

Advice from the Ecumenical Committee

WHEN UNITED REFORMED CHURCH PEOPLE MOVE TO AN ENGLISH VILLAGE WHERE THERE IS NO UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

This advice assumes that the Church of England is the only Christian church in the village. Although some of the principles and considerations will be similar in relation to other churches, others will be different.

Some questions to ask yourself.

1. *Does it seem right to worship in and commit myself to the church in the community where I live?*
2. *Am I prepared to commit myself wholeheartedly and worship as an Anglican?*

Under new regulations you may, as a member in good standing with the United Reformed Church and as a regular worshipper in the local Anglican church, declare yourself also a member of the Church of England. You may then serve on the Parochial Church Council and, in theory, be able to be a representative on Deanery and Diocesan Synods and General Synod. If you are a nationally accredited United Reformed Church lay preacher it is possible for you to be licensed by the bishop in whose diocese you are, to preach in your local area.

The relevant sections of Canon Law are quoted overleaf. However, there are supplementary questions you need to ask yourself.

- a Do you feel a sense of belonging within the life of the parish church as it now stands, with regard to its worship, its preaching, its study life, and its role within the life of the community?
- b If not, what hope is there that within a reasonable time span your active involvement might make a difference, either to the church or to your own attitudes and feelings?
- c Do you believe that the Reformed emphasis on the constant reformation of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Scriptures, and the aspects of church life which you bring from your own experience and tradition, can be set alongside the qualities which already exist in the local parish church in a positive and constructive way?
- d What is the incumbent's attitude to ecumenical co-operation and is she/he willing to do what is possible within Canon Law? What is the attitude of the diocesan bishop to ecumenical co-operation? This is important as so many decisions are inspired by the bishop and the local priest, although the local Parochial Church Council has a growing influence.

At some point, depending on the local vicar or priest, you may be challenged to make the full commitment to the Church of England and be confirmed.

3. *Should I continue, at the same time, to maintain my membership in the nearest United Reformed Church – and how easy is that journey?*

Some supplementary questions follow.

- a How often could you worship there – is less than once or twice a month being true to our understanding of membership? Church Meeting and the possibility of being an elder must also be considered.
- b Money – would you split your giving between the two?

If you retain this membership in a meaningful way then you can, at least in theory, be a member of District Council/Provincial Synod/General Assembly and one of the Assembly committees.

United Reformed Church links can also be maintained by subscribing to the Information Service, becoming a Friend of FURY (Fellowship of United Reformed Youth), subscribing to *Reform*, *SPIN* (Sharing People in Network), *Windows* (from the Silence and Retreats Group) and the Prayer Handbook, and attending *Window on the World* or the Holiday Forum etc.

Extracts from the relevant Church of England Canons

1 Canon B15A (1972) enables the admission to Holy Communion of "baptised persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and who are in good standing in their own Church..."

If anyone by virtue of this provision "regularly receives the Holy Communion over a long period which appears likely to continue indefinitely, the minister shall set before him the normal requirements of the Church of England for communicant status of that Church."

2 The Church Representation Rules 1995 enable a person to be enrolled if she/he is baptised, sixteen years or upwards and declares themselves to be a member in good standing of a Church which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ... and also is prepared to declare him/herself to be a member of the Church of England having habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment. Making this declaration also confers eligibility to stand for election to the decision making bodies of the Church of England.

3 Canon B43 (1989) says

1.-(1)) A minister or lay person who is a member in good standing of a Church to which this Canon applies and is a baptised person may, subject to the provisions of this Canon, be invited to perform all or any of the following duties -

- a) to say or sing Morning or Evening Prayer
- b) to read the Holy Scripture at any service
- c) to preach at any service
- d) to lead the Intercessions at the Holy Communion and to lead prayers at other services
- e) to assist at Baptism or the Solemnisation of Matrimony or conduct a Funeral Service
- f) to assist in the distribution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people at the Holy Communion if the minister or lay person is authorised to perform a similar duty in his or her own Church."

4 Canon B43 (1989) says

9. "The incumbent of a parish may (with specified approvals) invite members of another Church... to take part in joint worship with the Church of England or to use a church in the parish for worship in accordance with the forms of service and practice of that other Church on such occasions as may be specified in the approval given by the bishop."