



## THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND Council for Christian Unity

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# Joint Confirmations

## Guidelines for Church of England participation

*A summary of good practice when a Church of England bishop is willing to take part in a joint Confirmation in the context of a Local Ecumenical Partnership*

**The final responsibility for determining what will take place at a joint confirmation rests with the confirming ministers, which means, in the case of the Church of England, the confirming bishop.**

**These guidelines summarise what has proved acceptable to confirming bishops in the past. In any situation, however, discretion remains with the bishop concerned.**

**In many parts of the country, bishops and other denominational leaders have compiled through their county Sponsoring Body a jointly agreed checklist for services of joint confirmation, together with an agreed order of service. Usually this also has provision for baptism.**

**It is strongly recommended that use is made of such ecumenical check lists and orders of service provided they cover all the points made in these Anglican guidelines.**

### 1 Baptism

In order to respect the theological traditions of the churches involved the following guidelines relating to baptism need to be observed.

- *Only those who have been baptised may be confirmed.*
- *In the case of those who have not been previously baptised, their baptism should be combined with the service of joint confirmation. The form of baptism can be by dipping, pouring or immersion.*

### 2 Preparation

What happens before and after a service of joint confirmation must reflect the ecumenical nature of the event.

- In both single-church and multi-congregation LEPs, preparation for confirmation should always reflect the distinctive traditions and gifts of all the sponsoring denominations. Candidates should be prepared together and different understandings of the church and of membership explored. Issues include:
  - *How will those jointly confirmed enter into the life of the LEP churches and their patterns of worship?*
  - *How is the LEP challenged and developed by those who have received joint confirmation?*

It is important that those who exercise the ministry of oversight, and who come from beyond the LEP to participate in joint confirmations, should come on other occasions, and build up their relationship with the LEP.

### 3 Practicalities relating to the service.

- It is important that all those participating in the service are clear about how the service will be conducted, so that everything is done in a dignified and ordered way. A particular person should be nominated to ensure that the service runs smoothly and that all those taking part know when and where they should sit or stand and how any processions are to be arranged.
- Those who are participating should wear the form of liturgical dress appropriate to the occasion in their own tradition.
- *If there is an Anglican minister in the LEP, it is important that they have an appropriate role in the service.*

### 4 Sharing the ministry of confirmation

It is good practice for the confirming ministers to share the ministry of confirmation. Joint confirmation should be an example of shared ministry in committed ecumenical relationship. The confirming ministers should stand or sit together throughout the service, and be seen to share equally in leading worship. They all say the confirmation prayer together and all should lay hands together on all the candidates to be jointly confirmed.

### 5 Who confirms?

- Joint confirmations must take account of the practices of the different traditions involved.

A form of service for Joint Confirmation was published by the Joint Liturgical Group in 1992 in "Confirmation and Re-affirmation of Baptismal Faith" (Canterbury Press ISBN 1-85311-062-0)

Samples of joint services which are based on Common Worship and the Methodist Worship Book, and which have been agreed through various Intermediate Ecumenical Instruments, can be obtained from the Council for Christian Unity

- In each case, it is the primary local minister who is the confirming minister and this varies from tradition to tradition. For the Church of England, this is invariably the diocesan bishop or another bishop whom he sends. In other traditions it is normally the local minister, unless in a particular case that denomination decides otherwise: for example, sometimes the Methodist Circuit Superintendent or District Chairman may take this role. The confirming ministers lay hands on each candidate at the same time.
- The confirming ministers should be those who are properly authorised to act on behalf of their own traditions. An Anglican minister who is Recognised and Regarded as a Methodist minister or Authorised to serve as a Methodist, Baptist or United Reformed Church minister may not act as a confirming minister for any of the traditions represented.
- An appropriate minister from each denomination participating in the LEP should take part in the confirmation.
- It is helpful for the confirming ministers to have the opportunity to experience denominational services of confirmation in partner churches.
- It is not good practice for denominational confirmations to take place in the same service as joint confirmations.

## 6 Arrangements for the Service

The details of the service will need to be agreed in advance by all the confirming ministers, which in the case of the Church of England means the bishop involved. They have the final responsibility for determining what will take place.

It is important to agree on and check the details of the appropriate form of service before having anything printed. A draft of the agreed order of service, using the appropriate rite, should be circulated to all the confirming ministers at least two weeks before printing.

The following points among others should be checked:

- *What guidelines have already been agreed on joint confirmation in this diocese, district, association or province?*
- *Is there a set form of service to which the Church Leaders/Sponsoring Body have already agreed?*
- *Has the order of service changed since the last joint confirmation?*

- *If there is to be a Eucharist, which rite will be used, and who will preside? It is not permissible, under Church of England rules, for the ministers to concelebrate at the Eucharist but, although one must clearly preside, it is acceptable for them to stand together at the table.*
- *Who is to preach at the service?*
- *What music should be used? Careful discussion about music for the service may be necessary: in a multi-congregation LEP there might be a united choir for the occasion and questions such as whether the choir should robe need to be decided in advance. Each tradition involved should be able to feel at home with some of the music chosen.*
- *Are there confirmation certificates or membership cards to be signed by the confirming ministers?*

## 7 Other practicalities

Difficulties about practical issues can sometimes cause tension, and may reflect underlying ecclesiological differences.

- *It is important to send appropriate travel directions to those who are coming from beyond the local situation to participate in the joint confirmation. It may also be helpful to send them some information about the LEP, if it is their first visit.*
- *There should be adequate parking space available for those who are participating, especially for those who have come some distance. It is also helpful to offer some refreshment before the service.*
- *Proper space should be made available for those participating to put on their liturgical robes and prepare for the service.*
- *Refreshments should be available afterwards, so that the newly-confirmed can be welcomed in a sociable atmosphere. Such occasions can be especially important in building up the life of a multi-congregation LEP, and in developing the relationship between the LEP and those who exercise a ministry of oversight at a wider level.*
- *Joint confirmation should always take place in a church building within the LEP itself, unless there are exceptional circumstances which make this impossible*

## Background notes:

1. Canon B44 expressly permits joint confirmations in paragraph 4 (1) (e) where the bishop has included it in his written Instrument at the time of setting up the LEP. It remains for each bishop to decide whether he is personally willing to take part in a joint confirmation.
2. Comprehensive guidelines are included in the Ecumenical Relations Code of Practice 1989, pages 27-29.