

Dear Archbishop Cushley

43 Queen Margaret Close  
Edinburgh EH10 7EE  
[friel@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:friel@blueyonder.co.uk)  
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I have been waiting for some inclusive debate on the future of our dearly loved Archdiocese, but as nothing significant seems to be taking place, I hope you will forgive a direct approach to you to put my frustration and disappointment on the record.

I spent a number of years as Chair of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council in this Archdiocese and was a member of the Pastoral Planning team which produced "Now is the Favourable Time" (NITFT).

It saddens me greatly that you appear to have ignored the spirit of NITFT and attempted to use it to support a very different proposal. Given that document was presented to the Archdiocese as our future direction, I believe you have a responsibility to state why its principles are not the starting point for the next stage of our journey.

Clearly much has changed in the time since NITFT was written. The most important in my view, is the production of *Evangelii Gaudium*. From my reading, this has very similar principles to those used in NITFT - that the Parish is the centre of Church life. It is the parish where evangelisation takes place and it is through our communities that we both experience and indeed seek to build the Kingdom.

*Evangelii Gaudium* and NITFT are documents written in a spirit of hope and optimism for the future. They value the ministry of all the Church's members, recognising whilst the role of the priest is important, others too are called to play their part.

Both documents see the parish as the centre and hold community and the Eucharist to be pivotal. If we model our structures on available priests, what do we do when we have 20 priests or 15 priests or 5 priests?

Surely it is more important than ever to seek sustainable models for Church? That means working with our people to give them the courage and formation to sustain communities when there is no priest available on a regular basis. This will alleviate pressure on our priests. Additionally it allows us to fulfil our mission in a way which avoids us moving to the two tier model that you seem to suggest. Your proposals imply those with transport go to Mass and those without are left behind.

Towards the end of last year I heard the Most Reverend Justin Welby agree with a description of the average member of the Church of England being a 29 year old sub-Saharan African woman with a child. That set me thinking as to what the average member of the Catholic Church may be. Perhaps very similar, though

substitute Latin America for sub-Saharan Africa. What it would not be is a western member of a super parish built in the image of what you seem determined to create.

There are many models for Church around the world, and it seems disingenuous to propose that only those which have a resident priest have validity. So many of our brothers and sisters grow in their spirituality in parishes where priests are occasional visitors.

We continue to discuss our structure from the perspective that we have a shortage of priests. Perhaps the current situation can be approached from a different angle. It may be that in the past we had too many priests and that the lay faithful abrogated many of our responsibilities, aided by a clergy which was happy to be the professional managers of our faith.

That approach has not demonstrated much in the way of success in recent years. Could it be time to look again, as I believe Pope Francis is calling us? We could rebuild our Church modelled on the Gospel message which calls us all to participate.

Now truly can be the Favourable Time. It would be such a wasted opportunity to focus on central power and control because you do not trust your people in their communities to build a Church based on mutual love and service at a local level. Let us move forward in hope and confidence rather than the pessimism that runs through your proposals.

Christ ascended after 40 days leaving only a few. We were gifted the Spirit and trusted to get on with it. If that was good 2,000 years ago, why is it not appropriate for the people of St Andrews and Edinburgh in the 21st century? Please let us open up the discussion and ask our people if they are prepared to accept the Gospel challenge. You may be pleasantly surprised at what a willing flock, imbued with the Spirit, can achieve.

With my prayers, yours sincerely

Danny Friel