

‘Cluster Parishes Together’

A response by

by the clergy and people of

Our Lady and St Bernadette’s, Larbert,

St Anthony’s, Rumford,

St Francis Xavier’s, Falkirk

and

St Mary of the Angels, Camelon

Easter, 2017

Introduction:

We began the Archdiocesan conversation with a hinterland of clustering experience. Meetings were supported across the year by approximately forty-five parishioners across our Cluster, a relatively small number given the available 'pool'. All four parishes were represented however, our discussions were free and open, and new links were forged.

Some parishes were represented in greater numbers than others. Parts of our community, particularly the youth, our young adults and our young families, were much less well represented. Unfortunately, our Syro-Malabar and Polish communities did not take part in the process. It was a source of regret that not all parish voices were heard, but over the year our sense of ourselves as a Cluster grew. We are more aware of the challenges, but also of possibilities for growth.

The process was conducted with frankness and respect.

1. Current shared provision

We agreed the following provision is well established as shared provision, or is in place and growing; the sharing of our 'priestly resources', RCIA, all day Reconciliation initiatives, sacramental preparation, visits to the sick and elderly, lay formation, school links and Mission weeks.

- **Consensus emerged most strongly around all-day Reconciliation, preparation for the sacraments, and RCIA.**
- **We agreed cross-Cluster community life was strongest around social events, parish pilgrimages and retreats.**
- **In terms of service, consensus settled on the SVDP, Bereavement Ministry and our Joint Pastoral Council.**

Parishioners highlighted the growing strength of our joint Marriage Preparation, as well as the positive outreach effect of our Tots and Toddlers' group on local families. Other perceived Cluster strengths were fund raising, school links/events, our Lunch Club for the elderly and our Walking Group. The Pope Francis Faith Award and the work of the Catenians were also recognised. In general, we felt there is little which cannot be shared across all areas of parish life. **Indeed, we have a growing sense that such sharing/cross pollination can benefit everyone.**

2. Single Parish Provision

We perceived as necessary for single parish provision:

- **Sunday Mass (the potential loss of daily Mass was a great regret)**
- **lay-led devotions/liturgies**
- **the Sacrament of Reconciliation**
- **Children's Liturgy**
- **funerals**
- **prayer groups**

Moving forward – Signs and Developments

Our Lady of Lourdes and St Bernadette's has now joined our Joint Pastoral Council, which is working well, allowing each parish to be represented whilst retaining its unique identity. Work is still needed to highlight its role in facilitating cluster dialogue and pastoral planning. **As a Cluster, there was a keen sense that many more of our ministries and initiatives must be lay-led, to decrease the burden on our priests.**

A more 'community' based language and mind-set is required; the need to increase and improve communication was a recurrent theme. Collaboration between parishes must become more intentional, and information sharing more automatic. Our Lady of Lourdes and St Bernadette's has invited the Cluster to join their World Day of Prayer celebration. Since they have no hall, they will now be able to make use of the parish halls available in the Cluster. Participation in cross-Cluster events is still low; there is communion across the Cluster, but we should celebrate it much more.

Community outreach such as the SVDP is felt vital, but awareness grew that too few parishioners are actively involved. **Our missionary focus overall must be renewed.**

Our most important areas for growth were defined as:

- **more community outreach,**
- **growth in ecumenical initiatives and**
- **more community building through cross-parish social events**

Of the self-identifying Catholics in the most recent census, approximately one third are practicing. Mass attendance figures do not offer a true picture as many people travel between Masses.

New builds in the area are bringing in Catholics. We have the potential for growth in the Cluster area, but **we must become much more courageous in our missionary outreach. This requires transformative and ongoing formation for the laity.**

Liturgies: Worship is considered our greatest strength, however there was a healthy recognition that our priests cannot be expected to continue as things currently stand. Even our celebrations can become a 'burden' on overworked clergy.

The Lay: A sign of growth throughout the process was a clear change in the mind-set/expectations of the lay. Formation became a prominent theme. The pain of spiritual growth such re-education necessitates, individually and as a community, was acknowledged; many of our parishioners require a great deal of evangelization before we can urge them to the fuller participation called for by Vatican II.

Paradoxically another growing perspective was that, as a Cluster, we have very healthy, committed lay involvement. We Baptised are able and educated. Skills and gifts are abundant. However, our understanding has grown that these gifts need to be better identified and 'tapped into'. There was discussion about vocations. We understand that we must free up priests to live out their vocation, not be 'managers'.

Moving forward, we are asking for far greater opportunities to live out our baptismal identity and mission. We also believe that ministries agreed for shorter terms and rotated posts would increase participation.

Plant: Our churches and halls are generally very well maintained, but we questioned if the buildings as they stand are still ‘fit for purpose’ in a changing church? Two halls are badly underused. We challenged ourselves to raise their revenue and open them more to the local community. We also perceived the need for a rolling maintenance programme, which would be easier to budget for, given fewer unexpected bills. Whilst recognising that older buildings are not necessarily more expensive to maintain than new, ‘firefighting’ to maintain large properties and their attendant regulations is a constant drain on our priests. Parishioners have begun taking more responsibility for upkeep and maintenance.

One ‘radical idea’ emerged, that one of the churches should be ‘mothballed’. Four parishes becoming three might reduce costs and release capital. We debated the devastating potential loss of some parishioners should that happen.

Finances:

Key growth came in our confidence in realistically facing the ‘scandalous’ costs of maintaining the A-listed Coia church, St Mary of the Angels. These exceptional circumstances were the subject of much debate, highlighting the sense of injustice within that community given its inherited debt. A sign of spiritual and communal growth was our asking: ‘How can we help clear St Mary of the Angels’ debt as a Cluster?’ Currently the parish’s perception as having an ‘uncertain future’ is impacting on finances, with people unwilling to ‘throw good money after bad’, given the inevitability of more debt and the certain costs involved in maintaining listed buildings.

The parish itself must develop revenue streams to help fund the debt, which is real and must be honoured. We acknowledged the need to identify ways to increase revenue, including seeing a ‘Coia’ church as an **asset**, not a liability – perhaps even as a revenue source? Outside the box thinking is required.

The other parishes are in relatively sound financial condition (See attached appendix). A desire to grow in our understanding of our financial situation and needs was another clear sign of growth. Parishioners want a simple break-down of finances and to be better informed - we asked to be included in financial planning. More forward planning is also needed, and our finances need to be managed in much clearer detail. Awareness of our stewardship responsibilities was also raised; we need to ‘up’ our weekly offering. We urged that the church ‘invests, rather than spends’, asking to investigate investment as a revenue source.

There was, of course, encouragement for prayer and trust, but we also asked for professionalism in our church finances. For example, currently Camelon hall costs more to run than it brings in. If we are to fully understand our finances, we need to know what the trends are and plot the facts for the future. Truthful, fearless analysis is needed.

There was dissatisfaction at the financial opacity of the Archdiocese itself. People felt its financial situation should be better known.

Spiritual Vibrancy

We are an engaged, active communion. Two clear ‘**signs of vibrancy**’ emerged in discussion:

Eucharist: Though we acknowledged that there is clear room for growth, this essential aspect of our life in God, our worship as a community and the strength we receive from it, received the most positive response. **Outreach**: This vital part of our mission in Christ was rated next highest, but this may have been due to the high level of involvement by those at the meeting. We have a high level of internal vibrancy, but are less vibrant *ad extra*. This fundamental aspect of our call in Christ is already being evaluated by our Joint Pastoral Council as a core issue.

Two ‘signs of vibrancy’ rated as **less evident** amongst us: **Evangelisation and Catechesis** received equal ‘could do better’ status. A clear link between the two was agreed – one flows from the other, formation building confidence, leading to more joyful evangelisation and further growth in our Catholic faith.

Two areas emerged where we are **least spiritually vibrant**: **Lay leadership** – we need both a clearer model and a more visible authorization process by which to build and encourage lay leadership. **Stewardship** - we lack a clear understanding of this motivating concept at parish level, together with its value in combating the many challenges and stresses which discourage deeper lay engagement and activity.

Based on these hopes and realisations, three SMART goals were agreed for our Cluster:

Catechesis: After Easter, we will offer and encourage formation on the parts of the Mass, particularly to deepen our understanding and love for the Eucharist, our Source and Summit (CCC 1323). Ongoing catechesis, beginning with the Sacraments, will to be offered immediately thereafter.

Stewardship: Growth in our understanding of the principle of stewardship, beginning with a Stewardship Event to introduce core stewardship themes. Fr Jamie will evaluate timing. We hope for Pentecost.

Lay leadership: Formation on our lay vocation and our common priesthood, both from the pulpit and in the parish, to begin ‘now’.

Conclusion: We grew because of this process, both in our parish vision and in our self-understanding. The age groups not present during the evaluation process show the clear need to engage and evangelize our young more fully. Our young people need real ministry opportunities.

There is great concern for our young families. We need planned accompaniment and more ‘follow through’ with families after the Sacraments of Initiation.

We need to bridge the gap between mere attendance and participation for many of our parishioners. Above all, we need to remember our baptismal identity and our mission in Christ.

Clustering has worked for us. Our Lady and St Bernadette’s feel they are ‘catching up’ quickly in the process. There is concern that clustering can at times stifle independence e.g. within the RCIA. However beautiful, Godly new initiatives are emerging, e.g. Tots and Toddlers group as outreach, a new format lay-led bible study, the St Anthony’s prayer group. **Our priests have also formally decided to share formation of the lay, each according to their strengths and giftedness, a great example as we all seek to live out our gifts.**

This process has been a vital reality check.

We face major challenges.

- We are an aging population!
- The ‘Missing’... our youth and young families. It’s time to ask hard questions about why they don’t stay with us. How are we failing them? Our youth don’t feel welcome enough. We don’t ‘appeal’. A hard truth – without sufficient involvement, encouragement and youth leadership, they are bored. More evaluation and action are needed as well, as more love and understanding.
- How do we challenge family busy-ness/commitments? How can we develop a much deeper understanding of what Christ offers? We need to recognise that our families need support and encouragement, first and foremost.
- Ages and stages of faith development – how do we reach out to all in an intentional, *understood*, planned way? Intergenerational, strategic formation – how do we build this?
- We need to courageously address the question – **why** aren’t more people coming forward to be an active part of Christ’s ongoing mission?
- How do we better share what is working well? Recognise good practice? Mentor each other?
- How can we share the treasures of our Catholic Social Teaching with our community?

Reviewing the process, we further recognised a deep need for a clear vision and focussed pastoral planning across the Archdiocese. **These must come from our Bishop.** We ask for his fatherly guidance, aware of his heavy responsibility. Now the discernment process is complete, we ask particularly that he continue to collaborate with the lay. It is vital we continue to discern together with His Grace as we act to engage with the Catholic community and the community as a whole, evangelizing the many rather than the few.

Please see attached appendix.

Falkirk Cluster Final Report to the Archbishop

APPENDIX

Financial Status as at 31st December 2016

	Camelon	Falkirk	Polmont
Operating Income	£37,445.36	£165,262.66	£39,642.45
Ordinary Income	£12,341.50	£23,530.98	£920.00
Hall			
Income from other Parishes		£43,861.73	£40,562.45
Sub Total	£49,786.86	£188,793.64	£1,535.32
Extra ordinary income			
Total Income	£49,786.86	£232,655.37	£42,097.77
Operating expenditure			
House	£3,767.50	£65,934.20	£4,787.56
Church	£6,394.01	£39,044.70	£17,875.72
Hall	£14,500.92	£35,967.16	£3,356.19
General	£1,874.31	£30,376.02	£3,493.66
Assessment	£9,496.00		
Special Collections paid out	£2,653.64	£18,712.73	£4,088.61
Extraordinary Expenditure		£31,587.82	£19,464.00
Sub Total	£38,686.38	£221,622.63	£53,065.74
Surplus for the year	£11,100.48	£11,032.74	-£10,967.97
Current Assets			
Bank Balance	£28,263.42	£140,198.41	£37,951.71
Parish loan to the Archdiocese		£150,486.45	£60,000.00
Parish Loan from the Archdiocese	-£122,000.00		
Outstanding Cheques		-£1,063.27	-£793.16
Net Current Assets / Liabilities	<u>-£93,736.58</u>	<u>£289,621.59</u>	<u>£97,158.55</u>

Explanation of Extraordinary Expenditure

St. Anthony's

During the course of the year, much of the house was redecorated in preparation for the parish sisters to move in.

New chairs were purchased for the parish hall.

Extensive repairs were carried out to the garage (New roof and re-harled).

New carpet on the sanctuary.

The multiple parish costs were increased to reflect the frequency of masses celebrated at St Anthony's.

St Mary of the Angels

A lottery grant of almost £10,000 was received to replace the hall kitchen, however this resulted in a VAT bill of almost £2000.

The parish has a large debt of £122,000 owed to the Archdiocese. This is slowly reducing, only due to the rental income the parish receives from Canon Urquhart.

At present we are investigating replacing a large window screen in the presbytery which is beyond repair. As yet we have no costs but this is likely to run into a large sum of money, which could potentially deplete the bank account.

St Francis Xavier's

The parish received a large refund from Business Stream due to being charged double for water at the hall over several years. This refund was in excess of £10,000. This refund was used to redecorate the hall and in addition a further £20,000 was spent updating the hall lighting, re-polishing the floor and purchasing new tables and chairs