

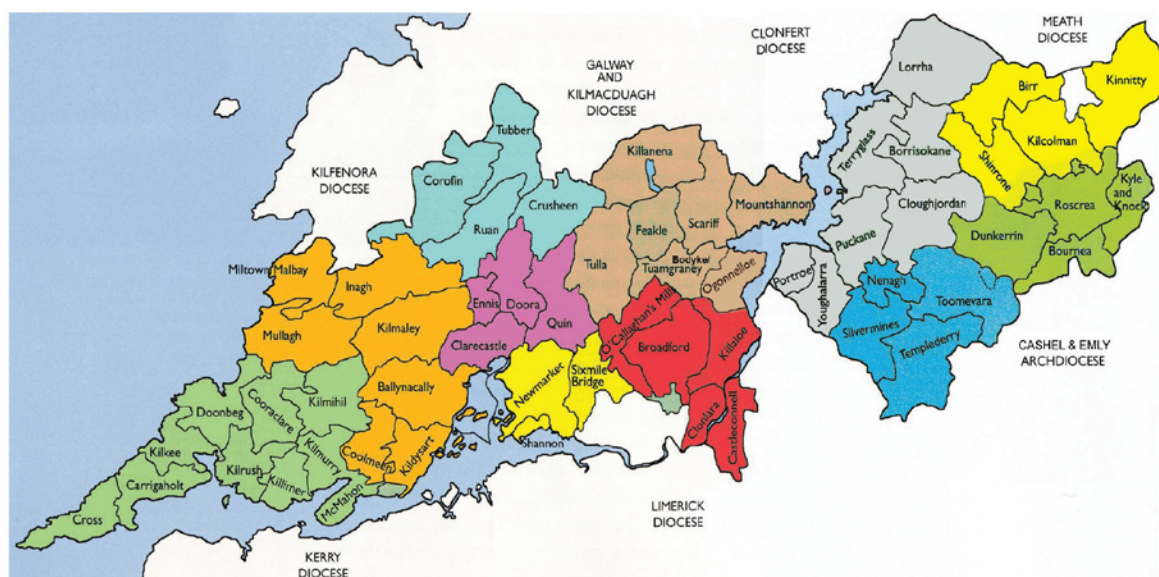


Diocese of Killaloe

Listening, Reflecting and Conversation Process

Report on Cluster Conversations

March - May 2012



Area 1	Inis Cathaigh:	Carrigaholt & Cross, Doonbeg & Kilkee, Killimer & Kilrush, Cooraclare & Kilmurphy McMahon, Kilmihil
Area 2	Mid Clare:	Ballynacally/Lissycasey, Inagh/Kilnamona, Kildysart & Coolmeen, Kilmaley, Miltown Malbay, Mullagh
Area 3	Imeall Boirne:	Corofin, Crusheen, Dysart/ Ruan, Tubber.
Area 4	Abbey:	Ennis, Clarecastle, Quin, Doora/Barefield
Area 5	Tradaree:	Newmarket-on-Fergus, Sixmilebridge, Shannon
Area 6	East Clare:	Ogonnelloe & Bodyke/Tuamgraney, Feakle & Killanena/Flagmount, Mountshannon, Scarriff, Tulla.
Area 7	Scáth na Sionnaine:	O'Callaghan's Mills, Killaloe, Broadford, Clonlara, Castleconnell.
Area 8	Odhrán:	Silvermines, Nenagh, Templederry, Toomevara
Area 9	Cois Deirige:	Borrisokane, Cloughjordan, Lorrha, Portroe, Puckane, Terryglass, Youghalarra.
Area 10	Brendan:	Birr, Kilcolman, Kinnitty, Shinrone
Area 11	Cronan:	Roscrea, Kyle & Knock, Dunkerrin, Bournea

Report issued July 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
AIMS OF THE CONSULTATION	4
APPROACH TO THE CONSULTATION	4
AIMS OF THE REPORT	4
 PART 1: FEEDBACK FROM THE CONSULTATIONS	
 1. PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING	5
1.1 PARTICIPATION: TRENDS IN CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND PRACTICE	5
1.2 WHAT DISCOURAGES PARTICIPATION/BELONGING	5
1.3 ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION: WHAT CAN BE BUILT ON?	5
 2. FAITH, SPIRITUALITY, LITURGY AND SACRAMENT	6
2.1 UNDERSTANDING FAITH IN TODAY'S CONTEXT	6
2.2 CENTRALITY OF LITURGY IN LIFE OF PARISH	6
2.3 POORLY CELEBRATED LITURGIES	6
2.4 CELEBRATION OF SACRAMENTS OF FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION	6
 3. MINISTRY ISSUES	
3.1 THE WORK AND ROLE OF PRIESTS	7
3.2 THE AGE-PROFILE OF PRIESTS	7
3.3 THE INVOLVEMENT OF RELIGIOUS	7
3.4 VOCATIONS AND DESIRE FOR NEW FORMS OF MINISTRY	7
 4. LAY MINISTRY	8
4.1 INCREASING NUMBERS ACTIVELY INVOLVED	8
4.2 CHALLENGES OF GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED	8
4.3 EFFECTIVE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS	8
4.4 COLLABORATIVE MODEL OF CHURCH	8
4.5 FRUSTRATION OF LAY INVOLVEMENT	8
4.6 DANGER OF BURNOUT	8
4.7 FRUSTRATION AT CRITICISM	8
4.8 NEWNESS OF LAY INVOLVEMENT IN SOME PARISHES	8
4.9 ROLE OF WOMEN	9
 5. PARISH/CLUSTER STRUCTURES	9
5.1 THE PARISH	9
5.2 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS: PARISHES WITH NON-RESIDENT PRIESTS	9
5.3 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS: SHARING OF PRIESTS BETWEEN PARISHES	9
5.4 CLUSTERING OF PARISHES	9
 6. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH	10
6.1 SENSE OF DISCONNECT	10
6.1.1 IMPACT OF ABUSE SCANDALS	10
6.1.2 IMPACT OF CENSORING OF PRIESTS	10
6.1.3 THE INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW MISSAL	10
6.1.4 RELATING TO ISSUES WHICH AFFECT PEOPLE'S LIVES	10
6.2 TRUST IN THE LISTENING PROCESS	11
6.3 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DIOCESE AND PARISHES	11
6.4 CONSULTATION WITH LAY PEOPLE/PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS	11

7. YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAITH	11
8. THE WORK OF SCHOOLS/FAITH FORMATION	12
8.1 WORK OF SCHOOLS IN WORK OF HANDING ON OF FAITH	12
8.2 PARISH BASED SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION	12
8.3 IMPACT OF CHANGES IN PATRONAGE AND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS	12
9. FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH	12
 PART 2: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES EMERGING	
10. PARISH AND CLUSTER INTO THE FUTURE	13
10.1 A SMALLER BUT MORE VIBRANT CHURCH	13
10.2 THE PARISH OF THE FUTURE	13
10.3 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS	13
10.4 CLUSTERING OF PARISHES	14
11. PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY AS THE WAY FORWARD	14
11.1 A MODEL OF CHURCH BASED ON COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP	14
11.2 PREPARING FOR A FUTURE WITH LESS PRIESTS	14
11.3 INVOLVEMENT OF LAY PEOPLE IS KEY	14
11.4 CENTRAL ROLE OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS	14
11.5 EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN PARISH MINISTRIES	14
11.6 LITURGICAL MINISTRIES	15
12. EDUCATION IN FAITH	15
12.1 ADULT FAITH FORMATION AND ADULT SPIRITUALITY	15
12.2 ENGAGING WITH PARENTS THROUGH SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION	16
12.3 FAITH FORMATION AND CHILDREN: SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION	16
13. MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE	16
13.1 CONCERN ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAITH	16
13.2 NEED FOR A DIOCESAN CONSULTATION PROCESS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE	16
14. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH	16
14.1 ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE	16
14.2 HOPE FOR A FRESH BEGINNING	16
14.3 COMMUNICATIONS	16
15. FUTURE FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH	17
CONCLUSION	17
APPENDIX 1: SCHEDULE OF CLUSTER GATHERINGS	18
APPENDIX 2: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION GROUP SUMMARY OF CONVERSATIONS	19

INTRODUCTION

AIMS OF THE CONSULTATION

This Report sets out the feedback from the local consultations of the Diocesan Process of Listening, Reflection and Conversation which took place across the Killaloe Diocese from March to May 2012. The Consultation forms part of the *Naming Our Reality* phase of the Diocesan Process. It builds on feedback from two Diocesan Gatherings of Lay People and Priests held in November/December 2011. These earlier Gatherings engaged participants in reflection on their experiences of Church which are life-giving and give hope and contrasting experiences of Church which drain life and energy. The focus of this present consultation is participants' experience of Church at local Parish and Cluster level. It aims to give a clear picture of the present reality and how people envisage the future.

APPROACH TO THE CONSULTATION

In total 12 consultations were conducted and nearly 700 participants took part comprising Parish Pastoral Councils/Parish Leadership Group and Priests from Clusters across the Diocese. Some parishes included other lay people with significant roles in their parishes, other than those involved in Parish Pastoral Councils/Parish Leadership Groups.

Two tasks were put to participants at each of the 12 sessions. Participants were sub-divided into small groups to facilitate discussion and the giving of feedback.

1. Describe, using words or images, the present reality of Church in your parish?
2. Describe, using words or images, your parish as it will be in the future.
(This was qualified as meaning between 5 and 10 years); ¹

AIMS OF THE REPORT

This Report aims to present the collated feedback from these conversations with priests and people about the local Church in the Killaloe Diocese. It falls into two sections:

- 1) The present reality of Church as it experienced on the ground;
- 2) Looking to the Future: Key challenges that emerge from the feedback.

PART 1: FEEDBACK FROM THE CONSULTATIONS

The following themes emerged from Question 1 on the Present Reality of Parish Life.

PRESENT REALITY OF PARISH LIFE: MAIN THEMES

1. PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING
2. FAITH, SPIRITUALITY, LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS
3. MINISTRY
4. LAY MINISTRY
5. PARISH AND CLUSTER STRUCTURES
6. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH
7. YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAITH
8. THE WORK OF SCHOOLS/FAITH FORMATION
9. FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING

1.1 PARTICIPATION: TRENDS IN CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND PRACTICE

- 1.1.1 A very considerable number of people still participate in their local parish and attend weekend liturgies according to the feedback received.
- 1.1.2 However, with very few exceptions, participants report a significant fall in participation levels. Figures for actual attendance vary, with some parishes reporting up to 40% attendance and others as low as 10%.
- 1.1.3 The age profile of those who participate is increasingly an older generation or 'a middle-aged Church' with diminishing involvement of younger families and little interest or involvement of young people.
- 1.1.4 Large numbers still present for sacraments of Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation and for Weddings and Funerals.
- 1.1.5 The general involvement of young families is felt to be low and inconsistent in many areas.
- 1.1.6 The impact of the loss of young people and young families is acutely felt in some rural communities across the Diocese as they go to live and work abroad because of the present economic climate.

1.2 WHAT DISCOURAGES PARTICIPATION/BELONGING

- 1.2.1 The impact of a more secular culture, increasingly indifferent to faith, the negative portrayal of religion in the media and people moving away from organised religion are seen as factors influencing non-attendance.
- 1.2.2 Non-participation at local level is frequently associated with lack of connection with the hierarchical Church and for some is a fallout from the child sexual abuse scandals which 'continue to drain energy' at local parish level.
- 1.2.3 Participants spoke of a prevailing perception that the Church is unable to relate to people's lives and to some sections of society, and is felt to be silent on social and economic issues which impact on people. Unemployment, the economic crisis and emigration were issues frequently named.
- 1.2.4 Lack of understanding of faith, not understanding the Mass or Scriptures used during Mass, feelings of boredom during the Liturgy, and inability to accept some Church teachings are seen as leading to loss of connection and non participation.
- 1.2.5 There was recognition that patterns of commitment are changing. People participate irregularly, as they feel the need to or have time available. One parish used an image of a bus to describe its reality. People 'hop on and hop off' as they wish.
- 1.2.6 Parishes which are perceived as closed to change, and where the liturgy does not engage people, are seen as more likely to discourage participation.
- 1.2.7 Participants feel that some people are searching for meaning or spirituality but the Church does not seem able to respond effectively to them.

1.3 ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION: WHAT CAN BE BUILT ON?

- 1.3.1 Despite decline, many parishes report good attendance at 'special liturgies' such as bereavement liturgies, harvest Masses, exam Masses etc. Events rather than regular commitment are felt to be more likely to engage some people.
- 1.3.2 Liturgies held outside the Church building are experienced as inviting to non regular attendees. One group said: "When we move out of the building e.g. for Dawn Mass – we get a different kind of spirituality". Other outdoor events named were pilgrim walks, outdoor stations on Good Friday, and graveyard Masses.

- 1.3.3 There is recognition that people turn to the Church at times of crisis and tragedy in local communities. At these times, the Church is seen to play a very significant role in supporting and comforting bereaved families and the wider community.
- 1.3.4 New ways of including people such as website, radio links, distributing Church newsletters in places other than Churches, or reaching out to families at different moments of the life-cycle are identified as important in keeping connection with those who otherwise may have no involvement with Church.
- 1.3.5 Participants identify community as a sustained value in Irish society, both in rural and urban contexts. A strong sense of community spirit is felt to energise and give life to parishes.

2. FAITH, SPIRITUALITY, LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

2.1 UNDERSTANDING FAITH IN TODAY'S CONTEXT

In every Cluster, the need for adult faith development/faith formation/adult catechesis/is evident. Lack of understanding of faith in today's world is felt to contribute to a lack of engagement with Church and affects people's participation in the liturgy. Participants spoke about the need to develop 'a more reflective and contemplative spirituality', to grow in relationship with God/Jesus, to get to know the Scriptures more, to be a more prayerful Church. Some feel that dependence on the Sunday Liturgy to nourish faith is no longer sufficient. 'I need more inspiration than I get at Sunday Mass to lead a better life.'

2.2 CENTRALITY OF LITURGY IN LIFE OF PARISH

Liturgy is seen, by priests and people, to have a central place in parish life. Where liturgy is celebrated well and felt to be connected to life, it is experienced as a real source of life and hope. The role of active liturgy groups in the preparation of parish liturgies is acknowledged. Good liturgical music is seen to play a very significant role in enhancing people's experience of the liturgy.

2.3 POORLY CELEBRATED LITURGIES

Where liturgy is poorly prepared or poorly resourced in terms of music or liturgical ministry it is not experienced as life-giving nor does it nourish faith.

2.4 CELEBRATION OF SACRAMENTS OF FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION

The reception of the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation is seen in many parishes to mark exit rather than incorporation into the local parish community. However, people also feel that these sacramental moments indicate a wish for some form of connection with Church, however tenuous. For many younger families, sacraments are now the only point of contact with the Church and are seen by participants in this consultation as offering potential for engagement. Programmes such as *Do This in Memory* are seen as valuable in reaching out to families.

3. MINISTRY ISSUES

3.1 THE WORK AND ROLE OF PRIESTS

Appreciation of the work and role of local priests is evident in every Cluster. Participants repeatedly expressed admiration for individual priests who are experienced as 'good', 'open-minded', 'available' and 'approachable'. In some Clusters, there is concern among priests and people, about the workload that is presently borne by priests as numbers decline. Some priests expressed gratitude for the support they receive from lay people.

3.2 THE AGE PROFILE OF THE CLERGY

The fall in the numbers of ordinations to the priesthood and the aging profile of priests raises questions about how future ministry needs will be met. Many envisage not having a priest in their parish in the future. In rural communities there is a fear of this leading to church closures.

3.3 THE INVOLVEMENT OF RELIGIOUS

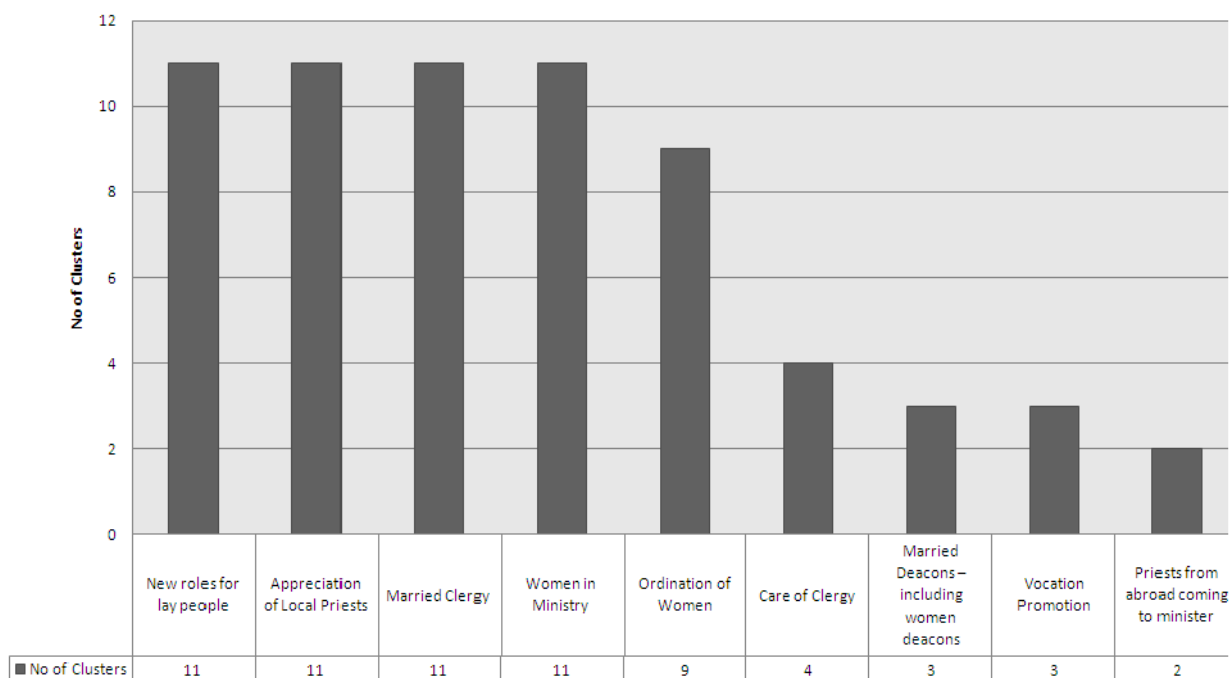
The contribution that religious have made is appreciated in parishes where there are religious communities. Individual religious are experienced as having made very significant contributions on the ground. There is also recognition that their declining numbers mean this cannot continue.

3.4 VOCATIONS & DESIRE FOR NEW FORMS OF MINISTRY

The aging profile of priests and declining numbers of vocations also raises questions about different expressions of ministry/vocation. In almost every Cluster people wish to see married priests and a relaxation of celibacy rules. Participants also hope to see women take up more roles in ministry, including, in most Clusters, ordination of women to priesthood. In two Clusters the ordination of permanent deacons is seen as desirable and one Cluster consideration of the ordination of women deacons is requested. In two Clusters inviting priests from abroad/overseas is proposed as a potential solution to the declining numbers of priests. Despite this decline, the need for promotion of vocations to priesthood in its present form is articulated only in three Clusters across the Diocese.

TABLE 1: RELATIVE STRENGTH OF ISSUES (1) MINISTRY

(Table 1 indicates the comparative strength of the issues raised in relation to Ministry.)



4. LAY MINISTRY

4.1 INCREASING NUMBERS ACTIVELY INVOLVED

Many lay people are currently giving of their time and gifts in their local parish communities. Numerous active groups exist in parishes across the Diocese involved in different areas of parish life, such as Liturgy Groups, Liturgical Ministries, Music Ministry, Elderly Care, St Vincent de Paul, Apostolic Workers, Parish Area Teams, Baptismal Teams and other sacramental preparation programmes like *Do This in Memory*.

4.2 CHALLENGES OF GETTING PEOPLE INVOLVED

However, the difficulty of 'moving people from a stance of passivity to involvement' is also experienced by priests and people. Many are willing to be involved in once-off events and to do specific tasks but are not willing to take on leadership roles in parishes. Many participate in liturgy, but relatively few want further involvement.

4.3 EFFECTIVE PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

The emergence of effective Pastoral Councils in many parishes across the Diocese is very evident from this consultation. There is recognition that these local leaderships groups are crucial in facilitating lay involvement in parish life. However, many lay people fear that membership of a Pastoral Council means taking more responsibility for the life of the parish than they feel ready to assume.

4.4 COLLABORATIVE MODEL OF CHURCH

It is clear from the conversations that there are many good experiences of a collaborative model of parish ministry between priests and people throughout the Diocese and that many lay people are assuming roles in their parishes "in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the People of God in their entirety is promoted."² (Pope Benedict XVI)

4.5 FRUSTRATION OF LAY INVOLVEMENT

However it is clear too that partnership is not always the operative model on the ground. Members of some Parish Pastoral Councils feel they have very little role in their parishes. They report resistance to change and a reluctance 'to let go of power' on the part of some priests. People in parishes like this articulate a sense of being stuck. .

Some find it hard to visualise their parish without dependence on a priest. One participant articulated it like this: 'Who will mind us when our priest is gone?'

4.6 DANGER OF BURNOUT

In several parishes, participants sense that some are 'punching above their weight', and 'end up doing everything' in local communities. Volunteers who are asked to participate in everything feel they risk exhaustion and will face burnout.

4.7 FRUSTRATION AT CRITICISM

Fear of local criticism is felt to discourage involvement. Frustration is experienced that those most vocal and judgemental about the Church fail to participate at any level with a view to improving or enhancing its presence in the community.

4.8 NEWNESS OF LAY INVOLVEMENT IN SOME PARISHES

In some parishes, parishioner involvement is experienced as a relatively new phenomenon with people still not fully comfortable or accepting of it.

4.9 ROLE OF WOMEN

It is clear that many women believe they do not participate as equals in the Church, in ministry or at leadership levels. Some women feel that they are not fully accepted, that their gifts and talents are ignored, and their present participation is mere 'tokenism'. Other respondents feel that, whereas women are generally the most active volunteers at parish level, they are absent and without voice at other decision making levels within the Church.

5. PARISH/CLUSTER STRUCTURES

5.1 THE PARISH

It is clear that there are different experiences of parish across the Diocese. Many parishes are experienced as prayerful, vibrant and alive. Others are experienced in terms of diminishing numbers and aging membership with less energy for participation.

Most participants in this consultation believe that the local Church has still a very important role to play in maintaining and supporting community.

Parishes which have a welcoming approach, which reach out to newcomers and are open to interact with diverse groups encourage belonging.

Parishes which explore opportunities to try new things, to involve people in new ways, are experienced as more vibrant and life-giving.

Extending invitations to parish events and parish socials to everyone in the parish, Church going and non Church-going, is seen as helpful in building community.

There was general agreement that future parishes will be smaller, with less people participating. Many participants see depletion of numbers leading to an uncertain future with potential closure of churches, infrequency of Mass celebrations, etc.

5.2 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS: PARISHES WITH NON-RESIDENT PRIESTS

Participants from a number of parishes who no longer have a resident priest took part in these consultations. Experiences are mixed. In some parishes it leads to people taking ownership of their parish and greater involvement. In other instances people feel abandoned and let down because of lack of consultation or preparation.

5.3 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS: SHARING OF PRIESTS BETWEEN PARISHES

Participants from parishes who share a parish priest with another parish express concern about the workload of priests who are 'running between parishes'. Fear/ uncertainty about the future and about losing their parish identity in twinning arrangements is experienced in some parishes which share priests. Other questions arise for people about possible parish amalgamations or closure of churches.

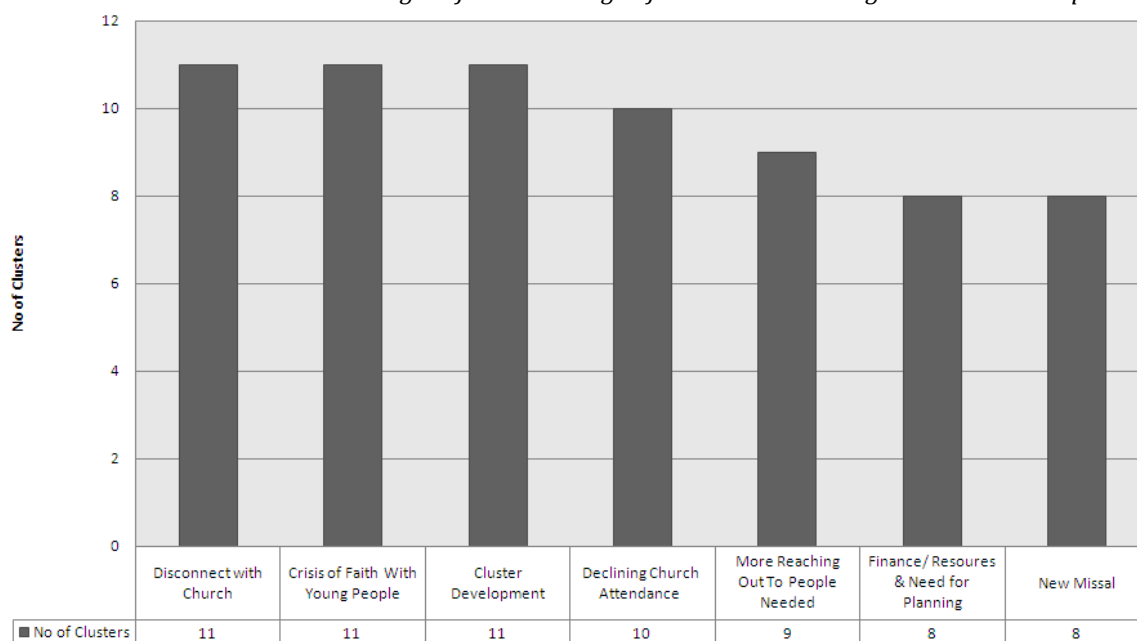
5.4 CLUSTERING OF PARISHES

There are different experiences of Clustering on the ground. Clusters which are developing structures to work together more effectively and taking joint initiatives between parishes are most positive about clustering. In other places, the Cluster model has taken hold minimally, if at all. In most Clusters, structures do not yet exist to facilitate the development of the Cluster and what sharing there is remains at the level of the clergy. The consultation process was the first experience of clustering for many lay people. In a few instances people feel that the geographical spread of the Cluster is too large and unmanageable. In other instances, not having a natural affinity among the clustered parishes makes for more complexity. Clustering of parishes with a sharp rural/urban divide is another factor which

affects development. It was noted that the development of the Cluster model will take time and effort and that we should not expect instant success.

TABLE 2: RELATIVE STRENGTH OF ISSUES (2)

Table two indicates the relative strength of a broad range of issues raised during the consultation process.



6. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

6.1 SENSE OF DISCONNECT

In every Cluster, a sense of disconnect with the institutional Church is widely felt. This was vividly described as a 'void' in the relationship between Church leaders and Church-goers. Perceived actions/inactions of the hierarchical Church impact strongly at local level and lead many Church-goers to distance themselves. The following issues were named repeatedly:

6.1.1 IMPACT OF ABUSE SCANDALS

At local parish level there is a legacy of hurt and a breakdown of trust in the institutional Church arising from the abuse scandals. Words such as 'let-down', 'betrayed' are frequently used. Others speak of their faith being 'shaken' / 'shattered'. The image of a 'wounded bird' was used by one parish to describe the Church after the abuse scandals.

6.1.2 IMPACT OF CENSORING OF PRIESTS

The period of the consultation coincided, in a significant number of Clusters, with the censoring of some Irish priests. There is much anger about this issue on the ground. Many feel these priests are accurately reflecting their views.

6.1.3 THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW MISSAL

The introduction of the new Missal is an often proposed example of the Church being 'out of touch' or 'not listening'. It is felt to have been imposed without consultation. The language is felt to be 'archaic' and 'cumbersome'. Many speak of not understanding or relating to the new text. The changes are felt to impact particularly on the elderly for whom familiarity with the Mass is a source of comfort.

6.1.4 RELATING TO ISSUES WHICH AFFECT PEOPLE'S LIVES

The perceived absence of the Church's voice on social issues is deeply felt. There is

disappointment on the ground that the Church is silent on issues which affect people's lives such as the economic collapse, the role of the banks, unemployment and emigration.

6.2 TRUST IN THE LISTENING PROCESS

The perception that the institutional Church is 'unwilling to listen' has an impact at a more local level, e.g. on the relationship between parish and Diocese. The present *Listening-Reflecting-Conversation-Process* is itself the focus of some scepticism. 'Will what is said count?' 'Will it be listened to?' are questions frequently posed. Some, priests and people, feel that the process will 'go nowhere'. On the other hand, many see this process as a sign of hope and are encouraged by engagement in it.

6.3 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DIOCESE AND PARISHES

The need for better communication processes between the Diocese and local parish communities is identified in a number of Clusters. Better communication of decisions, of new ways of doing things, and an explanation of the rationale behind decisions taken is called for. In some parishes, for example, new arrangements about the administration of Confirmation are felt to be poorly communicated by the Diocese.

6.4 CONSULTATION WITH LAY PEOPLE/PARISHES PASTORAL COUNCILS

Insufficient input from Parish Pastoral Councils is felt to contribute to unworkable solutions in some instances. For example, in grouping parishes into Clusters, consultation is felt to have happened at the level of the clergy only without involvement of lay people, who sometimes feel they are in a better position to know what will work on the ground.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAITH

7.1 Anxiety about young people and their faith emerges in all of the group discussions as something of great concern to local parish communities and especially to parents/grandparents. There is a perceived 'disconnect' between the teachings of the Church and the lives of young people many of whom, in the view of many parents in these conversations, see the Church as irrelevant to them.

7.2 Young people are felt to be lost to their local faith communities after the reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is clear from the conversations that parish communities wish to maintain connection with young people but feel they do not know how to do so.

7.3 The vast majority of participants who spoke on this issue wished to see young people 'coming back to Mass'. Many parents experience sadness in relation to their children's absence from Sunday Mass. 'Going to Church is no longer a family experience. I go to Church alone.' Taize style liturgies, Gospel Masses etc are felt to be closer to the world of young people.

7.4 The tendency to equate young people's faith with Mass attendance is questioned by some. They point out that young people are frequently living out Christian values especially justice. To engage effectively with young people, the Church must begin with what interests them or is of concern to them.

7.5 'I feel unable to pass on faith to my children' is a frequently expressed sentiment by parents. They experience a sense of not knowing how to talk about faith to their children or how to answer the questions posed of them.

8. THE WORK OF SCHOOLS/FAITH FORMATION

8.1 WORK OF SCHOOLS IN HANDING ON OF FAITH

The 'excellent', 'outstanding' work of parish schools in giving young people a positive experience of faith and the contribution of teachers to faith formation is widely acknowledged.

8.2 PARISH BASED SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

However, the failure of the catechetical process to lead to ongoing commitment is a serious concern on the ground in parishes. There is a felt need to rethink preparation for the Sacraments with more involvement of lay people in teaching faith outside of school. Some feel sacramental preparation should become predominantly parish based as it would require a choice to be made by candidates/parents.

8.3 IMPACT OF CHANGES IN PATRONAGE AND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS

There is recognition that change is imminent in terms of patronage and management of schools. Some question what is being done at diocesan level to prepare for this new reality.

9. FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

9.1 Several parishes experience the impact of less participation in loss of income, with less people contributing financially at parish level. In some parishes financial strain or deficit is a reality.

PART 2: LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES EMERGING

Part One of this Report has tried to present the issues and themes emerging from the 2012 Diocese-wide, Cluster based consultation process, as accurately as possible.

The consultation also points to the future. Key issues emerge from the feedback that will be crucial for a living Church and to sustain local faith communities in the next five to ten years. This part of the Report sets out to identify these key issues/themes and where possible to name actions proposed.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: KEY THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

10. PARISH AND CLUSTER INTO THE FUTURE
11. PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY AS THE WAY FORWARD
12. EDUCATION IN FAITH
13. MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE
14. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH
15. FUTURE FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

10. PARISH AND CLUSTER INTO THE FUTURE

10.1 A SMALLER BUT VIBRANT CHURCH

There is widespread acceptance that in the future parishes will be smaller with less people attending. While many are very discouraged by this reality, a significant number anticipate the emergence of more vibrant parish communities, based on choice rather than habit or custom.

10.2 THE PARISH OF THE FUTURE

The kind of parish which will facilitate participation and belonging is clearly indicated by respondents. Open, welcoming parishes, which engage with diverse groups, which exhibit warmth, involve people and offer liturgies which engage are perceived as attractive. Parishes are felt to have a significant role to play in helping to build and sustain local community and as a source of comfort and support at times of tragedy and loss.

Parishes are called on 'to move the Church out of the building', to reach out to those who no longer participate, and to include all parishioners – 'those who attend and those who don't' - in parish events and socials.

There is a need to invite participation. Not everyone is willing to be part of a planning or leadership group but there is a significant number who are willing to be involved in once-off events or to do things when personally invited.

10.3 NEW PARISH ARRANGEMENTS

New arrangements of parishes are seen as inevitable. There will be more parishes without a resident priest or sharing a priest with another parish. Support during transition, developing a strong lay leadership group, and a supportive clergy from the outside, are key to maintaining parish identity in these situations. Sharing of experiences/models that are working with parishes facing this new situation is also called for.

10.4 CLUSTERING OF PARISHES

There is overwhelming agreement that working in Clusters of Parishes is the way forward for us as a Diocese. There is need for i) the development of Cluster structures, ii) the ironing out of residual issues around grouping of parishes, iii) the resourcing of Clusters and iv) Facilitators to assist these processes.

11. PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY AS THE WAY FORWARD

11.1 A MODEL OF CHURCH BASED ON COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

There was widespread agreement that a collaborative model of Church, based on partnership between priests and people is the desired way forward. There is a need to tease out the implications of working from this model. Education for priests and laity in working a partnership model is viewed as essential.

11.2 PREPARING FOR A FUTURE WITH LESS PRIESTS

- a) There is much concern in parish communities about the decline in numbers of priests across the Diocese. There is uncertainty about the future and fear that there will be church closures and parish amalgamations. Some feel the issue is not being addressed sufficiently. 'We are taking it for granted that the present system will last when it is clear that it won't.'
- b) It is very evident from the feedback that while many are looking to new forms of priesthood, such as married priests and women priests, ordination of permanent deacons and inviting priests from overseas to minister has much less support.
- c) Inclusion of the gifts and talents of women in meaningful ways is called for, as well as their involvement in ministry and leadership roles at all levels of the Church.
- d) The burden of work on priests, especially those who have multiple roles, is acknowledged as is the need to care for and support them.

11.3 INVOLVEMENT OF LAY PEOPLE IS KEY

Involving people is seen as key to the future: 'Lack of participation kills a parish. We must get more involved.' The importance of invitation in facilitating involvement is acknowledged. 'People are out there: we just need to invite them.' Involving more people will also help ease the burden on those who feel they are over-committed. [c.f. 4.6]

11.4 CENTRAL ROLE OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

There is recognition that the future of the Church at local level will depend on lay leadership to help maintain parish communities and Clusters on the ground. The need to build on the very considerable existing levels of involvement, to encourage and support those already committed and to attract new people to take up lay leadership roles in their communities is seen as vital. The challenges of involving people who are often reticent about participation and who fear too much responsibility are also evident.

11.5 EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN PARISH MINISTRIES

The need to prepare for a different kind of Church through education is seen as an immediate priority. Many people see the Cluster structure as an ideal forum for education at local level.

- Education of laity to take on more active roles in their parishes including membership and leadership of Parish Pastoral Councils is requested along with help for Pastoral Councils in understanding their role.

- Education of lay people to work in faith formation/catechetical programmes with children, and formation in how to engage with parents is articulated as a pressing need.
- Education of priests and people in working a collaborative model of Church and enabling the giftedness of all members of the parish community to be expressed is seen as an urgent requirement.

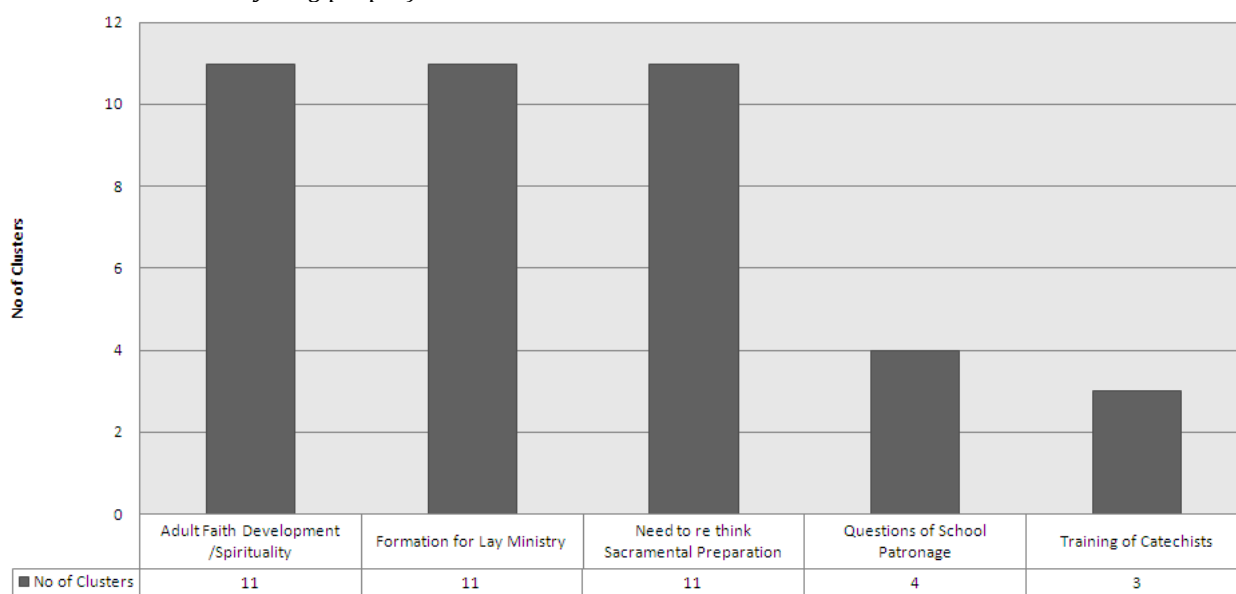
Though these needs are identified, the difficulty of motivating people to participate in any proposed education processes is recognised.

11.6 LITURGICAL MINISTRIES

There is recognition that it may not be possible to celebrate the daily or Sunday Eucharist in every parish community in the future. People envisage involvement by laity in areas previously reserved to clergy, such as lay-led liturgies. Training of lay people to take up roles of leading these kinds of liturgies is requested in many Clusters. The work of Liturgy Groups in connecting faith and life is acknowledged. Existing liturgy groups and other liturgical ministries experience a need for support and new groups are needed in parishes where none exist.

TABLE 3: RELATIVE STRENGTH OF ISSUES (3) EDUCATION RELATED NEEDS

(Table 3 indicated the relative strength of issues concerning education. This included education issues related to both adults and young people.)



12. EDUCATION IN FAITH

12.1 ADULT FAITH FORMATION AND ADULT SPIRITUALITY

As stated in 2.1 above, the need for adult faith development/faith formation/ adult catechesis/is seen as vital by priests and people. Opportunities to develop a relationship with God/Christ/Jesus, to grow in prayer and develop 'a more reflective and contemplative spirituality', to get to know the Scriptures more, are requested. The Sunday Liturgy on its own is seen as incapable of meeting these needs.

12.2 ENGAGING WITH PARENTS THROUGH SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

Fruitful ways of engaging with parents, who present their children for sacraments, in a way that promotes more connection with the local community, emerges as a priority from this

process. Training lay catechists and preparing lay people to get involved in faith formation of children is also identified.

12.3 FAITH FORMATION AND CHILDREN: SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION

The need for reflection/discussion on the sacramental preparation of children is also evident from this consultation. Initiatives such as the *Do This in Memory Programme* are felt to be valuable. Discussion on the ready availability of sacraments without any commitment or meaning is sought by many, priests and people. The question 'Is the parish the place where sacramental preparation should take place?' is also being asked.

13. MINISTRY TO YOUNG PEOPLE

13.1 CONCERN ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAITH

Parish communities clearly want to include young people but are at a loss to know how to do so in many cases. Sharing ways to effectively engage with young people that have worked in other places is seen as valuable.

13.2 NEED FOR A DIOCESAN CONSULTATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

This present process did not engage with young people. 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.

14. COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE CHURCH

14.1 ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE

It is evident that there is a legacy of hurt and anger at the perceived actions/inactions of the hierarchical Church and that many see it as not connecting with them. (c.f. 6.1ff)

This presents a further challenge for us as Church. Engagement and dialogue is needed if confidence and trust are to be rebuilt. The process we have begun as a Diocese has the potential to be precisely that.

14.2 HOPE FOR A FRESH BEGINNING

Participants ask for a sense of vision and direction from the Diocese. They expressed a wish that Bishop Kieran will lead a process of change. While there is scepticism among some about the present consultation, participants in many of the Clusters expressed a sense of hope that the present process is a fresh beginning which potentially offers a way forward.

14.3 COMMUNICATIONS

Participants wish to see more effective consultation processes, which include priests and laity, about issues which affect them. There are also requests for better communication about diocesan decisions along with the rationale behind them e.g. the schedule of Confirmations [see 6.7].

On a broader level, it is clear from these conversations that many people look to the Church to offer hope and encouragement and to offer a critique of society around important social issues such as the present economic crisis, emigration, unemployment etc.

15. FUTURE FINANCING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

15.1 Declining numbers participating and contributing has led to a fall in Church income. Financial planning for 'a future with less income and greater needs' is seen as a key issue for us as a Diocese into the future.

CONCLUSION

This Consultation/Listening process, along with the two previous gatherings of priests and laity from across the Diocese is a solid first step on the path of renewal in our Diocese.

We wish to thank all who took part in this process and so honestly shared their views. We thank too those who organised the Gatherings in the different Clusters or helped us in any way.

In this report we have tried to be faithful to the voices we have heard, to set out the reality as it is experienced in parish faith communities around the Diocese, to name the concerns and issues that were raised, as well as what gives people hope for the future of the local Church. We have tried to list some of the challenges which follow on from what has been shared.

The positive level of participation in this process across the Clusters of the Diocese is an indicator in itself of the interest and commitment of many to the future renewal of the Church in our Diocese. The potential for the emergence of strong lay leadership is also very evident from the Cluster Gatherings, something which gives much hope for the future.

One of the most striking impressions from these conversations is that many people feel a strong affinity and connection, a sense of identity and belonging with their local parish community, despite feelings of disconnect with the institutional Church. However, it is also true that hurt or anger with stances or decisions taken by the institutional Church impacts negatively at local parish level and leads to people walking away.

It is clear that these are days of immense change. There are new needs to be met and new challenges are set before us. These conversations set out the reality of these challenges.

We can read these findings and see them in terms of crisis and decline or we can, with the eyes of faith, see them in terms of newness and possibility. The theologian Karl Rahner says that as Christians we are called to have trust enough to constantly begin an exodus anew out of the present into the future, out of structures which have become 'petrified, old and empty'³ in search of new structures and ways of being. Only trust in the Spirit of God, present and active in the Church and in the world enables us to move forward with hope.

As a Team, we believe that this process opens up tremendous possibilities for the Church in our Diocese. This phase has allowed us to name our present reality with openness and honesty. The strands which have emerged, as set out in this Report, will help inform the next steps.

APPENDIX A: SCHEDULE OF CLUSTER GATHERINGS

MEETINGS TO PREPARE FOR CLUSTER GATHERINGS

7th February, 2012	Meeting with Moderators and Lay Cluster Representatives from Parishes east of the Shannon in Nenagh.
9th February, 2012	Meeting with Moderators and Lay Cluster Representatives from Parishes west of the Shannon in Ennis.

CLUSTER GATHERINGS: DATES AND VENUES

March 8th, 2012	Cronan Cluster Gathering, Roscrea.
March 13th, 2012	Cois Deirge Cluster Gathering, Ardcroney.
March 15th, 2012	Imeall Boirne Cluster Gathering, Ruan.
March 20th, 2012	Abbey Cluster Gathering, Ennis.
March 29th, 2012	Brendan Cluster Gathering, Birr.
April 17th, 2012	East Clare Cluster Gathering, Mountshannon.
April 19th, 2012	Odhran Cluster Gathering, Nenagh.
April 26th, 2012	Inis Cathaigh Cluster Gathering, Doonbeg.
May 1st, 2012	Mid-Clare Cluster Gathering, Spanish Point.
May 10th, 2012	Tradaree Cluster Gathering, Shannon.
May 15th, 2012	Scath na Sionna Cluster Gathering, Killaloe.
May 16th, 2012	Gathering of Parish Leaderships Groups, Nenagh.

Diocesan Listening Process Steering Group: Bishop Kieran O' Reilly, Leonard Cleary, Sean Conlan, Michael Geaney, Fr. John Kelly, Maureen Kelly, Fr Pat Malone, Fr Donagh O' Meara, Sr. Clare Slattery.

Ms Marie O' Connell-Quinn acts as part-time Administrator to the Listening Process.

¹ A somewhat different format was employed at the first Cluster Gathering of the Cronan Cluster in Roscrea. The process was amended and shortened for the remaining sessions to reflect the time available. The themes and issues which surfaced were very similar regardless of the process used.

² Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme of *Church Membership and Pastoral Co-Responsibility*, May 2009.

³ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* 10, p.258