



Moving toward Parish
Reorganisation in the
Archdiocese of Armagh
2007-2010:

Clustering, Rationalisation, New
Parish Structures and Ministries.

Introduction

This document on parish reorganisation in the Archdiocese of Armagh outlines the background to parish reorganisation, its framework and the practical steps that will be necessary in moving toward clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries in the diocese. The language is, at times, precise, technical and theological appropriate to policy formation papers.

Background

In Lent 2005 Archbishop Brady encouraged the people of the diocese to take part in a consultation process to discuss the formation of an action plan to address the pastoral needs of the diocese. Regional meetings were held, offering everyone the chance to contribute to this process. Following these regional meetings the findings of the consultation process were collated and summarised and priorities have been identified. Fourteen priorities emerged and nine working groups were formed to address the main areas of need within each priority. The nine working groups are:

- faith formation;
- youth ministry;
- prayer and spirituality;
- meaningful liturgy;
- care for priests;
- developing the role and ministry of women in the Church;
- family ministry and life issues;
- outreach to others – ecumenism and interfaith dialogue;
- parish pastoral councils, attending to diocesan and parish structures, leadership and training, diocesan / parish surveys.

This document has been produced by the last of these working groups responsible for Parish Pastoral Councils, Attending to Diocesan and Parish Structures, Leadership and Training, Diocesan / Parish Surveys.¹ One of the first things the working group did was to shorten its name to PALS (taking the first letter of each of the areas of work).

The first area of work that the PALS team gave a lot of time and energy to has been the formation of parish pastoral councils. As a result of that work there are many new parish pastoral councils in the diocese. Still, there is much to do to ensure that every parish has a thriving pastoral council.

¹ The members of the PALS team are Rev Oliver Brennan, Bishop Gerard Clifford, Ms Anne Gallagher, Mr Liam McCallion, Mrs Sheila McEaney, Rev Andrew McNally, Rev Michael O'Dwyer, Ms Debra Snoddy.

More recently the working group has turned its attention to the area named: *attending to parish and diocesan structures*. Within this brief the PALS team has decided to address two areas of concern:

- clustering and rationalisation;
- considering new parish structures and ministries.

Thus the reason for this document. There is much to be done in order to bring about clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries. It entails parish and diocesan reorganisation and is going to involve the commitment, involvement, energy and good will of many people in the diocese. This discussion document is the first step in that direction. In it we:

- clarify what we mean by clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries;
- outline the reasons for working toward this new reality;
- consider some of the difficulties and challenges that need to be faced;
- suggest ways of addressing the difficulties and challenges;
- and invite your comments and reactions.

From this a definite course of action can be identified and implemented in order to bring about clustering, rationalisation and new parish structures and ministries – in short, parish and diocesan reorganisation.

An Initial Step

In order to make a beginning the PALS working group, in October 2006, invited an ad hoc group of people from the diocese and beyond with a variety of experiences to participate in a workshop in Dromantine Conference Centre which focused on the question: *What are all the things we need to consider in bringing about clustering and rationalisation and in considering new parish structures and ministries?*

The consensus of those who participated is that we need to promote:

- the why and
- inclusive involvement.

We need to ensure that:

- prayer is a part of the process;
- there is effective education and training and that
- all are engaged.

Also, we need to consider:

- the pivotal role of parish pastoral councils;
- the priest;
- leadership;
- new models of parish;
- the financial implications and
- the practical implications of clustering.

These eleven areas of consideration will emerge for deeper reflection in the course of the discussion.

One reality that emerged during the workshop was that there was not clarity or consensus on terminology. What does clustering mean? What does rationalisation involve? What kind of new structures are being envisaged? It was agreed that creating clarity on these questions would be a pre-requisite to beginning the process.

A Framework for Implementation

Loughlan Sofield, ST and Carroll Juliano, SHCJ in their book *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry*² speak of the four C's of collaboration: clarification, conviction, commitment, and capacity/capability. They argue that these four are necessary for any group that wants to be truly collaborative in ministry. By extension, it seems plausible that the same four C's can be applied to any diocese that truly wants to bring about clustering, rationalisation, new structures and ministries that truly furthers the mission of Jesus Christ. Let us look at what they say about the four C's of collaboration.³

The first *C* is *clarification*. Sofield and Juliano tell us that collaboration has come to have as many meanings as there are people who talk about it. This absence of a common understanding is an obstacle to the development of collaborative ministry:

Any group who wishes to become more collaborative must first spend time discussing what the term means to each of the individuals within the group or unit. After the initial sharing, there is need for the group to determine a corporate understanding of collaboration. Failure to arrive at a common understanding of collaboration will result in frustration and inevitable conflict.⁴

This would be the case with clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries. In order to ensure that we are working together toward the same end, we need to be clear about what we mean. We need to determine a diocesan understanding of clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and new parish ministries on which there is a broad consensus.

The second *C* is *conviction*. Sofield and Juliano state, in relation to collaboration, that once a group successfully clarifies its common understanding, the next step is to discover whether its members are convinced of its value. Because collaborative ministry is challenging, commitment to the process will endure to the degree that those involved have a strong internal conviction of its importance and value. Without this conviction, a group will abandon its collaborative efforts as soon as difficulties begin leaking into daily encounters. The authors state:

A direct way to ascertain the level of conviction is to ask the members to identify reasons why they are convinced of the value of collaboration. The inability to generate sufficient reasons for conviction will result in no collaboration.⁵

So it will be as our diocese embarks on the challenging path perhaps of reducing the number of Masses, forming regional pastoral councils, closing churches and developing lay pastoral leaders. Without the conviction as a diocese that this is the way forward, if we are to further the mission of Jesus Christ, all efforts will be doomed to failure. It will be necessary therefore to address the question: why are we convinced of the need to work toward clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries?

² Loughlan Sofield and Carroll Juliano, *Collaboration: Uniting Our Gifts in Ministry* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2000).

³ *Collaboration*, 20-29.

⁴ *Collaboration*, 20.

⁵ *Collaboration*, 23.

The third *C* is *commitment*. With regard to commitment and collaboration Sofield and Juliano say:

No person is unconditionally committed to collaborative ministry. Rather, everyone is ambivalent. Even those who are staunchly convinced of the value of collaborative ministry experience some stirrings of resistance. Resistance is related to the fears and obstacles that confront anyone attempting to collaborate. The primary challenges are to identify, discuss and attempt to resolve those fears and obstacles.⁶

It is interesting to note that while we might have a tendency to identify the obstacles that others might present, the authors are insistent the main obstacles lie within ourselves and they name these as: low self-esteem, arrogance, burnout, hostility, failing to deal with conflict, not dealing with loss or separation and the lack of an integrated sexuality. They add a stern warning:

Identification of fears and obstacles is the first step. Here collaborative efforts can falter because commitment demands change and even radical conversion. Given the fact that most organisms – including individuals, groups and even the church – protect themselves from change, this step in the process is a challenging one.⁷

If we have a resistance to change then it seems reasonable to expect that when our diocese embarks on the change necessitated by clustering, rationalization and the development of new structures and ministries we will encounter obstacles within ourselves and within others impacted by the changes. A necessary part of the process of bringing about a new structure will be to identify these fears and obstacles, discuss them and, where possible, resolve them.

The fourth *C* is *capacity/capability*. Sofield and Juliano point out that clarity, conviction and commitment are not enough to ensure that collaboration occurs. Will and desire is not enough. It demands that those involved possess the capability and capacity to collaborate. They go on to identify four major areas to address in developing capacity and capability:

- skills (including group leadership, conflict resolution and management, confrontation and discernment of gifts);
- spirituality (one's relationship with God which leads a person into loving service of others);
- process (which includes a common gospel-orientated vision, a method for identifying gifts, a structure that assures that the gifts are used for ministry, a clarification of roles and authority, and a system for accountability and collaboration) and
- a developmental readiness for collaboration.

If collaboration does not happen without the development of skills, spirituality, process and readiness it would seem important that, as our diocese moves towards clustering, rationalization and development of new structures, issues of the skills, spirituality, process and readiness need to be addressed and developed.

The insights of Sofield and Juliano on the practical steps for moving toward collaboration offer us a framework for exploring the practical steps that we in the Archdiocese of Armagh need to take in embarking on the path of bringing about clustering, rationalisation and the development of new structures and ministries. In the next section we will explore the four C's of parish reorganisation, mindful of the considerations identified at the initial workshop organised by PALS.

⁶ *Collaboration*, 24.

⁷ *Collaboration*, 25.

The practical steps toward clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries.

1. Clarity

For initial consideration:

When you hear the terms clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries what images for each come to mind?

Broadly speaking, how do you understand these terms?

Defining terms

In proposing some definitions for your consideration the members of the PALS working group of the diocesan pastoral plan have looked at definitions that have been created by others and have reflected together on the meaning of the terms.

Clustering

The dictionary definition is as follows:

Noun = cluster (*plural: clusters*)

Small group or bunch of something

- *Astronomy* A group of galaxies or stars that appear near each other
- *Music* A chord of three or more notes
- *Phonetics* Group of [consonants](#)
- *Computing* A group of computers that work together
- *Military* Set of bombs or mines
- *Statistics* A significant [subset](#) within a population
-

Verb form = clustering [present participle](#) of the verb *to cluster*

- The [action](#) of the verb *to cluster*
- A [grouping](#) of a number of similar things
- (*Demographics*) the grouping of a [population](#) based on [ethnicity](#), [economics](#) or [religion](#)

The clustering of parishes in the dioceses of the United States has been an ongoing reality over the last few decades with the result that they have articulated their understanding of the term *clustered* parishes. *The 2003 U.S. National Study of Parish Reorganization* states:

"Linked" or "clustered" parishes are those that are organizationally connected by the diocese for purposes of staffing and/or ministry. The most common types of this arrangement include: sharing a pastor, sharing staff, joint ministry programs, and joint planning efforts.⁸

The archdiocese of Detroit offers the following definition of a clustered parish:

A Clustered Parish has a priest as its pastor, however the priest may live at another location and be pastor of more than one community. The communities each have a parish pastoral council, and may or may not have geographical boundaries. (See Canons 516, 517, 518, 536, 905)⁹

The diocese of Louisville says:

A cluster involves two or more parishes that remain separate entities but share one leader. The leader can be a priest or a pastoral administrator.¹⁰

Speaking in 1995 Cardinal Cahal Daly said with regard to clustering:

I believe that "clusters" of parishes should be formed (perhaps corresponding to existing Senate Area Groups or some modification of these) within which priests would agree:

- to exchange Masses and "pulpits" from time to time, so as to provide people with a variety of voices and styles;
- to arrange to "supply" for one another for vacations, retreats, renewal courses, or other absences;
- to plan common pastoral programmes, youth programmes, family pastoral programmes, etc., within the parishes of the "cluster".¹¹

Reflecting together the members of the working group identified the following aspects of clustering:

- people working together to bring about the most efficient way of making Jesus a living presence in the lives of the greatest number of people;
- an 'organic' grouping of parishes committed to living the Gospel message;
- the coming together of parishes that naturally go together to carry out parts of their mission that could not be done on a parish only basis or which would be better done by the cluster together;
- parishes working together, sharing resources and personnel, lay and ordained;
- groups of clergy meeting together for mutual support and for the good of their individual parishes in sharing resources etc.;
- putting clergy in place who will work together;
- groups of parishes interacting in the day to day activities of parish life;
- lay people involved in decision making, administration and ministry for the good of all;
- programmes of education and training provided to clustered parishes.

⁸ Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development, *2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization*, (Dubuque: Loras College), 19. Quotations from this study retain the American spelling.

⁹ See the Detroit diocesan website: <http://www.aodonline.org/AODOnline/Parish+Information+6911/Parish+Clustering+14276/Parish+Clustering+--+Guidelines1.htm/>.

¹⁰ See the Louisville diocesan website: <http://www.archlou.org/parishplanning/>.

¹¹ Cardinal Cahal Daly, *Letter on the deployment of priests*, September 19, 1995.

From this we propose the following:

When we speak of clustering in the context of the Armagh diocesan pastoral plan we mean the bringing together of two or more parishes which remain separate entities for the purpose of:

- **sharing personnel, resources, training and formation;**
- **offering support to the priests, lay leaders and pastoral councils of each parish;**
- **creating opportunities for the laity and priests together to investigate, ponder and make decisions about pastoral matters that are more suitably addressed by the group of clustered parishes together;**

in such a way that priests are supported and lay people are empowered in furthering the mission of Christ in the locality and in the world.

Rationalisation

The dictionary definition is as follows:

English Noun = rationalisation

The process, or result of [rationalising](#)

- A [statement](#) of one's [motives](#), or of the [causes](#) of some event
- A [reorganisation](#) of a [company](#) or [organisation](#) in order to [improve](#) its [efficiency](#)
- (*Psychiatry*) the [concealment](#) of true [motivation](#) in some non-threatening way
- (*Mathematics*) the [simplification](#) of an [expression](#) without changing its [value](#)

Cardinal Cahal Daly spoke of rationalisation in 1995 saying:

Attention was called by the Senate Working Party on deployment of priests, and also during the recent Clergy Conferences, to some points related to the use of manpower. Among these are the following:

- the need to review the number of weekend Masses required in each parish;
- the need to scrutinise very carefully the wisdom of expending large sums of money on refurbishment of smaller churches, in view of the probable increasing difficulty of supplying Masses in these churches in the future;
- the possibility of realignment of parish boundaries in certain cases, and perhaps even the remoter possibility of merging smaller parishes together, if in particular cases this seemed feasible or useful;
- the possibility of “sharing” a curate over two parishes, or of extending an existing practice of combining a curacy with some non-parish diocesan ministry.¹²

In 1997 Archbishop Brady set the first Sunday of Advent for the following proposals to be implemented. He wrote:

- The times of Masses in each parish should be reviewed so that Mass is celebrated at times best suited to the present pattern of Sunday Mass attendance.
- Where it is feasible there should be an interval of not less than ninety minutes between scheduled Masses in any one church.
- When the number of priests is reduced in a parish, the number of Masses should also be reduced. Ideally each priest should not have more than two scheduled Sunday Masses per weekend.
- The possibility of one priest covering for another priest, whether in his own or a neighbouring parish, in times of illness or absence, should be considered when determining the times of Masses.
- In rural parishes a weekday morning Mass may be dropped in favour of a wedding or funeral Mass.¹³

Issues surrounding rationalisation have also been raised in other Irish dioceses. In 2006, Bishop Jones of the diocese of Elphin invited all parishes to revise their Mass schedule in view of the steep

¹² Cardinal Cahal Daly, *Letter on the deployment of priests*, September 19, 1995.

¹³ Archbishop Sean Brady, *Mass in an age of decline of vocations: a letter from Archbishop Sean Brady to the people of the Archdiocese of Armagh*, 30 November 1997.

decline in the number of priests. He was concerned about the quality of the celebration of the Eucharist. He listed a number of guiding principles to assist in the revision that had been drawn up with the assistance of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and Diocesan Priests Council.¹⁴ They were:

- that Mass times will be arranged so that it will be possible for priests in neighbouring parishes to preside at these Masses when the priest resident in the community is on holidays or ill or has to be away for any reason;
- that parishes with more than one priest will be able to meet their commitments when one priest is away;
- that no priest is celebrating two vigil Masses as his normal commitment;
- that no priest is celebrating three Sunday Masses as his normal commitment;
- that no priest is celebrating two weekday Masses as his normal commitment;
- that the starting times of Sunday Masses in every parish be at least one and a half hours apart;
- that during Holy Week a priest would only celebrate one liturgy per day.

Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick, also writing in 2006, said the declining number of priests means the diocese is faced with a number of decisions, some of them painful.¹⁵ He raises the following for consideration:

- Each parish wishes to retain at least one resident priest. At the same time, however, parishes vary from less than a thousand parishioners to almost ten thousand. It is clear that we need to ask ourselves questions about how a reduced number of priests should be deployed.
- How can we ensure that, when parishes find that they have fewer priests than they have been used to, or perhaps no resident priest, that they have prepared themselves realistically and confidently for the new situation?
- Would it not be unwise and unrealistic to make it an absolute priority to maintain at least one priest in each parish, without considering the size of the parish, irrespective of the state of health of the priest, taking no account of special pastoral demands such as hospitals and schools and nursing homes?
- In the case of special demands, for instance chaplaincies to schools and prisons and hospitals, or work with youth or with pastoral renewal and education programmes in the diocese, are some of these so important that we should try to ensure that there are priests available for them even at the expense of parish ministry?
- If we decline below the level even of one priest per parish, what then?
- From the point of view of the diocese there is a question about deploying a more limited number of priests. From the point of view of the priest the question is about deploying his own limited resources in the face of rising demands.
- There is the challenge of finding time for prayer and reflection and renewal; there is the need to prioritise and select among all the calls upon him.
- There is a need to ensure that priests can get away from the parish for holidays and for a day off.
- There is the need to ensure that those who offer pastoral care are not left without the support and understanding of those they serve and of one another.
- I believe that there is often not sufficient awareness of the stresses under which priests increasingly labour because of rising age, declining numbers and a culture less supportive of their ministry. Priests are often taken aback to be told “This is your busy time” at periods of the year when there are a number of big celebrations but the burdens of parish life are actually lighter than at other times. One can still sometimes hear people wonder what priests do during the week. Such remarks can, quite unintentionally, be very morale-draining for someone who is feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. One of the benefits of greater involvement of lay people in the life of their parishes will, I hope, be a greater understanding of the load that priests carry. We cannot be content to look towards a scenario in which aging priests are asked to accept ever greater and more impossible burdens. However we prepare for the future, the answer will not lie in increasing the workload of priests.
- We must ask ourselves what the shape of the diocese should be if we are to have a living, faith-filled community in the future. What kind of clustering and cooperation and rationalisation do we need to undertake? We also need to ask ourselves whether others can do many of the things that were done by priests in the past and whether new needs may require new provisions. This presents a clear challenge to the Parish Pastoral Council in the future.

In coming to an understanding of rationalisation the members of the PALS working group spoke of:

- the declining number of priests and the impact of that on priests’ workload and health;

¹⁴ See <http://www.elphindiocese.ie/> - quoted in the communications/press release section.

¹⁵ Bishop Donal Murray, <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/publications/pastorals/index.htm/>.

- the importance of ensuring that priests' needs are catered for in the area of days off, breaks, holidays and sick leave;
- The necessity of reducing the number of Masses and streamlining resources and services;
- The possibilities of sharing resources among parishes;
- The hard issues such as new parish boundaries, larger parishes, parishes without a priest and the closing of churches;
- The importance or recognising that rationalisation also includes developing an ecclesiology of lay ministry, structures and attitudes that will enhance lay people's active involvement in parish ministry, carrying out roles that in the past were primarily seen as "the work of the priest."

In the light of the dictionary definition and diocesan reflections we propose the following:

Rationalisation in the context of the Armagh diocesan pastoral plan will entail an assessment and evaluation of the needs and demands of each parish and the needs of the diocese with a view to deciding:

- **how many priests will serve in each parish,**
- **which parishes can be prepared to be without a resident priest,**
- **what resources are to be allocated to the employment of lay leaders,**
- **what churches can be less used,**
- **which parishes are in need of new churches**
- **how many Masses are to be celebrated at the weekend and on weekdays,**
- **what personnel is needed to work at diocesan level,**

so that the diocese can carry on the mission of Christ in the light of fewer priests and an increasingly involved laity.

New parish structures and ministries

It does not seem appropriate to give a definition of new parish structures. Rather it is important to acknowledge that as a diocese gives time, energy and finance to the activities of clustering and rationalisation new parish structures will emerge. It will be important as a diocese to encourage and foster new structures.

When the PALS team reflected on what we need to consider in bringing about clustering and rationalisation and in considering new parish structures they identified new parish models as one of the considerations. It relates to the questions of: what are the ways of being Church in the twenty first century? How do we embody the Christ we proclaim? As we find new ways of being Church what new ways of being parish will emerge?

With the introduction of clustering and rationalisation new structures within the parish will be needed as lay professionals begin to take on the work traditionally assigned to the priest. This would also involve the introduction of different ministries to which the Irish Church may be unfamiliar such as the pastoral associate (an appointed lay minister charged with the care of the parish by the diocese).

One emerging parish structure in the diocese is the parish pastoral council which ensures the participation of the lay people of the parish in creating plans and making decisions with regard to the pastoral activity of the parish. The pastoral council is a structure that identifies the needs that

exist in the parish, identifies the gifts of the parishioners and put the gifts in contact with the needs in such a way that the needs are responded to.

The 2003 U.S. National Study of Parish Reorganization studied parish changes from 1995-2000 and identified the following structural changes:

- Of the 89 dioceses surveyed 60 percent have clustered parishes. A total of 1115 parishes were clustered in the 89 dioceses.
- Parish mergers and the establishment of new parishes have each occurred in over half the dioceses.
- Nearly 40 percent of dioceses have closed parishes (besides those that have been closed in mergers).
- More than 40 percent of dioceses have replaced a parish priest with a parish director¹⁶ and nearly as many replaced a resident parish priest with a non-resident parish priest.
- Fewer than 10 percent of dioceses indicated that they replaced a resident parish priest with a team of priests.¹⁷

Speaking about the impact of a decline in the number of priests, Cardinal Daly, speaking in 1995, said:

The present scarcity of priests constitutes also a call for more vigorous efforts to promote lay involvement in the life and work of the Church. It gives new impetus to our diocesan programme for the formation of lay men and women in view of the setting up of Parish Pastoral Councils.¹⁸

Among the various definitions that are available for ministry Thomas O'Meara's definition is respected as communicating the central meaning of the term. He states:

Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realise the kingdom of God.¹⁹

That Christian ministry is rooted in baptism demands of the people of the diocese that we recognise, acknowledge, affirm and foster new forms of Christian ministry as they emerge in parishes in the context of clustering and rationalisation. Bishop Donal Murray of Limerick states:

We need to ask ourselves whether others can do many of the things that were done by priests in the past and whether new needs may require new provisions.²⁰

New ministries that we have witnessed the emergence of in recent times include baptismal preparation ministry, children's liturgy coordinators and parish visitation teams. There is also the need to consider the introduction of professional lay ministries for example, the pastoral associate (an appointed lay minister charged with the care of the parish by the diocese), the pastoral administrator (an appointee of a cluster of parishes charged with the day-to-day administration of the parishes), the catechist and/ or pastoral worker for a group of parishes.

¹⁶ The term parish director here refers to religious, other lay persons, and deacons assigned to parishes under Canon 517.2. In other place terms such as pastoral leader, parish administrator, parish or pastoral life coordinator are used.

¹⁷ *2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization*, 6.

¹⁸ Cardinal Cahal Daly, *Letter on the deployment of priests*, September 19, 1995.

¹⁹ Thomas F O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, (New Jersey: Paulist, 1983), 142.

²⁰ Bishop Donal Murray, <http://www.limerickdiocese.org/publications/pastorals/index.htm/>.

The development on new ministries raises another of the considerations identified by the PALS team, namely the need to promote inclusive involvement. The fact that the Archdiocese of Armagh is exploring new parish structures and ministries, clustering and rationalisation is an opportunity to “think outside the box” and to be adventurous in ensuring the involvement of women, young people and people from minority groups in parish ministry. Parish life is enriched when all members use their gifts in the service of others.

In the light of the above we propose the following by way of clarification:

New parish structures and ministries (voluntary and professional) will emerge in the context of the process of clustering and rationalization that the diocese is embarking on. For the purposes of clarity we adopt the definition of ministry proposed by Thomas O’Meara. While it is not yet clear what structures and ministries may emerge we are committed to fostering their emergence through training, formation and financial support.

For closing reflection:

For each of the three proposals answer the following questions:

- What did you like?
- What were you uneasy with?
- What would you take out, change or add before the whole diocese could adopt this definition/clarification?

2. Conviction

For initial consideration:

What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of clustering, rationalisation and developing new parish structures and ministries?

What for you are the key reasons for working toward these in our diocese?

When you consider your reason how compelling do you find them?

The reasons why

The key question we need to consider is: are we convinced of the need for and value of clustering, rationalisation and developing new parish structures and ministries? If we are not, they simply will not be adopted with any enthusiasm or conviction. All attempts are likely to be perceived as being imposed and therefore worthy of resistance and opposition.

Plausible arguments could be formed to demonstrate why clustering, rationalisation and new structures and ministries should not be pursued in our diocese. It may involve more work, more meetings, more travelling, changes in Mass times, less Masses, a loss of identity, the loss of a resident priest, resistance, power struggles and disputes over resources and churches. Why then do it?

The PALS team is convinced that parish reorganisation is essential and that we must as a diocese take this road immediately. There are a number of compelling reasons, some practical and some theological. For now we highlight four in no particular order of importance.

The first reason is that the expanding theology of lay ecclesial ministry, arising from the Second Vatican Council, is beginning to take root. The shift in our understanding of ministry as based on baptism is gaining understanding and acceptance. There is a growing awareness that church is a living, breath-filled body with many parts all of which need to work together to build up the Body of Christ, the church. With a new emphasis on collaboration the time is right therefore to increasingly engage lay people in the pastoral and administrative leadership and ministries of the parish community.

The second reason is the importance of the Sunday Eucharist in the life of the parish. Parish reorganisation will be necessary in order to ensure that the Sunday Eucharist is fittingly celebrated in each parish in the diocese each Sunday.

The third is that we have an aging and declining presbyterate. The simple statistics are these:

- there are 138 diocesan priests in the Archdiocese of Armagh;
- 30 of these are 75 and over (many of them still in active ministry);
- 44 are aged 60-74;
- 46 are aged 40-59;
- 18 are under 40 years of age.

It is therefore possible that, even though there has been a slight upward trend in the last couple of years, 15 years from now there will be less than 75 priests in the diocese under the age of 70 with 25 of them being under 60 in a diocese that presently has 61 parishes. This raises the question of how we ensure that the needs of the parishes are met without putting an unrealistic work burden on the priests of the diocese? It is imperative that parish reorganisation takes place to facilitate this decline in the number of priests.

The fourth is that the Church in each generation must adapt so that it can continue to effectively carry on the mission and ministry of Christ, locally and globally. As was suggested in the discussion on the meaning of clustering there are some things that we, as disciples, can do more effectively in clusters of parishes together than in individual parishes by sharing our resources. The aspects of ministry that can be enhanced by being addressed at cluster level as well as parish level include:

- liturgy and worship;
- parish community life;
- education and formation;
- spiritual outreach;
- general administration.²¹

Initial considerations

Four of the considerations identified by the PALS team when it asked what are all the things we need to consider in moving toward parish reorganisation fit with attending to the question of conviction. They are:

²¹ This classification of ministries is based on the work of Tom Sweetser and Peg Bishop, *Parish Evaluation Project*. www.pepparish.org/.

- promoting the why;
- leadership;
- ensuring the engagement of all;
- the priest.

Promoting the why

Having identified the primary reasons for moving toward clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries it will be essential to promote the reasons among the people of the diocese. It is essential to ensure that all of the people in the parishes are fully aware of the reasons to reorganise their parishes. This will entail a well-prepared and coordinated process of adult education throughout the diocese with a view to increasing ownership of the new reality. It will involve inviting people to consider the reality of the falling number of priests, promoting an understanding of ministry based on baptism and collaboration and outlining the merits of clustering and rationalisation for all.

Leadership

Good leadership ensures that people willingly do what is needed so that the objectives as defined in the vision are delivered. This requires a demonstration that the leaders themselves are convinced of the reasons for parish reorganisation and that they want to involve their people in the delivery of this vision. This process of promoting the why by those in leadership in the diocese allows the people to appreciate that the course being shown is the correct one. It requires that the leaders be open to questioning and criticism. They must, with patience, accept these questions so that they can use them to guide and educate people. These criticisms and questions are an essential part of the growth process both for the leaders and those being led.

In the executive summary of *The 2003 U.S. National Study of Parish Reorganization* the authors summarise the respondents' advice to leaders in the light of their experiences:

- Their advice for other parishes included: a) plan carefully and well; b) establish effective two-way communication; and c) practice leadership and develop it in others. Finally, they stressed that the parish priest is responsible for exercising his leadership in a way that ensures that the spiritual dimension of the change process is not overlooked.
- Parish leaders' advice to bishops addressed ways in which they can teach, govern and sanctify in the context of parish reorganisation, especially by providing training, engaging in a consultative process, and being present to and supportive of those at parish level.
- Diocesan respondents had advice for other dioceses based on their own experiences. Collectively their comments defined a seven-step process: set goals; provide leadership; prepare; educate; collaborate and consult; move at a deliberate pace; and prepare for emotional difficulty.²²

Ensuring the engagement of all

As well as ensuring that all of the people in the parishes are fully aware of the reasons behind parish reorganisation, effective consultation of the people of the diocese along the way will be essential. As *The 2003 U.S. National Study of Parish Reorganization* states in its final recommendations:

If parish reorganization is to be successful, dioceses need to ensure that effective consultation and training occur. Both are essential.²³

²² 2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization, vii.

²³ 2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization, viii.

The process of engagement with the laity must be free and open and not be delivered as an instruction but rather a request for help in achieving the vision and in setting up the structures that will be needed for the future. The consultation process that happened at vicariate level in the diocese in Lent 2005 can act as a model for consultation as well as meetings of Parish Pastoral Councils and other parish groups.

The emotional impact of change on parishioners, particularly where loss of priest, church building or parish identity occurs will be an important reality that needs to be acknowledged and responded to.

The priest

Parish reorganisation will have implications for priests. For many it will entail a change of approach to ministry. No longer will the 'going it alone' approach be possible and therefore priests will need to develop their collaborative skills and leadership skills. Ongoing formation for priests will be a necessary part of the process. *The 2003 U.S. National Study of Parish Reorganization* has this to say about the leadership of priests:

Good leadership, especially by the pastor, is essential. In addition to possessing strong communication skills, personal attributes that a pastor (or parish director) will find most useful are: self-confidence and trust, a passion for consultation and a tolerance for ambiguity.

While good leadership cannot be fully defined or predicted, there are three steps pastoral leaders can take to foster personal leadership; develop a guiding vision; learn to think strategically; and use the parish pastoral council as a tool of consultation and planning.²⁴

Expectations of the workload of priests will need to change if priests are to maintain their health and well-being in the context of an aging and decreasing presbyterate.

For closing reflection:

How convincing do you find the four reasons for parish reorganisation outlined above?

What convincing reasons would you add?

Which is the most convincing?

Which is the least convincing?

Which, if any, would you take away?

3. Commitment

For initial consideration:

On a scale of 1-7 where 1 is low and 7 is high, how committed are you to process of clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries?

What obstacles to parish reorganisation can you identify:

- in yourself;
- in your community;
- in our diocese?

What might be some of the reasons for these obstacles?

²⁴ 2003 *National Study of Parish Reorganization*, viii.

Personal and strategic obstacles

Of the four steps clarity and conviction are relatively easy compared to commitment and capacity. The step from conviction to commitment is a difficult one because in truth we are usually ambivalent about change. While we can identify the sources of our conviction we can observe in ourselves and others a significant resistance to change. Moving from conviction to commitment therefore requires of us that we identify the obstacles to moving toward parish reorganisation, that we discuss them and that we try to resolve them.

Recent history in our own diocese has shown that the move toward clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries has been resisted, often with an attitude that this is not an urgent need. The proposals quoted above from Cardinal Daly²⁵ and Archbishop Brady²⁶ on clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries had little impact at the time. This is an indication that while there was at the time a conviction that these things needed to happen it was not matched in the diocese by a commitment to making them happen.

The blocks to commitment can be both personal and systemic. At the personal level these obstacles occur as sources of resistance within ourselves, while at the systemic level they occur as contradictions that are to be found in historic and social trends, in our images and attitudes, and in the structures and patterns we create and out of which we operate.²⁷ It will be necessary to address both personal and systemic obstacles. This can be done by considering obstacles identified by Sofield and Juliano in their work around the world and the contradictions identified around our own diocese in the strategic planning work carried out by the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry.

The global perspective

In their book, *Collaboration: Uniting our Gifts in Ministry*, Sofield and Juliano identify eleven fears and obstacles that emerge most frequently with regard to being committed to collaboration. Given that clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries demand a collaborative approach to ministry, it seems reasonable to suggest that the same factors will be operable in the context of moving toward parish reorganisation. While it will be essential for those who are leaders in the process to address these matters personally it will also be of value for each and every person who finds themselves ambivalent, resistant or hostile to organisational changes as they occur to reflect on how these personal fears and obstacles are influencing their resistance or opposition.

Sofield and Juliano name the eleven obstacles as:

- low self-esteem;
- arrogance and self-righteousness;
- burnout;
- hostility;
- inability or unwillingness to deal with conflict;

²⁵ Cardinal Cahal Daly, *Letter on the deployment of priests*, September 19, 1995.

²⁶ Archbishop Sean Brady, *Mass in an age of decline of vocations: a letter from Archbishop Sean Brady to the people of the Archdiocese of Armagh*, 30 November 1997.

²⁷ For a further discussion of how underlying systemic contradictions function see The Institute of Cultural Affairs *The technology of Participation: The Participatory Strategic Planning Process*, (Brussels 2005), 30-32.

- lack of forgiveness;
- unwillingness to deal with loss, termination, and separation;
- a lack of integrated sexuality;
- a lack of knowledge of one's own gifts or the gifts of one's co-workers;
- an unwillingness or fear of sharing faith;
- learned helplessness.²⁸

How do each of these occur as an obstacle to the process of parish reorganisation and how can they be addressed? We will look briefly at each.

Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem can happen when our needs are not met or are threatened. It expresses itself in a variety of behaviours that militate against the kind of collaboration necessary to bring about clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries. One such behaviour is the destructive competitiveness that blinds people to the gifts of others and interferes with their freedom to unite their gifts in ministry. Competitiveness can occur among groups as well as individuals and can lead to individuals and groups attempting to be better than others and to putting others down and belittling others.

Low self-esteem also manifests itself in an attitude of parochialism which is characterised by narrowness of thinking. It can lead to an attitude of exclusive concern for the needs of one's own group and a corresponding apathy to the needs of others.

In the context of parish reorganisation, low self-esteem manifested in competitiveness and parochialism could turn into aggressive opposition to proposed changes. Sofield and Juliano refer to low self-esteem as the major obstacle which is also the most difficult obstacle to overcome.²⁹ They suggest that each individual must take personal responsibility for his or her level of self-esteem. Beyond that they believe that creating a climate that fosters self-esteem is important and that this can be created by adopting the gift discernment process, where a person is presented with the positive qualities that others have observed.³⁰

Arrogance and self-righteousness

Arrogance, because it remains hidden to those who possess it, is a very difficult obstacle to overcome. Arrogant people are not inclined to work with others because they perceive themselves as better than everyone else. Arrogant leaders consider themselves to be superior to others and that therefore if everyone were to listen to them everything would be fine. In encountering arrogant leaders others can assume a posture of arrogance, becoming extremely aggressive and vocal in denigrating those in leadership. Adopting the process of parish reorganisation will demand a willingness to listen, to respect the wisdom of others and readiness to accept honest feedback.

²⁸ For a full discussion of the obstacles see *Collaboration*, chapter four, Obstacles to Collaborative Ministry.

²⁹ *Collaboration*, 56.

³⁰ For a detailed outline of the gift discernment process see Loughlan Sofield, Rosine Hammett and Carroll Juliano, *Building Community: Christian, Caring, Vital*, (Notre Dame: Are Maria, 1999), 67-75.

Burnout

Burnout leaves a person tired, depressed, cynical and lacking energy resulting in an inability to work with others and being unable to lead others. Support for those suffering from burnout in the process of parish reorganisation will be essential.³¹

Hostility, conflict and forgiveness

These three are related. Hostility occurs when a person turns feelings of anger into hostile behaviour where others are treated as enemies. Failure to deal with conflict occurs sometimes because of fear of conflict or because of a lack of the skills necessary to deal with conflict. Where there is hostility and conflict but no willingness to forgive in the context of parish reorganisation cooperation within and parishes and among parishes could be negatively effected. Dealing effectively with anger, attending to situations of conflict, learning conflict management skills and working toward forgiveness and reconciliation will be essential.³²

Loss, termination and separation

Feelings of loss will be inevitable as the process of clustering, rationalisation and new parish structures and ministries progresses. A failure to acknowledge these and deal with these can only lead to feelings of resentment, hostility and conflict. Thus where there is loss it will be essential to provide opportunities for people to discuss their feelings, ritualise the loss and grieve adequately.³³

Lack of an integrated sexuality

Parish reorganisation may entail people working together in close collaboration. Sofield and Juliano suggest that it will be more difficult for those lacking an integrated sexuality to enter more fully into ministry with others. They propose that those involved in ministry attend sexuality workshops and receive pastoral supervision as part and parcel of their ministry.³⁴

A lack of knowledge of one's own gifts or the gifts of one's co-workers

The development of new parish structures and ministries in the context of an aging and declining presbyterate will necessitate people being invited to use their gifts in service of the parish community. For this to happen it will be necessary to engage people in a process of identifying and releasing their gifts. The essential elements of the process include:

- creating a climate in which people feel free to discern their gifts;
- developing a method for sharing and clarifying the individual gifts;
- examining ways these gifts can be used in ministry.³⁵

Failure to share faith

Faith sharing entails sharing moments of grace where God is experienced in a special way. Where there are people working together in a pastoral context faith sharing is essential for spiritual nourishment. Faith sharing in groups happens most effectively in a climate that assures safety in sharing where there is an expectation that sharing will in fact take place.³⁶

³¹ For an outline of the stages of burnout and how to deal with them see *Collaboration*, 58-63.

³² For a fuller discussion on hostility conflict and forgiveness see *Collaboration*, chapters 6 and 8.

³³ *Collaboration*, 65-67.

³⁴ *Collaboration*, 68-70.

³⁵ For a detailed outline of the gift discernment process see *Building Community*, 67-75.

³⁶ For a further discussion on a shared spirituality see *Collaboration*, chapter 6.

Learned helplessness

Learned helplessness refers to the attitude that we have absolutely no control over any decisions regarding our lives and ministry. It is an attitude related to low self-image, low self confidence and low self-esteem that can exist in individuals or in parishes. In the process of parish reorganisation it will be important to assist individuals and parishes in having a say in their own futures.³⁷

The local perspective

The Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry(OPRFM) in working with Parish Pastoral Councils to develop their pastoral plan asks them to spend a significant amount of time identifying the systemic contradictions that block them from achieving their vision. While some of these may be peculiar to a particular parish the OPRFM has identified seven systemic obstacles named by the parishes that could negatively impact commitment to parish reorganisation. The seven are:

- increasing secularisation;
- a culture of apathy;
- clericalism;
- a status quo mentality;
- underdeveloped spirituality;
- fractured community;
- poor capacity.

Again we will explore how each of these occur as an obstacle to the process of parish reorganisation and how can they be addressed.

Increasing secularisation and a culture of apathy

Secularisation refers to the declining influence of religion on society. Add to this a culture of apathy and the impact occurs as a decline in interest in involvement in the life of the parish. Pastoral council members spoke of competing priorities, a reluctance to volunteer, work commitments, and attitudes of “it’s not my responsibility,” “someone else will do it” and “it’s not cool to be into prayer, spiritual development or religion in general.” They also spoke about people, especially the young, being disenchanted with the Church for a variety of reasons. The consequence of all this is a decline of interest in church activities and a decline in volunteerism. In a diocese that desires to expand lay ecclesial ministry these two realities of secularisation and apathy certainly exist as contradictions. Addressing them will involve sharing a vision of lay ministry, developing volunteer recruitment strategies, ensuring that volunteer expenses are paid, expanding the pool of full-time pastoral workers in the diocese and extensively using the gift discernment process developed by Sofield and Juliano.

Clericalism and the *status quo* mentality

Clericalism refers to a particular understanding of the church that is overly dependent on the priests. It is an attitude that militates against lay people taking up their rightful responsibilities in carrying on the mission of the church. The status quo mentality which suggests that “everything is fine as it is” results in resistance to change, hostility and conflict. Pastoral council members spoke of people holding onto the past, narrow mindedness, a reluctance to change, resistance to change, over dependence on the priest, outdated models of church and unrealistic expectations on priests. Attending to these obstacles will, first and foremost, involve exploring the question of what model or what way of being church will best suit us in the twenty-first century and then widely

³⁷ *Collaboration*, 70-71.

communicating that vision. It brings us back to the question of conviction. Are we convinced that parish reorganisation is something that we need to attend to in our diocese at this time? Being convinced, we need to share our convictions.

Underdeveloped spirituality and fractured community

Underdeveloped spirituality indicates a low level of faith expression among some parishioners and is related to the growth in secularisation. Pastoral council members spoke of there being no hunger to spread God's love, low confidence in faith expression, no commitment to faith sharing and praying together, limited involvement in the liturgy, poor knowledge of faith matters, little interest in faith development and a reluctance to reach out to people of other faiths.

Where Christian faith is not expressed in love and forgiveness the potential for fractures in community increases. Pastoral council members spoke of fractures in community arising from unresolved disputes in the past, perceived divisions in the parish, the presence of an "us versus them mentality," a growing population, a suspicion of newcomers and those who seem different. These realities of underdeveloped spirituality and fractured community point to the need to attend to matters of faith sharing, dealing with loss and practicing forgiveness.

Poor Capacity

In various ways Parish Pastoral Councils in the diocese, when considering the obstacles that blocked them from moving toward their vision, identified the issue of capacity or capability as a block. They spoke of poor planning and not having the skills and know how to move forward. Poor resources, inadequately trained personnel, little access to finances, insufficient supportive structures and poor communication within the diocese were also spoken of. These issues highlight the importance of addressing the question of capacity and capability when considering clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries. Ensuring that there is good planning, adequate resources and excellent communication will be key to the success of the process of parish reorganisation in our diocese.

More of the initial considerations

Of the eleven considerations identified in the initial workshop organised by PALS three of them fit well with the question of commitment. They are:

- ensuring that prayer is part of the process;
- the pivotal role of parish pastoral councils;
- financial implications.

Ensuring that prayer is part of the process

The central focus of the process of clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries is to carry on the mission of Christ in the twenty-first century. Relationship with Christ and asking for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will therefore be essential. The *Renew* process in which the parishes of the diocese engaged at the end of the twentieth century can act as a model for ensuring that prayer is a part of this new process. During the *Renew* process a diocesan prayer card was printed and distributed. The people of the diocese were encouraged to pray it personally and communally. Intercession for the success of the *Renew* process were included in the general intercessions at the weekend liturgies and faith sharing in small groups was integral to the process. To ensure our commitment to the process of parish reorganisation prayer will be essential.

The pivotal role of parish pastoral councils

The success of clustering, rationalisation, new parish ministries and structures is dependent upon and presupposes the existence of effective parish pastoral councils in each parish in the diocese. Experience in the diocese of Limerick has shown that clustering in particular happens most effectively where there are already parish pastoral councils in place. Are we committed to parish reorganisation? The formation of a parish pastoral council in every parish in the diocese will indicate that commitment and increase our capacity to achieve clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries.

Financial implications

Providing the necessary finance in any project is always an indication of commitment. In the case of clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries finance will be necessary for the purposes of promoting, consulting, training, hiring, employing, building, communicating, evaluating and reimbursing. It will be necessary therefore for the diocesan and parish finance committees to make provision for the venture.

For closing reflection:

What resonated with you in the obstacles as they were outlined above?

What obstacles are you aware of that have not been addressed here?

What obstacles named here are not relevant to us?

Which of the obstacles present you with a personal challenge?

Which do you see as the primary blocks to parish reorganisation in the Archdiocese of Armagh?

How do you see these being addressed?

4. Capacity/capability

For initial consideration:

What do you see as the practical steps that will lead us from being committed to clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries to making it a reality in our diocese over the next five years? Make a list of the things that need to be done.

Which of the elements on your list will be easy to implement? Which will be difficult?

What for you personally are the skills, habits and attitudes that you will need to work on in order to participate in the process of parish reorganisation?

How can you ensure that you develop these?

Mapping the process of parish reorganisation in the Archdiocese of Armagh

We can become clear about what we mean by clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries, we can be convinced of the importance of making it happen and we can be committed to making it happen but that is not enough. We need to develop the capacity and capability to make it a reality. This will include developing the skills, the process, the spirituality and the developmental readiness necessary for parish reorganisation to happen in the Archdiocese of Armagh.

What follows is a proposed outline of the elements of the process of parish reorganisation as it could be developed in our archdiocese. It includes some general proposals and within each of these some more specific proposals. In reflecting on it you will be asked to consider the wisdom of the proposals. They are there to be tested, applauded and scorned. Do they seem appropriate? Will

they move us in the right direction? Are you unhappy with the proposals? If so, why, and importantly, what alternative or addition would you suggest? At a result of this consultation PALS and the coordinating group of the pastoral plan will create a definite timeline and outline of how we will move forward toward parish reorganisation in the archdiocese. This timeline will be made public in Advent 2007.

There are various aspects to developing the capacity to reorganise our parishes. Sometimes they happen in sequence and other times concurrently, sometimes with small groups other times with larger groups. They include:

- initial consultation June - September 2007;
- forming parish pastoral councils, ongoing until June 2009;
- creating a prayer process - October 2007;
- launching the parish reorganisation process - First Sunday of Advent 2007;
- initial formation 2008 - 2009;
- parish assessment and consultation January 2008 - Easter 2009;
- unveiling the recommendation - Pentecost 2009;
- preparing for parish reorganisation July - Advent 2009;
- the cluster assembly day Advent 2009;
- forming the cluster commissions and the cluster pastoral council 2010.

Initial consultation

The fact that you are reading this document suggests that you are presently involved in the initial consultation process. This process involves inviting diocesan groups to read this document and respond to it. The consultation period is from June until September 2007. The priests of the diocese are being invited to discuss the proposals at specially convened gatherings of their vicariate in June and to make their submissions. In September each parish is to hold a gathering either of its parish pastoral council or, where there is no pastoral council, a group of parishioners involved in pastoral ministry to discuss this document. Each parish group will be invited to make a submission. It will also be discussed by the Diocesan Pastoral Council and other pastoral groups identified by the co-ordinating group of the pastoral plan.

Forming parish pastoral councils

Given that clustering happens more effectively in a context where parishes already have a parish pastoral council in place the ongoing work of forming parish pastoral councils must continue in the diocese. Since its formation the PALS working group has created a process for the formation of pastoral councils available to parishes through the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry (OPRFM). In the last year the OPRFM has worked with fourteen parishes. Other parishes have established parish pastoral councils, but there remains a significant number that do not have a parish pastoral council and have not indicated an intention to do so.

On behalf of the parish the parish priest of each parish that does not yet have a parish pastoral council is to indicate to Archbishop Brady by October 31, 2007 his intention with regard to the formation of a parish pastoral council. Does the parish intend to form a parish pastoral council? On the basis of the responses to these questions a timetable for the formation of parish pastoral councils can be created so that all parishes can have a pastoral council by June 2009.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Creating the prayer process

In order to ensure that prayer is an integral part of the process of parish reorganisation we propose that the diocesan liturgy commission in consultation with the spirituality team and the faith formation team of the diocesan pastoral plan design a prayer card, a prayer process and a faith sharing process that will be ready for launch of the parish reorganisation process and would be seen as integral to the workings of the whole process over the next few years.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Launching the parish reorganisation process

After the primary consultation with regard to our understanding of clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries and how to implement them the process of implementation will be established in October 2007. On the first weekend of Advent 2007 the official process will be launched and promoted throughout the diocese. Parishioners will be informed of what is entailed in the process, why it is being carried out, how the people in the parishes can have their say and how they can contribute to the process. This launch can be done in various ways including:

- a pastoral letter from the Archbishop being read at all the Masses to explain the process;
- a parish reorganisation information booklet being made available to each family in the parish;
- speaking at the Masses and at a midweek parish gathering to explain the process;
- sixty one lay people being given a one-day briefing after which they will bring the message to the parishes;
- creating press releases and making people available for interview.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Initial Formation

In its initial workshop on what needs to be considered in bringing about clustering, rationalisation, new parish and structures the PALS team identified the whole area of educating and training to be key to the process. It is, however, something that cannot be undertaken with haste. Time and resources need to be made available for the education of those charged with the education of others. It must not be assumed that we already have all we need to make this a reality in parishes. We need to consider the models, content and curriculum of the training for priests and people; the models, content and curriculum of the training for any of the new ministries that will arise from the clustering and rationalising of parishes and the resources (fiscal, material, and human) to make it happen.

Collaborative Leadership in the Context of Parish Reorganisation

We propose that a period of formation for priests and lay people in full-time pastoral ministry in the diocese be held in 2008/9. Each priest and pastoral minister in active ministry in the diocese will attend three formation events, one in Spring 2008 (January - June), one in autumn 2008 the third in Spring 2009. At each formation event there will be a maximum of twenty people in attendance so each course will be run seven times.³⁸ Each course would last for three full days with there being the possibility of it being residential. If the courses were residential they could begin on Sunday evening, finishing with lunch on Thursday. The overall theme of the formation

³⁸ This will also ensure that no area of the diocese has too many priests away at the one time.

address some of the obstacles to commitment addressed in the previous section. A similar structure will be followed each time:

- arrival - an evening of welcome
- day 1 - considering leadership (c)
- day 2 - practicing leadership (p)
- day 3 - readiness for leadership (r)
- day 4 - looking back, looking forward

The content for course one includes:

- principles and spirituality of leadership (c)
- facilitation skills (p)
- gift discernment (r)

The content for course two includes:

- The nature of teams and effective team leadership (c)
- designing and leading effective meetings (p)
- dealing with loss (r)

The content for course three includes:

- collaborative leadership (c)
- managing conflict (p)
- pastoral supervision (r)

The logistics of making this intense period of formation possible are quite challenging. The course content outlined above is provisional. The final content would be based on consulting the priests and pastoral workers on their leadership needs. In October 2007 we would contact Jim Campbell of the Institute of Cultural Affairs who has tremendous experience in designing leadership courses and in training facilitators and Loughlan Sofield, who has been extensively quoted in this document, to design the training programme and to train diocesan personnel, identified by the diocese, to deliver the programme. The diocesan personnel will then deliver the programme during 2008/9.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Using our gifts in service of the mission

We further propose, under the heading of initial formation, that each parish in the diocese in the first half of 2008 hold a reflective formation weekend triduum for all parishioners. The purpose of the three days is to share with parishioners the vision of lay ecclesial ministry that is integral to why we are embarking on parish reorganisation and to invite them into the gift discernment process with a view to releasing their gifts in the ministerial areas of:

- liturgy and worship;
- parish community life;
- education and formation;
- spiritual outreach;
- general administration.³⁹

³⁹ This classification of ministries is based on the work of Tom Sweetser and Peg Bishop, www.pepparish.org/.

The work of creating the process for the weekend and of providing the personnel to deliver the triduum would be carried out by the faith formation team of the diocesan pastoral plan in consultation with the youth commission and the developing the role of women working team.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Parish assessment and consultation

Decisions with regard to which parishes will be clustered together, all the matters connected to rationalisation,⁴⁰ ideas for new parish structures and ministries will be based on a process of parish assessment and consultation. We propose that it be held between January 2008 and Easter 2009 informed and shaped by the work of Tom Sweetser SJ and Peg Bishop OSM⁴¹ who have successfully developed the Parish Assessment and Renewal (PAR) process.⁴² According to this proposal, we would create a Parish Reorganisation Assessment and Consultation (PRAC) process based on the work of Sweetser and Bishop that would meet the assessment and consultation needs of the diocese with regard to parish reorganisation. A diocesan PRAC team would then run the process in each of the parishes of the diocese to be completed by Easter 2009. The PRAC team will then compile its report and make its recommendations.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Unveiling the recommendations

On Pentecost Sunday 2009 the major recommendations with regard to clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries will be fed back to the diocese. It will communicate:

- which parishes will be clustered with which,
- how many priests will serve in each parish,
- which parishes can be prepared to be without a resident priest,
- what resources are to be allocated to the employment of lay leaders,
- what churches can be less used,
- which parishes are in need of new churches,
- how many Masses are to be celebrated at the weekend and on weekdays,
- what personnel is needed to work at diocesan level,
- what new ministries and structures are to be adopted.

⁴⁰ Rationalisation includes making decisions on how many priests will serve in each parish, which parishes can be prepared to be without a resident priest, what resources are to be allocated to the employment of lay leaders, what churches can be closed or less used, which parishes are in need of new churches, how many Masses are to be celebrated at the weekend and on weekdays, what personnel is needed to work at diocesan level.

⁴¹ Tom and Peg's monthly parish newsletter is available on the website of the OPRFM, www.parishandfamily.ie/.

⁴²The Parish Assessment and Renewal (PAR) process is a unique blend of information gathering and future planning. PAR begins with four months of self-assessment, during which time the leadership collects information about the parish. This self-assessment is followed by a two week on-site visit by the PEP Pastoral Consultant team. The focus of the two week visit is to assess the strengths and needs of the parish through direct observation, personal interviews, telephone calls to parishioners and analysis of parish liturgies, programmes and ministries. At the conclusion of the two week parish visit, the PEP Pastoral Consultant team writes a report of what it has observed, as well as making recommendations for the future. The report is presented to a gathering of the parish leadership. From this information, the leaders fashion a plan for the future direction and renewal of the parish. PAR also includes a three day follow-up visit by the PEP Pastoral Consultant team six months after the initial report in order to assist the parish during the implementation of the renewal. The website address of the PEP Pastoral Consultant team is www.pepparish.org/.

The people of the diocese will be given an opportunity to reflect upon and consider the implications of the recommendations for them personally, their parish and the diocese. They will be given an opportunity to respond to the PRAC team and the Archbishop before the recommendations are formally adopted on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul 2009.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Preparing for Parish Reorganisation

There are a number of steps to be taken in preparation for parish reorganisation, some of which can be fleshed out at a later stage. According to this proposal the new diocesan reality would begin on the first Sunday of Advent 2009, which makes July 2009 - Advent 2009 the period of preparation. Some of the preparations will include:

- celebrating in parishes rituals of thanksgiving, loss and transition;
- a gift and appointment discernment process for all priests with the clergy appointment team and bishops with a view to diocesan changes and appointments to coincide with the beginning of parish reorganisation Advent 2009;
- establishing a recruitment process and employment policy for parish directors, administrators and pastoral leaders;
- creating a formation programme for cluster commissions, recruiting and training leaders to deliver the formation programme;
- holding a formation event for priests and pastoral leaders on cluster commissions, cluster pastoral councils and the cluster assembly day.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

The cluster assembly day

During Advent 2009 each parish will hold a cluster assembly day. It will be an opportunity to create a sense of identity for the cluster, to explore possible areas of concern for the five ministry commissions (see below) and surface possible commission members. The day will be facilitated by a trained leader.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

Forming the cluster commissions and the cluster pastoral councils

In their first year of existence, 2010, each cluster is to form five commissions, each consisting of six - eight people. They are:

- the liturgy and worship commission;
- the community life commission;
- the education and formation commission;
- the spiritual outreach commission;
- the general administration commission.

Each cluster will have representatives from each of the parishes in the cluster. Their task is not to repeat what is being done by the parish pastoral councils but to identify aspects of the work that can be more appropriately done at the cluster level. During their formation each commission will identify two projects that they can reasonably take on in first year. All commissions will meet in the one venue on the same evening. They will each work separately for an hour and fifteen minutes after which the members of the five commissions will come together for prayer followed by tea.

After six months each commission will choose two of its members to join the cluster pastoral council. The cluster pastoral council will consist of the priests, full time parish pastoral staff and the ten commission members. The cluster pastoral council meets for one hour each month. Its function is to direct the work of the five commissions and ensure the effective functioning of the cluster. Ideally its monthly meeting would be on the same evening as the commissions' meetings after the commissions have had their prayer and tea together. The term of office of the cluster pastoral council and the five commissions is three years.

What would you add to or take away from this proposal, if anything?

For closing reflection:

What stood out for you as most significant in this section?

Which parts of it excite you and which parts concern you?

What would you add or take away from this process for parish reorganisation to happen effectively in our diocese?

What will your own contribution be?

Conclusion

The Archdiocese of Armagh, as it faces into a new millennium, continues to be committed to carrying on the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. As we do so we acknowledge the need to bring about clustering, rationalisation, new parish structures and ministries in order to assist in this task. While the number of priests in the diocese is declining there is great potential in lay involvement due to an expanding understanding of lay ecclesial ministry. In moving toward parish reorganisation four steps are necessary: clarity, conviction, commitment and capacity. This document is an attempt at taking the first step. You can send your comments on the document to admin@aracoeli.com marked *parish reorganisation consultation*.

Compiled by the PALS working team of the diocesan pastoral plan, Archdiocese of Armagh, May 2007.