

## The Catholic Church in Birkenhead

### Introduction

1. This document summarises the views expressed at parish meetings held in March 2017 at the request of the Local Pastoral Area (LPA) team.
2. They are arranged in the order of questions asked in the consultation document. A number of other interesting points were raised: they are not described here if they fall outside the power of the church in Birkenhead.
  - A. *Should we just carry on as we are?*
3. There was general agreement that change is inevitable - indeed at St Joseph's Upton, Fr Roger Clarke announced his impending retirement. It is said to be unlikely that there will be a successor.
4. Some questions were raised concerning the role of the LPA. Are its borders correct? How is the LPA team accountable? Has it the power to make reforms - does that not lie with the Bishop?
  - B. *In the past the Church has closed buildings at St Laurence's and Holy Cross. The LPA's view is that, so far as we can, we should try to keep our present church buildings and sustain the communities which use them. Do you agree?*
5. With some dissent, there was approval for the approach suggested by the LPA team.
6. Those who were sceptical of it pointed out that hard decisions should not be shirked. There may be a point at which a building no longer served the people of the area and could not be afforded.
7. Powerful points were made about the pain of closing buildings which local communities (or their parents) had built. They still belonged to the communities and should not depend for their existence on a resident priest. Closed church buildings were a depressing symbol to those passing by.
8. There was concern about putting empty buildings to use and it was suggested that retired priests might live in old presbyteries.
9. The possibility of participating in Mass relayed by webcam was raised.
  - C. *If you disagree, which church buildings should close?*
10. Parishes were reluctant to name other church buildings which should close.
  - D. *If you agree, is there more that lay people could do? If so what?*
11. In a church building lay people could with training conduct funerals. Lay people may only baptise when there is a danger of death. Eucharistic service are only allowed on Sundays when there is no priest available.
12. They can and do give pastoral support in the community. There is a case for paid pastoral workers.

13. It was suggested that lay people should take more responsibility for their church. A formal structure would make this easier and might encourage commitment.
14. Car pools and lifts could be organised if there are fewer Masses.
15. There is a need to evangelise: to look outward, not inward.  
*E. If the mass times at your parish became inconvenient to you, would you stop going or would you go to another Birkenhead parish?*
16. The general answer seems to have been "Yes" but with a number of comments.
17. To an extent this is already happening.
18. There were concerns about the effect on a parish community of individuals "shopping around". On the other hand, gone are the convenient days of a church building just around the corner.
19. Communication was felt to be important. Mass times at other parishes and at Carmel should be available in church porches and/or in newsletter.  
*Or should there be one LPA newsletter?*
20. Mass times in the LPA should be coordinated paying attention to bus routes. There might be for example within the LPA one weekday mass in an evening for those who work during the day.  
*F. It has been suggested that the parishes in Birkenhead might share one office to deal with administration. Can you see any advantages in this?  
Can you see any drawbacks to this?*
21. Reaction was varied.
22. Some were cautious about a central telephone point being a barrier to access to a priest. Others were happier with a central office as a back stop if their own priest could not be reached.
23. Perhaps the majority felt the idea could work. It made sense to centralize to share costs and expertise. There could be one diary for priests and deacons - who could be freed from administrative burdens.

### Conclusion

24. The LPA team will now meet to discuss these views and hope soon to issue a plan in response. The doors of consultation are not closed - please feel free to raise any issue with your parish priest or lay representative.