

Working with multiple PCCs

Clergy working in multi-parish benefices, many in a rural context, often spend numerous hours and evenings attending PCC meetings. They may suggest uniting parishes to cut down on this workload, but this idea may not go down well in fiercely independent village communities. At least one diocese has a "one vicar, one parish" rule for rural benefices! However, there are ways of reducing the workload of meetings without necessarily making such radical changes and this leaflet suggests some options. There are parallels with models in the educational world, where smaller schools work as a federation under one headteacher or run working groups concurrently to enable the head to attend each as necessary.

Co-ordinating PCC meetings

No legal process is needed to co-ordinate PCC meetings so that they take place on the same evening and in the same venue. It just needs local co-operation!

In one 3-parish benefice, all the PCCs meet on the same evening in a local school. They meet together in plenary for part of the time to discuss mission, events, items that would be on each PCC agenda and other matters of mutual concern. They then break out into 3 separate PCCs in separate rooms, under the lay vice-chair, for their own business, with the incumbent able to move between the meetings as needed. The lay chair of each PCC is responsible for providing feedback to the incumbent.

Note that separate APCMs will continue to be held.

It may be helpful to create smaller working/task groups, to enable the PCCs to focus on their task of **co-operating with the incumbent in promoting in their parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.**

Creating an informal Joint Benefice Council

Bring together the churchwardens of all the parishes and any assistant clergy to meet with the incumbent periodically to discuss mission initiatives, joint events and any other matters of mutual concern. The churchwardens will need to report back to their individual PCCs.

In smaller benefices, the membership might be extended to include Readers, PCC Secretaries, etc.

This can be a good way of encouraging co-operation, getting new ideas and making the best use of time.

Creating a Joint Council – the formal way

The formal process for creating a Joint Council, to provide a recognised framework for the longer term, is set out in the Church Representation Rules (rule M37). A Joint Council can apply to all the parishes in a benefice, or to just two or more within that area. Joint Councils now have a legal

"corporate" identity like that of a PCC, can hold property and have corporate liability in the same way as a PCC.

The Annual Meetings agree, by making a joint scheme, to create a Joint Council (or this can be done at a Special Meeting in each parish).

The Pastoral Secretary at the Diocesan Office can provide guidance on:

- who to include as members – this will be the parish clergy and an agreed number of lay representatives from each parish, who could be the churchwardens or PCC members additionally elected to the Joint Council
- who the chair should be, and
- what functions of individual PCCs should be delegated to the Joint Council.

The scheme agreed locally is agreed by the Bishop's Council and it then comes into operation on a specified date, before the next Annual Meetings.

One group of 6 small parishes in rural Bedfordshire has operated a Joint Council for more than 20 years and has re-established it under the latest Church Representation Rule provisions. The Joint Council has a Lay Chair and discusses the main PCC business, including worship, mission and some finances. It has a legal status like that of a PCC and is responsible for safeguarding across the benefice. The individual village PCCs meet primarily to deal with matters relating to the individual church buildings.

The individual PCCs can continue to exist as well as the Joint Council, or the PCCs can decide to transfer all their functions to the Joint Council, in which case the individual PCCs become dormant.

It is important to think carefully about which functions should be exercised by the Joint PCC and which should be retained at parish level. Matters such as finance, including Parish Share, may be contentious.

The Scheme could be replaced by a new Scheme involving more parishes if the benefice is enlarged; a Scheme can also be revoked using a similar process to setting it up.

Creating a single parish

This may be too radical for some, but it is a good model in a group of small parishes used to working together (perhaps already with a Joint Council). A Pastoral Scheme is required to unite the parishes into a single entity. The new parish will then have a single PCC, although there could be Village Church Councils or Fabric Committees to deal with the care of the individual churches. There would only be one APCM. The churches could all remain Parish Churches, or some could become Chapels of Ease with no separate churchwardens and no requirement to have a service every week.

The Pastoral Secretary can provide guidance on the implications of creating a single parish and the process to be followed.

For more information, please contact your Archdeacon or the Pastoral Secretary: 01727 818138 or pastoral@stalbans.anglican.org.

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