

St Mary and St Philip, Fordingbridge

Response to Larger Pastoral Areas Discussion Document

March 2006

What follows is a summary of the results from a parish-wide questionnaire, followed by discussion meetings of the results of the questionnaire after both the Saturday evening and Sunday masses, and then a final meeting of the PPC. I have listed our concerns first, followed by our proposal and comments on the many positive feelings about LPAs in principle.

Concerns

The LPA proposed in the discussion document was felt to be unworkable by everybody. It was felt that no consideration had been given to travel across the LPA, and that the choice of parishes had been based solely on what looks like a nice shape on the map, ignoring the routes and quality of roads in the area.

In the parish survey, of the 43 responses indicating which other parishes we attend on Sundays, Ringwood was cited 22 times but Salisbury and Downton were cited 16 times. There is overwhelming evidence that if Sunday mass was not available at Fordingbridge then a large number would go to Salisbury/Downton; if there was also no mass at Ringwood, then the vast majority of the parish would go to Salisbury/Downton rather than elsewhere in the proposed LPA. People 'voting with their feet' was a repeated phrase.

There was great concern that by pushing so many towards Salisbury, the proposed LPA would lead to the fragmentation of our parish.

There was great concern about the possibility of losing a Sunday mass in Fordingbridge.

A very frequently mentioned concern was fear of a loss of our identity, sense of community and cohesiveness.

There was great concern about the possibility of losing a resident priest.

There was concern about the absence of guidance over what should happen on Sundays for those for whom travel to a mass elsewhere in the LPA is impracticable. There was confusion on what to make of the Vatican's rules that Europeans have an obligation to do everything possible to attend Sunday mass, whereas Africans are only required to gather for prayer. There is no guidance as to whether on Sundays when there is no mass at Fordingbridge, we ought to provide some other form of service that would maintain the unity of our community, or risk fragmentation of our community by people travelling all over, as suits them personally, to find mass.

How will we cope with none of our churches having the capacity to hold the increased numbers for masses that will be necessary with fewer masses?

We would like clarification on exactly what the proposed financial arrangements are for the LPAs.

People cannot understand why the Vatican refuses to ordain married men when it is depriving us of the Sunday mass by doing so, given that there is no theological reason for its position and there is no shortage of vocations amongst married men. There is a significant voice of the opinion that Catholics in England ought to be far more vociferous in demanding that the Vatican changes its position. If the Vatican is happy to accept married Anglican priests who convert, why is it also happy to sacrifice Sunday mass for the laity on the altar of its refusal to ordain married men? How can the Vatican, in all conscience, reconcile its theologically unnecessary refusal to provide us with priests with its insistence that we do everything we can to attend Sunday mass?

Enthusiasms

We propose that we form an 'Avon Valley' LPA comprising Fordingbridge, Ringwood and Christchurch. We also propose informal links be established with Salisbury/Downton. The Avon Valley is a natural communication route with a good road link along its length; travel time from Fordingbridge to Christchurch is actually less than 30 minutes. Our youth group is also already developing links with Christchurch.

There were many positive expressions about the potential benefits of LPAs, including sharing, friendship, broadening of horizons, broader spectrum of talents, music and liturgy, combined activities from CAFOD groups to social events and so on. A significant number of people feel that either there are no potential difficulties worth worrying about, or that any difficulties there are, we will be able to overcome them. There is definitely a feeling that the formation of LPAs would be a good thing even if every individual parish in the LPA could still have its own priest.

We have much to offer as a member of an LPA: people who have joined our parish, and have had the choice, say they have joined us because they have found our parish very welcoming. We have very active and successful children's liturgy and CAFOD groups. In bricks and mortar terms we have good parking facilities, the church has a new roof, refurbished living quarters attached, and a large grassed area very suitable for summer social occasions.

Steve Berry

Chairman PPC, St Mary & St Philip, Fordingbridge