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The Application of Canon B44 when Congregations are in Covenanted Partnership

Note: *This study and discussion paper specifically addresses the question of the application of Canon B44 in the context of congregations in covenanted partnership.*

John Cole November 2005

The key visible differences between a local Churches Together group and a local covenanted partnership are likely to be:

- a) The level of mutual commitment and sacramental sharing
- b) In particular the sense that the ministers of the partner churches operate as a committed partnership or as a single ministerial team
- c) The range of joint activities - often including joint initiation training.

When an Anglican parish church or district church makes a commitment with other congregations to form a local covenanted ecumenical partnership, Canon B44 will usually be needed to give formal recognition to this level of commitment as follows :

A: Clauses 1-3 of Canon B44 will be necessary - to cover arrangements for setting up and revoking a formal Local Ecumenical Partnership (known as a 'Project' in the Canon) -

1. The creation of an LEP under Clause 1 of B44 will formalise the proposed covenant by ensuring that the bishop is the lead partner on behalf of the Church of England. Once all denominations have made their commitment, it will then be registered as an LEP by the area's Ecumenical Sponsoring Body

2. Setting up an LEP consolidates the individual permissions that a bishop may grant in any parish under Canon B43 (when requested by the incumbent and PCC): viz:

i) The bishop can give permission for ministers of Churches designated under the Ecumenical Relations Measure to perform the following in a Church of England service on a regular basis (provided they are baptised and authorised to do the equivalent in their own church):

- a) Say or sing Mattins or Evensong or the Litany (B43.1(1)(a) and B43.1(2)(a)(ii))
- b) Preach at any service (B43.1(1)(c) and B43.1(2)(a)(ii))
- c) Assist at Baptism or the Solemnisation of Matrimony or conduct a Funeral Service (B43.1(1)(e) and B43.1(2)(a)(ii))
- d) Assist in the distribution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people at the Holy Communion (B43.1(1)(f) and B43.1(2)(a)(i))

NOTE: The bishop's permission is not required when members of designated Churches are invited by the incumbent to read Holy Scriptures (B43.1(1)(b)), to lead intercessions or prayers (B43.1(1)(d)), or (with the PCC's approval) to preach at or say (sing) Mattins or Evensong.

ii) The bishop can give permission for an Anglican priest or deacon to take part in services in a non-Anglican church on a regular basis (provided it is something they are authorised to do in the Church of England - and provided they have the permission of the incumbent and PCC of the parish where the non-Anglican church is situated) (B43.3(a)(iii)) - but with restrictions when it comes to presiding at Holy Communion - see below:

iii) The bishop can give permission for an Anglican priest to preside at Holy Communion in a non-Anglican church, whether on a specific occasion or regularly, only if he "is satisfied that there are special circumstances which justify acceptance of the invitation and that the rite and the elements to be used are not contrary to, nor indicative of any departure from, the doctrine of the Church of England in any essential matter." (B43.4) Guidelines to bishops issued by the Council for Christian Unity in 2004 suggest, for example, that the Anglican/Methodist Covenant provides such a 'special circumstance'.

iv) The bishop can give permission similarly in relation to an Anglican deaconess, lay worker or reader (B43.6 (b))

v) The bishop can approve joint worship in the Anglican church and can permit the use of the Anglican church for worship by another church in accordance with its own forms of service on such occasions as he specifies (B43.9). Thus non-Anglicans can be permitted to preside at non-Anglican services of Holy Communion in Anglican churches on a regular basis if this is what the bishop chooses to specify.



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NOTES: Any regular holding of non-Anglican services under B43.9 cannot replace the equivalent Church of England services that are required under Canons B11 and 14, except when the bishop is able to issue a dispensation under B14A for other reasons - e.g. The parish is in a multi-parish benefice. Canon B14A allows parishes to set aside their weekly Sunday obligation to provide Anglican services (Mattins, Evensong and Holy Communion) only on an occasional basis.

It is important to note that this level of sacramental sharing can be achieved in any parish under B43. For some parishes that are part of a covenant partnership, given that B15A allows non-Anglicans to receive Holy Communion in Anglican churches, these provisions might well be sufficient. Designation as an LEP might therefore not be required. The advice offered to bishops about the use of Canon B43 in relation to the Anglican-Methodist Covenant shows how this can work.

B: Clauses 4 - 5 of Canon B44 are also available – to be applied where desired or judged appropriate. The bishop may issue an 'Instrument' (or write a formal letter) authorising the following under B44.4:

i) **If it is intended that ministers of designated Churches should conduct Baptisms in the Anglican church:** The bishop can permit the ministers of other Churches in the Partnership to baptise in the Anglican church (and - by inference - record the baptism in the church baptism register). (B44.4(1)(c)) If, under B43.9, they were 'using' the Anglican church for a non-Anglican baptism service, the baptism would need to be registered in their own denominational register book.

Case study: In a small village the Anglican and Methodist churches are in a covenant LEP. The Methodist minister lives in the village, while the Anglican priest is NSM and lives elsewhere. In the context of a regular interchange of ministry, these circumstances make it pastorally appropriate for the Methodist to be authorised to conduct baptisms in the parish church.

ii) **If it is intended that Anglican priests should preside regularly at Holy Communion in partner churches:** The bishop can expressly permit an Anglican priest to preside at Holy Communion in partner churches using their authorised rite (B44.4(1)(d)) This could be valuable (especially outside the context of the Anglican/Methodist Covenant) as it is more explicit than B43.4. The rite

and elements used need to be compatible with the doctrine of the Church of England. (B44.4(2))

iii) **If it is intended that there should be joint initiation training and joint baptism/confirmation into 'multiple membership':** The bishop can authorise the holding of joint services, including baptism and confirmation. (B44.4(1)(e))

Case study: Joint initiation training is a feature of many local covenant partnerships. This generates a desire for joint confirmation - even though, for the most part, those who have been confirmed into multiple membership will continue to worship within their own denomination. Their sense of joint membership, however, is likely to deepen these people's commitment to covenant partnership.

iv) **If it is intended that ministers of designated Churches should preside regularly at services of Holy Communion in the Anglican church:** The bishop can authorise the holding, in the Anglican church, of services of Holy Communion presided over by a minister of any other participating Church (B44.4(1)(f)). This provision is more explicit than its nearest equivalent in B43.9. According to the Canon, however, such services are not "services according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England," even when these ministers use an Anglican rite - as they may well be free to do in accordance with their own denominational disciplines.

v) **If it is intended that these services of Holy Communion should replace Anglican services of Holy Communion in the Anglican church on a regular basis:** The bishop can issue a dispensation under Canon B14A by which the Anglican church(es) in the partnership may no longer be required to keep their canonical requirement to have Church of England services (Mattins, Evensong and Holy Communion) every Sunday and on certain principal holy days. (B44.4(1)(b)) But the basis on which he is able to do this will be the provisions of B44.5, which specifies certain key holy days when there must always be a Church of England service of Holy Communion – in order to meet the requirements of Canon B15 about when parishioners are expected to receive Communion.

NOTE: In February 2005 General Synod voted to delete part of Canon B44.5, with the intention of removing this minimum requirement for Church of England Communion services. It is not yet clear whether this simple deletion would achieve the intention or whether further amendments to the Canons would be needed.

vi) **If it is intended that the programme of services in the Anglican church should include**



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joint services: The bishop may authorise these, provided they are compatible with the doctrine of the Church of England. (B44.4(1)(e) and B44.4(2)) Joint services for regular use (e.g. joint baptism and communion services) are, however, usually only required in single-congregation LEPs. It is the role of the Sponsoring Body to assess the suitability of these services on behalf of the participating denominations.

Case study: Two congregations, Anglican and Methodist, in a shared building meet for worship at different times. But they benefit from having a joint baptism service that can be used in conjunction with either service by either minister.

The Bishop's Instrument (or formal letter) may indicate the full range of provisions that are available, even if not all of them are to be introduced immediately.

C: An assessment:

1. Local covenants can exist effectively between Anglican churches and others without reference to Canon B44. The bishop has freedom to grant a wide range of permissions under Canon B.43. Provided the Anglican church can maintain its obligations under Canon B14 to provide Church of England services every Sunday, there is no need to invoke B44 and, in Anglican terms, such a covenant would not be classed as an LEP.

2. If, however, the covenant is set up in the context of Canon B44, it gains

- a) The formal committed agreement of the bishop
- b) Agreed procedures for joint consultation over ministerial appointments
- c) Agreed procedures for seven yearly review and renewal
- d) A proper procedure for ending the LEP if necessary

It can also include:

- e) More explicit authorisation by the bishop for ministers of designated Churches presiding at Holy Communion in Anglican churches (B44.4(1)(f))
- f) More explicit authorisation by the bishop for Anglicans presiding at Holy Communion in designated Churches and/or using the rites of those Churches. (B44.4(1)(d))
- g) The possibility of a dispensation from the requirements of B14 re weekly Anglican

services of Holy Communion (but subject to B44.5)(B44.4(1)(b))

- h) The possibility of ministers of designated Churches conducting Baptism in the Anglican church (B44.4(1)(c))
- i) The possibility of agreed rites for joint worship (B44.4 (1)(e))
- j) The possibility of agreed baptism policies and joint confirmations leading to 'multiple membership'. (B44.4.(1)(e))

3. The formality achieved by B44 is highly desirable (and probably essential) if the local covenant is intended to achieve a serious commitment by the ministers of the partner churches to operate in ministerial partnership, sharing ministry. Such a commitment by ministers needs to be matched by the commitment of the congregations to accept such a shared ministry. The procedure for setting up an LEP is an appropriate way of testing this on behalf of the Anglican congregation.

4. The usefulness of the 'added value' of B44 - listed in items (e) to (j) above - will depend on the context and aspirations of each particular covenant. The expectations of a covenanted partnership need to be tested thoroughly and repeatedly.

D: Conclusion:

o In most cases Anglican churches entering local covenanted partnerships should be encouraged to follow the procedures for setting up an LEP that are set out in Canon B44.

o At the same time the Anglican church should work out with its prospective partners and with the bishop what specific authorisations the bishop ought to be offering them as part of the provisions of B44.4.

o Those who might want to draw on particular provisions in the future might suggest that the bishop makes provision for such future developments from the outset.

o The whole process will be part of an important conversation within the LEP concerning its long-term goals. Covenanted LEPs, perhaps more than any other kind of ecumenical partnership, will always be in a state of flux, either developing towards deeper expressions of unity or else growing weaker. Canon B44 can and should be used flexibly and creatively as part of a sensitive pastoral oversight of this living relationship.