

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

Constitution for a Churches Together (or similar) Group

Preface

While informal relationships are to be commended in the movement towards Christian Unity, there is much to be said for clarity about aims, membership and a way of working.

This 'light touch' constitution attempts to offer some guidelines. It aims to keep all choices in the hands of the member churches, offers some safeguards and attempts to incorporate as much flexibility as possible. In the end, however, although we commend it to local Churches Together groups, the best constitution simply describes how you already work or wish to work.

Adapt this draft, therefore, as your local circumstances suggest, but please keep an eye on the advice in the footnotes. They are not whimsy, but are based on experience in many parts of England. There is no harm in leaving them in your final text for future reference. Above all, don't spend too much time on your constitution. You probably do need one, but your time together is better spent on mission and service rather than on creating a perfect document.

In particular, resist the temptation to add detail to the constitution. You can do this in a supplementary document which can be changed easily. For example, it is good practice to list in a supplementary document a list of your Member Churches.

This constitution is meant for Churches Together (or similar) groups with an income less than £5,000 and which therefore don't need to be registered as a charity. Please note that if you wish to register as a charity, regardless of income, this constitution is not suitable.

If you plan to receive grants from external funding bodies you may wish to consider establishing a separate charitable organisation which would have the option to be incorporated. Please seek appropriate advice in that case. It would be a kindness to keep your [County Ecumenical Officer](#) informed but please note that Churches Together in England does not have further advice to offer in these cases.

4 February 2016

CONSTITUTION FOR A CHURCHES TOGETHER (or similar) GROUP IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD OR SMALL TOWN

INTRODUCTION

This document is advisory and not definitive. You are advised to consult your [County Ecumenical Officer](#) before adopting a constitution and to send him/her a copy of the final document. Comments on this document are welcomed by [Churches Together in England](#).

1 BASIS

Churches Together in unites in pilgrimage those Churches in which, acknowledging God's revelation in Christ, confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures, and, in obedience to God's will and in the power of the Holy Spirit commit themselves:

- to seek a deepening of their communion with Christ and with one another in the Church, which is His body; and
- to fulfil their mission to proclaim the Gospel by common witness and service in the world to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

2 OBJECT

The object of Churches Together in shall be the advancement of the Christian religion and other purposes which are charitable according to the Law of England and Wales according to the doctrine and practices of the constituent Churches.

3 AIMS

The aims of Churches Together in shall be:

- a. to enable the Member Churches, as pilgrims together, to explore the Christian faith together, to develop mutual relationships, to find common ground, and to work together to build God's Kingdom;
- b. to enable and encourage the Member Churches to worship and pray together;
- c. to enable the Member Churches to live and share the Gospel, to evangelise together and to take further steps towards fuller unity;
- d. to enable the Member Churches to respond to the needs of society and to witness to the Gospel together.
- e. to enable the Member Churches to reflect together on the nature and purpose of the Church in the light of its mission – each church sharing with others the treasures of its tradition.

4 AREA

Churches Together in aims to serve either the neighbourhood of or an area co-terminous with and (specified parishes) or an area bounded by the and the (see attached map).

5 RELATIONSHIPS

Churches Together in is in association with County Ecumenical Council/Sponsoring Body/ Churches Together in County.¹

6 MEMBERSHIP

Membership of Churches Together in shall be open to:

- a. Any local church in the area which is affiliated to a Church or association of Churches which is a full member of Churches Together in England;²

¹ A list of County (Intermediate) Bodies can be found [here](#). Consult the Officer in your county about the appropriate text for this clause.

² Current members of Churches Together in England (CTE) can be found [here](#) and the procedure for joining CTE [here](#). And see the next footnote re schools admissions.

- b. any other local church in the area which affirms the Basis and commits itself to promote the aims of Churches Together in;³
- c. any local church which on principle has no credal statements in its tradition and therefore cannot formally subscribe to the statement of faith in the Basis, provided that it satisfies 50% in number of those Member Churches which subscribe to the Basis, that it manifests faith in Christ as witnessed to in the Scriptures and it is committed to the aims and purposes of Churches Together in and that it will work in the spirit of the Basis.⁴

New applications for membership under #6.a, #6.b, and #6.c require the nomination of two existing members of Churches Together in and require the approval of 50% of existing members. Members must be given at least 28 days in which to respond to a nomination.⁵

7 OFFICE-HOLDERS

The officer-holders of Churches Together in shall be a Convenor and a Deputy Convenor (one of whom shall, if possible, be a minister and the other a lay person and who, if possible, should belong to different denominations), an Honorary Treasurer and an Honorary Secretary (plus a Minute Secretary, if desired) to be elected at the Annual Meeting of the Enabling Group. Office holders shall normally serve for an initial period of three years and may be re-elected if willing to serve, normally for no more than one further period not exceeding three years.⁶

8 ENABLING GROUP⁷

- a. The Enabling Group shall consist of the ordained clergy and ministers and up to two⁸ others, preferably lay people, appointed from each Member Church.

³ The starting point here must be relationships – which is partly why the final paragraph in the membership clause is there. We suggest that if a local congregation wishes to join your Churches Together Group, it is more helpful first to invite them to meetings as observers and suggest that they spend some time (a year?) engaging with the existing members before again applying for membership. Be aware, too, that membership of a local (or any other) Churches Together Group does not confer membership of Churches Together in England – a criterion sometimes required in [school admissions policies](#) although we have asked schools not to do this.

⁴ Upon its inauguration Churches Together in England welcomed the Religious Society of Friends under this clause.

⁵ The point of this is to ensure that you are in control of membership. We recommend most strongly that you retain this clause or something similar to avoid future problems. Smaller CT groups may find this threshold too high as it might enable one or two member churches, or one denomination, to overrule the others. Remember that there is no definition of what constitutes a 'church' and you must avoid a situation where a group automatically qualifies for membership.

⁶ Older constitutions use the term 'moderator' instead of 'convenor' – use which you prefer. We suggest you retain the two instances of 'if possible' in the bracketed phrase and also strongly suggest that you retain the limit on someone serving for more than one term of office to ensure that the group does not become stale. Nevertheless, flexibility has been retained here for practical reasons and, basically, this clause lets you do what you want!

⁷ Older constitutions called this the Forum.

⁸ We suggest sticking to no more than two extra people to ensure that the Enabling Group remains a workable size. You can always co-opt someone if necessary or admit observers. Just ensure that there is a time limit on the co-options or observers, just as there is on office-holders so that there is a natural point at which you review the membership of the Enabling Group.

- b. The Enabling Group may co-opt others; such co-options not exceeding 25% of the total number from the Member Churches.
- c. The Enabling Group shall normally meet not less than three times annually. One of these meetings shall normally be the Annual Meeting at which the independently examined'/inspected accounts shall be presented and any new office-holders elected.
- d. Other meetings of the Enabling Group shall be held as deemed desirable by the office-holders or at the written request of Enabling Group members from three Member Churches.⁹
- e. At least two weeks' notice in writing of any meeting of the Enabling Group shall be given.
- f. The attendance by at least one Enabling Group member of at least half of the Member Churches shall constitute a quorum.

9 STANDING COMMITTEE¹⁰

- a. When there are more than six churches in membership of the Churches Together Group, the Enabling Group may appoint an Standing Committee whose functions shall be to enable the Member Churches to make decisions in common and to serve as a reference point for the Enabling Group.
- b. The Standing Committee shall comprise the office-holders of the Enabling Group, up to four lay people, and up to four clergy or ministers appointed by the Member Churches with regard to an appropriate representation of the various Christian traditions and denominations in membership.
- c. Attendance by at least half of those eligible to be present shall constitute a quorum.
- d. Where there is no Standing Committee the officer-holders of the Enabling Group shall fulfil this function as the need arises.

10 FINANCE

- a. Each Member Church/body shall pay such annual sum to Churches Together in as shall be agreed at the Annual Meeting of the Enabling Group. The annual sum may be related both to the size of the church and to its ability to pay.
- b. The financial year shall be from (specify month) to (specify month).
- c. Cheques shall require the signature of any two of the four office-holders.
- d. An honorary independent examiner¹¹ shall be appointed at the Annual Meeting.

⁹ Please note that 'in writing' or 'written' includes e-mail. We suggest that it should not include text messages without e-mail backup as they are much harder to track and harder to retain as proof.

¹⁰ Previous constitutions called this the Enabling Group. We recommend you retain the section to allow for growth and leave you choices. Note that you do not need to implement it if that is your choice.

¹¹ Only charities with an annual income of more than £500,000 require an audit from a qualified auditor who has current professional indemnity insurance. In most cases the charity can appoint an independent examiner who will examine the accounts following the procedures found on the Charity Commission website. (Information accurate on 26 June 2012.) So don't call this person

11 CONSTITUTION

The constitution and any subsequent amendment to it requires the approval of 66% of the Member Churches, acting either through their members of the Enabling Group or through their normal decision-making bodies.¹² Member Churches must be given at least 28 days' notice in writing of a proposed change.

12 DISSOLUTION OF THE CHURCHES TOGETHER GROUP

- a. A motion to dissolve the Churches Together group must be circulated in writing (both electronically and as a hard copy) to full members at least three months before it can be considered by a special meeting of Member Churches when the support of at least 75% of Member Churches is required for the motion to be successful. It will be the responsibility of Enabling Group members to discuss the proposal for dissolution with their nominating bodies.
- b. Any residual funds should be allocated to Christian charitable organisations designated by the Enabling Group.

Date: ¹³

Approved: ¹⁴

your auditor. If you do, they need not only to be qualified but also have current professional indemnity insurance. This would rule out your friendly retired bank manager or accountant.

¹² It cannot be over-emphasised that a major principle of the ecumenical process is that it is the Churches' own decision-making bodies, rather than simply Enabling Group members acting on behalf of the Churches, which need to make major ecumenical decisions about policy and priorities. However, if Enabling Group members do not consider changes significant enough to refer to their normal decision-making bodies, this clause allows them to approve the changes themselves.

¹³ Ensure that you date every draft and label it clearly as a draft. Using watermarks and footers is very helpful here as long as you remember to update them each time. When the constitution is approved, check headers, footers and everywhere else you can think of to ensure that it is dated with the correct date.

¹⁴ Write a note giving clear details of when and how the constitution was approved. Ensure that each Member Church has a copy and send one to your [County Ecumenical Officer](#) too. However, don't assume that his/her successors will necessarily be able to provide you with a copy in the future – keeping the constitution is your responsibility.