

We are in a new situation in our society, which can no longer be considered Christian, and we are called to be the new evangelisers of our country. The mission remains the same, but we have to review our methods and practices. Our generation is being asked to see how we can best fulfil that mission in the world in which we live now, not the world of 20, or 50 or 100 years ago.

Please be assured that we are committed to keeping you informed, and you will be directly involved, as this process develops. We ask for your patience as the Bishop and clergy get their heads around some of the issues first. This will help us to engage better with you when the time comes to do so.

Please pray for Bishop John and your clergy as we embark with you on this process of discernment. Please pray for an increase in vocations to the Priesthood for our Diocese, and please pray, too, for a deeper awareness of your own vocation within the church and your parish community.

Yours in Christ,

<i>Daniel J. McLoughlin,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Andrew's, Greenock
<i>Maurice Callaghan,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Joseph's, Greenock
<i>Desmond J. Berry,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Joseph's & St. Patrick's, Wemyss Bay
<i>Eoin W. Patten,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Laurence's, Greenock
<i>Thomas H. Boyle,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Mary's, Greenock
<i>Graham R. Kelly,</i>	Parish Deacon, St. Mary's, Greenock
<i>Gerard Gallagher,</i>	Parish Priest, St. Patrick's, Greenock

DIOCESE OF PAISLEY

PASTORAL MESSAGE

FROM THE LOCAL CLERGY TO THE PEOPLE OF

THE NOTRE DAME & ST. COLUMBA CLUSTERS

19th. April 2026
3rd. Sunday of Easter

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are writing to you today following a series of important preliminary meetings between the clergy of our clusters* and Bishop John. These discussions have been centred on the necessary and comprehensive review of the pastoral provision across our diocese which has been taking place over the last few years. It is now the turn of our clusters to undertake such a review with the Bishop. We are grateful to Canon Jim Duggan who has assisted us by facilitating our discussions which have been conducted in an open and prayerful atmosphere.

As your Bishop and clergy, we know that we must be open with you about the significant challenges we face as a diocesan family.

At the same time, we want to be clear that this review process is not just about managing decline; it is about renewal and ensuring that our resources—both human and financial—are used in the best possible way to support our mission of proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments and caring for one another in faith-filled and vibrant parish communities.

To ensure the Church continues to serve our communities effectively, we all, clergy and people, must further adapt to several changing realities:

- **Availability of Priests:** We are experiencing a notable decline in the number of active clergy relative to the past. At present, 14 out of the 30 parishes in our Diocese are already required to share a parish priest, a trend that is expected to continue.

*In our Diocese, a **Cluster** is an informal grouping of parishes based on a local High School. Our two clusters are part of **Inverclyde Deanery**.

Notre Dame Cluster consists of St. Laurence's, St. Mary's and St. Patrick's parishes.

St. Columba Cluster consists of St. Andrew's, St. Joseph's, St. Joseph's & St. Patrick's and St. Ninian's parishes.

- **Shifting Demographics:** Over the last several decades, there has been a steady fall in the population of Inverclyde and there have been significant population shifts within our area. The falling birth rate has had a significant effect on our local schools which are now much reduced in number. The Church is not immune from these changes and many of our current church locations no longer align with where the majority of our people live and work.
- **Mass Attendance:** Like many parts of the country, we have seen a gradual fall in the number of people attending Mass. This decline affects our ability to sustain the vibrant parish life we all desire.
- **Building Maintenance:** The high cost of maintaining our aging buildings is becoming increasingly unsustainable. Unfortunately, not all of our buildings are in the best physical condition or the best placed locations to serve our current and future congregations.

We also recognise that there are new opportunities in today's Church. There are opportunities for the clergy to co-operate more across parish boundaries. There are new opportunities for lay people to take on a greater role in nurturing their parish communities, as we have found recently in the Diocese with the absence of priests due to illness or other circumstances.

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we understand that change can be difficult, and we ask for your prayers and support as we move forward together.

We are being invited and challenged to be the church of today and tomorrow and to look forward with confidence to the future. The Good News of Jesus Christ is as necessary today as it ever was, and the celebration of the Sacraments and the pastoral care which the church provides are as needed today as in the past.