

## **Towards unity for Christ, in Christ and with Christ**

### **1:3:6: from theory to action**

**Proposal: That the two PCCs who between them already hold responsibility and liability for the actions of the whole Benefice look at whether it is timely to operate as a joint PCC in some form.**

This is a background briefing paper to set a context and to generate discussion for the PCCs.

#### **Context:**

Busbridge and Hambledon have been a united Benefice since the 1990s. They have the same structures and the same Rector. The Rector is part of two PCCs, works with four wardens, two treasurers, two sets of standing committees...

In recent times we have been operating as a single Benefice. It may be that individuals have not quite realised this but this has been going on for a while. Stephanie operated across the Benefice. It may not be well known but some members of Hambledon church asked to meet with the previous Rector to discuss the advantages of greater mutual relationship. Members of Busbridge church gave generously to the project when Hambledon undertook an extension. Similarly, some members of Busbridge have offered to support Alwyn's work in Hambledon with a financial pledge.

Many of the issues one PCC addresses are addressed by the other PCC the following week. In a recent (2011) PCC it was noted by a member of Hambledon PCC that five of the six items on that agenda were Benefice issues and would be discussed at the other PCC too.

The Diocese sees the Benefice as the primary vehicle of operation logistically, financially and legally. There is no concept of Busbridge parish or Hambledon parish in Diocesan circles.

Hambledon Rectory was sold in the 1990s because there cannot be two Rectory's in a single Benefice as the Benefice is the primary unit seen by the Diocese.

The Diocese does not make distinction between the finances of Hambledon and that of Busbridge. The Diocese sees the Benefice as the "Cure of Souls" held by the Rector. Cure of Souls can only be held by one person and then shared with others internally. The financial 'split' of 80/20 costs for the Rector and 50/50 for the Associate that the Diocese indicate are simply given because the previous Rector asked the Diocese to indicate this split in this manner. Most Benefices show no external split from the Diocese but simply divide it internally.

It has come as a surprise to some that the Diocese sees the Benefice as the financial heart of operations. This came to the fore during negotiations regarding the Associate post.

The licences of those authorised or on the paid staff are to the Benefice. The permission of occasional preachers is assumed by the Diocese to be to the Benefice.

Our electoral roll, though divided as Busbridge-Hambledon is legally a Benefice electoral roll. For example, it is already legally stated in our Diocesan licence to officiate as Clerks (clergy) that someone living in Busbridge parish or on the electoral roll of Busbridge can marry at Hambledon and visa-versa.

The Benefice interregnum and Stephanie leaving Hambledon has brought some existing practice to the fore and has led to greater integration. There is fluidity of musicians and resources across services, congregations and worship evenings. Clergy from the Benefice have been leading Hambledon's services and we are seeing some of those who lead at Hambledon leading and preaching in Busbridge.

The Benefice shares an evangelical theology and openness to the Holy Spirit.

The concept of 1 church, 3 sites and 6 congregations appears to have been well received though is of course in its early days. This is important. There is no strength in size alone. Strength comes from faith in the Lord. Hambledon has been a large church with dynamic youth work. It is not so right now. A small church today may be a large church tomorrow and visa-versa. It is better to be one together where this is possible: we can learn from one another.

We already have a situation where we have a global specialist in risk assessment in one PCC with members of the other PCC asking if that person might take this on for the Benefice. Likewise, we have specialists in HR in Busbridge who might bring expertise to a joint staffing group?

### **Where may this be leading?**

The legal structures are already in place for greater integration. The wardens of one parish of the Benefice have a responsibility to operate as warden in the other parish if required. It is already legally possible to have just two Benefice Wardens who are appointed by the Benefice/joint PCC decision. The Benefice is a legally recognised body (it may interest some to know that a Deanery has no legal jurisdiction).

### **Learning from elsewhere**

This is not the first Benefice or group of churches to explore the issues raised here. There are Benefice' in Gloucestershire where a single stipendiary vicar leads 8 parishes. Each church in the parish is led by a lay team. Rather than operate with 8 PCCS, 16 Wardens and 8 treasurers they combine as a single unit with the PCC taking a strategic overview whilst day to day operations are led by each team.

There is a Benefice in Chichester Diocese (Horsham) of four churches. Each church has its own clergy and staff teams. Finance is held locally in the churches but governance is held by a central PCC which also operates as employer.

Another Benefice is Chichester Diocese (Lewes) has at least three parishes. It has been combining for many years. This Benefice has one warden for each church and a single treasurer team across the Benefice with the treasurers of each church meeting quarterly to support one another.

In all the above cases the legal position of the accounts is that they have to be signed off as individual accounts at the end of year (ie: each church has to have an audit) but the treasurers working together support one another and reduce the workload.

In our own Diocese of Guildford we only have to go as far as Loxwood to find two legally distinct parish churches operating as a united PCC. The two PCCs meet together but if there is a particular issue pertaining to only one PCC they decide at that moment to either stay together to hear wider

voices (wise council of the wider PCCs) or divide into two PCCs. It seems they began by dividing but learnt that trusting one another meant they preferred to hear wider views so now divide quite rarely.

### **What is the view of the Diocese?**

To say the Archdeacon is enthusiastic is an understatement. It would be welcomed by the Diocese. Stuart pointed to Loxwood as an example to seek advice from. The vicar who has just retired is John Burley. John was previously a vicar in the same parish that Simon came from. It appears the Diocese may be interested to see how it would work in one of the larger Benefice' of the Diocese and could see it as a possible model for the future. They would also be interested to see how it created capacity for the 'Gloucester example' above – in other words, more parishes being seen as a single unit.

### **How could it work?**

#### **Framework**

- The two PCCs would need to make reciprocal statements affirming their desire to meet together. This agreement could be rescinded in the future by a mechanism agreed by both PCCs.
- If desired there would need to be agreement that the PCC of one would be able to vote on issues of the PCC of the other. Otherwise the framework would need to state that if a decision required vote regarding one PCC the other members could comment but would be non-voting. Alternatively, the PCCs could split at that point.
- A framework would need to be created so that all members knew the parameters of mutual co-operation.

#### **Based on practice elsewhere a framework *could* be (1):**

- Have four wardens, two from each church. Have two treasurers, one from each. Have two assistant wardens for fabric or other related issues, one from each church. Have Rector and Associate. These form the standing committee (or 'PCC acting in mini')
- There is one child protection overseer on the (joint) PCC as reporting person to PCC. Each church has a child protection person (not on PCC). There is one risk assessment monitoring person for PCC. There is one health and safety monitoring person who conducts annual inspection of all church sites (who may be the same person as risk assessment). All this could be termed a 'Safeguarding Committee'.
  - This committee + 1 warden of each church + a nominated clergy person could form the Risk Assessment approval/health and safety document approval team with delegated authority from PCC to authorise risk assessments and to investigate, following Diocesan procedures, any breaches/concerns regarding child protection/safety
- There is one electoral roll officer on the PCC who links with the following: each church has an electoral roll person (not on PCC). The eroll becomes (as it already is!) the Benefice electoral Roll

- Could have two PCC secretaries. When the PCC meets at Hambledon the Hambledon secretary takes minutes and visa-versa (assuming the PCC 'travels'). Why two secretaries? If the two PCCs decide to divide for the second half of a meeting there is a secretary for each group. A single set of central PCC minutes is kept and signed off. If the PCC(s) decided to just stay together at all times only one PCC secretary would be required.

### **Other aspects of framework :**

#### **Number of PCC members.**

This is set legally. It would not alter. The number of members is based on the electoral roll of the church. We currently divide this as Busbridge-Hambledon but we do not need to. Our total roll allows us a PCC of, say, 20 (??? An eg round number) people. How we divide this is our internal decision.

The possible solutions are:

- It is possible to have a joint PCC of an ad hoc number of members from Hambledon and from Busbridge without 'reserving spaces'
- We could state we seek 50/50 split
- We could base it on the divided roll numbers of the two churches
- We could reserve a set number for the smaller church to ensure it has a voice as we would like a balance of members who are willing to understand the wider Benefice context and pool resources and expertise

Perhaps the most straightforward mechanism (used at Loxwood?) would be to state that Hambledon has x spaces, Busbridge has y spaces and this would be reviewed in four years. Where spaces were not filled the other church would be asked to see if extra people would come forward. The reality is that we tend not to have dozens stepping forward each year!

#### **Governance.**

With a single PCC the importance of the governance role of PCC become quite clear. PCCs were not designed to be, for example, the place where the active members met to discuss the harvest meal, arrange it and decide who on PCC will run it. PCC is there to ask critical questions, check significant theological decisions if they depart from the norm of the church, pray and set the policy and governance framework in which the whole church operates. A PCC specifically exists to:

1. Ensure that financial liabilities are met (finance team)
2. That the buildings and sites of the PCC are maintained for future use (buildings team)
3. Child protection, safeguarding, staffing and personnel and other legislation is abided by (Safeguarding team, Staffing team)
4. Legally, there must be a standing committee to act as 'PCC in mini' (Standing committee) which is usually the Officers of the church

In other words: a PCC is the trusteeship which sets policy and ensures others adhere to it

This means that a joint PCC requires each church to have active bodies to deliver groups and events within the policy of the PCC. These operate outside of PCC under delegated authority for the day to day Cure of Souls to the Rector but, where relevant, report to PCC for accountability.

### **Finance**

It is possible to centralise finance onto a single person. This has been done elsewhere (Horsham). Experience suggests that it eventually removes much of the sense of financial ownership from each church and smaller churches look to the larger to 'fund them'. It is suggested this approach be avoided.

A possibility is to have two treasurers, each responsible for reporting to PCC, each working with the relevant vicar but twice/three times a year hold a cross Benefice finance meeting of relevant people.

### **APCM and annual reports.**

PCCs can produce a single annual report together. They can also produce adaptations to reports with common points and individual aspects.

Financially, it is better to submit two audits. It is possible to have a single APCM though it is probably better to have two APCMs so that local voices can be heard.

### **Mutual voting: possible issues**

The key question to address is 'what happens if, for example, Busbridge brings an idea to the table for Busbridge, it is discussed, voted on, every member of Busbridge likes it but Hambledon reject it'? In National terms this is something Parliament chunter on about: should Scots in Westminster vote on English things when Parliament cannot vote in Scotland?

Answer: it might be rare, but it might happen. It requires grace and listening. It requires all PCC members to think beyond a 'single church site box'.

An alternative is that Hambledon members can only vote on Hambledon issues and visa versa. The difficulty here is: what is a 'single site' issue? The reality is that every staff appointment, finance decision... has a joint impact. Another comment (from Lewes) is that one church bringing an idea to the table knowing others will hear it tends to really think the issues through carefully first. A compromise could be that where a decision would seem better as a one-site vote, the PCCs could split to discuss individually.

What about the autonomy of the associate in Hambledon? The reality is that the associate does not have autonomy. There is only one Cure of Souls. Even with Steph, most things were checked with her Rector prior to bringing to Hambledon PCC. Any faculty requires the Rector's signature. Churchyards and the consecrated part of the building are the domain of the Rector alone. A Rector may share it with the associate, but autonomy is not there by right. A combined PCC may be a joy to an associate in Hambledon and free them for the mission imperative that is needed!

### **Dividing to vote on some issues**

An answer to both the above queries is to make clear the protocol that both PCCs may, where something is appropriate to only one site, may request to go into sub groups. At that point the associate vicar would lead the relevant PCC. It is possible that the right associate (or curate?) could chair the entire PCC.

**Sub teams/committees of staffing, safeguarding, finance.... :**

Divided between PCC so mixed numbers and people. Suggest that each church also develop a localised fabric action team (beyond PCC). This would allow expertise to be drawn on from the other team in particular times of need.

**Divide into sub-PCCs for some aspects or stay large?**

Staying together creates more open questions. People from the other PCC less familiar with the context will be able to ask good, simple questions. Dividing allows those with detailed knowledge to discuss in shorthand. It depends on the situation and the impact on the Benefice. It appears this is the process that Loxwood has engaged in. They began dividing but over time decided there was greater strength in always being together but to **have an agreement that where an issue related only to one church, the other PCC members would take a lead from the views of that PCC discussion.**

Or... we could do nothing and keep things as they are.