

The Church in Warden Hill LEP Constitution

1 Practicalities

The Local Ecumenical Partnership shall be known as The Church in Warden Hill. (Church of England and United Reformed Church).

The Partnership is a Church of England in the parish of St Philip & St James, Leckhampton in the Cheltenham Deanery and in the diocese of Gloucester and a United Reformed Church within the United Reformed Church in Cheltenham and West Midlands Synod.

The Ecumenical Partnership primarily serves the community of Warden Hill, Cheltenham and those who associate with it and benefit from its ministry. The area boundary is shown on the attached map.

The Partnership looks for support, encouragement, advice and overview to Gloucestershire Churches Together.

2 Christian Initiation

Baptism shall be administered according to the rite and/or practice of either of the constituent denominations, or according to a rite approved by the participating denominations through Gloucestershire Churches Together, and shall be set, in normal circumstances, within an act of congregational worship. A register of baptisms shall be kept.

All persons involved as candidates or parents in baptism, whether of believers or infants, should proceed with the full knowledge of the options that are available to them. Infant Dedication and Thanksgiving for the Gift of a Child shall be among such options, as shall be a service for the Re-Affirmation of Baptismal Faith, as appropriate.

3 Membership

Preparation for Believer's Baptism and for Confirmation and admission to the full responsibilities and privileges of membership shall be undertaken jointly and shall include specific denominational teaching and instruction. Confirmation and Reception into Church Membership or a transfer and/or extension of membership shall normally be administered at an act of worship according to a rite authorised by Gloucestershire Churches Together, and agreed by the confirming ministers.

Those received into membership by joint Confirmation are thereby members of both denominations.

Those received into membership by transfer and extension of membership are thereby members of both denominations which have received them.

Members of The Church in Warden Hill may declare themselves 'members of either denomination for the purposes of synodical elections.

There shall be a Common Roll, which shall indicate denominational affiliation.

Membership discipline shall be in accordance with denominational procedures. In any particular case, joint members shall be subject to one denomination's discipline as agreed by the Sponsoring Body and the appropriate denominational authorities on the proposal of the Church Council. The standing of any joint member with each denomination shall be reviewed in the light of the outcome of any disciplinary process initiated under this clause.

4 Worship

The Partnership shall respect the faith and practice of both denominations. Worship shall safeguard and present the doctrines, practices, traditions and developing traditions of each denomination and be conducted in accordance with denominational practices and/or using rites adopted by Gloucestershire Churches Together. A balanced and varied pattern of worship shall be aimed for in order to maximise the riches of each tradition and to enable the congregation to explore and express its ecumenical life and aspiration, while at the same time ensuring that worship is accessible and sustaining for all its members. Ordained priests, ministers or other duly authorised persons shall preside at the Eucharist as permitted by denominational legislation.

The authorisations of each denomination apply to that denomination's services.

All those recognised as communicants by both denominations may receive the Sacrament. In arranging services, encouragement shall be given to the participation of the whole congregation, especially Lay Preachers, Readers, and others authorised as leaders of worship or as preachers.

5 Ministry

The Ecumenical Ministry Team shall consist of the local clergy serving the Anglican parish of St. Philip and St. James and the URC in Cheltenham and of any other people duly appointed by both denominations, after reference to Gloucestershire Churches Together.

Denominational procedures shall be followed in the appointment/call of Ministers. Recognising, however, the importance of continuity, the Partnership expects that those responsible for the appointment/call of Ministers shall select persons who shall develop the Partnership ecumenically. To this end, when it is anticipated that a minister or member of the Ecumenical Ministry Team serving the Partnership may leave, or before any major changes in the responsibility of the minister presently in post are considered, or if additions to the ecumenical ministry team are being contemplated, the agreed procedure of Gloucestershire Churches Together shall be followed.

Newly appointed ministers shall be inducted/ welcomed at a service at which they, other members of the Ecumenical Team, the Local Ecumenical Partnership congregation and representatives of Gloucestershire Churches Together shall affirm/reaffirm the Declaration of Intent.

All ministers serving the Partnership shall seek or be offered appropriate status within both denominations.

6 Decision-Making

Joint decision making for the Partnership shall be by means of an Ecumenical Church Council and a Congregational Church Meeting. The composition of the Ecumenical Church Council shall be as shown on the attached Terms of Reference.

The Council's chairperson shall be elected from its membership. The Ecumenical Church Council shall set up such committees as it may from time to time consider necessary: the current structure is appended to this Constitution but does not form part of it. For the purposes of the United Reformed Church, the Ecumenical Church Council shall be the equivalent of the Elders' Meeting. For the Church of England, care should be taken to ensure that as far as possible the membership of the Council required for synodical purposes within the Church of England is the same as that of the Ecumenical Church Council.

Denominational/Church Councils or other committees shall be constituted and meet as frequently as required for purposes determined by the respective denomination/church.

A Congregational Church Meeting, which shall comprise all those on the Common Roll, shall meet at least twice a year. Those not on the Roll may normally attend/speak, but not vote. There shall be an Annual General Meeting, normally in March or April, at which the independently examined / audited accounts for the previous financial year shall be presented for adoption, an independent examiner / auditor appointed for the current year, and elections to the Ecumenical Church Council (including denominational elections) shall be held. Where a Special General Meeting is called, those eligible to vote shall be those qualified to vote at Annual General Meetings.

The Partnership shall maintain a proper relationship with the appropriate local and regional denominational bodies, fulfilling necessary constitutional requirements. These bodies are, at present, the Parish of St. Philip & St James, Leckhampton, the Church of England Cheltenham Deanery and Gloucester Diocese, the United Reformed Church in Cheltenham, the URC Gloucester Area and the United Reformed Church West Midlands Synod.

7 Buildings

The premises of the LEP comprise St Christopher's Church and the Warden Hill United Reformed Church building and both shall be subject to a Sharing Agreement under the provisions of The Sharing of Church Buildings Act, 1969. They shall be subject to inspection in accordance with the current Regulations of the denomination in whom ownership of the property is vested. The terms of the Sharing Agreement shall take precedence if any conflict is perceived with this Constitution.

Where a Sharing Agreement is entered into under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act, 1969, financial and management arrangements for the building shall be as set out in The Sharing Agreement. The Joint Council required under the provisions of the Sharing Agreement must meet when new capital money is to be raised or proposals to buy or sell land or property are being taken. The text of the Sharing Agreement may allow the Joint Council to delegate its day to day management functions to the Ecumenical Church Council.

8 Finance

The advice of Gloucestershire Churches Together shall be sought over denominational financial assessment, and a policy agreed with both parties involved.

There shall be a common purse. All monies donated to the Partnership through collections, gifts etc. shall be accounted for to the Ecumenical Church Council, the Congregational Meeting and the Annual General Meeting. Out of the common income there shall be discharged:-

- a) the expenses of ministry and of the administrative costs of the Partnership.
- b) financial obligations to the central and other funds of both denominations.
- c) gifts to other societies and charities, as determined by the Council and Congregational Meeting.

9 Ongoing Development

Other churches in or near the neighbourhood of the Partnership may negotiate for participation in the Partnership at any time, subject to the agreement of the appropriate denominational authorities and Gloucestershire Churches Together.

The Partnership looks to Gloucestershire Churches Together to review its work and witness every seven years, or sooner, with reference to its objectives set out in the Declaration of Intent and the Constitution.

The Partnership shall only be terminated with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities and of Gloucestershire Churches Together. Any amendments to this Constitution shall be made by a Special General Meeting called for that purpose. Amendments shall be made only with the approval of the appropriate denominational authorities and of Gloucestershire Churches Together.