

PARISH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Towards the future with hope

“ **The Church exists to proclaim Jesus Christ to all peoples.** ”



This is our mission. Christ loves us, has saved us, walks with us and offers the hope of eternal life.

We are pilgrims of hope who wish to share the hope of Jesus Christ with others. I invite you to help shape the future of the Church for the Archdiocese.

The mission today, for tomorrow, needs realistic and forward-looking structures because people have moved, the cost of maintaining too many buildings is prohibitive and the number of clergy has reduced.

We need the means that help us proclaim Jesus Christ to all people and help them to participate in the life and mission of the Church. This is the calling of all the baptised.

Our hope in Jesus Christ, our culture of vocation, and our participation in the life of the Church will then foster faith in the family, attract more people to serve the Church as priests and religious, and enable all members of the Church to proclaim Jesus to the world and serve others through faith in action.

Archbishop John Sherrington, April 2025

Questions for your reflection:

- 1 **What stands out for (or excites) you in what the Archbishop said?**
- 2 **What ideas for the future come to the forefront of your mind?**
- 3 **What worries you as you imagine the future?**

Our shared mission

Like the first Christians, we are called not just to maintain what we have, but to grow as a missionary Church. Jesus asks us to ‘go and make disciples’ (Matthew 28:19) and calls for all the baptised, not just priests, to be part of His mission.

Together, we are invited to be a Church that reaches out, a Church that listens and includes, a Church where everyone has a part to play.



Introduction

The Sefton Coast North Deanery stands on foundations of deep faith, committed clergy, strong lay involvement, vibrant worship, and a rich tradition of service.

Some of the most vibrant parishes within the archdiocese are to be found in this Deanery. But as well as significant strengths there is a growing urgency to be aware of the pastoral, financial, and structural challenges that face not just the Deanery, but the archdiocese as a whole.

There is an awareness that this moment presents a profound opportunity: to reshape our mission, renew our presence, and reimagine how we best serve the people of God. We must plan for a sustainable and vibrant future that will be different but mission focused.

These proposals have been put forward to guide discernment about the future of the parishes within the deanery. They are framed through a vision-first approach, placing sharing the good news of Jesus, mission, evangelisation, the worship of God and presence to the community at the heart of any structural decisions. Once the path towards a vision is agreed upon, the necessary structural decisions will have to be made. These changes will not happen overnight – but the path will be clear and so the right decisions can be generously put into action.

Why do we have to have to do this?

The drivers of change are:

- A deep desire to live out our missionary purpose: to proclaim Christ, worship, evangelise, and serve.
- The hope for greater cooperation between parishes and deaneries to strengthen our mission and support one another.
- A sobering truth: the number of diocesan priests will fall from 100 today to below 60 within seven years.

In Sefton Coast North Deanery, none of the present priests will be under retirement age in 12 years' time. We must put in place a secure future for those who follow us.

- The aspirations of a vibrant future for our children and young people.
- The flourishing life of Catholic schools and families.
- The urgent need to attract more vocations to priesthood, diaconate, and religious life.
- The call for all the baptised to actively serve the mission of the Church.
- The financial strain of maintaining too many buildings, leading to years of overspending. The diocese spent over 45% of its income on building repairs in 2025.
- Across the diocese there has been an annual deficit of around £10 million for the last 7 years. If this continues to eat away at reserve the diocese has only 14 years left to function.
- The burden of stewardship is falling on fewer priests and parishioners.
- The challenge of engaging those indifferent or hostile to the Church.

Vision for the Future & Proposals

We commit to:

- Moving from a building-centred, individual parish mindset to a mission-centred presence.
- Forming disciples for mission, equipping every member to witness to Christ.
- Developing genuine synodal listening within each community.
- Organising ourselves around what enables evangelisation and ministry.
- Making the most from the academisation process and its family of schools vision.

This vision is not about contraction, but about renewal, courage, and faithfulness to the Gospel.

PROPOSAL ONE

Formation of Two Parishes Across the Deanery

Divide the deanery into two large parishes:

North Parish

St Marie's
St Patrick's
Holy Family, Southport
Our Lady of Lourdes
St Joseph's
St Teresa's

South Parish

Sacred Heart / St John Stone
Our Lady of Compassion
Our Lady of Victories
Holy Family (Ince Blundell)

Both new parishes would commit to ensuring coordinated pastoral care and evangelisation across wider family networks of churches. Decisions about buildings, finances and personnel will have to be made as we move forward.

PROPOSAL TWO

a: Formation of a Single Parish Unit in the South

Unite the following parishes into **one parish unit**:

- Our Lady of Compassion
- Our Lady of Victories
- Holy Family (Ince Blundell)
- Sacred Heart / St John Stone

This new unit would engage in local discernment to determine which buildings are:

- **Viable**
- **Sustainable**
- **Missionally effective**
- **Needed for the future vision**

b: Parishes remain separate, but collaborate more deeply

The Parishes in the north would initially remain separate but commit to developing deeper collaboration and shared ministry. As a move towards this the amalgamation of Our Lady of Lourdes + St Joseph with St Teresa's would be consulted upon.

- St Marie's
- St Patrick's
- Holy Family, Southport
- Our Lady of Lourdes
- St Joseph's
- St Teresa's

Over time, the north would also discern which buildings are **viable, sustainable, missionally effective**, and **needed for the future vision**.

PROPOSAL THREE

Formation of a Single Parish Across the Deanery

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| • St Teresa | • St Patrick | • Our Lady of Compassion |
| • St Joseph & Our Lady of Lourdes | • Holy Family | • Our Lady of Victories |
| • St Marie | • Sacred Heart & St John Stone | • Holy Family (Ince Blundell) |

About the Proposals

The heart of these proposals is a **mission-first transformation**.

Buildings do not define us—the **mission of Jesus Christ** does.

This consultation invites every community to:

- Discern courageously
- Listen deeply
- Think creatively
- Collaborate generously
- Make realistic recommendations
- And place the Gospel before everything

The future of the Sefton Coast North Deanery will be shaped by **what God is calling us to become**.

Invitation to participate

This summary is offered for **prayerful reflection, discussion & consultation**. Your insights, concerns, and hopes are essential as we discern the best way forward together.



CLOSING DATE:
30th September 2026

archdioceseofliverpool.org/SCSouth

Methods of consultation:

Over the next few months your parish will be organising a number of ways to discern and consult on the two proposals. This process is your opportunity to pray about these proposals and have your say.



Online form - you can respond to the proposals using the QR code or link



Open meetings held in your parish/schools (which will offer opportunities to listen to one another and discuss)



Response boxes in your church for paper replies



Email response directly to the Archdiocese at pds@rcaol.org.uk

Questions for your reflection:

1

What is good about the proposals?

2

What is not good about them?

3

The Pastoral Plan asked us to be bold and creative – are we doing this?

4

Are there any other observations?

You might feel that a proposal / a suggestion that is not in this leaflet is the best way forward – please feel free to make that known.