

PROCESS OF CONSULTATION AND DISCERNMENT

HOLY APOSTLES PARISH

Nova Scotia

2024



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Holy Apostles Parish, 18 Scholars Rd., Upper Tantallon, NS B3Z 0N2

July 19, 2024

Most Rev. Brian Dunn
Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth
1559 Brunswick St Suite 101
Halifax, NS B3J 2G1

Dear Archbishop Dunn:

We are submitting a Report and Recommendation in terms of the future of Holy Apostles Parish and the eventual closure of two churches within our Parish.

For the last twenty years there has been a steady and visible decline in Catholic Parishes across the province, country and in fact, the world. The Archdiocese began to have discussions and begin a process regarding the number of churches versus the number of people in the pews. This process continues, post Covid, as attendance numbers continue to decline, finances are a challenge, availability of priests to serve our wide geography are limited, and aged church buildings require ongoing upkeep and maintenance.

From its inception, Holy Apostles Parish recognized that there were a number of constraints that made growth and evangelization very challenging. Geography has a huge impact on our identity and ability to get to know one another; to be able to gather and share Eucharist with one another in one location, continues to be rare. Another factor is the age of many of the parish's buildings. Declining attendance and an aging demographic of those attending prohibits growth. Summer and major religious holidays like Christmas and Easter will bring in families to visit but that does not enable sustainability.

In April 2024, the leadership of Holy Apostles Parish began the process of discernment in order to determine its ability to best serve the needs of our faith communities. The process commenced with Listening Circle consultations with parishioners in two of the parish's locations.

Archbishop Brian Dunn
July 19, 2024
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Sessions began with prayer and moved on to difficult, but open conversations centering around the reality of limited pastoral and financial resources. A parish-wide, in-person and on-line Listening Circle was held on June 4, 2024. We recognized that prayer, listening and presence must be at the forefront as people would be grieving, angry and hurt about decisions that needed to be made in the near future.

Based on these challenges, we recommend to Archbishop Dunn that St. Patrick's, New Ross and St. Anthony's, Hubbards be closed. We are enclosing some information which explains why we believe there is just cause for these two locations be closed. We do this discernment with prayer, sadness and yet a hope that the Parish can and will be a vibrant "place" to worship God, invite others to "come and see" and truly a place where Eucharist is made present for all.

We ask for your consideration and prayer in our journey of faith.

Sincerely,

Holy Apostles Leadership Team

VISION STATEMENT

Holy Apostles Parish strives to be a Christ-centred welcoming community;
respecting each other and serving those in need.

THE PROCESS OF DISCERNMENT

Discernment is recognizing that we are guided by the Holy Spirit: seeing the world and what we must be do, no longer with our own eyes, but through the eyes of the Spirit.

Holy Apostles' approach to the discernment process has been a combination of reflection, prayer, dialogues and Scripture. The following outlines that path as provided by the Archdiocese's prescribed guidance:

Stage 1: Information and Prayer

Archbishop Dunn visited the Parish on March 16, 2024 and informed Fr. Earl and Maryn that there would be only 1 priest available to Holy Apostles Parish. As a result, Bishop Dunn, in consultation with Fr. Earl and Maryn, decided to begin with the closure of St. Anthony's and St. Patrick's in order for the Pastoral, Sacramental and overall good of the entire Parish be considered. Letters of Fr. Earl's departure and decision made regarding closures were sent/given to parishioners on the weekend of April 28, 2024. Information needed for consideration began to be gathered.

Stage 2: Dialogue

An essential part of being a Christian is prayer and presence. Four different dates and times were set for "Listening Times":

May 4 at St. Patrick's, New Ross

May 15 with all Parish Leadership groups, SMB, Tantallon

May 19 at St. Anthony's, Hubbards

June 4 hybrid (in person at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Church and on-line) for the entire Parish to participate.

Notes from these gatherings were taken.

Stage 3: Prayer

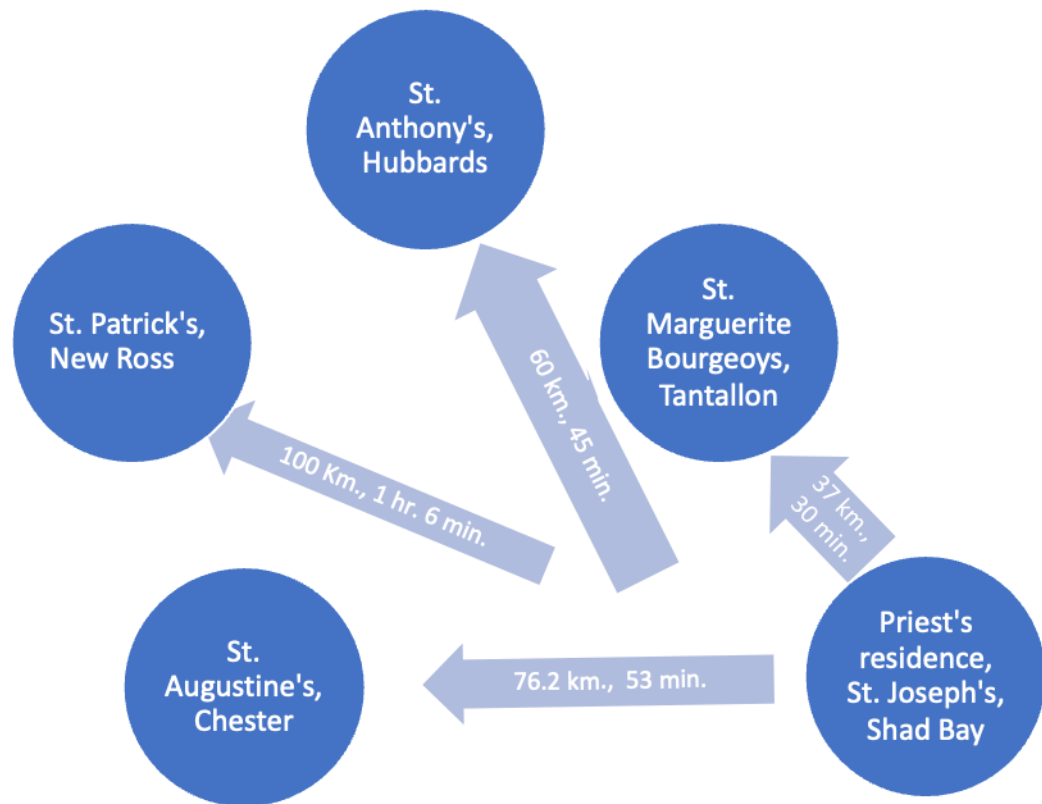
As we continue to journey through this process, prayer is essential. We are asking people to continue to pray for each other, for the Parish and for good decisions to continue. Prayers of Intercession and the Parish prayer is used for all Masses and events to keep the presence of the Holy Spirit with us on our journeys.

Stage 4: Communication

Communication regarding Fr. Earl's departure and the closure of two locations came out on April 26 and April 28 through written letter and on-line bulletin. Dates and communication were also chosen to have listening times at various locations. These events were for prayer, listening and sharing. Leadership knew how important it was to keep the entire Parish in the loop re the process and to give people opportunity to share input, give feedback, ask questions and be present to one another. May 4 there was a Listening Time in New Ross. May 15 at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, where members of Leadership Team, Pastoral Council, Finance Council and parishioners from Hubbards gathered to listen and discuss. May 19 there was a Listening time at Hubbards; again to pray and listen to one another. The final Listening time for the Spring was held on June 4 at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys and was a hybrid form for all parishioners who wished to participate. In mid to late July, the "Process of Consultation and Discernment" will be approved by Leadership and sent to all Parishioners via Bulletin and paper copy. After this time this will be sent to the Archbishop and his Council of priests for approval or non-approval regarding the closure of two churches.

INFORMATION GATHERING:

a) Analysis of one-way trips from the Priest's residence to each faith community



One can see that the pastor travels a substantial distance to each faith community. This is particularly difficult in the winter months.

Distance is part of the concern on a sacramental level that Bishop Dunn expressed for one priest ministering in the Parish. One priest will be responsible for all funerals, marriages, baptisms, house calls, sacrament of the sick, interments, house blessing, and reconciliation. He will also work with catechetical programming, meet parents, assist in evangelization opportunities and fulfill his duties to the Diocese. There are no extra priests to come to the Parish and if Fr. Edwin is unable to serve, what happens to the Parish as a whole? To be a Eucharistic people, we need the presence and council of an ordained person.

b) Analysis of Pastoral Support since Holy Apostles' inception

Holy Apostles Parish has lacked a consistent ordained presence since its inception in 2019. While thankful for the pastoral support provided, parishioners have been unable to establish a consistent bond with their pastor due to the steady flow of priests in and out of the parish. The following outlines that flow and the present situation:

August 2019	Fr. Roberto Donato chose Fr. Sebastien Szewczyk as Associate. Fr. Paul McIntyre was also part of the ministry
June 2020	Fr. Roberto became gravely ill in June and left the province. Fr. Sebastien returned to his order in Poland.
Fall 2020	Fr. Paul as Associate tried to minister but poor health would not allow it. Multiple priests “filled in” in the various locations as churches opened up.
Winter 2021	Only fill in priests were available to meet the spiritual needs of parishioners at all locations.
Sept. 2021	Fr. Earl Smith, SJ agreed to be Moderator; he began as a sacramental minister but the role quickly expanded to include multiple meetings and events. Fr. Gregory Agyeman was appointed Associate in July 2022 but was transferred in December 2022. Had multiple priests to assist in covering all locations
June 2023	Fr. Earl was removed. Fr. Jim Richards came into the Parish. He attended some meetings, but recognized he did not have a clear role in the Parish; administration of Parish continued with PLC and staff. Fr. Edwin Ewuzie was appointed to the Parish.
November 2023	Fr. Earl returns to full ministry.
June 30, 2024	Fr. Earl is reassigned to Toronto. Fr. Edwin Ewuzie becomes Assistant priest for Holy Apostles Parish. Fr. Charles Pottie is reassigned and Fr. Pat Cosgrove begins ministry.
Current situation	Three visiting priests that were formerly available for ministry are no longer available. There is no guarantee of 2 priests and a parish of this size needs 2 active, committed priests. Even if the parish is reduced to 3 locations, one active priest would only be able to minister with assistance at Christmas and Easter. 5 locations would not allow for this possibility. A Parish of Holy Apostles' size and geography, with 5 churches, is not manageable with the limited number of clergy available.

c) **Analysis of Churches by Faith Community**

** All major repairs have been put on hold at all churches for the past 3 years due to budget restraints. Only urgent or low-cost repairs have been conducted.

1. **St. Anthony's, Hubbards**

Built	1977: age 47 years old
Graveyard	Simms Settlement Cemetery
Round trip km. from Priest's Residence	120 km
Round trip travel time from Priest's residence	90 minutes
Condition of building(s)	Fair to good
Repairs required	Deferred maintenance
Estimated cost of maintenance	Donor covers the cost of maintenance such as snow removal, grass, etc. This will end in 2024.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average # at Mass	60	32	37	38	36
Marriages	0	0	0	0	0
Baptisms	0	0	0	0	1
First Communion	1	0	1	0	0
Confirmations	2	0	0	0	0
Number of people involved in lay ministries	17	8	14	14	12

2. St. Augustine's, Chester

Built	1846: age 146 years old
Graveyard/ Columbarium	Graveyard and Columbarium
Round trip distance from Priest's Residence	153 km
Round trip travel time from Priest's residence	1 hr. 46 min.
Condition of building(s)	Fair
Repairs required	Deferred maintenance
Estimated cost of repairs	\$25,000 (Painting Glebe and ½ roof repair)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average # at Mass	100	33	42	46	60
Marriages	1	0	1	2	2
Baptisms	0	0	0	0	0
First Communion	2	0	0	2	2
Confirmations	1	0	0	1	0
Number of people involved in lay ministries	20	9	17	20	23

3. St. Joseph's, Shad Bay

Built	1932: age 88 years old
Graveyard/ Columbarium	No columbarium. 7 cemeteries.
Round trip distance from Priest's Residence	n/a
Round trip travel time from Priest's residence	n/a
Condition of building(s)	Good
Repairs required	Insulation added Spring 2024. Fuel gauges needed.
Estimated cost of repairs	\$3,500

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average # at Mass	125	44	54	57	62
Marriages	2	0	0	0	0
Baptisms	3	0	0	0	0
First Communion	3	1	0	0	0
Confirmations	0	6	0	0	0
Number of people involved in lay ministries	15	12	14	18	22

4. St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, Tantallon

Built	2016: age 8 years old
Graveyard/ Columbarium	1 Columbarium and 2 closed cemeteries
Round trip distance from Priest's Residence	74 km.
Round trip travel time from Priest's residence	1 hr.
Condition of building(s)	Excellent
Repairs required	None
Estimated cost of repairs	No big repairs. Usual maintenance.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average # at Mass	300	57	114	135	183
Marriages	1	0	3	1	3
Baptisms	18	8	15	22	14
First Communion	27	34	24	13	12
Confirmations	37	18	25	16	12
Number of people involved in lay ministries	90	45	67	92	100

5. St. Patrick's, New Ross

Built	1877: 147 years old
Graveyard/ Columbarium	2 graveyards: one beside church, the other in Mill Road
Round trip distance from Priest's Residence	200 km.
Round trip travel time from Priest's residence	2 hr. 12 min.
Condition of building(s)	Poor
Repairs required	Roof, furnace, oil tank
Estimated cost of repairs	\$20,000 - \$25,000

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Average # at Mass	55	18	14	22	25
Marriages	0	0	0	0	0
Baptisms	0	0	0	0	0
First Communion	0	0	0	0	0
Confirmations	0	0	0	0	0
Number of people involved in lay ministry	10	4	6	8	8

ANALYSIS OF FINANCES:

Two factors contribute to the financial instability of the Parish: the cost to maintain aging and old buildings and fewer people giving or able to give. The People of God need to be a presence in the world, not spending pastoral and financial resources on a geographically fragmented and crumbling infrastructure.

Sadly, little is actually spent on what we are called to do: catechetics, evangelization and liturgy. The majority of expenses are related to capital expenditures to repair infrastructures of aging properties, upkeep, fuel, heat, lights, and insurance.

The majority of the cost to build St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Church was paid for from \$2,025,434 in net proceeds from the sales of 3 churches: the former Sacred Heart Church, St. Margaret of Scotland Church and St. James Church.

Parishioners of the St. Marguerite Bourgeoys faith community provided approximately \$900,000 toward the cost of building the new church from a Capital Campaign and a bequest of \$100,000. The Capital Campaign and bequest funds will continue to cover the St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Church mortgage until October 2025.

The following outlines the finances of each faith community and the culmination of all for the parish.

Please note that each of the faith communities is shown before the inclusion of the Parish's Shared Costs. Shared Costs are related to the running of the parish as a whole and are applicable to each community. They include:

- Diocesan Assessment
- Insurance
- Priests' salary and mileage
- Staff salaries
- Parish Office supplies, communication, equipment,
- Religious education and programs

1. St. Anthony's, Hubbards

+ / -	2019 **	2020	2021 *	2022 *	2023 *	Budget 2024
Total Revenue *	Unknown	36,556	65,473	63,021	61,005	63,424
Direct Expenses	“	-15,060	-14,190	-14,467	-14,294	-22,650 ***
Contribution to Shared Costs	“	21,496	51,283	48,553	46,711	40,774

* Included in the above revenues, St. Anthony's received an annual \$20,000 donation from an anonymous donor for each of the following years 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. This donation may not extend beyond 2024.

** St. Anthony's was part of the Chester, Hubbards and New Ross parish. Revenue and expenses were not separated. We are therefore unable to provide a breakdown by church.

*** Higher budget in 2024 due to rise in cost of oil and utilities expenses.

2. St. Augustine's, Chester

+ / -	2019 *	2020	2021	2022	2023	Budget 2024
Total Revenue	185,425	34,906	30,853	38,494	68,440	62,275
Direct Expenses	-174,268	-6,823	-7,097	-20,598	-12,885	-31,940
Contribution to Shared Costs	11,268	28,083	23,756	17,896	55,555	30,335

* St. Augustine's was part of the Chester, Hubbards and New Ross parish. Revenue and expenses were not separated. We are therefore unable to provide a breakdown by church. Amounts shown in 2019 are the combined amounts for the 3 churches.

3. St. Joseph's, Shad Bay

+ / -	2019 *	2020	2021	2022	2023 **	Budget 2024
Total Revenue	172,618	93,710	79,209	83,307	177,704	91,675
Direct Expenses	-223,948	-26,618	-16,754	-34,960	-118,207	-32,450
Contributions to Shared Costs	-51,330	67,092	62,455	48,347	59,497	59,225

* 2019 Revenues and Expenses are for the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish. In 2020 the remaining church, St. Joseph's, became part of Holy Apostles Parish.

** 2023 was an outlier/exceptional year in that \$86,890.06 in insurance monies were received to compensate for insured expenses due to a flood.

4. St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, Tantallon

+ / -	2019 *	2020	2021	2022	2023	Budget 2024
Total Revenue	332,673	331,806	280,419	281,620	306,791	299,460
Direct Expenses	-157,655	-74,018	-77,263	-166,774	-122,605	-116,570
Contribution to Shared Costs	175,018	257,788	203,156	114,846	184,186	182,890

* Excludes Extraordinary Income from sale of Sacred Heart Church and proceeds of St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Capital campaign.

* 2019: Includes operating expenses of St. James, Sacred Heart and St. Margaret of Scotland churches.

5. St. Patrick's, New Ross

+ / -	2019 *	2020	2021	2022	2023	Budget 2024
Total Revenue	Unknown	7,624	8,205	10,928	15,838	16,676
Direct Expenses	“	-3,519	-2,953	-3,529	-4,622	-10,700
Contribution to Shared Costs	“	4,105	5,252	7,399	11,216	5,976

* St. Patrick's was part of the Chester, Hubbards and New Ross parish. Revenue and expenses were not separated. We are therefore unable to provide a breakdown by church.

6. All -- Holy Apostles Parish

+ / -	2019	2020 Year Holy Apostles Parish created	2021	2022	2023	Budget 2024
Total Revenue *	690,716	598,283	659,252	539,254	668,679	599,336
Net profit (expense) from Cemeteries & Columbariums **	unknown	7,074	12,087	-14,706	-21,368	-5,000
Direct Expenses	-555,871	-126,038	-118,257	-240,328	-272,613	-214,310
Shared Expenses ***	n/a	-368,020	-339,867	-312,550	-354,686	-420,404
Surplus / Deficit **	134,845	111,299	111,151	-28,330	20,012	-40,378 ****

* Realized gain on Cemetery investments in 2020 and 2021. Revenue was therefore greater than expenses.

- * 2019 Revenue: Excludes Extraordinary Income from sale of Sacred Heart Church and proceeds of St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Capital campaign.
- * Includes Extraordinary Revenue received in 2020 and 2021 - Covid Wage Subsidy
2020 = \$64,866. 2021 = \$16,749.
- * 2021 Revenue: excludes Extraordinary Income from sale of St. James Church.
- ** Prior to 2020, year of creation of Holy Apostles Parish, cemetery costs were not separated from Operational Costs. Therefore, they are unable to be determined.
- *** Separation of Shared Expenses was not applicable in 2019 as this was the year before the creation of Holy Apostles Parish.
- *** Shared Expenses 2022 and 2023:
Includes actual salary and travel expenses for 2 full-time and 3 part-time priests as required.
2024: Includes budgeted salary and travel expenses for 2 full-time and as required part-time priests.
- *** Shared Expenses 2022 and 2023:
Diocese waived payment of \$48,883 Diocesan Assessment charge. This expense has been budgeted for in 2024.
- **** By July 1, 2024 the actual loss from Parish operations was **\$50,044.**

SUMMARY: A CASE FOR GRAVE CAUSE

The Diocesan document entitled “*Process of Discernment of Closure*” makes a distinction between a just cause and a grave cause. Holy Apostles recognizes that the Archbishop only makes a decision for closing a church if there is grave cause. We believe that the preceding provides evidence of “grave cause”. That evidence is summarized as follows:

1. A general plan of the Diocese to reduce the number of churches

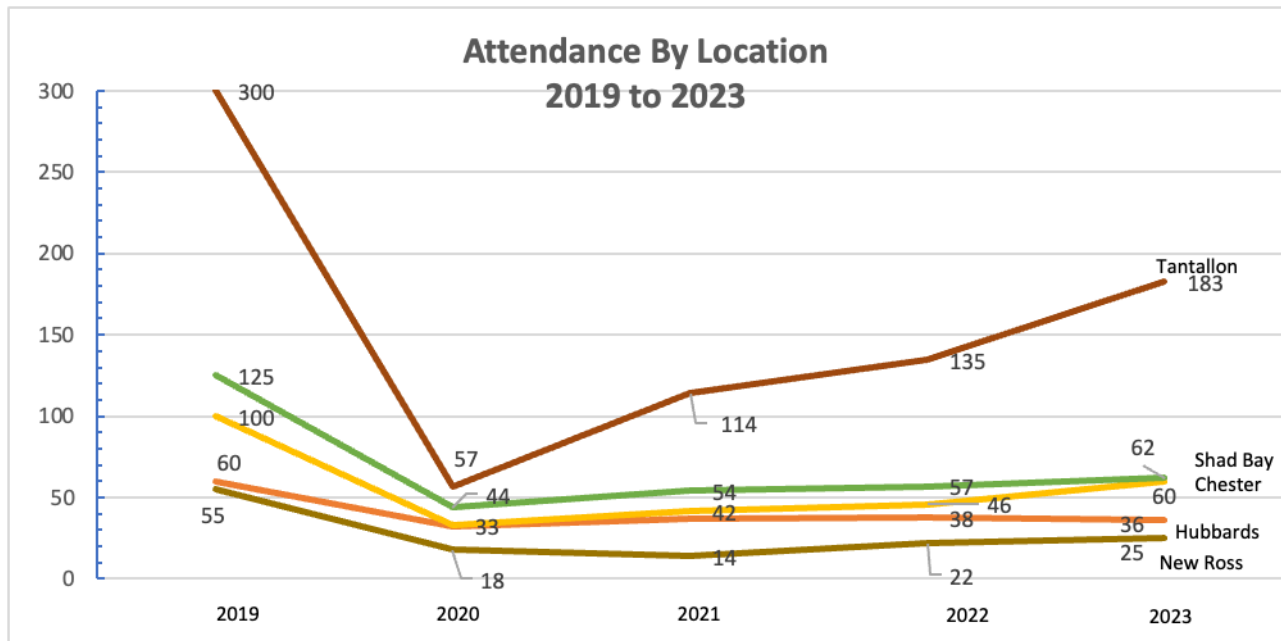
There is recognition that amalgamation of churches began with the Pastoral Plan of “*Equip the Saints*” and noted that restructuring of parishes is a necessity to be a missional church. Amalgamation came out of “*New Parishes Stronger Together*” and asked parishes to do an assessment of their infrastructure. It is never good to close a church, but it becomes a necessity for the entire good of the Parish. A just cause was made as part of the Archdiocesan restructuring and the greater good.

This process was previously followed by St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Parish, Tantallon with the closure of St. James, Hammonds Plains; Sacred Heart, Timberlea and St. Margaret of Scotland, Glen Margaret.

This process was also followed by Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish with the closure of Our Lady Star of the Sea, Terence Bay and St. Christopher’s, Hatchet Lake. The Parish had no remaining church. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish closed St. Thomas, East Dover and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Prospect. Both Parishes amalgamated and were left with a single church: St. Joseph’s in Shad Bay.

2. Declining attendance and proximity to other churches

As seen in the graph on the following page, the lowest number of parishioners attend in Hubbards and New Ross. Hubbards is approximately 15 minutes from the Tantallon church and New Ross, is approximately one-half hour from Chester. Maintaining churches for a small number of parishioners who are within a reasonable travelling distance of another church weighed heavily in this decision.



3. The former Parish of St. Augustine has been suppressed (parish no longer exists)

In the amalgamation process, Archbishop Mancini suppressed St. Augustine’s Parish, which at that time was made up of the New Ross, Hubbards and Chester. This we feel is another just cause for closure.

4. Decline in the number of parishioners

The decrease in mass attendance since Covid is not unique to our Parish. New Ross, except for Christmas and Easter has not seen any growth. Hubbards, outside the summer visitors, has also not realized a significant return to pre-Covid attendance. This overall low numbers of parishioners constitutes another just cause for closure.

5. Closure will not harm the good of souls

We believe that the remaining 3 churches in the Parish will be sufficient to serve the present parishioners. The other parts of our Parish have gone through this process of closing churches, and we all know first-hand how difficult and painful it is. We want to welcome and provide opportunities for the parishioners of New Ross and Hubbards to join in ministry, programs and opportunities for prayer in our other locations. We recognize that although difficult and sad for them, in the short-term, we pray that they will continue to be active faith filled members of Holy Apostles Parish. We hope the closure will not be harmful for the good of souls. This fact is another just cause for closure.

6. Unity of Parish

Parish Identity is a priority for the Diocese, but also for our Parish. Pastoral Council, as part of its Parish/Pastoral Plan, sees that in order to be truly a Parish that is alive and living our Vision, we need to have a strong, visible Identity. This Identity means that all locations participate in the building of Holy Apostles Parish, being present to those in need and serving in different capacities in order to have viable catechetical programs, strong evangelization and prayer-filled liturgy.

We need to invite people to worship together, not to remain separated, holding onto old buildings in need of repair. Coming together is a visible sign of unity; a lived reality! Thus we believe that the cause of unity of Holy Apostles Parish is yet another just cause for closure.

7. Potential future cause that has not yet happened

Potential future cause includes the eventual deterioration of the buildings, potentially fewer and fewer people, and the non-existence of a unified Holy Apostles Parish. Old buildings and aging populations with little to no growth is not only a future cause but one we live with at present. Old buildings and infrastructure will only last so long and presently seem ok, but in the near future this will cause much pastoral, human resources and financial strain to the entire Parish.

In conclusion, our recommendations for the closure of two churches, St. Patrick's, New Ross and St. Anthony's, Hubbards include the following reasons:

1. Pastoral resources
2. Sacramental resources
3. Number of parishioners attending Mass
4. The reasonable distance to alternative churches
5. Overall financial constraints

“Holy Apostles Parish strives to be a Christ-centered welcoming community, respecting each other and serving those in need.”