DIOCESE OF GALLOWAY

Pastoral Letter Feb 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am writing to you in response to a promise I made to the clergy. In November of last year, I spent time with them discussing their well-being. On the subject of their ministry and the many responsibilities they have, one word came up: ***unsustainable***.

Before I expand on that, let me give an important context. The priests love their ministry, love the People of God and show a tremendous commitment to Christ and their calling. I am inspired by the example they give, their witness and their pastoral care.

However, the simple fact is that they are being asked to do increasingly more while being fewer in number. Few priests have responsibility for only one parish and, along with other pastoral responsibilities, they are being stretched more and more. And yet, they still answer the call. For that, I am sure you are as grateful as I am. But we cannot simply continue as before, and hope things get better.

As we continue to ask the question of how best to proclaim the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ in the Diocese of Galloway, we must also be asking if the present structuring and number of parishes is suitable.

And it is not simply a question of the number of priests. That was the factor that brought things into focus, but it is not the only one. There are many others: reduced numbers of people attending church; the physical condition of some of our churches; shifting populations from one place to another; financial issues. This is far from an exhaustive list, but my point is that this would not simply be solved by bringing in more priests.

We are very fortunate in the priests who are already with us from outside the Diocese, including the Spiritans, a Schoenstadt Father, a Passionist. But please do not imagine that there is a massive pool of priests out there waiting to be invited in. Yes, we do look for priests from elsewhere, but this has to be done carefully. Not all priests are suitable for ministry here.

In my previous letter to you, I directed you to the next Holy Year in 2033, the 2000th anniversary of the great events of our faith. As we progress towards that, and as we pray to the Spirit for inspiration, we must also be prepared to make difficult decisions around our present parish

structures. I do promise you transparency and the chance to engage with the process. I ask that you be open to this and to resist the temptation to simply fight your corner. While we naturally want to preserve what we have, at times the vine has to be pruned so as to grow (John 15:1-2).

I am signalling my intention to begin a process that will include a review of the whole Diocese. This will include some decisions on parish structures that will have to be made sooner rather than later and will also include medium- and long-term planning. You all have your part to play, and I promise you the opportunity to do so.

While this is a letter that is difficult for me to write, it is not a message without hope. As a Diocese we might have to breathe in to breathe out, to contract in order to expand. If we retain our missionary identity, we will be doing more than managing decline. We will be answering the call to proclaim the Good News to our brothers and sisters around us and finding the best way to do this. Let us not lose sight of that demand that Christ makes of us individually and collectively:

"Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Mt 28:19-20)

St Ninian pray for us.

Yours in Christ,



Bishop of Galloway

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