

CONSULTATION ON FOUR QUESTIONS PUT BY THE 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 everyone in **Our Lady’s, Millport**, for whom I could find an email address! Below is a synthesis of the responses received.

They can form the basis for parishioners not yet consulted to submit any further views by the end of June 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, 26th May 2026.

ONE: WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF OUR PARISH?

1. The parish church itself centred on the Blessed Sacrament, which is our greatest strength. We are blessed to have a priest to shepherd us by means of Mass and the sacraments. We are a small parish but have a number of people committed to attending Sunday Mass. Spirituality is remarkable among many of those who attend.
2. We are a vital contribution to the Christian presence on the island. There is a strong sense of identity and community (which encompasses the whole island) and of open welcome and hospitality towards others. For example, for 3 or 4 years now, the parish house has been home to a family of Ukrainian refugees. At other times, it has welcomed guests on retreat or here for a rest. There is good if limited interaction with the wider community and with other Christian denominations.
3. The smallness of the community facilitates a more personal closeness and the opportunity to respond to personal needs.
4. There is good support for the various jobs needing done in and around the church from a faithful core of the active members of the congregation who thereby help sustain parish life.
5. The island context is conducive to peace and spiritual reflection. It also speaks to a unique local heritage with its traditions.
6. There are many weekend and holiday visitors to the island, and they support the parish financially and spiritually while bringing their diversity with them. The island population increases considerably during the summer. Mass attendance can reach 100 at times like Easter and Christmas.
7. The church is always open during the day for prayer and lighting candles.
8. We have a well-maintained building.

TWO: WHAT ARE ITS WEAKNESSES?

1. The increasingly fewer number of regular parishioners due to ageing and, sadly, to the reality of lapsation. To this is added the lack of children and young families.
2. The heavy reliance on a few to do everything. Although a reasonable number commit to Sunday Mass, they do not seem to involve themselves in other areas. Perhaps they have just not been asked, don’t have time or feel excluded or find collaboration difficult.
3. Church and property beginning to show their age. Lack of sufficient funds to upgrade the property properly.
4. No resident priest. While grateful for the priest serving our parish we know that sometime in the future this will not be the case.
5. The insular nature of the parish and its lack of accessibility after 8pm most days make it nigh impossible for it to participate in most diocesan and national meetings
6. The difficulty attracting new active members and the limited outreach to people on the island. It would be good to bring back the St. Vincent de Paul Society for the outreach to the poor which it represents.
7. Catholic literature such as that produced by the Catholic Truth Society booklets, should be made available again to assist parishioners and visitors to understand their faith more.

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

1. Attract more regular churchgoers.
2. The church could promote itself more.
3. More social activity to raise funds within the island community.
4. Attend more events from other island denominations. Build stronger links with the wider island community through local events, seasonal celebrations. Explore simple forms of outreach.
5. Relaunch the parish pastoral council as distinct from the parish finance council to favour greater focus on different issues and to increase the diversity and participation of parishioners in these ways of consultation.
6. Have a more prominent social media page for our parish here in Millport for it to be accessible to parish council members to post notices/news on and to keep visitors and distant supporters connected to the parish
7. Find small ways that people can help without feeling pressurized into major commitments. Identify a core of individuals willing to fill in where appropriate and needed in the parish. Examples to explore could be the permanent diaconate; lay ministry; fundraising; social events and ground/building maintenance. Entrust these matters as appropriate to the consideration of the parish finance council or the parish pastoral council.
8. Millport would be an excellent placement for a newly or semi-retired priest to continue to offer mass and minister within a less pressurised environment.
9. A choir has been mentioned in the past. If one starts with only a few members, it might encourage others to join.
10. Have a children's day for all the children in the primary school. Some of them have parents who were raised Catholic. This could be a fun day starting and ending with young children's prayer and hymns. It may drop a seed or two.
11. Possibly a low key charismatic meeting once a month lasting no more than 45 minutes. We could invite the other churches.
12. A "Pentecost Commitment": invitation to parishioners to commit to one thing on a list of ministries and activities, from the humblest to the more sublime, which could be drawn up.
13. Hold a Parish mission.

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

1. With a PP who is approaching 70 years and lives off the island, pastoral attention to all areas requiring it is necessarily minimal. Extra-parochial obligations further reduce this attention.
2. The ageing and lack of priests to serve us, resulting in fewer Masses. But God is faithful and we still need to remain faithful, too.
3. That the church will close due to a dwindling congregation - which would be devastating.
4. That, at some point, a huge repair will be required for the building and we won't have the funds for it.
5. Lack of incoming new parishioners and the continuing decline in church attendance especially among younger generations although social networking used well is an avenue to building a faith community.
6. Too much responsibility on too few people.
7. There needs to be some difficult decision-making from the Church in terms of what are the critical elements that need to be preserved and how can that be implemented.
8. The possibility of agendas being pushed which are not always compatible with the truth of the Catholic Church.
9. It is difficult to see a mid- to long-term future for the parish due to many of the various factors mentioned above and to the overall planning for the diocese which will probably impact negatively on the parish's viability.