

**Killaloe**  
**pastoral plan**



# CONTENTS

	<b>Foreword</b>	<b>5</b>
1.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – A Papal Vision	<b>7</b>
2.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – A Gospel Vision	<b>11</b>
3.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – A Local Vision	<b>13</b>
4.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – Implementation of a Vision	<b>21</b>
5.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – Prayer and Spirituality	<b>24</b>
6.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – Formation and Support	<b>28</b>
7.	<b>Pastoral Planning</b> – Structures and Communication	<b>43</b>
	<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>51</b>
	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>52</b>



## FOREWORD



### Gentle Reader and Dear Friend

At the close of the Jubilee Year 2000 our Holy Father wrote a wonderful letter entitled *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*. In that letter he invited the local churches across the world to take up the challenge of bringing the good news of the gospel to the world of the twenty-first century. He asked that each local church would begin this task by ‘drawing up an effective post-Jubilee Pastoral Plan’, reminding us that any such plan must have ‘its centre in Christ Himself’ (*BNM* 29).

An Assembly of priests at Dundrum in January 2002 endorsed the call for a pastoral plan for our diocese of Killaloe. Over the past eighteen months a small committee of priests, religious and lay people have been working on such a plan. They engaged in an extensive consultation process across the diocese and outside it.

We now present this Pastoral Plan which has evolved from these consultations. It should be seen as ‘work in progress’ and not at all as a finished product. It will need refining,

readjusting, extending as we learn from experiences along the way. The work of renewal has been ongoing in the diocese for a number of years and has made significant progress in a number of parishes. It is my fervent hope that this plan will give a new impetus to our ongoing work of renewal in the life of the Church in Killaloe. A Director of Pastoral Planning, in the person of Fr Harry Bohan, has already been appointed to the task of leading the implementation of the Plan.

I am deeply grateful to the members of the committee who have generously given so much time to the project. I am grateful to the many people across the diocese who participated in the listening sessions and to those who made personal submissions.

As we set out on the journey of implementation of this plan can I repeat with the Holy Father that Christ is our companion on this journey and that we need to constantly contemplate the face of Christ, inviting Him to guide us on our way.

May the gentleness of Christ be with each one of us as we journey together.

**Christ is our  
companion on  
this journey**



Willie Walsh

# PASTORAL PLANNING — A PAPAL VISION

## 1.

### Going Forward in Hope

the challenge  
of bringing the  
Gospel to the  
world of the  
twenty-first  
century

Let us go forward in hope. The new millennium is opening up before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture relying on the help of Christ' (*At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, 58). With these encouraging words Pope John Paul II, in his letter at the close of the Jubilee Year, invites us to respond to the challenge of bringing the Gospel to the world of the twenty-first century. The challenge is that of trying to live our lives following the example and teaching of Jesus Christ.

When Simon Peter and his companions had been out fishing all night and had caught nothing Jesus invited them to 'put out into the deep'. When they did so 'they caught a great number of fish' (Lk 5:4-6). The Pope has invited us who are privileged to live at this time of new beginnings to have the courage and the confidence to 'put out into the deep'. He points out that this courage and confidence is not based on some unrealistic optimism, it is based on the belief that Jesus Christ is with us on our journey – 'I will be with you always to the end of the age' (Mt 28:20).

## 2.

### The Plan is Already in the Gospels

it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated

The Pope is clear that this ‘putting out into the deep’ is not a matter of inventing a ‘new programme’. ‘The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospels and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known loved and imitated’. But at the same time ‘it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community ... It is in the local churches that the specific details of the pastoral plan can be identified which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture. I therefore earnestly exhort the Pastors of the particular Churches, with the help of all sectors of God’s People to plan the stages of the journey ahead’ (*BNM* 29).

## 3.

### Priorities

Pope John Paul sets out a number of priorities in relation to pastoral planning. Among these he places particular emphasis on holiness, a ‘spirituality of communion’ and on compassionate action on behalf of all who are in need.

#### 3.1 Holiness

One of the key ideas running through the Holy Father’s letter is that all pastoral renewal has to



be built on holiness – that is on knowing Jesus better and being more closely united with him (*BNM* 30). Time and again in the letter he keeps coming back to ‘contemplating the face of Christ’ as providing the inspiration of all that we do as Christians.

### *3.2 A Spirituality of Communion*

He speaks of the need to promote what he calls a ‘spirituality of communion’ amongst us. The basis of this spirituality of communion is the belief that each one of us is made in the image of God. A spirituality of communion enables me to try to see the face of God in each of my brothers and sisters – ‘an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith as those who are part of me. This makes me able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs ... to see what is positive in others and to welcome it as a gift from God ... to know how to “make room” for our brothers and sisters, bearing “each other’s burdens” and resisting the selfish temptations which provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy’ (*BNM* 43).

to try to see  
the face of  
God in each  
of my brothers  
and sisters

### *3.3 Compassionate Action on Behalf of Those in Need*

Responding to the needs of our brothers and sisters is an essential part of the living out of the Gospel. ‘I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me to drink ... I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison

and you came to me' (Mt 25: 35-37). John Paul reminds us that these words are not simply an 'invitation to charity'. They are really a measure of our faithfulness to Christ's teaching.

## 4.

### Continued Prayerful Reflection

While the Pope unambiguously calls us to action he emphasises that our actions must constantly arise from the practice of prayer. In the drawing up of an effective post-Jubilee pastoral plan he stresses that 'what we propose with the help of God, should be profoundly rooted in contemplation and prayer' (*BNM* 15). In our world there is often an impatience to 'get things done'. There is a need for prayerful patience in pastoral planning. All our pastoral initiatives must be rooted in prayerful reflection and indeed the ongoing work arising from these initiatives ought in turn to be subject to further prayerful reflection.

# PASTORAL PLANNING — A GOSPEL VISION

## 5.

### Our Good News

our God is a  
loving God  
who loves me  
no matter  
what my  
story is

The aim of any pastoral plan must be to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. At the core of the plan is, therefore, 'Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated' (*BNM* 29). This Good News of Jesus Christ which we find in the Gospels is in tune with the longings of people.

- It is news that God reached out to us by taking human form in the person of Jesus Christ, that Jesus preached the highest standards of love, challenged the powerful and was a friend of the outcasts and sinners, that he died and rose to new life in order to restore our friendship with God and give us a share in his life.
- It is news that every person is created in the image of God and is therefore worthy of the deepest reverence and respect.
- It is news that our God is a loving God who loves me no matter what my story is.
- It is news that our God is a forgiving God who is always ready to forgive my failures when I turn to Him.

- It is news that our God is a compassionate God who wants to share my struggles, my pain, my brokenness.

## 6.

### Connecting this good news with lived experience

**the need to  
link this good  
news to the  
ordinary lives  
of people**

**T**his good news of Jesus Christ remains a distant idea unless it can be related to and connected with the real lives of people.

Our consultations emphasised the need to link this good news to the ordinary lives of people in their joys and sorrows, in the successes and failures, in their struggles and pain. They believe that there is a hunger in people for a Church which will speak of their experience of life.

Our good news must be truly good news for those who are most directly involved in ministry. This implies the need for a deep care and respect for them and a willingness to put resources into their ongoing formation and support.

The good news that Christ was a friend of the outcasts and the marginalised was not that widely reflected in the response to our consultations. Nonetheless there was a clear recognition that our Church must have a special care for those who find themselves on the margins of society. We must be a clear voice on their side.

# PASTORAL PLANNING – A LOCAL VISION

## 7.

### Pastoral Planning – A New Experience

Ongoing  
listening to  
identify the  
real needs and  
concerns of  
people

The work of the Church in Ireland during the last century was largely one of ‘maintenance and management’. Masses were celebrated, Sacraments were administered, rules of morality were spelled out for the people, buildings were constructed and maintained. And this ‘maintenance and management’ was largely done by the clergy. The programme was clear, the clergy simply followed the programme.

The very idea of Pastoral Planning is something new to all of us.

Such planning involves:

- Assessing the current pastoral reality;
- Ongoing listening to identify the real needs and concerns of people;
- Articulating what kind of parish and diocese we want in the years ahead;
- Prioritising where our energies and resources should be focused;
- Establishing appropriate structures and training to facilitate the implementation of the plan;
- Devising mechanisms for monitoring progress of plan and reviewing it in the light of experience.

# 8.

## Pastoral Planning

### – A Consultative Process

**It is in the  
local churches  
that specific  
details of the  
pastoral plan  
can be  
identified ...**

**W**hile the Holy Father emphasised that any pastoral plan must be rooted in the Gospels he also reminds us the plan ‘must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to each community ... It is in the local churches that specific details of the pastoral plan can be identified ...’ (*BNM* 29).

In our attempt to adapt our plan to the needs of the local community we set out to engage the community in a widespread process of consultation with priests and laity. We did so in the belief that the Spirit of God is present in all people and that this very consultative process itself is the beginning of the pastoral plan because the Church in Killaloe is the people of Killaloe.

Given the widespread consultation process in which we engaged it is hardly surprising that we received an extraordinary variety of viewpoints/comments/suggestions. Nonetheless it was possible to identify certain significant areas where there was widespread agreement among people in relation to the pastoral needs of our Church at this time. We hope we have been faithful to these consultations in setting out the ‘local vision’ in the following way.

# 9.

## Effect of Rapid Social Change

**the right of each person to be treated with respect and dignity**

**T**here was a clear recognition throughout our consultation that rapid social change has had a profound effect on our church. Much of this change has been for the good. Developments in education, communication, economics, and cultural activities have given people a self-confidence that was lacking in the past. This self-confidence gives them the freedom to question systems and structures of authority and to take a more independent stand in relation to these structures. Bishops, priests or indeed anyone in a position of authority can no longer use that authority without being accountable to people for its use.

There is too an increased emphasis on the right of each person to be treated with respect and dignity.

There are of course aspects of this social change which are less positive. The growth of materialism and consumerism has promoted an aggressive individualism which often cares little for those who cannot compete. In this environment of materialism there appears to be less time for the spiritual, less time for God and perhaps less time for each other.

# 10.

## Experience of People

people are still open to the values and ideals preached and lived by Christ

People varied in their interpretation of and response to this rapid social change. Some believe that society has become materialistic and Godless and that people have turned their back on Jesus Christ and his teaching.

The majority of people we met in our consultations, however, do not agree with this view. They argue that despite the pressures of modern life the majority of people still hold to spiritual and moral values. They maintain that people are still open to the values and ideals preached and lived by Christ but that our Church is failing to help them to apply these Gospel values and ideals to their lives in a meaningful way. We have already noted this need to connect the good news of the gospel with lived experience (see p. 12). Young people and indeed many adults have said that they experience Church as being distant from their ordinary life concerns. They feel that our religious rituals and our faith language do not speak to them in a way that touches their lives, their ideals and their struggles.

# 11.

## Experience of Priests

The effects of social change has of course also impacted on the lives of our priests. They are only too well aware of the apparently growing gap between the Church and the younger generations. They are conscious of the declining number of young people going forward for priesthood and of their own increasing age profile. The trauma of scandals revealed in recent



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years has been deeply painful for them and has undoubtedly affected their morale. And yet, all of them would say that people have been more openly supportive of them in recent years than in earlier times. This support for and appreciation of the work of the local priest has been confirmed recently in a diocesan survey indicating that the vast majority of people expressed satisfaction with the service provided by their local priests (Killaloe Diocesan Survey – April 2003).

Many of our priests also see the present as a time of openness to new ideas and new opportunities. Despite the difficulties of recent years there is no desire among them to return to the certainties and rigidities of the past.

There is a genuine desire among our priests to minister to the people as effectively as possible. How best to do this is not always clear to them. They know that they cannot do it on their own, that the future lies in teamwork among priests and laity. They recognise that they – priests and laity – will need additional support and formation to adapt to the new situation. We are in effect moving towards a new model of Church.

# 12.

## Towards A New Model Of Church

**a new model  
of Church in  
which priests  
and laity work  
together in a  
collaborative  
way**

**B**oth our consultation process and our experience of the work of renewal in recent years have been telling us of the need to continue to move towards a new model of Church in which priests and laity work together in a collaborative way.

The model of Church in which bishop and priests were seen as the managers/decision-makers and the people as those who obeyed instructions is well and truly outdated.

The model of Church towards which we must continue to move is a Church in which the dignity and the responsibility of all the baptised are recognised. The Sacrament of Baptism is a starting point for each one of us. Because we are baptised we 'who are many are one body in Christ'. Through our baptism we have a shared dignity and equality among all of us – young and old, women and men, clergy and laity.

That shared dignity through our baptism implies a shared responsibility. It means that the local church is 'our church', that the parish is 'our parish', and that the diocese of Killaloe is 'our diocese'. We do not 'help the priest' or 'help the parish'. We are the parish, we are the Church because of our baptism.

And that shared dignity and responsibility for 'our church' implies a sharing in the ministry of 'our church' – putting our talents at the service of our community. It implies too a right to have a part in decision-making of 'our church' through pastoral councils and other structures.

It is well to remind ourselves that it is Baptism and not holiness that gives each of us this special dignity of being a member of ‘the body of Christ’. Our Church is not a Church of saints, it is rather and will always be a Church of saints and sinners, and which of us is not part saint and part sinner?

Sadly, some baptised people often feel that they can have no meaningful part in our Church. Some feel excluded because as they live their lives they may be in conflict with aspects of the Church’s moral teaching. Others feel alienated because of some hurtful experience in the past with priests or other ‘Church people’. With Christ there were no outsiders. If our Church in Killaloe is trying to follow the example of Christ it needs to be a welcoming Church, a loving Church, a listening Church, a humble Church, a Church of saints and sinners.

While our Church is the baptised people of God it must also be open to the wider world respecting people of other faiths and of none, respecting too those who were baptised into our Church but have chosen ‘to walk no more with us’ (Jn 6:26).

Our Church needs to recognise the dignity of every person. It needs too to recognise the dignity of God’s creation respecting and caring for our environment.

We deliberately spoke above of ‘moving towards a new model of Church’. It is not a journey which will be accomplished overnight. In fact this new model of Church requires a real

**a welcoming  
Church, a  
loving Church,  
a listening  
Church, a  
humble Church,  
a Church of  
saints and  
sinners**

change of mindset in both clergy and laity and that change will take time. We can, however, set out on that journey in a spirit of dialogue, openness and collaboration. The journey is an endless one. We will never arrive at the perfect model of Church. But then sometimes the journey is more important than the arrival!

# PASTORAL PLANNING

## — IMPLEMENTATION OF A VISION

### 13.

#### Pastoral Planning

#### – The Pursuit of a Vision

‘**W**here there is no vision the people perish’ (Proverbs). Pastoral Planning is about setting out a vision for the future. In the opening chapter we set out the vision presented by the Holy Father for the Church at the beginning of this new millennium. We followed in the next chapter attempting to outline the Gospel vision. Though the consultative process we tried to inform ourselves in regard to the vision of the people of the Diocese for our Church in Killaloe.

In devising the Pastoral Plan we have tried to be faithful to all three visions – papal, gospel and local. In doing so we have identified three general areas where we believe that the energies of our diocese ought to be focused in the coming years.

- (i) **Prayer and Spirituality**
- (ii) **Formation and Support**
- (iii) **Structures and Communication**

If we believe that ‘where there is no vision the people perish’ we might add that where there is no implementation the vision perishes and so we move to that new challenge.

# 14.

## Pastoral Planning –

### Implementation

**The task of  
implementing  
the plan  
involves the  
whole diocese  
– priests,  
religious and  
laity**

**D**evising a Pastoral Plan requires a significant amount of work in terms of consultation, analysis, writing, etc. The real challenge however is implementing that plan.

The task of implementing the plan involves the whole diocese – priests, religious and laity. The Bishop will of course have a central role in leading this implementation. He will be assisted in this task by an Interim Implementation Group. This Group has been established and a Director of Pastoral Planning has been appointed for a period of two years. At the end of this period a representative Diocesan Pastoral Council will take over from, and continue the work of, the Implementation Group.

The role of the Implementation Group will be to:

- Manage the operation of specific actions over the next two years;
- Identify key individuals and groups who will take responsibility for leading these actions;
- Implement simple monitoring and evaluation systems;
- Be responsible for communications in relation to Pastoral Plan throughout the Diocese;
- Build relationships with Council of Priests, regional/cluster groups and other committees;
- Continue to advise bishop in relation to ongoing development of plan.

# PASTORAL PLANNING

## – PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY

# 15.

## Liturgical Prayer

**The most  
important act  
of worship for  
each local  
Church is the  
Sunday Mass**

Liturgy, the public worship of the people of God, is central to the life of the church. ‘Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations undermine faith’

*Fr Thomas Whelan CSSP*

**T**he single most important act of worship for each local Church is of course the Sunday Mass. Sunday Mass is about our local Christian Community coming together to pray believing that Christ is present with us as we do so. Christ is present in the Word of God read at Mass. Christ is present under the appearance of bread and wine after the priest has pronounced the words of Christ ‘This is my body; this is my blood’. Christ is present when we receive him in Communion.

One of the most frequent messages we received during our consultations was the need to improve the quality of our Sunday Eucharistic Celebration. There is a variety of factors which affect the quality of the celebration. Among them are the faith which we



ourselves bring to the celebration, the personal faith of the priest, the relevance of the homily, whether there are too many poorly attended Masses or one real community celebration? These are among the factors which must be addressed if we are to improve the faith nourishing quality of our celebration.

Wedding and funeral liturgies are also extremely important in the life of the local church. They are important for the immediate families who are intimately involved. They are also important because they are usually attended by some people who would not be regular church goers and thus provide a pastoral contact that is otherwise missing from their lives. It is only fair to say that the quality of these celebrations is already generally good.

Again there are other sacramental liturgies and para-liturgies which are always occasions for nourishing the faith of those who attend.

Some very worthwhile work has been done in this whole area in recent years through pre-Advent and pre-Lenten meetings. Such work needs to be continued and further developed.

**many poorly  
attended  
Masses or one  
real community  
celebration?**

We propose:

- That two Diocesan Liturgy Groups be set up representing both sides of the diocese early in 2004. These groups will attempt to offer formation, resources and ongoing support to parishes;
- That a Liturgy Group be set up in every parish and that training and education be made

listening to  
the Word and  
trying to  
connect it  
with our daily  
lives

available for them in order to develop more participative and better quality liturgies and para-liturgies. The creativity of local talent needs will be encouraged and enabled;

- That at the end of 2004 parishes will report to the Diocesan Liturgy Groups on their efforts to improve the quality of liturgy celebrations so as to enable us to share ideas and learn from each other.

# 16.

## Group and Personal Prayer

**G**etting to know Christ in the scripture is enhancing and deepening the lives of many people across our diocese.

Listening to the Word of God ought to be the inspiration for all our journeying in prayer. This listening to the Word and trying to connect it with our daily lives through the method called Lectio Divina is one of the oldest methods of prayer and contemplation. It has experienced a significant revival in recent years. Many of our priests are already using this prayer form and find it enriching.

There are a number of other Prayer forms and spirituality initiatives already in place across the diocese – Eucharistic Adoration, Taizé Groups, Charismatic Prayer Groups, etc. These too are to be commended and encouraged.

We propose:

- That during Lent 2004 an opportunity will be afforded to people in parishes to experience the Lectio Divina method. This will require prior training of people to lead parish groups;
- That evaluation of the training, the experience of the Leaders and the participants will take place after Easter;
- That during 2004 the many varied prayer forms and spirituality initiatives already in place be collated, affirmed and shared.

# PASTORAL PLANNING

## — FORMATION AND SUPPORT

### 17.

#### Formation and Support for Priests

**an invitation to  
move away  
from authority  
leadership  
towards  
servant  
leadership**

In the century just ended the Church exercised considerable power and influence in Irish society especially in the areas of education, health care and social mores. This power was exercised principally through bishops and priests. Their leadership might be described as authority leadership.

Recent years have seen a considerable erosion of that power. We are satisfied that this erosion can be of significant benefit to our Church. There can be strength in our new found weakness – ‘my power is strongest when you are weak’ (2 Col 12:9). This weakness is surely an invitation to move away from authority leadership towards servant leadership. We are reminded of Christ’s own words “The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45).

This model of servant leadership has a particular significance for our priests who are the principal “stewards entrusted with the mystery” (1 Cor 4:1). They have a vital role in the development of the local Christian community of which they are part.

**New ways of  
being priest in  
the service of  
people need to  
be explored**

In this ever changing culture their role has been changing and will continue to change. Some of the old ways of being priest are no longer found to be useful. New ways of being priest in the service of people need to be explored. Priests need help in their exploration of these new ways by working together in a structured way – a way that will nurture their personal, professional and faith lives.

A group of professionals, lay and clerical, are already working on a programme for this very purpose. This group has proposed that a structured pastoral support system for priests be put in place immediately.

This support system:

- Will set aside one day per month for all priests for formation and support;
- Will be group based and include prayer, personal support and input on issues of agreed concern;
- Will offer a supportive environment in which participants can reflect on, evaluate and plan particular elements of ministry;
- Will include a component of accountability to colleagues who care about what we do and how we do it.

While the primary purpose of this initiative is not spiritual direction, counselling or therapy, it may well help us to identify our needs in these areas.

# 18.

## Formation for Parents of Young People

they  
experience the  
joy and the  
wonder of new  
life in their  
own children

**W**e suggest that reaching out to parents of young people ought to be a priority.

While many of these young parents remain steadfastly committed to faith and practice many others will have drifted away from contact with their Church. It is often when they experience the joy and the wonder of new life in their own children that they become more aware of and open to the deeper mystery of life. The preparation for and celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism becomes all the more important in these circumstances.

Again the vast majority of parents, whatever their commitment to religious practice, still want their children to receive the Sacraments of First Confession, Holy Communion and Confirmation.

While our teachers continue to do a really generous and effective job in preparing our children for these sacraments they often have a sense that what they are doing in the classroom is not being supported by the child's experience in the home.

We believe that there is a real need at this time to offer parents a programme focused on the Sacraments for which their children are preparing. Such a programme would enable parents to accompany their children in a manner which would be supportive of the work of their teachers and hopefully would be effective in revitalising their own faith and practice.

Discussion with the Diocesan Catechetical Team has already taken place and they have

indicated their willingness to help in putting such a programme in place.

We propose to:

- Prepare a programme for parents on the baptism of their children;
- Prepare a programme for parents which will enable them to accompany their children in preparing for First Confession and Communion;
- Use the opportunities suggested in the Confirmation Programme (*Alive-O 7*) to involve parents in the preparation of their children for the Sacrament. The Catechetical Team is already working on this matter;
- Evaluate the pilot project already underway in nine parishes in relation to Confirmation so as to learn how we may improve the process in future years;
- Train personnel to deliver these programmes.

# 19.

## Our Schools

**the generous  
and effective  
contribution  
made by our  
primary  
teachers in  
handing on the  
faith to our  
young people**

**O**ur consultations did not at any stage address the issue of our Catholic schools. This omission is not in any way to underestimate the vital importance of our schools in the faith development of our young people. It is rather that we do not have the appropriate knowledge or skills to make specific recommendations in this area. It is our belief that the issue of our schools would be better addressed in a different forum.

There is a diocesan study in progress at the moment in relation to primary schools. The six Ennis primary schools are participating in a study of the ethos and values which underpin their school culture and their role in serving the wider parish community. It is hoped that the results of this study being done by Céifin Institute will help to inform a diocesan initiative in relation to primary schools.

We believe, however, that we should record here our awareness of the extraordinarily generous and effective contribution made down the years by our primary teachers in handing on the faith to our young people. They not only teach the basics of the faith to our young people but they prepare them for the sacraments of first Confession and Communion and for Confirmation. The recent diocesan survey confirmed the importance of the role of teachers in this area.

In the previous section we have set out proposals to better equip parents to give proper support to our teachers in this faith formation We



note too the importance of the appropriate support from the local parish.

While our primary schools are well established as parish based, the position of many of our post-primary schools is less settled. Due to falling numbers of religious many congregations are now in the process of passing on responsibility for the continued Catholic ethos to lay trustees and boards of management.

We are not making specific recommendations in relation to our schools in this document. We do suggest, however, that our schools play a vital role in building our faith communities and must receive proportionate attention from our local churches.

## 20.

### Formation and Support for Team Ministry

The majority of the parishes in our diocese now have just one priest. Most of our priests are coping well with this situation. Nonetheless there is a real danger that such a priest can become a ‘one man operation’ working in isolation from priest colleagues and even from one’s own parishioners.

We believe that the more healthy alternative to this ‘one man operation’ and the isolation which can follow lies in the concept of Team Ministry where a group of priests take joint responsibility for the pastoral care of a group of parishes.

As part of our Pastoral Plan we have already established one model of Team Ministry across

the parishes of Corofin, Crusheen, Ruan and Tubber. We use the title Imeall Bóirne (Edge of the Burren) for this group of parishes.

In establishing the Imeall Bóirne group of parishes the Bishop in his letter of appointment to the priests asked them to do the following as a beginning of the team ministry process:

**a group of  
priests take  
joint  
responsibility  
for the  
pastoral care  
of a group of  
parishes.**

- Hold a team meeting once a week to plan and review work using an outside facilitator/supervisor occasionally; share the principal meal on a few days each week;
- Establish a Mass Schedule for the whole area with priests celebrating the Sunday Masses on a rota system – going to different churches each Sunday;
- Plan parental preparation for sacraments – First Communion and Confirmation – on a joint basis.

The above suggestions were simply made as a way of starting the process. There was a clear understanding that the process would develop with time.

The Imeall Bóirne team will produce a progress report every six months which will be used in furthering the concept of Team Ministry.

This Imeall Bóirne project is not just about team work among priests. Good team work among priests will automatically lead on to team work between priests and people. While collaboration between priests and people begins at individual parish level we are satisfied

that this collaboration will grow naturally across the group of parishes.

In our larger parishes where there are a number of priests working together we commend and affirm the significant progress already made in team ministry. Wherever a group of priests are responsible for the pastoral care of a community of people there must be regular meetings in order to plan the pastoral activities appropriate to the needs of that community.

## 21.

### Adult Faith Formation

Faith formation ought to be a constant pastoral activity of the Christian Community. It is done in a wide variety of ways. Our parish renewal work over recent years has been part of that faith formation. Already in this plan we have outlined proposals in relation to liturgy, prayer, and reaching out to young parents. All of these contribute to the faith formation of the people involved.

In the 1970s and 80s some excellent work was done through lecture style presentations to large audiences at different venues across the diocese.

It is important however to bear in mind that the most effective adult learning comes from reflection on and sharing of people's own experience in the light of faith. This can best be done in small groups. Talks and lectures which bypass adults' own experience may still have a place but will be limited in the learning that can be achieved.

**Faith formation  
ought to be a  
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We propose to:

- Examine and acknowledge what is already happening across the diocese in Adult Faith Formation through liturgy, prayer groups, sacramental preparation, parish renewal work.
- Inform people what is available in the area of formal courses of study such as Theological/Scriptural courses available in Mary Immaculate Training College in Limerick and St Patrick's College in Thurles.
- Study what may be available in the form of 'distance learning' in this area.
- One of our priests is doing studies in Adult Faith Formation and will be available to work in this area from September 2004. He will be joining those who have already been working in the diocese in different areas of faith formation.

# 22.

## Vocation

### - Priesthood and Religious Life

**Promotion of  
vocations is  
the  
responsibility of  
every Christian**

**A**s we prepare to publish this Pastoral Plan there is no student preparing for priesthood for the diocese. While we still have sufficient numbers of priests to supply all the services which require the presence of a priest this absence of students preparing for priesthood has quite serious long term implications for the Church in Killaloe.

The dramatic fall in vocations has been even more pronounced in the religious life. We acknowledge the enormous contribution made down the years by the religious, especially in the areas of education and health care.

Promotion of vocations to the priesthood and religious life is the responsibility of every Christian. A group, which includes the director of vocations, has been identified to lead a new initiative in the diocese. A research study has been carried out to inform a vocations' strategy. This strategy will emphasise and identify innovative ways of introducing (young) people to theology and pastoral ministry. This group are invited to prepare and implement a Vocations Strategy within the time-frame of the Pastoral Plan.

# 23.

## Vocation

### - The Family and Marriage

**P**rofound social change taking place in Ireland is probably best reflected in the changes taking place in family patterns. Recent census figures show that the traditional image of a household as consisting of a married couple with or without children, now represents less than half i.e. 49 per cent of homes. If a measure of the health of a society is that of family life there is an urgency to reflect on the implications of these changes. Ireland is now part of Europe not only economically and politically, but also socially. Couples, children, family life no longer occupy the same place that they used to.

European countries now reflect a pattern of declining births, fewer marriages, a rising divorce rate, more couples living together and children born out of wedlock. All of these have a very significant influence on the family unit and indeed society as a whole. The implications are enormous, especially for the care of children, of the elderly and of other dependent family members.

There are no proven methods of reversing the trends towards less stable marriages.

Accord has done quite significant work in the areas of marriage preparation courses and counselling marriages which are experiencing difficulties over the past thirty years. Little has been happening however in the area of support for families.

Some good work was done by the Marriage Encounter Movement in the 1970s. There

appears to be a revival of the Encounter Movement in recent times. We hope to explore this development during the coming years.

The picture in relation to families will be clearer when the research on experience of families being done by the Céifin institute becomes available. A work group on family ministry will be set up to develop a range of appropriate ministries in this area.

# 24.

## Vocation

### - Single People

It is sometimes said that Sunday homilies and other Church communications regularly refer in an encouraging way to young people, to elderly people and to married people, but often ignore the many single people who constitute a significant part of the people of God. And yet many of these single people, young, old, widowed and separated contribute very generously to the life of our Church at parish and diocesan level.

We recognise the need:

- To encourage and affirm the generous contribution of single people to the life of our Church;
- To facilitate their inclusion in liturgies and para-liturgies;
- To acknowledge their often vital role in the life of the community.

# 25.

## Youth Concerns

**it is not just  
about getting  
young people  
'back to Mass'**

**A** recurring concern during our consultation was the apparently diminishing interest in Church by so many of our young people.

There was an acceptance that it is not just about getting young people 'back to Mass'. It is recognised that the issue is a deeper one – of young people being disconnected from institutions generally, be it Church or State or even family. It is as if they live in a world quite apart from Church. The task of reconnection does not lend itself to simple solutions.

We are very conscious that some excellent work is being done for and indeed by young people in different initiatives across the diocese. These activities are often done in isolation and are not co-ordinated into a diocesan programme

We propose to:

- Convene a meeting of people who are involved in specific initiatives with a view to comparing notes on the nature and effectiveness of programmes (among such initiatives are annual trips to Taizé and Lourdes, Youth 2000, West Clare Initiative, etc.);
- Compile a database of young people currently involved as a starting point for engaging them in the future;
- Convene regular meetings of school Chaplains with a view to sharing of ideas as to how their ministry can be most effectively exercised.



# 26.

## Protection of Children

**all of us have been deeply saddened at the pain of victims of child sexual abuse**

**A**ll of us have been deeply saddened in recent years at the pain of victims of child sexual abuse and by the apparent failure at times of our Church to respond to their pain in an appropriate way.

The diocese through the Bishop and the Diocesan Child Protection Committee is committed to continue to:

- Welcome and listen sympathetically to anyone who claims to have been a victim of abuse;
- Do all in their power to help victims towards healing;
- Ask victims to try to begin the journey of forgiveness, always acknowledging that for some the pain is still too deep even to set out on that journey;
- Ensure, as far as it is humanly possible to do so, that such abuse will never occur in the future;
- Liase and co-operate fully with the appropriate statutory authorities in regard to all aspects of this matter.

# 27.

## The Work of Justice

people need to be challenged toward a Gospel care for the marginalised

**W**hile people need to hear how the Gospel is good news for their lives they also need to be challenged toward a Gospel care for the marginalised.

Over the centuries the Church has responded to the various needs of the marginalised and socially excluded – through education, health, social services, through famine relief, etc. A recurring pattern of this gospel care has been the moving on to meet new needs when the original needs are now being met by the State or otherwise.

We propose that a small ‘Justice Group’ be established whose task will be to:

- Listen to the most marginalised people in the diocese such as refugees, asylum seekers, travellers, the elderly, people in rural areas of depopulation and urban areas of deprivation;
- Help to identify and speak out on current issues and emerging needs in the area of justice;
- Be supportive of those organisations who work for justice at international level such as Trócaire, Concern, Goal, Bothar, etc.;
- Inform and try to conscientise all of us to be more aware of and sensitive to our obligations in the area of justice at all levels.

# PASTORAL PLANNING

## – STRUCTURES & COMMUNICATION

### 28.

#### Structures

**Church structures have no purpose other than to serve the Gospel.**

All Church structures and indeed the Church itself have no purpose other than to serve the Gospel.

There will be need for some new structures to facilitate the implementation of this Pastoral Plan. We need to be careful in setting up any structure that it will be at the service of the Pastoral Plan and thus hopefully at the service of the gospel. We are suggesting that rather than rushing in to set up structures which could take on a life of their own we would allow structures to evolve as the process of implementation progresses and the appropriate type of structure needed becomes apparent.

Furthermore our consultation process identified a ‘bottom up’ rather than ‘top down’ approach to our plan and a certain wariness in relation to over structuralisation. There was emphasis that any structure put in place must be at the service of ministry on the ground and should be flexible and responsive to emerging needs. Bearing in mind this need for ‘bottom up’ approach we envisage the need for some

form of structure at parish, cluster/group of parishes and diocesan levels. We are suggesting that there is an immediate need for a structure at parish level, where it does not already exist. We propose that structures at cluster/group and diocesan level be allowed to develop as the needs become apparent.

# 29.

## Parish Leadership Teams/Pastoral Councils

**It should be the norm for parishes to have leadership teams of priests and parishioners**

It should be the norm for parishes to have leadership teams comprised of priests and parishioners to oversee the carrying out of key ministries on the ground. These groups will need training and support for their tasks from resource people made available from the diocese. Some parishes will need to function (at least for periods) without a resident priest. The training of parish leadership teams will need to take this into account.

We propose that:

- By December 2004 every parish have in place a Parish Leadership Team/Pastoral Council, which is not more than five years old;
- A programme of preparation and training for teams be provided;
- Model(s) for this parish leadership structure be detailed in terms of minimum requirements, e.g. term of office, range of responsibilities, relationship to priest.

The new parish leadership structures will build upon the experience of existing parish councils and parish renewal groups. Parishes will be invited to move forward to a new parish structure. The new parish leadership structure will differ from previous 'advisory' groups and will have central responsibility in making and implementing parish 'decisions'.

## 30.

### Regional Leadership Teams/Pastoral Councils

These councils will evolve over a period from the experience of parishes in partnership. They will provide a framework for co-operation between neighbouring parishes. It is at this level, with the support of appropriate resource people, that the training will be provided for parish leadership teams/pastoral councils and other ministry groups. It is at this level too that practical co-operation between parishes will be arranged in the event of there being one or more parishes without a priest. These regional councils will draw their members from the parish leadership groups and from priests in the region.

# 31.

## Diocesan Pastoral Council

**F**or the next two years the Interim Implementation Committee will work with the bishop in implementing and monitoring the operation of the Pastoral Plan.

Toward the end of those two years – December 2005 – a Diocesan Pastoral Council will be formed. This council will replace the Interim Committee and continue its work.

The role of the Diocesan Pastoral Council will be to:

- Assist the bishop on all aspects of continued implementation of the Pastoral Plan;
- Advise on the need to adjust/alter the plan as experience suggests;
- Take responsibility for putting in place human and financial resources needed for the work of the diocese;
- Advise the bishop on all aspects of pastoral care of the diocese.

## 32.

### Diocesan Office

The volume of work at diocesan level is increasing each year. There is a real need to separate different aspects of administration and to divide the workload among a number of people.

A fairly obvious division would be:

- Pastoral Office;
- Education Office;
- Chancellor/Secretary Department;
- Finance and Property Department.

The Interim Committee will continue to give consideration to this matter.

There is also ongoing discussion on the possibility/advisability of moving the Diocesan Offices from Westbourne when the St Flannan's Boarding School becomes vacant.

## 33.

### Towards a Changed Style of Leadership

Traditionally in the Church in Ireland the Bishop and priests took almost total responsibility for the various activities of the Church in diocese or parish. 'My diocese' and 'my parish' gave a message of personal responsibility for all that should and indeed should not happen in diocese or parish.

Vatican II with its emphasis on the Church as the people of God reminds us that all of us have responsibility for 'our diocese' and 'our parish'. This understanding of Church calls for a real change in the style of leadership of bishop and priests. The Pastoral Plan envisages a style

**all of us have  
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diocese' and  
'our parish'**

of leadership in which people 'take ownership' of the parish and their diocese.

The Implementation Group have responsibility with the Bishop for the implementation of the plan. They will invite people with energy around pastoral action to take a leadership role for specific actions. They in turn will call on the gifts of others in an ever widening circle so that responsibility is shared as widely as possible. This will fulfil the Pastoral Plan's ethos of partnership and participation of laity and religious in progressing the plan. It will also give strength to the faith community to sustain itself as priestly and religious vocations are in decline.

We will all – priests and laity – need help in adjusting to this changed style of leadership.

## 34.

### Communications

If our parish and our diocese is going to move forward in a manner that tries to engage all our people we will need an effective communications network. Such a network will serve to inform people about what is happening in different parts of the diocese, facilitate the exchange of ideas and help toward a great sense of diocesan communion.

We therefore propose to put in place a diocesan communications committee which will:



- Investigate the feasibility of producing a regular diocesan newsletter;
- Promote the use of communication technology – computers, e-mail facilities, website, etc.;
- Monitor parish newsletters with a view to improving their quality;
- Advise on use of local radio and (local) television in the service of the Gospel.

# 35.

## Conclusion

*‘There are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one I suppose the whole world would not hold the books that would be written’.*

*(John 21, 25)*

With deep respect for the sacred closing words of John’s gospel we are reminded of the multitude of different suggestions/ proposals/plans which we received at our meetings with so many people across the diocese. We are reminded too of the variety of ideas we ourselves discussed and debated over the past year and a half.

Eventually we had to sift, to adjust, to omit, to select and to set priorities. We simply had to finalise our Pastoral Plan. Even now we use the word finalise in a restrictive sense – the Plan is

always open to further adjustment. We are hopeful that most of our selections will prove workable and effective. We know that some will need adjusting as we learn from successes and failures.

While recognising the energy and commitment of so many to bringing the Good News of the Gospel to people we also need to recognise and work within our limitations. Not everything can be done at once, but we can set priorities and begin some tasks right away.

May the God of Patience, Gentleness and Love be with us as we set out on this new journey together.

**May the God  
of Patience,  
Gentleness and  
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with us**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over one thousand people in the diocese participated directly in the making of this pastoral plan. These belonged to a range of focus groups who came to a series of meetings at the early stages of the plan. Parish groups responded to the initial findings from the focus groups, and a range of individuals, parish and pastoral groups responded to the first draft of the document. In all about one hundred written submissions were received.

The consultative process was facilitated by Martin Kennedy.

Members of Planning Committee and Implementation Group: Harry Bohan, Leonard Cleary, Nora Daly, Gerard Lynch, Tim McGillicuddy, Marie McNamara, Ger Nash, Mary Noonan, Paddy O'Meara, Ena Quinlan, Sean Sexton, Noreen Spain, Bríd Talty, William Walsh.