



Diocese of Argyll & the Isles
Bishop's House
Corran Esplanade
Oban
PA34 5AB
Bishop@rcdai.org.uk
Charity Registration No. SC002876

PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP BRIAN MCGEE
'Implementing the Fruits of *Led by the Spirit*'

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

During this Holy Year Pope Francis has asked us to be *Pilgrims of Hope*. The source of this hope springs not from our own abilities but the love of God. For the past few years I have consulted you regarding the future of our diocese, not focussing on our own wisdom and plans but discerning together God's will. My desire is that in all things we allow ourselves to be *Led by the Spirit*. Prayerful discernment of our present situation will enable us to grow as missionaries of God's love.

Having invited every parish to participate in three phases of consultation,¹ I then further consulted on how best to implement the fruits of that consultation². I am grateful to both our clergy and lay faithful for your honest and open engagement. Having prayerfully reflected upon your advice I now share with you my conclusions regarding four areas which will be addressed in a synodal manner:

1 Establishment of Four Commissions to Support Implementation of our Discerned Priorities.

We discerned together our need to grow in (i) holiness (ii) mission (iii) catechesis and (iv) support of both laity and clergy in our vocations. Four Commissions will each focus on one priority and support local parishes and the diocese to develop them. Each Commission will consist of approximately six people, a mixture of clergy and laity. Commission members will have knowledge, experience and interest in the relevant field. Although I will appoint the Commissions' members, I invite nominations which will encourage a wide pool of talent. If you wish to nominate someone then please contact me before Monday 5th May 2025, providing the person's name, contact details and reasons for the nomination.³

Furthermore, the Led by the Spirit Working Group will reconvene as a Diocesan Synodality Team which will develop synodal practices including openness and transparency.⁴

2 Our Parish Structures.

Having already acknowledged the current situation with fewer priests, smaller congregations and facing other challenges you agreed on the need to review our parish structures. My purpose is not to manage decline but to positively respond to the changing realities and thereby grow in our fidelity and witness to Christ. Our intention must be how to best fulfil our God given mission and not preserve customs. Such discernment demands going beyond parochialism through genuine openness, courage and Christian maturity. However, the topics to be covered will not be restricted to the number of Churches or size of parishes but will also include, in the light of fewer priests, the provision of pastoral and spiritual care and

¹ Beginning with the Spiritual preparation and Parish Visits December 2022-February 2023. The Consultation Phase concluded in December 2024. For full details of the process see 'Led by the Spirit' at the Diocesan Website

² Draft Action Plan, January-February 2025

³ Email: bishop@rcdai.org.uk or write to Bishop's House, Corran Esplanade, Oban PA34 5AB

⁴ While I proposed such a Group in January 2025, on 11th March Pope Francis mandated each diocese to have a Synodal Team. Openness and transparency are our final discerned priorities.

missionary growth. The discussions will take place within the proposed six groupings⁵, with parish clergy and one parishioner from each parish participating. The parishioner is to be appointed by the Parish Priest but should be genuinely representative of the parish and preferably appointed after consultation within the parish. I will meet with each grouping initially, who will then meet fortnightly for four months after which their recommendations will be forwarded to me. If requested, this period can be extended. As bishop, I will make the decision for the future structuring of our parishes. It is preferable that subsequent changes would occur as soon as is reasonably feasible although, when appropriate, some may need to be phased.

Those involved in this part of the process will have full access to all necessary facts, an essential aspect being the need for all our properties to undergo a structural building survey. Arrangements for surveys are being made and once this process is complete the groupings can then begin to meet. I regret having to delay the start of this process but it is important to have full grasp of the facts before serious and permanent decisions are made. However, this interval does provide an opportunity for the appointment of a parish representative, as well as allowing people the time to study the other relevant material. Groupings should also use this time to decide on how best to keep the rest of the parishioners informed. I ask that everyone keeps this process in their prayers.

3 Diocesan Pastoral Councils

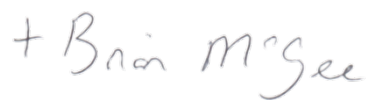
I have decided to establish a Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) so that I can better listen to and speak with our laity. I intend that the DPC will be operational by the end of this year.

4 Parish Pastoral Councils

I highly recommend the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC) as a locus for discernment between priests and parishioners. Where PPCs do not yet exist, I would suggest it may be better to wait until the review of parish structures is complete.

Sisters and brothers, the enormity of the task which lies ahead does frighten me yet I am convinced that communal discernment is not only preferable but essential if we are to grow as a Christian Community in the direction God is calling. My experience of the Synod of Bishops (2021-24) and subsequently striving to implement it, leaves me in no doubt that engaging with our challenges in a synodal manner (i.e. walking together as God asks) is our only option. I therefore commend to you this process for implementing what we have so far discerned, to remain in prayer and be open in mind and heart. During this Jubilee Year, let us go forward together as Pilgrims of Hope.

Yours in Christ,



Right Reverend Brian McGee
Bishop of Argyll and the Isles

28th March 2025

⁵ (a) Western Isles: Castlebay, Northbay, Eriskay, Daliburgh, Bornish, Ardkenneth, Benbecula, Stornoway

(b) Lochaber: Mingarry, Glenfinnan, Caol, Fort William, Roy Bridge, Kingussie, Skye, Ballachulish

(c) Rough Bounds: Morar, Arisaig (d) Lorn: Oban, Taynuilt (e) Mid-Argyll and Kintyre: Lochgilphead (f) Clydeside: Dunoon, Rothesay, Arran