

Pastoral Planning Committee Proposal for the Parishes of the Inverness Deanery

Pastoral planning is a community based process that seeks to follow the *Great Commission* of Christ to make disciples of all nations, directing all activities of the Diocese toward the fulfillment of this mission of the Church. As many of our communities continue to decline in numbers, our parish communities often struggle to maintain buildings. Fundraising and financial concerns become a first focus, and yet we are called to move beyond a “maintenance mode” to a focus on “mission.” As our Holy Father continues to emphasize, we need to reach out to all those in our midst who have very little connection with our parishes, so that our work becomes directed to the ‘making of disciples.’ Pastoral work, therefore, means we have to ask the serious questions of how we continue to invite people into the faith, support them on their journey and continue to reach out to others.

This work will demand that we change prevalent attitudes, especially as we address the reality of the dwindling resources available (priests, finances, buildings, parishioners’ support, etc.) while ensuring the long term pastoral care of parishioners. The Pastoral Planning Committee for the Inverness Deanery has reviewed the financials of each parish, the attendance numbers versus capacity for each church in the Deanery, the demographics for parishes, and the distances between churches in the Deanery. We have considered the age and numbers of priests that we will have available for ministry in the future. Finally we looked at what makes a parish sustainable. Further, in November 2014 parishes in the Deanery were invited to general meetings, one held in Port Hood and the other in South West Margaree. The challenges facing the Diocese were presented and discussed. Parishes and individuals were asked to make suggestions as to how to deal with these challenges and to submit them to the committee by February 15, 2015. All responses were considered by the Committee.

In its discussions, the Pastoral Planning Committee began to focus on the creation of a larger team which could be appointed with responsibility for the pastoral care of several parishes together, called a pastoral zone. With the support of the priests of the deanery, this committee recommends that the deanery be divided into two Pastoral Zones, with a team of priests, deacons and lay people to oversee the spiritual needs of the parishioners of the Pastoral Zone. Focusing energies in a larger area (as the whole diocese will be doing in the near future), means asking questions about the quality of our faith formation programs for the pastoral zone, about what ministries are active for outreach to the poor, marginalized, young families, and youth, about whether our liturgical ministries are vibrant and growing, and about what real hospitality looks like. During the next year, priests, lay leaders and parishioners will be educated and formed in the understanding of collaboration so that we can create the structures that will allow the best use of our resources for the future. After considering all the discussion and the recommendations received, the Pastoral Planning Committee is recommending the following proposal, emphasizing that it is a PROPOSAL.

Elements of the Proposal

1. By June 2016, the Inverness Deanery will be restructured into two Pastoral Zones: Inverness North and Inverness South. Inverness North Pastoral Zone will include the following parishes: Stella Maris (Inverness), St Margaret of Scotland (Broad Cove), St. Joseph (South West Margaree), St. Michael (East Margaree), St. Patrick (North East Margaree), St. Joseph (St. Joseph du Moine) and St. Peter (Cheticamp). The French culture will be considered in this zone. Inverness South Pastoral Zone will include: St Mary (Mabou), St John the Baptist (Brook Village), Immaculate Conception (West Lake Ainslie), St. Joseph (Glencoe Mills), St. Peter (Port Hood), St. Andrew (Judique), and

Stella Maria (Creignish). St. Joseph (Port Hawesbury) will be placed in another pastoral zone at a later date.

2. During the next year, both zones will begin the process of education and formation in a Collaborative Model of Ministry and will begin to lay the foundation for a Pastoral Council for each pastoral zone. By June 2016, a Pastoral Team will be appointed by the Bishop, consisting of at least two priests per zone (appointed as co-pastors or as pastor and associate) and several lay people. The team could include such people as a deacon(s), Parish Life coordinator(s), Lay Ecclesial Minister(s), Office Manager and/or Business Administrator. Other priests present in the zone will be involved to assist with some pastoral activities within the zone.

3. During the coming year, parishes will attempt to develop an attitude of collaboration and parishioners will be asked to identify not so much with their parish, but more with the larger zone. Once a Pastoral Team has been appointed, a Pastoral Council in each zone will be established to oversee efforts of working together as a single unit, e.g., common sacramental preparation and coordination of liturgical celebrations. With the reduced number of priests, the new configuration will provide weekend mass in most churches, but some churches will likely close, while others will have reduced services. The Diocese will continue to assist each zone as it decides the future viability to some of these churches.

Other Issues Regarding the Proposal

Incumbent upon us all, laity working with pastors, is the necessity of examining how we manage all our economic and our human resources. It is clear that we have an ageing clergy and very few vocations. We are no longer able to support and sustain ministry in the ways we have become accustomed. Pastors desire deeply to help build up the Body of Christ, but they often become “dispensers of sacraments”, not having sufficient time and energy to focus on gathering people together to continue to build community. The question facing us together is how do we work together with our clergy to ensure that we are supporting and nourishing healthy and holy ways of engaging in ministry for both laity and clergy, so that all have the pastoral care that we need.

While most of the parishes in the Deanery are rural, their churches part an important part in the community. Yet many of these churches have very small congregations, making them increasingly more difficult to keep as viable parishes. A viable parish is one that is not only financially solvent but also one that can do all that a parish is expected to do, e.g., provide religious education, have a vibrant Sunday Eucharist, etc.

The committee is aware of the pain that parishioners experience when facing change and the possible changes connected with particular church buildings. The committee believes that the creation of pastoral zones in the Inverness Deanery is the best way to serve the people in the midst of the challenges of decreasing population and the reality that we will have fewer priests to serve us.

The committee invites Parish Pastoral Councils and parishioners to respond to this proposal by offering comments or suggestions in writing by June 1, 2015 addressed to:

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