

Cluster Parishes Together

Report from the proposed cluster of Peebles, Innerleithen, Galashiels, Melrose and Selkirk

A report prepared by the Cluster Planning Team

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Summary

The parishes have engaged with the process of reviewing their work and future potential of a cluster in a thoughtful and considered way. Given the challenges presented by the geography of the parishes in the Borders, it was agreed that the existing local parish communities need to be maintained. The consensus of the group is that a cluster model has the potential for two things: (1) to strengthen the work of the individual parishes by building a robust interface between the Archdiocese and the parishes; (2) to promote and support the sharing of faith life among the parishes.

Signs of vibrancy indicating potential for growth have been identified and a number of pastoral goals agreed.

Cluster structure

Geography

A consistent theme of discussions was that pastoral provision in the Borders is determined largely by geography. The five communities of the proposed cluster are dispersed in a large area of rural Scotland that has limited infrastructure in terms of roads and public transport. The existing clusters of Peebles and Innerleithen and of Galashiels, Melrose and Selkirk have worked reasonably well up to now. Combining them would create a very large cluster with a distance from Peebles to Melrose of 25 miles, and the road is not quick. The distance between the outer boundaries of the parishes is closer to 40 miles.

Challenges

Such dispersion presents various challenges for cluster working. Travelling for cluster meetings or events, especially on dark winter nights is an unattractive prospect and limited to those with cars unless special provision for transport is made. Travelling across the cluster for Sunday Mass would be an unrealistic expectation of congregations of which significant numbers are elderly.

There are currently three priests serving within the cluster with one retired priest and one retired deacon also residing. One of the priests, however, is split between two clusters, serving Selkirk in one cluster and Hawick in another. This is not sustainable. The establishment of cluster working will likely require significant engagement of the clergy in collaboration with the laity to build momentum. This will be most effective where individual clergy are able to focus on a single cluster.

Opportunities

In spite of the challenges it is recognised that cluster working presents significant opportunities for the parishes to share resources and talents, to focus training, and to coordinate pastoral programmes. There has been an encouraging level of engagement in the present consultation across the parishes and there is willingness to try and realise the opportunities that clustering presents to grow our communities in faith.

Realism

The opportunity in the Borders is to promote clustering of parishes for the sharing of resources and talents, to focus training activities that develop and sustain faith and leadership among the laity and to coordinate pastoral programmes that can both foster cluster cohesion for the support and sharing of faith life and increase the vibrancy of the existing local parish communities which should be maintained.

Cluster activities

Coordination

It will be important to establish a Cluster Council/Management Team made up of PPC representatives to discuss, plan, initiate and energise cluster activities. It should also act as a conduit for communication within the cluster and also between the cluster and other bodies including the Archdiocese, other clusters and the media.

Communication

Set up a cluster website and social media presence to facilitate shared newsletters, communicate with the press, provide information exchange and dissemination, share good practice, promote events and celebrations. Modern technology can be used to overcome geographical challenges, e.g., video conferencing. We also recognise a duty of care to those parishioners who do not have internet access and we would need to devise strategies for including them in communications.

Training

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Encouraging leadership and developing the knowledge and practical skills of lay people in a variety of parish activities will be essential for building up the parishes at a time when clergy are increasingly stretched. Clustering offers the opportunity to focus the provision of training in many aspects of parish life including liturgy, music, catechesis, sacramental preparation, RCIA, finance, fabric, health and safety and safeguarding. Uptake of training will be greatly encouraged by having it take place within the local area of the cluster and not in Edinburgh all the time as at present.

Cluster Events/Celebrations

Gathering people together from the parishes of the cluster for special celebrations and events could enliven them significantly with the greater numbers attending. It is also an encouragement to all to congregate with fellow Catholics from other communities and realise that 'you are not alone'. This is particularly important for children and youth. Examples of such shared celebrations and events are Confirmation, special Masses, penitential services, carol services, pilgrimages, retreats. There was also a proposal to establish a cluster choir.

Schools

Holding joint school events with the three Catholic schools coming together would foster cluster relations and support faith (e.g., P7 Transition Mass). Secondary school chaplaincy needs to be developed and coordinated.

Pastoral programmes

There is an opportunity to pool resources, talents and energy within the cluster to plan and initiate development programmes for adult faith formation, youth, evangelisation and RCIA. Parishes working together may be able to fund personnel to support these programmes, for example, employing a youth worker, supporting visiting missionaries, attracting key speakers on faith and topical issues. The need for a supporting role of the Archdiocese in providing outreach to clusters for such programmes was identified .

Cluster contracts for consumables

It may be possible to establish favourable contracts with suppliers based on the greater buying power of the cluster working together.

Parish activities

Sunday Mass

Weekly celebration of Sunday Mass is what gathers the community in each of the parishes. The loss of a weekly Sunday Mass is likely to lead to the disintegration of the community. There is always a preference for celebrating Mass with a regular parish priest for the sake of cohesion and stability of the community.

Liturgy, prayer and devotions

These aspects are essential to the spiritual life of each parish and it will be important to encourage and provide for them in the parish. Parish communities can meet for prayer, scripture study, Rosary, Stations of the Cross, children's liturgy and other activities. At the meetings, several participants expressed the view that lay led Services of the Word with Holy Communion should be promoted for days when a priest is not able to attend to celebrate Mass. It will be important for the Archdiocese to provide clear guidelines regarding what is possible for the laity to do in the absence of a priest on Sundays and on weekdays, with particular regard to Communion services.

Preparation for and celebration of Sacraments

Baptism, First Reconciliation First Holy Communion and Marriage should all be retained within parishes as they are best celebrated in the local community and feed the life of parishes. Families and couples are far more likely to become committed parishioners if they have prepared for and celebrated the sacraments as part of a particular community.

Funerals

People have a strong desire and expectation to bury their loved ones and be buried themselves from their own parish.

Pastoral care of the sick, housebound and elderly

FINAL REPORT

It is important for the sick, housebound and elderly to be visited regularly and by people that they know and have a connection with. However, a cluster approach to supporting the sick in Borders General Hospital was identified.

Parish administration and financial accountability and stewardship

These are best kept at the parish level with a greater degree of autonomy and responsibility held by lay people. An example would be lay people becoming signatories of the parish cheque book for the day to day running of parishes.

Social events

These foster community spirit and cohesion.

Community outreach

Again the local connection is key. Much outreach work involves building relationships and networking with other local groups and activities. Each parish community is best placed to do this in their own place.

Ecumenical relations

Again the key is personal relationships which are best developed at the local level.

Signs of vibrancy and potential for new growth and life

A number of signs were reported.

- Some parishes have links with nationally known places of interest which helps to put them on the map and serve visitors (e.g., Innerleithen and Traquair House, Galashiels and Abbotsford House).
- There may be opportunities to reawaken interest in places that previously drew visitors. For example Cross Kirk in Peebles was once a major pilgrimage site. It may be possible to attract pilgrims again.
- Peebles has links with the local addiction rehabilitation centre at Castlecraig and provides spiritual support to some of the clients.
- Links with local media exist and could be developed, for example Borders Radio, articles in local newspapers
- There are strong links with local community civic events. For example Selkirk parish is an established supporter of the Selkirk Common Ridings and of local festivals such as Scott Selkirk.
- There is good community outreach involvement across the parishes - Foodbanks, Freshstart (support for the homeless), SSVP, Fairtrade
- There are three Catholic primary schools in the cluster - Peebles, Galashiels, Selkirk
- There are encouraging numbers currently attending children's liturgy in Peebles and Galashiels.
- The number of parishioners engaging in the cluster discussions has been encouraging.
- There is good lay participation in all aspects of parish life.
- Hall facilities are well used by local community groups in Selkirk and Peebles.
- There are strong ecumenical links through membership of Churches Together.
- All of the parishes are financially sound. The financial generosity of parishioners shows that people care for their parishes and the wider church.
- There is a strong sense of community

There was a recognition that these are the seeds of new growth and vibrancy which need to be nurtured further to deliver real results. If we simply continue to do what we have been doing this will provide the same results and therefore we need to change and do more. This desire to adapt was demonstrated in our pastoral goals for mission and evangelisation through the co-operation of Parishes within the Cluster.

Pastoral goals for mission and evangelisation

1. Establish Cluster Council/Management Team which is linked to individual PPC's through representation. Ensure that members are aware of responsibilities and boundaries.
2. Establish a clear and workable system of communication within the cluster and also between the cluster and without (Archdiocese, other clusters, media).
3. Plan and initiate a cluster programme of training for parish activities.
4. Plan and initiate a cluster programme of adult faith formation to build confidence and capability within parishes.

FINAL REPORT

5. Reverse the decline in the church-going population by developing and implementing cluster programmes for Youth Development and Evangelisation.
6. Investigate and share good practice in reaching out to non-attending Catholics.
7. Organise a common celebration early in the life of the cluster to foster cluster cohesion.
8. Establish a Cluster Choir.

Making it work

From the cluster meetings it is clear that skills, energy, ideas and determination abound in the group. But so does a certain scepticism, a scepticism that says, “we’ve been here before and just as soon as we start to develop new methods and ideas, the diocese steps in and pulls the plug or a new parish priest is appointed who is not supportive of lay leadership.”

There is a recognition that an active laity is essential to not only maintain but grow our Catholic Community in the Borders. In the absence of a resident priest the Cluster Planning Team feel that our local communities can operate well with an active and empowered laity and there has been a willingness shown to step up and take on this responsibility. To succeed in delivering our positive vision for the future of the Church in the Borders there must be a strong partnership between the laity, local clergy and the Archdiocese with all three of these areas providing strong and forward looking leadership. Therefore it is essential that the Archdiocese, from the outset:

- a) set clear rules and boundaries regarding lay involvement and leadership in all areas of parish life with particular regard to liturgy and finance;
- b) ensure adequate training;
- c) Appoint a named individual at Archdiocese level whose role it will be to support and enable the Cluster and the individual Parishes;
- d) Set out a long term vision for the Archdiocese and the work of the Clusters, which is shared and reviewed regularly in partnership with the laity;
- e) replace constraint with encouragement.

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APPENDIX 1

Cluster 1 - Peebles, Innerleithen, Galashiels, Melrose, Selkirk

Information from Cluster Planning Meeting 2 (“A detailed examination of joint resources”)

PEOPLE

How many parishioners are there from the households of the cluster parishes?

Estimated Catholic Population

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
1.	400	100	1000	500	200	2200
2.	809	190	1690	401	451	3541

1. Archdiocesan Directory 2017

2. National Census 2011

PLANT

How many buildings are shared between the cluster parishes?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
Church	1	1	1	1	1	5
House	1	0	1	0	1	3
Hall	1	0	0	1	1	3
Other	Attached cottage (vacant)	Flat (vacant)	0	0	0	2

What is the condition of these buildings?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
Church	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	
House	Good	-	Good	-	Good	
Hall	Good	-	-	Good	Good	
Other	Needs work	Good	-	-	-	

What is their upkeep cost?

(heating and lighting, insurance, routine maintenance for 2016)

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
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FINAL REPORT

Church	£9400*	£4300*	£12,535	£3,695	£3,508	
House	Incl.		£12,615	-	£754	
Hall	Incl.		-	£652	£1,948	
Other	Incl.	Incl.	-	-	-	

* Figure for all buildings combined

CELEBRATIONS

How many baptisms have taken place in the past year in the cluster parishes?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	5	2	16	cf Gala	2	25
2014	15	2	17	cf Gala	2	36
2013	8	3	14	cf Gala	3	28
2012	5	1	15	cf Gala	3	24
2011	13	2	15	cf Gala	1	31
2010	6	1	22	cf Gala	0	29

First Holy Communions

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	4	0	12	cf Gala	1	17
2014	5	1	0	cf Gala	1	7
2013	7	0	20	cf Gala	0	27

Confirmations

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	7	0	12	cf Gala	1	20
2014	5	2	16	cf Gala	1	24
2013	7	0	24	cf Gala	0	31
2012	2	0	0	cf Gala	0	2

How many RCIA participants?

(baptisms of over 7 year olds + adult receptions)

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	2	0	2	cf Gala	0	4

FINAL REPORT

2014	2	0	0	cf Gala	0	2
2013	1	0	4	cf Gala	0	5
2012	2	0	0	cf Gala	0	2
2011	3	0	2	cf Gala	0	5
2010	1	1	2	cf Gala	0	4

How many funerals?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	5	2	21	2	4	34
2014	13	3	12	2	3	33
2013	3	1	22	3	4	33
2012	5	0	14	3	4	26
2011	9	3	17	cf Gala	4	33
2010	6	3	19	5	1	34

How many marriages?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	2	0	1	1	0	4
2014	3	1	1	2	1	8
2013	3	1	5	1	0	10
2012	2	1	1	1	0	5
2011	3	2	3	0	1	9
2010	6	5	4	2	2	19

What is the Mass attendance?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2015	123	32	172	68	58	453
2014	145	40	170	47	56	458
2013	130	34	427	84	60	735
2012	147	43	243	84	60	577
2011	172	47	390	120	74	803
2010	173	51	333	60	66	683

Mass attendance on four Sundays 22 January to 12 February 2017

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	Peebles	Inn.	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
TOTAL						
22 Jan	134 (42, 92)	33	273 (43, 230)	57	35	
29 Jan	139 (49, 90)	36	230 (56, 174)	62	43	
05 Feb	132 (47, 85)	34	243 (57, 186)	67	37	
12 Feb	145 (61, 83)	24	241 (62, 179)	67	35	
CHILDREN						
22 Jan	16	4	23	0	0	
29 Jan	13	10	26	0	0	
05 Feb	14	ca.5	0	0	0	
12 Feb	10	ca.5	24	0	0	

FINANCE

What are the operating incomes of the joint cluster parishes?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2016	£52,600	£13,900	£44,371	£19,963	£21,770	
2015				£23,210		

What are the operating expenses of the joint cluster parishes?

	Peebles	Innerleithen	Galashiels	Melrose	Selkirk	Total
2016	£44,409	£9,800	£50,362	£21,693	£17,268	
2015				£25,803		