

**Non-Anglican Ministers in Single Congregation  
Local Ecumenical Partnerships ~**

**The Church of England Perspective**

# Things you wish they'd told you!

*This leaflet is in your hands because, as a minister in another tradition, you are the sole minister in a single congregation Local Ecumenical Partnership where one of the partners is the Church of England.*

## Thank you

*for being an ecumenical pioneer! Within the Church of England, beneath a legalistic exterior, beats a devotional heart and a passionate commitment to share God's love with all who live in each locality.*

*Thank you for enriching the Church of England with the perspectives you bring from your own tradition.*

*Thank you for being part of a process whereby every tradition is being called to grow and change and learn how to be more faithful to God's mission.*

*John Cole  
National Adviser (Unity in Mission)  
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In the following, words in *italics* are explained in a Glossary (see enclosed sheet)

### **A: People in *parishes* have rights and expectations**

1. A single congregation LEP where the Church of England is a partner will be either
  - a) A parish in its own right servicing a precisely-defined geographical area. (It might also be part of a *Group Ministry*.)
  - b) Part of a parish - with the implication that in the same parish there will be another Church

of England 'parish' church or place of worship and an *incumbent* minister - *Vicar, Rector* or *Team Rector*.

- c) A *conventional district* - which for practical purposes operates in the same way as a parish.

In exceptional cases, e.g. a few pioneering church plants, you might find yourself ministering in an *extra-parochial place*.

2. Everyone living in a parish can expect to receive ministry from the parish church in terms of baptisms, weddings, funerals and pastoral care. On behalf of the Church of England, therefore, you are the minister to everyone in your geographical area - but not outside it, except for those who worship with you regularly and choose to be on your *Church Electoral Roll /LEP Membership list*.

3. Being an LEP in only part of a parish can have advantages and disadvantages, e.g.,

- a) The LEP can develop a baptismal policy knowing that the legal obligation to baptise all comers can be addressed at the parish church up the road.
- b) The flip side is that people from the LEP area can choose to be married at the parish church and the potential pastoral and evangelistic contact is lost - see also section C below. The pastoral opportunities associated with funerals can also be lost in the same way.
- c) Being an LEP in only part of a parish does, however, bring to light what is true even when a non-Anglican minister is effectively in sole charge in a parish - namely that there is still an ordained Anglican minister who is nominally 'in charge' of that parish. Usually that person will be the *Rural/Area Dean* and the parish itself will be nominally 'in vacancy'.

### **B. In an LEP, the ministries of Anglican priests and ministers/presbyters of other traditions are shared, though not formally interchangeable.**

Your LEP place of worship is 'a Church of England place of worship' as well as being shared with others by the very fact that the Church of England is a partner in the LEP - and probably also because of the existence of a *Shared Building Agreement*. This explains the legal language in what follows:

Canon B44 (which regulates Church of England participation in LEPs) allows the *bishop* of a *diocese* to make an *Instrument* (for which is often substituted a less formal 'letter of authorisation')

- \* authorising a minister from another church to baptise in a Church of England place of worship.
- \* allowing joint services with other participating churches in the LEP
- \* authorising services of Holy Communion presided over by a minister from another church.

When, therefore, you preside at services of Holy Communion, they are not (legally speaking) "services of Holy Communion according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England" - even if you use (as you may) the Church of England form of service in *Common Worship*. Of course, the very fact that you are in an LEP means that few people will notice the difference!

The bishop is still required by Canon, however, to ensure that Church of England services of Holy Communion are celebrated "at least on Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, Easter Day, Ascension Day and Pentecost." In the situation where the LEP covers only part of the parish, this requirement can be met if adequate publicity is given to the Church of England services of Holy Communion elsewhere in the parish.

If, however, the LEP covers a whole parish and you, as a minister from another church are the only resident minister, the legal requirement is that an appropriate Church of England minister is drafted in from elsewhere. Obviously this has to be handled sensitively - as part of the pain of our continued incomplete unity. The Church of England can only hope that you will be gracious about this requirement, which is part of the Church of England's legal obligation to provide Church of England worship in every parish of the nation. There is no requirement that the Church of England service should be the main service on these major festivals - and it helps greatly if the Church of England minister is already known to the congregation.

### **C. Weddings - and the law of the land!**

Church of England priests are ipso facto recognised by the law of the land as the officers of the crown who conduct marriages after banns.

If your LEP place of worship has a *Shared Building Agreement*, it can (and should) be both licensed by the bishop for Church of England marriages (which only Church of England clergy can conduct) and registered under the 1949 Marriage Act for marriages by an authorised person of another church.

The legal limitations here can cause real difficulties when the LEP is only part of a parish. If someone living in your part of the parish (for whom you have been given pastoral charge) exercises his or her right to be married in the parish church (which is unlikely to be covered by a Shared Building Agreement), only a Church of England clergy person will be allowed to conduct the wedding.

You can of course play some part in the wedding service in the parish church - something encouraged by Canon B43.

### **D. What it means to be part of a Church of England Diocese**

1. The *diocese* (and its *bishop*) are important in Anglican self-understanding. Ultimately the bishop is responsible for everything that goes on in his diocese. So it is quite possible that your bishop or *archdeacon* (see glossary!) will want to pay you a visit - or even arrive out of the blue! Getting both the bishop and the archdeacon involved in the LEP can be valuable. In an Anglican/Methodist LEP, for example, a regular (but not too frequent) meeting between the archdeacon, the circuit superintendent and LEP leaders can prevent many misunderstandings.

2. Your LEP constitution should have been drafted in such a way that your Ecumenical Church Council - through which your church is routinely governed - can be at the same time a *Parochial Church Council* (or *District Church Council* - if in part of a parish) and the relevant governing body of your other partner denominations.

Occasionally there may be reasons why it still needs to be constituted as a PCC or DCC - if only for particular items. In these circumstances Church of England rules apply as to who should chair the meeting. The usual device is to ensure constitutionally that the lay chair of the Ecumenical Church Council (as established in your LEP constitution) is also ex officio the vice-chair of the PCC/DCC and that he/she should chair the

meeting in question (notionally deputising for the Anglican incumbent). Similar arrangements will apply for other partner denominations.

3. In the same way your LEP constitution should specify how annual church meetings should be conducted - in a way which is consistent with the legal requirements of the Church of England.

*Churchwardens*, reflecting their historic role as bishop's officers for the whole parish, are appointed at what is technically a separate meeting solely for that purpose. Everyone resident in the parish may attend and share in the appointment process.

Your annual church meeting will be the occasion every three years when you elect representatives to the *Deanery Synod*. Deanery Synod members in turn elect to the *Diocesan Synod* and *General Synod*.

4. Your congregation will be expected to pay an annual contribution to the diocese ("*Parish share*" or "*Quota*"). In most dioceses arrangements for funding are made at diocesan level - and the amount of the contribution can be quite substantial.

Since your LEP will also be making contributions to the funds of other partner denominations, careful negotiation will be needed to ensure that the combined total of contributions is not unreasonably high. In some parts of the country, formulae have been agreed between the denominations and you are encouraged to enquire whether these exist locally.

5. Sadly you will not, as a minister of another church, be an automatic member of the *Deanery Chapter*. It is to be hoped, however, that you will be welcome as a full and active participant at all meetings - apart from on those rare occasions when a formal vote is called for from "*the House of Clergy*" of the Deanery Synod.

6. Similarly you should be encouraged to take part in the Deanery Synod. It is recognised, however, that you will be similarly expected/encouraged to become involved in the wider groupings within the other participating denominations.

7. Through the *Church Representation Rules*, you could in theory be elected to Deanery Synod,

and from there to Diocesan Synod or even *General Synod* - but only as a member of the *House of Laity*. It would be embarrassing for the Church of England if you were to follow this course, because the Church of England wants very much to affirm your ordination to ministry in practice, even though it cannot do so on an 'interchangeable' basis.

8. Most dioceses have a team of resource and advisory personnel available to support local churches. This may be more extensive than anything you have been used to elsewhere. You are encouraged to make full use of them. They are likely to cover such areas as stewardship/funding, children's work, youth work, adult education, ministerial training, mission and evangelism etc. Some dioceses may be able to offer you grants for Continuing Ministerial Education.

9. You will be as likely to want to encourage vocations to accredited ministries from among your LEP congregation as you would in any other context. At present all such ministries - Readers, Local Preachers, Ordained ministries - are denominational. Please take advice early from your County Ecumenical Officer or relevant denominational advisers, to ensure that denominational requirements do not conflict with your ecumenical aspirations.

## **E. Conventions and disciplines in Church of England worship**

1. Church of England discipline requires that the form of worship to be used at Sunday services - if it is to be other than the Book of Common Prayer - should be discussed and agreed at your church council meeting. In practice, there may already be specially-drafted liturgies for your LEP which have been approved by your *County Sponsoring Body*. If not, it will be important to gain the agreement of your church council about the extent to which Church of England service material will be used and how it can be blended with material from other traditions. Recent provision for a Service of the Word requires a shape to worship but allows great flexibility within that. "*New Patterns for Worship*" is a valuable resource book.

As usual the balancing act is to maintain both diversity and continuity, and to blend meaningful structure with spontaneity.

In reality the Church of England discipline matches good practice. The challenge in an LEP is to draw

on the riches from the worship styles of all the partner churches (and elsewhere!), and not be limited either to the minimum that everyone can tolerate, or only to those things that are familiar to the minister from within his or her tradition. Particular care needs to be taken over liturgies for Holy Communion.

2. Licensed *Readers* within the Church of England may well be found in your congregation - just as there may also be Local Preachers etc. from other traditions. These will have a lot to contribute to the conduct of worship. They are well trained and authorised by the bishop to preach. They and others in the congregation, including organist/choir master/director of music, will expect to be involved in shaping Sunday's act of worship.

3. If there is a regular choir or musician, they may well expect to choose the hymns or other musical items for the service. This can work well, provided everyone is working to the discipline of using the *Church Calendar* and *Common Lectionary*. If you want to divert from the regular lectionary, it will be important to share your ideas with everyone concerned in good time. "Sunday by Sunday" is a resource for hymnody linked to the Common Lectionary which is published by the Royal School of Church Music, an agency commended by General Synod.

4. Most congregations will provide lesson readers and, if there is a set liturgy, people to lead *intercessions*. The more settled the liturgy, the more you may have to quiz people to discover 'how things are done' - e.g., where people stand for different parts of the service, how communion is administered, disciplines about the disposal of the bread and wine after communion, etc. Anglicans are particularly sensitive about what happens to the remainder of the bread and wine that has been blessed during the communion service. They expect it to be 'consumed' - as specified in the rubric in Common Worship.

Not that you should always feel forced to follow convention! Everything should be negotiable - but everything will need to be discussed openly, including the deep significance that some may attach to certain actions. This is part of what makes ecumenical partnership so creative!

Other potentially sensitive areas include the wine used at communion and what vestments to wear.

5. You may have to get local advice about whether it is appropriate in your LEP to give children communion prior to confirmation. Church of England policy nationally allows this under House of Bishops guidelines but practice may vary from diocese to diocese. What you agree to do in your LEP may need to be ratified through the Sponsoring Body.

6. You will also need to discover locally whether, as permitted by Canon B44, bishops in your diocese are willing to take part in joint Confirmations. Briefing papers are available within the Resource Pack compiled by the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity.

## **F. Finally - there are friends in high places(!)**

Hopefully you will quickly develop a good working relationship with your County Ecumenical Officer and your appropriate denominational Ecumenical Officers, including the Diocesan or Archdeaconry Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England. They should have run up against most of the issues that you are likely to face. If they don't know the answers, they know who to ask!

### **Induction Courses for new Incumbents**

Many dioceses provide induction days for new incumbents, or those arriving from other dioceses, to introduce people to the way things happen in the diocese and to the resources that are available.

You are encouraged to find out from the Rural Dean or from the Diocesan Office what your diocese can offer, and to make sure you receive an invitation.

## *Things you wish they'd told you!*

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