

## **KILLALOE Adult Faith Team**

### **NOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS AT THE TALK by Fr Prof Michael Conway on 1st March 2025 - AS GATHERED BY THE FACILITATORS:**

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This set of notes is a compendium of the notes from the individual facilitators as named above, with duplication omitted. The notes reflect the opinions and views of those attending, including some views of the facilitators. In no case has any modification of the views been made despite necessary editing to accommodate to a readable format and size.

Fr Professor Conway made his presentation in two parts – in the first part he outlined the current state of the Church in Ireland, and in the second he put forward ideas and suggestions for moving forward in line with the Church teaching on Synodality.

These notes are categorised, so all the thinking on each part can be considered, with other thinking on the same part. The categories are broad, and our objective is not to provide precise analysis but to offer an overview of events and statements. This approach aims to encourage readers to think further and engage with the content, as it is part of a continuous process meant to stimulate more reflection and involvement.

This is a revised version, focusing on the central points. Some points have had to be omitted so as to present a readable version but hopefully this document is a true reflection of the course of this meeting, which remains just a step on the way.

From 51 to 53 people attended, including Bishop Ger Nash of Ferns and approximately six priests from the Diocese.

21.03.2025

## **PART 1 – OUTLINE OF CURRENT STATE OF CHURCH IN IRELAND**

### **Overall picture – cultural change – is there a problem?**

- Fr Conway has put words on and given possible reasons for a situation felt and thought by many, but hard to put into words.
- Our intellects and our secular culture have developed in every way except in relation to our faith. Learning about our faith stopped at 14.
- A real need to change the way we think – but it is good to recognise that there is a problem, and it must be discussed towards action, despite the traditional passivity of lay people, which gave rise to so much being automatically and thoughtlessly accepted

- Two or three were angry about the content and thought that the session was “controlled” and was insulting to the priests who were present, and some felt that meetings such as this were being “taken over” by a hostile “them”
- Despite Fr Conway’s comments on a Church dying – people have confidence because the faith lives on despite the institution, and change already happening – look at Eucharistic Ministers, laity reading scriptures, pastoral councils, women’s greater involvement and more lay ministers, Church already becoming less centralised, more inclusive.

### **Priests – the Parish – Clusters of Parishes**

- It is very hard for priests to change as they were trained in the old model
- Lay people were previously only observers and the priests “applied Church to us” – this was the “old model” and many still want to keep it in place.
- The loss of a priest is a loss for the whole community: “despite dominance they have done a wonderful job”, making many lasting contributions to their parishes
- There is an importance to maintaining parishes in the midst of change – the parish is such an important part of our culture.
- One priest strongly disagreed with Fr Conway’s assertion that pastoral areas or clusters are not working because they are still priest centred: he argued that they are the only way forward.
- Another participant rejected the criticism of clusters, arguing that society had developed and that, as a result, business companies, shops, doctors and other professionals were coming together to work more effectively; but in a parish where there is no resident priest do parishioners have connection at all with visiting priests who attend?

### **Non-practising youth and others**

- Several spoke about their non-practising children whose lives were still essentially Christian, though they were expressing it differently, for instance through yoga and meditation etc. – and that these children were still very good and decent people: “if the parents are decent people, so will the children be.
- Maybe remove teaching religion and faith from the schools, like in Britain; would this build more authentic faith in children/young people?
- “I think our grasp of what it was to be a faithful Catholic seems to have been living a good moral life and observing certain religious practices. Pope Francis keeps trying to move us from being religious to being a disciple of Jesus, having an encounter with the living God. Unless children and grandchildren can perceive something of the wonder of the possibility of this relationship I can’t see why they would think they are missing out on anything.”

### **PART 2 – SOME IDEAS FOR PROGRESSING IN A SYNODAL MANNER**

## **Synodality**

- The overall response was one of hope, tempered by a sense of the difficulties before us, but actually people realise that any significant change in an important area of life will be at least demanding and challenging!
- A strong recognition of the value of synodality as the way we move together as Church, being led by the Spirit and, as the Pope says, it is what the Lord expects of the church at this time. Risk: that we ignore the Holy Spirit and rely too much on human thinking?
- We need to read and study the Final Document from the XVI Synod and so move to embrace synodality and get it actually to happen
- People critical of not being informed adequately or at all about the Final report of the Synod – one person querying if there was an intention to keep people in the dark!
- Agreement that synodality had not (yet) been “bought into” in Ireland – and that for several it was just another “churchy” word indicating a lot of talk but no action; though some intended to download the Final Document and read it.

## **Roles and status of all the Baptised; the Priests**

- Opening out to greater parish empowerment welcome – a great improvement over the “closed clique” – recognise our sacred self-worth as baptised, and our calling to be “other Christs” but always recognising that there is only one Christ
- Several relished the recognition of the participative gifts of all the baptised in this presentation of the theology of baptism; some, however, stressed the need for a leader. We would be rudderless without the priest!
- Leadership emerged as a central theme: traditionally looked to priest but acknowledging now that most are elderly and that their training hasn’t equipped them to deal with today’s issues – even if they had the energy needed, so how to “create” leadership appropriate to the task was a strong theme
- From one priest – we priests need to change our expectations and let go in the same way that parents let go of their children at a certain age; the institutional Church has to recognise the roles for lay people to do what is required
- Lay people must become more involved – explore – make mistakes – grow in collaboration! We are in this together! Let us deepen our conviction about our faith!
- We support each other, we need more training – both as ordained and as non-ordained, and Canon Law must be amended to accommodate fully the new realities.
- This is a transition time towards nourishing and growing new communal relationships, accepting courageously the equal importance of each other – one group expressed a sense of “struggle” to see how any of the changes may even begin to happen!
- A real need for serious adult catechesis
- In one group (at least?) the view was strongly expressed that despite the talk, it’s the job of the Bishop and Priests to lead change. In the parish, it is the priest who decides

about change – volunteers in Tidy Towns for instance are all involved in the decision, and a volunteer may be elected as chairperson!

### **The Liturgy – not just of the Mass**

- The “relevance” of the Mass and Mass attendance was mentioned several times – frequently regarding Mass attendance as a lesser indication or requirement of being Catholic
- We need to be more open to the Liturgy of the Word – without the living Word, no life – reading the scriptures vital for a mature faith.
- Some of what Fr Michael said around the Eucharist was hard to hear for some people – they spoke of the Eucharist as their food for the journey and also the Living Word
- The Mass is always central or core to our Faith practice, but it is not the only Church liturgy and also the Christian should be active in the Community and not just attend Mass.

END.