

The Ministry of Pastoral Care: Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is the Ministry of Pastoral Care being introduced in the Diocese at this time?

In most parishes, up to now, the priest was the only frontline minister. The Ministry of Pastoral Care, especially, has been seen as a ministry reserved to priests only. It's the priest who visits the sick and elderly, brings them Holy Communion. The priest attends those near death, is called to administer the Sacrament of Sick and is on hand at the time of a funeral to offer support to families and to organise and celebrate the different moments of the funeral liturgy.

This ministry is being introduced, at this time, so that there will be trained people in our Christian Communities, with the necessary skills and awareness, to take up some of these ministries, in a time, when there are fewer priests covering wider areas.

Furthermore, the thinking about the Ministry of Pastoral Care has developed in our Church since Vatican II. No longer is it seen as ministry which only the priest can exercise. Nowadays, it is seen as a ministry of the whole Christian Community. Those who exercise this ministry do this on behalf of the Christian Community, showing the love and compassion of Christ to their neighbours at times of illness and vulnerability.

Q. Who can apply to be a Minister of Pastoral Care?

This Ministry is open to any adult member of the Christian Community, with a sensitive and caring disposition, who has time and the pastoral skills needed to reflect the care of the Christian Community to those who need it. The role requires people of faith, maturity and integrity gifted with a listening ear, who have an ability to relate to people experiencing illness, aging or bereavement.

Q. What does a Minister of Pastoral Care do?

The primary focus of the role of the Pastoral Care Minister is to reflect God's unconditional love and compassion. They will "exercise pastoral care" on behalf of the Christian Community to those who experience illness or aging. They will be a compassionate presence to families at the time of funeral, and where invited, they will be a supportive presence in times of bereavement.

The Ministry will take different forms according to local needs and the skills, and level of comfort of the Pastoral Care Minister. With training and experience it is envisaged that Pastoral Care Minister will be involved in some of the following areas:

- Visiting sick or elderly people at home, in a nursing home or in hospital setting—where such visits are welcome.
- Leading a lay-led liturgy or other form of prayer in a nursing home setting.
- Having a concern for those who are isolated or on their own in the community.
- Supporting people and families at a time of a funeral by offering personal contact, warmth and support where appropriate.
- Helping families to prepare a funeral liturgy and facilitating their involvement.
- In the future, it may become necessary for Pastoral Care Workers to lead some moments of the Funeral Liturgy such as the Receiving of Remains or the Rite of Committal.
- Sensitive care for people who are bereaved in a parish or pastoral area context according to their needs and wishes.

Q. Will people accept these ministries when they are offered by lay people? Will people say that the role of the priest is being taken over by lay people?

This new ministry is not about taking over the role of the priest. There are aspects of the Ministry of Pastoral Care, especially the Sacramental aspect, that can only be exercised by a priest. What is envisaged is that Ministers of Pastoral Care will work alongside priests, in a team ministry, in Parishes and Pastoral Areas, taking up the aspects of the role that are appropriate for lay people.

A good example is what currently happens in many of our hospitals. Here, lay chaplains exercise the ministry of pastoral care alongside priests. The experience is that where lay ministers have appropriate formation and skills, they are very much accepted and exercise their ministry in their own unique way. In these situations, priests are called to be involved where there is need.

The introduction of this new ministry will not mean that priests will not visit people at home or in nursing homes or at times of funerals or bereavement. It

does mean that lay people will work alongside them, taking up some of the burden of work and enabling priests to minister more effectively as a result.

Q. The brochure mentioned that the Minister of Pastoral Care may be involved in funerals. Surely people would want a priest to celebrate a funeral Mass?

Funeral ministry is no doubt a very sensitive area. It's also a ministry that is many faceted and onerous for priests. It ranges from journeying up to death with the sick person and their family, offering the Rites of the Church to the sick person, praying with them and with the family, helping them plan a funeral and helping them prepare the liturgy and enabling their participation.

There are also different moments of the funeral liturgy to be considered: prayer at home or in the funeral home where the deceased is reposing – such as saying the Rosary, the Reception of Remains at the Church, the Funeral Liturgy itself and the Final Commendation at the graveyard.

There is no question here of replacing the Funeral Mass with some other kind of liturgy, led by lay people. However, other prayer moments can be led by lay ministers. Nowadays, in some dioceses, lay ministers preside at the committal part of the funeral liturgy. This is now the practice in many parishes in Dublin, for example.

No doubt, it will mean adjustments of expectations. The experience is that when this ministry is done with care and sensitivity it is very accepted.

Q. Will I be working on my own if I train for this new ministry?

It is envisaged that teams will be formed in Pastoral Areas where the new Ministers will work collaboratively with priests and other lay people in Parishes/Pastoral Areas. Support for those working in this new ministry will also be put in place by the Diocese.

Q. When is the training for this new Ministry beginning?

Training for this new Ministry in the Killaloe Diocese will begin this Autumn. The first year will be an exploratory one giving an opportunity for both the person applying for the ministry and for the Diocese to mutually decide if this ministry is a good fit. The focus of the first year will be on enabling participants to develop reflective skills, to reflect on their own journey and their own spirituality and what has formed and shaped it.

It is hoped that this first year will be an uplifting and nourishing year for participants and one that will give them a good sense of the role as envisaged.

Q. What will happen in Years Two and Three of the Course?

In years two and three, the reflective style of course will continue with input under these headings:

- Personal Development
- Spirituality
- Theology for Ministry
- Understanding Today's Cultural Context
- Skills for the Ministry of Pastoral Care

Some of the input offered will aim to help participants to be aware of what a person experiencing illness or bereavement or facing death is living through, and what kind of issues and questions are faced at times like this.

Other areas to be covered will be praying with people who are sick, understanding the different moments of the funeral liturgy as well as creating ritual and leading people in prayer.

Q. Three years seems like a long time to prepare for this Ministry. Why is the formation process so long?

The Diocese recognizes that it will take time for the new Ministers to become comfortable in journeying with people at times of illness, death or bereavement. The formation process will provide opportunities to work in this Ministry in a supportive context. In Year Three, participants will take up a placement in a Pastoral Area and work alongside priests or others involved in pastoral care for some hours each month. There will be an opportunity to reflect and learn from the experience within the course setting.

Having a residential course also helps participants to get to know each other and to build up peer support so that when the course ends they will already have the support of each other.

Q. What kind of commitment is expected of the new Ministers of Pastoral Care after they have completed the formation process?

On completion of the formation process, Diocesan Ministers of Pastoral Care will be formally appointed by the Bishop to a Parish or Pastoral Area to work alongside priests in a Pastoral Care Team. They will agree areas of

responsibility that is feasible for them to take on in a voluntary capacity. They will be invited to commit initially for a period of five years. A review will take place at the end of that period where the Minister of Pastoral Care will have an opportunity to reflect on his/her ministry and the context s/he is working in and on any issues that are arising. There will also be a chance to receive feedback from those s/he is working with. Each Minister of Pastoral Care will be invited to meet with the Bishop and/or the Pastoral Development Team to discuss their experience and consider whether s/he is in a position to commit for a further period.

Q. Will the Course be Accredited?

The Diocese is in negotiation about accreditation of this course by a third level institute.

Q. What About Cost?

All participants who are accepted onto the course will have their course costs paid.