

Doing Mission Together: *How Partnership Promotes Gospel Growth*

Report Summary

The Council for Christian Unity
2019

Inspired by 'Renewal and Reform' in the Church of England, the project sought to see whether ecumenism enhances mission and, if so, how this happens best.

The project investigates the cooperation in mission of Church of England parishes in towns across the country with non-Anglican churches.

KEY FINDINGS

- Much missional activity by Anglican parishes in urban settings is routinely undertaken in partnership with other churches
- Such 'missional ecumenism' includes a mix of activities relating to the first four 'Marks of Mission', many of them relating to evangelism and discipleship
- Partnership flourishes where there is a common calling to serve the local community, concern for good use of resources, attention to growing relationships and commitment to sharing in prayer and worship.

WHAT NOW?

- The CCU team would love to hear how the picture we have developed in this report corresponds to your own experience of doing mission with churches of other denominations.
- If you are not currently involved in missional ecumenism, how might you begin to explore the rich possibilities here for gospel growth?
- If you are involved in missional ecumenism, why not invite your church partners to a discussion about the four factors we identified as critical for partnership to flourish?

BACKGROUND

There is a growing perception that while institutional ecumenism may be struggling, a more missional ecumenism is thriving. Churches working together to transform their local community are changing the Christian landscape in this country.

A key factor in supporting this change is claimed to be a shared awareness of the need to focus on mission – on how the church shares the gospel in every place. While there are lots of stories about this, substantive evidence to help us understand what is happening is hard to come by.

The Five Marks of Mission

Adopted by the General Synod in 1996, the Marks provide a useful framework for thinking about the different elements of mission.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

KEY QUESTIONS

- How likely are Church of England parishes to be sharing in missional activities with other churches?
- To what extent does such cooperation tend to focus on particular aspects of mission?
- What helps missional ecumenism to be valued as effective by those involved?

Doing Mission Together reports on a project to help answer these questions conducted over a two-year period by the Council for Christian Unity.

METHODOLOGY

PHASE I

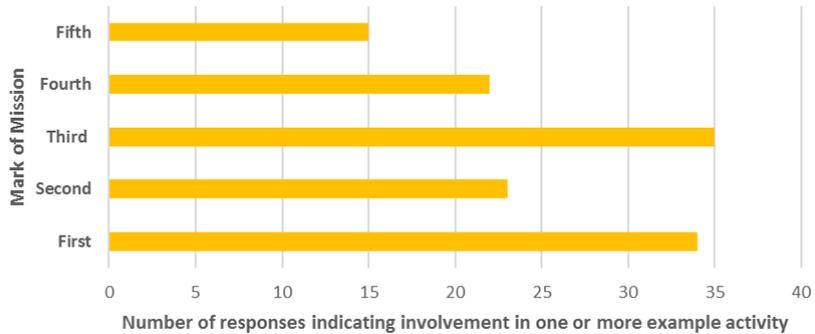
- A random sample of twelve medium-sized towns was identified (three in the Northern Province and nine in the Southern Province)
- Every parish inside or overlapping with the municipal boundaries was invited to complete an online survey
- The Five Marks of Mission were used to investigate how these parishes cooperated with non-Anglican parishes for different types of missional activity

PHASE II

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten of the original respondents
- Each Anglican respondent was invited to bring a colleague from another church with whom they were involved in doing mission together

PHASE I: KEY ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

Overview of engagement with the Five Marks of Mission

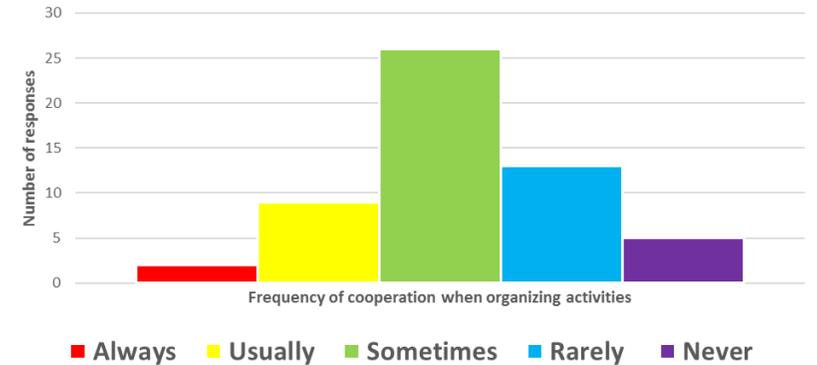


Based on 55 responses

Around two-thirds of responses indicated they cooperated in one or more missional activity for the First and Third Marks of Mission

Missional ecumenism is important for local evangelism, as well as social outreach

When you are organizing activities for your church and wider community, do you work with other churches in your town?



The most popular missional ecumenism activities were:

- Public Act of Worship
- Foodbanks
- Homeless Provision

For each Mark of Mission, only a minority of responses said they 'never' cooperate with a non-Anglican church

**PHASE II: INTERVIEW THEMES -
WHAT HELPS 'MISSIONAL ECUMENISM' WORK WELL?**



Common calling to serve the local community

A focus on the local community and its distinctive history, identity and current needs gave both motivation and shape to shared initiatives in mission that reach across the town as a whole

Example: commemorating an event of local significance like the anniversary of the closing of the local mine, recognizing an important part of shared identity and history



Attention to building relationships

In some places, these were deliberately kept very informal while in others formal structures played a key role, but in all cases the need to attend to building relationships of mutual trust and understanding was stressed, with a strong emphasis on relationships between church leaders

Example: church leaders from a dozen denominations committing to meeting on a weekly basis for breakfast and prayer together



Concern for good use of resources

Awareness of limitations around venues, finances, staff time and volunteer capacity led churches to want to think hard about how to avoid duplication, how to act together where this made sense and when to let a church with evident strengths 'lead' while others then supported

Example: different churches contributing a specific resource (volunteers, venue, etc.) to provide a service like 'Christians Against Poverty' together



Commitment to sharing in prayer and worship

Key for grounding both practical initiatives and emerging interpersonal relationships in the primary relationship between Christians of communion in Christ

Example: in one town, a time of shared worship and prayer as part of Thy Kingdom Come led to a deepening of relationship between churches and resulted in hosting a shared Christianity Basics course