***Parish Hub Proposal***

In July the Isle of Wight Deanery met to discuss how sustainable our parishes were and how the Church could grow and thrive on the Island.

In September there was a further discussion with the Archdeacon about the future of Ministry on the Isle of Wight with a recognition that we cannot stay as we are and every parish will be affected. Parishes were invited to think about how we could organise ourselves differently, grow mission and tackle the island’s financial deficit

There was a recognition that all our congregations (and our finances) had been declining on the Island and Covid had just accelerated the crisis. Staying as we are is not an option.

In September PCC members were all invited to an online consultation with the Archdeacon on the future of Ministry on the Isle of Wight, diocesan strategy, vision, structures and finances. Bishop Christopher has asked all Deaneries in the Diocese to submit a plan for growth and mission in late February.

There have been many good ideas put forward for growing our mission, increasing our income and organise ourselves differently. One of the proposals was to divide the Island geographically into just 7 parishes with one Team Rector and one Assistant Priest, and one PCC. This would have meant St Saviours and Good Shepherd being part of a Bay Parish with Christ Church and St Johns in Sandown, and St Pauls and St Blasius in Shanklin.

We were concerned that this would have made it difficult for us to maintain our Anglo Catholic tradition and therefore we put forward a proposal that we join with St Albans Ventnor and All Saints Godshill to create one Anglo Catholic parish.

Since then, however, our Area Dean, Amanda Collinson has suggested a much looser arrangement of collaboration between churches called “hubs” to enable us to work together, share skills and connect with our local community without formally re-organising our parish system.

We are asked to consider what parishes would work best as our own “local hub”.

Sarah McCarthy -Fry

In light of this, here is the discussion paper which I prepared and discussed with the Benefice Standing Committee at a meeting last week, who were all in support of the plan to form a Bay churches hub, as being the best option for our churches.

The proposals from churches across the island will be fed back to Deanery Council and Deanery Synod, and will be presented to the Bishop on 22nd February.

This is a very tight time-frame, which I only heard about last week, so there is not as much time for consultation as I would have liked. However, if you do have any observations or questions, please get back to either Sarah or me and we will do our best to answer them.

**Proposal for Good Shepherd and St Saviour’s to join the Bay Hub:**

You will be aware that we have been very fortunate since the vacancy began to receive priestly help from retired Bay clergy, Frs Tony Richards and James Cook; and, as soon as he knew Fr D was leaving, Mark Williams kindly offered to say a mid-week mass for us on an occasional basis.

As you may know, it has long been my desire for the churches and clergy of the Bay to work more closely together, and this had been the original intention when Fr David was appointed. Sadly, this didn’t happen but, with the Area Dean’s idea of forming geographical “hubs”, there would now seem to be an opportunity for opening up a potentially fruitful partnership between us, especially as our strapline is “living and sharing the love of God in the Bay”.

At Chapter meetings for some months now, Clergy have been discussing possibilities about how we might work with one another more closely. To this end, the Bay clergy decided to meet via Zoom to float some ideas about how we might collaborate for our mutual benefit, given the relationship which to some extent already exists between us. The group consisted of Jonathan Hall, Mark Williams, and the two PTO clergy, Tony Richards and James Cook.

Although we will obviously still need to find priestly cover for masses once we’re out of lockdown, and the Bay clergy have generously offered to continue to support us in this way, you will know that Shirley had done great job getting the rota filled up to the end of March; so that was not my primary reason for participating in the Bay clergy meeting.

What interested me more, and what I would like to share with you, is that I can see there could be great potential to be had from harnessing the diversity of experience and gifts among the Bay clergy, and our people, to develop various areas of mission and ministry, eg healing ministry, bereavement support, outreach to schools and an expanded portfolio of ministry to older people.

My sense is that there could be a lot to gain from entering into a partnership or “hub” with the Bay churches, based on geography and a mix of churchmanship, because this could bring a richness and depth to our mission and discipleship here in Shanklin and Lake, and which could make growth in numbers more likely.

If we choose to participate in this hub, we would absolutely not, in any way, lose our distinctiveness or autonomy, but would rather gain the support to be had from being part of a bigger partnership. It would also show the Deanery our willingness to live out the Archdeacon’s and the area Dean’s call to us to be “courageous, collaborative, generous, resourceful and pioneering”.

As both our churches have renewed the resolutions, this will continue to be honoured and respected so that our integrity isn’t compromised in any way; but I’d say that our distinctiveness doesn’t mean we can’t work with churches of different traditions and ecclesiologies within the parameters of what is possible. I’ve been doing this for years!

Our constituency has something very particular to offer the Deanery and it is our distinctiveness in this regard which gives us our “value-added”, in terms of what we bring to the Deanery and the Diocese, as I said to Peter Leonard last time I saw him.

Also, the fact that we, along with Godshill Parish, are under alternate episcopal oversight protects us from any eroding of our position with regard to women priests; all that is being suggested is the forming a partnership of equals for mutual support and appropriate sharing of resources.

As you may know, we had been considering forming an alliance with All Saints’, Godshill and St Alban’s Ventnor. Whilst I can see this could work in terms of raising the profile of Anglo-Catholic spirituality on the island, having been serving there for several years I do not think it would work practically in terms of day to day mission.

I have several reasons for saying this. Firstly, people generally don’t travel far on the island, and that is especially true of my dear people at St Albans and All Saints; so the logistics of working with them on a meaningful day to day basis would be pretty much impossible!

Where I can see we could share with All Saints’ and St Alban’s, would be by holding occasional joint events to highlight our tradition, such as a Walsingham Festival, for instance; and +Norman has already said he’d be happy to come and facilitate something of this sort.

In terms of day to day mission and ministry, though, I really feel if we are serious about desiring growth in numbers, depth and in impact on the community (as we’d said at our away day), it would be more possible within a local geographical hub.

It would probably make more sense for AS/SA to join a hub in their geographical area, but discussions around this have not yet been had. For my part, I intend to continue to support them pastorally and spiritually, but would be happy for the main focus of my work to be at GS/SS and the Bay hub of churches.

In this regard, as you heard at PCCs, Anne, Shirley and I have been invited by Anthony Rustell to participate in a course he’s running on Building a Ministry Team. I am fully committed to supporting our readers and helping them to grow in their ministries, so that we can establish a strong clergy/lay leadership base for our churches, and to help us work together to think about what sort of leadership we will be needing when it comes to drawing up the parish profile.

Happily, Nigel Porter will be retiring to Shanklin at Easter and, once he’s got his breath back a bit, is keen to be part of the “ministry mix” here; so we will be very fortunate to have the benefit of the many gifts he will bring when he comes back into PTO ministry about Christmas-time.  His wife is very keen on High Church tradition, too!

You will know that Nigel, with whom I have worked for several years, has huge expertise in lay training. This expertise could be used to enable our Benefice to become a base for a range of educational opportunities for people across the Bay area, who wish to deepen their discipleship.

This doesn’t, of course, address our financial challenges, but we have to start somewhere! I would suggest that this partnership could lay a foundation, from which we could build a community which really can be a beacon of all that is good about the Anglo-Catholic tradition and to draw others in by its light.

I do hope you will agree that this is the best way forward for out churches, as I can see it could potentially herald an exciting new phase in our history.

With my love and prayers,

Deacon Corinne