

Led by the Spirit 3

Gathering at Portree, Wed 25th Sept

Convergences

- There was general view that change was inevitable given the number of Priests vs Churches in the Diocese and that Mass might not be available in every church every week. We should however be positive about change.
- There was a very strong feeling given the shortage of priests that consideration should be given to allowing female clergy, priests and deacons and also allowing priests to marry. The call to serve God as clergy should be available to all regardless of gender. Although this was noted, it was pointed out that this was outwith the remit of the Led by the Spirit Initiative as the Bishop is bound by current Canon Law. It has been passed up the line via the General Synod where the bishops meet next month for their final Conversations in the Spirit.
- There was general agreement that more responsibility be given to the laity in running parishes. Areas such as Eucharistic Ministry, visiting and taking communion to the elderly and sick, leading certain devotions (eg Rosary), involvement in the administration of the parish including Finance, Gift Aid, Fabric, repairs and maintenance. Included in this would be to identify peoples' skill sets to help in key areas.
- There was a general view that we really need to engage with the young and youth of our parish and diocese and come up with good initiatives to get them interested.
- A few people suggested grouping priests in certain locations to serve a given no of parishes.
- In the event of reduced availability of Mass, some thought it would be beneficial for the Diocese to make available an online Mass.
- A few commented on church buildings if some churches were to close. How easy would it be to dispose of them? Could some be converted to guest houses or retreats? Could they be offered to local community? The Church of Scotland has done a lot of work in this area of redundant churches - we can learn from them.

- Two people thought we could strengthen our faith through small groups for contemplative prayer and study - both at Parish and Diocese level.
- A view was noted that we should have more exposition of the Blessed Sacrament either before or after Mass. Possibly morning Prayer?
- A view was expressed that given the growth potential in our Parish that a priest should be resident here even though he might have to fulfil other duties elsewhere.
- There was a view that it would be good for priests to do more regular exchanges between parishes.

Divergences

- One or two people felt that this Led by the Spirit Initiative was perhaps focused too much on the negative. We need to ensure that “the light is left switched on”.
- One person thought we should try to maintain the status quo.
- One person thought the current model for Skye worked well and should not be changed.
- A view was expressed that a service of Word and Communion was not appropriate on a Sunday or Feast Day.

Questions

- 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?
- How crucial is it for parishes to retain their separate identity and be more compact communities?
- Are we accepting that the current state of decline in numbers is permanent?
- Are we holding onto a church of the past? Is this why only 21% of our Catholics are practicing? Have we surveyed the 11000, who no longer come, to understand why? If we are only talking to those who support the status quo then are we simply reinforcing what is not necessarily working at present?

- What outcomes are expected from this initiative? If the outcomes are clearly identified then we can better plan how to achieve them.
- What about using missionary priests?
- A Diocesan prayer group?
- Is confession online possible?
- Is there a need to establish an “eldership” for the diocese? Or is that a step too far?
- In future could all seminarians become priests for the whole of Scotland and then put to serve where they are most needed?