



Diocese of Argyll and the Isles

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Charity Registration No: SC002876

PASTORAL LETTER REGARDING THE DISCERNMENT OF MISSION WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF ARGYLL AND THE ISLES

Dear sisters and brothers,

Pope Leo spoke these insightful words during the Consistory of Cardinals in June of this year:

"Mission is not merely one of the Church's many tasks. It is her very reason for existing and thus, it also becomes the criterion that guides our discernment. When we learn to listen to one another, to share responsibilities, and to recognize the action of the Spirit in the various Churches, we are not merely improving the way we work: we are becoming a Church that is better able to engage with the men and women of our time and to bear witness to them of the joy of the Gospel".

The time is now right for us to discern how the Church's mission can best be served in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles today while also preparing for the future. Our Diocese knows both challenges and opportunities and we are obliged to prayerfully discern together how the Lord is calling us to deeper fidelity to the mission He has entrusted to us.

The temptation could be to focus primarily on parish structures. However, I have always believed examining parish structures must take place within the wider context of the Church's mission. Structures exist to support mission and not the other way round. Likewise, discernment must involve both clergy and laity¹. Therefore, concern for mission is central to this process and it is precisely within the context of mission that our decisions for clergy, laity and parish structures will be discerned.

Our method of discernment will be synodal, therefore communally discerning where and by what means the Lord is calling us to grow mission. A synodal approach is natural for the Church, follows the teachings of Pope Francis and Pope Leo² while developing our experience gained by *Led by the Spirit*. The Synod of Bishops on Synodality (2021-24) provided practical steps to implement the vision and spirit of the Second Vatican Council. This particular process has been informed by my experience both during the Synod and since then but has also improved following advice from the Diocesan Synodal Team. It is collegial, promotes subsidiarity and crucially is rooted in prayer.

¹ Through baptism we are all temples of the Holy Spirit and each person has a (unique) wisdom shaped by life experience and faith.

² When Pope Leo addressed the Cardinals he explicitly asked that communal discernment, including Conversation in the Spirit be used in dioceses: *"I also ask you to uphold, each within your own Church and in your own ministry, this style of ecclesial discernment. I know that it requires patience and sometimes raises questions. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the Lord is teaching us a more evangelical way of living out together the responsibility he has entrusted to us. The credibility of our witness and the fruitfulness of our mission depend on this"*. Pope Leo, Consistory 26th June 2026

As bishop I will make the necessary decisions but only once I have received proposals from the priests, deacons and laity³. Not only is this approach useful and sensible but in such a complex and crucial endeavour I need your help and support.

Decisions must be taken regarding the support of both clergy and laity for mission as well as the appropriate parish structures for mission today. Parish responses to *Led by the Spirit's* Phase 3 touched on these issues but not with sufficient depth. Therefore, we will not be repeating previous conversations but rather deepening what has already been discerned to enhance the likelihood of good decisions.

The consultation has a deliberate structure. It begins with a broad reflection regarding mission locally at present before gradually moving to discern mission for the future and identifying which structures will be necessary to support this new reality. The consistent requirement for any proposal is: "*Will this make us more missionary?*"

The process will last for nine sessions throughout October and November. Two parishioners and clergy from every parish will participate. These sessions should be seen as spiritual encounters, rather than business meetings, since their purpose is discernment of God's guidance. Prayer and openness are essential for the success of discernment. I ask us all to prayerfully read the Word of God and seek the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

Fuller details of this important discernment process can be read on our diocesan website www.rcdai.org.uk

You will discover that this process is ambitious due to the involvement of so many people, every parish across our widespread diocese, the variety of topics and the use of technology. However, *much more ambitious* will be our striving to be a diocese – laity, deacons, priests and bishop - who discern together the will of God. A diocese that intentionally discerns trusts that God is first leading it. I have no doubts that God has wonderful plans for the proclamation of the Gospel in the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland. As bishop I am determined that we become a people for whom discerning God's will, and putting it into practice, becomes the norm. Then we will have every reason to face the future with confidence!

On the Solemnity of the Assumption, I entrust our discernment to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church who constantly *pondered in her heart* the mysterious deeds of God and guided the apostles and first disciples as they awaited the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Yours in Christ,



Right Reverend Brian McGee

Bishop of Argyll and the Isles

16th August 2026, Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

³ Final Document of Synod of Bishops, see especially Ecclesial Discernment for Mission #81-94