

# DIOCESE OF KILLALOE REFLECTING, LISTENING AND CONVERSING PROCESS



**'We are trained to ask  
'What's wrong?' &  
'How can we fix it?'**  
**We need to learn to ask  
'What's possible here?'**  
**and 'Who cares?'**  
**Margaret Wheatley**  
*Turning To One Another, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*  
*January 2009, Berrett-Koehler Inc*

In October 2011, the Killaloe Diocese began a process of Listening, Reflecting and Conversation across the Diocese. The overall aim of the process is to engage the people and parish communities of the Diocese in a process towards revitalising local Christian communities in their commitment to the Gospel and the living out of that commitment in mission and ministry today. The process was launched by Bishop Kieran O' Reilly in his Pastoral Letter of October 2011 (could the link be put in here - I don't have it?)

As a Diocese we recognise the need to work towards new ways of being Church. This need is heightened by the following:

1. The depletion in numbers of priests in the diocese means that 12 out of 58 parishes no longer have a resident parish priest.
2. The impact of the abuse scandals has resulted in feelings of anger, disillusionment, alienation, a sense of lack of direction and lack of leadership.
3. We live in a culture where faith and spirituality are increasingly marginalised and privatised.
4. The economic collapse has impacted severely and negative on people's lives.

The Church in the Killaloe Diocese recognises the seriousness and urgency of the situation in which we find ourselves. Given this reality there is a need to identify pastoral responses and future direction for local Christian Communities.

## PROCESS OUTLINE



The Diocesan Process is first of all a Listening Process aimed at creating fora around the Diocese where our current experience of Church can be named and reflected on. The first stage of ***Naming Our Present Reality*** was initiated with two separate Diocesan Gatherings, for lay people representative of each Parish and for the priests of the Diocese.

Nearly 90 people gathered in Bunratty on November 27<sup>th</sup> 2011, to talk about their experience of living Church on the ground in parish communities and their hopes for the future of Church. There was much honest conversation as people from different parts of the Diocese reflected on their struggles and disappointments about their experience of Church as well as their hopes about the future.

The feedback from this day was overwhelmingly positive about the process. Many people said it was the first time they had ever been invited to speak about their experience of Church. Here is the evaluation from the day: (Link to document Bunratty Lay Gathering Collated Evaluation.)

A similar day was held with the priests of the diocese on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 with the same format as the lay day. Here is the collated evaluation from this day. (put in link to Priests Gathering Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 Evaluations).

All of the feedback from these days was collated and you can read the full report here. (link to Killaloe Diocesan Report 6<sup>th</sup> February). You can also read a summary of the findings here (link to Summary of feedback from Diocesan Gatherings).

Theologian, Fr Gerry O' Hanlon SJ was the resource person at each of these gatherings. Having listened to the feedback from the groups, he offered some reflections about the present situation in the light of the Gospel. Fr Gerry offered us the image of our Diocese, as a people on a journey, a people on the move, a pilgrim people, who seek change, metanoia, conversion. We seek new models, new structures to help us to live as disciples. We want our relationship with Jesus Christ, the saving and loving face of God, to be at the centre of what we do.

Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus we were telling our story – our fears and hopes, our desolations and consolations. Fr Gerry asked us to imagine what Jesus might say to us? He quoted Timothy Radcliffe O.P.

‘ In the church there is too much silence. We bite our lips, we hold back from what we really think, keep mum. We need to have the freedom to voice our anger and suffering and pain’.

Fr Gerry went on to say that

‘It would be awful if we wasted this present crisis, if, ostrich-like, we put our heads in the sand and waited till the storm passed, hoping to return to quieter waters, if ‘listening’ becomes just an exercise in crisis management and not a real engagement at deeper levels, a ‘being heard’. If we do this we will have missed a glorious opportunity for real change, we will consign our church to a future as an inward-looking enclave of little relevance to the world to which it was sent. And so, the listening and talking is important, is a step on an ongoing journey, is a sign of real hope.’

(Link to Fr Gerry O' Hanlon Input to Lay Gathering and Fr Gerry O' Hanlon Input to Priests' Assembly).

96% of those who attended the gathering of lay people from around the diocese in Bunratty identified a need for a similar process to be held at local level. This was endorsed at the Priests' Assembly and it was agreed that the best place for this to happen was at Cluster Level. From February to the end of May, a Gathering was held in each Cluster to which each Parish Pastoral Council or Parish Leadership Group was invited. Eleven of these meetings were held in Clusters across the Diocese (link to [Map of Diocese with Clusters \(powerpoint doc\)](#)). One further meeting was held in Nenagh Parish with the Parish Commissions at the request of the Parish Pastoral Council.

The feedback from these gatherings will be available shortly.

The Process on the ground has been grounded in and accompanied by prayer at all stages. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent, each parish community across the Diocese was asked by Bishop Kieran to pray for the success of the Diocesan Process. (Link here to [Homily Notes for Day of Prayer and Prayer for Diocesan Process of Listening, Reflection and Conversation \(word docs\)](#) used on that day.)

We continue to pray that the Spirit may guide us as we begin to see how we can respond to what has been heard during the Listening Sessions across our diocese. The words of this prayer of the Iona Community speak to what we hope for the Church in our diocese:

Come Holy Spirit  
Give us a new breath of freedom,  
A new heart of fire  
A new strength of purpose  
To see the story of God  
In the people of God;

Come Holy Spirit,  
Show us the patters of your presence  
In the places of our lives  
Where we work and serve,  
As much as where we worship and pray;

Come Holy Spirit,  
Make us a sign of God  
In the darkness and poverty  
Of our world,  
Where hope is frail  
And daily life a struggle to survive.

(Written by Yvonne Morland in *Holy Ground: Liturgies and Worship Resources for an Engaged Spirituality*, p. 309. Neil Paynter (ed), Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 2005)