

Submission from Argyll and the Isles Diocesan Pastoral Council

1 Convergences

The unanimous view is that Argyll and the Isles is to remain a diocese but that it did need to share resources with other dioceses. Such resources could be financial, expertise in areas such as property management and Health and Safety, youth ministry. However, it was also pointed out that we have much to offer others (e.g. music, Gaelic, spirituality, welcoming tourists). We envisage an 'exchange of gifts' as seen in the Synod of Bishops Final Document.

It was also unanimous that our diocese enjoys a vibrant Gaelic and Celtic heritage which enriches our spirituality and religious life. For Western Europe we are also extremely rural consisting principally of small and scattered communities. How would our needs be understood so that we receive adequate pastoral care if we merged with an urban diocese?

We agreed that Mission was the most important value. We accept that diocesan structures are secondary. However, we do believe that preserving our unique identity is best for promoting mission in our area. If we are to merge we would like to see the evidence for why this would improve our ability for mission.

Our diocese has multiple geographical challenges which are especially exacerbated during the long winter months. The weather, economics of travel and infrastructure has actually deteriorated. Becoming part of an even larger diocese would be unhelpful.

Our bishop is accessible to us, regularly visiting even the most remote areas. Merging our diocese would reduce pastoral interaction between the bishop and his clergy and parishioners. This would increase isolation for the clergy, including the bishop, and for our small communities.

Throughout this process our voices must be heard, change must not be imposed on us (as we have seen in some Protestant Churches).

There was a particular fear of breaking up the diocese.

Regarding the specific question of mission both positives and the need for support and growth were identified.

We see a welcoming and open Church regarding ecumenism, the incomer, the youth and elderly. We rejoiced in the growth of adult converts and those returning to the practice of the faith. Children were recognised as missionaries of parents. Unique in secular Europe is that many of our parishes are a natural part of their wider society.

The role of the clergy is important, especially as they understand the local context. Examples of service was providing many liturgies and visiting schools.

The laity in remote places were described as resourceful. Many were faithful in travelling long distances to mass.

2 Divergences

Many parishes spoke of a strong outreach to the poor through societies such as SVDP and food banks while others spoke of a 'quiet' visiting of the sick and dying. The Diocesan Holyland Initiative was mentioned. However, others thought that their parish could improve their outreach to the poor.

It was expressed that parishes could be more sensitive to those living in irregular relationships

3 Areas for further Study and Discernment

How can we better share good practice across parishes and the diocese?

How can local cooperation improve e.g. within deaneries?

How can we encourage lapsed people, especially those with a somewhat casual link to the Church, to return?

Increasing lay involvement, especially among men. Giving people the skills and confidence to take up roles.

Overcoming a distaste for meetings which negatively impacts synodality.

More information about other dioceses before any decisions can be made.

How can we better support clergy?

How can we deepen spiritual and catechetical growth of the laity?

Develop youth catechesis beyond Sacramental preparation. Use of local 'youth camps'?

How can we encourage more people, when they are able, to participate in daily Mass?

Can parishes be better prepared for not having a resident priest?

Better use of digital technology.

How can we become more missionary?

Conclusion

There was much enthusiasm and honesty in the room. People see much that is good in their parishes although all have issues too. Perhaps this process will encourage self-reflection leading to growth. We need to grow in mission.

The unanimous position was that Argyll and the Isles should remain an independent diocese as this best suited our unique reality and so enable missionary growth. However, we did recognise our limitations and therefore would benefit from better cooperation with other dioceses.