

The Sharing Agreement explained

The Wood St premises still belong to the Methodist Church Trust (TMCP), not to Wellspring. You may consider that what follows below does not reflect the spirit of our Local Ecumenical Partnership but lawyers insist that such a Sharing Agreement is necessary alongside the LEP Constitution. It is a document adapted from one originally intended for a rather different sort of sharing.

(For instance, if at some time in the past the Baptist chapel had burned down and Baptists had wanted to hire the Methodist chapel in order to carry on *purely Baptist* worship – say on Sunday afternoons – and hold their own Baptist midweek meetings and events, they'd need a Sharing Agreement.)

It is an agreement between Wirksworth's Methodist Church Council (Geoffrey and Sue will sign it) and Baptist Church members (Bill and John Bayes will sign). It needs the consent of the East Midland Baptist Trust Company and the Nottingham & Derby Methodist District.

It allows Baptists and Methodists **equal rights** to use the Wood St building.

A Baptist minister or lay preacher can **conduct worship** in Wood St in accordance with Baptist practices providing s/he complies with (essentially) our LEP Constitution.

It makes Baptists just as responsible as Methodists for meeting the **cost of managing** the buildings. This includes insurance; repairs; replacement of fixtures, furnishings and ornaments; *but not* structural repairs to the main walls, roof or foundations.

It makes the two parties to the agreement equally responsible for the **cost of upkeep**:

heating, lighting, cleaning and caretaking;

but not the cost of specifically Baptist or Methodist amenities such as denominational hymnbooks.

If there is not enough money for the above in our common Wellspring Funds, Methodists and Baptists are equally responsible for making up the **shortfall**.

In the normal course of events, the LEP Trustees are responsible for managing this Agreement but either Methodists or Baptists can request a separate meeting – the **Joint Council** – which overlaps the Trustees but is slightly larger and broader, in order to settle Sharing issues.

Where it gets tricky is if Baptists want to contribute money for **improvements** to the Wood St premises. Baptist money cannot be tied up in bricks and mortar without the approval of the Baptist Regional Minister Team Leader; and contributions cannot be *accepted* unless the conditions under which the loan or gift is made are approved by the Methodist Connexional Ecumenical Officer. Obtaining these two approvals is not guaranteed. We are still waiting for clarification.

The agreement also says what to do if Wirksworth Methodists or Baptists want to **stop sharing** the building*. (Like making a will, this is something we would rather not think about!)

If Baptists ever *did* want to move out, there would have to be a **settling up** of accounts between the two congregations. This could be quite problematic if Baptists wanted to recoup the donations they had contributed for bricks-and-mortar improvements at Wood St. Where would the Methodists find the money to repay them?

Rob Few, 23 April 2015

* This is not the same as breaking up the LEP: the two congregations could agree to continue using Wood St for worship and midweek activities – at different times – even if the *LEP* were to break up.