

The Experience of Widnes as a Witness to Team Ministry



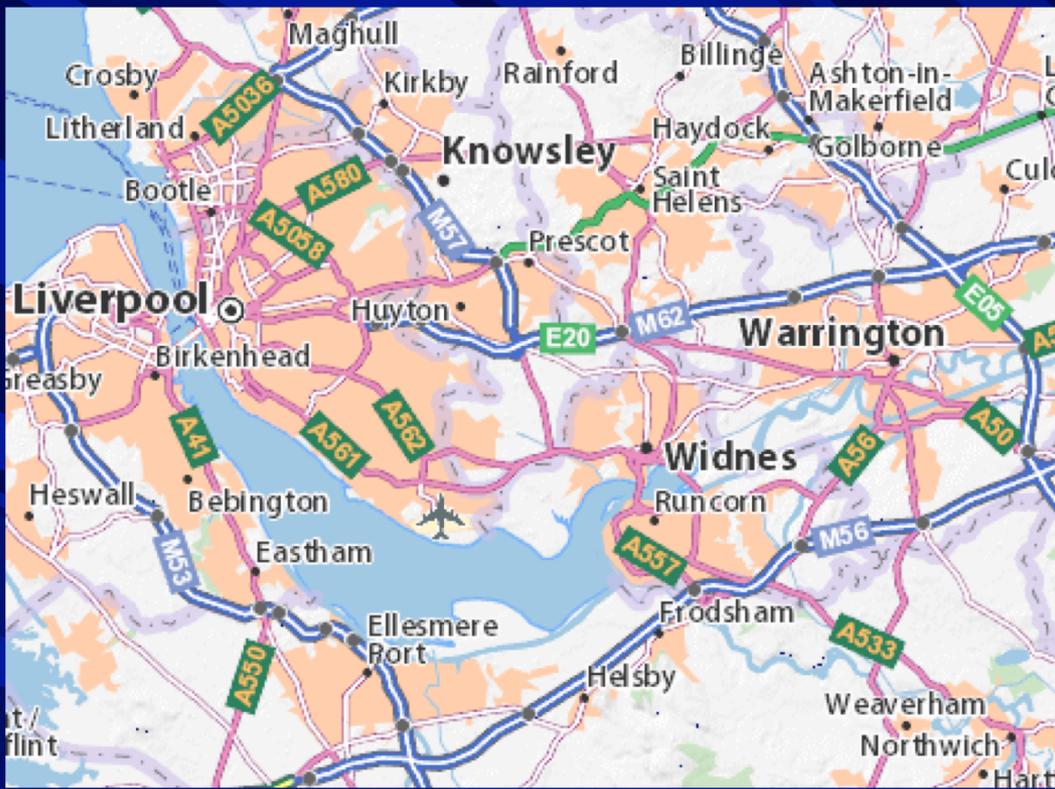
Liverpool

Manchester

Widnes







Widnes

- About 5km east to west & north to south
- Geographically self-contained
- 63,000 people
- Former chemical industry
- Widnes people stay in Widnes

1990's

- 10 churches
- 10 parishes
- 12 priests

2000's

- 9 churches
- 9 parishes
- 7 priests

2015

- 4 churches
- 1 parish
- 5 priests

Team Ministry

Background to Evolution of Team Ministry in Widnes

- Decline in number of priests
- Decline in Mass going population
- Age profile of Mass going population
- 'Clustering' of parishes – experienced as temporary measure, not a long term 'solution'

Background to Evolution of Team Ministry in Widnes

2000's

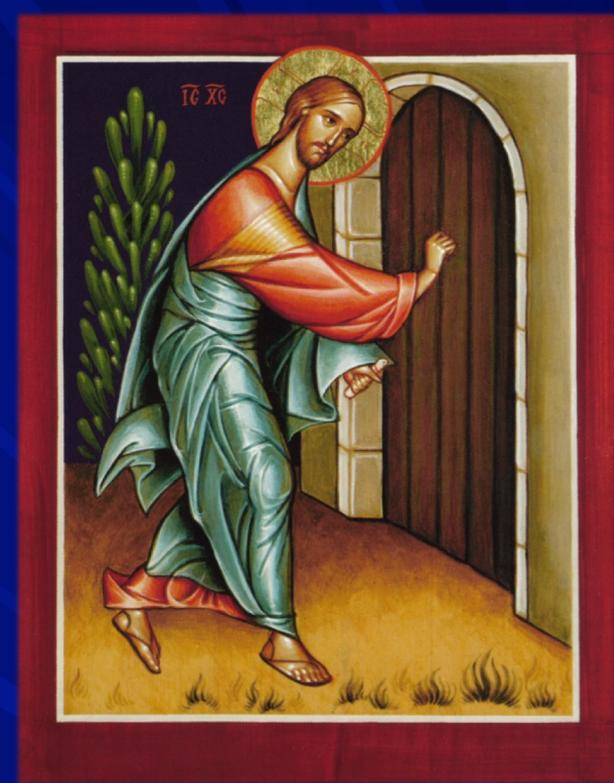
- 'Clustering' of parishes
- Working together across parishes
 - RCIA
 - Marriage Preparation
 - Service of Reconciliation
 - Easter Vigil

2013

- Focused process of consultation: what could happen?

Key Outcomes:

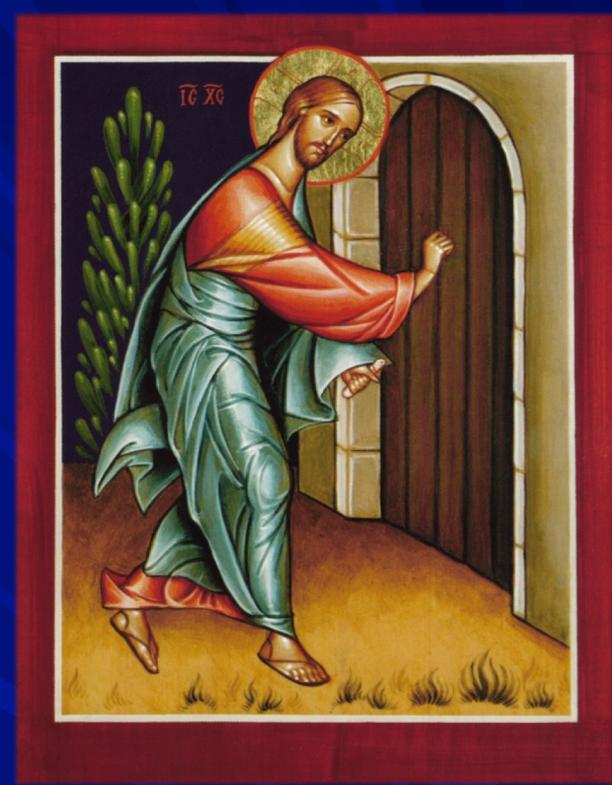
- Need to move to fewer church buildings
- Strength in working together – people & priests



Background to Evolution of Team Ministry in Widnes

First Sunday of Lent 2015

- All 8 parishes amalgamated to form 1 new parish
- 4 churches closed
- Team Ministry established



Team Ministry in Widnes

- Established as per Canon 517 & Canon 543
 - Pastoral care of a parish or of different parishes can be entrusted to several parish priests *in solidum*
 - One of them must be the moderator
 - Moderator is not 'the' parish priest or directing how others should act – needs agreement of joint action
- 3 Parish Priests
 - Fr Joe Bibby, Fr Malcolm Prince & Fr Matthew Nunes
 - Fr Matthew Nunes as Moderator
- 2 Assistant Priests
 - Fr Tony Reynolds & Bishop John Rawsthorne

Team Ministry in Widnes: Key Features

Priests regularly meet:

- Wednesday lunch & diary meeting
- Saturday evening meal
- 3 times a year overnight – prayer, reflection, sharing together

Co-ordinating group:

- Main decision making body
- Lay & priests (lay chair)
- Meet every week for 2 hours

Focused groups (priests & lay)

- Liturgy / Schools / Sick & Housebound / Ecumenical / Family Ministry / etc

Centralised Admin

- 3 staff providing full time Parish Office cover

Team Ministry in Widnes: Key Features

Sunday Mass

- Priests move around the 4 churches from week to week
- 3 week cycle
- Congregations in all 4 churches see all 5 priests regularly

Weekday Mass

- 1 Mass each day in 1 of the churches
- Additional Mass in another setting: School, Nursing Home, House Mass
- Funerals in addition

Strengths

Release Creative Energy

- Freed up from focusing only on managing decline
- Missionary discipleship moves more to the foreground
- Move from crisis management with decisions made on the basis of availability of priests
- (Priests available to supply elsewhere in diocese)
- Tangible sense of discerning together

Strengths

Collaborative Working

- Priest & lay people working together at all levels of the life of the parish
- A spirit of shared responsibility / co-responsibility

Strengths

Supportive, Formative & Challenging Environment

- Working with priests & lay people who see things differently from me
- Regularly being with brother priests & spending time together
- Sharing prayer together
- When things get tough - 'I'm not on my own with all this'
- Great environment in which to learn how to be a priest
- Good setting for someone who can't take on being a parish priest
- Brother priests notice if I am OK or not - am I looking after myself? – holiday, day off, taking on too much, etc

Strengths

Flexibility

- All priests don't have to be good at everything
- Priests can focus on a particular area of parish life
- Play to priest's (& peoples) strengths
- Things don't need to be set in stone - things can evolve: what does this person need to be part of this team?

Weaknesses

Very different way of working

- I can't just do my own thing
- Need to let go – I'm not in control
- Good degree of willingness & ability to work together needed
- Needs commitment & to be worked at – painful at times
- For some just too difficult
- Looked at from outside with envy & suspicion

Weaknesses

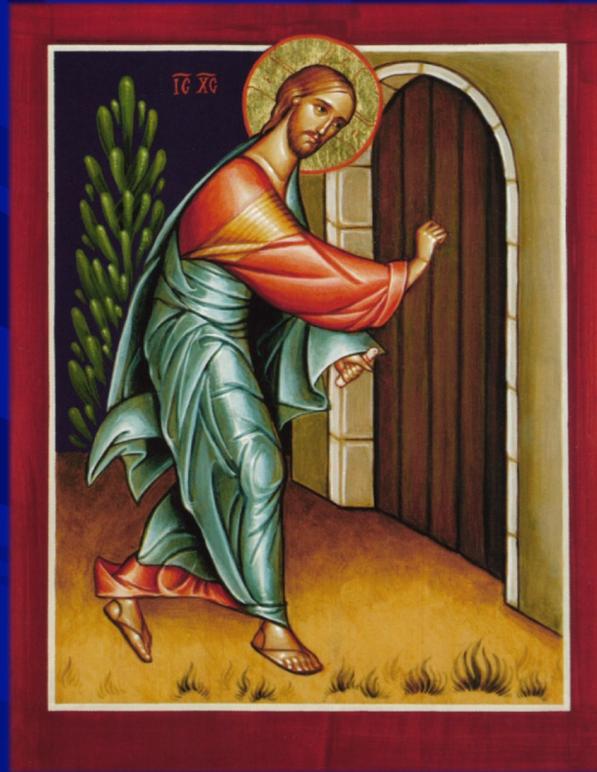
Relationship between each priest & people

- Distance – don't see same priest / people each week
- Who is my priest?
- Needs a new way of connection – small group / focused responsibility

Weaknesses

Difficult questions

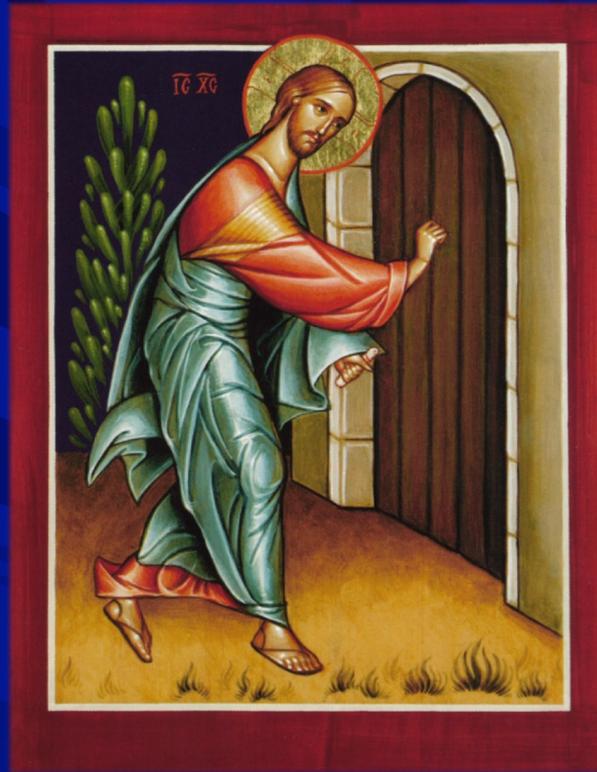
- Opens up difficult questions – that some may wish had been left alone!
- Easy answers elusive
- Not a comfortable place to be in at times



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Some Closing Thoughts

- The reality of Team Ministry need not be as threatening as it might at first appear
- 'Buy in' - can you force someone to be part of a Team Ministry?
- We all work in teams – what is the working together that is possible?



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