

The Single Parish Multi Church Benefice



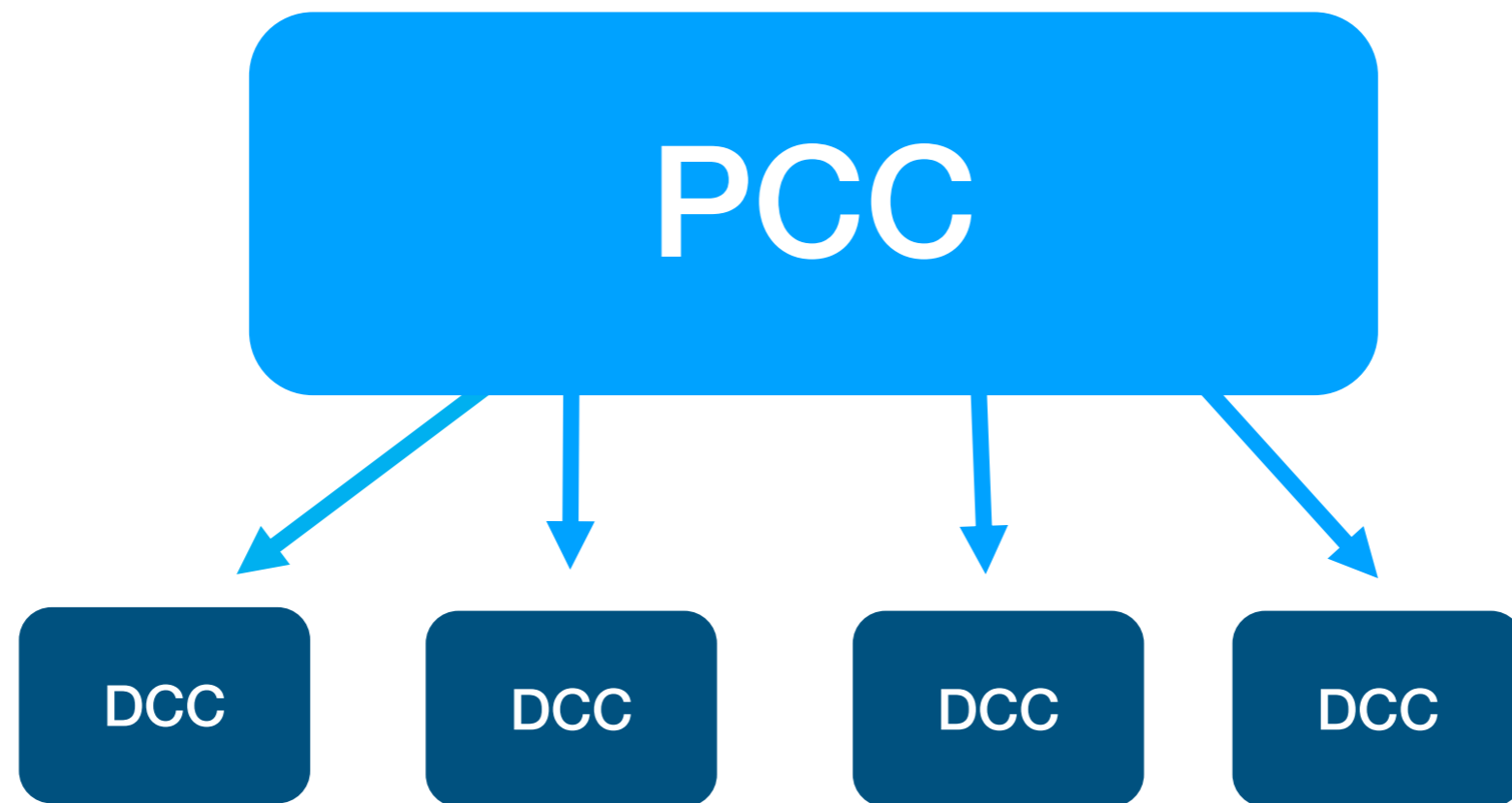
Alex Pease, Rolls Coleman and Simon Ffennell

Alex Pease: Priest in Charge, Itchen Valley Parish. Formerly commercial lawyer Allen & Overy LLP; 15 years in Upper Itchen Benefice, a multi parish benefice – 6 parishes – as churchwarden, treasurer, secretary, and latterly ordinand-in-training; there two unsuccessful attempts to merge parishes; 7 years in Itchen Valley Parish, a multi church single parish – 4 villages - as curate, assistant priest and now priest in charge

Richard Coleman: Honorary Treasurer, Itchen Valley Parish. Chartered Accountant, Richard joined Exxon Mobil in 1974 and in a 35 year career held various key managerial and executive positions across all financial functions. He is currently also Treasurer of the Shipwrecked Mariners Society, Youth Options and Citizens Online

Simon Ffennell: Verger St Swithun's, Martyr Worthy. River keeper and market gardener. Has lived in Martyr Worthy in Itchen Valley Parish all his life. Churchwarden when the MW PCC was merged to form Itchen Valley Parish with Itchen Abbas Avington and Easton

Single Parish Benefice: What it looks like



- PCC is the legal body with trustee responsibilities - holds all the money – all Church Wardens have resp. for all churches
- DCCs delegated responsibility for building management, sidesmen and fund raising

Theological Basis for simplification of governance

- The Holy Spirit is responsible for people coming to faith

John 3:5 Very truly I tell you, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit

- The Holy Spirit is *grieved* by dissension and is less effective in changing hearts

Ephesians 4:30-33 Do not grieve the 'Spirit..get rid of all bitterness rage and anger....'

- The Multi Parish Benefice (MPB) *institutionalizes* dissension within the ministry of one minister, within a cure of souls
- Therefore MPB structures tend to inhibit growth of the kingdom

Advantages of Single Parish Benefice as opposed to Multi Parish Benefice

- Creates a common sense of purpose and mission across combined community
- Enables change to happen - only one body to persuade - no more months of delays as individual PCCs consulted on everything proposed at Benefice Council
- Manages decisively relationship between many villages and one minister
- Reduces duplication of Church Officers: Safeguarding, Data protection, treasurers, secretaries, electoral roll officers, thus regulatory issues more professionally managed (less risk of decisions without faculties)
- Centres power in one place, rather than diffusing it in a series of unmanageable small groups, less demanding to deal with for clergy
- Less process means more time for mission
- Can facilitate a reduction in low attended services without undermining over all church attendance 'It's a single parish, after all'
- Easier to recruit clergy for appointments

Disadvantages of Single Parish Benefice as opposed to Multi Parish Benefice

- Risks losing engagement with the community in smaller villages – if services are reduced, it's a narrow path to keep them engaged (acting as Churchwardens, looking after the building and contributing to the Common Mission Fund)
- It's hard work to set up – can easily be de-railed by even one small community – as in case of Upper Itchen Benefice in 2004

The multi-layered cake issue



Can you create a Single Parish Benefice anywhere?

- The individual parishes need to be culturally and demographically similar, although not the same. The aim is to create a single community. It doesn't matter if they fought on opposite sides in the Civil War!
- Mission geography - does the proposed merger cover the same area as catchment area for a local primary school - existing relationships etc. Can you walk/gently cycle around the proposed parish during a day?

Legal structure

- A scheme under Rule 18 of the Church Representation Rules 2011 and in accordance with Pastoral Measure 1983
- Policy Guidance: states intention to keep all churches open, no major changes to building without consent of village CWs
- Must be approved by APCM or EPCM of combined parish
- In practice needs either agreement or leverage by Bishop on new appointment - starts by merging cash collections

How do you get agreement to set up?

- Good and clear leadership, backed up by the Diocese
- Take the money seriously - parishes with large fabric funds worried about profligate parishes next door - get them to spend the money in advance of set up!
- Allow each village to form 'Friends of St Aloysius' independent of the PCC/DCC for villagers to contribute to their church building
- Get most able church officers to lead the process
- Speak to potential opponents - don't just try to ride roughshod over them

Practical Experience of Merger

Financial Considerations

- Finance can often become a stumbling block
- Used as argument against change rather than actually a show-stopper
- Use of restricted or designated funds can provide comfort that each church is being treated fairly
- Looking into the future, a single Parish can actually provide greater security to financially weaker churches
- Need to take a long term view – we are still evolving the financial position in the Parish

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