



CCU Resources 2007

LEPs in Changing Times

Priorities and Perspectives Appendix A

A Letter to the Churches

Sent to church leaders following the Consultation on LEPs 2002

There have been many changes in society and in the LEPs themselves since the last national consultation in 1994. The 860+ LEPs are now grouped in 6 categories:

- 1) Single congregation partnerships, integrating all aspects of church life and work
- 2) Congregations in covenanted partnership (often developing from a Churches Together group)
- 3) Shared building partnerships
- 4) Chaplaincy partnerships
- 5) Mission partnerships e.g. rural and industrial mission, Christian broadcasting
- 6) Education partnerships: joint training and schools.

In November 2002, 77 denominational and ecumenical representatives gathered for a major consultation to address issues raised by the churches and those working in LEPs.

Gethin Abraham-Williams, Moderator of Cytûn (the ecumenical body for Wales) gave the introductory address, offering 3 pointers for consideration in the discussions:

- > God, rather than our structures, should be at the centre of our thinking.
- > God as Trinity leads us to think of relationships: with God and with each other.
- > Relationships are personal, so we must take seriously the local level, where relationships are made.

Bible studies were led by Elizabeth Welch, with water as the theme - water in the desert, Living Water, water springing up from the earth, water flowing and overflowing, water seeping into dry places, being rooted by the water - a theme rich in imagery for reflecting on the life and mission of our churches, whether in LEPs or not.

Eight aspects of LEPs were addressed in Issue Groups:

1. Ministry -deployment and availability
2. LEPs growing out of themselves - identity, expansion, change.
3. "Imagine.. ." - what would LEPs look like if unity had arrived?
4. Team Work - chaplaincy teams. Can county ecumenical bodies and leaders' groups work as teams?
5. Worship and Spirituality - valuing each other's traditions; working at the 'edges'.
6. "We're all Christians here!" ... fears that LEPs are loosening links with their parents. Oversight, reviews.
7. The Impact of Today's Culture on the Churches: mission responses and approaches.
8. Ecclesiology, 'When is a Church a Church?' change, dispersed congregations, recognition.

The groups were asked to consider all categories of LEPs in their discussions, and both urban and rural contexts. The range of participants meant a good breadth of views and approaches and there was a session for meeting in denominational groups to pick up on points of specific denominational concern.

Comment

- It became clear that the 8 issues are the right issues. Work was done on them at the consultation and will be continued by the appropriate bodies. The Group for Local Unity, (a Co-ordinating Group of Churches Together in England) will oversee the follow-up process.



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- For local ministry, categories 1 and 2 LEPs offer different ways of working and could be said to represent two different models of unity: so-called organic unity and reconciled diversity models. Both have a validity, but some partners, notably the Roman Catholic Church, are only able to participate in category 2.
- There was much lively and productive discussion of the two models and the value of the second for teaching about covenants and the depth of relationship and commitment expressed in these. It was fully acknowledged that in practice, many of the category 2 LEPs do not have the quality of relationship which should be implied by their covenants. However, at their best they are fruitful, demanding and challenging.
- Faith and order questions arise most sharply in single congregation partnerships, especially in the area of Christian Initiation.
- Other categories of LEP are seen as something to be celebrated. There was much discussion about how their orientation for mission and positive experiences of team working in the chaplaincies could be fed into the denominations to lead us forward. Some denominations participate more fully and enthusiastically in these categories of partnership e.g. the Salvation Army.
- There is an impatience about ecumenical structures, often contrasted with the relational aspects, but structures protect our joint working from unilateral decision-making and are signs of our commitment to one another in Christ - a commitment we do not always find easy. Structures hold us to account. One discussion group looked for structures which are 'light, robust, flexible and purposive'.
- LEPs are not the only way of working together. We need to promote whatever serves God and his world best, but the challenge remains: to continue to be true to our mutual commitment as Churches Together, and to give visible expression to this as widely as possible.
- The global context for the LEPs was emphasised in a session given by Sheila Maxey of the United Reformed Church who spoke about the recent international conference for United and Uniting Churches of the world. Other countries do look to England for ways of coming together and we have

much to offer - but also much to learn from the experiences of other ecumenical patterns and structures. Many endorsed the statement from the report of the international conference:

'A model of unity, if it is to deserve such a label, must be tangible enough to make a witness to the world, intense enough that those in it recognise their responsibility for one another, costly enough that the churches are changed as a result of being in it, and intentional enough that the Body of Christ is renewed through the sharing of gifts. We also agree, however, that no one model guarantees or denies such an outcome. The new models remind us to look for partners in unexpected places and to expect to be surprised by what God will do in our midst'.

Attached are summaries of the Issue Group Discussions and an article from Bill Snelson, General Secretary of Churches Together in England, which was published in the February 2003 edition of *Pilgrim Post*

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