

✠ St Andoenus, Mounton ✠ St Arvans, St Arvan ✠ St Christopher, Chepstow ✠

St Deiniol, Itton ✠ Holy Cross, Kilgwrrwg ✠ St James, Devauden ✠



Severn Wye Ministry Area - Consultation events – November 2022

Opening remarks

The Venerable Ian Rees . Archdeacon of Monmouth & Diocesan Director of Ministry & Discipleship

As many of you will know I started as Archdeacon in June and I think it's really good that we're holding these meetings as I recognise that a lot of information has been shared about Ministry Areas and some of that information hasn't always been helpful. These meetings are an attempt to redress that and I think it's always good to be able to meet in person rather than on zoom as some of you will have done previously.

I think one of the things I need to stress is that the move to Ministry Areas is going to happen – it's happened already in 3 dioceses, St Asaph, Bangor and St David's, and will happen in Llandaff by the end of the year. Swansea & Brecon are also moving towards the creation of Ministry Areas and this will no doubt accelerate when their new Bishop is in post.

Initially when details relating to Ministry Areas in their current form came out this diocese put a target date of the end of this year like Llandaff, and a number of Ministry Areas, I think 8 out of 16 in the diocese, will be commissioned in the new year. However, I think it's much more important to get it right than to rush into something when we're not ready so I think it's important that each MA moves at a sensible pace – that doesn't mean we can put it off for too long but it does mean that we don't need to worry about being ready for the end of the year.

As we are together today I think I'd like to just mention a few issues which I know have caused concern, not just in this area but in others as well. And it's important for me to stress that I believe in Ministry Areas, promoting these isn't just a part of my job !

I think they're important to try and ensure that we are in a position to move forward as churches with mission and growth at the very heart of what we are about. The reality is that as we look around at a lot of our churches, numbers have declined and often are still declining and the average ages of our congregations have risen. It is a fact that if this rate of decline continues, not just here, but throughout Wales, we won't have the Church in Wales. We will still have a church in Wales, because God will still be present and active in our communities, but our denomination will not continue in anything like its current form.

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And so Ministry Areas are about working together to seek to strengthen all churches – and working together as part of one family is something that should be an obvious part of church life – but you'll all know that it often isn't. I have been a Parish Priest for many years and occasionally have fallen into the trap myself of looking at what a particularly successful church is doing nearby and instead of celebrating that, I've looked at it jealously !! We are one church, working together, in lots of different ways, but with one aim, to worship God, to pray and praise together, to enjoy fellowship and to share the gospel with people outside the church.

What MAs certainly are not is a chance to just centralise everything with some sinister purpose of taking money off the better off churches to give to those that are struggling, or to take power off individuals who have contributed to the life of their churches positively, often for many years. They're also not about closing church buildings, that may happen in some cases, but that won't be because of MAs – quite the opposite in fact, MAs are about supporting all churches to be as strong and viable as they can be. Working together we can be in a much better position to do that.

And working together certainly doesn't mean trying to make every church look the same – again, quite the opposite. We want and need our MAs to be diverse, offering different styles of worship and activities for people. There can't be a 'one size fits all' mentality.

Some of the fears and concerns about MAs have been about these things, about money, about buildings, about the fear of losing influence over our own church buildings, but these are things that don't need to be feared. MAs are not a step back, they're not just a knee jerk reaction to decline but they are a sensible way forward offering hope and support for the future.

There isn't a 'one size fits all' MA either – and that's why these consultations are important. MAs will happen but each one will probably look a little bit different in terms of how they're going to operate and so we welcome thoughts and ideas... And it's important to recognise that even when the MA is formed there may still be things that come up where we recognise we can do things better and so there will be continued opportunities for the MA to evolve over the coming years.

Finally for my part now, can I just stress that I honestly don't believe that MAs are something to be afraid of, but rather they are a really positive way of working together where it's sensible to create space and opportunities for a real focus on mission and on growth – that is what MAs have to be about.

Ministry

The Rev'd Philip Averay. Vicar. Parish of Chepstow

Greater co-operation and support for the unique Ministry and Mission of each of our local church communities across the new Ministry Area is perhaps one of the most exciting and important parts of coming together as a Ministry Area.

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One of the key aspects of the Ministry Area will be to provide greater support to all the congregations, greater support for all clergy, both with stipends and non-stipends, greater support for our lay and licenced ministers too.

Our great hope is that by working together as a larger grouping and drawing all our gifts together we will not only maintain our current church congregations, but will be more able to engage in mission and draw new people to know the love of Christ and into the community of faith, which we all know and love and are passionate about.

Some might say “Could we not work together in this way without forming a Ministry Area and making these changes?”, to which I would answer history has shown that without such structural and legal change, such co-operation has never occurred or been sustained. The formation of the Ministry Area is the only realistic way to ensure this co-operation and support is sustained long-term.

Without coming together and supporting one another in our Ministry and Mission, we will not be able to sustain what we hold so precious. The only way we ensure the future of all our churches across the Ministry Area is to come together.

We have the rare opportunity at this time to shape the future of our churches, to help see them flourish and to draw others into the kingdom. We love our churches and unless we come together, we could be the last generation to love them.

Consultation questions – Ministry

To help our Transition Team shape the Ministry Area into a form that works for all of us we need your input. We have a few questions we would like to ask everyone to help us do this:

- How would you like to see your clergy and licenced lay ministers co-operating across the Ministry Area? and
- Whilst continuing to support our current patterns of worship, what new ministries and worship opportunities would you like to see developed across the Ministry Area? (i.e. Bible Study/Home groups, Schools and children’s ministries, etc.)

Finance

The financial side of combining our parishes into a Ministry Area is potentially one of the areas that congregations are most concerned about. We understand this concern. As has already been outlined, we think that the primary drivers of our coming together should be around ministry, parochial care, working together and providing opportunities to leverage to best effect all the wonderful talents which exist in our area. Finance is important, but it’s **not** the driver. That said, we intend to do our very best to consult with those who are concerned about these matters, and to reflect these as best we can in the resulting financial structure that we adopt. Whilst the Ministry

Area Council, being the legal trustees, must have oversight of the MA finances – because they are responsible and accountable for them – there is considerable scope to set things up in the way that will work best in our local context. To that end, we have already convened a finance sub-group, to which all the treasurers were invited, and we had our first meeting on the 8th November. The objective of the finance group is to develop and recommend how our finances should be organised. It's early days but there are a number of things which we aim to deliver, and which we hope will give a level of reassurance. These include:

- Maintaining the existence of local treasurers who will work with the overall MA treasurer as a team. We intend that this group should have access to the MA accounting system, and therefore continue to have visibility of each church's funds. The team will support each other in knowledge and expertise, covering sickness and holidays etc.
- Funds raised for a particular church (whether through fund-raising events, or bequests etc.) will remain allocated to that church – they will not be available for other churches to use. This is not an attempt to grab other churches' assets.
- We are acutely aware of the need to maintain engagement and a sense of connection with local people – so when raising and spending funds people know that these will go to "their" church.
- We need to set up a sensible delegation of authority so that we have practical systems for receiving and spending money e.g. paying an organist will be done much more efficiently using local knowledge than sending in a request to the centre.

Governance

The basic governance structure is set by the Church in Wales. Legally, a Ministry Area Council will take over responsibility from the PCCs. There will be 2 MA wardens, and a MA treasurer.

However, we have a lot of freedom to decide the size and membership of the MAC, and how this will interact with the individual churches.

It is clear from the discussions already that many people want to retain control of most things at the parish level. It wouldn't be practical to organise everything from the centre anyway. So the key issue is what is done centrally, and what delegated, and how do we manage the relationship between the MAC and the local church councils.

Consultation questions – Finance and Governance

- 1) How do we ensure that the Ministry Area Council is representative?
- 2) How would you like it to be accountable back to you?

Fabric

Our church buildings are the centre of our communities and have been for many years and we take a pride in and love them. Although buildings are not of themselves the centre of the Christian life and witness, they offer to regular worshippers and casual visitors alike a place of refuge from the pressures of the outside world. Many will tell you that a particular church has a special atmosphere and in it they feel at peace.

Some churches have a designated person who may lead a band of others in undertaking the upkeep and maintenance of their churches, others may, for a range of reason, have no one so designated and they may need a little help and support in carrying out regular and sometimes unpredictable work. In an attempt to embrace both of these the new Ministry Area will have a fabric coordination role. This network of people with a whole range of skills and expertise will be able to assist each other in taking projects that relate to the fabric of our churches forward.

The network will also have access to a database of resources that other churches within the Ministry Area have found of benefit. This work has already started and churches have already started to share their contractor and provider information with each other. This should not only be helpful if one church needs access to a resource that they have not needed hitherto but also might enable us to obtain some economies of scale if we all moved to one provider. In the present financial climate, none of us wants to pay over the odds for any service that is provided if we can help it – so long as it offers us the same specification or better than we have had previously. As a MA we can help each other access funding and grants, particularly for major works. This will be a pooling of expertise.

Many of our church buildings and halls, either now or in the near future, will require work to be done ranging from regular DIY type of maintenance to the issues raised at Quinquennial Inspections. Keeping up with the general maintenance of our beloved churches can be a chore or an act of service and love. The establishment of the new Ministry Area Fabric Group will be an opportunity to assist those who feel it to be a chore and with the opportunity to team up with others turn it into a labor of love and service.

Consultation questions – Fabric

1. What are the areas in which you would like some support in relation to the upkeep of your local church building?
2. What ways do you think the Ministry Area structure can support your church's ongoing fabric needs?