

Church of Ireland
GENERAL SYNOD 2005
MOTIONS

8. GUIDELINES AND PROTOCOLS FOR LOCAL COVENANT PARTNERSHIPS
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The General Synod accepts the protocols laid out in *Local Covenant Partnerships*, and commends their use for an initial experimental period of three years.

Guidelines and Protocols for Local Covenant Partnerships

Preface

It is acknowledged that there are many forms of ecumenical co-operation within the spirit of the Covenant. The purpose of the Local Covenant Partnership (LCP) is to provide a framework in which many of these may be more fully realised. The vision of a partnership needs to be “owned” by the participating congregations, and LCPs should not be entered into lightly, but only after careful preparation and on the basis of long-term commitment.

In light of this, the following Guidelines are presented to our Churches for consideration. It is recognised that it is impossible and probably undesirable to produce a definitive document applicable to every kind and mix of LCP. These Guidelines incorporate the considered view of the Covenant Council, based on the Guidelines approved by Churches Together in England for use in Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

Much of this present publication is concerned with LCPs in Categories 1 & 2 – Single Congregation Partnerships, and Churches in Covenanted Partnerships. Much of this material will also be applicable to each of the other categories. The sample documents are not, in any sense, ‘straight-jackets’, but rather examples of how these documents may be worked out at local level.

Throughout this document the word “Ministers” is used to refer to those persons, both lay and ordained, who are collectively exercising ministry in an LCP. When references are specifically to those who are ordained, the word clergy is used.

The whole concept of the Local Covenant Partnership is still developing, and this publication should be regarded as advising on best practice at the time of publication. Any suggestions for changes should be sent to the Secretary of the Covenant Council.

Concept & Definition of a Local Covenantal Partnership

A Local Covenant Partnership (LCP) is defined as existing where there is a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects of two or more congregations; and approval of that agreement by the appropriate denominational authorities, on the recommendation of the Covenant Council.

This means that for an LCP to exist there must be -

- ◆ a formal written agreement by the local churches/chaplains/participants (depending on the category of the Partnership)
- ◆ formal written authorisation by the appropriate denominational bodies in line with their provisions and procedures
- ◆ formal recognition, ongoing liaison, support and review by the Covenant Council and local Diocesan / District Covenant Facilitators¹.

Exploratory Stage

¹ See p.27ff for further details of local Diocesan / District Facilitators

At the initial stage, it is advisable to establish a LCP committee, consisting of the local clergy, together with up to six members to be appointed annually each by the Select Vestry and the Methodist Church Council (Leader's Meeting). The following 12 points may provide a framework for the Committee to discern how the Holy Spirit is calling the congregations to move forward together, and to help to decide what form the LCP may take.

1. To look at appropriate occasions and plan together united services of worship during Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, Aldersgate, Ascension, the summer period, Harvest, Remembrance Sunday etc. To extend invitations to each congregation's specially arranged services.
2. To consider and organise social events whereby congregations can get to know each other or jointly fund raise for worthy causes.
3. To explore setting up of opportunities for the congregations to pray and study together during Advent, Lent or other appropriate occasions.
4. To encourage occasional joint meetings of Mothers' Union and Methodist Women in Ireland.
5. To consult on the needs of children, youth, elderly and otherly-abled within the locality and consider joint ventures.
6. To carry out a joint audit or survey of the needs of the neighbourhood and consider appropriate joint action.
7. To plan a united welcome to newcomers to the area; to carry out a joint visitation of new housing developments. To facilitate this task there might be a joint production of a leaflet providing new arrivals with helpful information about local community as well as what the churches are offering.
8. To consider establishing together new churches in new areas subject to the approval of the respective denominations.
9. To oversee the visitation of local schools, hospitals, nursing and residential homes.
10. To consider producing an occasional joint news sheet.
11. To form relationships with other churches and faiths represented in the area who are prepared to work more closely together. Observers could be invited to attend the LCP committee.
12. To make church property available to the other partner as required.² Each congregation shall make any agreed financial allocations to the LCP Committee to facilitate its work.

A report of the work of the LCP Committee shall be submitted annually to the Diocesan and District Covenant Facilitators, and to the secretary of the Covenant Council.

Larger partners should be sensitive to the smaller congregation's needs. Major or contentious issues should be decided by a majority of each congregation's representatives separately. Where differences cannot be resolved they may be referred to the Diocesan and District Covenant Facilitators, or ultimately to the Covenant Council.

Categories of LCP

The primary categories of LCP are:

1. Single Congregation Partnerships.
2. Congregations in Covenanted Partnership.
3. Shared Building Partnerships.
4. Chaplaincy Partnerships.
5. Mission Partnerships.
6. Education Partnerships.

1. **Single Congregation Partnerships.** Where two congregations have merged to form one united congregation, or a combined church established in new towns or new housing areas where close co-operation has made sense for both ecumenical and economical reasons. They usually have shared ministry and a common purse, and seek to integrate every aspect of their life and work.

2. **Congregations in Covenanted Partnership.** Sometimes described as "unity in reconciled diversity", this pattern of partnership allows distinct denominational identities, but encourages commitment to joint action. Two or more congregations in an area agree to work very closely together for specific purposes, whilst usually retaining their own buildings, forms of worship and ministers. Such congregations set out their agreement in a *local covenant*, which defines, for instance, what they are going to do together, how they will share resources and how frequently they will meet for joint worship.

3. **Shared Building Partnerships.** This type of partnership is formed when a Sharing Agreement enables either an existing or a new church building to be shared by two congregations. They may operate as completely distinct

² It is important to ensure that the property owner's insurance liability extends to cover other invited groups.

congregations, each with its own worship pattern and church government. Alternatively the Sharing Agreement may be a vital part of a partnership described in 1 or 2 above.

4. **Chaplaincy Partnerships.** These typically occur in prisons, hospitals, universities or colleges of further or higher education. Chaplains from both denominations who find themselves working together on similar matters decide to formalise the relationship in a partnership which is then approved by the respective denominational authorities and by the institution involved.

5. **Mission Partnerships.** These are formed when the churches undertake a specific commitment together, for example to industrial or rural mission or to religious broadcasting. They may also formalise a twinning link with a united church or a council of churches in another country.

6. **Education Partnerships.** These are entered into when denominations wish to commit themselves to working together in areas such as lay training, ministerial training, or joint schools.

Single Congregation Partnership

Single Congregation Partnership is the term given to an LCP where there is:

- ◆ **One joint congregation.** This type of partnership involves shared sacramental ministry. Aspects of the life and worship of each tradition should be reflected in the Constitution. The Partnership must be able to be recognised as a local congregation by each of the partner Churches.
- ◆ **Normally only one worship centre,** but a variety of styles of worship. The aim must be to offer a nourishing and varied diet of worship. Many Methodists appreciate the opportunity for more frequent eucharistic worship, while many Anglicans enjoy all-age services and informal worship which may have a key role in reaching out to those on the fringe of the church. There will be opportunities to use ecumenical forms of worship.
- ◆ **Shared sacramental ministry** - there may be a ministerial team, drawn from both denominations. Some of the clergy may have pastoral responsibility for other congregations (whether Partnerships or not) and others may serve full time in the LCP. In many cases, however, ordained ministry will be provided primarily by one of the partner denominations, often in an agreed alternating pattern.
- ◆ **A common purse** - a shared life calls for a common budget and a common purse. Out of this payments can be made in recognition of ordained ministry received and involvement in the partner denominations' wider ministry and mission.
- ◆ **An LCP Church Council** which as far as possible co-ordinates the life of the Partnership. Local decision making will focus in an LCP Church Council and a Congregational Meeting. How decisions are taken will be spelt out in the constitution after careful discussion of different denominational understandings.

CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE IT IS APPROPRIATE

Single Congregation Partnerships may come into being by the formal coming together of two or more congregations, where a pooling of resources is perceived as God's will. Usually the congregations come into one building, though some retain two and use them for different purposes.

Others may take the form of ecumenical church plants - where in a new housing development several denominations combine to 'grow' a congregation. These will often begin in a house, progressing to a school or community centre. In the early stages they may rely heavily on ministry (and some members of the congregation) from outside the immediate area.

Approval must be sought from the appropriate denominational authorities.

Often a Single Congregation Partnership will also be a Shared Building Partnership. It may also be part of a Congregations in Covenanted Partnership, which covers a wider area.

Congregations in Covenanted Partnerships

Local covenants between two or more churches can help local churches live and work together whilst also remaining distinct. Covenanted partnerships are constituted by formal agreements between local churches. These recognise a mutual commitment to God and to each other and lay down ways in which the relationship will be deepened and the locality served. Such covenants acknowledge the distinctiveness of different congregations, while enabling them to share some forms of worship, church life, pastoral care and witness to the wider world.

To be recognised as a LCP such covenants must be formally supported and ratified by the denominational authorities involved. Informal local covenants also exist, but these cannot be considered to be LCPs until they fulfil the conditions outlined in the first paragraph above.

The advantage of a covenant partnership is that it forms a basis of mutual commitment on which the participating congregations and their denominations can rely and build. Setting up a local covenant also indicates to those responsible for the appointment of ministers that they should consult with the partner denomination before making ministerial appointments to any of the churches in the covenant, and that only ministers ready and able to work ecumenically should be appointed.

Like marriage, a covenanted partnership should not be entered into lightly. It is vital that the members of the participating congregations should be involved fully in prayer and consideration of its implications.

A local covenant should be drawn up, the text of which must be approved by denominational authorities. It should clearly state the objectives of the partnership in such areas as mission, joint ministry, shared worship; to describe only general aspirations of “working more closely together” is insufficient. There also needs to be a commitment to the development of the relationship between the churches and what they do together.

In covenanted partnerships, particularly those with many members, it will normally be necessary to have a constitution which lays down the structures and procedures for joint decision making and defines areas of responsibility. The covenant will be signed formally and recognised by the appropriate authorities in a special service for the occasion. Its life and development will then be monitored and supported by the local District & Diocesan Covenant Facilitators who will also carry out a review after a specified period.

Shared Building Partnerships

A Sharing Agreement enables each of the partners involved to use the church as if it were a building of its own denomination, extending the provisions spelt out in canon law or the trust deed. Where a Methodist Chapel is held under local trustees, their permission must be sought for the shared use of Buildings.

Churches may decide to share their buildings for a variety of reasons:

- a congregation is outgrowing its existing premises, but cannot afford, or may not wish, to buy or build somewhere larger;
- a congregation has dwindled and cannot afford, or may not wish, to keep up a large, old church building;
- in a new town or major housing development denominations come together to provide one church building to be used by all;
- two or more denominations in an area want to make a formal commitment to Christian unity by sharing their lives and ministry in a LCP; this may include the sharing of buildings.

All sharing of buildings offers an ecumenical opportunity. Even those who come together because of economic circumstances can learn and change through the experience of sharing. They may then take some more steps down the path towards greater commitment to each other and the wider church. For this reason those cases where care has been taken to enter into a formal sharing agreement involving the appropriate local and wider denominational authorities constitute shared building partnerships and are a form of LCP.

Sharing a church building is not a straightforward process, but it can be made easier by taking the needs and wishes of each congregation into consideration at every stage.

1. The churches are not entering into a landlord/tenant relationship, but into a *sharing relationship* with an element of Christian partnership. If a congregation which has no buildings approaches another, seeking a base for worship and outreach, then the approach must go through the church leadership; this is not an arrangement which is appropriately handled by a caretaker or hall bookings secretary. The question of insurance must always be fully investigated.

2. Both congregations need to be clear what it involves. It may mean making adjustments to the space or changing the times of services, for instance. Some members of both “host” and “guest” churches may find this difficult. It helps if the two congregations make the effort to understand as much as possible about the theology and forms of worship of the other church so that they can treat each other sensitively.

3. A Sharing Agreement enables thoroughgoing legal and management arrangements to be entered into by both denominations. It provides greater security and may enable capital funds from the “guest” congregation to be channelled into the “host” church. It will usually stipulate that a Joint Council be established to decide when and how the building is to be shared and to resolve any difficulties that arise.

4. Normally one of the partner churches, usually the one owning the shared building, will act as Custodian Trustee for the partnership. This may also apply to buildings jointly owned.

Chaplaincy Partnerships

The formation of LCPs for chaplaincy within institutional settings such as a health care trust, prison or establishment of further or higher education usually arises in one of two ways:

- ◆ from the strong desire of the chaplains themselves to work and be seen to work increasingly closely;
- ◆ on the initiative of the Intermediate Body, when seeking to provide appropriate chaplaincy.

There must be an agreed Declaration of Intent, solemnly attested at a service to inaugurate the Partnership. Not only the chaplains but also the leaders of the church bodies which they represent and senior members of the institution in which they serve should be present and should normally be signatories to the document.

- ◆ **Universities.** Forming a chaplaincy partnership may enable more effective chaplaincy to the institution and will lend credibility to the work.
- ◆ **Further Education.** A chaplaincy partnership could either secure a half- or full-time post in the name of a range of churches or integrate the contributions of several part-time chaplains.
- ◆ **Prisons.** The Prison Chaplaincy Service encourages the formation of chaplaincy partnerships for individual prisons. Prison chaplaincy can be particularly intense and make heavy personal demands, so the formation of a team strongly committed to each other in their common task is usually welcomed by chaplains and prison authorities.
- ◆ **Health Care.** All Chaplains are expected to embrace ecumenical teamwork. A Chaplaincy Covenant puts icing on this cake for those teams where working relationships are strong, by affirming what has already been achieved and making a commitment to continue and develop this. It also gives a standard of ecumenical co-operation for use when new posts are created and vacancies filled. The Covenant is a personal covenant between the Chaplains, endorsed by the employing NHS/Primary Care Trust, the nominating bodies and the Intermediate Body.

Mission Partnerships

The commonest forms include –

- ◆ **Industrial Mission,** which from its beginnings has been ecumenical in nature. Those appointed on a full-time or part-time basis represent “the Church” rather than a single denomination. This is experienced as a great strength. A Declaration of Intent and a Constitution will be needed. This will include a management committee. Care must be given to its composition to ensure that the Partnership is “owned” by the churches and that industrial/commercial bodies are well represented; both management and trade unions.
- ◆ **Local Broadcasting** often relies on ecumenically co-ordinated input. Some Intermediate Bodies have set up a local broadcasting partnership to employ, support and manage a full or part-time producer/presenter of religious material and to keep local broadcasting stations aware of their responsibilities.
- ◆ **Overseas Church Twinning.** In some areas a twinning arrangement with an overseas church or churches has the full backing of several denominations. It is then registered as a form of Mission Partnership LCP. This seems particularly appropriate when a relationship is formed with a diocese or unit of a United Church.

Education Partnerships

- ◆ This type of Partnership is appropriate where **the nature of the institution is to be ecumenical** and is to be acknowledged as a resource for at least two different church constituencies. Examples are St Bede’s (Roman Catholic/Church of England) school in Surrey and the Queen’s College (Anglican/Methodist/URC) ecumenical ministerial training college in Birmingham. Lay training initiatives are also regarded as Education Partnerships.

How do we start an LCP?

Discern what it is that you have a vision to do together instead of separately:

Is it bringing together existing ministry, mission, life?

Is it responding together to a new challenge or opportunity, e.g. new housing, a chaplaincy, a publicly recognised need?

Seek support & guidance from higher levels

Brief statement of what it is planned to do together and why – Declaration of intent

Float idea round congregations

Celebrate Declaration of Intent
Formulate a constitution

1. A model³ “Declaration of Intent” for a Single Congregation Partnership.⁴

(Specify Locality) LOCAL COVENANT PARTNERSHIP

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the world has been reconciled to God, and in Jesus Christ unity has been offered to all people. Through him we are called into a new relationship with God and with one another as the children of God. It is a relationship inaugurated by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, appropriated by faith and baptism, nurtured and deepened through the ministry of word and sacrament, and expressed in a confession of the one faith and a common life of loving service.

“We understand the mission of the Church to be (i) to proclaim the good news of the kingdom; (ii) to teach, baptise and nurture new believers; (iii) to respond to human need by loving service; (iv) to seek to transform unjust structures of society; (v) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”

“We, therefore, now declare our readiness to commit ourselves to each other under God. Our earnest desire is to become more fully, in God’s own time, the one Church of Christ, united in faith, communion, pastoral care and mission. Such unity is the gift of God.”

“With gratitude we have truly experienced this gift growing amongst us (in these past months / years). We affirm our openness to this growing unity in obedience to the Word of God, so that we may fully share, hold in common and offer to (the community around us) those gifts which we have received and still hold in separation. In the unity we seek we recognise that there will not be uniformity but legitimate diversity.”

In response to God’s call, and accepting the challenge to be pilgrims together, committed to God and to each other, we, the (*named*) churches, hereby publish our intent to constitute a Local Covenant Partnership, as understood by our denominations and interpreted in our Constitution.⁵

We commit ourselves to sharing together in the ministry of Christ to the world, and within this context to explore together the meaning and possibilities of unity for worship, evangelism, mission and service.

We commit ourselves to assessing the resources of church and community in terms of people, money and buildings, and to deploying them in the best way in relation to the aspirations and needs of local people.

We commit ourselves to maintaining and developing relationships with our parent bodies and with the Covenant Council and (*named*) district and (*named*) diocesan Covenant Facilitators.

We pledge ourselves to this arrangement for an initial period of seven years from the date of designation.

(Signed⁶ and dated by local clergy, church representatives, and endorsed by the signatures of the Bishop and District Superintendent, the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators and/or the members of the Covenant Council.)

³ This is a model, not a straight-jacket! A further model is provided under the section ‘Congregations in Covenanted Partnership’. It is for each local partnership to choose to frame their declaration of intent in words that are appropriate to their local context.

⁴ A Declaration of intent is usually quite a brief document. Its purpose is to ‘express the essential spirit of the Partnership and to give people a vision to which they can commit themselves’. It should contain a theological basis for working together, either from the Scriptures or from the belief that God wills unity, or from the ‘Lund Principle’ that challenges the churches to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately. It is the focal point of the public act of worship which inaugurates the project.

⁵ Because the essence of covenanting lies in the act itself – the act which brings about a new relationship – covenanting makes co-operation between Christians both visible and permanent. This is the heart of the matter. The fact that covenanting is performed with the approval of those in authority and is concerned with definite activities shows the interrelationship of church leaders and congregations. Without the leaders a covenant would have no authority; without the congregations’ activities it would have no substance.

⁶ The declaration should be signed during the course of a solemn act of worship attended by as many people as possible from the partner Churches and representatives from both denominations. It may be desirable to provide an opportunity for those attending to add their own signature to one large sheet. Copies should be made and displayed in the foyer of each Church. The document

2. Guidelines for a constitution for a Single Congregation Partnership.⁷

1 Name

The Local Covenantal Partnership shall be known as *(specify)*.⁸

The partnership is a (part of) *(specify)* Church of Ireland parish in the *(specify)* Diocese, and a Methodist Church within the *(specify)* Circuit and *(specify)* District.

2 Area

The Ecumenical Partnership primarily serves the community / neighbourhood of *(specify)* and those who associate with it and benefit from its ministry.

3 Covenant Council

The Partnership looks for support and guidance to the Covenant Council through the local Diocesan and District Covenant Facilitators, and will be accountable to both partner denominations. The Partnership, in conjunction with the local Facilitators, shall make an annual written report which shall be sent to the Covenant Council and to the partner denominations.

4 Baptism and Membership

Baptism shall be administered according to the rite and / or practice of either denomination, or a rite approved by them, and shall be set, in normal circumstances, within an act of congregational worship. A joint register of baptisms shall be kept, and a joint certificate of baptism issued.

Preparation for confirmation shall be undertaken jointly and shall include specific denominational teaching and instruction. A service of Confirmation shall normally be administered at a joint act of worship according to a rite authorised. The Church of Ireland Bishop and the appropriate Methodist Minister shall jointly lay hands and invoke the Holy Spirit on each candidate. Those thus confirmed should be considered full members of both denominations.

Membership implies certain duties and responsibilities: regular attendance at worship including eucharistic worship, active sharing in the life of the church including attendance at meetings of the church and congregation, regular sacrificial giving, witness to God's love in the world by word and deed.

There shall be a common roll, including those on denominational rolls and those on joint roles by virtue of joint confirmation.

It may at present be necessary for each denomination to follow their own procedures regarding membership discipline, but every effort should be made to consult and show sensitivity to the partner denomination.

5 Worship and the Eucharist

The partnership shall respect the faith and practice of both denominations.

Worship shall safeguard and present the doctrines, practices, traditions and developing traditions of each participating denomination and be conducted in accordance with denominational practices and / or using appropriately authorised ecumenical rites.

A balanced and varied pattern of worship shall be aimed for in order to maximise the riches of each tradition and to enable the congregation to explore and express its ecumenical life and aspiration, while at the same time ensuring that worship is accessible and sustaining for all its members.

can be copied and postcards made for individual use. A copy of the Declaration of Intent shall be registered with the Covenant Council by the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators

⁷ This is a model, not a straightjacket! It outlines the main issues and areas to be considered in drafting a constitution for a new Local Covenant Partnership or for revising an existing one. Agreements should be reached on how issues of extended membership and admission of children to Communion will be handled in the Partnership. These should then be written into the appropriate sections of the Constitution. A copy of the Constitution, and any subsequent amendments appended thereto, shall be registered with the Covenant Council by the local Covenant Facilitators.

⁸ It is not normally appropriate to use the term 'United Church' or even 'Ecumenical Church'. A name clearly indicating the church's location, a saint's name or another name may be appropriate.

Ordained priests, ministers or other duly authorised persons shall preside at the Eucharist as permitted by denominational legislation. In LCPs, sensitivity is needed to with regard to the frequency of Eucharistic worship, ensuring that none are deprived of regular sacramental participation. Sensitivity will also be needed in regard to issues such as the common chalice or individual cups, and alcoholic or non-alcoholic wine.

In arranging services encouragement shall be given to the participation of Lay Readers / Local Preachers, and others authorised as leaders of worship or as preachers.

6 Ministry Team (or) Ministry⁹

The minister(s) of the Partnership shall be duly invited / appointed in accordance with the practice of the appointing denominations, after consultation between the appropriate authorities of the two churches. The minister(s) will normally share leadership and pastoral care with the LCP Church Council.

Denominational procedures shall be followed in the appointment of ministers. Recognising, however, the importance of continuity, the Partnership expects those responsible for the appointment shall select persons who will develop the Partnership ecumenically. To this end, the LCP Church Council shall appoint (*an agreed number of*) members to a Staffing Consultative Group.

When it is anticipated that a minister or member of the Ministry Team serving the Partnership may leave, or before any major changes in the responsibility of a minister presently in post are considered, or if additions to the ministry team are being contemplated, there shall be a meeting of the Staffing Consultative Group. This Group shall consist of representatives of the Partnership, the parent denominations (including, but not limited to the Bishop and the District Superintendent), and the local covenant facilitators.

The Staffing Consultative Group shall be responsible for amending an existing job description or drawing up a new one and submitting it to the appointing authority. The staffing consultative group shall advise as to the appropriate level of ministry and the denomination of the new minister to be sought.

The minister(s) shall be subject to the normal discipline of the denomination to which each belongs.

(In some partnerships the following clause may also apply:-)
There shall normally be a practice of alternating ministry.

Newly appointed ministers shall be introduced at a service at which they, other members of the Ministry Team, the Local Covenant Partnership congregation and the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators and/or representatives of the Covenant Council shall affirm / reaffirm, the Declaration of Intent.

7 Joint Decision Making

Joint decision making for the Partnership shall be by means of the LCP Church Council.

The LCP Church Council shall comprise:¹⁰

- The duly appointed minister(s) and / or the members of the Ministry Team,
- An honorary treasurer and an honorary secretary, *either* both elected from the Common Roll of the participating churches *or* both elected by the LCP Church Council from those on the Common Roll.
- And (*specify number*) of members elected by and from those on the Common Roll.

Election to the LCP Church Council shall be by proportional representation by STV (Single Transferable Vote).

The Council shall normally be chaired by the minister, or minister(s) in rotation.¹¹

The Council shall set up such committees as it may from time to time consider necessary: the current structure is appended to this Constitution but does not form part of it.

The Council shall, where necessary, fulfil the role of Select Vestry and Methodist Church Council.

⁹ Some LCP Church Councils may wish to appoint pastoral visitors or class leaders to share in the pastoral care. If desired, reference to this practice can be made at this point in the Constitution.

¹⁰ When a Single Church Partnership is in its infancy it may be desirable to require on its decision making body a balance of members of each of the partner churches. Later on, this requirement might be seen as unduly limiting. The Constitution should therefore be worded so that either method can be used. The LCP Church Council can draw up rules spelling out the practice to be adopted. These should be appended to the Constitution, indicating the date on which the LCP Church Council adopted them. They can be varied by decision of the Council without having to alter the Constitution itself.

¹¹ This task may be delegated to another appropriate person.

There shall be an Annual General Meeting, normally in March or April, at which the independently examined / audited accounts for the previous financial year shall be presented for adoption, an independent examiner / auditor appointed for the current year, and elections to the LCP Church Council shall be held. The AGM shall also serve as a Congregational Meeting, whose role is to review the previous 12 months and celebrate the advances made, to set out goals for the next 12 months, and to discuss the vision of the Church for the next five years.

Where a Special General Meeting is called, those eligible to vote shall be those qualified to vote at Annual General Meetings or those on the Common Roll.

The partnership shall maintain a proper pastoral and ecclesial relationship to both the Church of Ireland Diocese of (*specify*) and the (*specify*) Circuit and (*specify*) District of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

8 Premises

The premises comprise (*specify*), and are subject to the sharing agreement in force between the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland.

They shall be subject to inspection in accordance with the current Regulations of the (*specify*) denomination.¹²
The terms of the sharing agreement shall take precedence if any conflict is perceived with this Constitution.

9 Finance

There shall be a common purse. The honorary treasurer shall receive and account for all monies donated to the Partnership through collections, gifts etc. to the LCP Church Council and the Annual General Meeting. Copies of the independently examined / audited accounts as adopted shall be submitted to the Diocesan Council and the Circuit Treasurer.¹³

Out of the common income there shall be discharged: the expenses of ministry and of the administrative costs of the Partnership; financial obligations to the central and other funds of the both denominations;¹⁴ gifts to other societies and charities.

10 Wider Participation

Other churches in or near the neighbourhood of the Partnership may negotiate for participation in the Partnership at any time, subject to the agreement of the appropriate denominational authorities.

11 Review

The Partnership shall be evaluated with reference to its objectives set out in the Declaration of Intent and Constitution. Partnerships will be reviewed on a regular basis by the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators, the Bishop or his/her representative, and the District Superintendent or his/her representative. A review shall be held annually for the initial three years of the partnership, then every second year for the following three reviews, then every three years for the subsequent three reviews, and then every five years thereafter. If problems arise, particularly in later years, more frequent reviews may be necessary. The role of the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators is to facilitate the partnership in its own review. A copy of the report of the review shall be sent to the Covenant Council by the local Facilitators.

12 Continuity

The Partnership shall only be terminated with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities.

13 Amendments

Any amendments to this Constitution shall be made by the LCP Church Council or by a Special General Meeting called for that purpose. In either case, amendments shall be made only with the approval of the denominational authorities.¹⁵

¹² Where a shared building is under the ownership of one denomination, that church's rules on inspection will apply as well as on alterations / extensions. Where a building is in joint ownership it is the responsibility of the Managing Trustees to negotiate a system of regular inspection. One of the partner denominations' (or some other equally rigorous) system should be followed, since capital money from both denominations is at stake.

¹³ It is particularly important that an agreed system for financing ministry is in place. Every effort should be made to ensure that financial arrangements are as equitable and not subject to drastic variation.

¹⁴ Denominations differ considerably in the responsibilities discharged from central funds, and this will need to be taken into account when working our financial obligations. Some regular contribution should be made to the central and missionary funds of each of the partners.

3. Guidelines for the Recognition of a Local Covenant as a LCP

1. The text of the Local Covenant and the Constitution of the Partnership must have been approved by the appropriate authorities within both denominations and the Covenant Council
2. There should be a formal acceptance of the Local Covenant by each of the congregations involved, so that all their praying and decision making is done with an awareness of the other congregation(s).
3. The leaders (lay and ordained) of the congregations involved should be committed to meet regularly for prayer and consultation.
4. There should be a clear indication of and commitment to the objectives of the Covenant. These should include the areas of mission, joint ministry, shared worship, training and mutual care which are to be the starting points for the operation of the Covenant. To describe only general aspirations of “working more closely together” is not sufficient. There also need to be a commitment to the development of the relationship between the churches and of that which they do together. The Local Covenant will be reviewed and evaluated with reference to these objectives.
5. Agreed procedures for joint decision making, areas of responsibility etc. should be framed in the Constitution.
6. Both denominations should undertake that appointments to posts within the Local Covenant will be made after consultation with the other denomination.
7. Nothing should be required of the congregations within a Local Covenant which infringes the disciplines of their denominations, unless that discipline is redefined through LCP status.

4. A Model Declaration of Intent / Covenant for Congregations in Covenanted Partnership

In obedience to the call of Christ, we the clergy and people of (*specify*) Methodist Church and (*specify*) Church of Ireland Parish, who have increasingly shared our Christian life in a variety of ways over recent years, now feel a need to show our love for God and for one another by a more formal commitment to grow together in doing his will.

We confess our Faith in One God; the Father, Creator; the Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour; the Holy Spirit, guiding his Church, the body of Christ, into all truth.

We repent of all that is sinful in our past histories and present attitudes.

We rejoice in the riches of the traditions we have inherited and seek to share them more fully with one another in the unity which is the will and gift of God.

We seek a deepening of our communion with Christ and with one another.

We covenant to seek visible unity, even though in our pilgrimage together we cannot foresee the form it will eventually take.

We therefore make this commitment to God and to each other.

We commit ourselves and our churches:

- a. To move through co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service to the world.
- b. To engage in joint worship, prayer and study so that we may know and value each other and seek God’s will for His people.
- c. To work together in pastoral, social and evangelistic outreach into our community.
- d. To publicise and promote our Church life and worship by joint means wherever possible.
- e. To develop an Joint Ministry Team for regular prayer, study, consultation and appropriate action.
- f. To co-ordinate decision-making and use of resources through a Local Covenant Partnership Committee comprising the Joint Ministry Team and (*specify number of*) lay representatives appointed by and from each participating congregation.
- g. To ensure that each ordained or lay appointment to the Joint Ministry Team, although made by the appropriate denomination, is made in consultation with the Joint Ministry Team as is reasonably possible, consonant with denominational procedures.

¹⁵ Rules relating to committees or working groups should be appended to the constitution, but do not form an intrinsic part of it and may therefore be altered by formal decision of the Ecumenical Church Council.

- h. To set specific targets under each of the above headings and review progress annually and to express our achievements and aspirations in a united act of worship and rededication, marking the anniversary of the singing of the covenant.

SIGNED by local clergy plus two representatives of each partner local Church.

COUNTERSIGNED by the local Bishop and District Superintendent, local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators, and members of the Covenant Council.

Note: The covenant should be signed during the course of a solemn act of worship attended by as many people as possible from the partner Churches and representatives from both denominations. It may be desirable to provide an opportunity for those attending to add their own signature to one large sheet. Copies should be made and displayed in the foyer of each Church. The document can be copied and postcards made for individual use. A copy of the Declaration of Intent shall be registered with the Covenant Council by the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators.

5. Constitutional Guidelines for Congregations in Covenanted Partnership¹⁶

This is a model, not a straightjacket! It outlines the main issues and areas to be considered in drafting a constitution for a new Local Covenantal Partnership of this category or for reviewing an existing one.

1 Name

The Local Covenantal Partnership shall be known as *(specify)*.¹⁷

The partnership comprises *(specify)* Church of Ireland parish in *(specify)* Diocese, and *(specify)* Methodist Church within the *(specify)* Circuit and *(specify)* District.

2 Area

The Local Covenant Partnership primarily serves the community / neighbourhood of *(specify)* and those who associate with it and benefit from its ministry.

3 Covenant Council

The Partnership looks for support and oversight to the Covenant Council through the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators, and will be accountable to both partner denominations. The Partnership, in conjunction with local facilitators, shall make an annual written report which shall be sent to the Covenant Council and to the partner denominations.

4 Baptism and Membership

Baptism shall continue to be administered according to the rite and / or practice of the denominations and shall be set, in normal circumstances, within an act of congregational worship.

The legal requirement to keep a register of baptisms and confirmations / membership shall be met. Preparation for confirmation shall be undertaken jointly and shall include specific denominational teaching and instruction.¹⁸

Membership implies certain duties and responsibilities: regular attendance at worship including eucharistic worship, active sharing in the life of the church including attendance at meetings of the church and congregation, regular sacrificial giving, witness to God's love in the world by word and deed.

Each Church shall keep a roll of its members according to denominational practice. Those on either roll shall be eligible to represent their congregation within the partnership, if so appointed / elected.

Membership discipline shall continue to be a matter for each denomination following its own procedures.

¹⁶ A copy of this Constitution shall be registered with the Covenant Council by the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators.

¹⁷ The name will aim to specify the locality as clearly as possible. The Partner Churches should be listed here.

¹⁸ Where distinct congregations continue to exist within a Partnership it will not necessarily be thought appropriate to confer multiple membership on candidates for Confirmation. Each individual affirms Christian discipleship and commitment to Christian living in the context of the local congregation, the denomination and the Universal Church. However, it may be appropriate for other members of the partnership to welcome newly confirmed persons in the name of the partnership.

5 Prayer, Worship and the Eucharist

The partnership shall respect the faith and practice of both denominations.

The Joint Ministry Team (together with lay leaders) shall meet weekly for prayer and at least monthly for discussion. It shall be encouraged to bring suggestions to the LCP Committee and may be asked by the Committee to do work on its behalf.

Regular prayer for the Partnership and for wider ecumenism shall be a feature of the ongoing life and worship of each of the Partner Churches. To that end, a rota of prayer shall be compiled and kept updated.

There shall be regular united worship (*specify pattern and how often*). Worship shall safeguard and present the doctrines, practices, traditions and developing traditions of both denominations and be conducted in accordance with denominational practices and / or using appropriately authorised ecumenical rites.

A balanced and varied pattern of worship shall be aimed for in order to maximise the riches of each tradition and to enable the congregation to explore and express its ecumenical life and aspiration, while ensuring accessible and sustaining worship for all.

Ordained priests, ministers or other duly authorised persons shall preside at the Eucharist as permitted by denominational legislation. At any eucharistic celebration it shall be made clear that any who for whatever reason are unable to receive communion are invited to come forward for a blessing. In arranging services encouragement shall be given to the participation of Lay Readers / Local Preachers, and others authorised as leaders of worship or as preachers.

6 Ministry Team

The Ministry Team shall consist of the local clergy (*enumerate by office*) and of any other people duly appointed by the participating denominations, after reference to the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators.

Pastoral Care of church members and the wider community shall be the concern of the Ministry Team and the congregations. Individuals (class leaders/pastoral visitors) may/shall be appointed to share this responsibility. The clergy shall have a specific role within that total ministry, which they will normally share.

Denominational procedures shall be followed in the appointment of members of the Ministry Team. Recognising, however, the importance of continuity, the Partnership expects those responsible for the appointment will select persons who will continue and develop the Partnership. To this end, the LCP Committee shall appoint (*an agreed number of*) members to a Staffing Consultative Group.

When it is anticipated that a minister serving the Partnership may leave, or before any major changes in the responsibility of the minister presently in post are considered, or if additions to the ministry team are being contemplated, there shall be a meeting of the Staffing Consultative Group. This Group shall consist of representatives of the Partnership, the parent denominations (including, but not limited to the Bishop and the District Superintendent), and the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators.

The Staffing Consultative Group shall be responsible for amending an existing job description or drawing up a new one and submitting it to the appointing authority. The staffing consultative group shall advise as to the appropriate level of ministry and the denomination of the new minister to be sought.

The minister(s) shall be subject to the normal discipline of the denomination to which each belongs.

Newly appointed ministers shall be introduced at a service at which they, other members of the Ministry Team, the LCP congregations and the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators and/or representatives of the Covenant Council shall affirm / reaffirm, the Declaration of Intent.

7 Joint Decision Making

Decision making for the Partnership shall be by the Partner Churches in accordance with their normal canons and practice. There shall be a LCP Committee comprising the clergy and (*specify number of*) lay people from each

congregation in the partnership, appointed / elected in accordance with their normal practice. It is expected that such individuals shall have access to the decision making body of their congregation.¹⁹

The LCP Committee shall appoint from its number an honorary secretary, and in addition an honorary treasurer to administer any common monies, where appropriate.

The Committee shall set up such committees / working groups as it may from time to time consider necessary: the current structure is appended to this Constitution but does not form part of it.²⁰

There shall be an Annual General Meeting at which a report is given by the chairman or secretary and any accounts presented. All members of Partner Churches shall be eligible to attend. Normally this shall be in the context of an inspirational or social event. Other general meetings shall be held as desired.

8 Premises

The premises comprise (*specify*).

They shall be subject to inspection in accordance with the current Regulations of the (*specify*) denomination.²¹

The terms of the Sharing Agreement shall take precedence if any conflict is perceived with this Constitution.

9 Finance

The honorary treasurer shall receive all monies donated to the Partnership through subscriptions, collections, gifts etc. and account for them to the LCP Committee. Copies of the independently examined / audited accounts shall be submitted to the decision making bodies of both churches.

10 Wider Participation

Other churches in or near the neighbourhood of the Partnership may negotiate for participation in the Partnership at any time, subject to the agreement of the appropriate denominational authorities.

11 Review

The Partnership shall be evaluated with reference to its objectives set out in the Declaration of Intent and Constitution. Partnerships will be reviewed on a regular basis by the local Diocesan & District Covenant Facilitators, the Bishop or his/her representative, and the District Superintendent or his/her representative. A review shall be held annually for the initial three years of the partnership, then every second year for the following three reviews, then every three years for the subsequent three reviews, and then every five years thereafter. If problems arise, particularly in later years, more frequent reviews may be necessary. The role of the local covenant facilitators is to facilitate the partnership in its own review. A copy of the report of the review shall be registered with the Covenant Council by the local Covenant Facilitators.

12 Continuity

The Partnership shall only be terminated with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities.

13 Amendments

Any amendments to this Constitution shall be made by the LCP Committee or by a Special General Meeting called for that purpose. In either case, amendments shall be made only with the approval of the denominational authorities.²²

Shared Buildings

¹⁹ It is likely that the Committee will need ready access to a fund in order to plan and execute work with which it is charged by the churches. However, the principle behind the Partnership must be that what is in the interests of either of the churches is the concern of all. Often one of the churches will be asked to undertake a particular task or responsibility in the name of all, and this may have financial implications.

²⁰ Much of the potential for growth in unity and mission lies in encouraging those with particular responsibility in the life of each congregation to meet and work with their opposite numbers. The importance of this cannot be over-emphasised.

²¹ Where a shared building is under the ownership of one denomination, that church's rules on inspection will apply as well as on alterations / extensions. Where a building is in joint ownership it is the responsibility of the Managing Trustees (usually the Joint Council) to negotiate a system of regular inspection. One of the partner denominations' (or some other equally rigorous) system should be followed, since capital money from both denominations is at stake.

²² Rules relating to committees or working groups should be appended to the constitution, but do not form an intrinsic part of it and may therefore be altered by formal decision of the LCP Church Council.

A sharing agreement enables a church to use another church's buildings as if it were its own – i.e. its own worship styles and practice are fully allowable.

Usually, an existing building already owned by one of the partner churches will remain vested in that church. A LCP Committee will normally be specified in the sharing agreement. This will comprise an equal number of representatives from each partner church. Its task is to decide on matters relating to the management and care of the building and the raising of capital money to be spent on major works or extensions.

There should always be a sharing agreement on a new church building which is planned ecumenically from the start. Capital money from both partner denominations can be put into a building covered by a sharing agreement. The arrangements for financing the day-to-day upkeep should reflect the amount of use being made of the building and may also take into account the size or ability to pay of the respective congregations. These matters need to be handled sensitively and realistically.

It is possible to have 'mirror image' sharing agreements on two or more buildings in the locality. Sharing agreements may also be made in respect of a Church hall or minister's house. The latter will be especially appropriate where an alternating scheme of ministry is being entered into.

NB: Many churches allow other congregations to use all or part of their premises on a regular basis. There is sometimes a reluctance on the part either of the 'host' or the 'guest' church to sign a sharing agreement. If regular shared use is envisaged – particularly if the 'guest' church does not have access to any other building for worship – a sharing agreement is strongly advocated.

Having a sharing agreement puts the 'guest' church into a stronger position that may be afforded by a tenancy or by a so called informal arrangement to use the premises between certain hours each week. Often, a sharing agreement will lead to the development of closer working between the partner churches which may in time come to be expressed in a covenanted partnership or a single congregation partnership. On the other hand, sharing agreements should have written into them a way in which they can be terminated if necessary.

The issue of liability insurance cover needs to be dealt with fully in any sharing agreement.

Guidance on documentation for Chaplaincy, Mission and Education Partnerships

(1) The content of a Covenant or Declaration of Intent will usually include:

- ❖ A theological basis for working together.
- ❖ A commitment to prayer and decision making which is always aware of the other partners in the Covenant.
- ❖ A commitment among the ministers to meet regularly for prayer and consultation.
- ❖ A commitment to clearly named objectives in the area of mission and ministry served by the ministers.
- ❖ A commitment to the development of the relationship between the ministers and of what they do together or on behalf of another.
- ❖ A recognition that nothing should be required of the ministers which infringes the discipline of the denomination to which each belongs.

These will form the objectives with reference to which the LCP will be reviewed. There will also need to be an acceptance by the constituent denominations that appointments to posts within the LCP will be made only after ecumenical consultation.

(2) An accompanying Constitution would include:

- ❖ A definition of the 'catchment' area covered by the Covenant.
- ❖ A statement of its relationship with each of the partner churches, the diocesan and district covenant facilitators, and with the institution served.
- ❖ Agreed procedures for consultation over appointments, joint decision making and areas of responsibility and accountability (including, as appropriate, provision for ongoing support / management / enabling of the partnership).
- ❖ Provisions for amendment, wider participation, review and development.

In order for the Covenant to be recognised and registered as a LCP, specific examples and evidence of the commitments named in the Covenant or Declaration of Intent may be requested.

Covenant Facilitators

Very often new ideas fail to get up and running simply because there is no-one in place to see that they do! Default mechanisms at local level come into play, and nothing new happens.

It has been agreed that each diocese / district shall appoint a person to monitor Covenant developments or lack of them in the diocese / district.

The person appointed:

- ❖ may be lay or ordained.
- ❖ should be conversant with the processes leading up to the signing of the Covenant.
- ❖ should be in broad sympathy with the thrust of the Covenant, while being sympathetic to those who remain uneasy with it.
- ❖ should be known at local level for the purposes of consultation by both ministers and congregations.
- ❖ should be aware of partner facilitators in the sister diocese(s) / district(s).
- ❖ should be enabled to report on Covenant matters to the relevant Synod, and should work to keep these on the agenda.
- ❖ should be ready to consult appropriately in situations of complexity, particularly with the Covenant Council

Brief:

To encourage the development of the Covenant relationship at local level:

- ❖ by advocating the Covenant where little or nothing appears to be happening.
- ❖ by encouraging where congregations are unsure of how to go forward.
- ❖ by highlighting opportunities for working together.
- ❖ by assisting developments when invited.
- ❖ by highlighting examples of good practice and exploring reasons for poor practice.
- ❖ by being available for consultation to ministers and congregations.
- ❖ by working in conjunction with LCPs in reporting to the Covenant Council.
- ❖ by together facilitating LCPs in any process of review.
- ❖ to register a copy of the Declaration of Intent, Constitution (including any subsequent amendments) and the Report(s) of the review(s) of each LCP with the Covenant Council.

It is important the facilitators are active in pursuing their brief and ready to work with their counterparts in the sister church.

Clearly there are areas where, because of facts-on-the-ground, that facilitators may have to relate, at different times, and in different cases, to a number of different counterparts in the sister church. For example, the Midlands and Southern District includes areas covered by at least four united dioceses.

Where there may be a perceived conflict of interest (e.g. where one or both of the local Covenant Facilitators is a minister or member of one of the congregations involved) the respective bishop or district superintendent may invite a facilitator from a neighbouring diocese or a member of the Covenant Council to act as facilitator for a particular LCP.