

LPA Rep Statement for 10/11th December 2011

Over the last eighteen months or so, the Local Pastoral Area Team, in conjunction with the Bishop, has been planning for the future. At the Team's most recent meeting a week last Tuesday, Bishop Mark came to meet with the Team. He came first of all to **listen**. He came to share the concerns of the Team as we respond to his request for Runcorn, and eventually Frodsham also, to be served by two priests.

The LPA Team has three concerns. These are for: a) the individual parish communities, b) the increasing demands made upon our priests, c) and how we might work closer together as a local pastoral area, supporting and encouraging one another.

In the general discussion that took place that evening, Bishop Mark spoke about the growing needs across the Diocese, especially during these last few months. By January 1st, three more parishes in the diocese will be without a Parish Priest, and so he does not envisage Father Jonathan being able to return to Runcorn. We were happy that Bishop Mark was not in the business of dictating to us what should or should not be. He is **entrusting** the future of our parish communities to you and I, the LPA Team and our priests. There is no doubt that whatever is finally decided and approved will be the fruits of prayer, careful thought and preparation. The outcome, we believe, will be right for Runcorn and Frodsham.

As your representative I have constantly spoken on your behalf. As a result, the LPA Team has come to an agreement on three important priorities. 1) The first priority is valuing and supporting each church community. The Team is anxious that each community is cared for and affirmed and that no one feels expendable. 2) The second priority is that we value our priests. We will seek to ensure that they are able to cope with the demands made upon them. 3) The third priority is that we as parishioners care for our neighbouring communities. We are not a parish in isolation. We are part of a six-parish community that is LPA 12. It is essential to explore ways of working together and supporting one another.

So, how will we be moving forward? Well, the date we are moving towards is the first weekend in Lent next year: that is Saturday and Sunday **25/26th February 2012**. From that weekend, the five **Runcorn** parishes will be in the care of two priests. Father Peter Wright will have spiritual responsibility for Holy Spirit and Saint Edward's. Father George Malecki will have spiritual responsibility for Our Lady's, Saint Martin's and Saint Augustine's. **Saint Luke's, Frodsham**, will continue as is for the time being and will be incorporated into the greater scheme of things once Monsignor O'Neill retires. How that will work is unclear at this time.

The next step in the whole process will be for wider consultation. It is important that **you** have the opportunity to have **your** say and to offer **your** ideas and suggestions for the future. In mid-January, each parish will meet with its priest and with its LPA representative. Then, on **Wednesday 1st February 2012**, the six parishes will meet together at 7pm. in Saint Chad's High School.

As we have already said, mindful that from the first weekend in Lent, Runcorn will be in the care of two priests only. So before then, talk with one another and share your ideas and concerns among yourselves. Share them with your LPA Rep. Share them with our priests. Don't sit back and do nothing. Play an active and interested part in what is to come.

So in conclusion, what do we say? Well, God's ways are not our ways. We know that. But it appears that his ways are leading us in a direction all of us, we pray, will find positive and exciting. The Holy Spirit is at work in this place and as priests, people and communities, we welcome this opportunity to take the Catholic Church in this area into a new future.