

Statement from the Bishops of Scotland

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Following a request from the Holy See, the Bishops of Scotland have been invited to reflect on how the structures of the Church in our country can best serve her mission in the years ahead, specifically whether the present situation of eight dioceses is suitable.

We are all aware of the challenges before us — fewer clergy, changing patterns of practice, and increasing pressures on our diocesan resources, among other things. Yet our mission remains unchanged: to proclaim the Gospel and to lead our people to Christ.

Two possible pathways are being proposed for careful discernment: developing deeper cooperation and the sharing of resources across dioceses within our present structures, or the merging of some dioceses.

In order to best inform ourselves and the Holy See, each bishop will engage with his diocese over the coming months for the first part of this process. Everyone will be given the opportunity to pray, reflect, and contribute.

Following-on from the presentation of a discussion paper, responses from each diocese will contribute to the initial findings which will be given to the Holy See in the Autumn.

This is not simply an administrative exercise. It is a pastoral and missionary response to our changing landscape. This process will ensure our Church in Scotland will continue to grow ever more missionary, more Christ-centred, and more collaborative in the service of God's people.

Entrusting this work to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to the intercession of Our Lady, we move forward together with confidence and renewed hope.



Diocesan Centre
Coursington Road
Motherwell
ML1 1PP

Rt Rev. Joseph Toal STB KC*HS
Bishop of Motherwell

Commentary on Message for Bulletins (Sun 22 March 2026)

Dear Fathers,

Just a word or two to give context to the message for bulletins attached below. As you may know, the Holy See has already effected changes in Ireland, Wales and England where they have united Dioceses (as in other parts of Europe). This can happen for various reasons, but often the catalyst is a vacancy in one Diocese.

There is no reason to suggest that this is something that will happen in Scotland, but it does seem reasonable that it might. For this reason, and following discussions with the Dicastery for Bishops, we have agreed to get ahead of the curve and look at this issue ourselves so that we can advise Rome. I am sure you can understand why this is better than simply waiting to see if something will be imposed without time for reflection and discussion on our part.

Hence the decision to announce this now so that we can engage with clergy, religious and laity in each Diocese on the issue. The first step will be a discussion paper that looks at the two possibilities given in the statement:

1. Retaining the same number of Dioceses but with greater cooperation and mutual support;
2. Reducing the number of Dioceses.

The timescale for the first stage might seem short (with a report to Rome being sent in the Autumn), but for context, Bishop Gilbert in Aberdeen will turn 75 next year.

We will discuss this at a Clergy Assembly in May and then at the Council of Priests later that month, and we can look also at the best way to engage with the faithful throughout the Diocese and so produce our response.

Some Dioceses have Council of Priests' meetings imminently, so the Bishops wanted to ensure the message would be communicated this weekend.

I hope that gives you some initial background on this matter, and we will discuss the possibilities in May.

With my prayers and best wishes,

Yours in Christ,

+ Joseph Toal

T: +44(0)1698 269114 F: +44(0)1698 275630 W: www.motherwelldiocese.org E: chancellor@rcdom.org.uk

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