

**Pastoral Area of St Charles Borromeo
Widnes**

**Leaving Safe Harbours
Developmental Report to
Archbishop's Council**

21st January 2010

The following report is a work in progress based on the outline proposal distributed in June 2009. It provides a more detailed outline of the thoughts, considerations, aspirations and implications that have underpinned our Pastoral Area development thus far.

In coming to the Archbishop's Council we are seeking an Archdiocesan perspective on and dialogue around:

- a) The vision that we are projecting in implementing Leaving Safe Harbours in our Pastoral Area
- b) Some specific practical issues in relation to plant

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Part One

Fundamental Principles

(Our response to the aspirations of the Leaving Safe Harbours initiative)

- We understand our lived reality as a Pastoral Area to be working, in some way, as **a single community composed of a number of parishes – The Catholic Church in Widnes.**
- We aim to be an evangelising, thriving community reaching out in hope to the wider locality.
- A community centred on Eucharistic gatherings as a sign and source of our unity.
- A community where small groupings focused on prayer, scripture and social action will enrich and deepen our faith.

This is what has led us to them...

Pastoral Area as a single community...

- This concept initially challenged us to recognise the difference between a Pastoral Area and a Deanery essentially highlighting the need for parishes, and parish groupings, to work together for the common good of the whole community of Widnes.
- This then moved us into thinking around the theological vision underpinning the Leaving Safe Harbours process.

An evangelising, thriving community reaching out in hope to the wider locality...

- In recognising that the Church is essentially *missionary* – its primary call is **to make disciples of all nations**, we asked; “How can we ensure that LSH initiative in Widnes highlights a renewal of focus and intention so that evangelisation, growth and development become an obvious priority?”
- This challenged us to consider how we promote and nurture a deeper understanding of why; “Evangelising is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelise.” (Evangelli Nuntiandi 14)

A community centred on Eucharistic gatherings as a sign and source of our unity...

- At the heart of our evolving Pastoral Area vision the Eucharist will continue to be central to our lives, the high point, the pinnacle, which gives us nourishment for everything else.
- This challenged us to acknowledge that over the coming years our Eucharistic gatherings will be less frequent and larger. There will be the need for ongoing reflections on how we are going to allow our celebrations to speak to us, effectively sharing the life they contain.

A community where small groupings focused on prayer, scripture and social action will enrich and deepen our faith...

- Alongside our gathering for Eucharist there will be a need for us to gather together in smaller groups in order to enrich and deepen our own faith journey and enabling us to better appreciate ourselves as members of the Body of Christ.
- This challenged us to consider different ways in which faith can be nurtured and expressed in relation to prayer opportunities, ecumenical prayer gatherings, praying the scriptures, ecumenical bible study, faith sharing, social action - local and universal.

This is how we are aiming to bring them about...

- Our proposition is that we have **1 Pastoral Area community** composed of **5 parishes**, each a canonical unit in its own right.
- We re-found all the parishes of the Pastoral Area in this evolving new structure.
- We work together to further develop and strengthen a sense of belonging to the whole Pastoral Area community.
- We reassess the resources we have and explore the resources we need, to effectively and creatively serve our Pastoral Area into the future.

Part Two

Principles as envisaged in Widnes

- a) Background and development so far
- b) Development of plan to realise the goals we seek to achieve

a) Background and development so far... ..

How are we beginning to make the fundamental principles a lived reality?

This has largely been the focus of the Pastoral Area Working Group who have worked in close collaboration with the Pastoral Area Ministry Team to ensure that: we reflect and agree on pastoral principles; provide suitable Pastoral Area liturgies whilst sustaining local (parish) access to those things which can better be celebrated at parish level.

United as a Pastoral Area we already have:

- Sacramental Preparation for;
 - RCIA
 - Confirmation
 - Marriage

The area of sacramental preparation is being further explored in relation to *evangelisation through the sacraments*. The topic has been approached by identifying our overall aims as follows:

- To be clear about how things happen currently.
 - To discern if we, as a Pastoral Area, have a common approach/message which underpins our preparation for each of the sacraments.
 - To identify the areas of formation needed to support and ensure on-going, quality catechesis.
 - To have an awareness of resources available across the Pastoral Area, both human resources and plant resources.
- Liturgical Celebrations/Spiritual Development
 - Pastoral Area services of Reconciliation
 - Annual Mass for the sick and housebound held at PA Catholic College
 - Pastoral Area Stations of the Cross
 - Weekly Pastoral Area Mass and Novena
 - Pastoral Area Mass of Confirmation
 - Pastoral Area Novena to Sacred Heart, travelling across all churches of PA together
 - Churches Together Monthly Hour of Prayer

- Evangelisation and Mission/Pastoral Care/Spiritual Development
 - Ecumenical Bereavement Care Group
 - Faith sharing groups
 - Ecumenical Lenten House Groups
 - “Home is a Holy Place” group reflections and parental catechesis- some held in school settings, some parish based
 - Visiting Teams to sick and housebound
 - CAFOD, Zambia support Groups
 - Bible Study Groups
- Communication/Administration
 - *Borromeian* quarterly Pastoral Area Magazine/Newsletter
 - Pastoral Area Open forums, opportunity to share information, thoughts views, news
 - Local publicity, managing local publicity e.g. informing council of proposals relating to buildings
 - Some centralisation of administration
 - Modelling what we are
- Education in Faith
 - Pastoral Area Days of Reflection for all ministers of Holy Communion
 - Catechesis training
 - Reconciliation faith formation

An illustrative example of how we are struggling/endeavouring to make these principles a lived reality is;

- ***How we arrived at a Pastoral Area policy on celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation at Lent and Advent***
 - Identified the diverse ways in which the sacrament was being celebrated in the PA
 - Agreed to a united PA approach to the issue
 - Catechesis of clergy and other members of PA Ministry Team
 - Further reflection and discussion arriving at discernment of a common approach
 - Practical application in Advent 2009 by catechesis across PA
 - Leading to a service of the Word and examination of conscience
 - Followed by local accessing of the sacrament throughout an entire day
 - On going reflection

b) Development of plant to realise the goals we seek to achieve

Our starting point in considering how the physical resources might help us to better move towards the realisation of our goals was to consider the Pastoral Area as a whole and ask the question: what do we need and where do we need it.

Two elements were identified in trying to come up with a proposal on this front. To consider what church buildings we would need and then to consider what additional buildings we would need to enable the other aspects of the life of the Pastoral Area community. These ancillary buildings would include the likes of a place or places for social gatherings, the bringing together of administration, facilities for training/reflection/meetings etc.

This proposal addresses the issue of what church buildings we might need. It does so with an eye to the necessity of considering what other buildings we might need, but does not explicitly address this issue at this stage.

Working Towards the Proposal

A PA Buildings Group was brought together and tasked with considering this question of the physical resources that we might need in order to further the PA vision. They gathered information and attempted to discern what issues may contribute to the building up of a criteria on which to be able to decide which church buildings should be retained. The results of their reflections were presented to a joint meeting of the PA Ministry Team and Working Group. The reflections from this meeting and many subsequent meetings have formed the basis of this proposal.

Proposed Church Sites

A natural focal point for the town is St Bede's. It is located towards the centre of Widnes, on main routes of communication, with public transport access. Mass attendance, celebration of the sacraments, funerals all indicate its role as a central focus within the town. The site itself consists of the church and presbytery along with an infant school, a junior school, scout hut and parish club. An on site public car park along with the use of

the use of the school playground and the church car parks gives substantial weekend and evening car parking. The church itself is a grade II listed building. The proposal envisages the retention of St Bede's. One of the issues that has come to light, however, is that the demands that are likely to be placed on St Bede's in serving the Pastoral Area means that it would be necessary to investigate increasing its capacity. Although it is a Grade II listed building initial soundings with Historic Churches have indicated that it is at least worth considering such a proposal. The availability of land on the site may allow for such an expansion alongside any other buildings that may be necessary for the site.

The other church sites which would be retained are: St Michael's, St Basil and All Saints, Holy Family and St John Fisher's.

One key factor in determining that these would be the five churches in this proposal was the need to ensure a spread of churches across the town. With St Bede's being located towards the centre of town those churches towards the outskirts of the town were at an advantage when considering which others would be retained.

Holy Family in Cronton is on the northern perimeter of the town with roads that give good access to significant areas of housing including Hough Green, the substantial new housing developments in Upton Rocks and Farnworth. There is also relatively quick access over to the east of the town and Halton View.

St Basil and All Saints is located towards the western perimeter of the town and is situated within a significant area of population. The road system around St Basil's gives relatively easy access to Hough Green, the new housing of Upton Rocks and down to Ditton. There is a significant area of population in Hough Green who do not have access to a car.

St Michael's is located towards the southern part of town. It would be the closest church to two relatively isolated areas in the extreme south of the town: West Bank and Halebank.

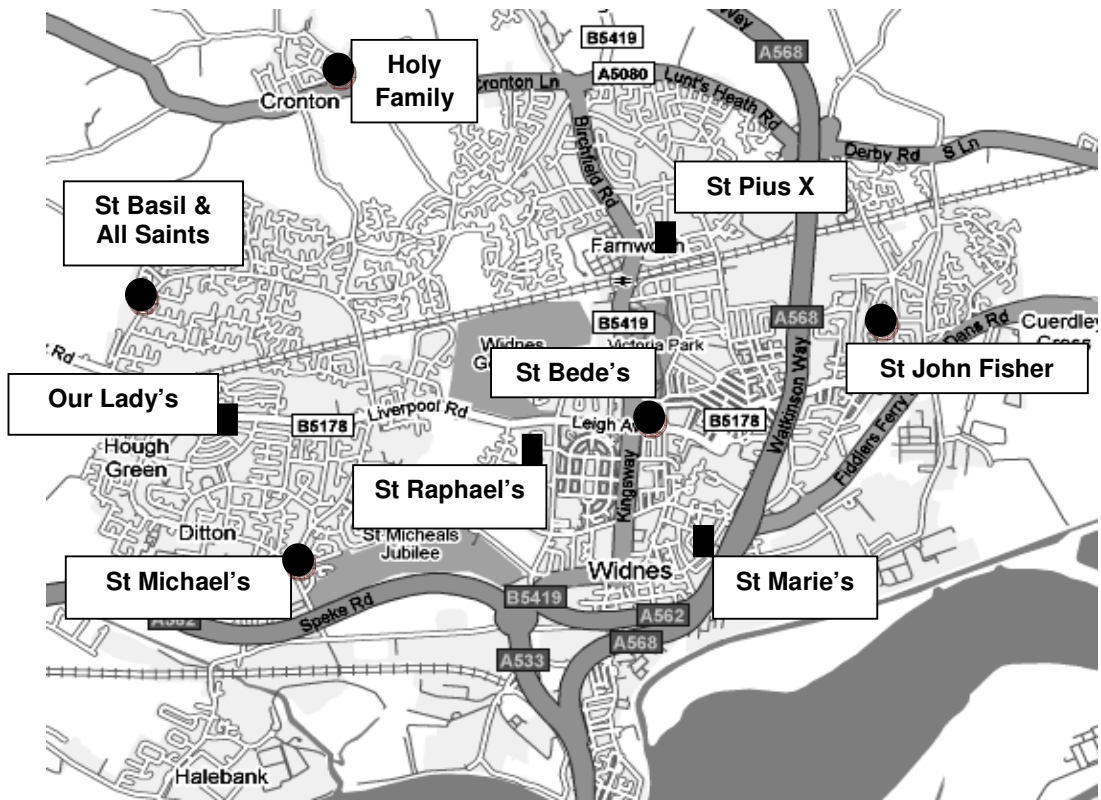
St John Fisher's is located in the eastern part of the town, Halton View, a significant area of population. This part of town is somewhat cut off from the rest of the town by the main bypass that cuts through from the M62 to the Runcorn Bridge.

This proposal therefore envisages the retention of 5 of the current 9 churches to cover the Pastoral Area. Were this proposal to be adopted it would give a reasonable spread of church provision across the Pastoral

Area. However, for these buildings to be retained there are significant issues that would need to be considered. These are principally:

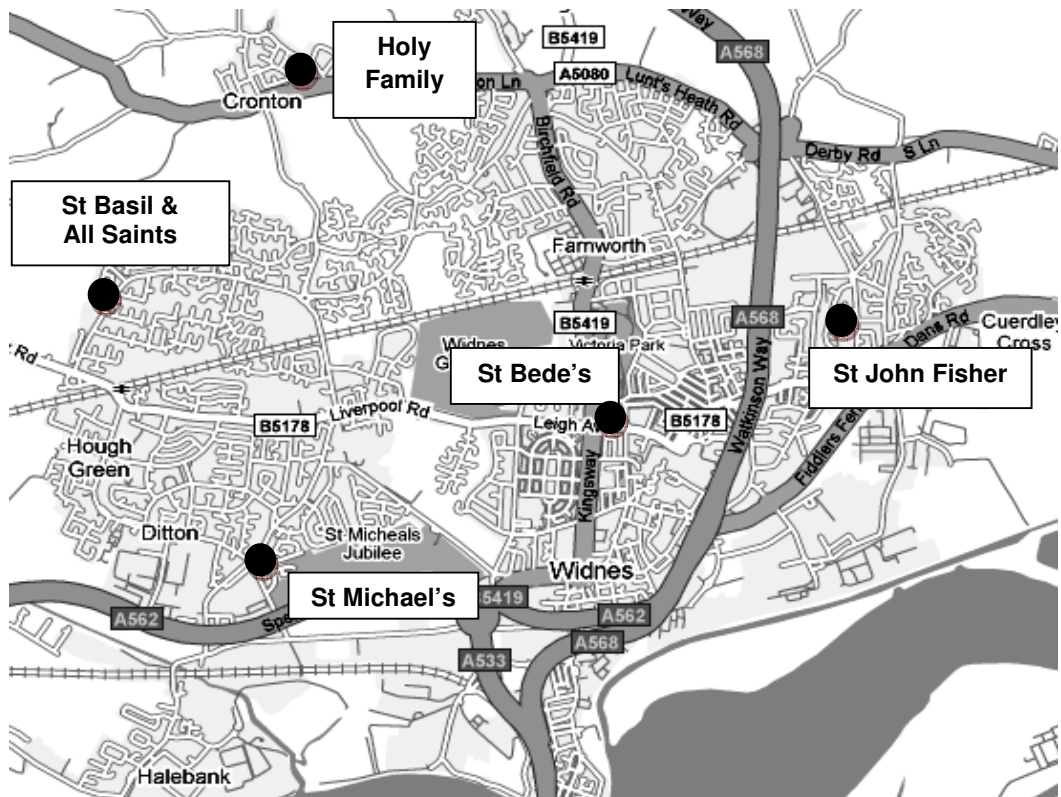
- The expansion of St Bede's church and the bringing about of the additional required facilities
- Possible adaptation and on-going maintenance costs for St Michael's
- Additional facilities and necessary re-ordering of Holy Family

The other churches would not in this current scheme continue as places of worship. This proposal does not presume what would happen to them. It may be thought desirable to retain the use of one or more of the sites for use within the Pastoral Area (ie. a pastoral facility or other use). It may be that some sites would need to be sold for redevelopment of some sort (housing, community use, etc.) in order to raise funds towards costs involved in the taking forward of the proposal. All of this would need further research and investigation.



● Church that would be retained

■ Church that would be closed



Part Three

Seeking the Goals: The Contribution of the Community

The Process

Well crafted though the foregoing proposals are, they unsurprisingly gave rise to further reflection and some heated debate. Unsurprisingly for they were presented as a work-in-progress. Clergy, Religious and laity alike were invited to a 'plenary' meeting in mid-summer where the Proposal was unpacked – as to its status, its vision of Church, as well as to the inevitably fascinating issue of the plant. Anonymous written contributions were invited from all present. These were collated and are summarised exhaustively in the “bullet points” of Appendix A.

In the early autumn four smaller gatherings, stretching over a fortnight (different venues; same agenda) were held. Verbal contributions flowed and the general thoughts and feelings of those present were captured (see Appendix B). It is not easy to summarise justly the contributions of all and sundry. Under four headings an attempt will be made: a shared vision of Church; the development of plant to realise this vision; the evolving relationship between priest and people implied by the vision; some practical realities arising therefrom.

a) A Shared Vision of Church

Leaving Safe Harbours envisages a paradigm shift from parish to Pastoral Area as the future basis for pastoral care. The earlier sections of this document indicate that healthy progress had been made in this regard prior to the publication of the Proposal and this is borne out by written and oral responses to it. (One rather extreme view was to rename all the churches after St Charles Borromeo!, since “we are all part of one parish”.) Observations from and reflections upon the responses of the people indicate that different parts of the Pastoral Area are on widely varying points of this journey. Whatever the Diocesan response to the Proposal, those who are currently focussed overwhelmingly on 'parish' as their only spiritual home should (and will) be given great support.

b) The Development of Plan

The Proposal's view that "four of our existing churches would close by September 2010" fell heavily on the ears of all who care for their neighbours' well-being. There was some sense of "winners" and "losers". Equally, there was a feeling of relief that (as it were) "the second shoe had dropped": an end had come to what felt to some like interminable uncertainty. Something was finally in print, albeit only as a *proposal*.

Reactions at Our Lady of Perpetual Succour could only be described as "shock and awe" giving way to profound sadness. It is desperately human: a combination of parochialism and a well maintained, modernised church. (See opening bullet points) As tempers cooled a clear problem emerged as the thoughts and feelings recorded from the autumn meetings attest. What is the rationale of enlarging St Bede's, *and* retaining St Michael's (an over-large, elderly and costly church) *and* "decommissioning" Our Lady's, the happy recipient of heavy interior expenditure in recent years? Conversely, what of the good – predominantly elderly – folk of Ditton and Halebank? There are no painless answers to this conundrum, as dozens of written and oral interventions indicate.

c) The Evolving Relationship Between Priests and People

Many responses indicate a measure of concern for the well-being of the priests in the Pastoral Area. There is evidence of a sympathetic awareness that clergy capacity for multi-tasking has its limits! That said, many responses evince a growing anxiety that "Father" will disappear over the horizon and a much-valued relationship will be lost. The care taken by the Proposal to prevent this happening (by retaining five *named* parishes, each the responsibility of a *named* priest) will only slowly be appreciated. The responses rightly show a concern about Vocations to the priesthood.

That the lay faithful are being given back their rightful role (irrespective of priestly numbers) does emerge from feed-back. So too does the vision of priest and people as co-workers of an evangelising, reinvigorated Church. That vision is challenging but relationships are good. Hope, courage and optimism characterised a healthy number of reactions to the Proposal.

d) Some Practical Realities

The local, as well as the universal Church ministers to the real world. Change can threaten: radical change more so. Will the Proposal – rooted in the eucharist and evangelising ideals of Leaving Safe Harbours – actually serve these ideals? Or will it (unintentionally!) do the reverse? The devil is in the detail. Rightly, questions were raised about: i) transport; ii) care of the elderly and housebound; iii) Requiem masses and the care of the bereaved; iv) maintenance of the Church's presence among the less affluent; v) provision of on-going lay formation; vi) the high age-profile of some parishes' Eucharistic Ministers and so forth. Above all there was the wholly laudible concern: 'Will I be able to get to Sunday Mass?' (as opposed to 'my' Sunday Mass.) A work in-progress indeed.

Conclusion

The Proposal submitted by the Pastoral Area of St Charles Borromeo is merely that: a proposal. It is one, crucial, step on our shared faith journey. May the Holy Spirit inspire us to go where the journey takes us!

Appendix A

Written Responses from Open Meeting held on 2nd July 2009

What are your thoughts and feelings about the proposal and/or what you have heard tonight?

Main Issues Raised ...

- From a purely selfish point of view as a parishioner of OLPS I am against the closure of OLPS church, the criteria stated for selecting St Michael's church over OLPS can equally be applied to both churches
- Maintenance and running costs of St Michael's will be high
- Listed building status seems to have *saved* St Michael's
- Keep St Michael's open as it is large enough to accommodate the PA
- Closure of St Marie's and OLPS will mean there is no church dedicated to Our Lady in the PA
- Will the John Dalton centre continue to be available for meetings and training etc
- OLPS has many positives as an interdependent site, it has many modern facilities
- Transport problems, no bus route between OLPS and St Michael's
- OLPS is on Liverpool Rd and is served very, very well by public transport how can this not be a positive?
- Restricted bus services on a Sunday

- Concern about how Eucharistic Ministers will be able to get around to the sick/housebound if they have no transport
- What about getting a PA mini bus and having a team of drivers
- Schools – how do they feature in the proposal?
- Schools should be a key issue
- What about the schools connected to parishes, which could be closed?
- Concern about the break –up of communities
- Could bringing in priests from abroad be an alternative proposal?
- This is a very sad time for the Catholic Church in Widnes, who cares about the people of the closing parishes? We will lose parishioners
- Unity is hard work!
- How will a single community evolve and overcome parochialism?
- Ecumenical dimension – where does this fit in?
- The model proposed makes sense geographically
- Deep concerns about the ratio of priests – this opens up wider questions about vocations and the use/role of the laity
- If the problems arise around lack of priests what are the clergy doing to look at this problem, are the possibilities of married priests and women priests being dismissed out of hand?
- To alleviate the shortage of priests allow the ordination of women and give lay people more opportunity, such as happens with Anglican readers, to lead services without having to look over their shoulder
- I agree with the proposal, it will bring our community closer together
- The proposal was well thought out and very well presented tonight
- It is imperative that we get the development of the St Bede's site right, what are the draft proposals for this change?
- The changes at the St Bede's site will go a long way to enhancing the togetherness that has been built up to date
- Rebuilding and extension to the main site – how long will this take?

- Identity of the main site needs to change ie a new name, not remaining as St Bede's
- People will be *ousted out* of positions, people at current St Bede's will try to retain *seniority* over incomers
- How will activities held in St Pius X and St Raphael's halls be maintained?
- What is the costing of the proposal?
- £45,000 has been spent on the new St Marie's church, is this money wasted?
- Is St Marie's community hall being closed for mass?
- Who will maintain and pay for upkeep of St Marie's community hall if, as Fr Peter says it will be kept open?
- St John Fisher should be closed as it is too small
- The proposal did not get sent out to parents through schools and governing bodies/headteachers were not informed directly on the proposal
- Don't ask people to keep putting money into collections now this process has started
- Could the church closures be phased in (ie. One per year), this might be less of a shock to PA and easier to administer
- Sadness about losing the past but positive about the future
- Want to work to ensure that the Catholic church in Widnes thrives and evangelises and is a sign of God's love to all in the locality
- Use the High School as a central site for new build this would be far less cost than modifying a listed building
- People who belong to the *doomed parishes* will not travel to the central site, many will go out of town
- It seems to be a done deal. This is going to bring smaller congregations
- Looking forward to progressing to the future and being part of one extended family, the PA
- It is time to change with less priests and less parishioners, thank God for the priests we have, let us pray constantly to do God's will
- Pray that God will grant us a smooth transition into new beginnings

- How are we dealing with peoples feelings of loss and difficulty in coping with this change?
- More discussion is needed
- Need to be more authoritative and less consultative
- If land is sold will the money come back to the PA or does it go to the Archdiocese?
- Are 5 churches still too many?
- Excellent presentation, we should support the proposal, it has to go ahead
- More discussion is needed within our parish community before we can pass judgement, at the moment we are obviously not happy (parish not stated)
- Don't drag it out, we need an urgent operation, not a course of tablets!!!
- As a parishioner of one of the many *condemned* churches we knew the *axe would fall* thank you for putting us out of our miserable waiting
- Make better use of priests available by staggering the timings of the weekend masses more
- Can the sociological information compiled by the PABG be made public?
- New rotas need to be made to merge all Readers/Eucharistic Ministers/Musicians into a PA team
- Clergy need help to let go
- We have to put lay people in charge – some salaried
- Do the trustees understand the *soul* of a parish or are they more concerned with the buildings?
- Don't allow Archdiocese and Trustees to curtail discussion
- The vision has to be for 25 years not 10
- How will we use media of the 21st Century to help us?
- We have heard a lot about buildings, not much about people, what plans exist for older/younger Catholics?
- The church has moved away from the areas of need into the middle class leafy suburbs

- Why was the decision about St Marie's held over until we were all discussed together, St Marie's parishioners were left to grieve and cry alone
- St Marie's church would have fulfilled key issues if left open
- Why has there been no oral questioning at this meeting? Is there a fear of open discussion?
- Why do we shy away from dialogue with all- Jesus never did!
- We need to allow the Holy Spirit to work through us
- As a PA we need to look at how we evangelise/reach out to young families and young people, otherwise what future is there for Catholic Church in Widnes/
- We need to reflect on the words of the PA prayer
- Why keep St Michael's and then extend St Bede's (two big churches for our shrinking populace)
- Are we renaming all the churches to St Charles so that people feel like they are part of one parish?
- Need for small house groups to enable the church community to become more integrated in locality; so that the one hour a week mass goes become part of a deeper journey. This will require lay-leadership and training. A positive response to the Spirit would develop this across Ecumenical lines.
- How is the proposed change going to be financed/grieved/celebrated?
- How will we ensure that adequate resources are in place to serve our PA needs before we close any churches, for example parish centres and places to gather as community outside of the mass setting?
- More publicity is needed to make a wider range of people aware of how things are changing, people need to have a realistic awareness of the availability of priests for Baptisms, funerals, weddings etc.
- It has become obvious that the parish system will no longer work in Widnes.
- These proposals are well thought out and researched, the uncertainty about whether the proposals will be accepted makes *moving forward* very difficult.

- It is imperative that priests and people preach and catechise strongly about the positive aspects of the proposal, we need to be continually reassured of God's care of us and of His promise being true.
- We are a people who don't like change however when one experiences and recognises God's faithfulness in one's own life through grace, trust becomes possible and our preciousness becomes apparent.
- Thank you to everyone involved in the work laying out these proposals. I pray that their hope and excitement in searching for God's will may outweigh any discouragement they sometimes must surely feel.
- Who knows all this may be the beginnings of Vatican II reaching the priests and people at last!

Appendix B

Open Forum Gatherings September 2009

Meeting One – Held in St Michael’s Club

This meeting was attended by approximately 45-50 people. 14 sheets were returned reflecting thoughts and ideas from individuals and small groups.

General thoughts and feelings recorded:

- My and other people’s expectations of this meeting was that you, the representatives, were going to answer questions not expect us to discuss them.
- This meeting produced no additional information to that which we already had. These issues should have been discussed before the proposal was put forward.
- The three years of *Leaving Safe Harbours* was an opportunity to deepen and build on the faith of the differing generations in Widnes –this was not done – too late now?!!
- I found tonight very helpful, to get things out into the open.
- One question that wasn’t asked, could these proposals be amended before they go to the Diocese or are they written in stone?
- As well as the closure of churches and the removal of parish boundaries would the primary schools be at risk of amalgamation?
- The only person in *Safe Harbours* is our Archbishop. The people of the parishes are being rocked from pillar to post.

- Our Lady's parish has the most to lose; a lot of wasted money has been spent.
- Our Lady's parish is very accessible by bus and car, it has excellent parking facilities, a modern spacious church, which is well maintained and has recently had new heating and safety lighting installed. This could be wasted money if Our Lady's is closed. The church is often used by the schoolchildren and it provides them with a very welcoming environment. Please do not close Our Lady's church.
- In contrast I think St Michael's should be closed as it is old, cold, has no parking, very poor acoustics and is very uninviting. It will need lots of money spending to bring it up to standard.
- The use of Deacons has not been put forward in the proposal.
- We feel that priests from other countries could be brought in to help our own priests.
- I can understand St Raphael's and St Pius closing due to lack of all facilities, but not Our Lady's.

Thoughts and feelings recorded in relation to the discussion points

Q1. It is imperative that we get the development of the suggested main PA site right. We need to think about; How long will rebuilding and extension to this site take? Will it be in use or out of use during this time? What about renaming of the main PA church and all the interdependent ones?

- St Michael's could be used as the main church. It is impossible to extend St Bede's without completely rebuilding it. There is no point in renaming St Bede's.
- Our Lady's has all the requirements needed for a main church.
- Who will find the cost of the building work needed at the main site?
- The choice of selected buildings should remain, but concerns around heating and parking at St Michael's.

Q2. How will we ensure availability of use of church halls during this period of change? Does church closure mean loss of parish centre/hall?

- Our Lady's hall is well used, St Michael's isn't.
- Halls are important for local people to meet together.

- Parish halls and clubs should remain as they are often meeting places for the young people.

Q3. *Are 5 churches still too many?*

- I think 5 churches are NOT too many.
- Churches are not used as much as they were in the past.
- If we only have 5 churches how will we get our junior school children to church for special occasions?

Q4. *This is a sad time for the Church in Widnes – who cares about the people and the break up of communities?*

- The parishioners are concerned with the break up of their local community, especially the effect this could have on the children.
- Not the clergy.
- The Catholic community across Widnes need to be in contact, communication is vital.
- People's feelings are not being considered, many will not be able to cope with the changes due to ill health, age and lack of transport.

Q7. *How can we address the concern about lack of transport for some parts of the PA?*

- Some ministers have not got transport so this could affect the serving of housebound parishioners, how will they be looked after?
- A PA minibus could be a good idea, would it be bought or hired? How much seating capacity would it have?
- Once it is known how many churches we have could the Ministers of Holy Communion be put on a PA rota to supply wherever needed?

Q12. *Do we have a realistic awareness and expectation around the availability of priests to celebrate funeral/wedding masses and Baptisms?*

- No, there is the need for an effective communication strategy that reaches out to the total Catholic population. We need to educate those who do not go to church.

Q13. *How are clergy being supported in this time of change? Are they being helped to let go?*

- There is support from some parishioners but practical support from fellow priests is non-existent because they don't have time. Delegation to parishioners can be difficult.

Q14. *As a PA we need to look at how we evangelise/reach out to young families and young people, how could we best do this?*

- We need to be more open to the ideas and needs of the younger generations. Leaving Safe Harbours is all about evangelisation – we need to lead by example.

Meeting Two – Held in St Basil and All Saints Club

This meeting was attended by approximately 45-50 people. 11 sheets were returned reflecting thoughts and ideas from individuals and small groups.

General thoughts and feelings recorded

- I suspect that the proposal for the extension of St Bede's and the closure of other churches will require huge financial commitment. Is it possible that there is a church building (of other denominations) which meet the agreed criteria looked at for deciding either the main church or other churches.
- Is St Basil's church still at risk?
- If St Basil's were to close what would happen to the small cemetery and garden of hope?
- What happens to the sick of the parish if the church closes, will we still be able to take the sacrament out to them? They rely on this contact to keep in touch with parish news and activities.
- What is going to happen to the SVP Group are they all going to merge as one?
- What training and support is going to be put into place for the laity to cope with such transition?

- Can there be a drive to encourage more Eucharistic ministers at this juncture?
- It really is making people very ill and it would be much better to let people know the truth.
- Laity needs to be up to speed to fill the gap between loss of priests and pastoral care. People in need can feel that they are left high and dry.
- Integral to plans should be Ecumenism. All plans should be seen ecumenically.
- Congregations have dropped.
- Surely there must be a good number of priests who can be recalled from Rome.
- We should be looking at how we can keep churches open not closed.
- Daily mass should be set at a time suitable for most people.
- Consult with Halton council's planning department to find out the options for the proposed closure sites.
- Check the predicted population figures as new builds may alter mass attendance in the future.
- We need to welcome those from churches proposed to close, listening to their needs, rather than assuming we know what they are. We need to give practical and spiritual support.

Thoughts and feelings recorded in relation to the discussion points

Q1. It is imperative that we get the development of the suggested main PA site right. We need to think about; How long will rebuilding and extension to this site take? Will it be in use or out of use during this time? What about renaming of the main PA church and all the interdependent ones?

- St Bede's – is there room for extension? There must be issues re parking, disabled access and potential planning with regards to listed building status. What is the cost?
- St Bede's is on a good bus route.
- Communication on progress essential for all churches to hear. Will there be a periodic newsletter and will we be listened to?

- Don't agree with the renaming of PA main church
- What information will be made available with regards to costs?
- Communication with people is of paramount importance.

Q7. How can we address the concern about lack of transport for some parts of the PA?

- Transport is crucial, not only to enable people to attend mass but also to ensure that parishioners can continue to serve as Eucharistic Ministers, readers, musicians etc.
- Minibus idea was tried here, too many problems, get people to bring others on a personal 1-1 basis, local action!
- Transport to morning mass – bus passes only in use after 9.30 a.m.

Q9. How will a single PA community evolve and overcome parochialism? Where does the Ecumenical dimension fit into the proposal?

- Care is needed, assumes all parochialism is negative. Church is more than attending a service, there is community, friendship, local needs.
- Ecumenism does not seem to feature in the current proposal but we can offer so much as Christians not just denominations.
- Anglicans here at SBAS do not always feel part of this process, yet we are! We have a special gift of Ecumenism to offer, how can we work together to make Christianity meaningful, especially to those on the outside?
- Ecumenism is very important, let's not lose any of this at SBAS, perhaps the Pastoral Area should embrace this more.
- Why do people come to churches from outside the parish? We need to keep what is positive about each area, i.e. Ecumenism should be endemic in the PA not just the identity of SBAS
- We are a famous Ecumenical church (SBAS), set up 25 years ago, surely this should be retained.

Q14. As a PA we need to look at how we evangelise/reach out to young families and young people, how could we best do this?

- We need to encourage more young people.
- More organisations such as Brownies and Guides could be set up.

Meeting Three – Held in Holy Family Club

This meeting was attended by approximately 45-50 people. 11 sheets were returned reflecting thoughts and ideas from individuals and small groups.

General thoughts and feelings recorded

- Are we meeting people's needs, "recognise me, hear my voice, understand my needs!"
- We are not opposed to change, we want our proposal to be right, we want to be happy with it.
- Do we have use of a professional body in the Diocese who can offer expertise in relation to buildings
- Could the PAWG have a designated link person for parishioners to speak to?
- Are we about becoming a mobile community or migration to one church?
- How do we communicate to the wider Catholic community? Communication needs to be improved.
- We need to promote a strong message with strong leadership.
- Is everything *done and dusted*?
- As I listen to comments I hear parish first Pastoral Area second.
- Why is the still consecrated St. Marie's church not being considered as part of the plan?
- What will happen to the newly refurbished, (at what cost!), St Marie's Parish hall?
- Be creative about mass times.
- Importance of Liturgy and meeting people's needs.
- We need to have mutual responsibility/sharing/respect
- What about change can we see as positive?
- A need for a strong hand after we have come to terms with what has happened... need for guidance.
- Do we take this chance to do what God and the Holy Spirit is asking us to do?

- Proposal – where is the positive sell!? Why are we not singing the praises of what we have to offer?
- Held in trust? Is it our church, or that of future generations? We have to make sure it survives.
- Transparency of decisions! Our PA priests will tell the Archbishop what they can work with - he then washes his hands and says get on with it! Not my problem it's yours my son!
- These meetings should have been held in the churches facing closure giving all parishioners a chance to attend.
- We need a PA policy on funerals/weddings/baptisms and this needs to be made public. We need to develop a PA handbook.

Thoughts and feelings recorded in relation to the discussion points

Q1. It is imperative that we get the development of the suggested main PA site right. We need to think about; How long will rebuilding and extension to this site take? Will it be in use or out of use during this time? What about renaming of the main PA church and all the interdependent ones?

- Do we need to extend St Bede's when we have St Michael's, a much larger church?
- If Our Lady's remains open, as it should, it has everything St Bede's has and more, there would be no need for extension, this would be a waste of money. As for renaming St Bede's this is ridiculous!
- Don't spend money on extending St Bede's before it is fully ascertained that there is such a need. Do the congregations want a huge building?

Q2. How will we ensure availability of use of church halls during this period of change? Does church closure mean loss of parish centre/hall?

- Holy Family parish centre is available during this period of change and is a members run club.
- We all assumed if a church was closing, i.e. St Raphael's, then so would the hall/ centre.
- Surely Our Lady's new centre cannot be closed when it was built with lottery money.

Q3. *Are 5 churches still too many?*

- Five churches would give cover to the Widnes community but we need 6 priests.

Q6. *Does the proposal move our church away from vulnerable areas of pastoral need in the town, if so how do we plan to provide continued, visible support in these areas?*

- What are we going to offer to the parishioners of St Marie's and West Bank?
- How can this proposal possibly provide for the needs of the extensive population of south Widnes?
- There is still a distinct feeling of two parts of Widnes – the leafy suburbs and south Widnes.
- We are a village as part of the PA, we have an elderly community and this is maintained in the village and could be lost if the church community is not maintained.
- Yes, the parish will be left by the wayside if people cannot move to the next nearest church. If any support can be given it will come at great expense and inconvenience.

Q7. *How can we address the concern about lack of transport for some parts of the PA?*

- No transport links to other churches on Sundays.
- Transport to morning mass – bus passes only in use after 9.30am
- In the village how will the proposal fit within a Green Policy as everyone will need to go by car to mass as no other churches are within walking distance.
- We in Cronton are a village not part of the town.
- If ministers are expected to travel across all five churches they could only do so if they had their own transport.

Q9. *How will a single PA community evolve and overcome parochialism? Where does the Ecumenical dimension fit into the proposal?*

- Treat the whole of Widnes as a parochial area – don't just pay lip service to it.
- In Cronton we already have some Ecumenical services that could be built upon as they have been at St Basil's.

Q13. *How are clergy being supported in this time of change? Are they being helped to let go?*

- Some of us think that it would be a practical solution to the shortage of priests and their feeling of isolation if they were all housed together in one building. This would also give them companionship and support when threatened.

Q14. *As a PA we need to look at how we evangelise/reach out to young families and young people, how could we best do this?*

- More organisations such as Brownies and Guides could be set up.

Meeting Four – Held in St John Fisher Hall

This meeting was attended by approximately 45-50 people. 6 sheets were returned reflecting thoughts and ideas from individuals and small groups.

General thoughts and feelings recorded

- Don't make the same mistakes made at St Patrick's.
- It is fine to close St Raphael's church and St Pius.
- Why hasn't the addition of Holy Family and St Basil's caused the three church community to become the five church community?
- We think Our Lady's should be kept open and not St Michael's. If St Michael's is kept then is it necessary to extend St Bede's?
- We think the proposal has already been agreed, therefore what is the point of having all these meetings?
- My thoughts are that too much change, all in one go is being expected of the Catholic church in Widnes. Renewal would take time to build up it couldn't happen overnight. As a parishioner of Our Lady's I feel that this church should be taken off the list for closure.
- What are we doing to pray and promote vocations to the priesthood in our PA?

Thoughts and feelings recorded in relation to the discussion points

Q1. *It is imperative that we get the development of the suggested main PA site right. We need to think about; How long will rebuilding and extension to this site take? Will it be in use or out of use during this time? What about renaming of the main PA church and all the interdependent ones?*

- I don't think that the main church and interdependent churches should be renamed, you are expecting too much change too soon.

Q2. *How will we ensure availability of use of church halls during this period of change? Does church closure mean loss of parish centre/hall?*

- Our Lady's new centre cannot be closed, and what about our lovely grotto?
- Closure of church should not mean loss of hall/centre. If a church is closed the heart of the community is ripped out so to then follow this with the loss of a hall/centre would leave the people with nothing.

Q3. *Are 5 churches still too many?*

- Five churches would not be too many but one of them should be Our Lady's.
- Cannot understand how St Michael's, with all its problems and run down condition could be chosen above Our Lady's where we have a modern well equipped big church with not much debt.

Q4. *Who cares about the people and the break up of communities?*

- Who does care about the well being of the people and the break up of their communities – certainly not the people on the committees who put together this proposal.
- We have not dealt with people's feelings of grief since the proposal was announced.

Q6. *Does the proposal move our church away from vulnerable areas of pastoral need in the town, if so how do we plan to provide continued, visible support in these areas?*

- It does and this is detrimental to those in need. I honestly don't know how you could begin to pick up the pieces for those in areas left in isolation.

- There will be a huge gap between West Bank/ St Marie's and the next closest church.

Q7. How can we address the concern about lack of transport for some parts of the PA?

- It is necessary to have transport for older, less able people.

Q9. How will a single PA community evolve and overcome parochialism? Where does the Ecumenical dimension fit into the proposal?

- It will be difficult for PA to keep community life as we have known it.
- Some changes have been made at St Basil's parish which have caused upset and division in a parish that has served it's community so well for 25 years.

Q13. How are clergy being supported in this time of change? Are they being helped to let go?

- It isn't only the clergy who need to be supported at this time of change, we all need help if we have to let go!
- I think recruitment of deacons would help.
- When St Raphael's and St Pius close it will leave 3 priests to serve St Bede's, Holy Family and St Basil's that should be manageable
- One priest to serve Our Lady's and St Michael's should then also be able to be maintained.

Q14. As a PA we need to look at how we evangelise/reach out to young families and young people, how could we best do this?

- Evangelising is very time consuming and a large task, it needs perseverance and courage but we do need to get out there amongst the people.
- Evangelise to the 30-60 age group.
- How do we develop our faith to enable us to grow and have the confidence to reach out?