

## Feedback - Family of Parishes Consultation Feb-Mar 2026

Following the consultation of parishioners in November 2025, the FoP working group (made up of 2 parishioners from each of our 4 parishes plus the 6 clergy, and facilitated by Fr Matthew Nunes) articulated some hopes and fears for the future along with the key drivers for change that we face. The group developed 4 possible scenarios of how our 4 parishes (5 church communities) could work together moving into the future. These Scenarios were presented to the parishes in February 2026 and a series of 5 open parish meetings were held.

A total of 230 people attended these open meetings (OLHC-40; StO-36; StM-57; StMM-60; StT-37) and feedback was collected. In addition, 20 direct emails were received. This feedback is collated into 36 pages and is available in full on the link: [Family of Parishes](#)

A summary of all the collated feedback is here:

### Summary of Collated Feedback (Feb–Mar 2026)

The summary brings together written feedback from parishioners, open parish meetings, and schools in response to the Family of Parishes (FoP) scenario consultation. Across all responses there is broad acceptance that change is unavoidable, primarily due to the declining number of priests, but there is a concern that ways forward are being considered without sufficient information, particularly around finances, buildings, demographics, and long-term sustainability.

#### Key Themes Across Feedback

Several themes recur consistently across parishes and meetings:

- **Parish identity and locality matter deeply.** There is strong resistance to models perceived as overly centralised or impersonal, especially where parishioners fear loss of local community, voice, and pastoral care.
- **Access and transport are critical,** particularly for elderly, disabled, or non-driving parishioners. Travel between churches—especially in rural or semi-rural areas—is seen as a major barrier.
- **Schools and young people are viewed as essential to the future of the Church.** There is broad support for investing in youth workers, school chaplaincy, and stronger parish–school links.
- **Greater lay involvement is welcomed,** but parishioners want clarity about roles, training, accountability, safeguarding, and whether responsibilities are paid or voluntary.
- **Transparency and communication are lacking.** Many contributors express frustration at the absence of published parish accounts, parish council minutes, and clear explanations of governance structures and decision-making authority.

#### Views on the Four Scenarios

No single scenario commands universal support:

- **Scenario 1** is valued for continuity, familiarity with clergy, and parish identity, but criticised for workload imbalance and limited future resilience.
- **Scenario 2** is seen as fairer in sharing clergy and resources, though concerns remain about cost, rotation of priests, and loss of personal connection.
- **Scenario 3** attracts interest for shared leadership and collaboration but raises fears of remote governance and loss of parish voice.
- **Scenario 4** is viewed by some as the most “future-proof” and efficient, but by others as overly centralised, risking loss of identity, reduced access, and parishioner disengagement.

## Overall Tone and Conclusions

The overall tone is constructive but cautious. Parishioners express gratitude for the work undertaken so far and a willingness to adapt, yet repeatedly emphasise that:

- Decisions should not be rushed.
  - Robust data must be shared openly.
  - Local identity, accessibility, pastoral care, and mission must remain central.
  - Any long-term solution must address not only clergy numbers but also parish life, governance, finances, buildings, and mission.
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## Clarification of expectations:

### Diocesan Boundaries

The geography of our South Ribble FoP means that we have boundaries with Lancaster and Salford Dioceses. Whilst it is true that sometimes churches in Preston, Bamber Bridge, or Lostock Hall are closer to us than churches in our own Family, the reality is that changing diocesan boundaries is a very lengthy and complex business that ultimately would be decided by Rome. It is not a realistic expectation that this would change any time soon.

### Ordained Ministries

The decision to ordain women to the diaconate or priesthood and/or married men to the priesthood may or may not make a difference to the situation, but these are decisions that can only be taken by the Bishop of Rome in concert with the world's Bishops and is not going to happen any time soon.

We will feedback these views to our own Archbishop, but we will not be able to realistically plan locally with these options.

### Next steps

The working group has met and received and pondered all you said in the feedback. We will be meeting again in May to decide the next steps.

### Young people consultation

A small group of young people with representatives from each parish is being gathered together by Kate Wilkinson and will contribute their reflections.

### Basic information

We are establishing a short term sub-group to identify what information we need, to gather this information, and to reflect on how it can be usefully presented to the working group and parishes.

### Deanery & diocesan timescales

We need to keep in mind other processes and timescales. The Archdiocesan Parish Development Strategy (PDS) will offer the support of diocesan team members (including for example in building surveys & quinquennials) but this PDS is being rolled out deanery by deanery and the Lancashire Deanery will likely only have access to this support in the summer of 2027. Our FoP has decided we need begin the conversations and not to wait until 2027. There are things we can do before the PDS process, and all these conversations will put us 'ahead of the game'.

### Vision & Mission

In focusing on the drivers for change, particularly the declining numbers of parishioners and priests, we risk overly focusing on a 'management of decline' and the challenge to 'keep the show on the road'. We need however to keep at the forefront of our reflections and planning the Mission we have as baptised members of God's people. As Pope Francis constantly reminded us, we are all missionary disciples and our mission to proclaim the Gospel in the world is the first priority. We need to come back to and keep at the centre of all our work therefore our vision - our purpose and our mission as individuals, as parishes, and as a Family of Parishes.