

# Looking to the Future, Being Faithful to the Past



The Archdiocese of Glasgow has a rich faith tradition which is celebrated today in parish communities across the city and beyond. These parishes have taken shape as the Catholic community has sought to respond to the need for Pastoral Care in changing circumstances. Our parishes have been sustained by the faithful commitment of men and women, not simply to their local community, but to the Church, to the Gospel and to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Today, as ever, fidelity to that tradition implies a willingness to go further and to respond to new challenges.

**“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon,  
“Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Luke 5:4**

For some time, it has become clear that the current arrangement of parishes within the Archdiocese of Glasgow will be difficult to sustain into the future.

Change is never easy as it invites us to leave our safe harbours behind and cast off into the deep. In putting out our nets for a catch we seek a renewal of parish life and a rediscovery of collaborative ministry at the heart of our mission.

Together we seek a new spirit of evangelisation to create vibrant faith filled communities where Christ’s presence is celebrated. We seek a renewal of priestly and lay ministry. We seek a more collaborative experience of ministry. In fidelity to those who have gone before us we seek a new Pentecost for the Church in the Archdiocese of Glasgow.

**The process outlined here invites a review of parish structures. This process seeks to encourage discussion, to promote growth, and through a spirit of collaboration to build a strong pastoral response to the challenges faced by the Church today, particularly the shortage of priests.**

In this discussion we identify the deanery structure with the goal of considering how we might better work together, priests and people, sharing faith and sharing resources.

This discussion will enable decisions to be made on matters such as:

- ◆ **The number of parishes and churches required to serve a given pastoral area.**
- ◆ **The distribution of priests across the Archdiocese.**
- ◆ **The number of priests assigned to serve a given pastoral area.**
- ◆ **The number of Masses to be celebrated at the weekend and on weekdays within a given area.**

Each Deanery is made up of several pastoral areas. Each pastoral area, working as part of the deanery needs to assess how best to use the resources that are available, including the number of priests available.

### **Some Guiding Principles**

- ◆ This discussion affects every parish in the Archdiocese – not just those which might be assessed as being smaller or less viable.
- ◆ Responses need to emerge through prayerful listening, ongoing discussion, local knowledge, and a willingness to seek out appropriate solutions based on collective responsibility.
- ◆ There is no Master Plan that would cover all eventualities over an indeterminate period. Pastoral solutions must be characterised by flexibility and ongoing review.

There is an expectation that in the course of time some parish churches may be used less, closed, or reduced in status so that Sunday Mass is no longer celebrated there on a regular basis.

All decisions need to be taken in consultation with the appropriate parties.

### **New Opportunities for Growth** **New and Renewed Parish Structures**

To enable this discussion each deanery needs to form a Deanery Council consisting of the parish priests of the deanery along with one representative from each parish. The deanery council should be co-chaired by the Dean and a Lay person.

The Deanery Pastoral Council should assess the pastoral needs of the Deanery seeking out the most appropriate responses to ensure sacramental and pastoral care.

Properly implemented this process will reinvigorate growth in lay ministry. Making it clear that lay ministry belongs at the heart of the Church.

### **Viability**

Viability of a given parish within this process is an important issue. The following criteria are intended to guide deaneries in assessing the issue of viability.

A significant weakness in one or two of these criteria would not mean that the parish is not viable, but it would indicate that the parish might need additional support.

- ◆ The baptised faithful are the heart of every parish. To survive, every parish needs a core of members who are truly committed to the Gospel of Christ and are willing to make the parish a priority, giving generously of their time, their talent, and their finance resources.
- ◆ A viable parish probably needs a minimum active membership of 50- 75 persons. A parish that is smaller than this and has experienced decline rather than growth during the past five years, cannot easily expect to have the fulltime services of a priest five years from now. This kind of assessment should take note of the ratio of baptisms to the number of funerals each year over a 5 -10 year period; studying the increase, decrease, or stability of the general population in a geographic area.
- ◆ A viable parish must also have a sufficient number of active parishioners offering ministry by assisting as part of the Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Council, Music Ministry, Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, etc.,
- ◆ It is not reasonable to ask priests to provide pastoral ministry to an unrealistic number of parishes.

- ◆ In parishes where the same small, aging group of parishioners bears the burden of parish leadership and gives their time, talent, and finance in large measure, there would be serious concern about future viability. If the percentage of the faithful taking an active role in parish life cannot be increased, viability could be at risk.
- ◆ A viable parish demonstrates that liturgy is at the centre of its life. The ultimate goal of every parish is to bring the faithful closer to Jesus Christ. This is why the Sunday Eucharist should be the heart of every parish.
- ◆ A viable parish extends a spirit of hospitality and invites people to become members. It is committed to evangelizing the un-churched by means of active programmes such as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). A viable parish encourages inactive members to return. A viable parish exhibits practical outreach and service to the poor, the needy, and the homeless.
- ◆ A viable parish should have an annual income that is sufficient to cover the expenses of the parish. A viable parish should not be dependent on the Archdiocese for its ordinary expenses. It should be able to make reasonable payments on its debts to the Archdiocese.
- ◆ A viable parish should be able to maintain the parish facilities and property in good condition.
- ◆ The viability of a given parish is influenced by its location. The proximity of neighbouring parishes can have a real impact on the viability of a parish. If several parishes are in close proximity with large, aging buildings that are not needed and churches that are never even half-full, this can be a serious factor in viability.