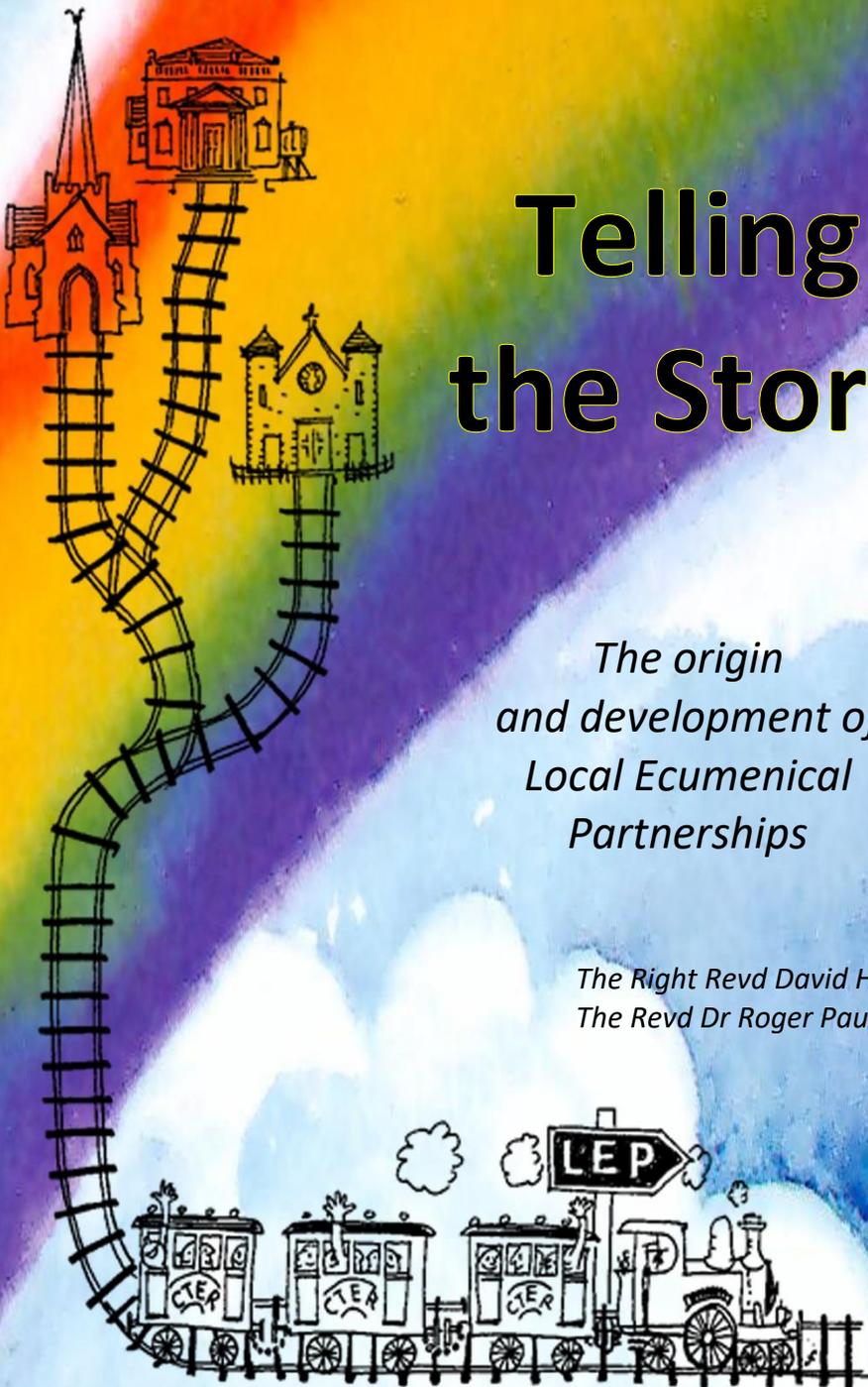


Telling the Story

*The origin
and development of
Local Ecumenical
Partnerships*

*The Right Revd David Hawtin
The Revd Dr Roger Paul*



Council for Christian Unity

The Authors

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Commendations

Appreciation of the present depends on understanding the past. That is particularly true of English ecumenism which is the child of vision and accident in equal quantities. The vision was of a united church by Easter 1980 and the anticipation of that locally in Areas of Ecumenical Experiment; the accident the collapse of the national aspiration in a series of agonisingly close decisions in the councils of the churches.

This paper lays out the history of local ecumenism with welcome clarity. Alongside that it offers a level-headed analysis of the significant contribution that Anglican leaders have given to the ecumenical movement. Equally significantly, it illustrates the ways in which the church has handled its own complex ecumenical relationships, and shaped its own legislation to respond to the evolving nature of the ecumenical challenge.

Although the paper inevitably has an Anglican audience in mind, it offers a singularly valuable resource to all who seek to make sense of English ecumenism and be open in the future to the ways in which the people of God seek to respond to Christ's prayer that they may all be one.

The Revd Dr David Cornick
General Secretary 2008-2018
Churches Together in England

It is important to pass on stories of how and why we got to where we are if we are to understand ourselves and find direction for the future. Don't be put off by the many acronyms – GLU; CCLEPE; CTBI; AEE – nor by the details of ecumenical canons, nor the legislation for the sharing of church buildings. Behind all of this bureaucratic language is the story of passionate ecumenists like Oliver Tomkins, Cyril Bowles, John Hapgood, who guided the Church of England to form closer relationships with other Christian communities for the sake of mission. Behind the detail is the experience too of many local Christians who knew that it was better and more credible together, a more faithful response to Jesus' prayer that we might all be one, and who were not afraid to move into new partnerships and covenanted forms of living. This is a story of Christians trying to live locally as 'the all in that place', showing that it is possible to overcome past divisions and live ahead of their national and world Communion, sharing gifts of ordained and lay ministries, offering and receiving eucharistic hospitality, and going out from the eucharist to live and work together. But this story also raises questions. How are we to move from sharing ministry to a fully reconciled ministry, beyond eucharistic hospitality to a fully reconciled life? And what would it take to be the 'all in each place' linked to the 'all in every place', in continuity with Christians down the ages? Is there a shared vision of visible unity that makes sense of these on- the- way- steps recorded in the story told in these pages? And what is the next step on the journey of reconciliation?

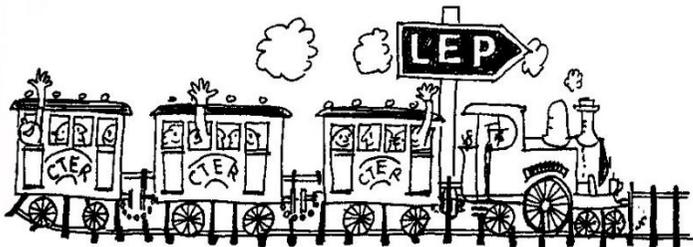
We owe David Hawtin and Roger Paul a debt of gratitude for telling this story in such detail. It is an important record for those who live in local ecumenical partnerships and covenants, those who minister in ecumenical contexts, those training on ecumenical courses, who are the natural leaders of tomorrow's ecumenical advance. And it is important for the next generation of those entrusted with a special ministry of unity, the bishops and leaders of the churches, as they guide us on the next stage of the ecumenical journey.

Mary Tanner, President for Europe 2006-2013
World Council of Churches

Introduction

1. The aim is to tell the story of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs), primarily in a chronological order, but also with a gathering of some material under specific headings, and ending with three Reflections and three Challenges. It is written from a Church of England perspective, but in a way that seeks to be of use to ecumenical partners.

2. Local Ecumenical Partnerships and local ecumenism have benefitted from leadership across all the Churches and at every point of the Church's life, in parishes and villages, across counties and in towns such as Milton Keynes, Telford and Washington. Bishops have been part of that leadership along with national officers and ecumenical officers. For the Church of England, these include: Oliver Tomkins, Bishop of Bristol; Cyril Bowles, Bishop of Derby; Philip Goodrich, Bishop of Worcester; David Brown, Bishop of Guildford; John Habgood, Archbishop of York; David Tustin, Bishop of Grimsby; Barry Rogerson, Bishop of Bristol; Michael Doe, Bishop of Swindon; and David Hawtin, Bishop of Repton, and Keith Huxley, Derek Palmer, Martin Reardon, Dame Mary Tanner, David Goldie, Clive Price, Terry Garley and many more. Good leaders continue to emerge. A key role has been played by those who have been willing to engage with the details and issues bubbling up from LEPs, and to be open to the views and feelings of ecumenical colleagues – encounters not without cost.



The Beginning of the Story

From the founding of the British Council of Churches 1942 to 1963

4. Encouraged by the leadership of Archbishop William Temple, the British Council of Churches (BCC) was founded in 1942, with 16 member churches plus several inter-denominational agencies. It was set up after the style of the proposed World Council of Churches (WCC) (founded finally in 1948)ⁱ and brought together different areas of work. The Roman Catholic Church, perhaps the largest even at that time in Britain, was never a member of the BCC.

5. The BCC was initially involved in the rebuilding of the nation and of Europe after the Second World War, and in the 50's was especially concerned with problems that Africa was facing, and with social issues and youth. At the local level, local councils of churchesⁱⁱ, emerging after the 1910 Edinburgh Conference (the first were established in Bolton and Manchester in 1917, and St Albans in 1918), were expanding, encouraged by a BCC paper in 1944. There were 126 in 1946 rising to 300 by 1960. Their focus was on education and social concerns, and, with the development of the Faith and Order movement from 1927, on seeking the unity of the Church.

6. One of the challenges for the churches in post-war Britain at this time was to do with mission to the new areas of housing development which were being planned and built around almost every major city. The proposed new towns were a particular challenge in this respect. Sometimes these plans only allowed space for one church site. There was a growing sense that in responding to this challenge the churches would be more effective if they were to work together. According to

the Register of Local Ecumenical Partnerships held by Churches Together in England, the earliest example of a local ecumenical partnership involving the Church of England still in operation is at Hart Plain, Waterlooville, near Portsmouth, where the Church of England and the Methodist Church have been sharing ministry and congregational life since 1962.

7. Another focus of the BCC was in relation to the WCC. The first annual BCC Swanwick Conference took place at Whitsun, 1954. Its aim was to develop the understanding and raise the enthusiasm of local leaders and was linked with world-wide preparations for the Second Assembly of the WCC at Evanston, Illinois.

The Nottingham Faith and Order Conference 1964

8. It was in this context that the BCC Nottingham Faith and Order Conference met in 1964, encouraged by the leadership of Oliver Tomkins, a champion of local ecumenism as Bishop of Bristol, who had vast experience of the World Council of Churches. More immediately, it followed on from the initial report of the Anglican/Methodist Conversations of 1963.

9. Two major directions of ecumenism were set at this conference.

10. The first major direction was to give approval to setting up locally 'areas of ecumenical experiment (AEEs)'. In giving its stamp of approval, the Nottingham Conference indicated how the unity of the church could be expressed at the local level. The early "Areas of Ecumenical Experiment" were mainly set up in the new housing developments and new towns, where united congregations, bringing together Christians from a variety of traditions, were the most obvious and effective means of

churching these areas. They were seen by some as being in the vanguard of the movement towards the unity of the church, which was coming soon. The experience in these experiments in forging local structures would help the churches nationally in their quest for unity. The resolution passed at Nottingham called upon the BCC's member churches:

*to designate areas of ecumenical experiment, at the request of local congregations or in new towns and housing areas. In such areas there should be experiment in ecumenical group ministries, in sharing buildings and equipment and in the development of mission.*ⁱⁱⁱ

11. It is worth noting that existing local congregations, as well as new areas, were envisaged as being part of the experiment.

12. The second major direction in ecumenism to which the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference committed the BCC was to commit the Churches to work together for visible unity. This was seen in terms of a covenant, reconciling divided Churches, and expressing a shared commitment to unity, mission and renewal, each inseparable from the other. It was a vision for "all in each place" to act together in mission and service to the world, echoing the language of the 1961 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi. The commitment to visible unity was expressed in these optimistic terms:

to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union, in appropriate groupings such as nations, by a date ... (which) ... we dare to hope should not be later than Easter Day 1980.

13. In the early sixties, unity proposals were getting under way, reflecting the wider mood of reconciliation in post war Britain and a positive ecumenical mood, although progress towards unity appeared slow on a number of fronts. So this was a very courageous challenge, and one that has had far reaching effects.

Unity talks: Failure and Success 1964 to 1972

14. Anglican-Presbyterian conversations had begun in 1934, and had taken new steps in 1953. The final stage began in 1960. These conversations had yet to be tested in their constituent denominations and were proceeding tentatively.

15. Talks between the Church of England and the Methodist Church had begun in 1956 and had made sufficient progress to publish the report on their conversations in 1963, with a view to bring forward a scheme for uniting the two churches. The goal was 'one Church renewed for mission and service'. The Unity Commission was set up in 1965 to clarify and refine proposals, which led to the report: 'Towards Reconciliation' being published in 1967. One of its main proposals was for the Methodist Church to receive the historic episcopate.

16. The original scheme involved two stages. The first began with a central Service of Reconciliation with:

- a. Acts of Commitment
- b. Acts of reconciliation of members and
- c. Acts of integration of ministries

17. A mutual laying on of hands between Church of England bishops and the representatives of the Methodist Church, in mutual recognition of the incompleteness of their ministries, and the gifts that each brought to the union, was originally envisaged, although this element was significantly revised by the final report^{iv}. This was intended to result in the integration of ministries in the coming together of the Methodist Church and the Church of England. The second stage would go on to develop the structural unity of the two churches.

18. The proposals were passed in the Methodist Conference but failed to gain sufficient support in the Church of England's Church Assembly in 1969. Following the Synodical Government Act of 1970, the proposals were re-presented to the first meeting of General Synod in 1972. Here it failed to receive the required two thirds majority in the House of Clergy of the General Synod by seven votes. Many people were disappointed and hurt by this decision, although it must also be acknowledged there would have been significant disappointment and hurt the other way round if the proposals had gone through.

19. One unity scheme which did come to fruition in 1972 was the formation of the United Reformed Church by bringing together the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches. (Subsequently the Churches of Christ joined in 1981 and the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000.) This happened shortly after the failure of the Methodist - Anglican Scheme, and lifted the ecumenical mood. However a significant number of Congregational Churches did not join the scheme, giving rise to the Congregational Federation.

From Areas of Ecumenical Experiment to Local Ecumenical Projects 1964 to 1973

20. In the early days, the Areas of Ecumenical Experiment (AEEs) were truly experimental. There were few guidelines, and there was no legal structure, certainly from the Church of England's point of view. Many of these experiments involved a number of churches sharing the same buildings for worship. To provide a legal basis for the sharing of church buildings in Areas of Ecumenical Experiment, in 1969, the churches promoted a bill in Parliament in order to authorize the sharing of church buildings. The result was the Sharing of Church Buildings Act (1969) which has been a powerful instrument in enabling local churches to work closely together.^v

21. By 1973 many scores of AEEs had been established, and the British Council of Churches agreed that, because they were no longer experimental but a series of well-established 'lived experiences,' they should be renamed '*Local Ecumenical Projects*.' Perhaps this was also an implicit recognition that the road to a more integrated unity was going to be longer than previously imagined. It was at this point that the Consultative Committee for Local Ecumenical Projects in England (CCLEPE) was set up – with full Roman Catholic participation. The newly named 'LEPs' were still understood to be pointing forwards to 1980.

22. In its first decade, CCLEPE produced a steady stream of reports and documents. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's it was served by the BCC's Ecumenical Officer for England (the Revd John Nicholson followed by the Revd Hugh Cross). The officer provided a ready source of advice to LEPs, resourced the annual LEP Consultation, and with this experience of local ecumenism made significant input to the Ten Propositions and

the English Churches Covenant Proposal (1974 to 1982), and also to the Not Strangers But Pilgrims Inter-Church Process (1984 to 1990). In so doing local experience was linked to national proposals.

23. In 1975, CCLEPE produced its first set of Guidelines for LEPs^{vi}, in which it developed the basis of much that is still relevant in the life of Local Ecumenical Projects, on matters of relations to the Sponsoring Body, church finance, ministry, Christian initiation and worship. LEPs were encouraged to be creative in the way they conducted their life, especially in the area of local church governance.

24. The single congregation LEP was at this time the dominant model, and this is still thought by some to be the only model of LEP. However, from the late 1960's, the number of LEPs for existing churches was growing. The single congregation model presented particular challenges which were addressed creatively at local level. CCLEPE encouraged local creativity, and drew on experience at local level in developing guidelines and examples of good practice. Some single congregation models expanded to include adjoining denominational churches (e.g. Washington).

The Ten Propositions and the English Churches Covenant 1974 to 1982

25. The Churches Unity Commission was set up in the Autumn of 1974, after the establishment of the United Reformed Church and the failure of the Anglican - Methodist Unity Scheme in 1972. There were eight member churches of the Commission: Baptist, Church of England, Churches of Christ, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church, Moravian

Church, Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church. In 1976 the Commission presented the Ten Propositions for response by the eight member churches.

26. The Churches Council for Covenanting was set up in 1978 to prepare the Covenant. Five of the original eight involved in the Churches Unity Commission were willing to go on to the next stage – these were the Church of England, the Churches of Christ, and the Methodist, Moravian, and United Reformed Churches. CCLEPE made an important contribution to the process, drawing upon LEP experience. Significantly, in its response to the Ten Propositions, the Roman Catholic Church encouraged the churches to take the process forward, although it could only endorse propositions 3, 8 and 9 as follows:

- *Proposition 3: We believe that this search (for visible unity) requires action both locally and nationally.*
- *Proposition 8: We agree to continue to give every possible encouragement to local ecumenical projects and to develop methods of decision making in common.*
- *Proposition 9: We agree to explore such further steps as will be necessary to make more clearly visible the unity of all Christ's people.*

27. By endorsing these three propositions the Roman Catholic Church gave support to the formation of local covenants. The Roman Catholic Church issued a paper encouraging this in 1978.

28. The English Churches Covenant was finally brought to the governing bodies of each church in 1982. The essential idea of the Covenant was to recognize that the churches needed time to grow together before a uniting of structures could happen. The Covenant was meant to provide a framework of

commitment and sharing in church life, which would lead to mutual recognition of ministry, and gradual merging of structures. Each covenanting Church would have bishops, who would be consecrated in a covenant service. The proposal again failed in the House of Clergy of the General Synod of the Church of England, by a very narrow margin.

Reflecting on 1942-1982

29. 1982 marked a very significant ecumenical moment with LEPs growing and becoming wider than the single congregation model, but with no national unity scheme on offer, (firmly closing the door on the Nottingham Conference hopes of unity by 1980). Much of this frustration was voiced at the 1983 LEP Consultation, entitled '*Together into Tomorrow*'.

30. Two cracks on the ecumenical path were becoming increasingly visible – one relating to the British Council of Churches, and the other to the Church of England. Firstly, the structure of the BCC was such that while it was very effective at bringing together representatives of the member churches to make decisions, the governing bodies of the member churches did not need to take any notice of its decisions. The British Council of Churches had become another institution, increasingly felt to be over against the member churches – something which troubled the Church of England, and which would never be acceptable to the Roman Catholic Church, now looking for some way of being involved nationally. The result was that the BCC appeared to be bearing ecumenical fruit beyond what it was capable of delivering. Sometimes the churches wished to distance themselves from the BCC position on issues such as racism, apartheid, and sexual morality. To some extent, the Churches Unity Commission, despite having direct representation from the Churches, was caught up with

this sense of gulf, along with a reluctance of some Churches to face the upheaval of changes for unity.

31. Secondly, Faith and Order issues were still very much in the hands of the governing bodies of the churches themselves, so that when matters as far reaching as the Anglican – Methodist unity scheme and the English Churches Covenant were brought to vote, underlying tensions within the churches, especially in the Church of England, were articulated. One thing that the rejection of these two schemes reveals about the Church of England is the complexity of its ecumenical relationships, a result of the different ecumenical affinities of different traditions within the Church of England. The failure of the two schemes to secure sufficient votes in General Synod, even by such narrow margins, enabled and required the Church of England to become more aware of its own complex identity. The challenge for the Church of England in its ecumenical relations is to acknowledge that no single tradition can claim to represent the Church of England. Since 1982, the aims of the Church of England’s conversations with other churches have been refocused away from schemes for structural unity to the gradualist approach of unity by stages, of which the five agreements entered into by the Church of England since are examples.^{vii}

32. The two major directions of ecumenism set at the Nottingham 1964 BCC Faith and Order Conference, first, to give approval to setting up “areas of local ecumenical experiment” and second to commit the churches to work together for visible unity, need to be seen in relation to each other. They both emerge out of an enthusiasm on the part of those present at Nottingham for the unity of the mainstream Protestant Churches and the Church of England. From the local perspective, the goal of tangible progress to union by 1980

provided a context in which Areas of Local Experiment could be given a rationale and connect them beyond the local. From the point of view of the national conversations, the Areas of Ecumenical Experiment/Local Ecumenical Projects, growing hugely in numbers,^{viii} would indicate what local church life might be like in the hoped-for new dispensation, and also would indicate some of the many practical issues that would need to be resolved. From the beginning, the main emphasis, although not exclusively, in LEPs was to form united congregations and push at the boundaries of what was possible as far as they would go, including shared sacramental ministry and shared congregational life. This emphasis sought a national framework for visible unity, and would increasingly be in difficulty without it.

33. But there is a second, even more significant factor which shaped the character of these local projects: the absence of the Roman Catholic Church, both in the British Council of Churches, and from any direct involvement in the areas of ecumenical experiment. Both these absences were to change. At the time of the 1964 Nottingham conference, Vatican II was formulating *Unitatis Redintegratio*^{ix} (Decree on Ecumenism), in which the ecumenical aspirations and foundations of the Roman Catholic Church were being articulated. Effectively, *Unitatis Redintegratio* brought the Roman Catholic Church into the Ecumenical Movement, including the inception of the ARCIC process and the Roman Catholic Church's engagement in a number of other bilateral conversations. The inclusion of the Roman Catholic Church in CCLEPE in 1973 was another major step, which brought potential for a wider approach to local ecumenism. To have an ecumenical partner who has a distinctive vision of the goal of unity and also a different perspective on what is possible and desirable at local level meant that a critical edge was introduced into this new committee.

Local Ecumenism from 1982

34. 1982 was a significant year, not only because it effectively brought an end to the English Churches Covenant proposals, but also because of the Pope John Paul II's visit to Britain, which opened up new possibilities for ecumenism at all levels.

35. At the local level, there were already many instances where Roman Catholic parishes were sharing church buildings, but these national events began to suggest new ways for churches to commit themselves locally. The notion of Covenant had been widely used of the binding agreements and relationships between churches at national and international level since at least the beginning of the BCC. Implicit in the formation of a Local Ecumenical Project was the idea that local congregations and church leaders committed themselves to each other in a binding agreement to establish a single or an increasingly united worshipping presence, subject to the rules of the participating Churches. In response (1978) to the Ten Propositions the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales had recommended to their parishes that entering into local partnerships with others was an appropriate form of local ecumenism. They promoted this particularly after the Pope's visit, with the publication of 'Local Churches in Covenant' in 1983, building on the earlier 1978 document. The move coincided with much local disappointment about the failure of the National Covenant, and at this time a number of local covenants were born.^x However, in 1984, 'A Pattern of Local Ecumenism', the fifth report of CCLEPE indicated that Local Covenants were relatively rare and were not always fully recognized as LEPs. In reporting on statistics of LEPs, the report stated:

One growing area is that of Local Covenants of which 24 are currently registered. The question is sometimes asked whether or not a Local Covenant is an LEP. CCLEPE believes that a Local Covenant is an LEP at an early stage, because usually it has restrictions on the sharing of ministry and the Eucharist where there is Roman Catholic involvement.^{xi}

36. The key factor in deciding whether a Local Covenant is an LEP is not the content of the covenant, but whether or not it has been formally approved by denominational authorities and registered with the Sponsoring Body. It may or may not include reference to buildings or ministry.

37. The report “A pattern for Local Ecumenism” published by CCLEPE in 1983 attempted to establish some common ground rules for Sponsoring Bodies and to produce a definition of Local Ecumenical Partnership which did justice to the growing diversity of LEPs. About Local Covenants, it said:

Some have wondered if a Local Covenant (as envisaged by the Roman Catholic document ‘Local Churches in Covenant’), should be registered as parallel to LEPs, or as an LEP itself. The document itself makes clear that they see Local Covenants as Local Ecumenical Projects (Page 12: ‘Every Local Covenant is really an LEP in basic form’. ‘It must be pointed out that a Local Covenant or LEP can only exist with the approval of the denominational authorities of the Churches concerned’.) We recommend that they are a category of LEP and be registered as such.^{xii}

38. The paper went on to suggest that Local Ecumenical Partnerships can be classified in terms of the presence of a combination of four building blocks, or elements, which in

different combinations could give rise to a large number of different types. These included:

- a. Local Covenant,
- b. Shared Building,
- c. Shared Congregational Life, and
- d. Shared Sacramental Ministry.

39. This report was shaped by two distinct factors, one positive and one negative:

- a. The positive factor was the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to local ecumenism, its support of Local Covenants and the effect of the Pope's visit on the ecumenical landscape.
- b. The negative factor was the failure of the English Churches Covenant, with no alternative in sight. This vacuum at national level led to an even stronger focus on local unity.

40. There is no doubt that the 1983 CCLEPE document represents a watershed in shifting the focus of ecumenism to the local level away from national conversations, and also in shaping the form of local ecumenism. The paper – later issued to the General Synod as GS Misc 191 – challenged the Church of England to put its house in order. The paper noted the 'level playing field' created by the fact that there were by that point no longer any national 'unity' negotiations in progress for the first time since 1946. It was now time for a 'grass-roots' ecumenism to set the pace. Those who had been telling local ecumenists to wait for the resolution of issues, felt acutely 'on the ground', had failed to deliver a national framework for delivering this.

41. Where the national had failed, encouragement came from the international, with the publication of theological reports pointing the way to new understandings between the Churches. In 1982 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches published its document “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Significantly the Roman Catholic Church was a member of Faith and Order so it was deeply involved in a process seeking to map out convergence in these three aspects of Church life. All member Churches were invited to respond. Alongside this multi-lateral venture, the 1980s delivered reports of bi-lateral conversations – those directly engaging the Church of England included the Anglican-Roman Catholic (ARCIC 1 – Eucharist, Ministry and Ordination, and Authority), Anglican-Lutheran, and Anglican-Reformed (God’s Reign and Our Unity) This international work on theological reconciliation was a great encouragement to those involved with Faith and Order practicalities at local level in LEPs. Equally significantly, these signs of theological progress gave confidence to those in the Church of England responsible for finding and commending new and formal arrangements for local ecumenism, without the hoped-for national framework.

The Ecumenical Relations Measure and Canons (1982 to 1989)

42. Previously, the Bishops had regulated the Church of England’s participation in LEPs through Guidelines – they accepted the CCLEPE Guidelines of 1975, approved joint services of confirmation in 1975, and issued a Code of Ecumenical Practice in 1980. The Code of Practice anticipated the hoped-for national framework which the English Churches Covenant would provide. After its failure in 1982 it became necessary for the Church of England to have more formal arrangements in place. Canonical provision for local ecumenism was consequential on the failure of national proposals.

43. The General Synod was quick to acknowledge the broader understanding of Local Ecumenical Partnership set out in the CCLEPE paper, and responded by setting up the ‘Derby Working Party’, chaired by Cyril Bowles, Bishop of Derby, to establish more clearly the terms by which the Church of England could positively and properly engage in partnership with other Churches.^{xiii}

44. The Working Party drew encouragement from the World Council’s “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Report, which provided some theological under-girding for its proposals. It also had to work in parallel with the Church of England’s synodical process for the ordination of women to the priesthood – the two timetables overlapped almost exactly, and both programmes directly related to the theology and practice of ministry. Those working and worshipping in LEPs felt closely involved in the debate, especially where women ministers of partner Churches were serving.

45. The result of the Working Party’s Report was the Church of England (Ecumenical Relations) Measure (ERM) and the associated Ecumenical Canons B 43 and B 44, which were approved by General Synod in 1988 and became effective in 1989 with the Bishops’ Code of Practice alongside them.^{xiv} The purpose of the ERM was to address those situations where shared ministry, sacramental life and worship were taking place outside the current legal structures of the Church of England and to make provision for episcopal oversight in those situations. The ERM and Canons B 43 and B 44 are therefore to do with the Church of England affirming local ecumenical relationships, and allowing varying degrees of sharing. Their focus is on ministry and worship since these were the areas of dispute in the earlier proposed national schemes. Much else,

not least prayer, discussion, and mission, could go on without canonical ordering.

46. The House of Bishops' Code of Practice picked up on the potential breadth of what might be considered a Local Ecumenical Project (later, Partnership), by referring to the four categories identified in the CCLEPE paper of 1984.^{xv} The ERM provided a legal structure for Bishops to designate Local Ecumenical Projects and to authorize varying degrees of shared sacramental ministry and worship.

47. The role of Canons in the Church of England is to set out in more detail what is indicated in a Measure, so the Ecumenical Relations Measure were accompanied by two "Ecumenical Canons" – B 43 and B 44.

48. Canon B 43 relates to ecumenical relations for all parishes, with a particular provision for allowing designated churches to hold their services in Church of England places of worship. Canon B 44 relates to all types of LEP(s) with provision for regular sharing of ordained ministry and for joint services of confirmation. Canon B 43 was about mutual hospitality, and Canon B44 takes this further to the formal commitment expressed in belonging to a Local Ecumenical Project (later, Partnership). The prefix 'B' indicates that these Canons belong to the section of the Canons which pertains to worship.

49. One of the cornerstones of the ERM was to define which churches may be designated by the Archbishops for the purposes of applying the Canons. The churches which have been subsequently designated, while representing many of the churches with a national profile in England, do not include the increasing number of more locally based, independent churches, nor some of the newer, Black Majority and Ethnic

Churches now with a national profile in this country. One difficulty encountered with the definition of designation in the ERM is that it excluded the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends, as they do not celebrate the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. A separate set of guidelines was subsequently published so as to be able to include them in LEPs.^{xvi}

In Parallel: 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims' 1984 to 1992

50. Running in parallel with the Church of England process leading to the Ecumenical Canons was a movement leading towards the widest fellowship of Churches yet – the 'Not Strangers but Pilgrims' (Inter-Church) Process. The Swanwick Declaration of 1987 summed up these new aspirations and led in 1990 to the new ecumenical instruments - the dissolution of the British Council of Churches and the emergence of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the national instruments, including Churches Together in England (CTE).

51. In 1984 the BCC Assembly proposed a process which aimed to bring the Roman Catholic Church and the Black Led Churches (now more usually called Black Majority Churches) into a new ecumenical pattern.

52. The inter church process "Not Strangers but Pilgrims" went public in 1986 with the radio broadcast Lent Course "What on earth is the church for?" in which one million people took part. Five headings summed up the comments from all the participants who filled in a questionnaire:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Grass roots find a voice | d. Enjoy our differences |
| b. Jesus hidden by jargon | e. Time to become one |
| c. Afraid to share | |

53. Such widespread participation from local congregations, including Councils of Churches and Local Ecumenical Projects (Partnerships) lifted the spirit in many areas, and gave an impetus to local relationships. The responses were published in a booklet 'What you said'.^{xvii}

54. In 1987 the Swanwick Conference challenged the churches to move from co-operation to commitment 'in search of the unity for which Christ prayed, and in common evangelism and service of the world' and in 1990 'Churches Together' became the model for both local and national structures. Throughout the process and into the development of the new structures, key leadership was provided by the Archbishop of York, John Habgood. His leadership also encouraged wider Church of England participation. In addition local ecumenical bodies made a significant contribution to the new ecumenical structures and style which emerged out of the process.

55. These changes had implications for local ecumenism. CCLEPE, which was part of the BCC structures, had dealt with only LEPs. When it was replaced by the Churches Group for Local Unity, a co-ordinating group of Churches Together in England, the remit was for local ecumenism in a more general sense. One immediate consequence was that more denominations were represented on GLU than had been on CCLEPE.

56. There was a wider agenda with a wider constituency. LEPs in a variety of expressions were to be seen as one element among others operating locally. There were to be gains and losses from this broader approach. The post of Ecumenical Officer for England was replaced by two Field Officers, working within Churches Together in England, and a network of County Ecumenical officers, funded by the Churches of the area.

57. After 1990, there was a very real sense of development in local ecumenism running alongside the development of new patterns for national structures. Since the demise of the last major unity scheme in 1982, it would be true to say that LEPs had been carrying the load of structural ecumenism. In Churches Together in England and the Group for Local Unity, they now had a national body to relate to. Local ecumenism was represented in these groups and at the Churches Together In England Forum.^{xviii}

Called to be One: 1992 – 1997

58. The Inter-Church process had been concerned with ‘the nature and purpose of the Church’. The newly-created Churches Together in England, with encouragement from the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, Derek Worlock and the General Secretary of CTE Canon Martin Reardon, wished to continue this process of theological exploration, through a programme entitled ‘Called to be One’. Each member church was asked to express its understanding of the words ‘Church’, ‘Unity’ and ‘Visible Unity’. These were published in 1996 as a resource for the specially extended 1997 Forum of Churches Together in England. Prior to the Forum the General Synod of the Church of England endorsed the responses from the dioceses that the Church’s Unity should be ‘Visible, Audible and Credible’.

59. Twenty three Intermediate/County Bodies, along with local Churches Together groups and Local Ecumenical Partnerships contributed to the chapter on the ‘Experience of Unity’. Interestingly this document uses the terminology of ‘single congregation’ and ‘multiple congregation’ to describe LEPs. A further booklet of responses was issued among the

documents for the 1997 Forum. The Forum engaged with the diverse responses and its final report^{xix} identified (the) Five Features of Unity, including:

- a. A common ministry of oversight, and
- b. A means of consulting one another and making decisions together.

60. Both of these themes were already extremely familiar to LEPs – not least because they had been so difficult to achieve.

61. The Forum report also endorsed the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission^{xx}:

- *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- *To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- *To respond to human need by loving service*
- *To seek to transform unjust structures of society*
- *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth.*

62. The Forum's endorsement brought together the themes of unity and mission, and providing a useful tool for ecumenical partnership in mission.

63. The material emerging from "Called To Be One" provides a valuable and substantive record of how a wide group of Churches in England understand the unity of the Church and the visibility of that unity. The responsibility for follow-up remains with those Churches, through Churches Together in England – significant work was done by its Theology and Unity Group.

LEP Consultations 1994 and 2002 - and Issues of Christian Initiation and Membership

64. In 1994, GLU organized a Consultation for LEPs, with the aim of injecting new energy into the movement, and with the 'Called to be One' programme underway, opening the door to local ecumenical experience and insight. The Consultation considered the implication of the new ecumenical patterns for LEPs, assessed the role of LEPs, and attempted to clarify a vision for their future. The Consultation focussed around seven issues, which presented themselves at local level:

- a. Baptism and re baptism
- b. Church membership
- c. Ecumenical deployment and resources
- d. The relationship of LEPs to their churches/ denominations and to their sponsoring bodies.
- e. Definition of an LEP
- f. Quality, effectiveness and potential of an LEP
- g. Finance and LEPs.

65. As a result, in 1997, Local Ecumenical Projects were renamed as Local Ecumenical Partnerships, and a modestly revised definition of LEPs was approved:

A Local Ecumenical Partnership is defined as existing where there is a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects of more than one denomination; and a recognition of that agreement by the sponsoring body and by the appropriate denominational authorities.^{xxi}

66. Six categories of LEP, replacing the four categories set out in the 1984 Pattern for Local Ecumenism were formally

listed by GLU in 1997, with Congregations in Covenanted partnerships being fully recognized alongside Single Congregation LEPs.. Whilst the focus of this essay is primarily on partnership between local churches, the covenant model, sometimes but not always expressed as an LEP, has been used for joint work in prisons, hospitals, universities, schools, local radio, and in industrial and agricultural mission - declaring a common commitment to key institutions and sectors of work, both within the Church and in society. In response to these developments, the extended categories of LEPs included Chaplaincy, Mission, and Education Partnerships. They appear within the statistics kept by Churches Together in England and in 2010 number over 100.

67. The notion of a Declaration of Welcome and Commitment, appropriate in situations where one church serves a community, emerged at this time with documentation issued by a number of churches from 1997. The Churches issuing a version were: the Church of England, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist Union. This added to the variety of local ecumenical provision.

Issues of Christian Initiation and Membership

68. The life of LEPs had been raising issues around Christian initiation and membership from earliest days, with the BCC issuing a succession of reports: One Body, Many Members (1986), Christian Initiation and Church Membership (1988), and Responses from the Churches (1990). Canon Martin Reardon, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, fed some of this ecumenical experience and insight into the Church of England in his booklet 'Christian Initiation – a Policy for the

Church of England' (1991). Experience in LEPs informed this discussion.

69. In 1997, Churches Together in England issued a report on 'Baptism and Church Membership'. As well as drawing heavily on ecumenical experience, this included a proposal made at the 1994 Consultation on LEPs about 're-baptism'. Another perennial issue was 'extended membership', which is to do with members of LEPs, previously confirmed, wishing to extend their membership locally to include that of all participating denominations of the LEP, as was the case with those benefitting from Joint Confirmations. A further issue was the clash of different policies on the admission of children to communion. In response, the Churches, sometimes separately, sometimes in partnership, worked hard at finding solutions to these issues.

"LEPs in Changing Times" 2002

70. A second Consultation entitled "LEPs in Changing Times" was convened by GLU in 2002, where many of the issues facing LEPs today were identified. Eight aspects of LEPs were addressed:

- a. Ministry – deployment and availability.
- b. LEP growing out of themselves – identity, expansion and change
- c. "Imagine" - what would LEPs look like if unity had arrived?
- d. Team work – chaplaincy teams, county ecumenical bodies and leaders groups as teams?
- e. Worship and spirituality – valuing each others' traditions, working at the edges.

- f. 'We're all Christians here'— fears that LEPs are loosening links with their parents; Oversight; Reviews.
- g. The impact of today's culture on the churches – mission responses and approaches
- h. Ecclesiology – When is a church a church? Change, dispersed congregations, recognition.

71. The Group for Local Unity reflected on the Consultation and identified a number of priorities, including developing good practice in shared consultation and decision making; simplifying LEP constitutions and documents generally; renewing the vision of being pilgrims together for a new generation of Church Leaders - and promoting a vision for ecumenical living and in LEPs in particular, highlighting one very important element – team work and collaborative ministry. This “Vision for Ecumenical Living” emerged as a GLU paper, offering three strands: the spirituality of sacrifice, a deeper understanding of team working, and a theology of diversity in our unity. Here were three themes around which partners might gather a wide range of ventures.

72. Among the tasks identified were developing light touch, flexible and purposive structures (instead of what were felt by some to be bureaucratic, oppressive and energy-sapping patterns) and making more use of the Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment, especially in rural areas.

73. GLU shared these reflections with the churches, and in response, the Roman Catholic Church produced Guidelines for Catholics in LEPs, building yet further on their documents of 1979 and 1982. The Church of England produced a written response to the eight topics discussed. A lot of work has also been done on introducing streamlined processes to establish

LEPs, and on promoting the use of the Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment. However there are still areas of work outstanding from the conference - such as the development of Light Touch Structures and developing good practice in shared consultation.

74. For a decade now, new LEPs have been able to draw upon model constitutions and model policies which have distilled the good practice and experience of LEPs. It is likely that the Charities Act (2006), with its requirement that excepted charities with an annual income over £100,000 need to register as charities will have a significant impact on the institutionalisation of single congregation LEPs in particular, by means of standardised constitutions, which meet Charity Commission requirements. The pressure for institutional structures continues in tension with the desire for light structures and experiment.

The Anglican Methodist Covenant 2002

75. Discussion initiated by the Methodist Church in 1994 had begun a new round of conversation between Anglicans and Methodists in the context of 'Called to be One' which had started its work in 1992. In 2002, the Anglican - Methodist Covenant was approved by the Methodist Conference and General Synod of the Church of England, and it was signed in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen on 1st November 2003. The Covenant is a significant commitment on the part of the two churches to each other. In this context, there has been a steady stream of new Anglican - Methodist LEPs established since then, many of which are Local Covenanted Partnerships, as Anglicans and Methodists at local level have sought ways of working more closely together. However, the Covenant did not introduce any

new legislation into Anglican – Methodist relations and therefore Local Anglican – Methodist Partnerships are still regulated by the ERM and Ecumenical Canons.

76. However the Ecumenical Canons have been made to serve the covenant relationship by providing for an increased degree of general application. So in 2004 it was agreed that the Covenant came into Canon B43 categories of “special circumstances”, and that this, with the hospitality provision of Clause 9 allows ministers of each church to preside at the Eucharist in one another’s church. In 2007, there was further agreement to have standardised procedures under Canon B44 to encourage Anglican – Methodist ‘Local Covenant Partnership’ LEPs.

77. In these ways, on the basis of a national agreement between the churches, pre-existing legislation is used in a new and liberating way to encourage unity locally. This convergence of national and local agreement had been a long cherished hope.

78. Another significant development has been the bringing together of the Anglican and Methodist groups with major responsibility for local ecumenism into the Methodist – Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM).

The Church of England’s Response to the Challenges of Local Ecumenism

79. We have noted that the Church of England’s General Synod failed to get the necessary majorities for two national breakthroughs: the Anglican – Methodist Scheme in 1972 and the English Churches covenant in 1982. Added to this, was the Church of England’s failure to deliver on hopes for an

ecumenical bishop proposed for Swindon, a highly significant proposal in the area of joint leadership, oversight and decision making. The negative outcome reduced the energy for a similar venture in Milton Keynes, which instead established the model of 'Ecumenical Moderator'.

80. For these reasons, the Church of England seemed to some to be a reluctant ecumenical partner. This however needs to be balanced by acknowledging the significant ways in which, subsequently to these failures, the Church of England has opened up its procedures and rules to facilitate local ecumenism. In matters of ministry, membership and the celebration of the Eucharist, what has not been delivered through national agreement has found a more limited kind of authorisation locally.

81. In the area of Ministry, a high degree of shared ministry has been made possible through the Ecumenical Canons (1989) and the extension of this within the Anglican – Methodist Covenant (2004 and 2007) so that ministers of participating churches can preside at the Eucharist in each others' churches (whilst retaining the Church of England's position that only an episcopally ordained priest may preside at the Eucharist defined as 'according to the use of the Church of England'). Progress has also been made in the sharing of authorised lay ministry. These are significant moves in the direction of integrating ministries, whilst falling short of a general reconciliation and interchangeability of ministers.

82. In the area of Membership, there has been from the time of the British Council of Churches a joint certificate of baptism, shared between many Churches. Joint Confirmations have been authorised in LEPs since 1975, and in 1995 provision was made under the Church Representation Rules for non

Church of England persons to 'declare themselves as members of the Church of England'. This was a response to the long running debate pressed by LEP experience for 'extended membership'. Widening the sense of belonging also found expression in the 1997 Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment, issued by the Church of England in company with the Methodist, Roman Catholic, United Reformed Churches and the Baptist Union. These were tools to enable members of other churches to feel at home where there was one church in an area, most obviously in rural areas.

83. For the Eucharist, intercommunion has been permitted in the Church of England since 1975, and, after a process beginning with the Ely report (1971) and developed in subsequent reports (the Knaresborough Report, "Communion before Confirmation?" (1985) and Christian Initiation – a Policy for the Church of England (1991), the House of Bishops first issued Guidelines (1997) and later Regulations (2005) for children to receive communion before confirmation. This helped LEPs by enabling children to be admitted to communion and then later to be confirmed within the various churches represented in an LEP. It meant that the Initiation patterns of participating churches in LEPs could be more readily integrated.

84. Underlying all these developments were the Ecumenical Canons (1989), giving the most formal expression possible to local co-operation in general and Local Ecumenical Partnerships in particular.

85. The patchwork of detail, created over many years, lacked the impact of a successful national breakthrough, but provided a range of tools showing that the Church of England could be a positive player in local ecumenism.

Three Reflections

A Broadening Picture and a Changing Church

86. The LEP concept emerged as a pioneering venture pointing the way to a reconciliation of the churches and an integration of their resources and ministry, - finding particular expression as new Christian communities in new towns and housing developments. They were exceptions seeking exception from denominational patterns, and acknowledgement and support from the denominations sponsoring them. In each diocese, they were limited in number and with support nationally through CCLEPE they were capable of being managed well. Conferences and reviews were the key elements of support.

87. Two developments changed the picture. Firstly, LEPs became greater in number and greater in variety. The promotion of Local Covenants from the 1980's onwards brought many ordinary denominational churches into the LEP world, causing a more widespread disruption of denominational patterns, not least in ministerial appointments. Managing more LEPs required more from the Church sponsoring them.

88. Secondly, the local ecumenical scene became increasingly wider than LEPs. Following the creation of Churches Together bodies nationally and across the four nations, there was a new focus on local Churches Together Groups, replacing Councils of Churches. Denominational rules became generally more supportive of ecumenical co-operation and the hospitality expressed in Declarations of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment (1997) offered a 'lighter option'. There was also a widening commitment to mission, emerging

from the 1990's Decade of Evangelism and the shift from a pastoral perspective, drawing on the Five Marks of Mission, which were gradually owned by the denominations between 1989 and 1996. This led some to draw a contrast between the priority of mission over against the bureaucracy of ecumenism. The Church of England's report Mission Shaped Church (2004) and the concept of Mission Orders (2007) heightened the focus on mission.

89. At a period when LEPs were becoming more diverse and with an increase in the number of ways of 'doing unity locally', in a climate increasingly defined by mission, they were in danger of receiving less oversight, less support, and less resourcing than in earlier years. The Group for Local Unity was set up in 1990 to engage with local unity in general, in contrast to its predecessor, CCLEPE, which had focussed chiefly on LEPs. It was the Intermediate/County Body which was now required to take on the role of 'LEP Sponsoring Body', but this was just one part of its much wider brief for ecumenical work, - and gradually these Bodies were becoming increasingly under resourced.

90. LEPs, in their increased number and greater variety, operating in a more challenging climate, needed more attention, but were getting less. One illustration of this is the frequency of Conferences for those actually working in LEPs. CCLEPE had a Conference most years. Since 1990 there have been just two Consultations, in 1994 and 2002. There has been a good programme of training for ministers coming new to serve in LEPs, but the building up of the ecumenical constituency has been less secure. Counties and regions, with their jointly funded Ecumenical Officers have increasingly had difficulty in picking up that role, because of reduced resources.

91. At the same time, financial pressures and internal strains have made decision making, especially in relation to ministry more denominational.

92. The irony is that alongside these pressures, the Church of England, not least in relation to the Methodist Church, but also with other long standing ecumenical partners, has been developing a wide range of tools and permissions to make possible increased ecumenical partnership locally. The tools are now in place, after the labours of nearly 50 years since the Nottingham Conference of 1964 first launched 'Areas of Ecumenical Experiment' – the challenge is to see that they are actually understood and used.

Merger and Partnership

93. This account of the origins and development of LEPs reveals a fundamental tension that lies behind two main models of LEP: The merger model and the partnership model.

94. The tradition of LEPs which was established during the 60's and 70's, mainly in the areas of new post war housing, emphasised the formation of a single congregation. Some of these were the result of bringing together two or more existing congregations, forging one congregation, one church council, and often a style of worship and church life which drew from each of the traditions represented in the LEP. Others were the result of a new church plant with input and commitment by a number of participating ecumenical partners, often associated with a new building, which was also a centre for community development and service. We might call this the merger model of LEP, which is entered into by churches, which are able to have a high level of sacramental sharing. Features of this model include:

- a. The LEP is based on an agreement which envisages the formation of a single congregation, as far as the rules of the participating churches allow.
- b. Forms of worship are used which may be locally devised rather than one specifically drawn up and authorised by a particular denomination: a Eucharistic Rite may be developed from a number of sources for general use regardless of the denomination of the minister. Presiding ministers will be used to a variety of rites not just those of their own denomination
- c. Members may have a stronger sense of belonging to the one congregation than to one denomination.
- d. Many members of the LEP will have a sense of multiple membership reflecting the various Churches sponsoring the LEP.
- e. Joint confirmations support this sense of multi-belonging.
- f. The existence of an Ecumenical Church Council, having control over a common purse, strengthens the sense that the LEP is becoming a body in its own right.

95. This merger model was the dominant model well into the 1980's.

96. The other main tradition of Local Ecumenical Partnerships emphasises the partnership as a covenant entered into between two or more distinct congregations of participating churches, which continue to remain distinct, with their own denominational identity, governance and traditions. This model, which can be called the partnership model came into prominence during the late seventies, when the response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Ten Propositions encouraged Local Covenants as an appropriate form of LEP. The Roman Catholic Church was fully able to endorse and be

committed to such local covenants, unlike the single congregation partnerships, because they did not require sacramental sharing, something not permitted in the Roman Catholic Church. The 1983 “Churches in Local Covenant” saw this model being promoted actively among all the churches.

97. The partnership model includes some of the following features:

- a. The LEP is based on a covenant between churches, committed to partnership, yet continuing as denominational bodies.
- b. The relationship between the participating churches allows for a mutual exchange of gifts and a shared sacramental life.
- c. Traditions are more readily upheld and valued.
- d. The participating churches retain their own decision making bodies.
- e. Modes of working together are developed, and adjusted in the light of experience.

98. Each of these main models has issues which need to be addressed. In the merger model, there are a number of fault lines:

- a. Relationship of the denominational bodies with the Ecumenical Church Council
- b. Issues about different understandings and approaches to church membership.
- c. Where there is a sole minister in charge, the pressure on the minister as a result of having to relate to all the denominational bodies of the participating churches.
- d. Charity registration – issues arising out of the need for the LEP to be set up as a charity in its own right.

99. In the partnership model the inherent weakness is that very little changes, with the risk that modes of working together remain undeveloped or become blunted by the more familiar denominational patterns and expectations. Put more sharply, the question which needs to be wrestled with is: “What does the partnership add to the life and mission of the church in this particular locality?”

LEPs and National Developments

100. One of the themes running through the story has been the interaction between local development and the national striving for a unity wider than the local.

101. It was there at the birthplace of LEPs, at the Nottingham Faith and Order Conference of 1964, building on the positive spirit of the British Council of Churches, carrying the hopes of post-war rebuilding and reconciliation, and encouraged by the hopes for Anglican – Methodist unity, with its initial report in 1963. Nottingham proposed Areas of Ecumenical Experiment, as pioneers for a wider unity by the hoped for date of 1980. The bandwagon, as yet untested, was rolling, but it was to suffer a series of setbacks. The Anglican – Methodist failures of 1969 and 1972, were however balanced by the creation of the United Reformed Church in 1972, and its initiative for ‘another go’ with a wider constituency of churches – the Ten Propositions. The hopes around the process encouraged LEPs to return to their pioneering spirit, but the failure of the English Churches Covenant in 1982 undermined that for a second time. LEPs thought there was a consensus for unity, in one way or another, but it didn’t feel like that in 1982 – rather, that something profound had ended in that year.

102. LEPs, far from being mainly new ventures in new areas were widening in scope to include established denominational churches in covenant with each other. LEPs were emerging in their own right, as part of the church scene, not defined by being primarily pioneers of unity on the horizon. This shift is mirrored in the change of name from 'Areas of Ecumenical Experiment' (1964), to 'Local Ecumenical Project' (1973), to 'Local Ecumenical Partnership' (1995). Experiment and Project pointed to something beyond (which had failed to materialise) whilst Partnership spoke of a way of being which could continue indefinitely. The increasing number of categories of LEP indicated that LEPs in their greater variety were becoming an established way of being for Churches not expecting, with any sense of immediacy, to unite.

103. Single Congregation LEPs with new buildings in new areas were likely to feel most adrift, pioneers who had become something of an embarrassment to their sponsoring Churches, but still a sign of unity to those willing to be encouraged. Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships adjusted to the reduced expectations, and were able to grow in the changed climate. Local churches could make local commitments despite disappointments nationally. The Ecumenical Canons taking shape between 1982 and 1989 provided a framework for this scenario.

104. But still LEPs kept on knocking at the national door – at two specific moments.

105. Firstly, they contributed to the Inter-Church Process (1984 – 1990) which in 1990 replaced the British Council of Churches with new ecumenical instruments, including Churches Together in England. The national instruments were intended to be sharper, something short of a national scheme but aiming

to provide a more committed environment for unity. LEPs were now able to relate to a national body, but this was about 'ways of being Churches together', rather than what was envisaged by earlier schemes.

106. The second national development was the Anglican-Methodist Covenant (1994-2002). This provides a second national reference point for LEPs, and on the basis of this national agreement, it has been possible to develop the application of the Ecumenical Canons in support of local Anglican-Methodist partnership. For Anglicans and Methodists the much looked for gearing between local and national is in place.

107. The pioneers of Areas of Ecumenical Experiment and the stalwarts of Single Congregation LEPs are nonetheless entitled to say that this is a modest outcome to the vision that initially motivated local ecumenism. They can very properly ask the Churches: What is the next step for unity, to which LEPs will seek to contribute?

Three Challenges

108. Local ecumenism, with the particular contribution of Local Ecumenical Partnerships, faces three major challenges in our new century.

109. The first challenge is the need to reposition local ecumenism within the mission focus that has emerged in the churches especially in the last ten years. The Church of England report, *'Mission Shaped Church'*, while affirming the necessity of churches working together, was critical of the ecumenical structures which have developed over the years as too rigid and

complex for the needs of mission. The relationship between unity and mission needs to be recast and renewed in order to harness the synergy of unity in mission, which was integral to the early local ecumenical initiatives.

110. The second challenge is then to develop a renewed vision for local ecumenism, to which the churches nationally can be actively committed, and which aims to liberate ecumenical structures so that they can be flexible and creative, but still have the potential to deliver shared ministry and mission. Theological training needs to engage with this challenge, equipping ordinands and clergy for the changing ecumenical task. Queen's College, Birmingham (now part of the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education), the Cambridge Federation and the Regional Training Partnerships have experience to share from the ups and downs of ecumenical relating. There is need for a developmental framework for local ecumenism, which is permissive, supportive and accountable, and which encourages the full range of potential ecumenical partnerships, both formal and informal. New models of ecumenical engagement at local level are already emerging and include a broader spectrum of churches than have traditionally been involved in local ecumenical initiatives. One of the key changes in the character of the Church in the UK in recent years has been the increase in diversity of Christian life and witness. Many of the new churches are now engaged in informal local networks, and bring a new energy and different emphasis to joint activity. These churches, however, do not always relate well to traditional ecumenical structures.

111. The third challenge is for the Faith and Order issues which currently engage the churches at national level to connect with local ecumenism. The issue of the interchangeability of ministry continues to be central in the relations

between the well established ecumenical partners, and the ecclesiological issues raised by fresh expressions have practical ecumenical implications at ground level. Above all, there is a lot of work to be done on developing a practical ecclesiological missiology which draws on the experience of unity in mission and which can help to equip the churches to work together in facing some of the major challenges of mission of the day.

And finally

112. Our account of the origins and development of Local Ecumenical Partnerships has aimed to show that local ecumenism is always developing and adapting as new challenges and contexts emerge. This was no less the case in the past than it is now. In rising to the current challenges the experience of the past is instructive and inspiring. That is why we have wanted to bring together its story with all the varied elements in a way which we hope is accessible. Honouring, knowing and understanding the story is important. It is the necessary preliminary to something equally important and urgent – appraising and recasting the experience and insights gained by so many people, laity and clergy, as a result of the pioneering decision made by the 1964 Nottingham Conference to establish those first “Areas of Ecumenical Experiment”.

The Right Revd David Hawtin
The Revd Dr Roger Paul
18 October 2011

Endnotes

Note: The links provided below were all checked on 12 June 2020.

- i Alan Dawkins, with notes by Colin Davey, *The Story of the BCC – follow the Pilgrim Road*, (CTBI, 1990). The text is available at: <https://ctbi.org.uk/history-british-council-churches/>
- ii *Local Council of Churches Today*, (London: BCC 1971)
- iii *Unity Begins at Home*, (London: SCM Press 1964), p.79
- iv Wakefield, G and Perry, M. *Anglican Methodist Unity – A Short Guide* (London: SPCK, 1968). A summary of the full report 1968.
- v *Under the Same Roof: Guidelines to the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969*, (London: HMSO, 1978), revised edition (London: CTBI, 1994). Available at: <https://ctbi.org.uk/books/under-the-same-roof-pdf/> (Also see unverified updated text: https://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/166606/Home/Resources/Local_Ecumenical_Partnerships/Different_types_of/Sharing_Church_Buildings/Under_the_Same.aspx)
- vi CCLEPE, *Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Projects*, (London: BCC, 1975)
- vii The Five agreements are: The Fetter Lane Agreement with Moravian Church in Great Britain (1995), the Anglican - Methodist Covenant (2003), the Meissen Agreement with the Evangelical Church in Germany(1991), the Reuilly Agreement with French Protestant Churches (2001), and the Porvoo Agreement between the Anglican Churches of Great Britain and Ireland and the Nordic/Baltic Lutheran Churches(1996) The latter, although being unique among the five in opening up the benefits of intercommunion and mutual recognition of ministries between the Anglican Churches of Great Britain and Ireland with the Baltic and Nordic Lutheran churches, still has some differences to resolve before this mutual recognition is complete.
- viii There were 73 new LEPs established between 1991 and 1995 and 96 between 1996 and 2001. There were a total of 860 LEPs in 2001, 871 in 2005 and 900 in 2010.
- ix For the text, go to: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

- x For example, the churches of Stoke in East Coventry entered into a covenant in 1984, as conscious response to the failure of the National Covenant two years previous. The RC Church Parish of the Sacred Heart was fully involved, and the form the covenant took was modelled on guidelines produced by the Roman Catholic Church.
- xi *Local Ecumenical Projects: CCLEPE Fifth Report to the Churches*, (London: BCC 1984). p.6.
- xii *CCLEPE, A Pattern for Local Ecumenism 1984, published as GS Misc 191*(London: CHB, 1984)
- xiii The key documents are GS 642 and GS Misc 225.
- xiv NB: In February 2019 an amended ERM, a new single Canon B 43 which covered the ground of the previous Canons B 43 and B 44, and a new Ecumenical Code of Practice, came into force.
- xv The Bishops' Code of Practice for the Ecumenical Relations Measure can be downloaded from:
[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Ecumenical Code of Practice 2019.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Ecumenical%20Code%20of%20Practice%202019.pdf)
- xvi Since this booklet was written, the previous advice has been superseded by later legislation. The Salvation Army had been included in the Ecumenical Relations Measure 2018, and its members may preach at any service:
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2018/6/section/1/enacted>. The situation for all smaller churches has been transformed because the ERM 2018 has made it possible for a bishop to designate a church, within the bishop's diocese, for the purposes of applying canonical provision.
- xvii What You Said, British Council of Churches for the Inter-Church Process 1986.
- xviii Palmer, D. *Strangers No Longer* (London, Hodder and Stoughton Religious, 1990)
- xix *Responses to Called to be One, CTE Forum*, (London: CTE, 1997)
- xx The Five Marks of Mission can be accessed here:
<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>
- xxi Welch, E. and Winfield, F. *Travelling Together: handbook on LEPs*, (London: CTE, 1997):
<https://www.cte.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=45303>