

Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2015

Introduction

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The Kilmore Diocesan Assembly, which took place on 25-26 October 2014, was a time of grace for our diocese. Despite many reasons for pessimism due to a variety of challenges to the Church today, the atmosphere was positive and constructive. There was a sense of quiet hope and confidence. That hope was rooted in the faith and solidarity of the people taking part and especially the delegates from the parishes and agencies around the diocese. It was also strengthened by the joyous witness of Pope Francis and his call for all Christians to be missionaries in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*.

We were fortunate in having the services of a diligent facilitator and steering group whose hard work facilitated the discussions and ensured that the feedback and conclusions were collated for further use. The Director of Pastoral Services, Fr Enda Murphy, worked with the Steering Committee on the material from the Assembly to produce a draft pastoral plan which was presented to a meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council early in the new year. In that and subsequent meetings the Council discussed and amended the draft to produce the plan which has now been finalised.

The Assembly identified four broad areas of pastoral action and missionary activity coming out of the listening survey that preceded the Assembly and the discussions during it. These are:

- Youth Ministry
- Liturgy, Sacraments and Prayer
- Diocesan Structures
- Support for Priests

The Pastoral Plan breaks these down into manageable goals and objectives with indicative timeframes for implementation. These goals and objectives should define the broad thrust of diocesan pastoral policy over the next five years.

I wish to thank very sincerely all who contributed to the drafting and production of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. That includes all who took part in the Assembly from the parishes, the representatives of apostolic agencies, the Steering Group and facilitators and those who planned and provided input at the Assembly itself. Finally, thanks to the Diocesan Pastoral Council who have discussed and finalised the Plan. I pray that the Holy Spirit will give us the grace and strength to bring about the renewal in faith, hope and charity in our people which is the goal of all our planning. We pray to Mary, the Mother of the Church, to be with us as she was with the disciples on the first Pentecost and that, with her, we will experience a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit so that we can proclaim the Word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

PREAMBLE

In November 2013, Pope Francis released an Apostolic Exhortation called *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel) in which he sets out a challenging path for the Church to follow in the years ahead.

This Pastoral Plan takes Pope Francis seriously when he says that this document has "programmatic significance and important consequences." (EG n. 25).

Along with the discussions held over two days at our Diocesan Assembly in October 2014 and the conversations which took place during the Listening Survey undertaken before the Assembly, *Evangelii gaudium* forms the context for pastoral ministry and planning in Kilmore for the next five years and beyond.

The proclamation of the Gospel is at the centre of what follows and at the centre of that proclamation is not an idea or a theory but a person, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. This plan will succeed in so far as that truth is always honoured. We do not seek to draw up pastoral strategies and make structural changes for their own sake. Rather, what will aid the preaching of the Word and the breaking of the bread has been the organising principle.

We hope that this plan helps the Church in Kilmore to be ever more outward looking and missionary in all that it does. We recognise, along with Pope Francis, that a constant preoccupation with internal Church matters is not a life-giving path to follow. It is the path of evangelisation and mission that carries with it the joy of the Gospel.

Pope Francis has compared the Church to a mother with an open heart. If this Pastoral Plan enables people to experience the Church in Kilmore as "a place for everyone, with all their problems" (EG n. 47) then it will in large measure have succeeded.

CREATING MISSIONARY COMMUNITIES

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities.'" (EG n. 33)

1. In order for the Pope's dream of a missionary Church to become a reality in the diocese of Kilmore, this pastoral plan will be a challenging document. It cannot be otherwise or the call to transform everything "so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structure can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" will go unheeded. (EG n. 27)
2. The listening survey carried out prior to the Diocesan Assembly expressed a hope for a Church that is closer to the lives of its people. The discussions at the Assembly deepened this insight and, as a result, four broad areas of pastoral action and missionary activity were identified:
 - i. Youth Ministry
 - ii. Sacraments, Liturgy & Prayer
 - iii. Diocesan Structures in light of declining priest numbers
 - iv. Support for Priests
3. Any one of these areas could provide the basis for a whole Pastoral Plan of its own. However, these four areas provide the basis for a thoroughgoing reimagining of life and ministry in Kilmore in the 21st century.
4. The resourcing of youth ministry and liturgical formation will be of vital importance if life is to be breathed into the new structures that emerge. Rather than settle for a list of aspirations which founder on the rock of no resources, this Pastoral Plan suggests a fund-raising strategy be put in place so that an investment is made in the true treasure of the diocese, its Christian faithful. Each parish in the diocese has a Pastoral Council. This Pastoral Plan recognises the work that they do and calls on all Pastoral Councils to be truly missionary in their outlook in order to avoid what the Pope calls "a tomb psychology [which] slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum." (EG n. 83). In order that they can achieve this, Pastoral Councils will need on-going training and formation.
5. Parishes should have structures in place to welcome new arrivals as well as engage with those who no longer practice the faith.
6. Pope Francis states "we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church" (EG n. 103), The Diocese of Kilmore acknowledges the indispensable role of women in the running and functioning of the Church throughout the diocese. In the coming years the role of committed women and men will be even more important in spreading the Good News and keeping the flame of faith alive in our parishes.
7. Many lay people in the diocese of Kilmore have already availed of adult faith development courses and continue to do so. These courses should be continued and expanded to reach as many people as possible. In addition to this, lay people with relevant qualifications in theology and pastoral work should be utilised in more effective ways on both a voluntary and paid basis.

YOUTH

"Young people often fail to find responses to their concerns, needs, problems and hurts in the usual [Church] structures." (EG n. 105)

1. The Diocesan Assembly identified ministry to young people as the top priority for the diocese in the coming years. Much good work has already been done with young people over the years and indeed the diocese continues to make significant investment in youth through its involvement in Catholic education.
2. Clearly a more structured and focussed ministry to the young is required at parish level. In order that this can become a reality, it is vital that each parish has an active Youth Officer who can promote initiatives at parish level with the support of the parish pastoral councils. *[By the end of 2015]*
3. A Diocesan Youth Core Group will be established in order to begin formulating a comprehensive youth ministry strategy for the diocese. *[By mid-Summer 2015]*
4. This Pastoral Plan recommends that Youth Ministers be employed in the diocese on a regional basis. The Core Group will advise on job description and qualifications. These Youth Ministers will be supported by the Diocesan Director of Pastoral Services. *[by end of September 2016]*
5. As Pastoral Areas become a more defined and important place of pastoral action, a Pastoral Assistant/Worker can be tasked with ensuring youth ministry is promoted and sustained in each area. The PA/PW will be an important support person for parish Youth Officers and assist the proposed Youth Ministers. This recommendation should be kept in mind in the future when contracts are being drawn up for PA's/PW's so that a youth ministry dimension is reflected therein. *[from 2015 onwards]*The diocese will support Youth Officers by providing training and resources on an on-going and regular basis. *(from Autumn 2015 onwards)*
6. The Pope John Paul II Awards were acknowledged at the Assembly as being a worthwhile initiative. Over the next five years every parish in the diocese will be able to participate in the awards. *[By 2020]*
7. Each parish should organise a youth Mass or liturgy on a regular basis. *[by 2016]*
8. The diocese will hold a youth day every year that could involve special celebrations in the parishes or a diocesan gathering of young people. *[by the end of 2015]*
9. The participation of Transition Year students in the diocesan Lourdes pilgrimage has been very successful. The diocese will explore ways of making pilgrimages to World Youth Day, Taize, Knock, Lough Derg or the Camino a regular part of diocesan life. *[by end of 2016]*

SUMMARY STATEMENT

- A Youth Core Group will be established by the end of summer 2015.
- Youth Ministers will be employed on a regional basis in the diocese beginning in 2016.
- Training in Youth Ministry skills will be provided to Parish Youth Officers beginning in Autumn 2015.
- The John Paul II Awards will be promoted in every parish in the diocese.
- More opportunities will be available for young Catholics to participate in pilgrimages from 2016 onwards.
- By 2020 the diocese will have a strong youth ministry programme.

DIOCESAN STRUCTURES IN LIGHT OF DECLINING PRIEST NUMBERS

"To make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful, I encourage each particular Church to undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform." (EG n. 30)

"Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelisation in their respective communities.'" (EG n. 33)

1. It was made clear at the Diocesan Assembly that the profile of the clergy in Kilmore is declining and aging. This has fundamental implications for the model of Church ministry which has pertained for the last 150 years. This reality also has consequences for how often as well as when and where the Eucharist is celebrated.
2. The diocese already has Pastoral Areas that are due to be reviewed. An *ad hoc* committee will be established at diocesan level to review parish structures and Pastoral Area configurations in order to ensure that parishes are fit for purpose in the new reality that faces us. Over five years, decisions will be taken in consultation with parishes in view of the figures that were presented at the Diocesan Assembly. *[by end of 2015]*
 - i) This committee will work in a consultative way with clergy and people throughout the diocese.
 - ii) There will be a review of the use of Church buildings on an on-going basis.
 - iii) In such a process, communication will be key. Therefore the diocese will adopt a comprehensive communications strategy.
3. Training will continue to be key for lay people and clergy in order to deal with the emerging reality of fewer clergy and the need for lay people to take on more leadership roles in pastoral and administrative settings. *[from 2016 onwards]*
4. The ministry and role of Permanent Deacons is acknowledged as an important development in the missionary outreach of the Church in a changed pastoral context.
5. The Bishop of Kilmore will liaise with the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference to explore the establishment of a commission akin to the one in Brazil under the leadership of Bishop Erwin Krautler and Cardinal Claudio Hummes to study the possibility of ordaining married men to the priesthood as well as appointing women deacons. This is a direct response to Pope Francis' words to Bishop Krautler that *"the bishops, the regional bishops' conferences, should make brave, courageous suggestions."*

SUMMARY STATEMENT

- Fundamental change will take place in diocesan structures and style of ministry in light of the numbers presented at the Diocesan Assembly.
- A committee will be established to review Parishes and Pastoral Areas.
- Working in a consultative manner, this committee will make proposals regarding the configuration of Parishes and Pastoral Areas.
- The skills and expertise of lay people will be further utilised in administrative and pastoral settings.
- At national level, the bishop will work with the Irish Catholic Bishops Conference to explore ways of bravely and courageously tackling the issue of declining priest numbers.
- By 2020 we will have established a structure which is missionary and sustainable.

SUPPORT FOR PRIESTS

"On account of this communion in the same priesthood and ministry, the bishop should regard priests as his brothers and friends. As far as in him lies, he should have at heart the material and especially spiritual welfare of his priests." (Presbyterorum Ordinis, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests n.7)

1. The summary statement from the Diocesan Assembly called for a "programme and culture of care for priests as they get older and fewer."
2. The Assembly sought to express its concern that priests in active ministry be supported in times of an increased workload and dwindling human resources.
3. The Care of Priests Committee will be reinvigorated and given the mandate to suggest practical ways in which the spiritual, pastoral, intellectual and human needs of the clergy could be supported and promoted. *[by end of 2016]*
4. It was clear from the Diocesan Assembly that support of priests is not just something that should be left to clerics. Parishioners have a role in understanding that it will not be possible for one priest to do the work that was previously shared by two or three. *[Ongoing]*

SUMMARY STATEMENT

- Care of priests will be greatly enhanced if the restructuring proposed in the previous section is adopted.
- The Care of Priests Committee will be given a renewed mandate.
- Lay people will be made aware of their role in supporting the clergy.

SACRAMENTS, LITURGY & PRAYER

"God's word, listened to and celebrated, above all in the Eucharist, nourishes and inwardly strengthens Christians, enabling them to offer an authentic witness to the Gospel in daily life." (EG n. 174)

1. The sacraments of the Church and the liturgy offer a precious source of support for all our people in their daily effort to draw closer to the Lord. The Diocesan Assembly expressed the desire that our celebrations would draw closer to the people, taking them as they find them but not leaving them there, hence the call for sacramental catechesis.
2. This Pastoral Plan suggests a five-year catechetical strategy, which focuses particular attention on the sacraments of initiation.
 - i) **Baptism** will be brought in from the shadows and reinserted into the midst of parish life. The semiprivate celebration of the sacrament needs to be reconsidered. Instruction for parents needs to consist of more than explaining the symbols but be centered on the question "Why do I want to have my child baptised?" *[2016 Programme]*
 - ii) **Confirmation** will have its fundamental link with baptism reaffirmed and explained. School and parish programmes that have been in use will be re-proposed for use. *[2017 Programme]*
 - iii) **Eucharist** needs to be rediscovered primarily as the means by which the Christian Community becomes most fully itself i.e. the Body of Christ. Why the Sunday Eucharist is important and the Eucharist seen not as "a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (EG n. 47) could provoke a powerful yearlong reflection. Sacramental programmes such as 'Do This In Memory of Me' will receive a new impetus in the parishes of the diocese. Within this reflection on the Eucharist, the sacrament of **Reconciliation** should be rediscovered and re-proposed as a great source of healing in a broken world, particularly to the young, as was suggested at the Diocesan Assembly. Pope Francis' reminder to priests is timely: "the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best." (EG n. 44) *[2018 Programme]*

3. Each parish will have a liturgy group, which plans specific liturgies as well as preparing for the major seasons of the Church's year. These groups will receive training in basic liturgical principles as well as looking at ways to make liturgical celebrations welcoming and engaging. They will also be provided with access to resources. Part of their remit will be to accompany and aid those who only attend official liturgies occasionally. *[by end of 2017]*
4. When it comes to the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist in parishes, it is quality not quantity that should be the fundamental principle. A well-trained and focused liturgy group will be able to work with parish clergy to ensure the joy filled celebration of the Lord's Day. *[by end of 2016]*
5. Pope Francis has spoken of the importance of popular piety (cf. EG nn. 122-126). Parishes will look at ways of promoting this popular spirituality through pilgrimages, processions, rediscovery of local shrines, saints and holy wells, prayer meetings and the many other ways in which people express their faith and belief. In many instances, the popular piety of a substantial number of our people consists in attending major events such as baptisms, weddings and funerals. A strategy that recognises this and seeks to build on these moments will be pursued. *[by end of 2018]*
6. Groups of lay people will be trained in order to plan and lead liturgical celebrations in the absence of a priest. *[by end of 2019]*
7. In seeking to build communities of mature Christians, the Pope has alerted us to the need of "personal accompaniment in processes of growth." (EG. nn. 169-173) This will be an important part of our work as faith communities as it seeks to engage with people who may be on the margins of the Church's sacramental life and accompany them on a journey towards the Father. Training people and giving them the confidence and skills to share their own faith with others as well as providing opportunities for spiritual direction will be an important part of our pastoral strategy. *[by end of 2020]*

SUMMARY STATEMENT

- A five-year catechetical plan will be developed focussing on the sacraments of initiation.
- The sacrament of reconciliation will be re-proposed as a tremendous source of healing and mercy to coincide with the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis beginning in December 2015.
- By 2020 each parish will have a strong, well-trained liturgy group/team.
- The diocese will provide training for these groups.
- These groups will seek to engage positively with those who only attend Church on major occasions.
- Sound Popular Piety will be fostered and promoted in the diocese.
- Lay people will be trained to lead services in the absence of an ordained minister.
- Training and participation in Spiritual Direction / Accompaniment will be provided by the diocese.