

Diocese of Aberdeen

Consultation on Diocesan Structures & Resources

The Consultation

Purpose

The bishops of Scotland have initiated a consultation on the Church's present diocesan structures and resources. In their current form, are the diocesan structures the best there can be for promoting the mission of the Church in Scotland? Or, are there better ways to share the resources we have in our respective dioceses?

Background

Prompted by the Holy See, there are at present consultations afoot in England and Wales concerning the possible amalgamation of the dioceses of Leeds, Middlesbrough and Hallam in England. In September last year, the Diocese of Menevia was merged with the Archdiocese of Cardiff to form the Archdiocese of Cardiff-Menevia. Similar discussions are taking place in Ireland.

Three Questions to be Addressed

The **third question** is of particular relevance to the consultation.

- 1) Where do we see good examples of mission in our parishes, deanery, diocese and country?
- 2) Where does mission need to develop or even begin? What are the barriers to better mission and what can encourage it?
- 3) **Does the present structure of eight dioceses in Scotland support mission? Does our diocese already have all that it needs? Would it help if we were to share resources with another diocese or dioceses? Would it help if our diocese were merged with another diocese?**

Timeline

May 31st	Diocesan discussions to be submitted to the bishop
June 5th	Bishop produces a single-page summary
June	BCOS Conference reflects on responses from dioceses in conjunction with output from the Working Group. In the wake of this, diocese-specific proposals are sent out for a final round of consultation
Aug/Sept	Feedback Final reflection by bishops at Salamanca meeting Present the written report to the Dicastery

Returns – by the end of 31st May 2026

Survey (sent out to the people of the diocese through the diocesan mailing list; clergy are invited to respond using it as well): <https://forms.gle/aYQwdP9RqF93fZgN8>

Conversation in the Spirit (see pages 6-8 below): by email, to consultation@rcda.scot. Any respondent may also send their own submission to the same email address, if they wish.

The Catholic Church in Scotland: Current Organisational Structure Statistics and Some Statistics

The Church in Scotland is organised into **two provinces**, comprising **eight dioceses**, each overseen by a bishop or archbishop. Diocesan boundaries, as a rule, correspond with civil counties.

Statistics for Scotland

These are approximate figures, based on returns published in the Catholic Directory for Scotland, 2026:

Estimated Population of Scotland (June 2024) - 5,546,900

Estimated Catholic Population (2025) - 674,800

Total number of priests - 555

Number of Dioceses - 8

Number of Parishes - 378

Baptisms in 2024 - 5,210

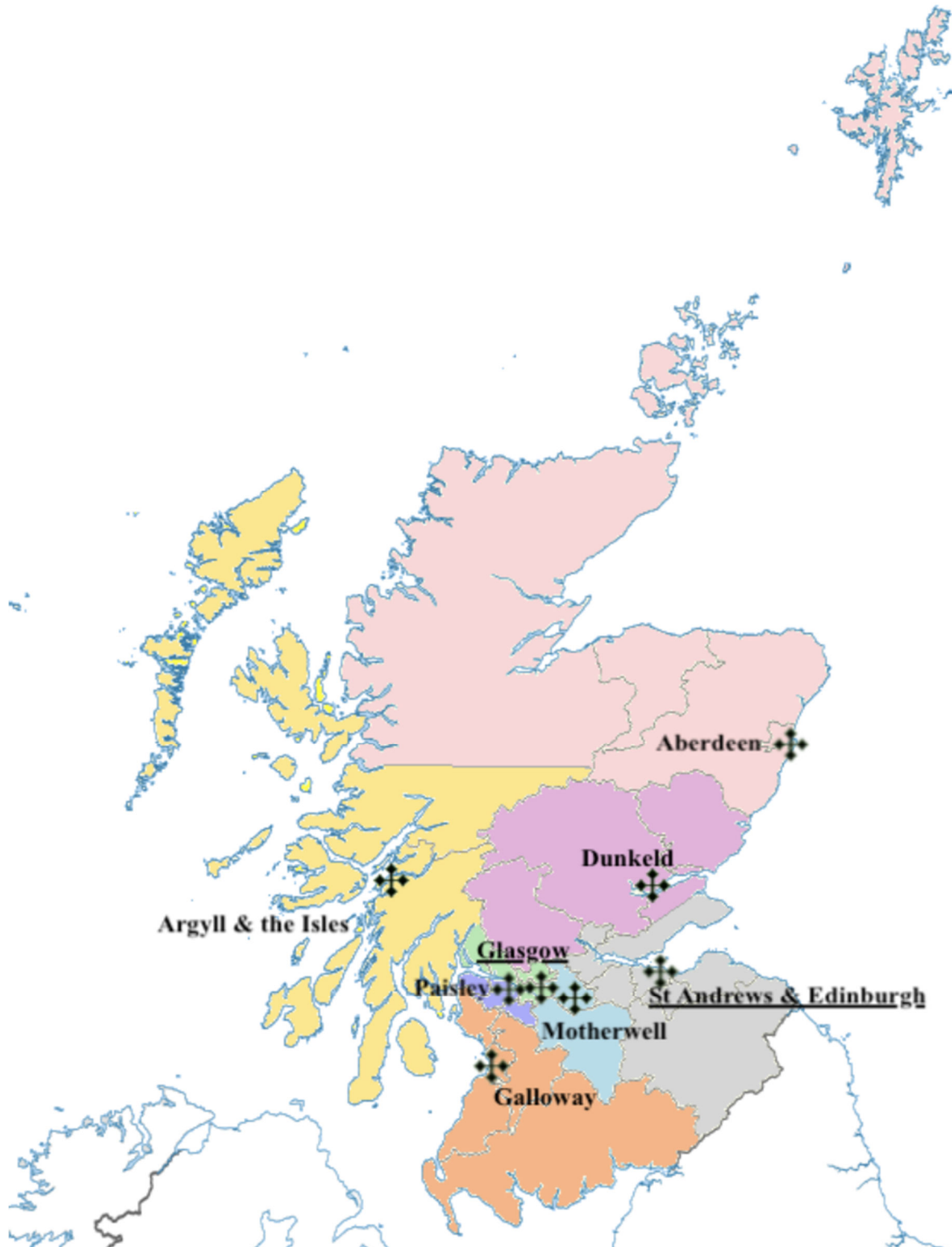
Marriages in 2024 - 748

Average weekly Mass attendance (Nov 2024) - 97,796

Overview of Dioceses

1. **Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh:** This serves the capital and surrounding areas.
2. **Archdiocese of Glasgow** This covers the city of Glasgow and its vicinity
3. **Diocese of Aberdeen:** This comprises the **City of Aberdeen; Aberdeenshire; Highland (except the parish of Kingussie, the former district of Lochaber and the Isle of Skye); Moray; Orkney Islands; Shetland Islands. Apart from Scandinavia, it is geographically the largest area of any diocese in Western Europe, covering an area of 29,068 sq km (11,223 sq mi).**
4. **Diocese of Argyll and the Isles:** This diocese encompasses the western coastal regions and islands.
5. **Diocese of Dunkeld:** Situated in central Scotland, it includes the city of Perth and surrounding areas.
6. **Diocese of Galloway:** Covering the southern part of Scotland, it includes the city of Ayr and surrounding regions.
7. **Diocese of Motherwell:** Located in the central belt, it serves the area around Motherwell and Hamilton.
8. **Diocese of Paisley:** This diocese covers the area around Paisley and Renfrewshire.

Map of the Dioceses of Scotland



Summary across dioceses

Diocese	Aberdeen	Argyll and the Isles	Dunkeld	Galloway	Glasgow	Motherwell	Paisley	St Andrew's & Edinburgh	Scotland
No of Parishes	43	25	35	36	88	58	31	110	426
Mass Attendance	5,670	2,018	5,966	4,990	23,311	25,440	11,047	19,347	97,789
Catholic Population	29,162	9,269	25,500	46,396	182,481	157,375	88,070	101,006	639,259
Baptisms	166	80	236	182	1,136	1,408	756	807	4,771
RCIA	42	11	53	22	89	92	25	106	440
Marriages	34	17	29	38	186	203	78	153	738
Confirmations	238	49	253	203	1,533	1,818	963	1,203	6,260
Priests	27	17	26	19	78	56	27	82	332
Square Miles	8,350	10,057	3,118	4,533	175	868	230	2,940	30,271

Detail on priests and churches

2025	EDINBURGH	ABERDEEN	ARGYLL	DUNKELD	GALLOWAY	GLASGOW	M/WELL	PAISLEY
Sec. working in diocese	39	20	14	16	13	56	52	27
Chaplains	1				1			
Outwith	1	2		3	1	2	2	2
retired	23	2	6	4	15	37	20	12
Ordinate/Prelature		2			1	3		
On loan	20	9	1	7		13	5	
TOTAL SECULARS	84	35	21	30	31	111	79	41
Regular Priests	38	10	2	13	8	37	15	
Total Number of Priests	122	45	23	43	39	148	94	41
Permanent Deacons	8	8	3	6	3	20	15	7
Retired Deacons	3	4		2	3	2	5	1
TOTAL DEACONS	11	12	3	8	6	22	20	8
Students in SC Rome	2				1	4	2	1
Beda								2
elsewhere		3						
TOTAL Students	2	3	0	0	1	4	2	3
Parishes	70	42	25	34	36	83	57	31
Churches	100	53	35	42	39	89	70	31
Mass Centres	4	9	4	2				
Relig. Communities Men	11	2		2	1	13	3	
Brothers	2	25		0	0	9	2	
Relig. Communities Women	16	3		3	4	34	9	9
Sisters	69	12		8	15	99	27	21
*Baptisms	913	208	90	289	204	1,225	1,500	781
Marriages	153	44	17	29	38	186	203	78
Mass attendance	19,347	5,670	2,035	5,966	4,990	23,301	25,440	11,047
Est. Cath. population	99,000	42,400	10,300	47,000	41,300	193,000	157,000	84,800

Aberdeen data

Diocese	Parish	Mass (2025)	Population (2025)	Baptisms	RCIA	First Communion	Confirmation	Marriages	Priests
Aberdeen (E)	Cathedral	1162	4525	44	11	109	90	12	1
Aberdeen (E)	Sacred Heart	123	2006	10	0	15	2	1	
Aberdeen (E)	St Francis	330	876	7	0	15	0	2	1
Aberdeen (E)	St Joseph	245	3475	0	0	0	0	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	Holy Family	397	2235	9	0	13	9	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Our Lady of Aberdeen	190	668	5	0	13	5	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	St Peter's	202	3941	14	2	33	26	1	2
Aberdeen (E)	St Columba (Bridge of Don)	151	1147	0	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Chaplaincy	91	140	0	7	0	4	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	Lerwick	0	111	0	0	3	0	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	Banchory	94	500	1	1	5	8	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	Braemar- Upper Deeside	20	218	0	0	0	3	2	
Aberdeen (E)	Ellon	66	862	0	0	0	2	0	1
Aberdeen (E)	Fraserburgh	147	471	8	1	23	1	1	2
Aberdeen (E)	Peterhead	127	522	4	1	12	1	3	
Aberdeen (E)	Inverurie	157	128	2	0	2	0	1	1
Aberdeen (E)	Stonehaven	128	200	0	1	0	1	2	1
Aberdeen (E)	Buckie	71	290	0	2	0	0	0	2
Aberdeen (E)	Banff	113	444	1	0	8	7	1	
Aberdeen (E)	Dufftown/Aberlour	22	36	0	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Elgin/Lossiemouth	162	668	15	2	11	15	0	2
Aberdeen (E)	Fochabers	32	130	1	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Forres	87	117	5	3	6	0	1	
Aberdeen (E)	Huntly	45	74	2	0	2	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Keith	71	189	0	5	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Tomintoul and Chapelton	47	32	0	0	24	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Westhill	129	252	0	0	5	0	0	
Aberdeen (E)	Dingwall	86	199	6	0	0	0	0	1
Aberdeen (W)	St Mary's	364	1154	9	2	32	26	1	1
Aberdeen (W)	Culloden	119	374	4	0	0	17	0	1
Aberdeen (W)	Fort Augustus	21	36	0	0	0	1	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Stratherrick	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (W)	St Ninian's	172	615	8	0	8	7	2	1
Aberdeen (W)	Aviemore & Grantown	72	169	1	0	4	0	0	1
Aberdeen (W)	Beauly/Eskadale	65	155	2	2	2	4	2	2
Aberdeen (W)	Ullapool	13	17	0	0	0	1	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Brora	16	124	0	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Marydale/Cannich	26	36	0	1	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Dornie	25	199	0	0	3	0	1	
Aberdeen (W)	Kirkwall	68	615	2	0	0	0	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Nairn	83	145	1	0	0	2	0	
Aberdeen (W)	Tain/Alness/Invergordon	76	823	5	1	13	6	1	1
Aberdeen (W)	Wick & Thurso	55	244	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total		5670	29162	166	42	361	238	34	27

CONSULTATION ON DIOCESAN STRUCTURES

EXPLANATION OF CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

The Scottish bishops have commenced a consultation process regarding our diocesan structures and whether they, in their present form, are best for promoting mission. Conversation in the Spirit will be the method for discerning during the consultation sessions.

What is discernment?

Discernment is the process by which we try to establish God's will. As disciples we are called to follow God's guidance and not our own agendas. Therefore, discernment is natural and core for the Christian. We can discern individually to determine one's personal call from God or we can discern communally to determine a community's call from God.

Conversation in the Spirit

Various techniques can assist discernment. One technique is called Conversation in the Spirit, which is especially helpful for communal discernment. The focus is listening to God through prayer, the Church's teachings, relevant facts and listening to other people. Both Pope Francis and Pope Leo have endorsed using Conversation in the Spirit, as have the Scottish bishops. It was successfully used both across the world and in the Vatican during the recent Synod of Bishops 2021-24.

Advantages of Conversation in the Spirit

Conversation in the Spirit has been developed to help communities discern God's will and/or resolve complex situations through attentive listening, avoiding agendas, allowing every participant the same time to speak and every opinion valued.

Conversation in the Spirit's Format

- A facilitator is appointed for each group which should have a maximum of 10 participants
- The questions and relevant facts should be made known to the participants in advance
- A secretary is elected
- The session begins with *lectio divina*
- Consecutive rounds of sharing deepens discernment
- During each round there is a time limit for speaking during which no one can interrupt the speaker. The emphasis is on listening
- After several speakers there is to be a period of silence
- A different speaker begins each round
- Confidentiality is paramount
- The facilitator ensures speakers keep to the topic and time limit

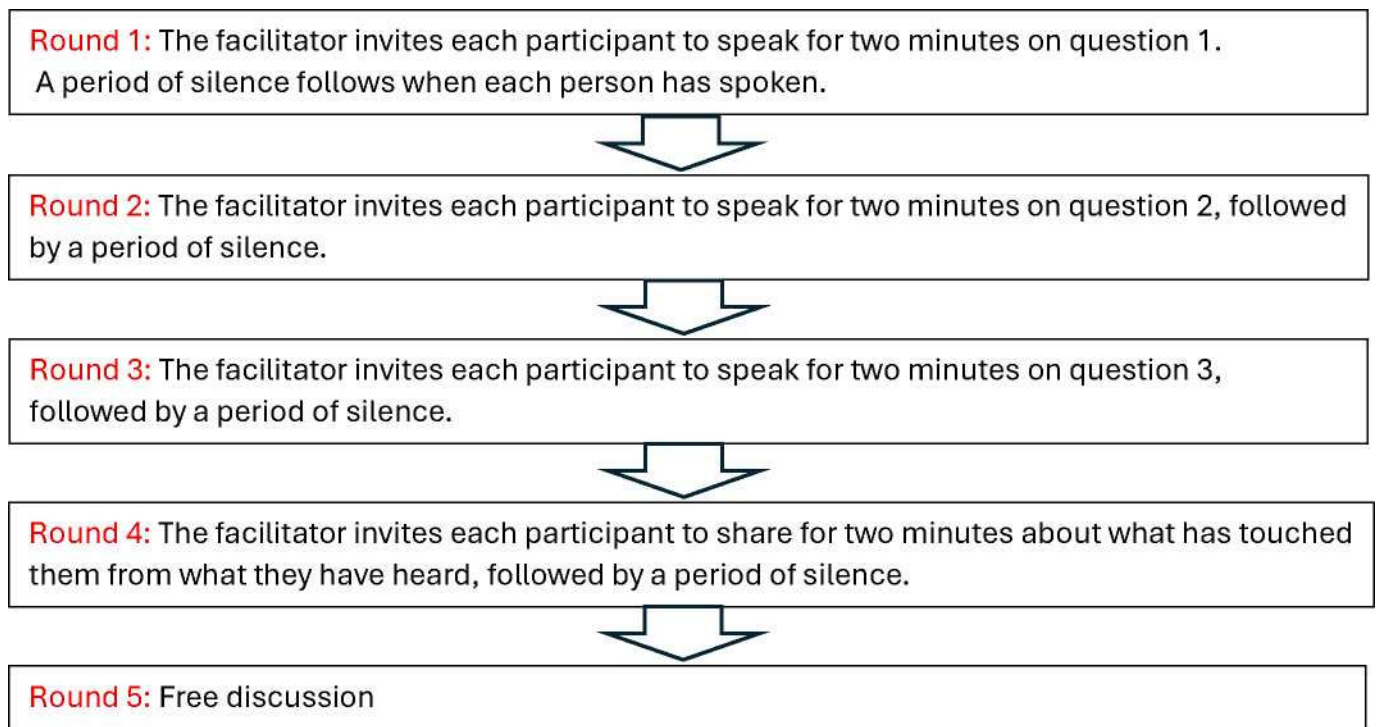
How our Consultation Session will Develop

The following three questions will be used to focus discernment:

1. Where do we see good examples of mission in our parishes, deanery, diocese and country?
2. Where does mission need to develop or even begin? What are the barriers to better mission and what can encourage it?
3. Does the present structure of eight dioceses in Scotland support mission? Does our diocese already have all that it needs? Would it help if we were to share resources with another diocese or dioceses? Would it help if our diocese merged with another diocese?

The session begins with prayer: **Matthew 28:18-20**

Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'



A report is then written, based on the secretary's notes, which should be divided into three sections:

- I. convergences i.e. points on which everyone agreed
- II. divergencies i.e. points on which there was disagreement and
- III. anything the group thinks needs more study or further discernment

In this way all opinions, including minority positions are recorded. The report should be agreed before being emailed to consultation@rcda.scot by the end of May 31st 2026.

Notes for the Facilitator

1. Remind the group that it forms part of a consultative process regarding mission within Scotland and whether the present diocesan structures sufficiently encourage mission and, if not, to offer concrete proposals for improvement.
2. Remind the group about Conversation in the Spirit's methodology e.g. consecutive rounds deepens the discernment, no interruptions and keeping to the time limit.
3. If you consider the group could benefit from pointers to the questions the following might be helpful:

Q1 – examples could include school chaplaincy, Youth Ministry, RCIA, sacramental preparation, social media, care of the poor, outreach, liturgy, care of clergy, etc.

Q2 – examples could include answers to Q1 as well as other areas. Facilitators should help the participants to probe barriers to more meaningful mission and what could help overcome this.

Q3 –

- (i) If people propose their diocese has no need of further development or support from elsewhere, reasons should be provided.
- (ii) If people propose that their diocese needs external support, examples could include financial help, personnel, shared projects etc.
- (iii) If people propose that their diocese should partially or completely merge, concrete examples should be provided, e.g. with whom and why.