A Flexible Framework for
Local Unity in Mission

TOOLKIT

CHURCHES
TOGETHER
IN ENGLAND

A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission

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Contents

1. Finding the right agreement

You have a vision for working with other Christians on a new or existing venture, sharing your insights, resources, creativity, and prayer. It may be an idea at the planning stage or an existing venture that has changed. Sooner or later those things that may begin with an informal understanding will benefit from a clearer expression of your commitments. Pitch it right and the organisation will go smoothly. You will be in a good position to recall, review, renew, change direction if need be, or even end well.

We offer this Toolkit to help you develop the right agreement for your venture. The different kinds of agreements to choose from will be outlined later. Most attention is given to what are called **'Working'** and **'Partnership' Agreements**, because what are called **'Constitutional' Agreements** need more detailed and technical information and that can be found elsewhere (the link is at the end of section 6). For more background on the kinds of agreement you may wish to read the full document, *A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission.* Visit **www.cte.org.uk/AFlexibleFramework** for more information.

In some cases, something different may be needed. Perhaps one church is taking responsibility for a project or activity with the assistance of others. In these situations, care always needs to be taken to ensure that other churches are consulted in decision making. The right fit here may be to follow a 'lead church model'. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/LeadChurchModel** for more information.

In other cases, you may be looking for something even simpler. Perhaps you have a single congregation that wishes to offer hospitality to Christians of other churches which allows them to be fully part of the congregation without abandoning or ceasing to honour their original church. In this case probably what you need is a 'Formal Declaration of Ecumenical Welcome and Commitment'. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/FormalWelcome** for more information.

It could be that what you wish to do is share a church building. There are two possibilities here. On the one hand, it may be that you wish simply to offer the use of your building to another church on an informal basis. There are several things to bear in mind in this case, and you can visit the website **www.cte.org.uk/SharingBuildings** for more information. On the other hand, you may need a formal agreement, with joint responsibilities and management. Such situations come under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969. Here again you can visit the website. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/SharingBuildings** for more information.

It may also be that you are wanting to set up a Churches Together group, either in a neighbourhood or a town. In Section 6 of this Toolkit, where it speaks about Working and Partnership Agreements, there are many questions that you will find useful. But there is also other help available. For more information please visit **www.cte.org.uk/LocalChurchesTogetherGroup**

If, however, your new venture is not one of these other kinds of cooperation among churches, then read on!

2. Three types of agreement

Once you have decided you require an agreement, here is a summary of the three types. They are not fixed. What may start as a Working Agreement can change into a Partnership Agreement. Even a Constitutional Agreement, the hardest to unpick, may eventually need to be re-thought.

It is worth noting that the process of setting up an agreement is important. Local cooperative working grows out of relationships, so it is necessary to listen to all those involved throughout the process.

Working Agreement	Partnership Agreement	Constitutional Agreement
When a **simple record** is all that is needed for a cross-church activity. Provides a simple outline of the agreed local informal arrangements.	When the activity requires **coordination of resources**, ministry, and pastoral provision.	When a **new body** is being created. It will involve registration with the Charity Commission, has trustees, and sets up the governance structures of the new body.
Denominational approval not required.	Requires denominational approval according to the organisation of the churches involved.	Requires denominational approval according to the organisation of the churches involved.

3. Questions to help you understand the nature of your project

What is the nature of your project? By working through the questions below, you will gain a clearer idea of which among the three agreements is the best suited to your venture. It may take time to consider these questions, but the process is important to give the project the best possible chance of prospering.

COLLECTIVE SPIRIT

Following this format, record the answers to each question you put to yourselves as this will help in selecting the right kind of agreement.

Project
• What is our project in a single sentence?

Purposes and Vision
• What is the vision – can we articulate our hopes and aspirations?
• What is the aim of our project – making disciples, serving communities, growing congregations, local transformation, or something else?
• How does this respond to our individual calls to witness, ministry, and mission?
• How do we hope it will deepen understanding of our mission, worship, and spiritual lives?
• How will we articulate our values, including trust and true collaboration?
• Do we need a mission statement? If so, what words should we use?
• What are the practical reasons for our cooperation?

Community

- What community does our activity serve?
- Is the community we serve geographically determined?
- Have we tested our perceptions about what is needed?
- Does our project focus on specific bodies of people or networks?
  - Institutions (hospitals, prisons, universities, police, fire service, local government, corporations)
  - Sectors (retail, business, industry, arts, sport, media, volunteering, education)
  - Cultural focus (ethnicity, common language, programmes to broaden experience, shared interests)
- Are others already doing similar work?
  - Have we consulted with others and learned from their experience?
  - Are we duplicating what is happening elsewhere?
  - Does this project build on existing activities?

Resources

- What resources are required – money, buildings, equipment, and skills?
- Who will provide each of these resources?

Relationships

- What is the quality of the relationship between the churches involved?
  - Are we able to be open with one another?
  - Are there areas where we need to work on our relationship?
- Who are the stakeholders (churches, other faith groups, voluntary, private, or public sector bodies)?
- Are there others we should involve at this stage?
- Have we tested our assumptions about who will wish to be involved?
- What external permission (if any) is needed to set up this initiative?

Timescale

- Is our project time limited?
  - If it is time limited, when do we start and end?
  - How long are people committing to?
- How will we end well when or if the time comes?
  - How will we:
    recognise we have reached the end point,
    celebrate achievements,
    handle shared assets,
    value and learn from our experience?

How are we organizing ourselves?

- What kind of structure do we want?
  - How will we:
    recognise achievements,
    discern gifts,
    ensure clarity of roles,
    manage conflict,
    allocate tasks?
- Is there a lead church? If there is:
  - Has everyone agreed to this?
  - How will other churches participate in decision making and activities?
- Who are we accountable to?
- Will there be an expectation of regular reporting?

4. Checklist to help you select the agreement you need

Now that you have answered the questions in Section 3, use your responses to find the best fit agreement based on the checklist below.

Working Agreement	Partnership Agreement	Constitutional Agreement
Makes few demands of the churches involved and has a specified timescale.	Makes several significant demands, impacting the life of the churches. Responsibilities allocated for a considerable period, with the option of long-term commitment.	Creates a new body, involving all the life and resources of the participating churches.
No creation of a new body but needs to identify which of the partners will be responsible for items such as insurance and employment oversight.	No creation of a new body but needs to identify which of the partners will be responsible for items such as employment and oversight. It may be necessary to set up separate insurance for the venture.	Needs a legal agreement spelling out the new body's governance and procedures. This is the structure to deal with items such as insurance, employment, and oversight.
No separate charity registration.	No separate charity registration.	Needs to be registered with the Charity Commission.

Parties involved do not require permission from others.	Permission from relevant denominational authorities will be needed.	Permission from relevant denominational authorities will be needed.
Arrangements written down to confirm understanding and assumptions.	Guidelines for partnership working set out in a written agreement.	New formal legal structure.
May be time limited.	May be time limited, but normally long-term.	Long-term project.
Possibility of staff employed by one of the partners.	Possibility of staff employed by one of the partners.	The new body can employ staff.
Safeguarding policies and procedures will need to be adopted.	**Safeguarding policies and procedures will need to be adopted.**	**Safeguarding policies and procedures will need to be adopted.**
No trustees.	No trustees.	Has trustees.

5.   Example projects

Working Agreements	Partnership Agreements	Constitutional Agreements
- Holiday Club - Humanitarian disaster response - Alpha course - Missional projects e.g. - beach mission - week-long festival - Informal volunteering e.g. - taking local people to medical appointments - delivering food and urgent supplies - Messy Church - Youth Group	- Foodbank - Café with volunteers e.g. - Good Grief - Dementia Café - Long-term volunteering e.g. - Refugee projects - Homeless night shelter - Congregation regularly sharing another church's building - Congregation that has moved to worship permanently with another church (but where no major assets are transferred) - Mission partnerships such as in Cumbria - New housing areas, particularly during the initial deployment of a pioneer minister	- Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership (SCLEP) - Some Chaplaincy partnerships - Community enterprise (especially with employees)

6. Important next steps

Depending on which agreement you have chosen, the following is what you need to do next in drawing up your agreement.

A. Working Agreement
In this section, the questions should be easily answered given the lighter touch nature of a Working Agreement.

- **Safeguarding** – Agree which church is taking responsibility for Safeguarding. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/Safeguarding** for more information.
    - Have we consulted our churches' Safeguarding Coordinators in planning this project?
    - Are we clear how to report a Safeguarding incident?

- **Insurance & public liability** – Agree how to go about providing insurance & public liability cover.
    - Is the cover sufficient for what we are doing? Visit **www.cte.org.uk/insurance** for more information.
    - Is there a need to inform the insurers about the project?

- **Questions to cover** –
    - Who is responsible for the risk assessment?
    - Have we considered all the potential health and safety requirements?
    - Have we considered all the potential GDPR requirements?
    - Who will be responsible for collecting and counting money, for banking and keeping accounts for the project?
    - Which of the partners will hold any money for the project?

- Who is responsible for any employees that may be attached to the project? What are the lines of accountability for the employee?
- How will the project be sustained financially?
- How do we reflect on our experience of working together in this way?

B. Partnership Agreement

- Write down your vision statement based on your answers to the questions in the previous sections.
- Answer the questions above for a Working Agreement, and then consider the following additional areas:
  - Who are the relevant authorities in the partner denominations required to give authorisation?
  - Describe the relationship between your project and the relevant authorities.
  - Draw up an agreement that lays out the following:
    - Frequency of meetings
    - Responsibilities (Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, and others as needed)
    - How people with responsibility are selected and nominated
    - The lines of accountability
    - How to provide supervision and support for volunteers and any paid employees
    - An appropriate process of review or reflection
    - A procedure for bringing the project to an end by the partners, including what happens if one of the partners wishes to withdraw
    - How long the project will run

C. Constitutional Agreement

Having chosen this form of agreement, you will now need to access the information about Model Governing Documents on the CTE website. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/MGD** for more information.

7. Sharing your experience

We would love to hear more about your experience, especially of creating Working and Partnership Agreements. Please send examples of agreements created for local situations so that we can use them to improve this toolkit.

Above all, we would like to hear your story. Whatever it is, please get in touch. Email CTE (Churches Together in England) at **FlexibleFrameworkStories@cte.org.uk**

8. Contacts for additional help and guidance

First visit **www.cte.org.uk** and use its helpful search engine. On the website you may also find articles relating to what you are planning to do. In addition, it could be that you will find the website of your Church and of other Churches useful.

Most areas of England are served by bodies that work for Christian unity at the level between the local and the national. They cover a wide area, often a county. They usually have an ecumenically appointed person, who can help with advice and local contacts. These tend to be called County Ecumenical Officers (CEOs), though their precise titles differ. Visit **www.cte.org.uk/CEOs** for the full list of CEOs.

In addition, CEOs work with Denominational Ecumenical Officers (DEOs) who are appointed by some of the Churches to help and advise their denominations. They, too, are an

excellent source of help if your denomination has them. If there is no DEO, your Church Leader may be able to help.

If you are still stuck, email **FlexibleFrameworkHelp@cte.org.uk** and the team supporting 'A Flexible Framework' will do its best to help.

More about Churches Together in England

Churches Together in England (CTE) is the national ecumenical instrument supporting and encouraging churches to work together and to grow in unity. CTE has 50 Member Churches from a wide variety of traditions. In fact, it gathers in a single body the broadest range of churches in the whole of Europe.

CTE's strapline is: *One in Christ Jesus, engaged in God's mission, empowered by the Spirit.*

To read more about CTE visit **www.cte.org.uk/WhoWeAre**

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