

**Parish Amalgamation Consultation
St Brendan, Harwood and St John the Evangelist, Bromley Cross**

Paper 3: Considering Pastoral Provision

One of the essential elements of the amalgamation consultation process is to determine that the proposed new parish is able to meet the pastoral and spiritual needs of the people.

We are in the fortunate position that these two parishes have been working together for almost ten years now, with St Columba also involved for almost five years. This has given us plenty of opportunity to experiment with working as “one parish with two/three churches”. We have developed a pattern of holding specific activities and events in one church/parish, rather than repeating things in each place. The most significant expression of this has been the fact that, for the past five years, we have celebrated Maundy Thursday at St Brendan’s, Good Friday at St Columba’s and the Easter Vigil at St John’s, thus celebrating the most central feast of our Church Year as one community.

The amalgamation process asks us to consider:

- How best can the new parish be served by one priest?
- How best may preparation for baptisms, sacramental programmes, weddings and funerals be arranged?
- How best may pastoral care be provided for the bereaved, sick and housebound?
- Should parish organisations work together or remain distinct?

We have already begun to address each of these questions by the approach that we have adopted over these past ten years:

- Whilst we currently have two priests (and did have three for a while), things are arranged in such a way that one priest could cover everything. Indeed, whether we simply combine SB and SJ or include part of SC, the area and population covered by the new parish will be less than we are currently covering with the three parishes.
- Preparation for baptisms is done every two months in one place for parishioners from any of the three parishes. The sacramental programme is set each year in conjunction with the three primary schools and follows the same pattern in each place, with the initial meeting and Presentation being held in just one church. Preparation for weddings is a combination of the deanery Marriage Preparation course and each couple seeing the priest individually. Funerals are arranged through the priest meeting with the family of the deceased and we take the same approach to the celebration of funerals in any of the three churches. All of this current practice can be carried over into our new single parish.
- Pastoral care for the bereaved, sick and housebound is provided by a combination of the priests, members of the SVP and our Eucharistic ministers. Again, there will be no need to change this approach when our new parish is formed – but those involved may be asked to minister across the whole of the new parish rather than just within the confines of one current parish.
- It makes sense for parish organisations to work together and, as noted above, we have largely moved away from the duplication of activities over the past ten years. Our CAFOD groups came together quite early on in this experience and we successfully brought the separate parish forums together into one. Our SVP groups in SB and SJ have remained distinct in terms of their relationship to regional and national structures of the organisation but within our parish boundaries they have increasingly been working co-operatively which paves the way for forming one SVP group when the new parish is established. [Note: there is no active SVP group in SC]

Sacramental Life

One of the decisions we will need to make early on in our amalgamation is about the pattern of Sunday and weekday Masses. For the Sundays, we will need to do this in conjunction with our neighbouring parishes so that the priests are in a position to cover for one another (particularly in an emergency).

At present we have one Sunday Mass in each of our three churches. If all three churches remain (with SC being looked after either from Holy Infant or as a separate parish linked to the new "SB & SJ" parish for the time being), then we could simply continue with this same pattern (even if we have to adjust the times a little to fit with our neighbours). If SC closes, then we will need to consider which of our two churches we should transfer the Saturday evening Mass to.

In that same circumstance, we would also have to consider whether we need to provide transport for any SC parishioners to go to Mass in either of our remaining churches (either on Saturday evening or Sunday morning). Would we need to consider buying a parish minibus or booking a taxi weekly? Or would there be sufficient parishioners able to offer lifts to those who require them?

Over the past few years, we have tried a number of different patterns for our weekday Masses and so we can consider whether the current pattern is serving our needs or should be altered.

Other aspects of sacramental life (whether preparations or celebrations) should largely be able to continue according to the patterns we have currently established (as noted above). We are awaiting new policy documents from the diocese with regard to the sacramental programme for Reconciliation and Eucharist, as well as for Confirmation at the later age of 13. Any changes that these require will be implemented when they are published.

Schools

The new parish will have either two or three primary schools within it (depending on whether or not we take in part of the territory from SC). We will continue to serve these schools as we currently do in terms of the involvement of the priests, the provision of governors and links with the parish communities. We recognise that there will be a particular issue for SC School if there is no longer a church next door – but this is a matter that we can work round, as other schools have to do in other parts of the diocese. Bringing SC School within the boundary of our new parish has the advantage that the three primary schools can continue to build on the good working relationship that they have developed over the past five years.

Parish Enabling Team

As part of developing our parishes across the diocese for the present and the future, Bishop John has asked that each parish should establish a "leadership" team – a group of parishioners who will oversee and co-ordinate parish activities. Here in the Bolton deanery, we have taken this request seriously and have run a "Lay Leadership" course during the past twelve months, which has formed a pilot scheme for other deaneries to take up. Each parish was asked to send three representatives to this course – one who would oversee parish administration, one who would oversee catechetical aspects and one who would oversee safeguarding. This was seen as a minimum structure for such a team.

We are fortunate that we had eight parishioners who were able to complete this course and who are now willing to serve our current parishes and our new parish in this leadership role. However, the group has decided that it prefers to be known as the Parish Enabling Team, since that rightly puts the emphasis on their roles of overseeing, co-ordinating and encouraging the involvement of many other parishioners in parish activities rather than them being the ones who lead, organise and run all (or the majority of) activities.

Pastoral Provision

Given all that is outlined in this paper, welcoming the establishment of the Parish Enabling Team, and knowing the goodwill of so many parishioners who are already involved in many ways, I am confident that the pastoral and spiritual needs of all those within the proposed new parish can be adequately met.