

**The Catholic Communities  
of  
South East Edinburgh**

Response to the Archbishop  
on the Reorganisation  
of the Archdiocese

## **Introduction.**

Our faith communities of South East Edinburgh have been working towards clustering for at least sixteen years. Over that time we have built up a wealth of experience in discerning how we might grow and develop individually as well as collaborating on how well we might share resources and best practice. It has been a process of trial and error but one which leaves us well placed to face the challenges of sustaining and developing our faith communities. We are happy to share our knowledge and experience with others in the Archdiocese as they seek to reorganise their parishes.

## **What works well at the cluster level & what works well at the parish level?**

As a general rule, we can say Sunday Eucharist and local prayer services; links with the local Catholic primary school; and a number of other ministries are more effective at the local level. These include pastoral councils, Mass readers, Fabric and Finance, Communion Ministers and so on. The local faith community works best, especially in pastoral terms, when it sustains itself. It recruits and trains its own ministers; it delivers its own services; it funds and maintains its own facilities. Although the values of a collaborative approach are beyond dispute, it is vitally important that we continue to take actions at the primary and fundamental level across the cluster. This ensures that we retain and develop engagement with the wider Catholic community, seeking to discover the gifts of the many rather than relying on the commitment of the few. Each of our faith communities ministers to itself in a wide range of ways as indicated in **Table 1**.

However, the cluster has learned over the years that this level of subsidiarity must be a measured one. Whilst we are grateful for the wide and varied skills of the people of God within each faith community, it is also prudent to propagate these skills widely throughout the cluster whenever possible. It makes sense for our communities to collaborate in certain areas so that a common approach can be agreed and our combined energies can be applied more effectively. This requires clear lines of responsibility and communication to ensure that all are properly consulted and are kept informed of progress. With this in mind, the cluster has a Co-ordinating Group composed of members from all three faith communities and has brought together their pastoral councils from time to time to discuss issues which are better dealt with as a cluster. For example, agreeing a reduction of Weekend Masses from seven to three and at times when one Celebrant could cope. The cluster parishes have links with

schools and communities in Romania, Uganda and in Tanzania; links with other Churches in the area; and outreach to refugees. Communication and support within this type of outreach is best conducted at cluster level. At this level too, a number of groups operate in relation to prayer, to bereavement support and to the study of Church documents to name but a few. Again, a list of the activities which are run mainly at cluster level is to be found in **Table 1**.

### **Signs and Developments of vibrancy.**

There are clear signs of vibrancy within our faith communities of south east Edinburgh. Each provides ample opportunities throughout the week for public prayer as well as a Vigil/Sunday Mass at the weekend where attendance has risen by 15% on average over the life of the cluster. The weekend Masses are noted for their welcoming atmosphere with a dedicated team of people who ensure that the “regulars” have a warm reception whilst being alert to the presence of someone new in their midst. The level of involvement by community members at these celebrations is considerable: there are welcomers, readers, Eucharistic ministers, musicians, the choir and children’s liturgy leaders. Then there are those distributing the singing material and newsletters; those who take up the collection and those selling religious cards and artefacts. When one factors in those who have prepared the altar and altar linen, those who have brought parishioners in their cars, those who have cleaned the church previously and those who will take Holy Communion to others, it adds up to a wide range of participation by many members. This certainly points to a faith community which is engaged and active.

Indeed, it is from this gathering on a Saturday/Sunday that the faith community takes its evangelical inspiration energising its members to strengthen each other and to reach out in ministries of all shades to others. Simply listing all these ministries does not do justice to the quality of service they provide. The main ones are in **Table 1**.

However, perhaps the signs of a community which is vibrant lies less with its past achievements and more to do with its sense of the need to continue to travel on its faith journey, deepening its own understanding of the gospel and how that message is to be lived out in daily service of its own community and the wider world. If the worldwide Church is called to be “semper reformanda” then this has to be reflected in the local churches too.

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With the participation and encouragement of its priests, our faith communities have embarked on a number of initiatives. In January 2013, our cluster recognised the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II by revisiting those documents. Over the course of a year between 30 and 50 parishioners not only grappled with its major themes but sought to apply its teaching to the context of their lives. They concluded this undertaking with a whole day Saturday retreat in each of our three communities. In 2014, the Saturday morning sessions continued with a study of Pope Francis' inspiring exhortation **The Joy of the Gospel**. The participants found this text much more readable but no less challenging in its call to be "missionary disciples". When Pope Francis instigated the Jubilee Year of Mercy, our cluster lost no time in gathering groups in each community during the six weeks of Lent to study and reflect on **Misericordiae Vultus**. This initiative occurred simultaneously in St John's Portobello and with our respective partner faith communities in Mweka and Legho in Tanzania. The cluster spent six Saturday mornings reflecting on the theme of Mercy ending in a Service of Reconciliation in each of our communities where our cluster priests were joined by visiting clergy to administer God's forgiveness to his people. We're currently on a chapter-by-chapter study of **The Joy of Love**: the pope's Response to the Synod on the family.

At the faith community level, two signs of vibrancy might be mentioned. In November 2014, our community of St John Vianney's commenced a year-long focus on Stewardship. Stewardship is a way of life taught by Jesus. At the very heart of it is our need to thank God for all His blessings, all He has given us, by happily returning to Him a portion of the time, talent and treasure He has given to us. By the end of this year-long focus around 30% of the congregation offered to serve in ministry. In 2016, St Catherine's decided to seek participants to undertake a one year distance learning course offered by Maryvale Institute in Birmingham for those interested in formation for collaborative ministry in faith communities. It awards the Certificate in Parish Mission and Ministry and is endorsed and supported by our Archdiocese. Three parishioners are now involved in the programme of study and it is anticipated that more will join the course in the years ahead. The need for adult faith formation by a variety of means is well understood in the cluster and this latest initiative is to be welcomed.

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The sign of a vibrant community is seen first of all in the way it ministers to its own community: being attentive to the pastoral needs and aspirations of its members and able to provide the range of ministries largely from among themselves. In addition to what might be called an ‘internal vibrancy’, there should be an attendant ‘external vibrancy’ whereby a faith community or a cluster looks outwards. An essential part of any faith community is its evangelical spirit: its need to tell others of the good news of Jesus Christ. The people of God are ‘missionary disciples’ because the Love they have received is too powerful and important to be reserved to themselves. Some examples of this “external vibrancy” follow.

St Catherine’s has had a significant involvement with communities in Romania from 1997 to date. It began with supporting many young people in the Romanian State Orphanage in Siret, aiding their transition to various levels of independent living. It has hosted some seventy people here in Edinburgh and was the main funder of a magnificent new Church building in Darmanesti. It befriended Fr Eugen the parish priest there and supported the Carmelite nuns with medical and nursing care supplies. Twenty seven family homes were destroyed in a fire in the town and our community here provided funding for their rebuilding. Since 2006 various groups of parishioners from St Catherine’s have regularly visited Darmanesti, Siret and more recently Oituz where Fr Eugen is now based. In 2016, St Catherine’s provided financial support for Fr Eugen’s medical expenses. Happily, he is recovering and in August we enjoyed a visit from him.

Our cluster has forged links with communities in Tanzania in terms of forming pastoral relationships with parishes and schools. Unlike previous ventures these initiatives are not aid-driven but are focussed on forming pastoral and cultural relationships. Both St Catherine’s and St John Vianney’s Primary schools have established links with Mweka Primary and Omi Primary respectively as part of the Global Visioning project supported by the British Council. Teacher exchange visits have occurred regularly since 2013. The Chairperson from one of the cluster Parish Councils visited Mweka in February 2015 and both Cluster Priests have also visited and worked in Parish and school communities in Tanzania and Uganda and it is intended to build on these links, communicating and sharing our faith experiences. Our cluster’s outreach energies have also been employed nearer home. Two examples will suffice.

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The cluster is an active partner of SEECAT (South East Edinburgh Churches Acting Together) which comprises eight churches in the area. Each year there are communal services during the week for Christian Unity in various churches as well as interfaith study groups during Lent. SEECAT has an active Justice and Peace group and supports the Chaplaincy at Cameron Toll Shopping Centre. Perhaps our most ambitious venture is the sharing of our Holy Week Liturgy with five other churches. We share a Passover Meal, Ecumenical Stations of the Cross and a Walk of Witness on Good Friday which starts at each of the churches and converges on the local supermarket for an outdoor service at 11 am. Later we gather in a local high school for a solemn celebration of the Passion of Our Lord. Some three hundred people regularly attend this liturgy. It is a powerful witness of a shared worship of the same Lord and God.

More recently, in response to Pope Francis' plea for the Church to respond to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers, our cluster has taken up the challenge with a mantra of "prayer, practicalities and pressure". For example, on 19<sup>th</sup> September, the day that the United Nations was discussing this humanitarian crisis, our cluster decided to hold a day of prayer. The Church was open from 8.30 am and finished with a Holy Hour at 7 pm involving people signing up to lead half hour sessions throughout the day. At a physical level, our cluster has refurbished and furnished several homes allocated to refugees and has worked closely with statutory bodies to provide refugees/asylum seekers with a range of practical items. Furthermore, some parishioners have befriended them and are engaged in teaching them English. The vibrancy of our cluster is reflected not just in its aptitude to plan prudently for what it perceives as upcoming issues but in its ability to react to the unforeseen and to respond with a missionary instinct born of its gospel values.

### **Pastoral goals for the cluster to work together**

Given the length of its existence, our cluster of faith communities is well practised in collaborating with each other. However fresh challenges continue to appear, not least the growing shortage of priests, and the cluster must face these and other challenges with all the resources at its disposal. We need to prepare continually for the next stage of our faith journey.

With this in mind, our cluster has proposed creating a Cluster Pastoral Plan which will be overseen by a Pastoral Plan Steering Group. The approach proposed is to start by considering the various elements that make up such a plan. This will be built from a variety of sources:

- Review of good examples of Pastoral Plans and use these to suggest key topics and focus areas
- Review outputs from the draft response to the Archdiocesan Consultation
- Seek inputs from Pastoral Councils across the cluster.

At this early stage, it is not possible to go into too much detail but it is safe to say that the plan will build on the projects and initiatives which have already been described in this response. So it is not surprising that four key areas are emerging for consideration:

- Worship and Liturgy: our community in prayer
- Community Building: our community and self-development
- Education and formation: our community and faith development
- Outreach: our community's relations with the wider world

In conclusion, we can do no better than quote Pope Francis in **The Joy of the Gospel**: *“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 our community...”* which he contrasts with a parish consisting of *“...a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few”*. (The Joy of the Gospel, #28)

We are clear that our proposed Pastoral Plan will take the pope's message seriously and that our cluster will continue to sustain and develop our faith communities while not forgetting to reach out to other communities not just with material aid but in the Spirit of Jesus who came that “they may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10, 10)

**Table 1**

	<b>Community/Parish Level</b>	<b>Cluster Level</b>
<b>Liturgy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebration of Mass</li> <li>• Preparation &amp; Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation: Primary age</li> <li>• Lenten Study Groups</li> <li>• Ministries                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Eucharistic</li> <li>➤ Readers</li> <li>➤ Music</li> <li>➤ Bereavement Support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Children's Liturgy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eucharistic Services</li> <li>• Preparation &amp; Celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation (RCIA)</li> <li>• Lenten Study Groups</li> <li>• Ecumenical Activities: Week of Christian Unity; Holy Week</li> <li>• Prayer Days: Day of Prayer and Reflection for Refugees/Asylum Seekers</li> </ul>
<b>Community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary School</li> <li>• Hospital Communion</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Fairtrade</li> <li>• Use of Hall as a Meeting / Shared Space for parishioners and the wider community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary School Links: Caritas</li> <li>• Youth Group</li> <li>• Refugees &amp; Asylum Seekers Project</li> <li>• Justice and Peace Group</li> <li>• SEECAT (South East Edinburgh Churches Acting Together): services, communal activities)</li> <li>• Mount Vernon Provision: quarterly Mass</li> </ul>
<b>Service</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St Vincent De Paul</li> <li>• Communion to the Sick</li> <li>• Welcomers at Mass and other services</li> <li>• Help with travel to services</li> <li>• Cleaners Groups</li> <li>• Communications (printing/distribution of the weekly newsletter/hymnsheet; maintaining the website)</li> <li>• Marriage Preparation</li> <li>• Parish Pastoral Council</li> <li>• Fabric and Finance Group</li> <li>• Organising Social Events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer Groups</li> <li>• Outreach Initiatives: (as mentioned in the text)</li> <li>• Study Groups:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Docs of Vat II</li> <li>➤ The Joy of the Gospel</li> <li>➤ The Joy of Love</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Bereavement Support</li> <li>• Cluster Co-Ordinating Group</li> <li>• Lay Training for Pastoral Ministry</li> <li>• SPRED (Special religious Development)</li> </ul>