



Churches Together in Oxfordshire Enabling Group
Minutes of the Meeting
held at Christ Church URC, Henley-on-Thames
on Thursday 5th October 2023

Those present: Jason St. John Nicolle (Chair, Church of England), David Hare (County Ecumenical Officer), Chris Robins (Treasurer), John Anderson (Secretary, Methodist), Steve Barber (Baptist), Glyn Millington (URC)

Apologies: None

- 1) The Chair welcomed everyone, thanked Glyn for his hospitality which included lunch. He then opened the meeting with a reading from 2 Corinthians on the theme of generosity, followed by a short prayer.
- 2) John was thanked for the minutes from the May meeting which were agreed as correct.
- 3) None.
- 4) *Financial matters* – Chris reported that with regard to our present situation we are holding our own. Two denominations were outstanding with their contributions but Chris expected them before the end of the year. Only 50% of local groups had offered a contribution, not all groups had contributed some were considering their future. He expected that some may not contribute but that this would not be a major concern. At current levels we would show a slight deficit against budget as expected.

Chris tabled the 2024 budget. It included denominations being asked for full contributions having being discounted for the last few years; the number of local groups contributing was reduced and bank interest was a significant contributor for the first time for a while. We are still not spending as much as before COVID. The budget was approved unanimously and Chris was thanked for his work.

5) *Church Leaders' meeting*

Jason apologised for letting the meeting organisation slip and thanked John for picking it up. 21st February 2024 was the date that had been agreed, Bishop Gavin to host, Sarah Brennan (Bishop Gavin's P.A.) would send out and collate the invitations. John offered to create an invitation list, circulate it to the group and liaise with Sarah. An invitation would be sent to the new Moderator of the Wessex URC Synod, Revd. Dr. Michael Hopkins.

John

6) *Update from November meeting on the way forward*

(a) Meeting local groups – John recounted his e-mail conversation with Debra McKnight, administrator of *The Church in Abingdon*, which John summarised as “why should we pay anything to CTiO when we get nothing from them”. John was meeting with them in November. David had been frustrated with the lack of response to his communication with local groups. John echoed Chris' comments about local groups considering how they were organised and suggested we needed to assess what resources we had

available and be more proactive in offering what ever we could to the groups. David was asked if similar conversations (or lack of) were happening across the country.

David/John

(b) CEDO remuneration – no further progress.

Jason/David

7) *Local Ecumenical Partnerships*

David had attempted to contact all the LEPs and the results of his work are detailed in the attached report.

(a) *Church of the Holy Family, Blackbird Leys* – Little further communication had been received. It was thought that the diocese was looking at a ‘lead church’ model.

David

(b) *Christchurch, Thame*: John and Glyn reported that the new constitution had been passed by both URC and Methodist synods. John had asked Rev Richard Atkinson, Superintendent of the Vale of Aylesbury Methodist Circuit, for signed copies of the final documents. David had been in contact with the new Methodist minister.

John/Glyn

(c) *Trinity, Abingdon (Methodist/URC)*: John had been in contact with Rev. Ian Griffiths, Methodist minister in Abingdon. Ian reported that a slow moving process considering the future of Trinity and All Saints Methodist Church was in progress. John noted that if the two churches amalgamated, which seemed likely, a new LEP constitution would be required.

John/Glyn

(d) *Ladygrove, Didcot (Church of England/Baptist)*: Steve reported that there as a meeting next week and that Baptist monies might be available to support a pioneer minister in the two new housing estates. John had been in contact with the new Methodist minister in Didcot, Rev. Bruce Thompson, who would welcome a conversation with the Baptists should the opportunity arise.

Steve/David

8) *Updates from local “Churches Together” groups*

This had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

9) *Annual General Meeting, 2024 meeting*

John had booked Witney Methodist Church for the evening of Monday 4th March. We will have access to the Wesley Room which has screen and hearing loop. There may be provision to share the meeting via YouTube if we wish. The cafe will be open before the meeting. There would not be a charge but a donation would be very welcome.

Steve suggested that we invite Dr. Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire County Council to be our key note speaker with the theme “Vision for the County?”

John

10) *Web site, GDPR and updated contact lists*

The web site continues to get a small number of views with a few enquires and requests coming to the Secretary. Everyone was happy with the current process when it came to vetting requests for endorsement. The work regarding GDPR and updating the contact lists was ongoing.

John

11) *Sharing of news*

(a) Glyn reported that Wheatley URC had determined to dismantle the LEP that may or may not have existed with the local parish church, who were of the same mind. Local ecumenical work continues in the village.

(b) Steve asked if the group thought that any new LEPs would be created in the future with the Church of England. General opinion was that it was unlikely. Reference was made to the 2019 General Synod paper "Ecumenical Code of Practice on Co-operation by the Church of England with Other Churches February 2019 issued by the House of Bishops under section 5B of the Church of England (Ecumenical Relations) Measure 1988" which defines LECOS as "Local Ecumenical Co-operative Schemes" rather than LEPs.

(c) Steve would be on sabbatical during May, June and July of 2024.

12) *Any other business* – None.

13) *Dates of next Enabling Group and Church Leaders meetings:*

(a) Thursday, 8th February 2024 via ZOOM

(b) Wednesday, 24th April 2024 at Kidlington Baptist Church (**Chris asked to book**)

(c) Wednesday, 2nd October 2024 via ZOOM

(d) Provisional Church Leaders' meeting 6th November 2024

14) Jason closed the meeting in prayer and the Grace was shared.