



Local Churches Together

A leaflet from the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR)

In all our ecumenical involvement, Friends endeavour to combine a strong sense of the need to be true to our testimonies with a desire to be 'answering that of God' in the members of other churches. At every level, Friends, like other churches, have to decide whether, how closely and how formally, to establish ecumenical links with their neighbours. This leaflet is designed to help Friends in this process of discernment, drawing on the shared experience of Quaker Meetings from around the country. Not all the suggestions in this leaflet will be applicable at every level, but we hope that Friends will find something of value for their particular situation.

Our Ecumenical Involvement

Quaker local ecumenical involvement is varied and vigorous. Friends also join with other churches in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, united worship and study courses, house groups, local events, social projects, and charity collections. Team chaplaincies in universities, hospitals and prisons often have enthusiastic Quaker input. Friends also make common cause on campaigns such as Trade Justice, and help to promote concerns such as the environment, anti-racism and housing.

Local Churches Together

BYM's membership of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) does not automatically make Friends members of Local Churches Together (LCTs). This is for each group of Friends to decide for themselves. They may choose informal co-operation with local churches, which can still be close and productive. Some meetings may become involved in a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) (see below). However, where Friends have formal involvement with local churches, a common model is the LCT.

Ecumenical 'borders' of LCTs and other groupings do not always

coincide with our Quaker structure of PMs, MMs and GMs. It is for Friends locally to discern how best to become involved. If Quakers become involved early in the life of a LCT, this give an opportunity for Friends' testimonies to be heard.

Differences between Friends and other churches may become sticking points during the process of agreeing a LCT covenant or constitution. One of the most common problems arises when the proposed covenant includes some kind of credal statement as a basis of membership. To help Meetings who are wrestling with this kind of situation, we have prepared a supplement on covenants and constitutions.

Quaker Voices

In joining with the other churches, we do not compromise our Quaker values. Many Friends active in ecumenical work have found that their input from a Quaker perspective is greatly appreciated. For others, it has been more problematic. Differences of approach or understanding in questions of faith may loom large, or maybe there is resistance from within our own Meeting to involvement with other churches. However, Meetings which have confronted these challenges have often found them to be growing points. Marple PM, a Meeting which felt unable to sign a covenant with their LCT, but has nevertheless maintained links with the other churches, reports:

Our good relationship with the other churches has been maintained. Though our very low numbers prevent our taking part in many activities, our distinctive contribution is much valued.

The experience of engaging with other churches is one that can challenge us to articulate our own position more clearly. One Friend wrote that her experience as a LCT representative had given her different perspectives on how people approach God, in a way that enabled her to hone her own insights and faith.

Steps on the way

For a Meeting contemplating whether to join a LCT, or working through difficulties in an existing relationship, the following steps may be helpful:

- Re-examining what *Quaker Faith and Practice* and *Advices and Queries* have to say may help in working through questions within the Meeting, and also in formulating responses to the LCT. The

Meeting could also consider offering QFP to the other churches, to help them to understand our position better.

- A study group, perhaps making reference to *Creeds and the Search for Unity*¹ or *To Lima with Love*. If there are Friends who for various reasons are wary of joining inter-church bodies, this may help to bring into the open the deep feelings that Friends may experience around ecumenical issues.
- It may be worthwhile considering holding a 'threshing meeting' or 'meeting for clearness' (QFP 12:22-26), as St Albans PM did

in order to establish how our business methods should be working, how we ought to be waiting for the leadings of God in this matter and how we can improve our listening to each other.

- In some LCTs, Friends may encounter theological elements which they find particularly challenging. Study groups may also be helpful in working through our own understanding of Jesus or Christ so as to be confident in responding to such positions.
- Where language is a stumbling block, it may be helpful to work through possible responses to unfamiliar theological language, and ways of articulating our own faith. If a situation doesn't offer the opportunity for an in-depth discussion, it can be helpful to be prepared with shorter responses. When confronted by questions such as 'Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?' we might say, 'This is not the language I would use...' or perhaps, 'I think we would put it in another way...'. On questions of salvation or redemption, we might respond that 'It is in God's hands'. Each individual may find a different response with which they feel comfortable.
- After the lengthy process through which they established a relationship with their LCT, Exmouth PM offered the following comments about relating to the other churches which Friends may wish to consider (perhaps by forming suitable 'Queries'.)
 - Don't be too much on the defensive about the position of Friends. Quietly but positively (not aggressively) help others

¹ Now available in *The End of Words: Issues in Contemporary Quaker Theology*

to see that ... we do have a particular contribution to make that is of value to all.

- As a corollary to the above, make clear that you recognise and value other traditions. Share in their life and worship as much as you can.

- It may be helpful to make contacts with Friends involved in ecumenical activity in other PMs or MMs. QCCIR may be able to put you in touch with meetings with similar experiences, and would welcome any news of what is happening locally. QCCIR can be contacted via the Secretary at Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

Other concerns and issues

Worshipping together may raise issues different from those which arise when working together on a common concern. QCCIR offers separate leaflets on the Eucharist, and on organising a Meeting for Worship to be attended by members of other churches. Some Friends may feel more comfortable than others in participating in different forms of worship, and it must be for each to determine where they wish to take part, and where they wish to stand aside. However, occasions of shared worship can be an opportunity to learn from each other, and to find an appreciation of different traditions. This works both ways, and a number of Friends have reported that through Quaker ecumenical involvement, appreciation of the value of silence instead of words has become more common in other churches.

Some Friends feel that we should not only be relating to the Christian churches but should be reaching out to other faith communities. It may be that this wider vision is something that we as Friends have to contribute to other churches. It has taken most of the last century to develop inter-church relations to the stage they are at now; is inter-faith encounter the next task for the churches?

Ecumenical Structures

Since national ecumenical bodies were established in 1990, Friends have been participating as full members. Current bodies are:

- Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS).
- Churches Together in Wales (CYTŪN).
- Churches Together in England (CTE).

- Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).²

In England, regional bodies also exist, such as West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council and South Cleveland & North Yorkshire Ecumenical Council. Scotland and Wales do not have funding for this intermediate level of support.

Sponsoring Bodies

In England, regional or county ecumenical bodies normally act as Sponsoring Bodies. In Scotland, ACTS has set up the Scottish Churches' National Sponsoring Body to assist the formation and progress of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) through pooling of experience, and to forestall and resolve constitutional difficulties. It is also setting up Regional Advisory Groups to work with LEPs at presbytery and diocese level.

Covenants and Local Ecumenical Partnerships

After working closely together for some time, two or more local churches may wish to strengthen their links by pledging to work in harmony and to do as much as is possible together. Such a pledge, when made in the form of a solemn written declaration, registered with a Sponsoring or Intermediate body, is known as a Covenant. Some LCTs may decide to move to a covenant relationship. For some, this relationship may develop into an LEP.

An LEP requires a formal written agreement affecting the ministry, congregational life, buildings or mission projects of two or more denominations: and a recognition of that agreement by the Sponsoring Body and appropriate denominational authorities. An LEP can be between churches joining together as a single congregation or to share premises, or between churches co-operating in a 'sector ministry' such as chaplaincy to, for example, schools and colleges, prisons, hospitals, economic migrants, industry, city- or town-centres.

A variety of leaflets on LEPs can be downloaded from www.cte.org.uk.

² Britain Yearly Meeting is in membership of all four national bodies. Ireland Yearly Meeting continues to be in membership of the Irish Council of Churches and of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

For further reading and study

Free leaflets can be downloaded from www.cte.org.uk:

- ❑ Sharers, Guests or Tenants? What does it mean to share church buildings in a multi-cultural society?
- ❑ Sharing our Spiritual Treasures. A practical and popular leaflet, aimed at helping Christians share their experience, appreciate different traditions, and find nourishment for their faith.
- ❑ Growing in Partnership. A 'rough guide' for local congregations forming a new Local Ecumenical Partnership.

And from www.acts-scotland.org:

- ❑ Progressing in Partnership. A step by step guide for congregations wishing to pursue local partnerships with their ecumenical neighbours
- ❑ Declarations of Ecumenical Welcome. Ways to welcome Christians of another church tradition and include them in the life of your congregation

This Growing Unity. A handbook on ecumenical development in the counties, large cities and new towns of England, by Roger Nunn. 2nd Edn. 1998. ISBN 1-874295-08-5. £4.95.

Together Locally. A handbook for local churches seeking to work together, by Jenny Carpenter. 1998. ISBN 1-874295-13-1. £5.95.

Travelling Together. A handbook on LEPs by Elizabeth Welch and Flora Winfield. 1995. ISBN 1-874295-09-3. £5.95.

Enriching Communion. This book aims to see how our understanding and experience of 'communion' can be broader, deeper and richer. 2006. £4.95.

Unity in the Spirit: Quakers and the ecumenical pilgrimage, QHS (out of print but your Meeting library may have a copy)

To Lima with Love, QHS (out of print but your Meeting library may have a copy)

The End of Words: Issues in Contemporary Quaker Theology.
Including 'Creeds and the search for Unity: A Quaker View' by Rex
Ambler. ISBN 0-852453-67-1 £6.00

Windows – reflections on a year's travel as Joseph Rowntree Quaker
Fellows, by Sylvia and Irwin Barnes.

Friends and Encounters with Other Faiths, QCCIR.

Organising a Meeting for Worship with those from other churches and
other faiths, QCCIR

Friends and Ecumenical Occasions: the Eucharist, QCCIR

A brief guide to ecumenical and Quaker acronyms used in this leaflet:

ACTS - Action of Churches Together in Scotland

BYM - Britain Yearly Meeting

CTBI - Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

CTE - Churches Together in England

CYTÛN - Churches Together in Wales

LCT - Local Churches Together

LEP - Local Ecumenical Partnership

QCCIR - Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations

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