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**Department of Theology
and Religion**

Consultation on the proposed Redcar Parishes Reorganisation

Executive Summary & Recommendations

**Commissioned by Middlesbrough
Diocese**

Undertaken by

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**Associate Researchers
Centre for Catholic Studies**

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Executive Summary

The Basic Issue to be addressed:

What is the most effective way of managing the following situation? By 2016/7 there is likely to be only one priest available to cover the Redcar, Marske and Saltburn area, which currently has a Mass attendance of approximately 1000, served by 4 priests in 7 church buildings.

The Starting Point: Undertake a Consultation with Parishioners and consider their views:

A re-organisation working party met in late 2010 to plan the consultative process and analyse factual data collected from local sources that had a bearing on any potential re-organisation. Five options emerged from these discussions:

1. Do nothing
2. Retain two of the existing churches with enhanced facilities
3. Build a new church and retain one of the existing churches as a chapel of ease
4. Build a new church and a new satellite church
5. Build a single new church

These options were to be put to as many of the 1000 Mass-goers as possible to give them an opportunity to offer their views and opinions on them. The information gained would assist the Bishop in his decision-making.

The Extent of the Consultation Process:

- An open meeting attended by over 230 parishioners at which over 50 additional written comments were received from attendees.
- Consultation after each of the eleven Masses which take place in the Redcar, Marske, Saltburn area each weekend to explain the options, listen to parishioners comments and answer specific questions. In total approximately 600 parishioners attended.
- Additional meetings with the four parish priests, three head teachers of Catholic schools and a group of students from Sacred Heart RC High School.
- Extra written submissions were made by a number of parishioners.

All of this material has been assimilated into the following report but the key issues raised can be summarised as follows :-

Workload for a Single Priest : -

There was considerable concern raised about the ability of a single priest to serve the needs of a parish of 1000 people. It was felt that the pressures of such a large parish would need to be shared by both a deacon and the increased role and engagement of the laity. The priest should not be over-burdened with additional Diocesan responsibilities.

Justification for a New Church : -

A significant number of parishioners questioned the option to build a new church on the grounds of cost, sustainability and numbers. Any final decision must be clear that

provision is being made on a sustainable basis for a realistic number of Catholics in the area.

Role of the Laity : -

There was general recognition that the proposed changes would require the wider involvement of the laity whatever building option was chosen. Further urgent consideration needed to be given to the training, preparation and development of the laity.

Access and Transport : -

The issue of access and transport was raised at every consultation meeting. This was seen as a particular problem for the elderly and those without access to a car and the limited provision of public transport was seen as a significant factor which could affect church attendance in the future.

Loss of Smaller Community Parishes : -

Parishioners are concerned about their ability to relate to a larger parish which they see as being less personal. This was particularly expressed in the Marske, Saltburn and Brotton areas. Whilst they could see the justification for a new church for Redcar, they felt no affinity towards it and would be reluctant to travel there, making alternative arrangements further south in the diocese.

Strength of Educational and Church Links : -

A strong case was made to maintain and enhance the link between the three Catholic schools and a local church. St Bede's School has a close connection to St Bede's church and a similar link was seen to be desirable for Sacred Heart and St Benedict's.

Needs of Young People : -

Many people were concerned that parishes were not doing enough to encourage and involve young people and that the absence of space and facilities for young people to come together was a major problem. This reflects the general observation that many of the existing churches lack any modern facilities for pastoral activities.

Planning the Process of Change:-

A clear message emerged during the consultation that a comprehensive 5 – 10 year plan detailing when and how changes would occur would be of benefit to parishioners. It would enable them to have closure on old arrangements and develop commitment to the new.

Recommendations Emerging in Relation to Options Put Forward

The option of doing nothing had a limited amount of support during the consultation. However maintaining and continuing to use 7 churches when it is known that only one priest will be available in 5/6 years time makes little sense. Doing nothing would create uncertainty for parishioners and undermine the development of the Catholic community in the area. It is recommended that this option be discarded.

The option of retaining two existing churches is only viable if Mass attendance falls significantly or the Bishop is able to find another priest to serve Saltburn and Brotton (as the position is summarised in the recommendations to the main report). Even so, it would do little to reinvigorate Catholicism in the area and makes no provision for youth development and social activities which are so evidently lacking. It is recommended that this option be discarded.

The option of building a new church and retaining one of the existing churches as a satellite or chapel of ease has considerable merit, although the credibility of the new church in terms of capacity and sustainability would have to be clear to parishioners. The Corporation Road site was seen to be the most appropriate to parishioners for a new building that could accommodate extensive facilities. There is a strong case for retaining St. Bede's in the satellite role because of its existing school links and to address the problems of accessing a new church in Redcar from Marske and surrounding areas. It is recommended that this option is given serious consideration.

The option of building two new churches was seen to be extravagant and unnecessary and was not seriously considered at any point in the consultation process. This option was discarded at a very early stage.

The option of building a single new church in central Redcar that would become a new focus for the Catholic community and provide the youth and community space provision which is urgently needed is possible. However, the probable reluctance of parishioners living outside of Redcar to support the new church makes this option problematic.

An additional option of extending existing churches was raised at two churches during the consultation. However, ongoing assessment and professional consultation continues to indicate that none of the existing church sites are appropriate for such redevelopment. Church extensions are therefore not seen as practical or viable options.

Full copies of the report are available from:

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