

DIOCESE OF ARGYLL AND THE ISLES

LED BY THE SPIRIT: COLLATION OF PHASE 1 CONSULTATION

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We have completed the first consultative phase of Led by the Spirit - our diocesan discernment process. Mindful that the Spirit dwells within us we have prayed and shared where we have thought God may be calling us. Together we have discerned that the Lord is guiding Argyll and the Isles to authentic holiness, to become more missionary, to develop catechesis, to support our laity and clergy, to be more welcoming and transparent.

Nineteen parishes made submissions which have now been collated into this single document. The most frequent comments about each topic have been placed at the top of each section with the less frequent lower down.

I thank you for your participation, including the Working Group. Every disciple is a Temple of the Spirit. Your voice needs to be heard or our discernment is impoverished.

This document is not the final word. I encourage you to reflectively read and pray over it. What resonates with you? What do you resist? Where is the Spirit in all of this?

In August we begin Phase 2 when we will explore our resources. In Phase 3 we will return to this document and discern how our aspiration to faithfully live as God calls can we best attempted with the resources we have.

May Our Lady and St Columba guide us.

+Brian

The Universal Call to Holiness

We are all called to holiness, to a deeper union with God. It is important to recognise that God is with us at the centre of our lives, in all we do. The Holy Spirit is our guide and our inspiration. This calls for wholehearted commitment. People can see through us if we are half-hearted.

We underlined the importance of prayer, for finding time to be with God, away from the distractions of our busy lives. There are many ways we can pray, many people/things we can pray for.

We pray alone, in the church, at home, in a quiet place.

We pray together in church, at Mass, in Eucharistic Adoration, in parish prayer groups.

We pray as family, and this fosters a culture of prayer in our young people.

How we use Sacred Scripture, and bring its message to people is important for their spiritual lives.

We need to make time to be with God, to see God in others, and this should be reflected in the way we treat them, using our talents and skills in the service of the Gospel and the community, as there are many people in need, at home and further afield. We must act with compassion and love, and be merciful and forgiving. We need to be a place people will turn to in their time of need, and show our commitment to the Gospel through love of God and our neighbour. We must 'be Christ for others'.

We must take time to reflect on what God wants of us in the context of the teaching of the Faith. We must discern between what we need and what we want. Church Social Teaching is important.

We must never lose sight of the Sacramental role of the priest. The Sacraments are central to our faith and our identity; vital in our lives and our call to holiness. Yet, Mass is not the only thing the Church offers. People need to remember the obligation to go to Confession at least once a year (in

case of grave/mortal sin). Some of us have become 'cultural Catholics' and do not attend church very often.

Let us remember that Sunday is the Lord's Day, and should be respected as such.

We can reintroduce Rosary, Sacred Heart Devotions... Benediction etc, other than just Mass. Is the decline in devotional practices an unintended consequence of Vatican II? However, we must be careful that these devotions go deeper than mere ritual.

We can have a prayer intention box if people want someone prayed for by the parish.

We can visit the housebound, - not just with Holy Communion, and not just the priest.

Retreats and prayer days can help us grow closer to God and each other.

Let us recognise the importance of the holiness of others and respect that in our interactions.

We can be counter-cultural - going against the flow of secular society, which is a positive advertisement for people searching for spirituality and peace. Affluence and consumerism can take us away from our faith.

Older generations were perhaps less questioning of their faith than younger people are now. There are fewer visible reminders of faith than in the past. We can invite others to Mass with us, so that they can see what our faith means to us, and they can appreciate it as well. They may increase their faith too, especially if they are struggling.

Evangelisation

We lead by example, as witnesses to God's love. We can inspire others. We must know our own faith well, and live it, love it and practice it before we are able to be an effective evangelist. To live our faith presents its own challenges, and is counter-cultural in an anti-church world. Evangelisation is about witness, which we can do all the time. We need to be the hands, feet and voice of Christ in our community. This example will let others see God in and through us. We also need more of the 'missionary' spirit. We are becoming mission territory, where Christianity is becoming a minority.

Evangelisation has three sides: bringing Christ to those who do not know Christ, to those who have fallen away, and deepening the faith of those who are already committed.

We must be non-judgemental, as a judgemental attitude turns people away.

We also need to be confident in our Church leaders, from the Pope to our own priest, and recognise that the Church has lost a lot of credibility recently.

Parish social events can bring people in and make us all feel we belong more.

We can become involved in community events, ecumenical activities, sharing our faith with others. We can visit the elderly and the sick (not just a job for the priest), and be welcoming to newcomers. Volunteering, supporting local groups, bears witness to Christ in everyday lives and is evangelising.

House Masses are a good way to reach some far-flung areas and housebound people.

It is good to become familiar with the Church's Catechism.

We can invite people to see what happens in our church in a non-judgmental way.

We can use technology and social media (Facebook, Zoom, and parish websites etc.) to increase our footprint. This is the place where the young people are, so we must use these tools to reach them. We do not have to be overtly 'religious' to get the message across. We can promote TV and social media services for those who cannot get to Mass

We do need to tackle and try to overcome anti-church attitudes. We can do that by keeping to our values including keeping the Sabbath holy, also by making the liturgy more appealing to the young.

Homilies are important, so they should be well-prepared and well delivered. A good liturgy can bring us closer to God and is something people cherish.

We need to find effective ways to bring lapsed Catholics back to their faith. And we must return to full normality, as in some parishes there were comments that we have not fully reopened after Covid. Restart the prayer groups and other activities. These could just as well be led by lay-people.

Publish Mass times in local press and ensure parish websites and Facebook pages are up to date.

Part of our missionary Church involves supporting organisations such as SCIAF, Mary's Meals, other charities and Missionary societies.

We must give a vision of and access to the God of power and might, as well as love and mercy.

Getting back into the habit of going to Mass after Covid takes some courage, and so we must be welcoming and be non-judgemental to these people.

How hard does the Church fight for its place in education and society? Are we being side-lined because we are not evangelising enough? RSHP is an important issue at this time. Do we engage with those who seek to erode our values?

Catechesis

We can't catechise others unless we are catechised ourselves. We need a greater familiarity of our faith, of Scripture, of the Catechism etc.

Masses for children: some parishes already offer these from time to time. We can also use these to explain what happens at Mass, (even priests may need to remind themselves!)

It is important that children's participation does not end at First Communion or Confirmation. This requires commitment from families too. This includes the Children's Liturgy at Mass.

We need strong and solid teaching, especially on the Eucharist and Sacraments.

It is important if we are invited into schools (especially where we do not have Catholic schools) that we accept without being judgemental, and engage in the school community.

We need to teach the faith in the home more, so resources should be available, and adults need to be able to answer the children's questions effectively. This includes courses for newly married couples.

We cannot underestimate the effect of the early experience of children in the home where we encourage their development in faith and in appreciation of God's Creation.

The way we catechise children must be age-specific, and presented in short and engaging ways. Often people tend to have a short attention span. We can try activities outside, where young people feel more comfortable; we can promote youth activities, walks etc.

A challenge is when children want to explore their faith but their parents do not feel that they can engage. The Church needs to help these parents to overcome these obstacles..

Adult study sessions, learning about Scripture and the Catechism are a good resource in some parishes. This is an area that needs to be worked on, and resources provided to people. We can use parish websites and Facebook pages to provide catechetical materials or links to good resources.

In those parishes where we have Catholic Primary schools, we need to cherish this resource, as it is hard to attract and retain good Catholic teachers. It is good to have Catholic teachers in non-denominational schools, especially in areas where there are no Catholic schools.

We can promote groups such as Justice & Peace, or *Laudato si*, or any that will attract and engage our youth.

A radical approach involves restructuring the Church and taking into account the current trends, by empowering the laity, and making counter-cultural the new normal. We can pay lay catechists to train and encourage us. This is investing in our future.

We can offer more online courses, which could end with a retreat (not online) to promote fellowship as well as learning. We can run the Alpha Course (or equivalent) in all our parishes. Our priests can be mentors and can empower the lay faithful who will continue the work of evangelising. We need to be sensitive in dealing with LGBTQ+ issues. There is a fine line between being welcoming to these groups, and compromising our faith to accommodate some of the issues. It requires prayer and understanding, but also knowledge of what the Church teaches.

Some parishes commented on the importance of art and music as a way of bringing the faith to people. Good art and music can communicate in a different way than words.

It would be good to create a central resource list with links on the diocesan website, as there is so much material; cross-refer what people are using, finding to be worthwhile (and what is not). Different parishes have already suggested several resources for catechesis, adults and children.

Formation of Laity and Clergy

This starts with attendance at Mass. Some cannot get to Mass by themselves, so help should be offered. We can pray for and support each other, especially members of the parish who are vulnerable or struggling in any way.

Lay people are aware of the shortage of priests, and so they can become Eucharistic Ministers (many already are), able to lead a service if the priest has to be away, even on Sundays if necessary. Parish activities: walks, films, tea and coffee after Mass, can build up community spirit. Religious activities such as a Parish retreat or pilgrimage, days (or half-days) of reflection.

There are theological courses that are suited for laypeople, (such as Maryvale). A well-informed laity is good for the church.

Lay people can also lead days of reflection or talks.

Remember that 'Vocation' is not just for priests and religious, and the Laity do not just fill in for a lack of priests. There is a genuine calling too. They should be more involved in decision-making in the Church (not just at parish level).

We can promote the Secular Franciscans and Carmelites, and other charisms for the Laity.

Support the priest by helping out. Volunteers are often needed for help in running the parish and the upkeep of the properties. It is worth advertising this from time to time. New readers, cleaners, gardeners, welcomers are always appreciated. This can be led by the Parish Council.

A Pastoral Council is a good resource to help the priest, working together to benefit the parish. They can organise events, encourage people to share in liturgies, fundraising activities, and more.

Engage in ongoing support for the parish by ensuring the collection is healthy, with fundraising and donations, and the vital importance of praying for our priest and our parish.

While priests can be very busy, they can also get lonely, so it is good to be aware of their mental health and to help them by supporting them and being friendly. Pray for our priests.

Support any visiting priests, whether that is cooking for them or offering a lift etc.

Priests are vulnerable to the idea that 'all priests are paedophiles'. So, we must protect them when they are threatened. They are a valuable resource that is easily undermined.

We have 3 deacons in the Diocese, so we should promote the Permanent Diaconate, and encourage more to consider this Vocation, and learn what it is and what it is not. Deacons can baptise, witness marriages, visit the sick with Holy Communion, preach, catechise, help with funerals...

Are female deacons on the horizon?

We now have our group set up for Clergy Support. This will be very beneficial to us all.

An idea was mooted to cluster some parishes with more than one priest in the same house, so they can support each other and form a community. This might work in some places but not in others. It also requires the priests concerned to be willing to live under the same roof!

Transparency

There was a divergence of opinion in parishes whether the Church was being transparent enough.

Transparency between bishops, priests and laity has improved recently, and this consultation process is a good example of that. Bishop Brian has shown he wants to listen to the people of the diocese. We need to continue to support this initiative. It is transparent, and we must be too. We need to be able to listen to everyone without fear.

Hopefully the 'Led by the Spirit' process will lead to greater transparency, and allow parishioners to better understand what goes on in their own parish and diocese, and what changes, if any, will be proposed. And the governance of our parishes and diocese can be opened up to greater scrutiny, even having Lay Trustees, and performance auditing.

We already have skilled laypeople on Diocesan decision-making boards (DSAG, Finance etc.). Could this be expanded to other areas?

An elected Parish Council will be more transparent than a selected one. This should meet often and report to the parish.

It is important that the Church is seen to be proactive in Climate change.

Also, the universal (and local) Church must be seen to be getting its house in order after the recent scandals, and that it is transparent and truthful about scandals.

Financial Transparency: it is good to publish the weekly income as well as big expenditures in the newsletter, and the annual parish accounts should be made available to parishioners. People are more likely participate in fundraising if they know where their money is going. Gift Aid envelopes for visitors, and Standing Orders for parishioners can be better promoted. We can promote initiatives such as 'easyfundraising' and others to generate more income, and look for tax breaks and grants where we can. Increased revenue from outside the diocese releases pressure on our parishioners who are already giving what they can afford.

If there is someone in the parish who is good at finances, they could be looking after the parish accounts to ensure that they are healthy, or to spot problems, and to be accountable.

We are more aware of the Diocesan finances than we were (they are available on the Diocesan website), and Jake is 'visiting' every parish.

It has been suggested that we should consider amalgamating parishes to decrease 'doubling up' of administrative tasks (accounts, Gift Aid, Safeguarding audits etc.)

Safeguarding has become much more transparent in the past few years. Ensure that parishioners know who their Parish Safeguarding Coordinator (PSC) is and have access to their contact details - there should be a poster in every church. Also it is essential to have enough people with active PVGs to ensure that we can do activities for children and support vulnerable adults in the parish.

Within the parish, it is good to know what is happening; the weekly bulletin and other resources are essential; also to know who is in charge of what in the parish, rather than always asking the priest.

A More Welcoming, Open Church

(This was an optional question, and most of these groups had already addressed it at the Synod)

Promote ecumenical activities such as sharing soup kitchens with other churches.

Some parishes have a 'Welcome Team' at the door on Sundays. It is good for the priest to be at the front door at the end of Mass. Tea and coffee after Mass helps welcome visitors and unite the parish.

Be more accessible, by use of hearing loops, wheelchair access, volunteer transport systems to help the elderly get to Mass, and have large print or even a screen.

How do we welcome people enquiring about joining the Church? Are we welcoming enough?

Make marriage in church easier to access. Explain the Annulment process to people.

Some people feel excluded because of their marital situation, their sexuality, or maybe because they feel embarrassed at having drifted from the Church. Make them feel welcome first and then address their concerns. We should be here for everyone.

Many of the young people feel that the church is not as welcoming as it could be; Mass is long and boring, the church is cold, the seats are uncomfortable. Some of them felt that they would like an explanation of what Mass is all about.

We have lost generations of people by not welcoming people who are 'different', or who feel that their choices take them too far away from the 'mainline' of the Church. Without changing the teaching of the Church, we can listen to them and help them to see how they are welcome and to find a place where they feel comfortable and not threatened.

Do not water down the faith to appease certain groups, either within the Church, or in wider society who want to move in a particular direction. We cannot go against Church Teaching.

There are people from other countries in our parishes (Polish, Ukranian) that we can cater for.
We can offer Confession in the Confessional again since Covid.
We can have Open Days to welcome people of other faiths.