

## **BAPTISTS IN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE METHODIST CHURCH AND THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has sent an observer to the Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee since 1993 and appreciates the opportunity to be able to contribute to this revision of *Patterns of Sharing and Commitment between Methodist and United Reformed Churches*. There are more and more 'Free Churches' in places around Britain, bringing together Methodist, United Reformed and Baptist Churches into a single Local Ecumenical Partnership and it was felt appropriate that *Making it Work*, as a handbook for such churches, should have input from the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

We commend the Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee for the publication, which we find to be very helpful in setting out the different positions of the two denominations, and we would agree with much of what is said about the importance of consultation and listening to one another.

The following leaflet tries to set out some of the specific issues which need to be discussed if a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) includes Baptist participation. It is not intended to fully describe the differences involved, but to give a flavour of the way that many Baptist congregations organise themselves.

More information on any of these topics can be obtained from the Faith and Unity Department, Baptist Union of Great Britain, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8RT E-mail: [htreavis@baptist.org.uk](mailto:htreavis@baptist.org.uk)

### **SECTION 1: MEMBERSHIP**

The Baptist Union of Great Britain would, in general, agree with the formula for admitting new members to the partnership and placing them on a common roll. However, we could envisage a problem arising in the case of a person who had been baptised as an infant wishing to be 're-baptised' as a believer and being received into membership. The Baptist Union has negotiated guideline documents with both the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church which offer advice on what to do in this situation. These are available from either of the denominations which produced them. Like the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union permits LEPs to make use of 'extended membership' arrangements with the approval of the Church Meeting.

### **SECTION 2: MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS**

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has one Register of Covenanted Persons Accredited for Ministry. This includes people generally operating in what might be termed 'Ministries of Word and Sacrament'. However it also includes categories for a wider range of accredited ministries, particularly in the areas of youth ministry and evangelism.

Baptist ministers, like United Reformed Church ministers, are usually called to a pastorate without a fixed term and move in response to a call to another pastorate. We recommend that the advice of the Regional Minister for the area is sought when a church is planning to call a Baptist minister.

Baptist ministers should also seek Authorised status with the Methodist Church.

Accredited Ministers in good standing with either the United Reformed Church or the Methodist Church are recognised by the Baptist Union, and included in a section of our annual Directory. A leaflet is also available from the Baptist Union which sets out clearly how a minister of another tradition serving as the minister of a Local Ecumenical Partnership in which Baptists are involved can participate in the life of the Union through attending Association events, the Baptist Assembly and standing, if so inclined, for membership of the Baptist Union Council.

### **SECTION 3: OTHER MINISTRIES**

Most Baptist churches appoint members to serve as Deacons and/or Elders to work with a minister or ministers in the oversight of the church. This is a shared ministry, though Deacons are not normally ordained, and ordination, commission or recognition of Elders is a matter for each local church and not normally the wider Baptist community. Like the United Reformed Church, the Church Secretary carries considerable responsibility for the life of the local church but unlike the United Reformed Church is generally elected from the full body of members at the church meeting.

#### **SECTION 4: CONSTITUTION**

In general the questions noted in *Making it Work* cover the issues that we would raise. Attention is drawn to the Baptist notes in the *Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Partnership Constitutions* which are contained in *Ecumenical Notes* published by Churches Together in England. The most current edition should always be consulted. All LEP Constitutions involving Baptists must be agreed by the national group established for this purpose. Contact the Faith and Unity Department for more information.

#### **SECTION 5: WORSHIP AND THE SACRAMENTS**

Many Baptists, unlike the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, authorise lay presidency at Holy Communion, or the Eucharist. The Church Meeting is the place where members of the church are appointed to preside. These are usually, but not exclusively, Deacons or Elders.

Baptist Eucharistic practice on the whole mirrors that of the United Reformed Church.

#### **SECTION 6: PROPERTY**

The advice of the Baptist Union Corporation, or the regional Trust Corporation if a local church is in trust with such a body, should be sought at an early stage before making any alterations to property. They offer a number of Guidelines Leaflets on all aspects of property management and development.

#### **SECTION 7: SHARING AGREEMENTS**

In most cases, the Trust Deeds on a Baptist property are lodged with the Baptist Union Corporation, or a regional Trust Corporation, who can offer advice on the drafting of Sharing Agreements and legal requirements. Guidelines leaflet C5 is a useful resource and sets out the basic procedure to be followed in establishing a Sharing Agreement. This is available from the Baptist Union Corporation at Baptist House, or can be downloaded from the Baptist Union website: [www.baptist.org.uk](http://www.baptist.org.uk)

#### **SECTION 8: FINANCE**

The basic difference in the finance of an LEP where Baptists are involved is that a Baptist minister is paid by the local congregation rather than by a central payment agency as in Methodist and United Reformed Churches. Additionally a target figure is recommended for contributions to the national Home Mission Fund and towards BMS World Mission, but this is very much a voluntary offering rather than a quota or assessment.

The Home Mission fund exists to help churches who cannot afford to pay a minister themselves and an LEP with Baptist involvement can be eligible for Home Mission support.

If a Baptist minister is in post in an LEP, there needs to be consultation with the appropriate authorities of the other denominations involved as to appropriate contributions to be paid into the central funds of the other denominations.

Baptist churches with as few as 50 members often raise the necessary funding to have their own

full-time minister. Home Mission help is available in strategic mission situations for churches, sometimes with fewer than 50 members, but in all instances early consultation with the Association Regional Minister is suggested.

Hilary Treavis  
The Baptist Union of Great Britain  
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