

## **VARIOUS POTENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS OF PARISHES**

Presently Argyll and the Isles has 14 incardinated priests plus 2 priests on loan. Our twenty five parishes have 41 Churches and a further 4 non-diocesan properties are used for Mass. About 14,000 Catholics live within the diocese of whom under 3,000 practice. 45 Sunday Masses are celebrated.

One important element of *Led by the Spirit* is to consider our present parish structures. In these reflections we must look not just at the present but also to the future. Parishes are founded for mission. Is our present parish structure sufficiently missionary? Is it a realistic structure for the future? What can be done to improve it?

*Led by the Spirit* cannot achieve restructuring of the diocesan parishes. Any changes will need to follow the canonical procedure, including specific consultation. However, Phase 3 does give everyone, laity and clergy, an opportunity to think about our parishes – strengths and weaknesses – and to search for potential solutions, taking into account the many nuances.

The Instruction '*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*' was issued by the Congregation for the Clergy and approved by Pope Francis in 2020 and is very insightful. To read the Instruction please **[click on this link](#)**.

However, to assist our Phase 3 discussions please see below some simple pointers which indicate various possibilities. The list is not exhaustive and you may well have other proposals which the bishop would like to hear.

### **Keep the Status Quo**

All 25 parishes remain exactly as they are including all Chapels of Ease.

*Some points to consider: Would you prefer for nothing to change? Is this realistic for the future? Have we enough people, priests and finance to have 45 places for Sunday worship? Would keeping the status quo make us more or less missionary?*

### **Parish Groupings Which Share A Parish Priest**

Presently 16 out of 25 parishes in the diocese share a parish priest with another parish. This arrangement is not unusual across the Catholic Church. Each parish maintains its independence and identity.

*Some points to consider: How crucial is it for parishes to retain their separate identity and be more compact communities? Is it disadvantageous that Mass is celebrated less frequently in each parish (although just as often across the two parishes)? The Parish Priest's administrative workload doubles. There is an opportunity for increased lay involvement which would also lighten the priest's burden (including administration). Are you happy for*

*the laity to lead appropriate worship or should prayer in the Church only ever be led by a priest?*

### **Clusters of Parishes with Priests Living in Common**

Parishes could be grouped together with several priests living in one house (in a town) and then travel out to the surrounding rural areas.

*Some points to consider: What advantages or disadvantages would there be for priests to live together? Would it reduce feelings of isolation, increase fraternity or could it create challenges? Should only priests who wish to live together do so? Would the outlying parishes lose some of their identity? Alternatively, could this arrangement increase lay involvement?*

### **Closure of Parishes**

It could be decided that it is best for a parish to close. There would normally be multiple reasons for this. A formal process of consultation precedes such a decision. If a parish closes then it amalgamates with a neighbouring parish. Its assets (buildings, money, debts etc) transfers to the parish it has now joined.

When a parish closes the Church building also usually closes. However, sometimes it may be possible for it to remain open as a Chapel of Ease in the new parish arrangement.

*Some points to consider: The pain of loss for a community. The new larger parish could be renewed with the extra numbers. However, would any renewal only be short term unless the challenges facing the Church are properly addressed? Finances should improve. Less administration for the priest although inevitably there will be more pastoral work in the enlarged area.*

### **Chapels of Ease**

A Chapel of Ease is an additional Church building within a parish which is not the Parish Church. Our diocese has 25 parishes and therefore 25 Parish Church buildings but also a further 16 Chapels of Ease plus 3 places are rented for Sunday Mass. In former days Chapels of Ease were generally built when travel was difficult and so made it easier for parishioners to attend Mass. Today this would still be the case for some Chapels of Ease but not for most as roads have improved and many have cars.

*Some points to Consider: Although the Chapel of Ease is not a parish the local community who worshipped there would feel loss and pain. Could the parish be strengthened if everyone would worship together in the same Church? There should be financial savings and less maintenance of buildings. Can too many buildings for a small parish cause financial difficulty? Should there be a common policy across the diocese regarding Chapels of Ease or should they be evaluated on a case-to-case basis? Is the distance from Chapels of Ease to the Parish Church relevant?*

## **SERVICES OF WORD AND COMMUNION**

If a priest is unavailable to celebrate Sunday Mass a deacon can lead the parishioners in a Service of Word and Communion. If there is no parish deacon the Parish Priest can appoint a lay person to lead the Service. During this Service the Scripture Readings for Mass that day are proclaimed, prayers are offered and Holy Communion distributed. The Service is not Mass, but in the absence of a priest, allows parishioners to worship together, hear God's Word and receive Holy Communion.

*Some points to consider: Can Services of Word and Communion be beneficial for our diocese, especially in the more isolated place and/or if the priest is, with little warning, unable to celebrate Mass e.g. illness or travel disruption? If a priest is unavailable to celebrate Mass but another parish is relatively close by should there still be a Service to keep the community praying together or should they travel to the neighbouring parish for Mass? Should the diocese produce guidelines for such Services, including the criteria for them to take place, so that there is continuity across every parish?*