

## Lay leadership in Galloway

A group of lay people from Galloway opened the afternoon conversation. Helen-Marie, Stephen, Carol, Sara, David and Mary come from rural Galloway where there is one parish priest for seven parishes, together with a priest of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, two deacons, and a pastoral assistant.

Their ministry recognises the centrality of their baptism. They are 're-visioning ways which avoid replacing an ordained priest or deacon with a clerical model'.

Each of their parishes has a pastoral committee – not a pastoral council, which would require a priest. They meet at deanery level to share their vision, the practicalities of their ministry, and their planning ahead.

They share responsibility and accountability for fabric, leadership, RCIA, sacramental preparation and funerals. Seven lay people are now trained to take funerals. They take responsibility for evangelisation, liturgy and faith education of young people.

One of their initiatives is the TLC café which opened in response to the needs of lonely people in the community. After consultation with health and education services, and supplied with food by the local Co-op, a café has been established in a parish hall where people can go for lunch and a chance to talk. Young people from local schools have begun to help, and they receive training in hospitality skills.

The mission of the Church is not to guard a museum, they say, but to cultivate a flowering garden of life.

They have 'Ninian moments': times of quiet shared prayer and reflection. Every fifth Sunday, the Christians of Newton Stewart have a joint service. They contribute to local foodbanks and hold 'an exuberant joint service' at the end of the Wigton book festival.

All this requires a change of mindset on the part of priest and parishioners. At present they believe that as a church we are too 'priest-focused' – perhaps we need to be more focused on our baptismal call. Many lay people find it hard to break out of a clerical mindset.

Some of the group have had to take some serious, shared and drastic decisions about closing churches. Synodality requires a willingness for parishes to work together.

The presentation ended with Carol and Helen-Marie, declaiming together:

Do not change because of declining numbers and ageing population  
Do not change because of the decline in numbers being ordained to the priesthood  
Do not change because we want to replace the current clerical model of priesthood with a new lay priesthood

Change because...  
We are the pilgrim people  
We are guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit  
We are the people of hope and love

Have courage!