

Summary Report of the
LISTENING PROCESS
in the Archdiocese of Tuam



Spring 2011





A MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP MICHAEL

I welcome the publication of this summary report of the listening process organised by the Diocesan Pastoral Council in spring 2011. The publication of this report makes the findings of the listening process available to a greater number of the faithful throughout our diocese. Numerous themes emerged in the process. While there is the obvious concern for the handing on of the faith to the young and a greater involvement of lay people in the life of their local parish community, there is also a strong sense of the central place of faith in Jesus Christ for so many people in our diocese. Noticeable also is the strong sense of appreciation among those who attended the meetings for the great work being done by the priests in our parishes.

The findings of the listening process provide direction for all involved in the diocese with regard to our future planning. As a member of the Diocesan Pastoral Council I am grateful for the significant amount of time and effort invested by the members of the Council in organising this listening process. I am committed to working along with the Council in identifying the priorities arising from the listening process and working together on initiatives designed to respond to the needs identified in this report.

+ Michael Neary

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE

The Diocesan Pastoral Council was set up in Spring, 2010 to assist Archbishop Michael Neary in the provision of pastoral care throughout the Archdiocese of Tuam. Recent years have been difficult for the Church, not least because of the findings of the Ferns, Ryan, Murphy and, more recently, Cloyne reports. As a diocesan pastoral council we felt that a forum was needed to allow for the voices of the people of God to be heard on all issues within the Church of concern to them. Hence the 'Listening Process' which was held across the Archdiocese earlier this year.

The findings of the various sessions have been collated and are included in summary in this report. While the DPC is not in a position to respond to all issues raised, those that we can respond to as part of the ongoing process of Church renewal, will be given urgent priority. A notable feature of all our 'listening' meetings was the strong affirmation given to serving priests in the archdiocese. Other issues highlighted included the need for better communication between the Church and the laity, and ongoing and relevant training in ministry for the laity.

We sincerely thank all who made the 'listening process' possible.

Rosaleen Crowe-O'Neill

Chairperson 'Listening Process'
Council sub-group.

Seán Staunton

Chairperson Diocesan Pastoral



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 'Let's Listen' process took place throughout the Tuam Archdiocese in March and April 2011 and was the initiative of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. Its purpose was to consult with people across the Archdiocese on their views of church today and how to move forward in preparation for the future. The process was facilitated by an independent facilitator with listening sessions in nine venues across the diocese. These venues were Castlebar, Ballinrobe, Tuam, Athenry, Westport, Knock, Dunmore, Clifden, and An Ceathrú Rua.

There was a general welcome for and appreciation that the listening process was taking place with an open invitation for people's views and ideas. Feedback was welcomed in both verbal and written form. Some people, however, expressed concern about the outcome of the consultation process and about who will hear and respond to it. The publication of this report, as promised, is but the first step in that response.

The following themes emerged from the process.



CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

“If we believe we are the Church we need to reach out. There is a lot of need out there to show the Light of Christ” **Clifden**

“Encourage people by word of mouth to come along to gatherings in relation to the parish.” **Ballinrobe**

The listening process indicated that there is a desire and a willingness to collaborate in building a church of justice, compassion and equality that reaches out in particular to young families, non-Irish nationals, asylum seekers, people who are hurting and those on the margins. A suggestion mirrored in many meetings was the integration of community and church, the development of a Pastoral Council in each parish, a welcoming committee for new parishioners and greater involvement of lay people in the development of church as community.



LAY EMPOWERMENT

“In the light of fewer priests many of us just want to know how we can be of assistance” **Westport**

“Laity must be given proper training to provide Christian leadership and care in parishes that are likely to lose priests” **Dunmore**

Current issues regarding laity in the Church appear to be two-fold, the desire to have greater numbers of lay people involved in the Church and a desire from those already involved to have greater participation and involvement. Many participants requested the empowerment of lay people through education, training, adult faith development and the inclusion of lay people, particularly women, in decision-making and parish management. Participants were strong in their affirmation and appreciation of priests. Concern was expressed regarding care of priests, the shortage of priests, the future of churches and parishes, availability of the Eucharist, the role of the priest and the need for a positive plan to address the present reality. Questions were raised in relation to the introduction of the diaconate, parish administrators, pastoral workers, priests from abroad, married priests, and women priests. The involvement of laity in funerals, baptisms, weddings, liturgies of the Word, sacramental preparation and attendance at the bedside of the sick and dying was repeatedly suggested as a means of assisting priests in their pastoral duties. Some priests expressed the challenge they experience in ministering in the current church climate and church structure. It was proposed that cross-diocesan collaboration and greater co-operation between the parishes in the clusters would be useful in the development of greater partnership and communication.



COMMUNICATION

“Tá gá le modhanna cumarsáide atá níos éifeachtaí ins an pobal áitiúil agus ins an deoise.” An Cheathrú Rua

“The organisational Church needs to realise that while we must be “wise as serpents” in dealing with the media we also need to proclaim the truth that we profess to honour in our faith beliefs” Castlebar

Participants called for better communications between priests and people, and Church and people. The general consensus was that priests are listening and bishops perhaps are not. The introduction of the New Missal was particularly identified as something that had inadequate consultation and dialogue with much concern about the translation’s appropriateness for today’s liturgies. While considering that the Church has very positive stories to relate, participants expressed annoyance with what some considered the media’s negative image of the Church. Participants also identified the need for a regular forum for dialogue, similar to the listening process, and also a forum to hear the voices of those who no longer belong to the Church.



CLERICAL SEXUAL ABUSE

“The challenge for the Church is to acknowledge the shadows that exist... and work with people in bringing about a renewal of the Church as envisaged by its founder Jesus Christ.” **Knock**

“We need more sessions like this one to talk about the abuse to children” **Tuam**

The issue of clerical sexual abuse was aired during some sessions. Emotions of anger, frustration, helplessness, disappointment and compassion were expressed in relation to the sexual abuse of children by clerics, its handling by church authorities and the need for constant vigilance. Concern for the welfare of survivors and priests accused in the wrong was acknowledged, alongside the impact of the issue on the ministry of priests and the church in general. Participants called for constant alertness to the safeguarding of children. There was also an appeal for the opportunity to further discuss the issue of clerical sexual abuse within the diocese as a means of working towards healing and hope for the future.



“The renewal of the church could be through the young people” **Castlebar**

“There’s a sense of hope in young people” **Knock**

It was noted that few young people attended the listening sessions. Participants at each session expressed a genuine desire to reach out to and involve young people in the parish and faith community. Concern was expressed in relation to handing on the faith in homes and schools and how to creatively bring the Church to young people who are searching for meaning in their lives. There was general agreement that young people give great hope and it was suggested that they are willing to get involved with church if the right challenges are put to them. Suggestions for greater involvement included an improvement in communication and greater inclusion of young people in the provision of youth liturgies and events.



FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

“Our faith is our inheritance – it’s deeply ingrained in all of us” **Athenry**

“Faith of past generations was truly edifying, not as influential in the present generation of believers... there’s a huge demand for Spirituality” **Tuam**

“What kind of church will our children have in 35 years?” **Castlebar**

“We need to look forward to 15 or 20 years’ time”
Knock

“There’s a need to re-imagine ourselves – the faith won’t change” **Tuam**

“As the people of God we all need to participate in the change that must take place – not just priests – everyone involved” **Castlebar**

With a general call to return to the vision of compassion, hope, love and forgiveness that Jesus promoted, one participant queried ‘How do we give Catholic living the Wow! factor?’ The consensus at some meetings was that the Church in Ireland is currently in crisis and its survival threatened. Others considered that the present is a time of openness to change with enthusiasm for all to be involved. Participants at some meetings proposed that the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress offers a good opportunity to plan for renewal.

The hierarchical model of the Church was highlighted at many meetings with a sense of frustration and a call for a listening and a humble Church. Participants expressed the need to make real connections between their lives and the Church in the search for spirituality and true meaning. The preservation of the tradition of faith that is our heritage was considered to be core to the future of the Church today. The passing on of the faith, the teaching of religion and the patronage of schools were expressed as genuine issues in children’s entitlement to a good faith education.

“The church is like a bush that is too pruned. It is spring now and there is real growth – we should have faith and it will come back better than ever” **Clifden**

DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCIL RESPONSE

At the outset of the Let's Listen process the Diocesan Pastoral Council indicated that the process would serve to guide them in identifying areas to give particular attention to during their time on the Diocesan Pastoral Council. It did not guarantee to be able to respond to all the topics and issues that were brought up. However, a promise was made to listen to the responses at

the meetings, to compile a summary and to identify areas of action.

Three themes of action that the Tuam Diocesan Pastoral Council has prioritised for the remainder of its term of office are:

- New Evangelisation
- Spirituality, Prayer and Faith Formation
- Communications

The listening process was facilitated by Ann Caulfield, Director, Waves Facilitation and Consultation Services.

The items in *Italics* throughout the report are actual quotes from participants at the respective meetings.

A more comprehensive report of the Let's Listen process can be found on the Tuam Archdiocese website.

<http://tuamarchdiocese.org/2011/10/dpc-listening-exercise/>

THE DPC MEMBERS



The Tuam Diocesan Pastoral Council, back row, from left: Canon Tony King, Stephen Bushell, Triona Uí Chonghaile, Fr Ray O'Flaherty, Mary Trench, Fr Tod Nolan, Kathleen Loftus, Fr Pat Farragher, Sinéad O'Sullivan, Brendan Ridge, Ann McHale, Ray McGrath, David Harkin and Monsignor Dermot Moloney. Front row, from left: Teresa Carney, Sr Catherine Buckley, Mary Connell, Seán Staunton, Rosaleen Crowe-O'Neill, Archbishop Michael Neary and Eileen Gildea.

