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14<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the past several years, Pope Francis, and now Pope Leo, have been guiding us to rediscover synodality as our way of being Church. Synodality is an invitation for us to walk together with openness of heart, listening for the Spirit in one another's hopes, and concerns. This shared journey helps us discern how God is calling us to be Church in this time and place; "driving participation, deepening communion and directing mission". With this in mind I am inviting parishioners from around the diocese to enter into a time of synodal reflection. The synodal question that I invite you to consider is, "**What sort of parish are we called to be**" (see the following page). This time of reflection can help guide your Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Priest and will also help inform me as your bishop as to how God is calling us to be the church here in Dunedin diocese. If you would like some more information about the synodal discernment process or some assistance in leading these sessions, please contact Amy Armstrong on [amya@cdd.nz](mailto:amya@cdd.nz).

I also invite some of our parishes to consider some more practical proposals. In a continuation of the 2005 diocesan-wide consultation, I invite the parishes that were formed as part of a Pastoral Area in 2005 to consider becoming single parish entities instead of pastoral areas. While such a change will have little impact on the day-to-day life of our communities, the change will help ensure that our diocese and our parishes are less focused on administrative matters and more focused on the pastoral mission of the church. Your parish may develop a more localised discussion document.

Finally, I re-state my support for our rural church communities. In the accompanying document I give an outline of a proposal for how we can support our rural communities, particularly around maintenance of our churches and also to ensure the provision of Mass and the sacraments.

I encourage you to arrange a time to engage in this process in the New Year. Could you please provide me with your feedback by Easter 2026.

Yours In Christ

Bishop Michael

**Diocese of Dunedin**  
**Parish and Pastoral Area Consultation and Synodal Reflection**  
**January 2026**

Your parish/church community: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of people involved in developing this response: \_\_\_\_\_

Age range of respondents: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Parish synodal reflection**

Synodality is about listening to one another. We encourage you to meet with fellow parishioners to prayerfully listen, reflect, and discern your response together.

In a small group spend some time in silence pondering the synodal question. Make sure that you know what you want to say so you can spend the next part of the process genuinely listening.

- a. Listen, without interrupting, to each person.
- b. In the second round share what struck you from what you heard. This is not the time to re-state what you have said, but a time to feedback what you have heard someone else say.
- c. Finally, work out a shared response from your group.

Synodality is an invitation to listen. To listen to each other, but specifically to listen to the Holy Spirit who is present in each one of the baptised. This synodal question is centred around how we live the mission of Jesus here in this part of the diocese, in other words, what sort of parish do we want be? Over the next couple of weeks pray with these questions in mind and then meet with other parishioners to consider the synodal question. You may consider these areas of parish life.

- What are the strengths of our community?
- What are the challenges our community faces?
- What are the pastoral needs in our community and how do we meet these needs?
- How do we build community and help newcomers feel welcome?
- How can we best serve the local community, especially those most in need?
- What are the opportunities for us to grow in faith?

### **Our synodal question:**

### **What sort of parish are we called to be?**

Please write up your group's thoughts and return to your parish priest.  
Responses are required by Easter 2026

# **Diocese of Dunedin**

## **Parish and Pastoral Area Consultation and Synodal Reflection**

### **January 2026**

#### **2005 diocesan-wide consultation**

In 2005 a diocesan-wide consultation took place with over 1300 parishioners taking part. Questions asked in that consultation centred around what the priorities should be for the diocese and about how parishes would be best grouped into one pastoral area.

**Priorities** that were identified included the need for renewal and prayer, being outward and mission focused, the need for the formation of lay leaders and the need for education and faith formation for all ages.

#### **Formation of pastoral areas**

At the conclusion of the 2005 consultation the following pastoral areas were established:

Dunedin North Pastoral Area – incorporating Palmerston (which included a church in Hampden and a church at Waikouaiti), Port Chalmers, North East Valley and Dunedin North parishes.

Dunedin South Pastoral Area – incorporating Waverly (which included a church at Broad Bay), Tainui, South Dunedin and Forbury parishes. In 2012 these parishes combined to become Mercy parish.

Hills Pastoral Area – incorporating Brockville, Mornington and Kaikorai parishes.

Mosgiel-Green Island Pastoral Area – incorporating Mosgiel and Green Island parishes

South Otago Pastoral Area – incorporating Lawrence, Milton and Balclutha parishes.

Gore Pastoral Area – incorporating Gore (which included churches in Mataura, Tapanui and Waikaka), Wyndham and Riversdale (which included a church in Balfour). This has now become one parish with the churches in Waikaka, Tapanui, Riversdale, Wyndham and Mataura since closed and sold.

Invercargill Pastoral Area – incorporating Waikiwi (which includes a church at Rakahouka), North Invercargill, Georgetown (which includes a church at Rimu) and Invercargill Central (which includes a church at Bluff) parishes.

Alexandra Pastoral Area – incorporating Alexandra (which includes a church at Clyde), Omakau and Roxburgh parishes.

## 2026 Consultation

The 2026 consultation has a narrower focus than the 2005 consultation and is to be seen alongside the diocese's commitment to synodality and the diocesan strategic plan. For the most part the changes that are proposed are simply organisational. It is intended that the organisational changes will take some pressure off parishes and help us to be more efficient and effective. It is not proposed in this consultation that any particular Church will close. On the contrary, an important part of this process is to look at ways of supporting our smaller communities.

### A. It is proposed that the following pastoral areas formally become one parish.

1. Dunedin North Pastoral Area to become one parish with the Hampden community to be part of the Oamaru parish.
2. Hills Pastoral Area to join with the Cathedral to become one parish.
3. Mosgiel and Green Island Pastoral Area to become one parish
4. South Otago Pastoral Area to become one parish.
5. Invercargill Pastoral Area to become one parish with two pastoral areas.
6. Alexandra Pastoral Area becomes one parish.

### B. The following additional changes are proposed

- a. Western Southland parish and Winton parish combine to become one parish.
- b. Northern Southland church communities – Dipton, Lumsden, Mossburn and Balfour – consider their future. It is considered important for there to be a church in Northern Southland and that Mass should be offered every Sunday (as much as is possible). This Mass may be served by a priest from Gore, Winton, Te Anau or Invercargill. The Northern Southland church could be part of Te Anau parish and this parish would receive additional administrative support from the diocese.
- c. Te Anau parish to have a regular Sunday Mass and this Mass will be offered by a priest from Gore, Winton or Invercargill. Visiting priests would also be encouraged to stay in Te Anau and offer Sunday Masses. Te Anau Parish to receive additional administrative support from the diocese.
- d. Ranfurly parish to receive additional administrative support from the diocese.
- e. Oamaru Parish to include the Hampden church community.

### C. Parishes that will be unaffected by the 2026 consultation

Gore parish, Mercy parish, Queenstown Parish, Cromwell-Upper Clutha parish. Parishioners from these parishes are encouraged to participate in the first question which is a synodal reflection on what sort of parishes God is calling us to be.

### Rationale behind the proposal.

- A. To ensure that all of our parishes are financially sustainable and are big enough to sustain the sort of activities that you would expect in a parish.
- B. To overcome some of the canonical and organisational requirements that can be burdensome for many of our smaller parishes.
  - o Financial: the need to complete annual accounting returns, annual charities returns, the requirement to have a parish finance committee.
  - o Compliance: the need to have a safeguarding officer, a privacy officer etc.

**Question: Do you agree with the proposal that your pastoral area formally become a single parish?**

