

A Congregations in Covenanted Partnership Local Ecumenical Partnership is made up of two or more congregations in a village, town or area. A Covenanted Partnership has to be built on a solid foundation of friendship and trust between both the clergy and the congregations of the partner churches. These churches continue to worship in their own buildings with their own structures, but will have a high degree of commitment to sharing in worship, prayer, study, and community outreach. While each congregation maintains its own ethos and tradition, these will be shared with its partner congregations. All the partner churches commit themselves to look outwards and work together in their communities for evangelisation and mission.

A Catholic parish entering into a Covenanted Partnership will continue to work within the Deanery and Diocesan structures while sharing as much of its local church life as possible with partner congregations.

It is important that the people of the parish are fully involved and aware that the parish is entering a new commitment and that they agree to this. A Covenant Partnership is like an engagement and should not be entered into lightly. There should be a high degree of co-operation between partner churches for some time before entering into this more committed relationship.

‘It takes time. You need to prepare everyone and consult properly to get the majority on board. The terms of the Covenant need to be well discussed and traditional Catholics need to be heard.’ *Parish Priest, Hartlepool*

What’s different?

The parish has made a **FIRM COMMITMENT**. The Covenanted congregations will increasingly share in united worship, prayer, study, service in the community and social events. Parishioners should be active in all the ecumenical projects. Priests and ministers should meet regularly.

‘We have a sense of purpose when we meet together but we have to be careful not to move too quickly for the majority of the congregation.’ *Parish Priest, Hartlepool*

Entering into a *Congregations in Covenanted Partnership* enables congregations to experiment with varying forms of united worship.

‘Could we have a bit of flexibility over the Sunday Mass times, so that we can participate in united worship occasionally on a Sunday morning?’ *Parish Priest, Northumberland*

There will be opportunities to share the parish congregational life and spirituality with partner congregations and to share in their life. ‘Core’ work such as bereavement support, baptism and marriage preparation, shared pastoral care, and community projects at home and abroad can be shared as the Partnership grows in trust and confidence. **It is likely that partner churches will want to share their sacramental life, so Catholic people need to understand the teaching of the Church and be able to explain it clearly and with sensitivity.**

(See the norms in *One Bread, One Body*, a teaching document of the Eucharist published by the Bishops’ Conference, which explains Catholic discipline as regards intercommunion.)

Consultation over the appointment of clergy is an important part of the life and future of the Covenanted Partnership. The Bishop will be aware of the ecumenical nature of the parish and should try to consult ecumenically over the appointment of priests, in order to ensure that the life and future of the Covenanted Partnership is maintained.

Good communication is essential if congregations are to share their life with each other.

Support and advice will also be available from the Denominational Ecumenical Officer (DEO), and from the Sponsoring Body through the County Ecumenical Officer (CEO). (See *Local Ecumenical Partnerships Introductory leaflet*)

The Diocese, through the Diocesan Ecumenical Commission and the DEO will support the life of the Covenanted Partnership.

How to start;

It is very important to consult the DEO and CEO right at the start. A Statement of Intent or Covenant must be agreed and a Constitution written.

These documents must be agreed by the partnership congregations, then by parent denominations and finally, the Sponsoring Body. Guidelines are available from the Ecumenical Officers. They will give advice and support.

NB – Why not invite people from another LEP to come and talk it over? The DEO or CEO will give you details.

When the consultation process has been completed, the inauguration of the new Partnership should be celebrated at a service, when the Bishop and other Church Leaders are present to sign the Covenant with the local clergy and laity. **The Diocese is then committed to support the Ecumenical Partnership.**

Good Practice

1. Display the Covenant prominently and refer to it frequently
2. Renew the Covenant every year at a service on the anniversary of signing.
3. Make a plan of action for the year ahead.
4. Review the plan of action before the Covenant Renewal service and make a commitment for the following year.
5. Keep a Partnership diary so dates don’t clash. Communication is very important
6. Get to know each other through social events.
7. Invite others to Parish celebrations, prayer, etc.
8. Share each other’s ‘normal’ worship
9. Plan ecumenical joint worship
10. Agree a joint education and training programme
11. Plan social outreach projects to meet local needs
12. Work together on joint justice and peace issues and ecological projects.