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Where should the Church of England 'locate' a single-congregation LEP?

A variety of pastoral schemes is possible when a diocese plans to 'locate' a single-congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership within diocesan structures. All have both advantages and disadvantages. This paper aims to set out the pros and cons of different patterns that have been adopted over the years.

Two significant trends:

Both these trends affect how the different options should be evaluated.

1. The appointment of sole ministers to single-congregation LEPs. Older LEP constitutions, and to some extent the Canonical provisions of B44, assume that some level of ministerial provision would be made by all or most partners in a single-congregation LEP. This now rarely happens and the diocese needs to be very clear about the practical implications if the bishop chooses to authorise a minister from a partner Church to be 'engaged in the cure of souls' and be effectively in sole charge in a single-congregation LEP.

2. Pastoral re-organisation leading to 'maxi-parishes' and/or multi-parish benefices. LEP arrangements need to reflect a widespread trend away from single-parish benefices, even though Canon B44 is couched firmly in 'parish' terms. If this is the case, 'Conventional Districts' – as a halfway house towards the creation of a new parish - belong to a past perspective. Given the challenge of the major new housing developments taking place across the country, it is not yet clear how dioceses are planning to respond.

A Principle

Local Ecumenical Partnership needs to be in the mainstream of pastoral planning as a resource to it – not endlessly seeking special provision.

A: District Church in a large parish

Advantages

- Church of England services are provided elsewhere in the parish.
- It is relatively easy in terms of legal procedures within the Church of England to build a place of worship within a parish and designate it as a district church
- A new generation of 'maxi-parishes' may be emerging, broadly following this model, within which there can be a range of 'expressions of church life'

Disadvantages

- The LEP can be hidebound by PCC decisions (e.g. on women priests) – although clearly this is something to be thought through very carefully in advance!
- Partner churches with a congregational polity can find the team arrangement difficult – and feel the Church of England is treating LEPs as 'second-rate'
- Puts high premium on effective leadership and team working
- LEP more at risk if unsuitable appointments are made
- Local people in the area are entitled to be married in the parish church, but an LEP minister from a partner church will not be able to conduct the wedding (secular marriage law)

Other issues

- Anglican ministers must commit to circuits (and vice versa)

B: Conventional District in a team parish

(lower level of autonomy)

Advantages

- Where the LEP is a new development, a CD is easier to set up than a new parish.
- Church of England services are provided elsewhere in the team parish.
- The automatic right to marry in the parish church *may* not apply.

Disadvantages

- The LEP may still be at risk of being hidebound by PCC decisions (e.g. on women priests) – despite



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the presence of representative members of the LEP on the PCC.

- Partner churches with a congregational polity can find the team arrangement difficult – and feel the Church of England is treating LEPs as ‘second-rate’
- Puts high premium on effective leadership and team working
- LEP more at risk if unsuitable appointments are made

Other issues

- Anglican ministers must commit to circuits (and vice versa)
- The degree of autonomy within a CD is infinitely variable between ‘daughter church’ and quasi-independent parish.
- CDs should be reviewed at least every five years
- CDs often seen as experimental areas en route to becoming full parishes

C: Autonomous Conventional District

(quasi-parish)

Advantages

- Where the LEP is a new development, a CD is easier to set up than a new parish.
- The CD is free to develop its own structures, thus making it easier to create an Ecumenical Church Council that is compatible with the role of a PCC.

Disadvantages

- Could become so parochially minded that the LEP forgets partner churches and their other ways of decision-making
- Might create difficulties in the provision of episcopally-ordained priests when required (Canon B44.5 unamended)
- The wording of Canon B44.2 can be taken to imply that it is the incumbent and PCC of the original parish, and not the governing body of the CD, which decides on whether or not to ask the bishop for the renewal of the LEP after seven years.

Other issues

- Anglican ministers must commit to circuits (and vice versa)
- CDs should be reviewed at least every five years
- CDs often seen as experimental areas en route to becoming full parishes

D: Parish in multi-parish benefice

Advantages

- Can provide episcopally-ordained priest when required. (Canon B44.5 unamended)
- Can offer alternative Church of England worship within the benefice (Canon B14A)

Disadvantages

- Can easily lose its multi-denominational identity if the Anglican incumbent in the benefice is careless
- A minister from a partner church working in the LEP risks only having ‘curate’ status – particularly if only very part-time
- A ‘sole minister’ has to be Anglican, in order to serve the rest of the benefice

Other issues

- Anglican ministers must commit to circuits (and vice versa)

E: Separate parish

Advantages

- Offers the best model of equal participation by the Church of England in the eyes of other partners

Disadvantages

- Could become so parochially minded that the LEP forgets partner churches and their other ways of decision-making
- Likely to create difficulties in the provision of episcopally-ordained priests when required (Canon B44.5 unamended)

Other issues

- Anglican ministers must commit to circuits (and vice versa)
- Requires a scale of local church life sufficient to justify and sustain the appointment of a separate full-time ordained minister – someone who does not have responsibilities in other parishes
- If the LEP parish is smaller than this, a possible alternative might be to link the appointment of the ordained minister to some non-parochial specialist ministry.
- Conceivably a full-time non-parochial specialist could be the nominal priest-in-charge (and available for when an episcopally-ordained priest is required – Canon B44.5 unamended) – thus allowing a minister from a partner church to be engaged in the cure of souls.



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Footnote:

A Conventional District

A definition from the Church Commissioners' Code of Recommended Practice for the Pastoral Measure:

*A defined area placed under the care of a curate in charge (called the Minister of the Conventional District) with a district church council, by agreement between the **incumbent(s)** and **bishop**. They are not **parishes** but can have all the apparatus of a parish. They are often thought of as experimental parishes pending their creation as proper parishes in their own right.*

There is a procedure under Section 2A of the Pastoral Measure 1983 for reviewing the arrangements for pastoral supervision in Conventional Districts at least once every five years and this reinforces the idea that they are supposed to be a temporary state.

For the future:

It will be important to monitor the impact of the 'Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure' which was passed by General Synod in November 2005 and is due to come into operation in 2008.