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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are now entering the final phase of the consultation process in the formation of the new pastoral areas in our diocese.

The journey began with my pastoral letter to you last November. There was an initial consultation meeting in each parish that was held before Christmas. This led to the creation of the draft map that was published in February of this year. During Lent a public consultation meeting was held in each parish where you had an opportunity to express your views on the proposed pastoral areas. Bishop Clifford and I listened very carefully to what you said at those meetings. Then, after a gathering of the priests of the diocese on Monday 20 April, the present April draft of the proposed pastoral areas was drawn up.

I offer it to you, not as the perfect map of pastoral areas of the diocese, but as our best effort at creating a working map of pastoral areas of the diocese. It takes into account the views of the priests and of people of the sixty-one parishes in the diocese. It does not meet the desires of everyone who expressed their views, nor does it always give every parish what they most wanted. However, it represents a genuine attempt to take all considerations on board and creates pastoral areas in which the parishes can work together for the good of all.

In this final phase of the consultation your views are still welcome. My hope is that you will be able to look at the pastoral area proposed for your parish and agree with me that your parish could work with the other parishes in your proposed pastoral area in carrying on Christ's mission in the world. This is our focus of strengthening parishes and supporting parishes in carrying on Christ's mission in the world.

If you believe that this grouping of parishes is not the best way forward and think there is a better grouping that doesn't impact negatively on another proposed grouping let us know. Bishop Clifford and I are open to listening to your viewpoint. In this final stage of the consultation you are welcome to express your views to your priest or to the chairperson of your parish pastoral council who will then bring your view to your Parish Priest. Your Parish Priest can then represent your view directly to me or to Bishop Clifford. All such viewpoints are to be expressed to us by your Parish Priest by Friday 22 May. We will then make our final decision about the pastoral areas of the diocese. The official map of the new pastoral areas of the diocese will then be published in June of this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who engaged so positively with this process during the last year. The parish meetings before and after Christmas were engaging and lively, often with strong views expressed. They were very informative and fruitful. Consistently the facilitators of those meetings made two very significant comments. The first was: *the people at the meetings spoke very respectfully*. The second was: *the people at the meetings spoke very highly of their priests*. This feedback from the facilitators is very encouraging and speaks very highly of the people of our diocese.

I would like to acknowledge the work of the facilitators of the parish meetings. I had the opportunity to meet with them at the feedback sessions. They carried out their role with great professionalism. On all our behalf I would like to thank them for their time, energy and dedication.

I wish you all every blessing during this Easter season. May we all continue to testify to the resurrection of Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Yours sincerely,

Archbishop of Armagh