

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BEDFORDSHIRE

CONSTITUTION

1. Objects and Aims

The objects of Churches Together in Bedfordshire shall be

- (1) to advance the Christian Religion and Education by
 - (i) participating in the life and work of Churches Together in England as an intermediate body ;
 - (ii) sponsoring Local Ecumenical Partnerships;
 - (iii) encouraging those bodies and individuals in the Churches who share a similar remit or concern to work together;
 - (iv) taking any further actions which may encourage the development of the ecumenical agenda.

- (2) to relieve financial hardship anywhere in the world (by making grants from funds either raised directly or co-ordinated fundraising efforts by member churches).

Churches Together in Bedfordshire shall seek within its general objects to

- (3) be a visible sign of the Churches' commitment to one another and to assist the Churches in the visible expression of Christian unity

- (4) affirm, support and service local ecumenism, whether it be formal or informal, structured or unstructured and in particular to encourage the formation and affiliation of local Churches Together groups.

- (5) act as Sponsoring Body for present and future Local Ecumenical Partnerships, ensuring for them the provision of appropriate ongoing advice and support and proper periodic review.

- (6) encourage shared worship and prayer, learning, service, and evangelism, with each church sharing with others the treasures of its tradition.

- (7) encourage full and early ecumenical consultation so that the churches may use resources, including buildings and deployment of personnel, with sensitivity and in the interest of good stewardship.

- (8) provide a meeting point for Church Leaders and representatives within its area.

- (9) keep the churches informed about ecumenical initiatives within Bedfordshire, Luton and beyond, in particular those promoted by Churches Together in England and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

- (10) encourage the fostering of good relations with other faith communities.

(11) enable churches to respond to the needs and opportunities of society, to assist them in their relations with local government, and other statutory, voluntary and private bodies, and, where appropriate, make representations on behalf of the Churches, either independently or with others.

2. Vision

It is important to hold on to a vision for ecumenical working; that we do this not just for the sake of it, but because we believe that unity is both God's gift to us and our calling. Our engagement in the mission of God is better done together, sharing the riches of our traditions and our resources for the sake of the kingdom of God. We believe that the Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee exists primarily to enable and encourage the Churches themselves - denominations, congregations and individuals - to act together rather than separately.

We affirm that we would follow the Milton Keynes review of ecumenical structures in seeking to be:

- less about structures and more about relationships
- less about membership and more about participation
- less about representation and more about friendship
- less about duty and more about desire
- less about guest list and more about open invitation
- less about doing to and more about doing with

3. Underlying assumptions

1. There is need for a county-wide Bedfordshire committee to co-ordinate, develop and promote ecumenical working 'not as an extra, which absorbs energy, but as a dimension of all that we do, which releases energy through the sharing of resources'.*
2. Structures need to be as light and flexible as possible.
3. The vision and input of Church Leaders is needed, as well as their continuing commitment to the 2003 Bedfordshire Church Leaders' Covenant and their oversight of its being put into practice.
4. There is need for oversight of LEPs.
5. The ecumenical journey has more people involved in it than simply those committed to the formal ecumenical structures.
6. Grass roots ecumenism emerges in many ways.

4. Legal Matters

It would be good for CTB/ BEC to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Because full details on this have yet to be finalised by the government, there is no immediate urgency to make a decision. It will become more urgent according to Charity Commission timetables for all excepted charities to become registered charities in one way or another.

* Introduction to *The Next Steps for Churches Together in Pilgrimage* BCC/CTS 1989 p. 3

5. Structures

5.1 Churches Together in Bedfordshire

- To be open to all churches across the county in line with CTE guidelines
- To allow other ecumenical organisations to be Bodies in Association
- To have a regular e-letter to keep people in touch with initiatives in Beds and nationally
- To meet once a year in the Forum as the AGM
- To meet as appropriate at other times with speakers, workshops, debate, etc., in county-wide or area gatherings that are not linked to business meetings.

Examples of possible such events might be:

- Holding an evening to help the churches of Bedfordshire to understand our diversity by inviting smaller denominations and/or black majority churches to share something of themselves and their vision;
- hosting a meeting in the autumn to share ideas about ways of celebrating Holy Week and Easter as Churches Together, enabling groups to learn from one another;
- to look at an issue that lots of Churches Together groups are working on - street pastors, migrant workers, etc.;
- 'clustering' CT groups for mutual encouragement ;
- an 'information' exchange: Christian exhibition and trade stalls etc.

5.2 Bedfordshire Ecumenical Committee

- To be the Managing Trustees of Churches Together in Bedfordshire
- To have oversight of LEPs – formation, constitutions, reviews, liturgies, etc.
- To respond to CTE initiatives
- To plan and oversee the meetings of the Forum and other events
- To network with other ecumenical initiatives in the county
- To oversee the development and promotion of ecumenical working

5.3 Composition of BEC

Chair - to be line manager to the CEDO and to maintain links with Church Leaders in Bedfordshire

Treasurer

To be appointed by the denominations one each of the following, who should be people with direct access to their Church Leaders:

Anglican

Baptist

Methodist

Moravian

Quaker

Roman Catholic

Salvation Army

URC

Miracle Church of God, or other Church in membership of an association of Black-led Churches

Congregational Federation

Up to three other persons with ecumenical interest and expertise including local folk from CT groups and LEPs.

BEC to be serviced by CEDO and an honorary secretary

BEC to select its own chair from among its membership to serve for three years.
To have power to set up sub groups with the power to co-opt for detailed work
(e.g. LEP constitutions group, or forum planning group).
Members to have the option to send an alternate to a meeting they cannot attend.

Such a composition gives a standing group of 11, with up to three others, and two persons in attendance by virtue of role, making a total of 16.

5.4 CEDO role

The CEDO's role would be primarily to facilitate networking. So instead of looking for a Link person to each LEP from BEC (which has been a struggle to find in recent years), the CEDO would encourage each LEP to nominate a person who could be a Link person to another LEP for mutual sharing, and the CEDO would bring Link persons together in occasional meetings to support and resource them in their role. Link persons would also be invited to report to BEC and to be present at particular meetings concerned with their linked LEP.

Likewise clergy in LEPs and Chairpersons of local CT groups could be brought together at times to discuss common concerns and share ways of working.

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