

# Ministry Areas

## What it means for us

By now most people should at least have heard mention of Ministry Areas (MA).

This is something that has arisen out of the far-reaching Church in Wales Review of 2012, and since then all the dioceses of Wales have been moving forward in developing MAs.

Each diocese has taken a different approach, and our own diocese of Llandaff has allowed for different expressions of what an MA is in different areas. A consequence of this is that it's not really possible to come up with a single definition of what an MA is – it will mean different things in different places.

However, we are used to using words and phrases that don't always have just one, single, meaning (think of how many ways we use the word *love*, for example), so this ambiguity of meaning need not be a great issue.

Over the last nine months licensed ministers (ie Clergy and Readers) and parish Wardens from your church have meeting with those from neighbouring benefices in the Bridgend area, ie representatives from Coity, Nolton and Brackla with Coychurch, Ewenny and St Brides Major, Newcastle, Laleston and Merthyr Mawr with Penyfai. Since the end of last year we have been engaged in Ministry Area Conversations (MACs) to determine what the most appropriate shape for a local MA may be for us. In this we have been guided by Mark Brampton, the full time diocesan officer appointed to assist parishes in this process.

At the time of writing, Ewenny and St Brides Major is still without an incumbent, and their Wardens do not feel able to commit to joining an MA without knowing the wishes of their future priest. However, they have continued to be members of our MACs.

We've now reached the point where our MACs have come to a natural end, because there is consensus among us about how we wish to proceed. It's time to share these developments with our congregations. To help people understand what all this means, let's use a selection of questions and answers.

### ***1. Are we becoming a single parish?***

No. Some MAs have chosen to go down that route, but we don't think it's right for us at the moment. Every parish will remain separate and distinct as they are now, with their own priest, PCC, bank account, responsibilities for their churches and buildings, etc., etc., etc. None of that will change.

### ***2. Will any of our churches close? Will we lose any of our services?***

Again, no; because each parish remains a legal entity only it will have the power to make those kinds of decisions, not the MA.

### ***3. Will it cost us money?***

That's a possibility, but again the process is under the control of the constituent parishes.

It may be that we decide there is nothing we want to do together that has financial implications, so then there would be no costs.

Alternatively it could be that we decide that together we could make some kind of provision that individually we are unable to support, eg activities or facilities for young people. Then we might decide to run a project collaboratively, which would obviously involve sharing the costs.

### ***4. Will my Vicar be under another Priest's authority or direction?***

No, no one will have jurisdiction over another parish's priest.

## **5. Does it mean we'll be seeing less of our Clergy on Sundays?**

There will probably be occasional 'pulpit and altar swaps', but these will not become the norm.

## **6. So what does it mean, then?**

We believe that 'at pew level', ie for people who aren't much involved in the running or structures of the parish, there will be hardly any difference to the current situation. You'll still be looking after your own finances, have your own priest(s), and so on.

However, the member parishes have agreed that an important step to take will be to 'cross license' their ministers.

Everyone engaged in public ministry (eg Readers and Clergy) operates with the permission and under the license of the diocesan Bishop. Most of us are licensed to a specific geographical area. Although we can and do work outside our own localities, it's the exception rather than the rule.

Cross licensing would be an arrangement whereby each of us would receive the Bishop's license to operate not just in our own parishes, but freely across the MA.

This opens up the possibility of much greater inter-parish collaboration and cooperation than currently takes place, together with the sharing of resources and expertise that exists in the separate parishes.

As 'off the top of our head' examples, and not in any way to be seen as suggesting that this is necessarily the direction in which we'll choose to go, we could explore ways of:

- sharing preparation of candidates for baptism / confirmation / marriage?
- extending pastoral care to our dispersed elderly at home?
- making provision for our children and young people, eg through Messy Church?
- provide support for those ministers who currently work alone, eg through regular meetings for prayer or discussion?
- share office equipment and hardware, eg projectors / screens / reprographics / PAT testers / etc., etc.?

In fact, we have already collaborated in taking part shares in an advert for our parishes that has been printed on the newly published (and free) Bridgend Town Map.

If there was a shared will to do so we could also explore ways of getting to know each other's churches and people, having occasional shared services and 'pulpit swaps' for ministers, and so on.

## **7. So, what happens next?**

The dates are provisional at the moment, but we hope that in early October there will be a Quiet Day for those involved in the MACs to enable us collectively to discern God's will for us and even to begin to consider areas where there is already an opportunity for us to work together.

We hope to have a Ministry Area service to formalise and celebrate the cross licensing of clergy and readers during the Kingdom season (November), and in the meantime the ministers will meet to discuss some more of the detail of what we wish to commit ourselves to.

## **8. What if it doesn't work out?**

We know that sometimes not everything goes to plan. If it all goes pear-shaped then because every parish has maintained its own identity and autonomy nothing will have been lost.

But right now we're thinking positively at the moment, and prefer to focus on the benefits and opportunities that our new MA could bring.

*Canon M Komor  
Area Dean  
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