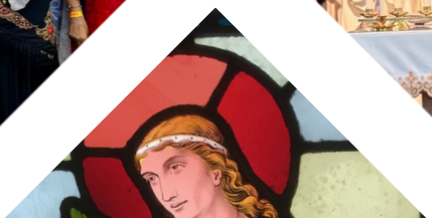

THE DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

INTO THE FUTURE (4TH EDITION)

BISHOP PETER BRIGNALL

SUMMER 2026

Prayer for the Renewal of the Diocese

Loving Father, you sent your Son into the world
to open the gates of heaven
and to teach us to know, love and serve you.
We thank you for those who first proclaimed the Faith in this land,
and for those who have kept alive the flame of faith for generations.
As we look to the future, fill us with the Holy Spirit
that with joy and boldness we may live and proclaim the Gospel.
Give wisdom to our Bishop and priests as they lead us
and nourish us all with the Eucharist
that we may be witnesses of the resurrection;
we ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Mary, Mother of the Church, **pray for us.**
St David, **pray for us.**
St Winifred, **pray for us.**
St Richard Gwyn, **pray for us.**
Ss Asaph and Tudno, **pray for us.**
Ss Beuno and Garmon, **pray for us.**
All you saints of Wales, **pray for us.**

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Introduction

1. It is now two and a half years since the third edition of **Into the Future**, my pastoral plan for the Diocese. As I have reflected with the clergy and people of the Diocese, and following periods of prayer, it is appropriate that this plan has evolved, adapting to changing realities and listening to voices from across the Diocese.

2. As a Diocese we must look to the future and, with a renewed openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, continue **the mission to which we have been called** in the circumstances of our time. This edition of the plan will lay out practical steps we must take as a Diocese, as parishes and as individuals, but I also wish to restate some core theological and pastoral principles that underly this plan.

3. The 2020 letter from the Dicastery for the Clergy "*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelising mission of the Church*" (PCP) provides an important reference point. It presents to all parishes "a call to go out of themselves, offering instruments for reform, even structural, in a spirit of communion and collaboration, of encounter and closeness, of mercy and solicitude for the proclamation of the Gospel." **It is this call which guides our thinking as we move into the future with realism and with hope**.

" For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."
Jeremiah 29.11

4. As I stated in previous editions of this plan, Pope Francis has reminded us that 'the parish is not an outdated institution precisely because it possesses great flexibility; it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 23). At this time and for the foreseeable future we are all deeply aware of the need to use that '**flexibility**' and, with '**openness and missionary creativity**', to remodel the parishes and the Diocese to serve the Church's mission in this time and place.

5. The aim of this Pastoral Plan is to refocus the whole Diocese on the mission entrusted to us, by unleashing the gifts of all the baptised in the service of the Church and the world. Parishes and communities are to be, and are encouraged to be, **evangelising communities** and as they grow, I intend to respond appropriately, similarly if they decline.

Theological Foundations

The Church

6. *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on the Church, teaches that the Church is fundamentally a **mystery and sacrament of salvation**, established by the Father, founded by Christ, and animated by the Holy Spirit (*LG* 1–4). It is the **People of God** (*LG* 9–17), in which all the baptised share a common dignity and participate in Christ's priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission, while also being the **Body of Christ** united under Christ its Head (*LG* 7). The Church of Christ **subsists in** the Catholic Church, a **communion** with a hierarchical structure in which bishops, in union with the Pope, succeed the apostles and serve the unity of the Church (*LG* 18–29).

7. All members of the Church are **called to holiness** (*LG* 39–42), and as a **pilgrim people** journeying together through history toward the Kingdom of God, the Church looks to its final fulfilment in heavenly glory (*LG* 48–51).

8. Although the primary expression of the Church that most Catholics experience is the parish, it is **the Diocese** which the Catechism describes as " a community of the Christian faithful in communion of faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession" (Cat. 833). Particular Churches, of which the Diocese is the most common example, are fully Catholic - and are united in the bond of communion with the Church of Rome, which "presides in charity" over the universal church (St Ignatius of Antioch).

9. It is important that we remember that the Diocese and the parish is called to be a **true Christian community** and not merely a collection of individuals. As Pope Francis reminded young people in *Christus Vivit*, "when we speak of "the people", we are not speaking about the structures of society or the Church, but about all those persons who journey, not as individuals, but as a **closely-bound community of all and for all.**"

10. The fundamental work of the Church is threefold: prayer and worship; the proclamation of the Gospel; and care for those who are poor and vulnerable. The aim of this pastoral plan is to **increase our capacity to fulfil this mission** faithfully.

11. The challenge to **return to the essentials** of the Church's work is not unique to our Diocese. In his recent pastoral visit to Pavia, Pope Leo XIV spoke powerfully of the challenges facing parishes but stressed the importance of bringing all activities **"back to the centre"**, back to Christ. Without this "cornerstone", he warned, our actions risk becoming "scattered" and "focused solely on ourselves and our own efforts." This

process of stripping back the Church's work to its essential core, the Holy Father told us, could mean **"giving up some of the structures and security of the past"** but also embracing synodality as we look the future.

The Work of Rebuilding

12. In his recent encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas,* the Holy Father reminded the Church of **Nehemiah's task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem**, whose story "opens at a time of great vulnerability in the history of ancient Israel" (*Magnifica Humanitas*, 8). As a Diocese, we can relate to the reality of Nehemiah's time, who receives words that his ancestral city is in dire need of restoration.

13. However, as Pope Leo powerfully reminds us, "**before taking action, he fasted, prayed and interceded for the people**. He then asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem and, upon arriving, examined the destroyed areas in silence. **He did not impose solutions from above**. He convened the families, assigned each of them a section of the wall to rebuild, listened to their concerns, coordinated their efforts and addressed any opposition." Likewise, the response to the challenges facing our Diocese is not for me as bishop to impose a way forward 'from above', instead we must develop an attitude of listening which allows us to **do the work of rebuilding together**. This begins, as it did for Nehemiah, with fasting and prayer before any actions can be taken.

14. "The narrative shows how the city is reborn, not through the initiative of one man, but through the shared responsibility of all." Recognising our **shared responsibility** is key to rebuilding the Church of Wrexham. In the Listening Exercises I conducted a few years ago, one of the key themes that emerged was a **call for more adult faith formation and an increase of lay leadership** in the Diocese. The latter depends on the former, and so a renewed focus on adult faith formation at a parish, deanery and Diocesan level is the crucial seedbed for our future growth.

15. We ought not to judge the 'success' of this plan on big programmes, but rather on the simple progress we can make to living more fully our mission as the Church in this place. One key element of this is the call for the lay faithful of the Diocese to **use their baptismal gifts in the service of discipleship and evangelisation**.

Causes for Joy

"Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."
Nehemiah 8.10

16. As I travel around the Diocese and speak to clergy and faithful, I witness **the life and vitality of our churches and parishes**. The faithfulness of clergy and people in maintaining a Catholic presence and witness, sometimes in difficult circumstances, should hearten us - even as we are honest about the challenges we face.

17. Our churches, in their different contexts, are **responding to the call to be places where the Lord is known and loved**; where the liturgy is experienced as an encounter with the wonder of heaven; where young people in our schools and churches grow in love for the Gospel; where people come to know the riches of the Faith and seek to share it with others.

18. I particularly want to acknowledge the encouragement it is to us that, in comparison to previous editions of this plan, we now have **additional priests who have come to serve in the Diocese**. These priests bring new life and joy to the Diocese, and they come to us often as missionaries, many from overseas, with a zeal for the proclamation of the Gospel and a desire to build up the church in North and Mid Wales. As Pope St John Paul II wrote in *Pastores Dabo Vobis, the presence of religious clergy in a diocese "is a source of enrichment for all priests" because it "broadens the horizon of Christian witness" (74)*.

19. We also must acknowledge the witness of those who have **come to the Diocese from other countries and cultures**. They bring great gifts to many of our parishes and enrich our common life.

Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."
Mark 16.15

20. I also write after the largest **Rite of Election** in the history of the Diocese of Wrexham - which reflects a reality seen in many Dioceses of the Catholic Church. Time will tell if this is the beginning of a renewal of our life, or just a one-off event; but, either way, it is a cause for rejoicing that so many people, young and old, from across North and Mid Wales continue to feel the call to belong fully to the Church and respond to the summons of the Gospel.

Restatement of Pastoral Principles

21. Previous editions of this pastoral plan have stated my clear principles for the future of the Diocese. I restate these now, before we turn to look at the situation of the Diocese at the present moment, so that our thinking can be rooted in these pastoral principles.

22. Firstly, all the changes that need to be made must be driven by **pastoral concern and care of all**. In particular, the changes that need to be made will involve some hardship and change, particularly to those in the East of the Diocese, as those in the West had already experienced such change and little more could be done there if the Catholic Church as an institution is to retain a presence. The question that we must continue to ask ourselves is, **"What must I do to enable some other person or family to get to Mass?"**

23. We are a Eucharistic community and the **celebration of Mass on Sundays in every church of the Diocese** continues to be my central aim. As Pope Leo reminded us in April 2026, "Every Sunday the Church invites us to do as the first disciples did: gather together and celebrate the Eucharist. During Mass, we listen to the words of Jesus, we pray, we profess our faith, we share God's gifts in charity, we offer our lives in union with the Sacrifice of Christ. His Body and Blood nourish us, so that we too may become witnesses of his Resurrection. **The Sunday Eucharist is indispensable for the Christian Life**."

24. All our parishes must be open to a **radical change of thinking**. The future of the Church in this Diocese requires the lay faithful to take **co-responsibility** with their priests for the good of the church's mission in each parish. The call to mission "demands that **the historical parish institution not remain a prisoner of immobility or of a worrisome pastoral repetition** but rather it should put into action that outgoing dynamism that through **collaboration** among different parish communities and a **reinforced communion among clergy and laity** will orient itself effectively towards an evangelising mission." *(PCP)*

"God chose what the world considers weak, in order to bring down powerful men. This means that pride has no place in God's presence: his power is strongest when we are weak."

Diocesan Statistics

General Statistics

25. The Diocese covers an area of **8,361 km²**
26. The Catholic population remains approximately **31,200** (4.1% of c.758,600 total).
27. Previously, the Local Authority Population Projections projected a population decline of between1.5% to 2.00 % over the next ten years, however these statistics have been amended, and we can now see **small population growth expected** across every county of the Diocese. That being said, it's important to note that, in all local authorities, the expectation is for a **decline in the number of children and a reduction of the working-age population**.

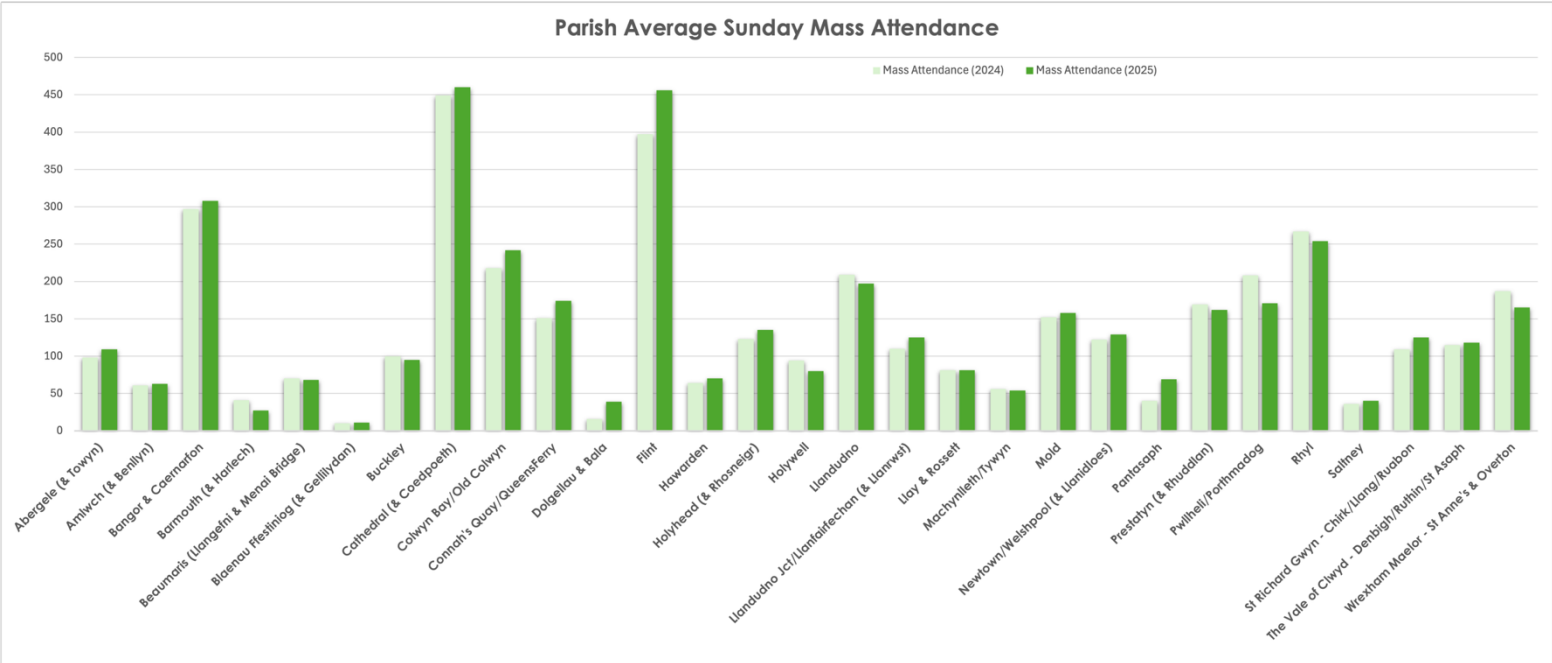
"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes,
and see that the fields are white for harvest."
John 4.35

Diocesan Structure

28. The Diocese is presently made up of **29 parishes with 49 churches**
29. They are divided between **4 Episcopal Vicariates**: Ss Asaph and Tudno; Ss Beuno and Garmon; St Mary and St Winefride.

Mass Attendance

30. Since the last edition in 2023, we have witnessed a **9% increase in Mass attendance** across the Diocese. Although this has not been witnessed everywhere, 18 of the 29 parishes have seen growth in Mass attendance in the past year.
31. Although this has gone some way to reversing the sharp decline from attendance before the **Covid-19 pandemic**, which stood at c. 4,900, we must still acknowledge that the impact of this time remains with us.
32. **Average attendance at Sunday Mass in 2025** is recorded as **4,185**, which is roughly **13% of the Catholic population** of the Diocese.
33. 17 parishes have an **average attendance of over 100 people** - although that means 30% of our parishes do not, even between their multiple churches that can be up to 25 km apart.



Priests, Deacons, Religious and Lay Workers

34. Priests (active in parish ministry):
    a. Diocesan Priests: 6 working in the Diocese and 2 elsewhere
    b. Regular Priests[1]: 18

35. Deacons
    c. 7 deacons are active in parish ministry, while others continue to contribute liturgically and prayerfully in retirement.

36. Institutes of Men Religious:
    d. 2 operating Retreat/ Spirituality houses.
37. Institutes of Women Religious
    e. I Enclosed
    f. A number of active institutes of women religious exist in the Diocese, including two new houses in Ruthin and St Asaph, who contribute in different ways in the pastoral ministry of their parish,
    g. 4 communities operate retreat/guest houses

38. Vocations
    h. Currently there are 2 candidates at various stages in the discernment process for priestly formation and 1 will begin seminary in September.
    i. There are currently 2 men in formation for the permanent diaconate. and 2 further men in the discernment process.

39. Lay Leadership:
    j. There are 2 people in fulltime chaplaincy roles - one in HMP Berwyn and the other in a university and 1 other working as a part-time pastoral associate
    k. There are many lay pastoral assistants operating in our parishes, and others who assist with catechetical formation, particularly in preparation for the sacraments.

Schools

40. We currently operate:
    a. 13 Primary Schools
    b. 1 Catholic secondary school
    c. 1 Anglican-Catholic secondary school
    d. and 1 All-Through schools
41. These serve **4,433 pupils** across the Diocese of whom 1,995 (45%) are baptised Catholics. However, within these 16 schools the number of Catholic pupils ranges from 19% to over 60%.
42. For a fuller National and Diocesan picture, see the CES Census Digest 2024 online.

[1] A regular priest is a priest who belongs to a religious order but is assigned to work in the Diocese by their superior.

ESGOBAETH WRECSAM
DIOCESE OF WREXHAM

OVER 4100 PARISHIONERS AT MASS EACH SUNDAY

1 BISHOP

HOUSES OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES

1 CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL; 1 CATHOLIC-ANGLICAN HIGH SCHOOL & 1 ALL-THROUGH SCHOOL

2 FULL-TIME CHAPLAINS

24 ACTIVE PRIESTS

1 CATHEDRAL

7 ACTIVE DEACONS

29 PARISHES WITH 49 CHURCHES

1 NATIONAL SHRINE

13 CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Core Challenges

43. In the last edition of this pastoral plan, I highlighted three core areas of challenge that threaten the viability of the Diocese over the next 5-10 years. It is these three areas that, like Nehemiah, we need to honestly survey before we can begin rebuilding. Even with the encouraging signs of growth and new life, these **challenges remain and will need to be addressed seriously** in the coming months and years. Before looking to the future, I reiterate these challenges again with updated statistics.

Personnel

44. In five years' time, only **6 of our current diocesan priests** will remain under canonical retirement age (75). That means that I will not be able to make appointments to those roles that are ideally filled by diocesan priests when the present incumbent retires, become sick, or dies.

45. We are fortunate, as I mentioned above, that additional regular priests have come to the Diocese as missionaries, but the **cost of sustaining that ministry** must still be met by parishes with limited income.

"And now we beseech you, Lord, in our weakness;
to grant us these helpers that we need
to exercise the priesthood that comes from the Apostles."
(From the Prayer of Consecration at Presbyteral Ordinations)

46. Already it is not possible to maintain many of those structures that underpin the working of the Church - at both a Diocesan and Parish level.

47. For some years there has been **no Diocesan Pastoral Council**, and it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain Vicariate Pastoral Councils. Some parishes struggle to maintain a Parish Advisory Council or even mandatory Parish Finance Committees and to find the other laity that are necessary for Safeguarding, good liturgy, sacramental preparation, etc.

48. **Diocesan consultative and advisory councils/committees**, e.g. Liturgy, Education and Formation, Evangelisation & Mission, Christian Unity, Youth, Family Life, Vocations Promotion struggle to get members and commonly fail to be able to recruit those with particular knowledge or expertise to direct and lead.

Financial

49. Financially the Diocese currently has **sufficient assets** to continue its mission for this period as long as there are no unpredicted and major repair expenses on churches or presbyteries.

50. With an average attendance of just under 4,200, we cannot sustain the current parish infrastructure in the long-term with an **average per capita contribution of under £6 a week**. The levy for central services takes 37% of parish income, and then there are the costs of a resident priest and the maintenance of the fabric of our buildings, which leads to a deficit in many parishes.

51. The **schools' development programme** also represents a financial challenge and threat, as in Wales the Diocese is subject to a 15% contribution to capital costs. In the longer term, investments would no longer be able to cover such expenditure resulting in the need to sell property. For example, the new primary school in Bangor will open in September and the Diocese has had to contribute a substantial amount of money to this new build.

Property

52. As I explained in greater detail in the last edition of this pastoral plan, the property portfolio of the Diocese falls into three main categories: churches and halls, presbyteries, and land.

53. **Civil legislation has become increasingly demanding**, and the cost of leaving properties empty has increased; as have the costs associated with changing the use of a building or making structural changes.

54. Added to this, **CADW have also "listed" 7 additional churches** in the Diocese, bringing the total to **16**. This has the immediate consequence of increasing the costs of repair and maintenance as surveys, plans and the work itself have to be done by conservation qualified architects and building contractors. It also removes any financial benefit to leaving a building unused, as the cost associated with this remain substantial. In these cases, **the options available to the Bishop and Diocesan trustees are severely limited**.

55. Post-Covid, the **availability of grants** for building work has decreased and the competitive nature of the process often requires substantial time and particular expertise in this field. However, those listed church buildings may still be eligible for grant-funding.

Progress so far

57. Since the first edition of the pastoral plan, progress has been made in a number of significant areas.

58. Firstly, a number of the **amalgamations** that were originally proposed have been completed:
    1. St Anne's, Wrexham with Overton - now known as the Wrexham Maelor Parish
    2. Bangor with Caernarfon
    3. Old Colwyn with Colwyn Bay
    4. Hawarden with Saltney
    5. Ruthin, Denbigh and St Asaph have merged to become the Vale of Clwyd Parish
    6. Prestatyn with Rhuddlan
    7. Mold with Buckley
    8. The Churches in Machynlleth, Tywyn, Barmouth, Harlech, Dolgellau, Bala, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Gellilydan are in the process of becoming a single, large territory named the **Parish of Merionethshire**.

59. An exciting and creative solution has been found for the deteriorating church building in **Newtown**.

60. Some parishes have also responded to the direction to **consolidate Mass schedules**, thus uniting the parish community more closely and freeing priests to support one another at times of sickness or leave.

"I will give you thanks, O Lord, for all the world to hear, I will sing your praises among the pagans; where your people gather, I will join in singing your praise."

Looking to the future

61. The aim of this edition of the pastoral plan is to pose **questions that have to be answered**. Given the facts we have discussed and the principles I have outlined, how do we rebuild together?

62. In order for us to inculcate the **radical change of thinking** that is required, this edition of the pastoral plan proposes considerations at three different levels:

    e. For the **Parish**: how does our parish promote co-responsibility and ensure that we have the resources to sustain the life of our community into the future?

    f. For the **Diocese**: how can we most efficiently order our life to ensure that a living Catholic presence can be maintained across the Diocese, and we can answer the call to mission effectively?

    g. For the **individual**: how can I take responsibility for my own growth in faith and contribute to the apostolic work of the church?

Next Steps: Parishes

63. At the end of the 2020 Instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy on *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish* (PCP), we are reminded that while the parish "remains an **indispensable institution** to encounter Christ and to have a living relationship with Him and with our brothers and sisters in the faith, it is likewise true that the Parish must constantly face changes taking place in today's culture and in the existential reality of persons, in order to **explore creatively new ways and methods that allow it to be at the height of its primary function**, that is, being a force of evangelisation."

What is our mission as a parish?

64. In the opening theological section of this document, I laid out the central tenants of the Catholic understanding of the Church and the three fundamental tasks entrusted to the Church: **to pray and worship; to evangelise; and to care for the poor**.

65. Within this broad mandate, **every one of our parishes must discern and articulate what their particular mission is** in the context they live and serve. A forum, as discussed in the final section of this document, must be held in every parish to listen to one another and articulate a shared vision for the mission of that parish over the next ten years.

66. Similar forums can then be held at a Diocesan level, so that every parishioner has a clear sense of the mission of their parish and how this relates to the broader mission of the Church in this Diocese.

67. In order to have effective lay leadership in our Diocese and parishes, we must be attentive to the need for ongoing formation for all parishioners. Parishes and deaneries must give thought to how **ongoing formation is provided for in our context**, and what resources or opportunities the Diocese can provide to strengthen and enhance this.

68. The smaller churches of the Diocese may want to use the opportunity of this forum to discuss the model of **Small Christian Communities**. This is explored in more detail in the addendum to this pastoral plan.

Finance Committees and Pastoral Councils

69. In order to help our parishes fulfil their mission and encourage co-responsibility and the use of the gifts of all the baptised, I repeat my instruction that **Finance Committees** (Can. 537) **and Pastoral Councils** (Can. 536) **ought to be functioning in every parish.**

70. As Pope Leo XIV powerfully reminded us in *Magnifica Humanitas*, "**Subsidiarity** becomes the guiding principle for governance and

pastoral life. It involves recognizing and supporting the faithful and intermediary ecclesial organizations as they carry out their responsibilities, valuing charisms and skills and avoiding any form of paternalism that suffocates evangelical freedom. In practical terms, the **participation of the baptized in decision-making processes and their shared responsibility in the mission** are achieved through genuine, rather than merely nominal, participatory bodies." (*MH*, 87)

"Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."
1 Thessalonians 5.11

71. These two vital councils should be for **the whole parish**, and not just for parts thereof.

72. Priests are reminded that the faithful have the right and duty to do what they can to spread the message of salvation, and to make known to their pastors their views on matters pertaining to the good of the Church. As Pope Leo XIV told the Synod's 16th Ordinary Council, "**synodality is a style, an attitude that helps us to be Church**, promoting authentic experiences of participation and communion".

73. These bodies are **consultative and advisory**, but parish priests are reminded that, in some matters, canon law requires that consultation. However, the parish priests are ultimately responsible for the parishes entrusted to them and that leadership should not be undermined.

    As *PCP* wisely states, "it is necessary to avoid two extremes: on one hand, that of the Parish Priest presenting to the Pastoral Council decisions already made, or without the required information beforehand, or convoking it seldom only pro forma. on the other hand, that of the Council in which the Parish Priest is only one of the members, deprived *de facto* of his role as Pastor and Leader of the community".

74. Those members of the lay faithful called to serve on these bodies are reminded that they should not be a forum for saying *'Father should do x or y'* or *'the parish should do more of this'* but a reminder that **"every member of the faithful is created for the building up of the whole Body"** and that every member of the faithful "participates in the mission of the Church" *(PCP, 2020)*.

Financial Viability and Church Buildings

75. We must also ensure that **regular maintenance** is undertaken in all our church buildings to prevent costly repair bills in the future. There are **8 parishes that show little or no maintenance in their expenditure** for the previous year and this is a cause for concern.

76. I would like to **express my gratitude** for all those who already contribute generously to the life of the church. It is that faithful generosity, both financially and in other forms of service, that sustains the life of our Diocese. This includes the generosity of the parishes to the various charities and agencies beyond the Diocese. These "second collections" remind us that we are part of the Universal Church and fulfil the scriptural command to "contribute to the needs of the saints" (Romans 12.13).

77. Currently, the average weekly offertory per attendee at Mass in the Diocese is **£5.76**. This includes a substantial range - there are 3 large parishes where giving is less than £4 per person each week, and 3 other parishes where average weekly giving exceeds £10. If we are to guarantee the sustainability of our parishes, the **lay faithful must be encouraged to see generous and realistic giving as a duty in response to God's generous love.**

78. Of course, these calculations of average weekly giving are not a perfect reflection of reality - the Mass count includes people of all ages, and so parishes with lots of children (who are obviously not contributing financially) will show a lower per capita figure. However, these broad trends are worth noting:

Parishes where per capita weekly giving is **below £5**	5
Parishes where per capita weekly giving is **between £5 and £8**	16
Parishes where per capita weekly giving is **greater than £8**	8

79. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us: "The **promotion of the practice of stewardship is important for the mission of the Church** and for the spiritual well-being of each individual Christian. Everyone benefits from the sacrificial gift one makes of his time, talent and treasure. Therefore, please accept my encouragement for your efforts and my prayers that your upcoming conference will be a stimulus to the practice of stewardship in the Church."

80. We also must grapple with the very real challenges of moving into an increasingly **cashless society**. Many of us do not carry cash in the same way as we used to, and so we need to be more intentional about providing opportunities to give through other means.

81. Those parishes that have not done so, would also benefit from encouraging people to move to forms of giving that allow for the **collection of Gift Aid** and ensure a consistent and regular income.

Online Presence

82. Research for this pastoral plan has revealed that **6 of our parishes have no discernible or regularly updated online presence**. In these cases, even the entries on the Diocesan website lack the times and locations

of Sunday Masses.

83. Given changes that will need to be made in some places to Mass times, **parishes must ensure that they are communicating to those beyond their walls the times and locations of the Mass**. This can be done simply through the diocesan website, or parishes can create their own low-cost website. This acts as a digital window into their life and can be both practical and serve as a tool of evangelisation.

Consolidation of Mass Times

84. As previously discussed, the **consolidation of Mass times** is an important element of this pastoral plan. Where it is possible, doing this unites the parish community more closely, supports the welfare of our priests, as well as freeing them to support one another at times of sickness or leave.

85. I remind all our priests of the provisions of Canon Law with regards to the **number of Masses that a priest is permitted to celebrate**:

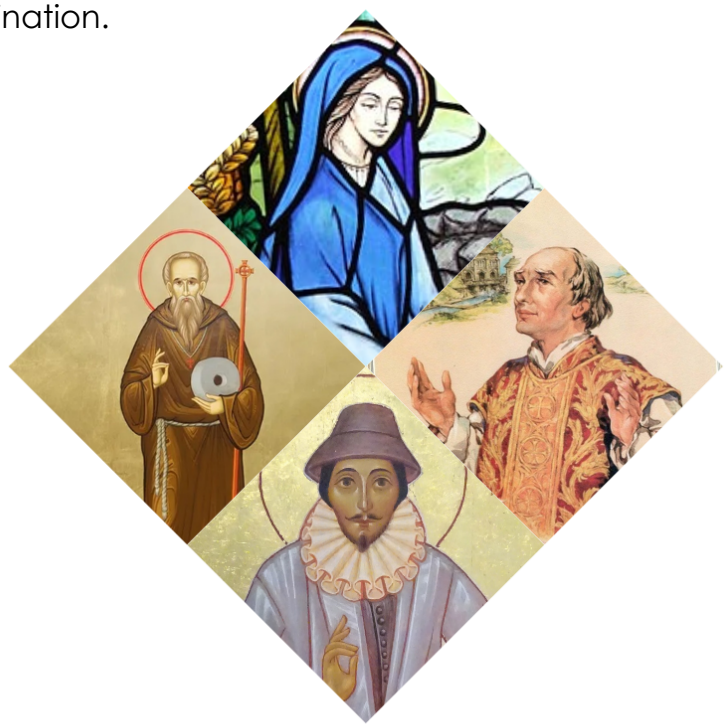
    a. Can. 905 §1. A priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except in cases where the law permits him to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day.

    b. §2. If there is a shortage of priests, the local ordinary can allow priests to celebrate twice a day for a just cause, or if pastoral necessity requires it, even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

86. Priests who regularly celebrate more than two Masses on a Sunday *(defined as the liturgical day, and so encompassing the Vigil Mass)* must attempt to **make arrangements with neighbouring priests** if pastoral necessity means that the number of Masses cannot be reduced. If this is not possible, this is to be discussed with me as the Ordinary and I will make a determination.

"Do not be afraid to be saints. Follow the saints because those who follow them will become saints."

Pope St John Paul II



Next Steps: The Diocese

87. Following forums in each of our parishes and Episcopal Vicariates, there is an urgent need for **a forum(s) of the whole Diocese** to address the question of what our mission is today. This was last done in 1992, at which point the Diocesan Pastoral Assembly formulated a Mission Statement that is still available on our website.

88. Charity Law imposes on the Diocese a duty to use our resources effectively for the fulfilment of our charitable purpose - which is summed up as "the advancement of the Roman Catholic Church in the Diocese of Wrexham and elsewhere." If we were to think of the Diocese in purely business terms, we have to ask **whether the current deployment of resources is the most efficient way to fulfil that core purpose**.

89. As a Diocese, we have to be mindful of the costs associated with maintaining the mission and ministry of our parishes. The **cost to a parish of having a resident priest is around £20,000 a year** - this covers the essential costs of utility bills, housekeeping, insurance, priest's allowance, and other expenses. Parishes or groups of churches must therefore be mindful that this requires weekly giving, including reclaimed Gift Aid, of **£385 a week**. Added to this are the additional costs of the Diocesan levy, utility bills, insurance and other vital costs, as well as the cost of maintaining and repairing our various buildings.

90. At the time of writing, there are 12 parishes whose annual giving does not meet the cost of a resident priest and the Diocesan levy, and a further parish whose position is very precarious. Added to this, parishes have to fund the essential running costs of the churches and the ongoing maintenance of their buildings.

91. Since the First Edition of this pastoral plan, **7** additional churches have become **Listed Buildings** - now **16 in total**. This entails additional costs for repair and maintenance but also limits our options for the future of the church - as even closure or modification requires substantial investment.

92. Those **parishes unable to meet the costs of maintaining ministry** in its present form will have to be prepared for serious conversations about their future viability and whether further amalgamation or church closure (*reducing a church to profane but not sordid use*) is required. In these cases, consultation will be undertaken with the Priests' Council and that church/parish in order to discern the way forward in accordance with the norms of Canon Law.

93. With the **consolidation of Mass times** having been done, one priest will be able to take on responsibility for two (or more) parishes thereby

enabling communities to remain Eucharistic and retain the focal point of their church. I remain convinced that **amalgamation of parishes is far preferable** to the closure of churches on pastoral grounds. This gathering of a larger community allows strengthens the life of the parish and the number of people needed to sustain good liturgy, pastoral care, sacramental preparation, and safeguarding.

94. Given the current profile of the Diocesesan presbyterate outlined above, we must address seriously the question **of how many incardinated priests we will have in ten years' time** and how this impacts the life of the Diocese.

Note on The Diocesan Levy

With the increase of the Diocesan Levy in 2026/27, it is a good opportunity to restate how this money is used to support the life of every parish in the Diocese. Please note that these proportions change slightly every year.

17% funds the costs of maintaining and strengthening Catholic education in the Diocese and our chaplaincy at Bangor University.

9% funds pastoral support and the welfare of our clergy, particularly those who have retired from active ministry.

5% funds the vital work of our safeguarding team.

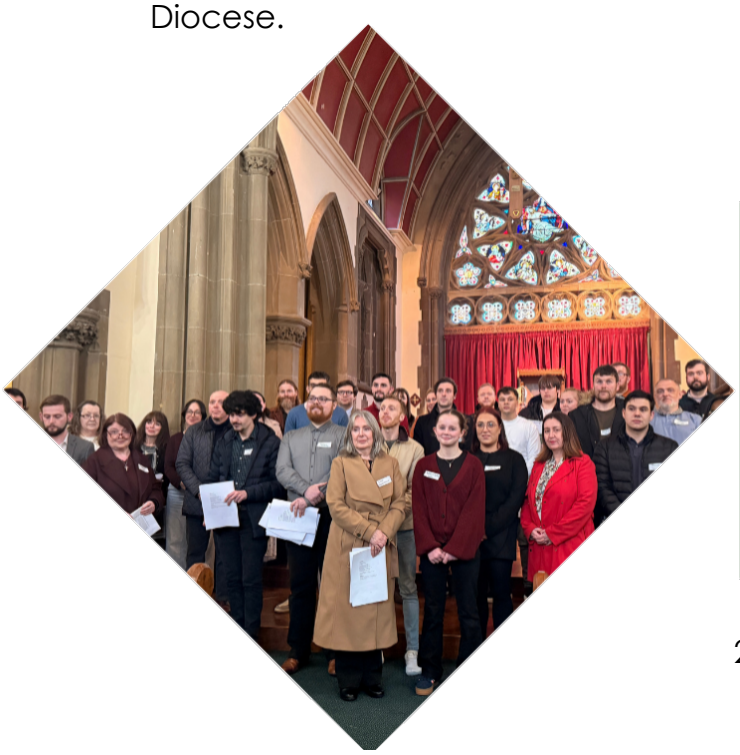
3% funds the initial and ongoing formation of clergy.

4.5% funds the ministry of the Bishop and the work of Bishop's House.

5% is a contribution towards the ministry of our poor parishes.

1% represents our contribution to the CaTEW (the Catholic Trust) which supports the activities of the Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales and its national agencies and activities across England and Wales.

The remaining amount (around 50%) funds the central services of the Curial Staff, the work of our commissions, and other key running costs of the Diocese.



"Today, we feel strongly that we must return to this participation of all the baptized in witnessing to and proclaiming the Gospel."
Pope Leo XIV

Next Steps: As Individuals

95. Vatican II's decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, ends with this solemn exhortation which I repeat now to all the lay faithful of our Diocese.

    The most holy council, then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit... Through this holy synod, the **Lord renews His invitation to all the laity to come closer to Him every day**, recognizing that what is His is also their own (Phil. 2:5), to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission. Once again, He sends them into every town and place where He will come (cf. Luke 10:1) so that they may show that they are **co-workers in the various forms and modes of the one apostolate of the Church**, which must be constantly adapted to the new needs of our times. Ever productive as they should be in the work of the Lord, they know that their labour in Him is not in vain (cf. 1 Cor. 15:58).

Prayer

96. Prayer is the "raising of one's mind and heart to God" (St John Damascene) and is the necessary foundation for every step that we take. Prayer is the life-breath of the Christian. Nothing is possible without it and **the continuing life of the Diocese, as in the past, will depend upon the life of prayer of us all**.

97. We are fortunate that the Diocese is home to a number of religious communities who actively **promote spiritual formation** and make provision for individuals and groups to make **retreats**. I encourage all the lay faithful of the Diocese to explore what is available to deepen their own relationship with the Lord.

98. **Pilgrimage** is another way to develop this area of our life as individuals and as a Diocese. We continue to promote pilgrimage to the **National Shrine of St Winefride in Holywell**, to the Cathedral for the annual celebration of **St Richard Gwyn** and to the other ancient holy places in the Diocese. We also hope that the re-launch of the **Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes** will be a source of spiritual renewal for many.

99. At the heart of this pastoral plan is the **centrality of the Eucharist**, which is the most profound encounter with Christ and is the greatest prayer that we can offer. Although there will, of necessity, be some reduction of the number of Masses offered each Sunday - it is my firm conviction that each church in the Diocese will continue to have a celebration of the Eucharist each Sunday.

Prayer for Vocations

100. In our prayer, I encourage all members of the Diocese to **pray regularly for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and to religious life**; as well as to ask for the grace to discern and accept our own vocation from the Lord.

101. This year, on Vocations Sunday, Pope Leo XIV offers us words of great encouragement: "**Listen to the voice of the Lord who invites you to a full and fruitful life**, calling you to put your talents to use *(cf. Mt 25:14-30)* and to unite your limitations and weaknesses with the glorious cross of Christ. Through the intimacy of His friendship, you will discover how to give of yourselves, whether through marriage, the priesthood, the permanent diaconate, or consecrated life."

102. I commend for use across the Diocese this prayer for vocations, from the Parish of Wrexham Maelor:

Bountiful Father,
your Son, urged us to pray for labourers for your harvest.
Grant, we pray, an abundance of priests
and consecrated men and women
to care for the needs of your Church in the Diocese of Wrexham.
Through the intercession of Our Lady of Sorrows,
pour out your Holy Spirit upon our families.
May we encourage each person to discern and follow
the vocation to which you have called them.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Formation

103. Formation, rooted in prayer, leads us to **be ever closer to Christ and conformed to Him**. Formation requires a deeper understanding of **Scriptures**, especially the Gospels. **Catechesis** is one element of Formation, grounded in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and enabling us to develop an understanding of the teachings of the Magisterium. The **celebration of the Liturgy** is, itself, a means of formation, centred on the celebration of the Eucharist on Sundays. Formation is life-long, for the journey to closer conformity to Christ is the very purpose of our lives.

104. I encourage all the lay faithful of the Diocese to see this work of **formation as a vital element in all our lives**. We cannot fulfil the mission to which we have been called without realising the need for life-long formation.

105. Formation already **takes place in many ways across the Diocese**. The Sunday Homily, Catechesis for the Sacraments of Initiation are key moments of formation for most of the faithful in our Diocese. However, there are ways this can be developed in the life of each of our parishes

or Episcopal Vicariates. For those parishes and Episcopal Vicariates that are more geographically diffuse, the concept of **Small Christian Communities**, explained in more detail in the addendum, may provide a beneficial model of ongoing formation to explore.

106. In my role as Lead Bishop of the **Biblical Apostolate** for England and Wales I wrote: "I encourage all Catholics in England and Wales to deepen their love of the Bible, and to find creative ways to encounter Christ in the Scriptures, that we may witness to the Word in the world."
    a. The Biblical Apostolate has produced a range of resources that are available for all on our website www.godwhospeaks.uk/, and I **encourage all in the Diocese to make use of these resources to deepen your own love and knowledge of the scriptures**, that we may be "*witnesses to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

107. Formation occurs on an individual basis, in the parish and, for young people, in a Catholic School but is also must take place in **the context of family life.** The family, as Catholic doctrine acclaims, really is the domestic church and parents are the "priests of the domestic" (*Familiaris Consortio*). And so, **formation in and for the family is a key part of our growth as disciples**. Parents in particular are called to be more actively and creatively supporting as the first and best of teachers in the school of love, that is the home. I encourage individuals and parishes to **seek out initiatives and associations** that can help to strengthen the family as a key arena of formation for both young and old alike.

Stewardship

108. As the statistics recounted above have highlighted, there is a need for all the faithful to consider their stewardship of the gifts that God has given to them and how to **respond in generosity**.

109. The fifth Precept of the Church ("You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church") means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability (Cat. 2043).

"Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might... But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."
1 Chronicles 29.12-14

110. Pope Benedict XVI, speaking before his election as Pope to the National Catholic Stewardship Council, spoke of three pillars of sacrificial giving that benefit both the Church and the individual. He reminded us that all we have is a gift from God, and returning a portion of those gifts is an act of gratitude.

The three pillars Pope Benedict emphasised were:

a. **Time**, including our prayer, worship, participation in parish life
b. **Talent**, our skills and abilities used to advance the kingdom
c. **Treasure**, financial resources given according to our ability

111. I encourage all the faithful of the Diocese, to consider how they are using their time, talent and treasure to serve the life of their parish and the Diocese.

Good Will

112. Some of the changes we have already made, and the questions posed by this edition of the pastoral plan, will require all of us - priests, deacons and the lay faithful - to accept that **changes will need to be made**, and **good will** and **patience** will be required. We must approach one another with charity and a desire for the whole Church of Wrexham to flourish, even if that means embracing new things. Safeguarding the future of our Diocese will require **a preparedness to make things work with flexibility and a spirit of mutual support**.

113. Parishes which have been restructured will have to **learn and build a new identity** as they increase in territorial size from what they were before. Priests will have to think of their parishes as being in two or three centres not just the one they were accustomed to, with smaller communities.

114. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews encourages his readers in the same challenge:

*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to **stir up one another to love and good works**, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*
Hebrews 10.23-25

Moving Forward

As we said in the theological introduction to this edition of the Pastoral Plan, the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was not done by imposing a solution from the top-down but by developing an attitude of listening which allowed the whole community to **do the work of rebuilding together**.

Having produced this fourth edition of Into The Future, it is now for us as individuals, parishes and as a whole Diocese to address the questions I have posed and **discern together a way forward**. This will be done through Synodal Gatherings first in parishes and then as a whole Diocese.

Using the Synodal Model

The format of these parish conversations takes its inspiration from the **'conversations in the Spirit'**, a method of discernment that is used widely in the Church following the Synod on Synodality. This method allows all voices to be heard, grounds our conversation in the Holy Spirit, and opens us all to new perspectives. Our response to the questions posed here should not be the cause of arguments or of people talking over each other, but rather this method will allow a range of views to be expressed.

Parish meetings convened to discuss the Pastoral plan should broadly follow this pattern:

- Open with **prayer and reading from scripture** with silence for reflection.

- **Listening and participation** on each of the questions posed by this document. Each time, everyone should be given the opportunity to speak with their initial response. This can then be followed by a moment of silence and reflection before everyone is asked again what has struck them or if any themes have emerged.

- This range of responses can be **captured in a few short bullet points** in response to each question and returned to me where they will feed into the meeting of the whole Diocese.

These are not arguments or debates, which only serve to shut down the reluctant, but **a chance for all of us to discern together how God is calling us** into the future. It is important that all those attending have read the Pastoral Plan and begun to prayerfully consider their response to the questions posed.

Questions

These are the central questions that the whole diocese is being asked to consider in its Synodal Gatherings in response to this Pastoral Plan.

Priests are asked to submit responses to the questions 'for parishes' below, following their parishes meetings. These need only be words and phrases that have arisen from the meetings.

For Parishes

- What is the mission of our parish? (63)

- How is the ongoing formation of adults undertaken in our parish or deanery and what would help individuals in their ongoing formation? (65)

- Do we have in place a Finance Committee and Pastoral Council which promotes the co-responsibility of priest and people for the mission of the Church? (66, 67)

- How do we promote stewardship of time, talent and treasure amongst the faithful? (73, 74, 75)

For the Diocese

- What is the mission of the Diocese of Wrexham in 2026? (81)

- Which parishes are struggling to maintain the cost of mission and ministry, and how can this be resolved? (86, 87)

- How many incardinated priests will we have in ten years time, and what are the implications of this for those roles ideally held by Diocesan clergy? (41, 88)

For Individuals

- How am I nourishing my own life of prayer and worship? (91, 92, 93, 94)

- Do I pray regularly for vocations and for the grace to discern my calling from the Lord? (95, 96)

- Do I see the work of ongoing formation as a vital element of my life, and are there ways I can grow as a disciple? (99)

- How do I use my time, talent and treasure to serve the life of my parish? (105)

- How can I engage in the process of consultation with a spirit of good will and patience, mindful of the question: '*What must I do to enable some other person or family to get to Mass?*'? (19, 106)

Addendum: Small Christian Communities

As an addendum to this pastoral plan, I want to introduce the idea of **Small Christian Communities (SCCs)**, which may be beneficial for our smaller and more geographically dispersed parishes.

The Catholic model of Small Christian Communities, also known as Small Ecclesial Communities, is a pastoral approach in which **a parish is organised into small groups of believers** who meet regularly for prayer, Scripture reflection, mutual support, and service. They do not replace parishes but create a "cell structure" for the faithful to live their faith in a more personal, participatory, and missionary way.

The model has been developed most extensively in Africa, particularly through the work of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), but this model has also brought **new vitality** to other parts of the Church. Indeed, Pope St John Paul II endorsed this model in *Redemptoris Missio* when he said:

"A phenomenon rapidly developing in the young Churches… is that of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, also known by other names. These are groups of Christians who gather together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis and discussion of human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment. ***These communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a 'civilization of love.'"***

Theological Basis

The theological basis of SCCs lies in the Church's understanding of herself as the People of God, the Body of Christ, and a communion of believers. We see this reality most clearly in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that the first Christians met in homes, devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, prayer, and care for one another (c.f. Acts 2:42–47).

SCCs seek to recover something of this early Christian pattern by enabling people to gather in local communities rather than limiting the practice of the Faith to attendance at Sunday Mass.

How do SCCs operate?

A typical SCC consists a handful of members or households who meet weekly or fortnightly in a home, parish hall, or other local venue. Meetings usually include:

- A welcome and informal fellowship;
- Reading and reflection on the Sunday Gospel or another biblical passage;
- Sharing how the Word of God relates to daily life;
- Intercessory prayer;

- Discussion of local needs and opportunities for service;
- Practical support for members experiencing illness, bereavement, unemployment, or other difficulties.

Leadership of these groups is normally exercised by lay members, often on a rotating basis, with the parish priest providing overall pastoral oversight, sacramental ministry, and theological guidance. In this way SCCs **embody the Catholic principle of co-responsibility**, where clergy and laity work together for the mission of the Church.

In this way, these small communities bear witness to Pope Francis' teaching in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he emphasises the importance of communities where **people can know one another personally, share faith, and become missionary disciples** rather than passive recipients of pastoral care.

SCCs in the Diocese of Wrexham

The context of the Diocese of Wrexham makes the SCC model particularly attractive, especially in our rural parishes.

One of the greatest challenges of our times is **social isolation**. In villages and other small towns, Catholics may feel that they are only loosely connected to parish life, particularly if they live some distance from the church building. **SCCs create local networks of belonging**. Instead of seeing the parish only once a week, members encounter fellow Catholics regularly in their own neighbourhoods. This can strengthen friendships, reduce loneliness among older parishioners, and provide practical assistance during times of illness or bereavement.

Deepening ongoing formation

We have discussed in this edition the importance of ongoing formation for all the faithful. SCCs encourage Scripture reading, theological reflection, and discussion, helping the faithful to **grow in confidence and understanding**. In those places where clergy have responsibility for several parishes, SCCs allow ongoing formation to occur even when the priest cannot be present at every meeting.

SCCs naturally **develop lay leadership**, training people to lead prayer, facilitate discussion, organise pastoral care, and coordinate local outreach. Such leadership remains firmly within the Catholic understanding of the parish, while enabling priests to focus on the sacramental and pastoral responsibilities that only they can fulfil.

Supporting missionary outreach

As the statistics above bear witness, our Diocese contains many communities with little regular contact with the Catholic Church, including lapsed Catholics, those with no experience of Christian faith, and newcomers from other parts of the UK or abroad.

SCCs have been shown to provide a **gentle point of contact for those exploring faith or returning to the Church**. A neighbour or friend invited to a home-based Scripture group may be more willing to attend than to begin their journey by entering a church building for the Sunday Mass. In this sense SCCs can become **instruments of evangelisation**.

Strengthening bilingual communities

The cultural character of North Wales also offers unique possibilities. SCCs can meet in Welsh or English, helping to **preserve the Church's connection with Welsh language and culture**. In smaller villages where community identity remains strong, SCCs can integrate Catholic faith with local traditions, festivals, and charitable initiatives. They may also collaborate with other Christian groups on issues such as food poverty, loneliness, environmental stewardship, and support for families.

Conclusions

A realistic implementation of this model could involve a parish identifying several local clusters of households and inviting volunteers to host monthly or fortnightly gatherings. The **meetings could follow a simple pattern** based on the Sunday Gospel, requiring minimal resources and allowing easy participation. Parish priests could provide a short reflection each week, or material from the Catholic Biblical Apostolate or another source could be used, while periodic gatherings of all SCCs would maintain unity across the parish.

Digital communication could also support the model. In sparsely populated areas, members who cannot travel easily could join meetings online, while younger families might use messaging groups for prayer intentions and practical support.

The SCC model is not without difficulties. Some Catholics may be unfamiliar with sharing personal experiences of faith, and there may be concerns about maintaining sound Catholic teaching. These challenges can be addressed through the formation of leaders, clear parish oversight, and the use of resources produced by the priest or the Biblical Apostolate. SCCs should always **remain integrated with the sacramental life of the parish**, especially the Sunday Eucharist, which remain the source and summit of Christian life.

Small Christian Communities represent a Catholic, parish-centred model of renewal rooted in Scripture, the early Church, and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. By **fostering prayer, Scripture reflection, mutual support, lay leadership, and evangelisation**, SCCs can transform small congregations from groups of individuals who attend Mass into **communities of disciples** who know, support, and witness to Christ together.

For the smaller churches of our Diocese, the SCC model offers a practical and theologically grounded way of **strengthening parish life** and ensuring that Catholic communities remain vibrant, resilient, and outward-looking in the years ahead.