

Journeying **Together** in Faith



2013 – 2020

**Proposals for Nurturing and
Developing the Catholic Faith in the
Archdiocese of Tuam**

A Phobail Dilís Dé

Dia is Muire dhaoibh go léir,

This is a time of challenge and change for the Church. In response to the 'signs of our times' the Archdiocese of Tuam has over the past number of years begun a process of restructuring and reordering so that we as a community of faith might ensure that faith continues to grow and to blossom into the future.

Throughout her long history the Church has had to re-imagine herself as she addressed different challenges at various times. Change is never easy. As we face the challenges of our time it is important that we do so in a creative, positive and imaginative fashion. With baptised faithful, religious and priests, I as Archbishop feel confident that we can do this, always mindful of the promise of the Lord to be with his Church to the end of time (Matt. 28:20). For that reason we need not be fearful or despondent.

In the past we depended very much on the parish structure and this served us well for so long. As we endeavour to address a society that is rapidly changing we need structures which will be capable of helping us to address these changes and ensure that Christ's gospel becomes available and relevant to all our people.

Signs of Hope

Despite the enormous challenges facing us, recent years have seen a renewed vibrancy in our parishes. Never before has there been such an engagement of lay people who are actively involved and happy to participate in the mission of the Church in their local Church areas. Pastorals councils, baptismal teams, bereavement support teams, liturgy groups, youth clubs and parental involvement in the sacramental preparation of their children, not to mention many other ministries and church related organisations, are signs of great hope.

The importance which the diocese attaches to pastoral councils is evident in that a priest has been allocated full-time to training, resourcing and helping to put in place pastoral councils. The diocese has committed itself to employing for two years a Liturgy Resource person and a Youth Director: the former acted as a resource to parishes and liturgy groups to enhance our celebration of our faith in the liturgy: the latter supporting and co-ordinating various youth activities in the diocese such as the Pope John Paul II Awards, the Transition Year Projects and the Diocesan Youth Choir. A Youth Ministry Course for the training of young people has been organised and our hope is that youth leaders will emerge from this.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council through its various sub-committees has been addressing and providing support for other groups who are attending to areas which have emerged as priorities in the Archdiocese.

Journeying in Faith together

At present, there are seventy priests in active ministry in our Archdiocese. It is estimated by 2020 that there will be no more than fifty priests available to minister in our 55 parishes. This will result in a number of parishes being without a resident priest. We must plan and prepare for that situation now. I have appointed a working group composed of Mgr. Dermot Moloney, Frs. Tod Nolan, Pat Farragher and Charlie McDonnell to make proposals as to how best the parishes of the diocese might be served in this new reality.” This group had been involved in drawing up the 2009 document on The Future Serving of the Parishes of the Archdiocese of Tuam and have overseen its implementation. As a diocese we are deeply indebted to them. I am most grateful for their insight, energy and enthusiasm and for their attention to detail as well as their overview of the Archdiocese.

Following on from the broad consultation which they undertook in preparation of this report - a consultation which invited the reflections of every Pastoral Council across the diocese - this working group has now furnished me with a report on how best faith may be nurtured and parishes served in the future. The working group has in the course of their work also engaged with the priests of the Archdiocese, endeavouring to explore how the clustering of the parishes affects them in their ministry and to elicit what supports might be needed for priests and the people they serve as this process moves forward.

It is my sincere hope that this report will provide direction as to how as an Archdiocese we can respond together to the challenges which face us as we move towards the future.

With every good wish.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,

Michael Neary

+Michael Neary,

Archbishop of Tuam.

Proposals for Nurturing and Developing our Catholic Faith

We are on the threshold of a new chapter of our faith story. The Good News of Jesus Christ is unchanging; the means by which it is proclaimed and the structures which support this proclamation change over time. As we enter this new phase in the history of our Diocese we do so in the full knowledge that we journey with Almighty God at our side.

It is our hope that the proposals contained below will provide a framework and guidelines as to how best the Kingdom of God may be proclaimed in our diocese in the future. The time frame covered by this plan, 2013-2020, will see many changes in our diocese. It is important we build on the foundations already laid and face the future with hope and confidence knowing that the Lord of the Harvest will be with us in our labours.

As we look towards 2020 two main questions have emerged:

- 1. What structures/supports need to be put in place to ensure that a parish without a resident priest receives the best possible sacramental and pastoral care?**
- 2. What groupings of parishes might be served by a lesser number of priests (ie. two parishes served by one priest, three parishes served by two priests, four parishes served by three priests, etc.)?**

Taking cognisance of the experience garnered over the past three years and of the various consultations to date, the Working Group in addressing these questions offers the following proposals:

What structures/supports need to be put in place to ensure that a parish without a resident priest receives the best possible sacramental and pastoral care?

We are moving from one model of church to another, we are moving from the comfort of the tried and tested to the challenge of the new and unfamiliar. This is not an easy transition for the parish community involved or for the priest who sees his pastoral responsibility ever widening. Both the parish and priest need support in making this transition.

While some parishes will not have a resident priest every parish will have a Parish Priest/Administrator to whom the overall pastoral and sacramental care of that parish will be assigned

Where a lesser number of priests is serving a greater number of parishes those priests will share the provision of pastoral and sacramental care to all parishes in the grouping



Each parish will continue to maintain its own status and identity. Every parish will receive the best possible pastoral and sacramental care whether it has a resident priest or not.

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals together with the main parish liturgical celebrations such as First Communion and Confirmation will continue to be celebrated in the local parish church.

With fewer priests available, the role of the Parish Secretary is becoming more and more important in parish administration. The role of the Secretary might include compiling the parish newsletter, paying bills, keeping a cheques journal, filing documents, keeping receipts, typing letters, making entries in the parish registers, issuing certificates, taking Mass, wedding, baptism bookings etc.

- ▶ We recommend that the Diocese should by January 2014 put in place a suitable course for parish secretaries.

The work of fostering, nourishing and sustaining vocations for the priesthood and the religious life is the responsibility of all the baptised. As a faith community we need to be strong in our commitment to the promotion of vocations.

The ongoing formation and training of Parish Pastoral Councils and of Parish Finance Committees in preparation for this new reality needs to be prioritised.

- ▶ We recommend that within 12 months all Finance Committees should receive appropriate training and formation.

While no church will be closed it will no longer be possible to celebrate weekend Mass in every church/Mass centre in the diocese.

The training and formation of suitably qualified people to organise and resource the various church ministries and sacramental preparation programmes for a grouping of parishes will be essential.

In addition, the possibility of Clusters employing a lay pastoral worker either as a catechist or as an animator of various pre-sacramental programmes in the parishes of the Cluster might also need to be explored.

The introduction of Permanent Diaconate. Permanent Deacons could be a resource for all the parishes in a grouping.

- ▶ We recommend that by June 2014 the diocese will have made a decision as to whether it will introduce the Permanent Diaconate

Inter-diocesan dialogue should take place where necessary with regard to cooperation between parishes on the borders of other dioceses.

- ▶ We recommend that within 12 months parishes which share a border with parishes of other dioceses should, where appropriate, meet to explore and formalise what cross-diocesan cooperation may be possible

Groupings of Parishes to be served by a lesser number of priests:

In 2009 following the publication of 'The Future Serving of Parishes of the Archdiocese of Tuam,' the 55 parishes of the Archdiocese were grouped into 15 clusters with a view to sharing resources and administrative tasks as well as the provision of training and formation. At that time it was possible to maintain a resident priest in each parish. This is no longer the case. For the most part the proposed new grouping of parishes is in keeping with the 2009 proposal but the identifying of groupings of parishes to be served by a lesser number of priests has in a few instances meant that this has not always been possible.

The grouping of parishes to be served by a lesser number of priests will over time become more and more common. The grouping of parishes needs to be done sensitively and with regard to the needs of all the parishes involved but with particular concern for the needs of the parish which will no longer have a resident priest. At present there are five priests serving in special ministries; by 2020 it is envisaged that this number will be reduced to two.

The following is a list of parish groupings which could be served by a lesser number of priests. We expect these changes may well take place by 2020. In that period however other parishes which have at present the services of a retired priest may lose the services of a priest when the retired priest steps down from ministry and is not replaced. Other than this, it is hoped that parishes not named below will continue to be served by the same number of priests as at present up until 2020.

While it is not possible to plan for the exact timing of such changes it is envisaged that over the coming years the following grouping of parishes will take place:

Williamstown - Glenamaddy:
One Priest serving two parishes.

Tuam Parish:
to go from three priests to two priests

Kilmeena - Westport:
Two Priests living in Westport serving both parishes.

Keelogue - Parke / Crimlin:
One Priest serving two parishes.

Knock / Aghamore:
Two priests living in Knock serving both parishes.

Tuam - Killererin:
Two Priests living in Tuam serving both parishes



**Mountbellew / Moylough -
Menlough / Skehana:**

One priest serving two parishes.

Balla - Mayo Abbey:

One priest serving two parishes.

Castlebar Parish:

to go from four priests to three
priests

**Kilmaine - Ballinrobe -
Roundfort - Partry:**

Three priests serving four
parishes

Castlebar - Islandeady:

Three priests living in Castlebar
serving both parishes

**Claremorris - Kilvine -
Crossboyne - Milltown:**

Three priests serving four
parishes.

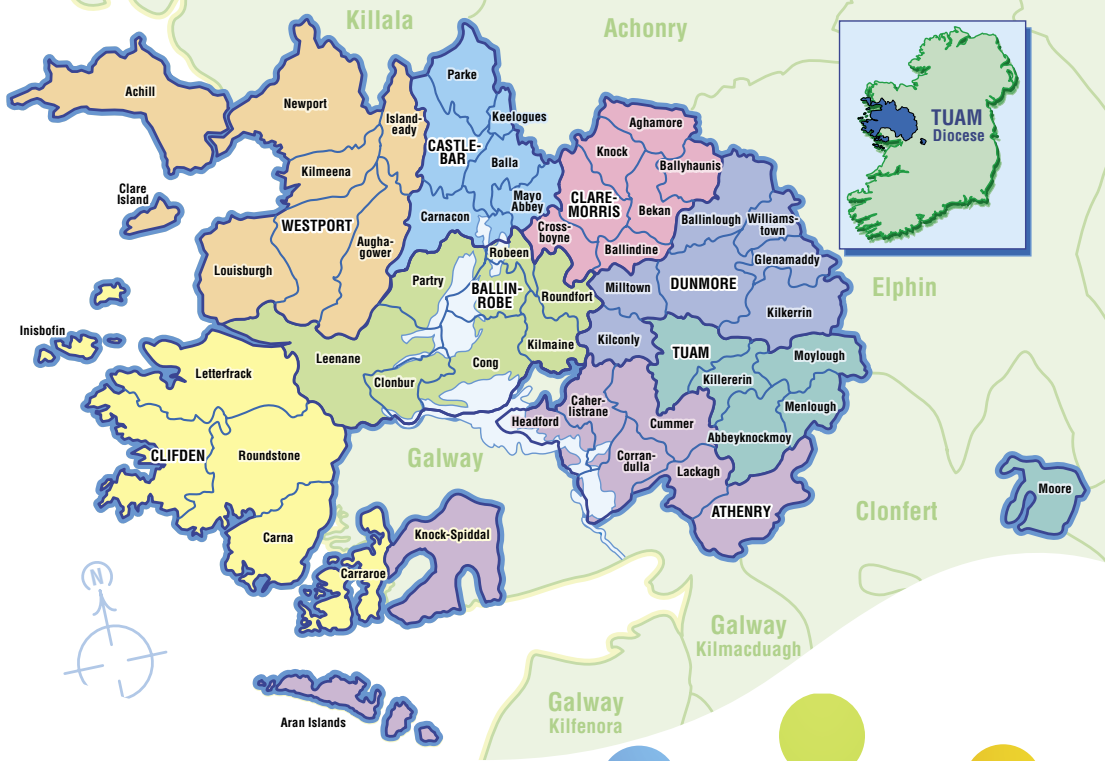
Note 1

Because of their geographical size and of their proximity to neighbouring dioceses it is not envisaged that the parishes of the Clifden and Carraroe clusters will see a lesser number of priests serving a greater number of parishes during this planning period.

Note 2

Island Parishes: It is envisaged that for the period covered by these proposals, ie 2013-2020,

- ▶ The Aran Islands will continue to have one resident priest
- ▶ The pastoral care of Clare Island and Inishturk will be the responsibility of the priest serving in Louisburgh Parish
- ▶ The Pastoral Care of Inisboffin Island will be the responsibility of the priests serving Clifden Parish



Conclusion

In looking at the current situation and in facing the challenges ahead, we, like the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:37), ask the question “What must we do?” How are we to respond to the pastoral situation in which we now find ourselves?

The Good News of Jesus Christ is unchanging. We are discerning new ways of being Church and of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We “remember the rock from which we have been hewn” (Is. 51:1) and we journey forward confident in the faith tradition we have inherited from the generations gone before us who themselves bravely faced the challenges of their own times.

It is the responsibility of each and every member of our faith community to give life to the faith they profess so that in the living out of their faith they proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. We believe that with proper structures and appropriate planning our Church can and will, through the grace of God, continue to flourish long into the future.