



Diocese of Monmouth Ministry Areas Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Ministry Area?

Very simply, it is a group of worshipping communities in a defined geographic area, served by a team of collaborating lay licensed and ordained ministers sharing resources and working together in their common life of faith and worship, witness and service.

All Ministry Areas will be a single legal entity. They will all be registered charities and the members of the PCC (aka The Ministry Area Council) will be the charity trustees.

Why do we need to change?

Quite simply, and for no other reason, we're establishing Ministry Areas because we believe that it's where God is leading us. God uses the raw material of our experience to guide us into the new, and our experience over the last few decades is sobering. It's been one of declining membership and church attendance: the number in some of our congregations is now in single figures and continuing to go down. Many of our congregations have few if any members under 60: the life of the church doesn't look sustainable beyond a decade or so. There's a growing demand on our finances with increasing costs and many of our buildings needing significant repairs. And we live in a world that seems to have little interest in faith and little time for organized religion. To do nothing would be an abdication of our responsibility and calling.

Whilst the picture is a challenging one, we do not lose heart. Rather, we trust in God who continues to be at work both in the Church and in the world. And we trust God to lead us into the new and shape us for the mission and ministry to which we are called. This, we believe, means working more closely together, sharing the resources that we have with one another and benefitting from the significant economies of scale that Ministry Areas will give us. It will also involve discovering ways of being church, of nurturing disciples, and of engaging with our communities that will help us to connect with at least some of the 99.9% of population who aren't members of the Church.

For those who fear that this is a covert way of closing church buildings, we can assure you that this is not the purpose of what we're doing. The local church building is a powerful sign and symbol of God's presence in the community. But some of our buildings are vulnerable because of the picture I've just described, and we believe that establishing Ministry Areas as we have, gives us the best chance of ensuring sustainable future for them.



Mission and Ministry

How many stipends will there be for each Ministry Area?

Each Ministry Area will have two full-time stipendiary clerics and some will have more, depending on their size. Other licenced and beneficed clergy and lay ministers will also be equal members of the ministry team. We need to work together to build discipleship and vocations to encourage more lay involvement in our ministry teams.

Within the ministry teams is there any opportunity to consider diversity of worship?

Yes! By building bigger teams and sharing resources we can ensure that each MA can have a range of ministry from fresh expressions to traditional worship. Schools ministry will be an important part of our vision as a diocese and by sharing resources across our new Ministry Areas we can make sure that we are connecting with the next generation in our church and community schools.

Are these plans just about reducing clergy numbers so that fewer clergy can deliver ministry over larger areas?

No! There is very little difference to clergy numbers in these plans. The plans are not about reducing the number of clergy but about enabling a way of working that is more effective. A team of ordained and lay ministers will complement one another and enable each other to flourish in their ministries. It is about creating different and diverse ways for people to discover faith in Christ and grow in their discipleship.

We are gathering our resources and putting ourselves in a place from which we can build.

There is a concern about the size of the planned Ministry Areas because they seem very big.

The areas have been planned with a view towards to them being sustainable for at least the next 10 years and for them to be a basis for future growth. They have been drawn up so that they can support a minimum of two full-time stipends as well as House for Duty posts, non-stipendiary and lay ministers.

Why are we discussing our internal structural changes when we should be talking about mission and evangelism?

These structural changes are intended to enable mission and evangelism and they are not an end in themselves. However, it is acknowledged that concentrating our energy and resources on structural changes is a distraction from the mission and ministry of the church. That is why we would like the changes to be complete by the end of 2021 so that we can look forward into 2022 with a renewed vision and a sustainable future.



Legal and financial

Under these plans the members of the Ministry Area Council will become the charity trustees. Does this make them liable if something goes wrong?

Members of our PCCs are already charity trustees because all parishes are currently excepted charities. When we move to Ministry Areas, the Ministry Area Council will be the PCC and we will need to make sure that our governance structures are formed properly and trustee training will be provided so that all trustees understand their responsibilities. If we get this right, then we can reduce the risks to the trustees. Trustee liability is also covered by the Ministry Area insurance policy with EIG.

What do these plans mean for Deaneries?

The Diocese will be reconfigured to have three Deaneries each covering the same territory as the three Archdeaconries. Each will have an Area Dean, a Clergy Chapter and a Deanery Conference with representation from all the MAs in the Deanery. As well as fulfilling its constitutional functions, the Deanery will become a focus for support, encouragement, sharing of good practice, training and equipping God's people for mission.

Will all the church buildings in the Ministry Areas remain open or is there also a plan to reduce the number?

These plans are not about closing churches and they have been drawn up to provide more resources to our smaller parishes and not less. We do not yet know the impact that Covid-19 will have on our buildings and congregations and we don't know who might decide to continue to worship on-line and not return to our buildings.

How will we decide who is in the Ministry Area Council? Will there be a representative from each church?

In a Ministry Area, the Ministry Area Council (MAC) will become the PCC and, as such, the membership is governed by the Constitution of the Church in Wales. There is no requirement for each church to be represented on MAC as this may result in trustee body becoming too large to function efficiently.

However, in order to make sure that the voices of all parts of the Ministry Area are heard and good relationships are maintained with individual church congregations, a Ministry Area Forum may be set up to act as a consultative body to the MAC. The Forum will have no legal or constitutional authority but may be seen as an aid to furthering the mission of the Ministry Area. The Ministry Area Transition Team can determine if it would be helpful to have such a body and draw up the method of appointment of the membership of the Forum.

More information on the membership of the MAC can be found in section 1.5 of the Governance Toolkit.



Will each church get their own committee?

This is a decision that needs to be taken by each Ministry Area. Each church or group of churches within the Ministry Area may have a church committee and appoint sub-wardens. The Ministry Area Council will decide which powers to delegate and, unless pre-authorised, all decisions of these sub-committees must be ratified by the MAC which retains overall responsibility.

We are concerned that decisions about local churches will be taken at a distance, both geographically and socially, from the people who care for and maintain them.

We understand the importance of the local networks and collaboration, especially in our more rural areas, and recognise this concern. Therefore, the governance structure we are putting in place will ensure we continue to build the confidence of local communities and ensure the voice of the local church is heard.

A Ministry Area Forum may be set up to act as a consultative body to the MAC. The Ministry Area Transition Team can determine if it would be helpful to have such a body and draw up the method of appointment of the membership of the Forum.

Can each church retain its own bank account?

The aim is for the Ministry Area to operate one current account, in the name of the MA. This account should be used for all payments and receipts which can be analysed into the various church funds through the use of the *myfundaccounting* accounting system.

In the short to medium term the Ministry Area may allow the churches to operate their own bank accounts, however the funds remain legally under the control of the MAC and, as such, operational controls and safeguards need to be put in place. Trustees need to exercise effective general control over their charity's bank accounts and make regular checks to ensure that these are operating as intended and are consistent with the internal financial records.



Process

Is this a consultation process? If congregations do not like these plans can they say no and continue in their current parish structure?

We know that change can be difficult and unsettling but, for the future of our churches, we cannot continue as we are. We believe these decisions offer us hope for the future and the way to ensure we can support and build faith and discipleship whilst maintaining our presence in our communities for generations to come. This is also not something that we are doing alone – the other dioceses in Wales are either working within the Ministry Area structure already or they are working towards it, just like us. Over the next few weeks and months, we will be able to discuss these changes with you and to examine how they might affect you, your congregations and your communities, including local meetings in all of our planned Ministry Areas. We believe that this is the right way to move forward and that it will provide the most sustainable basis for growth.

We are worried that making such a major change at this time, within the restrictions of a pandemic, when people are forbidden to meet, will be too difficult.

Our diocese has been on the journey towards establishing Ministry Areas for at least five years. Although progress has been hampered for a number of reasons, we believe that the time has come to complete the work. We all work better when the structures are clear: when we know who our partners are and who we are working with; when we are clear what our resources are and who is in the team that is leading us. At the moment, in many areas of our diocese, these things are not clear and this is hampering our ability to move forward together. It's also preventing us from being as effective as we can be with the resources that God has blessed us with.

With our church buildings closed and our lives so restricted over the past year because of the pandemic, a fairly large group of people has had the time and space to draw together the Ministry Area plans. The group consisted of the stipendiary clergy and some lay members of the DBF and Standing Committee, as well as the Diocesan Staff and Bishop's Staff Teams,

The vaccines are now being rolled out and the hopes of getting back to some sort of normality are in sight, so we're now in a good and more hopeful place to begin implementing the plans locally.



Who is responsible for directing this work to establish Ministry Areas?

This is a major organisational change and, as such, we will need input from everyone to ensure that this is a success. Bishop Cherry has overall responsibility for the principles behind Ministry Areas and she is driving forward this process.

On the ground, each new Ministry Area will be expected to establish a Ministry Area Transition Team (MATT) who will be actively committed to work from now up to the signing of the decree which establishes the new Ministry Area. Ideally this working party will include good representation from across the area and should be mandated by and report to all the existing PCCs. The MATT will be supported in its work by the Archdeacon and Diocesan Office Staff. External professional advice may also be brought in for specific purposes, especially in regard to uniting the finances.

What is the timescale for these changes?

The next phase of this process starts with the discussion meetings with all the new Ministry Areas where questions will be answered, and comments will be heard. The Bishop will be present at all these meetings and they will be chaired by the Ministry Area Leader and the Archdeacon. These meetings have been scheduled to start in February and will run until the end of April.

Following these meetings, the Ministry Areas will be encouraged to set up their Ministry Area Transition Team (MATT) and they will be supported by their Archdeacon and others to work through the necessary tasks establish their governance structures and collate the accounts. Support will be available at this stage to develop the Ministry Teams.

Once all the structures are in place then a decree can be issued, the Ministry Team licenced to the Ministry Area and the Vestry meeting can be held. Once elections have been held for the Ministry Area Council the Ministry Area can be formally registered as a charity.

Not all Ministry Areas will be able to progress as quickly as others, but it is hoped that new structure will be in place by the beginning of 2022.

We have already spent the last five years forming Ministry Areas and now we are expected to change again. What assurance can the Bishop give that we will not have to go through this process again in another couple of years?

You will see that the Ministry Areas are larger than we currently have. They have been drawn up with a view to their future sustainability and to be a place from which we can grow. We do not want to do this again for a least 10 years because concentrating our energy and resources on structural change is a distraction from the mission and ministry of the church.

