

Scottish Borders Cluster 2 Report -;

Hawick, (Selkirk), Jedburgh, Kelso, Duns and Eyemouth

In attempting to summarise the many views expressed in the three meetings of our cluster, it must be stipulated at the outset that all the specific views cannot be expressed in the format advised for the final report, hence this final report is restricted to the major views expressed.

Two overwhelming issues were reiterated several times -;

1 – The vast geographical area of our cluster must be taken into consideration when considering pastoral provision, especially that of the Sunday Eucharist.

2 – A very strong opinion that the role of the laity should be increased in the pastoral life of the cluster.

General Comments

In general things that work well at cluster level are those things that benefit from gathering together a larger number of people to create a critical mass for events. For example gathering children and their families together for

Confirmation in one place makes for a much more vibrant celebration, as was witnessed at the recent Cluster Confirmations in Jedburgh, where a very warm, Spirit-filled, joyous and vibrant atmosphere was commented upon by many people who were present.

Specific Issues

- a) Utilise the talents and skills of the laity.
- b) Train laity for leadership and other specific roles in the parish/cluster, e.g., parish catechists. Several parishioners have asked me to emphasise this point, and that there is a strong desire for pastoral training.
- c) Change mindset of clergy and laity to give lay leaders trust and authority to act without always having to ask the priest first.
- d) Greater level of responsibility of the laity for looking after parishes.
- e) Train clergy to delegate.

What needs to be retained at parish level?

- 1. Mass (as often as possible).
- 2. Sacramental Preparation of children.
- 3. Pastoral care of the sick including Holy Communion.
- 4. Social events.
- 5. Weekday services, prayer, Communion.
- 6. Engagement with schools.
- 7. Funerals.
- 8. Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- 9. Administration

Greater involvement of laity is the overriding desire.

Eucharist

Renewed requests to know what would be liturgically possible for congregations in the absence of a priest on Sundays and on weekdays.

Will Communion services be possible?

The suggestion that we would have to await guidelines on that from the Archbishop, was challenged by one parishioner who thought that this was wrong and that it should be the laity telling the Archbishop what was needed and being allowed to get on with it!

When the rest of the assembly was asked if they shared this view there appeared to be a general consensus that instead of vying with each other for authority and control, laity and clergy should learn to collaborate better in all areas of parish life. It was felt that this would require the clergy to review their attitude to lay involvement and to accept that parish councils may need to be given greater responsibility.

(The principle of *subsidiarity* to prevail.)

Up to now, there has been no reason for parishes to combine resources e.g. Eucharistic ministers, catechists etc.

Such co-operation will become desirable, and is recognised as an area for improvement, if two parishes are combined and there is a spirit of co-operation which has been manifested by the cluster meetings, Holy Week initiatives, and the recent Confirmations for example.

Whilst there is a unified Catholic identity, it must be remembered that each Borders town has its own proud, historical identity; (cf. Common Ridings, historically very significant!) and, because of the vast distances between towns, there has been little cross contact.

The area covered by the cluster is almost 70 miles wide!

This is in complete contrast to the situation which pertains in more urban locations.

Hawick, Jedburgh and Kelso were a cluster parish until September 2016. One priest **PLUS** a permanent deacon served the three parishes including a Mass centre in Earlston which has now closed.

It was agreed that the current situation is far more desirable and workable.

Financially, there is no reason to close a parish as each parish is sustainable in the foreseeable future.

The population of the Borders is slowly increasing.

There are more retirees coming into the area and there is regeneration money coming to Hawick and Jedburgh which, it is anticipated, will attract new businesses and jobs which will lead to an increased population.

There is a widespread recognition that communication between parishes in the cluster needs to improve immensely in order to achieve improved collaboration on the pastoral front.

Various pastoral initiatives were discussed but it was felt that until the exact identity of the future cluster was known, more formal discussions would have to wait.

I am content that this report accurately reflects the main thrust of the three public meetings.

Fr Hugh Purcell