

**CONSULTATION ON FOUR QUESTIONS
PUT BY THE GALLOWAY DIOCESE TO ALL PARISHES**

The aim of the consultation is to give parishioners a reference point as to the “status quo” of the parish to which they can return in a year’s time and examine changes or developments, good or bad.

The results below had to be submitted within a short timeline to the Diocese. I therefore consulted by email everyone in **St. Mary’s parish in Largs** who is currently a member of the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Council, Parish Hall Committee and Eucharistic Cenacle.

They can form the basis for parishioners not yet consulted to submit any further views by the end of July 2026. Once collated, the final document can form the basis for planning the way ahead which has to be done calmly, prudently and realistically. Key, in everything, is prayerful openness to the Holy Spirit!

Mgr. Peter Magee, 29th May 2026.

ONE: WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THE PARISH?

1. We have a very welcoming, friendly and close-knit community that helps not only in living our faith but also in providing help to those who need it. Those of different ethnicities and languages feel welcome. There is confidence that, if in need of help, someone will be able and willing to provide it.
2. We have a committed parish priest.
3. Wonderful liturgy, even during the week, with music and homily.
4. Mass attendance on weekends + weekdays is constant and slightly increasing.
5. There is a wide variety of different groups, with a good balance between the spiritual and the social, and which are also active both on the parish property itself and off it.
6. We have a committed congregation, a loyal core of parishioners and a strong and dedicated number volunteers. Good lay involvement in parish life both in the consultative organs of the parish and in areas such as dedicated extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, altar servers, musicians, flower ladies, friendly welcoming pass-keepers and excellent readers.
7. A budding openness to synodality and its methods.
8. Lots of opportunities to receive the sacraments and take part in other services (e.g. Agape); willingness of people to engage in liturgical and other activities, even if it is often the same people who do so.
9. Beautiful surroundings and location with many visitors all the year round.
10. Regular Eucharistic Adoration. Generous distribution of free pamphlets and leaflets with prayers, spiritual exercises, novenas, instruction in the faith, etc..
11. To support those with work commitments, we now provide an early morning weekday Mass.
12. The Eucharistic Revival focus which will be enhanced when the Shrine to SS. Carlo Acutis, Francis and Clare is in place, including (it is hoped) three first class relics of these saints. This will lead to a special outreach beyond the parish in the hope of strengthening faith in the Eucharist and/or whatever else the Lord foresees.
13. The RCIA program bringing in new people to the church.
14. The close relationship between the Parish and St. Mary’s Primary School.
15. Plenty of opportunities within the parish for developing spiritual growth.
16. Strong financial position thanks to a few substantial legacies.
17. The church and hall, which are well maintained, are facilities which are a big asset and should be used to the best advantage.
18. Constant generosity to charitable causes.
19. Ecumenical awareness and participation.

TWO: WHAT ARE THE WEAKNESSES OF THE PARISH?

1. Like most churches in our country, the main problem is an ageing population, the virtually total absence of the young, as well as of the hundreds who are no longer practising.
2. Lack of enthusiasm to deepen personal knowledge of the faith; poverty of ability to articulate it; resistance to being taught and led deeper into the faith; a passive contentedness with the status quo.
3. Outside of the liturgical setting, mainly Sunday Mass, there is quite a weak community spirit, and there does not seem to be an appetite to build one. A lot of parishioners show little interest in any church activity beyond Sunday Mass. Lack of enthusiastic engagement by the majority with new ideas and initiatives. A certain passivity and lack of creativity.
4. It is extremely difficult to figure out how to balance today’s societal pressures with the values of the Church and how to make the Church relevant and relatable.
5. Need for training for evangelisation. Maybe more training along the lines of courses previously offered in the deanery.
6. With the Catholic secondary school not being located in Largs, and due to social influence, it is extremely challenging to encourage and retain younger generations within parish life. Their non-attendance and involvement are very sad. Why do parents choose Largs Academy over St. Matthew’s? It’s not that far away!
7. Lack of response to the parish priest’s many appeals to the community to step up to help the youth hold on to and grow in their faith and socialise within a parish context.
8. The impression that parents do not fulfil their responsibility of teaching and training their young teenage children in the faith after they have left primary school, especially when most of the teenagers don’t attend St. Matthew’s.

9. People leaving Mass after Communion: why do they do this? We are supposed to be sent forth as a body on mission at the end of Mass with the blessing of the priest. Leaving when it suits you betrays an individualistic understanding. It's like getting up from table as a guest once you've had the dessert and leaving, with no consideration for the host or others at table.
10. Lack of engagement from a wider circle of parishioners to join in activities.
11. We don't receive any report from the SSVDP of its income from parishioners and of how the money is used for the poor locally. Are we reaching people in need - through St Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary? Or is more needed or delivered in a different way?
12. Lack of financial support - use of standing orders is good and bad (lack of review of contribution); lack of financial commitment on part of many. Some people genuinely can't afford more at this time. Others have been giving the same amount for decades!

THREE: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE PARISH?

1. Perhaps more involvement in the wider Largs community. Largs is a relatively wealthy parish and we might consider how we use our resources to "give back" to the town to encourage wider engagement. (Subsidised Hall use for local clubs may be an opportunity). We may need a "paid" position to coordinate and encourage these kinds of activities (engagement, youth, communications, marketing).
2. Opportunities for growth really depend on how we can encourage our young people to become more involved. Without them, it's hard to see how the parish can maintain itself, never mind grow. It's a great pity that no-one stepped forward to save the Youth Hub we had for a few years.
3. Find or invent a program to (re-)evangelize young marriages and families. Language and styles which bridge the gap between Church teaching and the reality of their lives in today's culture.
4. More varied music groups to step forward to play at Mass to increase the variety of music styles.
5. Continuation and promotion of the RCIA program, conversations in the Spirit, book club. More social activities would help grow a closer community.
6. Consult working parishioners as to what evening activities would appeal to them both as to content and as to commitment.
7. Find or create a program of outreach and "welcome home" for lapsed Catholics. We need to be ready to hear why they lapsed and how best to welcome them back.
8. There could be great opportunities for growth and renewal through the installation of the shrine to St Carlo Acutis.
9. The content currently available on our parish website is excellent, but there is significant potential for a completely redesigned modern website that reflects the new shrine and supports pilgrimage activity connected to St Carlo Acutis. A renewed online presence could help us reach younger people, engage visitors more effectively, and promote the spiritual life of the parish to a much wider audience.
10. There is also scope to increase parish income through the development of parish shop merchandise connected to the shrine and pilgrimage visits, as well as through practical improvements such as the installation of public toilet facilities to better accommodate the growing number of visitors we hope to welcome.
11. The demographic of Largs is changing; new housing projects have brought new potential (and actual) parishioners. The parish has an opportunity to tap into the newcomers if we find a way to engage with them and embrace them into the community.
12. Perhaps different Mass times, styles could be considered (the shorter Wednesday mass is an example) in consultation with parishioners. An evening Mass on Sunday may be something to consider in the summer months when there is an increase of visitors.
13. There are regular appeals and invitations for more parishioners to get involved in ministries and groups, but poor response. We must persevere in this.
14. The Parish Festival could serve as a springboard for other activities all the year round and for greater ecumenical and societal interaction.

FOUR: WHAT ARE THE THREATS/CONCERNS FOR THE PARISH?

1. Much the same as the weaknesses listed under question 2 as well as the rising indifference people have towards moral issues within our country.
2. There are also several other threats like social media, ideological influences, materialism, etc.
3. The reduction of "firsts" to "lasts": first Reconciliation and Communion seem to become last Reconciliation and Communion for most children. The Sacraments are eviscerated of their true meaning for children and for us all by the ascendancy of the social celebration mentality or by considering them as mere milestones on the path of (a largely secular) life. The rote nature of the preparation for and reception of these sacraments (and of confirmation) needs to be broken to recover their true spiritual and ecclesial meaning. Sacraments need to be chosen, not imposed and not routinely "fallen into."
4. The risk of becoming inward-looking rather than seeing the parish as a community in which to grow spiritually and reach out in mission.
5. "Drive-through" approach to Mass and community involvement.
6. Limited number of priests; priests taking on responsibility for more than one parish. Potential loss of resident parish priest in the future.
7. Being at the northern end of the Diocese, will it outlast any restructuring? If not, what arrangements would there be for transport etc?
8. Keeping the Mass / liturgy / church relevant is difficult for us who are used to a different style of religion.
9. The dramatic drop in attendance by the young, the drop in numbers of baptisms and weddings and the increase in funerals. This last point also has financial implications for the parish.