The Anglican Communion Institute has received the news, as is now customary (via the blogs), that the Episcopal Diocese of Texas has proposed a special plan for how it will accommodate same-sex blessings, should these be resolved as appropriate by the General Convention. The details of that plan are not the subject of this statement, and the plan itself can be read at a number of web-sites and links. (Equally, we are not concerned in this context with the status and character of General Convention resolutions in respect of diocesan reception and implementation or constitutionality).

One of the things we have been concerned to underscore over the past decade in our writings is the catholic character of our Anglican polity, catholic meaning ‘according to the whole.’ The covenant’s embrace of ‘mutual submission in Christ’ and a conciliar understanding of our common life are hallmarks, we hold, of the Anglican Way. Decisions which affect the whole need consultation by the whole.

The Communion Partner movement was something two of our own number proposed on the basis of conversations held in Toronto, as a way to pick up some loose threads of previous efforts at maintaining Anglican catholic-evangelical polity, especially in North America. The Communion Partner movement is naturally its own affair and yet it is important to make note of original governing logic, in the absence of claims to have altered that in significant ways.

Two things in particular require noting in the Texas plan as this entails Communion Partner support and endorsement. Arguably, the main reason for a Communion Partner initiative is found in the name: this is a way for the Communion at large to identify Communion-minded Anglicans within North America. Essential in this identification is eschewing ‘local option’ in favor of wide Communion consultation and deliberation. As the covenant sought to call for this, and still does, so the Communion Partners would model this within its own life in the narrower context of the Province of TEC, and latterly, the Anglican Church of Canada.

First, we note that at the heart of the Texas plan is local option. Every church decides for itself.

Second, the Communion Partner support of this, such as it is manifested in the document itself, has been undertaken as a local option of its own. That is, the decision to support the Texas plan was not undertaken after consultation and deliberation by all those seeking to hold to the Communion Partner theological commitment.

This we underscore is not a matter of following organizational guidelines carefully laid out. It has to do with the fundamental logic of catholic Anglicanism and ‘mutual submission in Christ.’ What affects the whole is the prayerful business of the whole, in this case, the whole that is Communion Partners.

We are entering yet another stage in the drawn-out controversy and contention respecting human sexuality. The Texas plan thinks of itself as a very special, charismatic way forward, ‘for a time such as this’ as it says of itself.

But are there really such cleverly crafted ‘plans’ that can accommodate innovation? And can any ‘plan’ commend itself which has not in the nature of the case sought, not to be fresh and novel and promising, but collaborative in the widest catholic sense? The only thing exciting new proposals will probably do is demonstrate just why Christians do not operate with such a non-conciliar hope and expose how experiments in devolving authority only draw out the confusion and defer the conflict downward.