

WEST SWINDON AND THE LYDIARDS CHURCH PARTNERSHIP

“Covenanted together for mission”

***‘We exist in order to BE the People of God
and EXTEND the Kingdom of God
throughout West Swindon and The Lydiards’***

‘The Covenant’ We, the members of the West Swindon & The Lydiards Church Partnership, reflecting the traditions of the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches, agree to the following Covenant :

We affirm our common faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, according to the Old and New Testaments, and as expressed in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. We rejoice in the wide variety of our Christian heritage, and thank God for the opportunities He gives us to grow together. Believing we are called by God to serve Him in the world, we commit ourselves to that calling - to ‘BE the People of God and EXTEND the Kingdom of God throughout West Swindon & The Lydiards.’

We specifically commit ourselves prayerfully :

- ◆ *to seek to understand more clearly the Vision of God and His calling to grow His kingdom here*
- ◆ *to discover more from the Scriptures about the theological basis for our unity-in-mission, and its practical consequences*
- ◆ *to conform ourselves to the values of Jesus, as enshrined in his teaching on discipleship and our ‘Declaration of Intent’*
- ◆ *to share together in missionary outreach to the people that God leads us into contact with through our daily lives*
- ◆ *to serve all the people of West Swindon & The Lydiards with the same unconditional covenantal love that God has for them.*

This Covenant will be reviewed every 7 years, as determined by the Sponsoring Body.

The Covenanted Local Churches are :

All Saints Lydiard Millicent,
St. Mary’s Lydiard Tregoze
Holy Trinity Shaw
Toothill Church and
Westlea Church.

Our Shared Vision

Our Partnership needs Vision – a shared sense of what God is calling us to become, and where His Spirit is inspiring us to journey together. Some key themes have emerged from our shared deliberations, which have been especially inspired by the Old Testament prophets (especially from Isaiah 6)

- ◆ *God's holiness – and our need for repentance from past attitudes*
- ◆ *God's glory – that we are called to reflect in our church life*
- ◆ *God's kindness – leading us through times of wilderness into the 'Promised Land'*
- ◆ *God's vitality – creating new life and growth bubbling up into us*
- ◆ *God's call – leading us into practical action for His Kingdom*

In sequence the process is : Vision of God – Repentance – Call by God – Action – Growth for God.

Through this process we believe that God is revealing Himself and calling us to a Vision of Growth, summed up as :

'We exist in order to BE the People of God and EXTEND the Kingdom of God throughout West Swindon and The Lydiards'.

Like the combined heat of five burning coals, we can grow together, to be more than the sum of our individual parts!

Our Theological Basis

John 17. 20, 21. Jesus said: 'I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'

Jesus Christ, on the night before his arrest, prayed for the unity of all believers in him. He prayed that all Christians would be one, just as he and his Father were one.

The purpose of that unity was to be a witness to the world, that they may believe in Jesus Christ too. We declare that we wish to regard these words of Jesus as the theological basis for the unity of our Partnership.

Doctrinally we begin with a Trinitarian understanding of God, a dynamic unity-in-diversity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian life of God will be the guiding model for our own unity. The inherent unity of all God's People is to become a passionate priority for all our activities – just as it was in the mind and heart of Jesus. The major purpose of our unity is to be a testimony of Jesus' reality and love towards those who are not yet within the Kingdom of God.

Our Core Values

We want to affirm a number of distinctive values which we hold as being of particular importance for our Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) :

- ◆ *We accept the Lordship of the risen Jesus Christ – alive still today*
- ◆ *We are Bible-based – accepting Scripture's inspiration and authority*
- ◆ *We are evangelical – in doctrine and its application to contemporary life*
- ◆ *We believe that Jesus Christ is the ground of our salvation and model of our mission, inspiring us in service to a materially and spiritually needy world*
- ◆ *We depend upon the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit – to renew us*

and impart charismatic gifts for healing, deliverance and other ministries

- ◆ *We are committed to a collaborative style of ministry – with all God’s People*

There will be further expression of our Values as they relate to specific policy areas in subsequent sections of this Constitution.

The Mission we share

Because the unity of God’s People was at the centre of Jesus’ passion, we wish to work and pray towards achieving this unity in partnership too. This spirit of unity is a gift from God that we intend to celebrate in worship and fellowship, to the glory of God (Rom 15:5). But above all, we desire that this unity will enable more effective Mission amongst the people of West Swindon and The Lydiards.

We pray that God’s Spirit will pour out upon us this spirit of love and unity, and empower us as we strive to make it visible to all (Eph 4:3). We will seek not only the best interests of all of the five partnership churches, but also try to build God’s Kingdom in a selfless manner with the other churches of our district (Phil 2:4). We commit ourselves to all play our part in this mission, as equal members of the ‘priesthood of all believers’.

We affirm, together with Churches Together in England, that our understanding of the practical outworking of our shared Mission is

- ◆ *to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;*
- ◆ *to teach, baptise and nurture new believers;*
- ◆ *to respond to human need by loving service;*
- ◆ *to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and*
- ◆ *to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.*

We will translate these ideals into an Annual Action Plan, which will set forward achievable objectives for each Year. These will be formulated at our Partnership Annual General Meeting, and will be rigorously reviewed there.

Our Covenant

We intend that our growing unity of vision, values, theology and mission be expressed in a Covenant, which we will make between ourselves and God. Our Local Covenant will express our ‘significant mutual commitment under God for our mutually discerned and agreed purposes’ (CTE)

The Scriptures narrate a series of Covenants through the Old Testament, notably with Noah (Genesis 9), Abraham (Genesis 15 and 17), Moses (Exodus 19-24) and David (2 Samuel 5). These Covenants reach their final fulfilment in the New Covenant inaugurated through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. We are called to be mediators of this New Covenant, sealed through the Spirit and expressed in the Lord’s Supper.

During 2003 Anglicans and Methodists signed a national covenant - ‘a major commitment to work together, at every level of church life, in all ways that now become appropriate, and strive to overcome all remaining obstacles to further and fuller forms of visible unity’ (Preface

to Covenant p.vi). We wish to include all four of our denominational traditions in our covenantal process.

In addition we wish to include as part of this Covenant a commitment to all the peoples of West Swindon & The Lydiards. This will recognise that God has made unconditional Covenants with his creation (Genesis 9 & 15, Numbers 25, 2 Samuel 7, Jeremiah 31), and so we must follow that model in our dealings with others.

We wish this Covenant to be signed by our Partnership Leaders, and also by our Denominational Leaders at a special Covenant Service. We will then celebrate the Covenant at an Annual Covenant Renewal Service - looking back to achievements, and forward to challenges in the future to which we specifically commit ourselves.