance structure is required (Section 3:9);**

The Methodist Church is aware that some of its ecumenical partners are encouraging the use of Charitable Incorporated Organisations within their denominations as well as in ecumenical settings. The Methodist Church's Law and Polity Committee is considering their use for various ecumenical purposes.

- f. **that the appropriate officers and specialists within CTE's member churches take responsibility for issuing guidance for the churches collectively and for their own denominations about the three sorts of Agreement (Working Agreement, Partnership Agreement and Constitutional Agreement) which we have identified.**

The Methodist representatives to MAPUM are already responsible for keeping under review the development of local ecumenical relationships in Britain and advising the Connexional Team accordingly, providing guidelines for the use of the Synods in dealing with various ecumenical matters, and offering advice in new situations. Given its wider terms of reference, responsibility for the production of guidance about different forms of agreement rests with MAPUM in consultation with others.

### **3. Draft text of the Methodist Church's response to 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission'**

- 3.1. The Methodist Church is grateful to Churches Together in England (CTE) for initiating and facilitating the process that has led to 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission'. We note that it has been sent to us following conversations in CTE's Enabling Group and a widespread consultation on the earlier 'A New Framework for Local Ecumenism'. This response is from the Methodist Council which undertakes ongoing work on behalf of the Methodist Conference, the governing body of the Methodist Church, between its annual meetings.
- 3.2. As a church in the three nations of England, Scotland, and Wales, and in other jurisdictions, the Methodist Church seeks both to recognise the distinctive ecumenical contexts in which it fulfils its calling in partnership with others and to ensure that ecumenical arrangements are 'connexional' in the sense of being coherent across the whole of the Connexion. The preparation of this response has, therefore, drawn on insights from and experience in the whole Connexion.
- 3.3. Turning to the first of the two questions we have been asked to answer by 6 February 2017, the Methodist Council thinks that the suggested new framework, with its built-in flexibility and recognition that not all churches/denominations will be able or willing to work with all its aspects, does provide acceptable parameters for the member churches to work co-operatively at local level.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Council hopes that there is sufficient common ground and mutual understanding to enable work to flourish. We respond positively to all the recommendations and offer the following more detailed comments on some of them:
- (a) Regarding (2), the Methodist Council encourages not only local churches but also circuits, districts, and the Connexional Team to draw on the resources and expertise of the Bodies in Association of CTE, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), and CTBI, and similar organisations belonging to Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales for both local and wider ecumenical work.
  - (b) Regarding 4(a), the Methodist Council thinks that an exploration of this sort could be a very substantial piece of work. It would be helpful for CTE to explore a few approaches to it with a consideration of the scope, method, and resources required for each so that it is clearer to the 45 member churches of CTE what could be involved. It would also be helpful for CTE to consider what role the Churches' Theology and Unity Group might have in this work.
  - (c) Regarding 4(b), (c), and (f), the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM), a panel of both the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity and the Methodist Council, needs to consider further how these recommendations are implemented.
  - (d) Regarding 4(d), consideration needs to be given to what types of agreement are included on registers/lists kept by denominational authorities and by ecumenical bodies.
- 3.4. The second question asks if there are aspects of the framework in which the Methodist Church cannot participate. We comment on two points:

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<sup>5</sup> 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission', Preface, §6.

- (a) As recorded above, we respond positively to recommendation 4(e) but we think it is appropriate to note that we cannot anticipate the outcome of our consideration.
- (b) In Section 1, paragraph 3 of the report, there is a paragraph on 'Joining together as one' with a reference to Appendix (which should be Section) 3, paragraphs 7 and 8. The Methodist Church understands single congregation LEPs to be partnerships rather than unions.

**\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

**20/1. The Council receives the report.**

**20/2. The Council adopts the responses to the recommendations as set out in section two of the report in order that implementation of the new framework can begin in those districts that relate to Churches Together in England.**

**20/3. The Council adopts section three of the report as its response to 'A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission' and directs that it be sent to the General Secretary of Churches Together in England.**

## Appendix A

# CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

## A New Framework for Local Unity in Mission

### A brief introduction

1. Churches of all traditions are faced with immense challenges to serve and transform communities, to make new disciples and to grow in holiness and worship within our nation today. The task is too great for one church to do on its own - it is a task for the whole people of God, called to work together in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit. To proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom of God with integrity, the churches must be seen to be living it. Unity speaks to a divided world.
2. Good ecumenical working is based on relationships and trust and can often be informal and spontaneous. At times, however, something more formal is required – but, even then, it is important that structure should follow need and that agreements should be light, enabling and flexible. Ecumenical co-operation can bring added value and benefits to all partners, by
  - a. deepening our discernment of what God is calling us to do;
  - b. enabling the sharing of gifts to equip us for the task;
  - c. enabling the sharing of resources to multiply the work.
3. The new framework commended by the CTE Enabling Group has been developed in response to the changing Christian context and is intended to raise the level of mutual understanding between the member churches of CTE and to facilitate the participation of the wider membership.

### *The framework in brief*

4. The framework refers to **local co-operative working**, which means churches of more than one denomination working together intentionally at local level, with a clear missional purpose – a purpose that has a specific focus and is contextualised within a particular locality. To fulfil this purpose they often need to agree to co-operate in ways that will affect their core activities as churches - worship, ministry, congregational life, buildings and mission. The work that churches do together needs to draw strength from and be rooted in the relationship between them. They also often need agreements, which are approved by the appropriate authority of each denomination, to enable co-operation to happen – and those agreements need to be light, enabling and flexible.
5. The framework is intended to include the widest possible range of ways of churches to co-operate with one another in a variety of contexts. There are four questions on which the framework is constructed.
  - a. What are the churches involved called to do together and for what purpose?**  
This could include: making new disciples; serving communities; growing congregations; transforming communities.
  - b. How will they relate with one another as they work together?**  
This could include: showing hospitality to one another; walking together; being in communion; joining together as one.
  - c. What is the context or locality in which they are called?**



This could include: institutions; sectors; cultural networks; geographical areas.

#### **d. What sort of agreement and authorisation are needed to do this work?**

6. In the original paper, the image of a house with many interconnected rooms is offered as a way of presenting the framework. An alternative picture has emerged, that of a climbing frame, which provides a stable open structure in which children can play freely and safely. This describes perfectly what the framework is meant to achieve.

#### *Forms of agreement for ecumenical co-operation*

7. The new framework provides three forms of written agreement to meet the needs of the rich diversity of ecumenical co-operation: working agreements, partnership agreements and constitutional agreements.
  - a. **Working agreement:** A working agreement is a set of agreed guidelines which will suffice in some circumstances to enable churches to get on with a particular piece of work together in response to the missional opportunities they discern in their communities – this would apply to many local mission initiatives for example. A working agreement is especially appropriate when decisions continue to be made by denominational bodies, when the work is limited in time and scope and when few resources are being shared. The working agreement would need to include a description of the work being done and a statement about its purpose. It would also include agreement about leadership of the work and its accountability to the denominational bodies. Agreeing a time limit for the work is especially relevant in this context, in order to incorporate a cycle of reflection into the work to assess its impact and decide whether to renew the commitment or to bring it to an end and respond to a new challenge.
  - b. **Partnership agreement:** A partnership agreement covers more extensive sharing of resources – for example, allowing the sharing of a church building with another congregation or setting up a structure to enable the use of resources from a number of congregations to run a night shelter together, or to allow two separate denominations to consult on important decisions, to worship together and to share ministry. A partnership agreement would not attempt to establish an independent organisation, but would be intended to set out how existing denominational bodies would work in partnership together, including decision making, accountability and resourcing.
  - c. **Constitutional agreement:** In some cases a more formal or even a legal structure is required. This will be the case when a body created needs to register with the Charity Commissioners or appoint trustees to oversee its work. This category will include such entities as existing (or new) LEPs, ecumenical University Chaplaincies, a Christian Counselling service, a jointly run cafe which is also a business and so on. In some cases the need for a constitution may be clear, in others advice may need to be sought about when a Partnership Agreement is sufficient and when a constitution is required.
8. The possibility of time limited agreements for ecumenical co-operation, as well as those which have a long term commitment are both possible within the framework.

#### *Oversight*

9. All the different pathways of ecumenical co-operation that require a form of agreement between the participating churches and the approval of denominational authorities need

oversight. Increasingly the model of oversight for local ecumenical partnerships provided by the system of sponsoring bodies has become problematical. In some areas, sponsoring bodies no longer exist, and oversight is exercised by the denominations which are directly involved in particular local ecumenical partnerships. This is a pattern which is gaining ground. In the light of this the new framework suggests the following principles of oversight for ecumenical co-operation:

- a. Oversight is the responsibility of the partners to any particular agreement, and it should be shared amongst them in the most appropriate and sensible way, again noting that different partners will have different ways of delivering it.
- b. The agreement supporting local ecumenical working should be approved solely by the denominational authorities involved.
- c. The denominational authorities should be responsible for recording the agreement.
- d. The denominational authorities should be responsible for deciding whether a review is needed and for commissioning the review.

*Finally...*

10. At its meeting on 11 and 12 March 2016, the Enabling Group of Churches Together in England (CTE) commended a new Framework for Local Unity in Mission, to the member churches for detailed consideration. We present the ideas and proposals for refreshing the framework in which churches work together. We encourage the member churches of CTE to:
  - a. be open to the possibilities of the new framework, and be prepared to be bold in grasping mission opportunities;
  - b. encourage local churches to draw on the resources and expertise of Bodies in Association of CTE for local ecumenical work;
  - c. appreciate that this new framework is born of wrestling with the complexity of relationships that we have inherited from the history of Churches and Christians working together in England, and be prepared to honour and support those patterns of co-operation which in some places are deeply embedded;
  - d. agree the following recommendations and authorise the work needed to implement them:
    - i. that they initiate through CTE a key stream of work to explore our visions of unity in mission, holiness and worship;
    - ii. that the denominations involved in specific instances of local co-operative working (including existing local ecumenical partnerships) take responsibility for the oversight of that work and that if they look to a sponsoring body to facilitate this they should nevertheless continue to hold that responsibility (Section 2:1(a));
    - iii. that agreements supporting local co-operative working should be approved solely by denominational authorities (Section 2:1(b));
    - iv. that CTE staff working with County Ecumenical Officers work out a new system of registering/listing agreements (Section 2:1 (c));
    - v. that the member churches consider the use of Charitable Incorporated Organisation models for local co-operative working when a single governance structure is required (Section 3:9);
    - vi. that the appropriate officers and specialists within CTE's member churches take responsibility for issuing guidance for the churches collectively and for their own denominations about the three sorts of Agreement (Working Agreement, Partnership Agreement and Constitutional Agreement) which we have identified.

22 September 2016