

Builders of Hope



PASTORAL PLAN
Diocese of Killaloe
2013 - 2020



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Quin Abbey ✱ Co. Clare



Monaincha Abbey ✱ Roscrea, Co. Tipperary



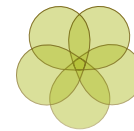
High Cross ✱ Kinnitty, Co. Offaly



Clonfert-Mulloe ✱ Co. Laois



Killeenagariff ✱ Castleconnell, Co. Limerick



'Don't be scared.
Dare to have fabulous plans.
I encourage you to not
be afraid to dream,
to have great ideals,
to be builders of hope.'

Pope Francis



Message from Bishop Kieran O'Reilly

In the Autumn of 1978 I set out on my first missionary journey with eight companions destined for Africa. I was appointed to minister in Liberia, West Africa. We ventured out into a world relatively unknown to us - travelling well beyond the horizons that we had previously known. Disembarking from our flights and embracing the heavy warm evening air of West Africa we began a journey of engagement with cultures, social and religious environments that were full of mystery and surprises. It was an exciting time, learning to adapt to the new world in which we found ourselves, grappling to understand how we might share, from our cultural background, the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now, I am here with you, my friends, setting out again towards new horizons with *The Diocesan Plan 2013-2020*. We, too, as with all missionaries, are on a journey of faith that involves many challenges, in many respects even more daunting than those I faced in 1978. However, this time I feel better equipped because of the work so many people across the Diocese have done to prepare for this moment. The work has been going on over the past two years. *The Plan* is the fruit of a listening process, a number of surveys, many conversations, reflection and discernment throughout the Diocese. I wish to express my deep appreciation to all who have participated so generously in the various gatherings and meetings over the past couple of years. I invite you to engage in this exciting plan for the future of our Church and to share your gifts and talents with our communities and the wider world through participating in it as it becomes operational over the coming months.

In our day, we have two great challenges before us - to ensure that we do all we can in our time to share the faith that we profess, with our communities - especially the young, and with our world. Secondly, the challenge to embrace the radical implications of the Second Vatican Council's vision of a Church in which all baptised members are given the opportunity to share their gifts to the full. *The Plan* will, I believe, assist us in facing with hope and courage both of these challenges.

We are all called to evangelize and actively promote God's reign of justice, love and peace in our world. The Lord is our companion on the journey as he was with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. I invite you to set out to new horizons with the joy of the Holy Spirit in your hearts.

May the same Holy Spirit accompany all of us on this journey of faith. We commend this Plan for the coming years to Mary, Muire na nGael.

Brat Mhuire orainn i gcónaí.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kieran" with a cross symbol above the first letter.

Bishop Kieran



Shaping our Future Church

The Diocese of Killaloe is a rich network of local Christian communities. Each of these is based around a local church – of which there are 137 – where people gather for prayer and worship. These are vibrant communities, where people strive to live the Gospel in their daily lives and to gather weekly to celebrate the Eucharist. However, we are conscious that significant changes lie ahead for all of these communities. Some of these changes are the result of the on-going reforms of the Church proposed by the Second Vatican Council, others are the result of social changes in Ireland over recent years and others brought about by local changes within the Diocese.

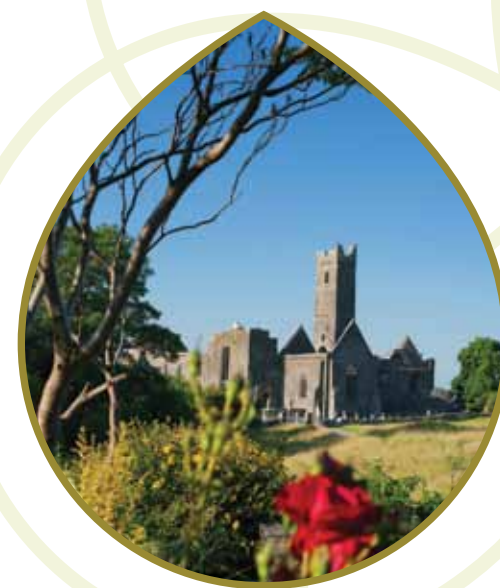
The current plan is being framed in view of all these changes and taking into account the situation in which we will find ourselves not just in 2020 but in ten to fifteen years from now. Therefore, we can see this as the first stage of a longer term plan. However, we need to continue making significant shifts in thinking and practice, if we are not to find ourselves struggling beyond our capacities in the middle of the next decade. We are in a very good position, especially in terms of the personnel we have, to continue the necessary renewal process with energy and enthusiasm. It will involve significant change. We are reminded of the words of Blessed John Henry Newman, “here below to live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often”.

While the changes ahead may be challenging, we have solid foundations on which to build. Fifty years ago, the Second Vatican Council provided the basis for a renewal of the Church. It provided a vision and now the circumstances demand that we renew our efforts to implement that vision with fresh enthusiasm. Central to the vision of Vatican II is the call for every member of the Church to exercise a much more active role in the life of the local Christian community and to assume greater responsibility for its life and well-being. The current situation, then, is calling us once more to take more seriously the renewal outlined by Vatican II.

We now know, for example, that in a very short time it will simply not be possible for each local community to have a weekly celebration of the Eucharist. While we pray for more vocations to the ordained priesthood, we still have to prepare for a changing situation, ensuring in so far as possible that each of these local communities is resourced to proclaim the Gospel, to assemble its members and to pray as a community. This means that each one of us will take more seriously our baptismal responsibilities to listen to God's word, to apply it to our lives and to celebrate it in liturgical prayer especially when celebrations of the Eucharist may not be possible.

We now have to plan for a situation where handing on the faith will be done not just by families and schools, but also by catechists or other ministers in the local area. We have to plan for a situation where members of the local community will lead liturgical celebrations on weekdays and also on Sundays when no priest is available. Others will work with families in preparing children for the reception of the sacraments. Lay ministers will visit the sick, bring communion to the housebound, receive funerals at the church and officiate at the graveside. Pastoral Councils will be even more actively engaged in coordinating these various ministries in their areas and finance councils assume greater responsibility for ensuring the provision of the material resources required for the Church's ministry. Various educational and training programmes will be put in place for all those involved in developing and supporting the faith life of these communities. The priests of the Diocese, with openness and commitment to these new challenges, will continue to act as guides and mentors to these communities. On any given week-end Masses will be scheduled for the parish clusters but not in all of the existing churches.

The Pastoral Plan 2013-2020 consists of a Vision Statement and ten strands, which are presented in the following pages. These are the result of a discernment process, conducted in the awareness that the Holy Spirit is with us as our guide. This discernment process included a Listening Process and a number of surveys conducted in the Diocese over the past two years. It takes into account the resources of the Diocese as well as other factors impinging on future developments. All elements of the Plan have been discussed and formulated by a Steering Committee, put in place by the Bishop, whose task it was to draw together the fruits of all the conversations and consultations around the Diocese over the past few years.





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diocesan vision statement

As the local Church of the Diocese of Killaloe, our vision is shaped above all by the person of Jesus Christ, by the all-embracing nature of his love and compassion, which shows us God's own plan in action.

So in the light of God's plan for us we will:

- ✦ Express our love for God, not just in words, but in concrete action
- ✦ Do all that we can to ensure that people flourish in every aspect of their lives, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual
- ✦ Empower women and men to live their baptismal calling in the Church at local and diocesan levels
- ✦ Build communities of welcome and hospitality for all
- ✦ Extend God's forgiveness to the sinner and God's healing to those who are ill
- ✦ Listen attentively to the Word of God addressed to us in the Scriptures and in the Liturgy
- ✦ Offer the Bread of Life as nourishment to all those who hunger for it
- ✦ Stand in solidarity with all who are finding the challenges of life and of faith difficult to handle
- ✦ Call forth the variety of gifts present in our communities and put them at the service of all
- ✦ Pray for vocations to the ordained priesthood and religious life
- ✦ Welcome especially the gifts of the younger people in the Diocese who can help shape a new future and a more vibrant Church
- ✦ Strive to promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- ✦ Work together in genuine solidarity with all people of goodwill to advance the Kingdom of God
- ✦ Act with accountability, so that, with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Killaloe will be a place of life and joy for all God's people

the strands of the plan



Leadership for Renewal in the Local Church

“Parishes that explore opportunities to try new things and to involve new people in novel ways are experienced as more vibrant and life-giving” (The Diocesan Listening Process, 2012).

“And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins too. No! new wine fresh skins!” (Mk 2:21-22).

Goal

To create an experience of a new model of the faith community, recognising the energy and leadership potential of every baptised person.

Objectives

- ✦ Affirm the work and development of each faith community in the Diocese so that they see themselves as valued expressions of what it is to be Church
- ✦ Strengthen relationships with other Churches, Christian Communities in the Diocese
- ✦ Facilitate dialogue with other faith traditions now present in the Diocese
- ✦ Enable local faith communities to realise that they share the primary responsibility for the life and well-being of the Church in their area
- ✦ Affirm and nurture the Spirit-given energy and the variety of gifts in each Christian community and invite all to share their gifts freely and generously
- ✦ Engage with local Christian communities and Pastoral Councils in discerning how they can be resourced to proclaim the Gospel, to assemble and to pray as a community, and to develop appropriate ministries for these tasks
- ✦ Identify, invite and offer training to lay people with skills for active and service-oriented leadership in their communities
- ✦ Nurture family life in all its dimensions and encourage family friendly communities and services
- ✦ Promote the inclusion of minority groups in our faith communities
- ✦ Invest in the on-going training and development of Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Leadership Groups
- ✦ Ensure clarity of role, support and formation for all involved in leadership roles in clusters
- ✦ Develop guidelines and terms of reference for the Cluster Co-ordinating Groups and provide resources, facilitation and training to support the development of these groups

Partnership in Ministry in the Emerging Church

“There was widespread agreement among priests and lay people that a collaborative model of Church, based on partnership between priests and people is the desired way forward”

(Report from Cluster Conversations, 2012).

“Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all” (Mk 10: 44-45).

Goal

To develop leadership structures across the Diocese, based on partnership between priests and people, with the capacity to animate, support and sustain local Christian communities into the future.

Objectives

- ✦ Facilitate the collaboration of laity, religious and priests in the Diocese so that the gifts of all are freely and generously expressed
- ✦ Provide personal human development opportunities, theological input and skills training for priests and lay people in working collaboratively
- ✦ Provide on-going formation programmes for priests and people to include raising awareness of the future reality of the Church in the Diocese
- ✦ Develop social media and online communication avenues to raise awareness among local communities about the changing reality of the Church in the Diocese
- ✦ Provide forums for reflection for priests ministering in multiple parishes and with increased workloads
- ✦ Affirm, promote and nurture different expressions of vocation to ministry, both ordained and non-ordained, and to religious life
- ✦ Provide pastoral workers, catechists and skilled resource personnel to facilitate and support the transition to new models of Church and ministry
- ✦ Pilot Team Ministry initiatives at parish and cluster levels
- ✦ Work towards the delegation of specific administrative tasks to lay people within parishes
- ✦ Develop participative decision-making structures modelled on co-responsibility at all levels – Parish, Cluster and Diocese – ensuring that the voices of women are represented at all these levels

Liturgy

“It is through the liturgy, especially, that the faithful are enabled to express their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church”

(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, # 2).

“Sing a new song to the Lord” (Ps 149)

Goal

To provide spaces and opportunities for people to become aware of and celebrate in word, ritual and sacrament, the presence and action of God in our lives and in our world.

Objectives

- ✦ Support and offer training to existing liturgy groups and encourage the setting up of new groups where none currently exists
- ✦ Establish teams of laity and religious who will be able to plan and lead various liturgies
- ✦ Encourage the development of liturgies that connect significantly with people's lives and experiences
- ✦ Involve young people in creating and celebrating liturgies which have meaning and significance for them
- ✦ Create more space for silence and stillness in our liturgical gatherings
- ✦ Build the capacity of each local Christian community in celebrating liturgies in the absence of the priest, such as a Liturgy of the Word, reception of funerals, etc.
- ✦ Support the on-going formation of the different Liturgical Ministers
- ✦ Promote the development of a vibrant Liturgical Music Ministry across the Diocese, providing opportunities for on-going formation
- ✦ Explore appropriate opportunities for shared prayer and worship with other Churches and Christian Communities in the Diocese

Spirituality & Prayer

“Christian prayer has several different forms of expression: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, petition, lament and intercession”

(Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland).

“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” (Mt 6:10)

Goal

To create spaces and opportunities in our Christian communities where people can discover God's delight in them and deepen their relationship with Christ.

Objectives

- ✦ Build on existing initiatives and programmes and create new opportunities for people to explore expressions of spirituality in the following areas:
 - ✦ Different forms of prayer
 - ✦ Praying with the Scriptures, e.g., Lectio Divina
 - ✦ Christian Meditation
 - ✦ Weeks of Guided Prayer
- ✦ Develop approaches to prayer suited to people at different life-stages
- ✦ Create once-off-events where people, especially those who are searching, can experience different forms of spirituality and prayer
- ✦ Explore the provision of reflective spaces in public areas
- ✦ Offer training to people in the different traditions of prayer and spirituality
- ✦ Create opportunities for prayer and pilgrimage experiences linking with ancient holy places and connecting with the Divine beauty through nature and landscape
- ✦ Enable lay people, religious and priests, to lead and sustain group experiences in prayer, meditation and spirituality
- ✦ Invite religious communities with a contemplative focus and people with particular gifts in prayer and spirituality to share their charisms with the local Church
- ✦ Encourage networking among those involved in promoting initiatives in spirituality and prayer across the Diocese

Youth Ministry

"There is a need for a specific consultation process with young people which begins with understanding their reality, how they see faith and how they express their spirituality and which engages their hopes and aspirations" (The Diocesan Listening Process, 2012).

"The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out in pairs to all the towns and places he himself was to visit and he said to them, *the harvest is rich but the labourers are few*" (Lk 10: 1-2).

Goal

To engage the faith experience of young people based on their own reality and to create spaces for them to grow spiritually, socially and emotionally and to plan initiatives and structures for this engagement.

Objectives

- ✦ Organise a diocesan gathering of people involved in Youth Ministry across the Diocese including priests, chaplains and catechists, to address the findings of the *Online Youth Survey 2013*
- ✦ Agree a diocesan based action-programme involving young people
- ✦ Re-imagine and reconstitute the Youth Forum on the basis of a peer ministry approach to young people
- ✦ Develop a peer ministry approach which enables young people to be involved in organising and facilitating events to nourish faith and spirituality for their own peer group
- ✦ Engage young people in creating liturgies relevant to their developmental stage and inclusive of their interests and desires at parish, cluster and school levels
- ✦ Create support structures for young people around issues that affect their lives, especially at moments of crisis and stress
- ✦ Establish Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation groups for young people enabling them to be involved in the work of social action to reflect on the experience
- ✦ Engage young people in creating events which are of interest to young people, e.g., pilgrimages to Croagh Patrick, Clonmacnoise, Taizé, Lourdes, World Youth Day, etc.
- ✦ Develop social media and methods of communication appropriate to young people
- ✦ Create Cluster structures to support young people in training for peer ministry
- ✦ Provide regular training and peer support for adults involved in youth ministry

Adult Faith Education

"Adult Christians reflect constantly on the Gospel. They do so, not alone but as part of their local Christian community"

(Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Dublin: Veritas, p. 101).

"Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24: 32).

Goal

To create local neighbourhood communities that will address, through conversation and other forms of education, people's personal relationship with Christ in the context of the family and faith community.

Objectives

- ✦ Provide educational opportunities for the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Cluster Coordinating Groups and Parish Pastoral Councils in areas of spirituality, theology, human development and pastoral leadership skills
- ✦ Initiate faith-education programmes at cluster levels for those interested in becoming part of a Religious Education Team initiative
- ✦ Pilot an inter-generational approach to faith education at parish level
- ✦ Initiate a Pastoral Ministry Programme at a number of venues throughout the Diocese
- ✦ Establish regular Faith-Education Programmes for the active retired at parish level
- ✦ Examine the possibility of setting up a one or two year programme for the formation of catechists on a diocesan or inter-diocesan basis
- ✦ Invite each parish to make an inventory of those qualified in Religious Education, Theology, Scripture and Pastoral Education with a view to enhancing parish ministry
- ✦ Pilot formation programmes for those to be involved in the pre-sacramental preparation of infants, school children and their parents

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation

“The doing of justice and the pursuit of peace are inconceivable without being grounded in respect for the integrity of creation”

(Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Dublin: Veritas, p. 23).

“Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God” (Mi 6:8)

Goal

To empower people, through education, to explore and reach an understanding and appreciation of the scope and tasks of the ministry of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Objectives

- ✦ Initiate study of the social teaching documents of the Church
- ✦ Raise awareness among parishes, Parish Pastoral Councils and Cluster Co-ordinating Groups about issues of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
- ✦ Introduce Parish Pastoral Councils and other groups to the Pastoral Circle, i.e., Look, Analyse, Reflect, Decide and Evaluate, so that our social action is deeply rooted in our Christian faith tradition
- ✦ Encourage and support the development of JPIC groups in primary and secondary schools
- ✦ Take definite steps at parish and diocesan levels to address the absence of women's voices in planning and decision making at local, diocesan and global level in our Church
- ✦ Create opportunities for people from other nationalities to come together to share their experiences and to address issues that arise for them
- ✦ Challenge at a diocesan level all forms of discrimination in relation to minority groups
- ✦ Establish Diocesan links with Justice Networks in the country, e.g., Justice Ireland, AEFJN (Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network), etc.

Diocesan Safeguarding Services

“The task you now face is to address the problem of abuse that has occurred within the Irish Catholic community, and to do so with courage and determination.”

(Letter of Pope Benedict XVI to the Church in Ireland) (March 2010).

“Let the little children come to me do not stop them, for it is to such that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs” (Mt. 19:14).

Goal

To acknowledge the central role of children in the life of the Church and to provide maximum safety for them through the implementation and monitoring of clear policies, procedures and protocols facilitating their involvement with the Church in the Diocese of Killaloe.

Objectives

- ✦ Welcome, listen and provide a compassionate and just response to those who have suffered abuse
- ✦ Acknowledge the pain, hurt and damage caused by failures in the past to protect children
- ✦ Liaise and co-operate fully with the appropriate statutory authorities and the NBSCCC (National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church) with regard to all areas of safeguarding
- ✦ Nurture the involvement of children and young people in a respectful manner so as to facilitate their spiritual, physical, emotional and personal growth

Diocesan Safeguarding Services >

Objectives CONTINUED

- ✦ Listen to, hear and respond to the concerns expressed by children in relation to their experiences of their participation in Church organised events
- ✦ Train and support personnel in the delivery and development of Safeguarding at Parish, Cluster and Diocesan levels
- ✦ Promote on-going Professional and Personal Development of personnel entrusted with the task of implementing Safeguarding in the Diocese
- ✦ Facilitate the involvement of parents and children in a proactive way in the Diocesan work of Safeguarding
- ✦ Implement policies, procedures and protocols for safeguarding children and young people in all Parishes, Clusters and Diocesan activities in the Diocese of Killaloe
- ✦ Enact transparent and open methods of communication to the public with regard to Safeguarding within the Diocese
- ✦ Monitor evaluate and develop Diocesan policies and procedures and their implementation annually in line with the demands of the Statutory Authorities and best practice in the area of Safeguarding
- ✦ Accept responsibility for the management of all complaints received by the Diocese with regard to Safeguarding, including the management of all Diocesan personnel against whom allegations have been made
- ✦ Cater for the material, emotional and spiritual needs of personnel against whom allegations have been made and who comply with diocesan protocols for safeguarding

Communications

“Those who have reflected deeply on the significance of religious faith in their own lives can often speak eloquently too, opening up new ways of thinking for others”

(Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Dublin: Veritas, p. 20).

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

(Is 52:7).

Goal

To develop and implement a strategy that facilitates effective communication across the diocese.

Objectives

- ✦ Maintain and develop the diocesan website to provide news, information and pastoral resources
- ✦ Promote more effective communications between the Diocese, pastoral ministry groups and parish communities
- ✦ Invite people with energy and gifts in the area of communications to establish a group to work with the Diocesan Communications Office
- ✦ Provide appropriate training in communications for clergy, diocesan and parish personnel
- ✦ Continue to engage, through the Diocesan Communications Office, with the various news media in promoting the Diocesan position on current or topical issues
- ✦ Support parishes in promoting and publicising activities that occur at cluster, parish and community levels
- ✦ Promote through respectful dialogue new ways of connecting with people who feel alienated from the Church
- ✦ Encourage and support people across the Diocese to see their daily lives as witnessing to their faith in a loving God
- ✦ Avail of the latest technologies to transmit the Gospel in the most effective ways possible and advise parishes and clusters on their uses

Management of Resources

“We are convinced that when the Christian community understands the value of sharing its faith and growing in faith, new resources will be found”

(Share the Good News, National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, Dublin: Veritas, p. 7).

“The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common” (Acts 2: 44)

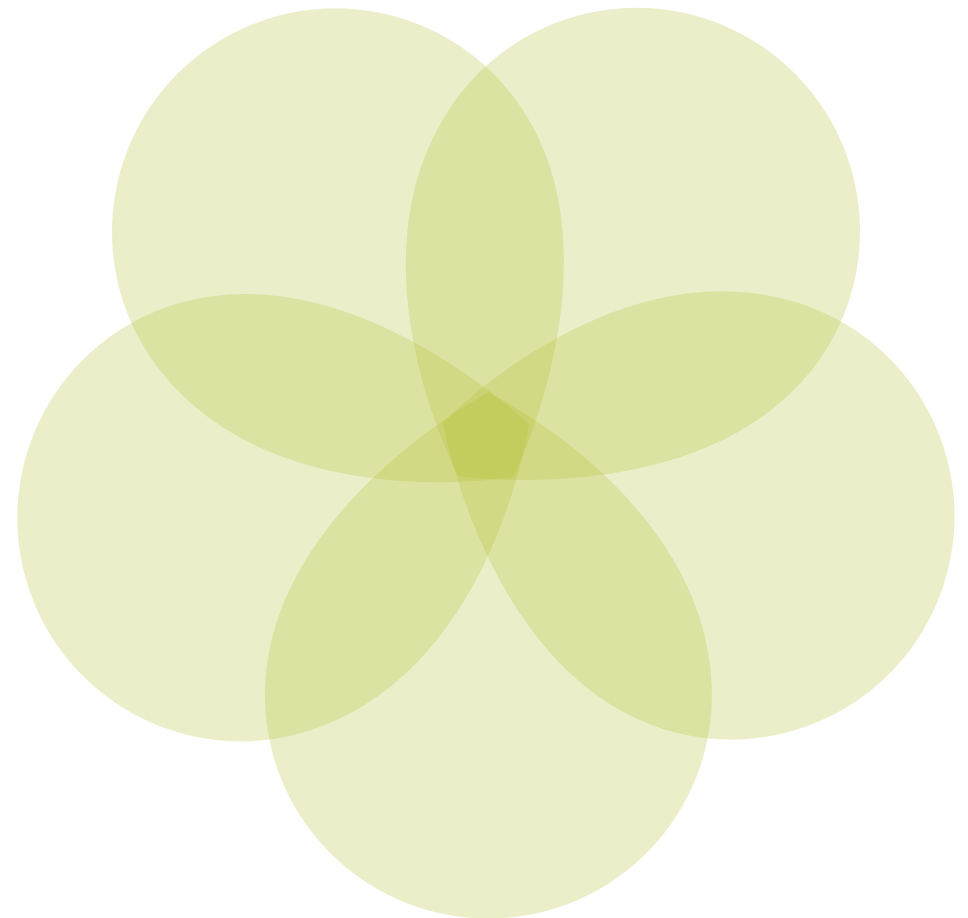
Goal

The Diocese will continue to engage in financial planning to secure sufficient resources for Diocesan needs, ensuring that transparent and accountable systems are put in place.

Objectives

- ✦ Enhance policies and procedures at Parish and Diocesan Level for:
 - ✦ human resource management
 - ✦ financial management and accountability in compliance with State legislation
 - ✦ property management and the development of appropriate structures for administering the material goods of the Diocese
- ✦ Continue annual monitoring of diocesan and parish financial systems in collaboration with parish finance councils, ensuring greater use of available tax concessions
- ✦ Draw on the talents of the people in administering the patrimony – ecclesiastical heritage – of the diocese
- ✦ Ensuring that the rich Faith Heritage of the Diocese is valued and highlighted for the benefit of all
- ✦ Working with State agencies and local communities to enhance and utilise local areas of religious significance and pilgrimage

getting behind the vision statement



Getting behind the Vision Statement

A Listening Church

As the local Church of the Diocese of Killaloe, we are today's Community of Disciples of Jesus in this place. We are the People of God, for whom God has a vision and a plan. Through prayer and reflection, through listening and conversation, we have tried to discern that plan so that we can live it in our lives and share with others the hope and joy that it brings.

God's Plan for Us

Our vision is shaped above all by the person of Jesus himself. In a very real way he put the plan of God into action in our midst. He showed us the kind of life to which we are called and that it is possible for us to live like him and to realise the great potential that is within us. We are also profoundly aware that we always need God's help in reaching our goal. We know that God offers us that help because of the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. This help is available to us through the power of the Holy Spirit among us, guiding, prompting and enabling us in all our efforts to do good, to live our lives in truth, justice and integrity.

A God of Compassion

When we look at the life of Jesus and listen to his teaching we see that he gives us an insight into who God is and into the extent of God's love. The God of whom Jesus speaks is a God of compassion, who welcomes all people, saints and sinners. There are no strangers or outsiders in God's household. All are cherished equally. All are welcomed and included around the banquet table that has been prepared for us. We see that Jesus welcomed all kinds of people around his table: the public sinners, cheats and fraudsters, prostitutes and lepers, rich and poor, locals and foreigners, as well as his faithful disciples and followers. In God's Kingdom there is a welcome for all of them. "God has no favourites" (Gal 2:6), all are equal in God's view. This is the radical message of Jesus that we want to share.

A People Fully Alive

Jesus also gave us a fresh perspective on what it is to be human. He wanted people to grow and develop in every aspect of their lives: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. There was nothing about being human that was not of concern to him. He healed the sick and restored bodily integrity to those who had lost it; he calmed the fears and anxieties of those who were troubled; he forgave the sins of those who repented; he worked to put people in right relationship with one another and with God. He showed that we cannot truly worship God unless we are first prepared to show solidarity with those in need or distress. Love of God and love of neighbour are all of a piece. Unless we can stand by those in any kind of trouble we cannot stand worthily before the altar. He showed the ultimate solidarity with humankind by giving his own life on the Cross, so that we might have the fullness of life with him in the glory of the Father, wherein lies our ultimate destiny.

Welcoming Communities

When Jesus formed his first community of disciples they were to put into practice the vision and the values of the Kingdom of God which he had expressed in his own life. After his death and resurrection he sent his Holy Spirit among them to continue the work that he had already begun, so that the Kingdom might continue to grow. That work is now ours. Today we are called, like the first disciples, to build communities of welcome and hospitality for all; to extend healing and forgiveness to those who stand in need; to listen attentively to the Word of God addressed to us in the Scriptures and in the Liturgy; to allow ourselves to be nourished by the Bread of Life in the Eucharist; to be genuine witnesses of the Gospel message in every area of our lives.

Called to Solidarity

We are conscious of the very significant changes that are affecting both Church and society at this time. In the midst of all of this, as a local Church, we will:

- * Work to be a sign of hope and encouragement for those who may be tempted to lose heart or to give up the struggle
- * Stand in genuine solidarity with all who are finding the challenges of life and of faith difficult to handle
- * Strive to promote justice in our communities and beyond
- * Give voice to the concerns of all our brothers and sisters who are struggling with various pressures, especially in the current economic climate, whether with personal problems or in family life; in the work place or in the search for work; in the excitement of youth or the loneliness of old age; in the midst of affluence or of poverty; as long-time residents or as newly arrived to our country
- * Build local communities of care and concern that will genuinely respond to the needs of all our people with the same compassion that Jesus showed to his contemporaries

We All have a Part to Play

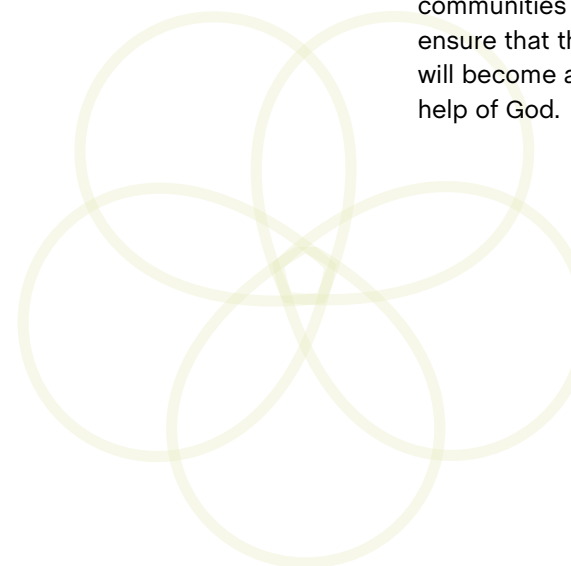
As we formulate more concrete ways of responding to the cry of God's People we will work to involve as many members of our parishes as possible in the various forms of action that are necessary. This will mean that all of us - every baptised member of the Church including the bishop, priests and religious of the Diocese - will be called upon to play a part in giving life to the vision of God's Kingdom as lived and preached by Jesus.

We are a Gifted People

The Diocese is blessed by God with a rich variety of gifts and talents among its people. It has the resources to realise this vision and we rely on everyone to place her or his gifts at the service of our communities so that the vision can be realised. Our hope is that each will contribute to the overall effort according to his or her ability. Not all may be actively involved in the life of their parishes at this time but we expect that each will be able to find an appropriate level at which they can participate in their local community. We share a deep desire that the younger generations will be especially welcomed and engaged in shaping the future communities of disciples to which we belong. It is the combined effort of all our people that will make the difference, not just those who have always been involved in their parish.

We will act with Accountability

Finally, we will be accountable to one another, too, so that the commitments we make are not just in words but are generously expressed in our common effort. Our diocesan leaders will work with all local leaders in Church communities around the Diocese to ensure that the vision we speak of will become a lived reality with the help of God.



Context for the Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2013-2020

Our Identity

The Diocese of Killaloe is a Church of more than 115,000 people, stretching from the rugged Atlantic seaboard in West Clare to the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains in Counties Laois and Offaly and including parts of Counties Tipperary and Limerick. The geographical area is one of rich and varied natural beauty. The built landscape of the Diocese and its place names bear witness to the fact that people of Christian faith have continued to worship here for almost 1600 years. One has only to see the monastic sites at places like Roscrea, Iniscaltra, Inis Cathaigh, Clare Abbey and hundreds of other less prominent ruins to be reminded of the deep roots the Christian faith has put down in this Diocese. Place names beginning with Kil-, Temple-, Dysart- provide other reminders of this long faith tradition, as do the saints whose memories we still celebrate: Molua, Flannan, Senan, Brendan, Breacan, Cronan, Imy, Kerin, Ruadhan, Tola, Odrán and Donán. This is a rich heritage in which we can take pride. It is a living faith which continues to flourish in the lives of individuals and communities across the Diocese and for this we can be truly grateful to God.

Signs of the Times

a) A Growing and Diverse Population

The population of the Diocese, according to recent census figures, is growing at a very modest rate, about 1% per annum over the past ten years. The bigger towns continue to grow while some rural areas, especially in west Clare and Offaly continue to lose population or barely retain existing population levels. The age dependency profile for the Diocese (those under 15 years and over 65 years) remains around 2% higher than the national average, reflecting the largely rural profile of the Diocese. Recent years have also seen the population profile significantly changed because of an increasing number of immigrants from countries like, Britain, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, the Philippines, Nigeria and Brazil. In many cases the majority of these are Roman Catholics, mostly in their twenties and thirties, with significantly more men than women among them. All of them add vitality and richness to the expressions of faith now to be found in the Diocese.

b) A Well-educated People

Education levels in Ireland have consistently risen over recent years. The numbers of those with a third-level qualification have more than doubled in the past two decades rising from 14% in 1991 to 31% by 2011. This growth was more pronounced for women than for men. An EU report of April 2013 shows that 49% of 30-34 year olds in Ireland have a third level qualification. In this category, Ireland was the best performer in the EU. Creating structures which encourage the active engagement of this well-educated and technically adept population is part of the challenge for the Church of the future.



c) A Time of Economic Hardship

The last five years have seen a serious deterioration in the Irish economy, going from prosperity to austerity in a very short time. There has been a major deterioration in the public finances and the banking crisis has wiped out the savings of many families and created national debts that will continue to be carried by future generations. Individuals and families struggle to pay mortgages and live with the stress of ever tightening budgets. The building industry has virtually collapsed and many small family businesses have been forced to close. Live register figures have increased with unemployment levels now averaging 14% and almost 30% among the under 25s. Suicide, especially among young males, is now a serious social issue, while emigration once again breaks up families and scatters our youth. The challenge for the Church in Killaloe is to bring the light and hope of the Good News to bear on this complex social reality. It calls all of us to promote the work of social justice and to act as advocates for those who are weak and vulnerable in our midst.

d) A Church in Crisis

While the people of the Diocese continue to be sustained by the Gospel message, preached and lived by the Church, nevertheless the past twenty years have seen the Church in Ireland shaken to its core by the revelation of a variety of scandals, mostly involving the abuse of children. These have been well highlighted in various television documentaries, in the press and, most shockingly, in Government commissioned enquiries and reports. All of these have brought to light serious moral failures by those who committed crimes against children, as well as by those who should have managed these issues more responsibly. It is a crisis that has brought shame on the Church in this country and especially on its leadership. It is hardly surprising that the moral authority of the Church has been weakened severely in the eyes of the people. The Church in Killaloe acknowledges what has happened and is already working to witness to the message of the Gospel from a position of humility, in protecting all in its care, especially children and those who are most vulnerable. Addressing these issues is now a priority for the Diocese.

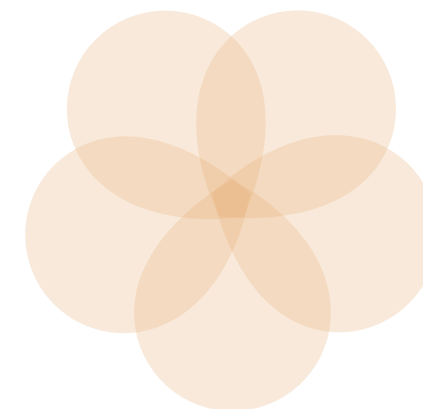
Secularising agendas in Irish society, together with the scandals, have impacted on Mass attendance in the Diocese, as has been the case across the country. An *Irish Times* survey of 2012 puts regular church attendance levels at 34%. Little direct research on overall church attendance levels has been conducted within the Diocese, but it is unlikely to vary significantly from the national average. Of particular significance is the fact that the participation rate in Church-related activity among the 15 – 40 age-group is remarkably low. An online survey of adults, conducted in the Diocese in March 2013, indicated that only 7% of those in the 20-30 age group and 29% of those in the 30-40 age group attended Mass weekly. Although, most people still have some level of significant contact with the Church, these data present fresh challenges for all those involved in the Church's ministry.

e) The Changing Shape of Ministry

The Diocese of Killaloe has long been served and continues to be served by a very dedicated group of priests, who give tirelessly of their service to their parishes. However, in this area of ministry we are witnessing dramatic changes. Recent decades have seen a reduction in the numbers of priests and they have an older age profile. Today there are 83 priests serving 56 parishes and 137 churches in the Diocese and more than half of them are over 66 years of age. Here we acknowledge, too, those who are retired. They still make a very significant contribution to the ministry offered by the Diocese. Their active support, experience and wisdom are gifts we all cherish as we continue to rely on their service and counsel.

The Religious in the diocese, too, have made an enormous contribution especially in the areas of education and health care. The foundations which they laid are now being built upon by another generation of committed educators and health workers who are inspired by the values of the Kingdom of God. However the greatly reduced number of religious – Sisters, Brothers and Priests – in the Diocese also has an impact on patterns of ministry.

These factors are a serious reminder of the importance for everyone in the Church to rediscover the responsibilities that we all share, by virtue of our baptism, for the life and well-being of our local Christian communities. There is a real urgency now for us to begin to prepare for a rather different kind of Church, one where all of us will have to assume much more active roles in developing and supporting the faith life of our communities. This newly emerging situation calls people in every community to look seriously at their own baptismal call and to discover ways in which they can more actively witness to the Gospel and be of service to their brothers and sisters. In this context, too, we continue to pray for vocations to all forms of ministry, including the ordained priesthood and religious life.



f) Sources of Hope

While it is important to acknowledge the changes and challenges that are currently confronting us, it is even more important to take stock of the rich treasure of resources that are at our disposal. It may well be that such changes are enabling us to rediscover the depths our faith, the gifts that we possess and the significant capacity we have to effect a genuine renewal of the Church. Rather than leaving most of the responsibility for the handing on of the faith and the organisation of faith communities to the religious and the priests, all of God's people are now being directed to assume their own full responsibilities for these tasks. Fifty years ago the Second Vatican Council provided the blueprint for the renewal of the Church. In Ireland at the time, the Church appeared to be functioning well and the need for renewal did not seem as urgent. Now we are being given a fresh opportunity to reclaim its teaching and to make its vision a lived reality.

* The Rich Contribution of Volunteers

Thousands of people continue to give dedicated voluntary service to a very wide range of Church related activities. Every parish in the Diocese now has a pastoral council. In this area of engagement alone, up to 1,000 people are now taking an active role in the development of their local parishes. Parishes also have active and effective finance councils. All parishes have child safeguarding structures in place, in which significant numbers of people are actively involved. There are those who participate in choirs, altar servers, altar societies, adoration groups, baptismal teams, adult faith development and numerous other parish based projects.

There are over 150 parish based primary schools that operate under the patronage of the Bishop. In all of them there are teachers who support the work of parents and families in handing on the faith to the children and prepare them for the sacraments. Each has a board of management. The combined membership of these boards is in excess of 1500 people. They contribute generously of their time and talents in the complex and challenging work of guiding and managing the provision of Catholic primary education. There is a similar commitment by members of boards of management in the second level schools under Church patronage. These second-level schools have dedicated and enthusiastic principals, teachers, catechists and chaplains nurturing the faith lives of those in their care.

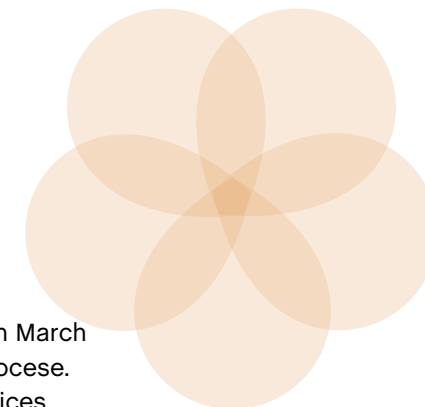
There are also numerous voluntary organisations that minister to the various social and personal needs of people across the Diocese. Among the list one may include Clare Care, North Tipperary Community Services, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Legion of Mary, Apostolic Work Societies, CURA and ACCORD, as well as many other organisations involved in social services and youth organisations. These lists are only an indication of the tremendous generosity of people who give of their time and talent in the service of God and neighbour.

* A Deeply Rooted Faith and Hope

The online survey of adults, conducted in the Diocese in March 2013, using the Diocesan Website (<http://www.killaloe-diocese.ie>), indicated that 85% of those who attend church services do so because their faith is important to them and 40% do so because of a desire to be part of their local community. There was a strong indication from the survey that there is still a deep spiritual hunger among the people and that they want this to be nourished by the Church. A genuine openness to the Church and its pastoral ministry exists and there is an expectation that the Church will connect in even more realistic ways with the felt needs of local communities. A very significant number of people indicated that they were willing to become involved in parish activities if they had a better sense of belonging to the Church.

Around the same time as the adults were surveyed, A *Youth Online Survey (2013)* was conducted. Over 1,000 young people responded – itself an indication of their willingness to engage with life of the faith community. It was noted in the survey that “[A]n overwhelming proportion of respondents indicated that they would like to be involved in voluntary work, pilgrimages and specific initiatives. ... One must observe that, for those who attend weekly and for those who attend seldom, there is still a desire to attend and ... an openness to hear the word of God” (pp. 23-24).

While all of this gives encouragement and reasons for hope, the Diocese must be aware of the need to promote and adapt the rich spiritual traditions and practices which are part of our faith story. There is a need to explore actively new approaches to community prayer and meditation that connect with the contemporary spiritual longing. There is also the challenge to engage people in deep reflection about the key moral challenges of our time in the light of the Gospel and in a way that respects individual conscience.



context for the diocesan pastoral plan 2013-2020

g) Changing Diocesan structures:

Profound change is already under way within the Church in Killaloe. Diocesan structures have been reformed. Pastoral councils and finance councils are in place in all parishes. In recent years the clustering of parishes has become a reality in order to maximise the human and financial resources that the Church has at its disposal. Increasing lay involvement is also a reality in all parishes while a small number of pastoral workers are engaged to work on particular pastoral projects. This means that the traditional role of the priest is changing and a new role is gradually emerging for him. His ministry is no longer confined exclusively to one parish but is being shared more widely in the service of the local Church. These changes to diocesan structures are being made in the light of a serious discernment as to where the Spirit of God is leading us at this time. It is only in that context that any changes in the Church make sense.

Implementing the Diocesan Pastoral Plan

The successful implementation of the *Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2013 - 2020* is dependent on all who strive in their own way to proclaim the Gospel and to bring about the Kingdom of God. However, there are specific structures in place to ensure that the efforts of all are coordinated effectively.

Therefore, the following structures, under the overall leadership of the Bishop, will take responsibility for facilitating the implementation of *The Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2013-2020*:

- 1) **Diocesan Pastoral Council**
- 2) **Groups established to lead each of the ten strands in the Plan**
- 3) **Priests' Council**
- 4) **Moderators' Team¹**
- 5) **Cluster Co-ordinating Groups**
- 6) **Parish Pastoral Councils**

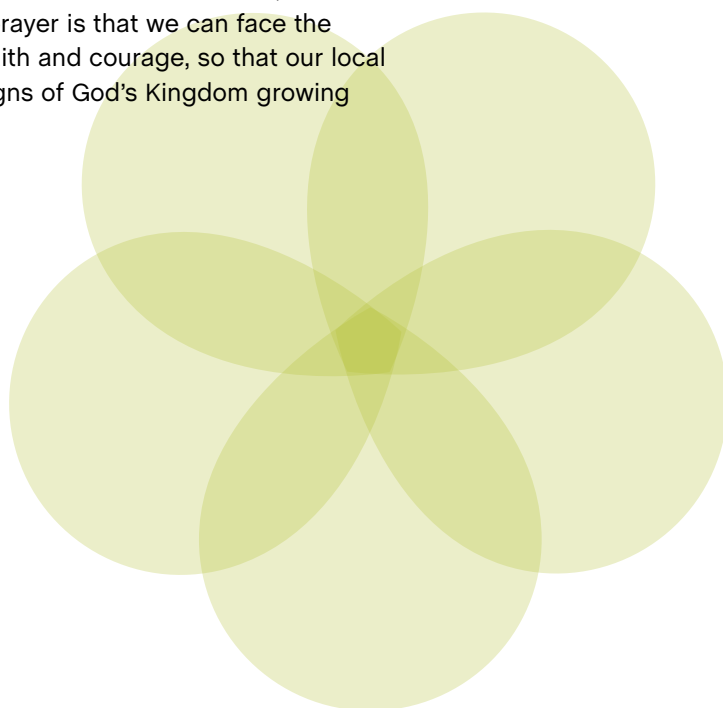
The Bishop, in consultation with the Diocesan Pastoral Council, will liaise with the other five groups to ensure that each identifies its own proper role in the implementation of the process. The assignment of roles will be completed by the end of November 2013. Each group will carry out an annual evaluation of its progress in the implementation of the plan and report to the Bishop.

¹The Moderators are the priests responsible for coordinating pastoral activities in each of the cluster areas of the Diocese.

Conclusion

The *Diocesan Pastoral Plan 2013-2020* is a response to an extensive Listening Process that was conducted in the Diocese in 2012, as well as to two on-line surveys conducted in 2012 and 2013. A number of groups, including the Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC), a theological reflection group, and a Steering Committee established by the DPC, considered the findings of the Listening Process and the surveys over the first half of 2013. All of these groups contributed to the distillation of the findings and to the emergence of the ten strands that comprise the *Plan*. In addition to all of these considerations, the *Plan* also takes into account the resources, both personnel and finances, available to the Diocese in making its response to the expressed needs and concerns of its people.

The next phase in the process is where the real work begins. The implementation of the *Plan*, under the direction of the Bishop, in consultation and collaboration with the DPC, will commence immediately. Our prayer is that we can face the challenges ahead of us with faith and courage, so that our local communities will indeed be signs of God's Kingdom growing in our midst.



Prayer for the Success of the Diocesan Plan

Lord God,

Fill our hearts with appreciation of the
dream for which you created us.

May the Pastoral Plan be a further
unfolding of your dream for all the people
of our Diocese.

Help us, with your gifts of wisdom, right
judgment and courage to make our
communities places of prayer and
listening to God's word;

Where all will feel at home,

Where gifts of people, religious and
priests are accepted and affirmed,

Where justice, peace-making and care
of creation is a priority,

Where all generations and different
nationalities respect and cooperate
with each other to build neighbourhood
communities of love in bringing about
the coming of your Kingdom.

Amen.

Paidir do Rath an Tréadphlean ár nDeoise

A Thiarna,

Ardaigh ár gcroíthe le dúil sa bhfís a
chruthaigh tú dúinn.

Go neartódh an Tréadphlean d'fhís
níos iomláine do mhuintir ár nDeoise.

Le saíocht, breithiúnas cóir agus
misneach cabhraigh linn ár láithreacha
paidreoirachta i lár an phobail a
fhorbairt le héisteacht go nádúrtha le
briathar Dé, áit a mbeidh gach duine
compordach, áit a mbeidh glacadh le
tabhartais cléire agus tuatach.

Bíodh tús áite agus cothrom na féinne
do shíocháin agus do chaomhnú agus
aire na cruinne.

San áit ina mbíonn meas agus ómós
á dtaispeáint ag glúinte agus
treibheanna agus iad á dtógaint,
le grá ar mhaithe le teacht do Ríochta.

Amen

