

CUMBRIA: THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNTY



The **Methodist** Church 

Where do we go from here?

A key aspiration of our Diocesan Vision is that we should become the first “Ecumenical County”. That was given tangible expression when on Advent Sunday 2011 we signed a Declaration of Intent with our key partners – the Methodist and United Reformed Churches – with the active support of other companion denominations.

The commitments to share mission, ministry and the development of our church buildings together have been taken forward in the work of three “strategy groups” coordinated by the “Growing Together Coordinating Group”. In particular, proposals to form “Mission Communities” to advance that work in local partnerships is well under way.

For those Mission Communities to thrive and serve as agents of our mission to grow God’s kingdom in Cumbria, they need to be as flexible as possible, open to other ecumenical partners as appropriate, and unimpeded by any heavy bureaucratic structure. On the other hand they need permission to allow a true sharing of ministry to happen.

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The wider Church has followed our story closely and is keen to encourage us on the next step of our journey. With that in mind an enabling framework called “**Covenanted Partnerships in Extended Areas**” has been put forward. The title may not be a headline grabber! But it is almost tailor made to allow

us to go forward together and share the rich resources God has blessed us with; whilst at the same time ensuring that the integrity of our particular traditions is maintained, and in a way consistent with the rules that govern our churches.

What will a Covenanted Partnership (CPEA) achieve?

- It will support initiatives, such as the formation of Mission Communities, which enable local ecumenical relationships to flourish in a way that serves the wider mission of the Church.
- It will enable Covenant partners to share ministry across the whole area of the Covenant
- and to develop joint strategies for the deployment of ministry for the sake of mission

What shape will it take?

As a church we are familiar with Local Ecumenical Partnerships known as LEP's. There are a number across the diocese, from Walney to Patterdale, from Ambleside to Ennerdale. They take different forms, but all have the advantage of giving permission for a greater degree of shared ministry than is

otherwise legally possible. They ensure the blessing and support of each participating church for the enabling of this sharing together. A CPEA would extend this permission across our county for all the churches that choose to participate in it. The more participants, the more effective such a Partnership would be in giving substance to our claim to be the first Ecumenical County.

A Covenanted Partnership will enable partners to share ministry across the whole area of the covenant.

Indeed we hope that the vast majority of our PCC's will see this as an important step forward that they want to be part of.

What will it permit to happen?

In general terms it will help to ensure that we take seriously our commitment to share as much as we can across our Mission Communities. But that will be particularly focussed around our worship of God, which is the key visible expression of the presence of his people gathered together in each place.

So entering in to a Covenanted Partnership will allow for

- Methodist and United Reformed Church ministers to conduct Baptisms and preside at Holy Communion in our churches (through the provisions of the Ecumenical Canon B44). [*Funerals and Services of the Word are already covered by Ecumenical Canon B43, which applies beyond formally agreed partnerships*].
- Equally, Anglican clergy to conduct Baptisms and preside at Holy Communion in United Reformed and Methodist churches
- Services of Joint Confirmation, which can provide a strong statement that we are growing disciples together.

It's not all about what happens in church though. Through this mechanism we will spell out our commitment to plan the deployment of ministry together across our Mission Communities. Whilst fully interchangeable ministry is not yet legally possible, it remains an important goal of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, and one which we very much share.

Therefore throughout the Covenanted Partnership we will be involved in each other's appointments, and ministry will then be shared as fully as possible, always allowing for local circumstances.

How and when will this happen?

It depends first of all on the commitment of our Church Leaders. The Bishop, the Chair of the Methodist District and the Area President of the United Reformed Church, will invite their own churches to participate. The process beyond that will be different for each denomination.

For the Church of England we will invite our Parochial Church Councils to consider carefully and prayerfully this leaflet. PCCs and Parochial Church Meetings will be asked to consider a resolution confirming their wish to become part of a county-wide Covenanted Partnership. Once significant coverage of the County has been achieved Diocesan Synod will be asked to confirm the Covenant. It will then be signed by Church Leaders.

Where can we get further details?

The following links will help you to access supporting documents:-

NB The proposal for CPEA's has arisen directly as a result of the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. So the documents refer to a Partnership between those two Churches. We have been assured though that in our context such a Partnership can be created which includes the United Reformed Church.

A detailed explanation of the proposal for CPEA's:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/england/methodists/covenant-partnerships-in-extended-areas.aspx>

The latest report of the Anglican Methodist Covenant (especially Section7):

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/england/meth/new-jic-report-the-challenge-of-the-covenant.aspx>

A guide to the Ecumenical Canons :

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/work-other-churches/resources/the-ecumenical-canons.aspx>