

DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

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*'The Church exists **to evangelise** and we have **to renew those structures that get in the way of our going out to spread the Good News.** We want everyone to feel included and that means our parishes becoming **centres of mission**, getting back into the homes of everyone in the area, inviting all without exclusion to participate in our joyful community'.*

Pope Francis

Dear brothers and sisters,

I wish you and your loved ones a Happy New Year, filled with the graces and blessings of our Lord Emmanuel, Who assures us *God is with us* to guide us in the ways of peace and new life.

In 2018 we will begin a fresh chapter in our diocese as we begin the implementation of our Synod across our parishes.

Our Synod identified **three big ideas** to define us in the generation ahead.

- The first is that we are a **people of evangelisation**, who actively reach out to those who do not know Jesus, or who have left or forgotten him,
- The second is that we are a Church of **lay participation**, where responsibility is shared appropriately among our people and clergy.
- The third is we are a **“synodal”** community, where we make decisions together, with everyone consulted.

The word “synod” means “walking together” and I invite you to join me on this journey of renewing our local Church by the fresh proclamation of God’s word, the joyful and worthy celebration of the Sacraments and by our love and care for one another.

I am convinced these key ideas, **EVANGELISATION**, **PARTICIPATION** and **SYNODALITY** will be powerful means of breathing new energy into our diocese to help us face the challenges of our mission to today’s needy world.

As a result of our Synod we are currently planning for;

- the formation of our laity,
- encouraging welcoming parishes with attractive liturgies,
- effective initiatives to support our families and young people,
- outreach to those who no longer participate in the life of the Church,
- embracing the means of new communication and social media of our times,

- creating processes of healthy collaboration between the laity and the clergy.

Ahead of all these ideas the Synod also commits us to consider how best we can use our wonderful resources of clergy and people, as well as our material and financial resources, **to move from a being a “CHURCH OF MAINTENANCE” to being “CHURCH OF MISSION”**.

With fewer priests and with the population shifts of the past fifty years, we must now ask: have we too many parishes for our current needs and are our parishes in the right places?

This reflection and discussion must include the present configuration of our parishes and the deployment of our clergy in the light of the challenges which lie ahead. Both my predecessors, Bishop John (Mone) and Bishop Philip (Tartaglia) have addressed you on this very issue and had to deal with it directly.

However, we have not really changed our overall diocesan structure for half a century while the rest of the world has moved on. **The reality is that the *status quo* is not an option.** Instead, I am inviting you and challenging you to discover and embrace new and creative models of parish and diocese and to find *new skins for new wine*.

In Eastertime of this year we will be holding open meetings in eight “cluster areas” centred on our eight diocesan high schools. I invite you to begin to think about plans for greater lay participation and evangelisation in your own locality.

At a recent meeting with your Priests, we agreed on two key principles.

- Firstly, we are committed to **transparency and good communication**, and we will ensure you get all the information you need in good time.
- Secondly, I am inviting you and your priests to come up with **local solutions**, rather than for solutions to be imposed from above.

In **further meetings in the autumn**, you will be invited to put flesh on your plans and to submit your **proposals** by the end of the year. It will be for me, as your Bishop, to make the final decision for the good of the whole diocese, but I will do all I can to respect your local proposals. I would hope to begin implementing our decisions in 2019.

Today, I ask you to **please take away the leaflet** that explains the process and invite you to go to our diocesan website where you will find for a fuller exposition of this process.

Until Eastertime we will **pray and reflect**. Please **pray daily the prayer on the leaflet**. This will also be **a time of catechesis** in preparation for our meetings.

My dear brothers and sisters, it is in Christ Our Lord and in His Good News that we confidently and joyfully place all our hopes.

With the assurance of my daily prayers and blessings,

+ John

Bishop of Paisley