

Cardiff City Parishes Facing the Future

*Summary of Responses from Parishes to the Proposals in the
Archbishop's letter of 24th – 25th April 2010*

4/9/2010

Preamble

For some time consideration has been given to the best way to respond to the anticipated reduction in the number of clergy serving Cardiff City parishes in future years. In January 2009 parishes were asked to consider and discuss five questions about the development of the mission of the Church in the City in those circumstances. In the light of those comments a proposal, broadly supported by the clergy in the City, was put to the Archbishop. That proposal was for an increased sharing of resources between parishes and involved the parishes in the City forming a number of groups, or clusters, with their neighbours and working more closely together within those clusters.

The process of re-organising pastoral care in the Archdiocese has been going on for some years and, within the two Cardiff Deaneries, a number of parishes in the City have already merged or are working together. One of the key principles behind the proposal was that the development of the clusters should reflect that experience as far as possible. The intention was that this should be an organic process over time, not an overnight change.

The Archbishop put the proposal to Cardiff City parishes in his letter issued on 24th – 25th April 2010, which also included a table identifying how individual parishes would be grouped into clusters (annexed to this Report). Altogether it was suggested that parishes should be grouped into six clusters with the Cathedral forming a cluster on its own. In his letter the Archbishop said that he would expect there to be a sharing of catechists, catechetical resources and, where appropriate, administrative resources, together with the development of consistent and shared pastoral practice within the clusters and across the City.

The parish clusters were intended to lay the foundations for when City parishes would have to manage with fewer clergy than we now have. As a consequence the Archbishop further expected that, in time, there would be a rescheduling of the times

and numbers of Sunday Masses in a way that would both be sustainable with fewer clergy and meet parishioners' needs. That would inevitably have implications for the number of churches in the City in the future and some closures would be unavoidable. As part of that process, the Archbishop proposed that initially the parish of St. Cuthbert be amalgamated with St. Patrick, Grangetown, and Sacred Heart with St. Mary of the Angels, Canton, and the two churches be closed.

Parishioners were asked to reflect on the letter and discuss it in their parishes with their parish priest. In particular parishes were asked to look at the proposal from four aspects:

What are the strengths of the proposed arrangements?

What are its weaknesses?

What opportunities does it provide to do things better (or to do things we haven't been able to do)?

What are the threats that might prevent the proposal from working?

This Report accordingly summarises the responses received from Cardiff City parishes specifically in relation to those four questions, and in more general terms.

Parish Contributions

Fifteen out of the twenty City parishes (including the Cathedral) responded to the Archbishop's letter. Generally parishes were positive about the strengths of the proposal and the opportunities it afforded, although in the view of one parish this was considered a *fait accompli*. Only one parish found little to say about the proposal's strengths, although it did identify a number of opportunities. Some parishes noted that they had been working in this way for some time with varying degrees of success.

It was apparent that, overall, the responses represented the views of only a small minority of people in each parish and this needs to be very much borne in mind in evaluating the results. Many individual parishes made a large number of comments,

in one case thirty-five in total, and necessarily therefore not every one of each parish's comments could be fully and completely reflected in this summary. However, as far as possible, the common themes in the individual responses have been identified. Apart from those main themes, individual parishes raised a number of specific points, which are included below. Additionally, some parishes made interesting and helpful suggestions for the ways parishes might be organised and work in future; these are not included here as this report is concerned with the principle, rather than the implementation, of the proposal.

Strengths

In summary most parishes raised one or more of the following key points as perceived strengths of the proposal:

Better use of resources	Nine comments
Adapts to the future shortage of priests	Five comments
Better administration	Four comments
Financial benefits (including sale of land)	Three comments
Closer working with other parishes	Two comments
Greater involvement of laity	Two comments
Parishes 'looking outwards'	Two comments

Other comments included the view that collaboration, the 'broadening of horizons' and formation of new inter-parish ties, as being a good thing in its own right. Others mentioned the desirability of recruiting more deacons and encouraging vocations. It was hoped that the changes would encourage different ways of administering parishes, for example having one PAC or an 'administrative team' in each cluster, with the laity taking on more responsibility. It was also hoped that more could be done to engage with youth as a result of the changes.

Weaknesses

The most frequently stated weaknesses of the proposal were:

Transport issues	Five comments
The loss of Masses	Four comments
Loss of individual parishes' identities	Three comments
Increased pressures on priests	Three comments
A reluctance to embrace change	Three comments
Loss of income (as fewer Masses)	Three comments
Proposal was not radical enough	Two comments

Many reported 'weaknesses' could be better categorised as threats, including the pressures placed on the clergy, their ability to work together, and the fear of, or resistance to, change among parishioners. Some reported 'strengths' had their equivalent 'weaknesses', so that the greater involvement of the laity could alternatively be seen as a 'weakness' if this put too great a burden on them. There was also a concern that without a parish priest in each parish, parishioners might drift away or have a more distant relationship with their priest.

Finance, while seen by some as a positive outcome, was also a concern for others who saw a risk of declining income and the problem of integrating richer and poorer parishes' income and expenditure.

The need for funerals to be conducted in the former parish of residence/affiliation was mentioned as an issue if services were in some way to be rationalised across clusters.

The composition of the clusters and transport issues should take better account of the natural/unnatural boundaries (rivers, roads, railways etc.), and the historical and practical links that determine people's perceptions of 'real' boundaries. It was noted that an earlier proposal to group Holy Family with St Clare and St Francis had not been supported because of geographical and transport issues.

Accommodating larger numbers in existing buildings (as a result of fewer Masses shared between parishes) could be difficult and give rise to car parking problems.

Provision of specific Masses (for the deaf, for the Polish people) needed to be taken into account.

Opportunities

Some used this heading to amplify what they would like to see in terms of the composition of the clusters, recruitment of more clergy etc.. In large part they reflected what had previously been considered to be the strengths of the proposal, i.e. building on what the new arrangements could enable. The key points were:

Sharing of resources/talents/expertise etc.	Eight comments
More opportunities for lay involvement	Five comments
Better links within clusters	Four comments
Connecting with youth	Three comments
Sharing management/administration	Three comments
Collaboration in Ministries	Two comments
Providing a new dynamism	Two comments
A new role for PACs	Two comments

The possibility of re-appraising the stock of Church buildings in the City was mentioned (and, as discussed below, several called for a re-assessment of the continued need for the Cathedral). It was also an opportunity to explore the roles of priests and laity, with priests being able to focus on their real mission, provided training for them and the laity in those respects was available. The end result might be a better, more dynamic base from which to evangelise and encourage more families to participate. It would also require reviews of the way things were done, for example Adult Formation, training for the Ministries, the role of PACs and so on.

Threats

Parishes' perception of the threats to the proposal working focussed on a smaller number of key issues, arising mainly from concerns about the attitudes of the clergy and laity and their willingness and/or capacity to respond to change. These were:

Parishioners' apathy/unwillingness	Seven comments
The clergy's ability to meet the demands	Five comments
Inter-parish rivalries	Four comments
Transport issues not resolved satisfactorily	Three comments

Although not a 'Threat', five parishes expressed concerns that the changes (less Masses, greater distances to travel to Mass) would result in declining congregations and parishes becoming 'less visible'.

Other Comments and Observations

Christ the King, St Brigid and St Paul made strong representations that they should remain together, citing the fact that Christ the King had not previously been successful in linking with St Teilo (with Our Lady of Lourdes) as now proposed.

Their case was essentially that they were supportive of the principle of clustering and that they represented a model of how a cluster should work after five years of hard work. It would therefore be a retrograde step and squander the efforts of past years to dismantle the present arrangement, particularly as physical barriers (the A470) and existing patterns of use support the present arrangements rather than those proposed. Christ the King suggested that instead the 'Three churches' form, with St Teilo and St Phillip Evans, a single, larger 'North Cardiff' cluster. Holy Family also regretted the proposal to split up the three parishes.

Several parishes cast doubt on the future need for the Cathedral, the financial gain that could result from its closure, and the reason for it being separate from the clusters.

However one parish did consider that the proposal offered an opportunity to find a new role for the Cathedral. A number of parishes also commented on the absence of any discussion of the future relationship of parish clusters to the Catholic schools in Cardiff and whether catchment areas would change. Similarly there was a comment about future plans for new housing developments and the implications for parishes. There were also concerns about what might be the appropriate size for clusters. Others asked about what would happen if the Rosminian order withdrew from Cardiff and some talked about the need to recruit more priests, possibly from overseas.

Annex

ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF

A Proposal for the Re-organisation of the Parishes in the City of Cardiff

Parishes

Parish	Comprising	No. * Priests	No. * Mass es	Mass ** Attenda nce	Baptis ms ***	First *** Commun ions	Confirma tion ***	Marria ges *** +	Deat hs ***
A	Blessed Sacrament; St Cadoc; St John Lloyd	1	4	853	86	42	53	16	60
B	St Alban; St Joseph; St Peter		7	1506	184	91	50	36	115
C	St Brigid (with St Paul); St Philip Evans	2	4	882	93	75	46	9	27
D	Christ the King; St Teilo (with Our Lady of Lourdes)	2	4	955	34	50	14	6	45
E	St Mary; St Patrick; St Cuthbert; Sacred Heart	2	4	1035	95	55	59	19	77
F	Holy Family; St Francis; St Clare	2	4	872	62	57	28	4	58
G	Cathedral	1	2	298	5	5	15	3	7

* Projected Numbers

** 2008 figures

*** 2009 figures

+ The number of marriages does not include preparation for marriages celebrated outside of the parish or the diocese