

## THE REVIEW OF LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

*Based on West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council Information Paper 8*

A Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) can be a point of growth in the life of the whole Church<sup>1</sup>. The ecumenical instruments – national, regional and county-wide – aim to support them and see LEPs as part of the developing life of the constituent denominations. It is important that LEPs continue to feel part of the Churches which instituted them, and important that the Churches feel that the LEPs still belong to them. LEPs have experiences to share with the wider Church, and the wider Church, or the Churches, may have experience and concerns to share with the LEP. A Review is an opportunity for mutual enrichment; it may uncover potential, pinpoint areas of growth and development, highlight achievement and help to establish priorities.

When an LEP is set up, part of the agreement or Constitution is that a Review should take place every five or so years, and that the Review should be arranged by the Sponsoring Body. The Sponsoring Body consults an LEP about when a Review should take place and chooses a group of people to undertake the Review. Sometimes an LEP might wish to be reviewed before it is required by its Constitution; this can also be arranged. It is always hoped that those who belong to the LEP will see the LEP as a chance to look more closely at their own Christian life, work and witness. **It is not meant to be an inspection!**

Some Churches have regular reviews or visitations of their local churches, whether or not they are in an LEP. Where these Churches are partners in an LEP, the aim is to tie together the Church's own visitation and the ecumenical review.

Those who are asked by the Sponsoring Body to be members of a Review Team are people who are reckoned to have sound and independent judgement and a fair amount of wisdom and sensitivity. Usually a person from each of the Churches participating in the LEP is invited, along with a further 'neutral' person from a Church not immediately involved in the LEP.

The County Ecumenical Officer consults the LEP about the proposal for a Review at an early stage, establishes if there are special concerns that might influence the choice of members of the Review Team and, in consultation with the Sponsoring Body, forms the Review Team.

The County Ecumenical Officer arranges a meeting between the Review Team and key people from the LEP. Introductions are made and information exchanged, and the LEP's documentation is made available to the Panel. There is an opportunity for questions and members of the review team can begin to get the feel of the LEP and are able to visit its premises. At the close of this meeting, the team has the opportunity to meet privately, divide up between them the various activities involved in the review process, and fix further meetings.

The Review Team is completely free to pursue its own line of enquiry and to attend meetings, services or activities as seems appropriate. There are no set questions of enquiry, since these might have a limiting influence on possible judgements; Reviewers may follow whatever course seems necessary. When the Reviewers feel that they have enough information and that their opinions have taken shape, they produce a report which goes initially to the County Ecumenical Officer.

A member of the Review Team, or the County Ecumenical Officer, will normally discuss the report informally, out of courtesy and to correct any factual errors, with the ministerial

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, and generally, 'Church' means the whole Church in every time and places, 'Churches' means the national Churches (denominations) or associations of churches, especially the 23 member Churches of Churches Together in England, and 'church' means a local congregation or parish of one of the Churches.

staff of the LEP, prior to the report being presented to the Sponsoring Body. The Sponsoring Body then receives and considers the report of the Review Team which has been acting on its behalf.

Soon after the Sponsoring Body has accepted the Report, members of the Review Team and the County Ecumenical Officer present it to the Ecumenical Church Council of the LEP and all involved in its life. After being presented locally, the Report is made available to people or committees of those Churches which are partners in the LEP, together with local comments. A summary of the Report and comments from the LEP is given to the Church Leaders.

A year later, the Sponsoring Body follows up the Review Report, seeing what further action is needed and what further conclusions may be drawn from the Review experience.