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Creating Pastoral Communities

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As a continuation of our Living Church process we conducted a Diocesan Review earlier this year and met with parishioners across the diocese in May as a first step in planning for the future. Since then I have been looking at the information gathered from the Review with the Council of Priests and our Diocesan Pastoral Council and this was the focus for our autumn Clergy Conference. We have been thinking about creating the best structures for outreach and evangelisation, how we make our parish communities fit for mission and begin real forward planning as a diocese. Having consulted with other dioceses in Ireland and around the world it has become clear to me that we need a new structure which will gather our parishes together for closer cooperation. We intend to set up new Pastoral Communities across the diocese. These Communities will ensure that parishes, while retaining their own identity, will become stronger and more effective through collaborating together rather than working in isolation.

Looking at the pastoral needs of the diocese and learning from the experience of other dioceses which have already experienced such a process I envisage that we will need to have approximately 15 Pastoral Communities. Since the most recent census tells us that there are 350,000 Catholics living in our diocese the population of these new Communities will have to be, on average, a little over 20,000. My hope for these Communities is that they will ensure that our local Church is a community which lives, celebrates, awakens and hands on faith in Jesus Christ.

I want to move towards a decision on the boundaries of the new Pastoral Communities in the coming months. In November I will meet with all of the clergy in three meetings, in Belfast, Downpatrick and Ballymena, to hear their further comments and prepare for a consultation with parishioners that will take place early in the New Year. In this way the views of clergy and parishioners will be taken into account as a decision is taken for the shared and common good and care of all our parish communities and parishioners. At this time I ask for your prayers that the Holy Spirit will guide us as we discern and seek to build a missionary church here in Down and Connor that will thrive and grow long after our time.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+Noel Treanor
Bishop of Down and Connor

10th November 2014