

Walton Churches Partnership

Working together in faith and hope to show the love of Christ

WALTON CHURCHES PARTNERSHIP & CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

“Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts. In the same way, all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free, have been baptized into the one body by the same Spirit, and we have all been given the one Spirit to drink.”

The journey of faith is a journey together with our sisters and brothers in the community of the Church. Each of our individual congregations is part of a wider ecumenical group called Walton Churches Partnership (WCP). Legally Walton Churches Partnership is ‘The Church’ and each congregation is an expression of that ‘Church’ in a particular place. In the WCP each congregation (All Saints, St Mary’s, Christ the King and Church without Walls) brings together people not just from the four sponsoring denominations – Baptist, URC, Methodist, Church of England – but also other church traditions.’ This rich diversity in our Church and in our congregations is a gift and a challenge.

Government changes, that began more than 10 years ago, mean that Churches now need to register as charities. As a partnership we have been aware of this for at least 7 years (both Ruth and Matt were told of the discussions when they arrived in 2013). This has proved particularly complicated for the hundreds of ecumenical partnerships, such as our own, across the country.

The key work has been undertaken by all four sponsoring denominations at a national level over many years and moving to become a **Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)** is the next, crucial, step in the process. The document, that ecumenical partnerships across the country, such as ourselves, are being asked to agree, represents this important collaboration between the denominations. They have sought to find a fruitful way of continuing to work together while recognising the differences within the denominations.

There are small areas where the local context has input into the nature of the document, but the substantial content is something as a partnership that we need to accept if we are to continue to function (we must legally move to charitable status by 31st March 2021). We must trust in the hard work that our national denominations have put into this process and rejoice that we do not have to do all the hard work ourselves!

At the heart of this process there are two levels to our mission: the churches and congregations (the WCP) ‘on the ground’, and the charity (CIO) which supports the work of the churches. The CIO is there to provide a stronger structure to support the continuing mission of the ecumenical churches.

Jesus uses the wonderful image of the vine in **John 15**. The vine is a great picture of the diversity of Christ’s followers, one branch winds off in one direction, another twisting off in an entirely different direction, but all the branches can be traced back to the one trunk. Their unity comes from their rootedness in Christ. Vines, though, often need a trellis to help them grow - a structure that supports the branches. Maybe we can picture the CIO as the structure that supports the diversity of our branches: it is there to simply help us grow.

