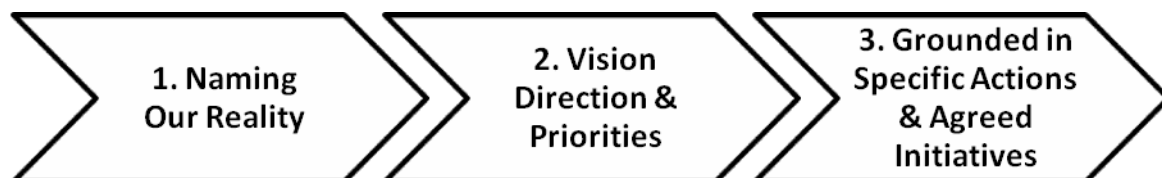


## 1. INTRODUCTION:

This report provides feedback from a consultation process conducted with priests and laity from the Killaloe Diocese held in November-December 2011. The overall aim of the consultation is to begin a process of Listening/Reflecting and Conversing aimed at engaging the people and parish communities of the Diocese towards revitalising local Christian communities. This will feed into the development of pastoral responses and future direction for the Diocese over the period 2012-2016.



It is envisaged that the Process of Listening, Reflecting and Conversation will comprise three stages.

**Stage 1: Naming Our Present Reality** was initiated with two Diocesan Gatherings. The first, for lay people from across the Diocese, was held on Sunday November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The second, an Assembly for the priests of the Diocese, was held on December 12<sup>th</sup> 2011. What follows is the collated feedback from these two Gatherings.

## 1. Feedback from Consultation with Laity from across the Diocese

### 1.1 Introduction:

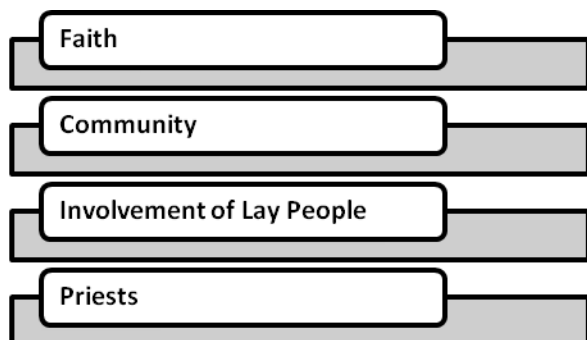
The Diocesan Gathering with laity brought together a representative group of lay people from across the Diocese. In all, seventy five lay people participated, drawn from parishes and other diocesan groups/councils/commissions.

Participants formed into 12 groups and were asked to focus their discussions on two questions:

1. What energises you, fires you?
2. What quenches the fire – drains- frustrates your spirit?

### 1.2 Laity Feedback 1: What Energises You?

When asked to focus on the question '*What energises you within the Church?*', the feedback was extensive. Overall, four key aspects of the Church were felt by participants to be energising and encouraging of their involvement. These four aspects are:



**i) Faith:**

Faith emerged in all groups as a feature that energised participants. Faith was seen by participants as a central element of daily life which gives a sense of purpose and meaning. There was a strong sense that the faith handed on to participants from previous generations was inspiring and encourages their active participation in the Church.

Participants saw the crucial importance of passing on this faith to a younger generation, nurturing it and expressing it in a way that is meaningful today. Without this, they felt, the Church will not survive.

The importance and success of initiatives such as 'Pray and Play', the children's liturgies, family Masses, Do This In Memory etc were recognised as being very positive experiences at parish level. The need for new approaches to involving young people was highlighted including the use of social media and meeting young people in their reality. The fact they are now questioning the Church more readily than previous generations was identified as something positive. If the Church is to find ways of relating to Young People and encourage them to become involved, then, it was felt, the Church itself has to change.

**ii) Community:**

The sense of involvement in a wider community was highlighted as an energising feature in a number of the groups. The act of coming together and supporting each other in times of difficulty has encouraged participation for many and gives hope and a sense of belonging to those involved, in spite of depleting attendance/numbers. The notion of a local supportive community is highly valued and there was a strong sense that people want to preserve it for future generations.

**iii) Involvement of Lay People:**

The active involvement of lay people in the Church at present was seen to have increased for a number of reasons, not least as a result of the depletion in the number of priests. This has, it appears, given hope to many as it represents a sense of new leadership within the Church and a more inclusive approach than the traditional hierarchical model where a priest had complete control over the parish. Some participants mentioned the very positive involvement of lay people in particular where parishes are without a resident parish priest.

The potential for further involvement of lay people in ministry in the Church at local level, including the possibility of presiding over liturgies was highlighted. The Church was called to support and enhance lay participation and ministry in all aspects of the Church and to dismantle the hierarchical approach which was felt to be alienating and excluding.

The feedback suggests that the Church is no different from other forms of community when it comes to volunteering. Knowing others, being asked to get involved, peer support and the potential for friendship and a sense of belonging were seen as encouraging participation.

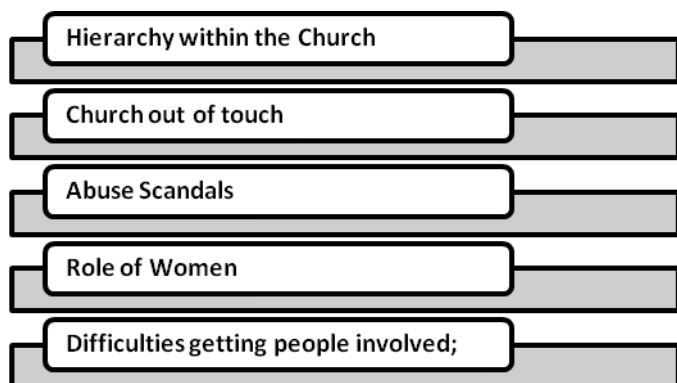
**iv) Priests:**

The leadership provided by some of the priests was mentioned on a number of occasions as encouraging and supporting active involvement by lay people in the Church and its activities. The resolve of the priests to continue in spite of adversity due partly to the reports on abuse in the Church was regarded as admirable and inspiring and something that energised people within the Church.

While these four aspects of the Church emerged as most energising, others were also mentioned and have played a role in people’s involvement and participation in the Church at varying levels. These include time for oneself, the hope of change and the benefits one derives from being involved. There was a desire for an inclusive model of Church and an ethos for moving forward that values the contribution of lay people in the mission and ministry of the Church.

### **1.3 Laity Feedback 2: What Drains Your Energy?**

In addition to what energises you, participants were asked to focus on what drains or frustrates them in relation to the Church. The responses fell under the headings below:



#### **i) Hierarchy within the Church**

The hierarchical nature of the Church emerged as a source of frustration for many participants. The lack of communication between the hierarchical Church and the Church at local level, decision-making without consultation, a perceived authoritarian approach by the hierarchical Church, inflexibility around issues such as celibacy and the role of women and the imposition of changes were examples of how the Church is impacting negatively on the laity.

Of particular frustration was the introduction of a new missal for the Mass without consultation. People feel it is not working. People spoke of an absence of structures for dialogue and discussion, an absence of a space for people to air their concerns and express differences of opinion. People experience the hierarchical Church as unwilling to listen. A failure of Church to change in line with changes in society was also raised in several groups. There is a sense of a divide between the institutional Church and the Church at local community level.

#### **ii) Church Out of Touch**

Lay People see some priests as out of touch with reality. This is reflected in the way the Eucharist is celebrated. Lay people experience the Mass frequently as boring, non-engaging and non-involving. The pressure on priests’ time and in some cases the authoritarian approach taken by the priest in relation to lay people and local parish communities is seen to be draining for lay participants.

A lack of ‘connect’ between mass and young people was mentioned on several occasions. The failure of the Church in some parishes to accommodate the times of masses to suit people’s working lives was seen as another example of disconnect between the Church and people. Poor leadership skills at local Church level were experienced as deeply frustrating to lay people.

Again, the hierarchical structure of the Church was perceived as heightening its 'out of touchness'. Hierarchical structures are felt to apply not only to the institutional Church structures but are also experienced locally where they discourage lay people's involvement.

**iii) Abuse Scandals**

The abuse scandals within the Irish Church were mentioned in some shape in all 12 groups. The manner in which the scandals were responded to and dealt with by the Church has alienated and discouraged many people. Again, lack of communication and the failure of the hierarchy to treat the matters with due respect and sensitivity and the unwillingness to change both at Vatican and local levels were highlighted by participants as draining their energy and frustrating their spirit. The negative media coverage of the Church as a result of the abuse crisis is a source of frustration for many. The question as to whether or not people can forgive was raised. Participants felt that the Church needs to learn from the past and carry this learning forward into the future development of the Church.

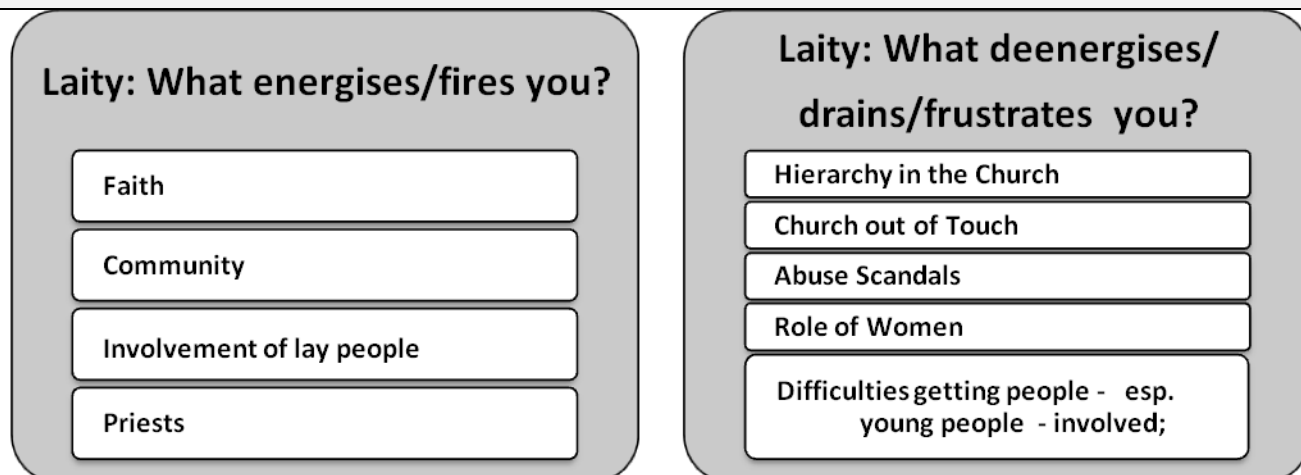
**iv) Role of Women**

The absence of women's voices at decision-making level in a hierarchical Church and their exclusion from areas of ministry was experienced as deeply frustrating by participants. The failure of the Church to recognise the equality of women arose in the feedback from many groups. Concerns that women were doing a great deal of work in the Church yet had no way of being recognised, that women were being treated as second class citizens and that women's voices were not being heard emerged throughout the feedback. There was a call for this issue to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

**v) Difficulties getting people – especially young people involved**

Engaging people within the Church was named as something that is very frustrating. There was a sense that many people did not want to get involved and that in particular there was little or no scope for young people to participate. The 'disconnect' between young people and the Church was consistently given as an example of this. There was a felt sense of the irrelevance of the Church to young people. However the failure of parents to take on the responsibility of passing on the faith was also identified.

**1.4 Summary Table: Common Themes: Laity.**



## SECTION 2: FEEDBACK FROM CONSULTATIONS WITH PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE

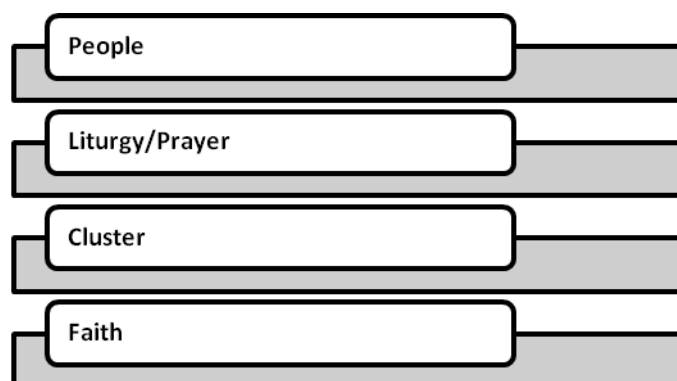
### 2.1 Introduction

Consultations with priests of the diocese were held on the 12<sup>th</sup> December 2011. 68 priests participated. As in the consultations with lay people, priests were asked to respond to two questions similar to those asked of the lay people:

1. What gives you life and hope?
2. What de-energises, drains or frustrates you?

### 2.2 Priests Feedback 1: What Gives You Life and Hope?

In response to the first question, *'What gives you life and hope?'*, four main themes emerged as follows:



As with the feedback from the laity, that from the priests was extensive. While similar themes emerged, it is apparent from the feedback that the experience of being a priest also made for a difference in perception on what gives life or hope and what energises.

#### i) People

There was a strong sense from all groups that involvement with people and the innate goodness of people is a source of great life and hope to priests. The increased level of interaction with the laity and the freedom that this brings to the Church was mentioned as a very positive development. The openness of people and their *'Church friendliness'* in spite of the adverse and somewhat tense relationship that has emerged between Church and society came to the fore throughout the group discussions. The hope that the lay people bring to the Church was seen as very energising and the increasing development of a sense of local Church, rather than an authoritarian institutional Church, was reiterated as positive and energising. The honesty, simplicity and enthusiasm of young people was highlighted on a number of occasions as giving fresh hope to participants and indeed the Church as a whole. All in all there is a strong sense from the priests that they continue to get good support from the people in their communities and that people can see them for who they are. This encourages and supports priests in fulfilling their ministry to their parish communities.

#### ii). Liturgy/Prayer of the Church:

Across all groups priests named various liturgies of the Church as giving them life and hope. These include the celebration of the Eucharist, the preparation and delivery of the Liturgy of the Word, daily mass and prayer. In particular, the involvement of laity in all aspects of these gives great hope.

Others mentioned the privilege of being involved in various aspects of people's lives, and ministry to the sick, the old, at weddings and funerals as being a source of life and hope. One specific programme, the 'Do This In Memory of Me' programme was identified as a very positive development and an experience of the Church involving lay people.

**iii). Cluster**

Working in a Cluster of Parishes and as part of a wider team was identified as a source of hope and support across most groups. Priests in these groups indicated that they draw energy and support from the Cluster groups for the most part. A sense of collective teamwork appears to be emerging from Clusters which are working together well and there appears to be a sense of achievement in some Clusters at having active involvement of lay people and the clergy together.

**iv). Faith:**

As in the feedback from the lay people, priests identified faith as giving them hope and life. There is a sense that, for priests, people's faith and spirituality is a source of hope, as is the desire of people to pass on their faith. There is acknowledgement that this faith has been challenged and tested in recent years and also a willingness to engage in looking at issues which have damaged people's faith. Some priests felt that a longer perspective was needed. This is not the first time that the Church has been in crisis and as before the faith of the people will bring it through and give life in the future.

**2.3 Priests Feedback 2: What De-energises/Drains Your Energy?**

Five common themes emerged from the second question priests were asked to focus on, 'What de-energises, drains or frustrates you?' Again some of these were similar to those identified by the laity, however more were specific to the experience of being a priest. The themes emerged as follows:

- Hierarchy
- Inability to engage with young people
- Difficulty getting people/laity to participate
- Age and depleting numbers of priests;
- Unwillingness of Church to engage in discussion on difficult issues ;

**i). Hierarchy**

Very similar to the feedback from the laity, priests identified a great deal of frustration with the hierarchy within the Church and the 'disconnect' that is experienced between the hierarchical Church and what is happening on the ground. The introduction of the new missal was again named by many groups and identified as an example of an authoritarian approach, introducing change to the Church without

consultation. It was felt to be as one group put it a 'big let-down'. Poor decisions being made in Rome were perceived as having very negative impacts on the Church at local level.

#### **ii) . Inability to engage with young people**

This theme emerged very strongly amongst the priest participants. The crisis of faith amongst young people and the inability to engage them in the Church was identified as draining and frustrating. The fact that young people are becoming more and more 'un-Churched' and a sense that young people do not see the relevance of the Church in their lives was seen as very negative. The loss of young people through immigration and indeed suicide was identified as very demoralising for priests and the Church as a whole.

#### **iii) Difficulty getting people/laity to participate**

While both priests and lay people identified the increased participation of laity in the Church as a positive, both identified getting people involved initially as very difficult and frustrating. Contributing factors such as the lack of a clear role for women in the Church, the limits people have on their time, the recent Church scandals and failure of the Church to act appropriately, were identified by participants.

#### **iv) Age and Depleting Priest Numbers**

The increasing age of the clergy and the dramatic decrease in the number of vocations was regarded as very de-energising amongst the priests. The increase in workload and responsibility also means an increase in administration and less time for parish work. This is experienced as very difficult by priests who have additional burdens in trying to strengthen the local community Church and increase participation. The tiredness that comes with age and the physical and mental draining that accompanies it for some was also highlighted.

#### **v). Unwillingness of the Church to engage in discussion on difficult issues**

The failure and unwillingness of the Church to enter into discussion on contentious issues such as sexuality and celibacy emerged as a cause of frustration amongst participants. The lack of leadership and the perceived 'cowardice' of bishops and leaders in addressing the difficult issues, including those arising from the abuse scandals and issues around the role of women in the Church, has made life more difficult for the Church at local community level. This was reiterated across the groups. One group explained this in the following quote: It is like "*being trapped in an institution that has a different vision from what is life-giving at local level*".

A leadership crisis within the Church was also flagged by participants as draining and frustrating. Structures which allow for a changing role and increased opportunities for leadership within the Church for lay people, especially women, were called for.

## 2.4 Summary Table: Common Themes Priests

### Priests: What gives life and hope?

People

Liturgy and Prayer

Working in Cluster/Team

Faith

### Priests: What deenergises/ drains /frustrates you?

Hierarchy

Inability to engage with young people

Difficulty getting people/laity to participate

Age and depletion of numbers of priests

Unwillingness of Church to engage in discussion on difficult issues

## 3.1 COMMON THEMES FROM LAITY AND PREISTS

### Laity:

#### What energises/gives hope?

Faith

Community

Involvement of Lay People

Priests

### Priests:

#### What gives life and hope?

People

Liturgy and Prayer

Working in Cluster/Team

Faith

### Laity: What quenches fire/ drains/frustrates you?

Hierarchy within the Church

Church out of touch

Abuse Scandals

Role of Women

Difficulties getting people involved

### Priests: What de-energises/drains energy/frustrates you?

Hierarchy

Inability to engage with young people

Difficulty getting people/laity to participate

Age and depletion in numbers of priests

Unwillingness of Church to engage in discussion on difficult issues

As can be seen from the above analysis, while experience of involvement in the Church may differ, the issues that energise and de-energise laity and priests are very similar. However, the different experience of both groups, also gives some difference in perspective.



1. **Faith:** People and Priests value the **faith** that has been handed on to them. There is a felt need to nurture that faith, and express it in a way that is relevant and appealing in our time.
2. **Interaction between priests and lay people:** It is striking that priests see the innate goodness, the faith and hope of lay people as one of the most positive aspects of Church for them while the active encouragement and support of priests was mentioned by some groups of laity as very positive.
3. **Liturgy and Prayer** were seen by priests as energising and life-giving; people's involvement in Liturgy gives life to them. However, lay people saw Mass/Liturgy as a frustrating element of the life of the Church, and often experience the way the Eucharist/Mass is celebrated as out of touch with reality.
4. **Laity in Leadership:** The involvement of the laity in leadership roles within the Church is seen by both priests and people as something that gives hope for the future. The need to support and enhance the participation of laity in all aspects of the Church was named by both groups. However, both groups also identified difficulties and frustration in getting people to participate.
5. The **absence of women's voices** at decision-making level in a hierarchical Church and their exclusion from areas of ministry is experienced as deeply frustrating by both priests and laity. The seeming unwillingness to have it addressed as a crucial issue in the Church today is adding to people's frustration.
6. **Young People:** Both priests and people highlighted concerns about the seeming inability of the Church to connect with young people and the seeming irrelevance of the way we present faith and spirituality to their lives. Parents experience an inability to engage with young people around issues of faith. The need to communicate with young people at a faith and spirituality level in a way that is meaningful to them was frequently mentioned.
7. The **fallout from the abuse crisis** continues to impact on the Church at local level among priests and people. Faith and trust in the leadership of the Church has been eroded.
8. There is a great deal of frustration among both laity and clergy about the **hierarchical nature of the Church** and its perceived **disconnect** from what is happening on the ground. There is a sense of a divide between the local community Church and the institutional Church though a hierarchically model of Church is also experienced in some instances locally and discourages lay involvement.
9. The hierarchical Church is experienced as inflexible and **unwilling to engage with the difficult issues** which people feel strongly about. This is felt by the Church on the ground as an imposition of decisions that are out of touch with both priests and people. The new missal was consistently named as an example of this.