

Extract from 'Making it Work':-
BAPTISTS IN LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS
WITH THE METHODIST CHURCH AND THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
(Baptist Union of Great Britain, Faith and Unity Executive Committee 1998)

INTRODUCTION

The following sets out some of the specific issues which need to be discussed if a Local Ecumenical Partnership (*involving the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church*) includes Baptist participation. It is not intended to fully describe the differences involved, but to give a flavour of the way that many Baptist congregations organise themselves.¹

1. MEMBERSHIP

The Baptist Union of Great Britain would, in general, agree with the formula (*used by the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church*) for admitting new members to the partnership and placing them on a common roll. However, we could envisage a problem arising in the case of a person who had been baptised as an infant wishing to be "re-baptised" as a believer and being received into membership. The Baptist Union has negotiated guideline documents with both the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church which offer advice on what to do in this situation. These are available from either of the denominations which produced them.

2. MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENTS

Baptist ministers, like United Reformed Church ministers, are usually called to a pastorate without a fixed term and move in response to a call to another pastorate. We recommend that the advice of the Regional Minister (for settlement issues) for the area is sought when a church is planning to call a Baptist minister.

We strongly advise that Baptist ministers seek **Authorised** status with the Methodist Church, rather than Recognised and Regarded status.

The document 2/B/1-2 above sets out clearly how a minister of another tradition serving as the minister of a Local Ecumenical Partnership in which Baptists are involved can participate in the life of the Union through attending Regional Association events, the Baptist Assembly and standing, if so inclined, for membership of the Baptist Union Council.

3. OTHER MINISTRIES

The Baptist Union of Great Britain has one list of accredited ministers. These are generally operating in what might be termed "Ministries of Word and Sacrament". However, in more recent years discussion has gone on within the Union about the possibility of developing a wider range of accredited ministries, particularly in the areas of youth ministry, church planting and evangelism, administration, social concern and music. Further details about the development and recognition of such ministries can be obtained from the Baptist Union.

Most Baptist churches appoint members to serve as Deacons and/Elders to work with a minister or ministers in the oversight of the church. This is a shared ministry,

¹ More information on any of these topics can be obtained from the Ecumenical Administrator, Baptist Union of Great Britain, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8RT.

though Deacons are not normally ordained and ordination, commission or recognition of Elders is a matter for each local church and not normally the wider Baptist community. Like the United Reformed Church, the Church Secretary carries considerable responsibility for the life of the local church but unlike the United Reformed Church is generally elected from the full body of members at the church meeting.

4. CONSTITUTION

Attention is drawn to the Baptist notes in the Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Partnership Constitutions which are contained in *Ecumenical Notes* (above). The most current edition should always be consulted (Note the current revised edition is 2001.) All LEP constitutions involving Baptists must be agreed by the Constitutions Sub-Group of the Local Ecumenical Committee of the Baptist Union.

5. WORSHIP AND THE SACRAMENTS

Many Baptists, unlike the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, authorise lay presidency at Holy Communion, or the Eucharist. The Church Meeting is the place where members of the church are appointed to preside. These are usually, but not exclusively, Deacons or Elders.

Baptist Eucharistic practice on the whole mirrors that of the United Reformed Church.

6. PROPERTY

The advice of the Baptist Union Corporation, or the regional Trust Corporation if a local church is in trust with such a body, should be sought at an early stage before making any alterations to property. They offer a number of Guidelines Leaflets on all aspects of property management and development.

7. SHARING AGREEMENTS

In most cases, the Trust Deeds on a Baptist property are lodged with the Baptist Union Corporation, or a regional Trust Corporation, who can offer advice on the drafting of Sharing Agreements and legal requirements.

8. FINANCE

The basic differences in the finance of an LEP where Baptists are involved are that the Baptist Union and BMS World Mission do not **require** the church to contribute to national funds, but **recommend** a target figure for each local church as a contribution to the national Home Mission fund and to the work of BMS World Mission. Baptist ministers are paid and maintained by the local church rather than by a central payment agency as in Methodist and United Reformed Churches.

The Home Mission fund exists to help churches who cannot afford to pay a minister themselves and an LEP with Baptist involvement can be eligible for Home Mission support.

If a Baptist minister is in post in an LEP, there needs to be consultation with the appropriate authorities of the other denominations involved as to appropriate contributions to be paid into the central funds of the other denominations.

Baptist churches with as few as 50 members often raise the necessary funding to have their own full-time minister. Home Mission help is available in strategic mission situations for churches, sometimes with fewer than 50 members, but in all instances early consultation with the Regional Association and the Regional Association ministers is suggested.