

Good Shepherd Sunday: Facing the Changes & Challenges Together

Dear People and Priests of Kildare and Leighlin,

Over the past four years, since I became Bishop, I have visited all your parishes and I am greatly encouraged by the numerous initiatives all over the diocese. I want to thank you for all your work, time and energy, which you have generously given.

Today we celebrate *Good Shepherd* Sunday, traditionally known as Vocations Sunday. The central message of *Good Shepherd* Sunday is a call to follow Christ. We pray that more men and women will open their hearts to follow Christ through a vocation to priesthood and religious life. However, the broader aspect of vocation is the call to each one of us to follow Christ. How we live this call '*is the work of today, the mandate of the present, the mission of now*'. Today I am inviting all of you, people, priests, permanent deacons and religious to follow your baptismal call by working together to face the changes and challenges of the future of our diocese, changes and challenges that are very immediate.

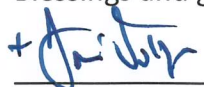
One major challenge is the falling number of priests. At present, there are 90 priests ministering in our diocese; 27 of them are over 75. This stark figure reminds us that a radical reappraisal of what a parish community should be, how it should be organised, co-ordinated, funded and ministered, is necessary.

In order to plan for the future, a series of meetings will take place in deaneries and in the diocese over the coming weeks and months. There will be a meeting of all the priests in the three deanery areas during May, leading to a meeting in Mount St. Anne's on June 20th for priests, involved lay people from each parish, religious and permanent deacons. There will be further meetings of priests and lay people in each deanery area into the autumn, to which all of you are invited. These meetings will include discussing topics such as:

- What people want from their Church, their parish, their diocese in 2017
- Appointment of priests
- Outreach to families
- Chaplaincy in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons etc.
- Outreach to minorities and those on the margins
- Permanent Diaconate
- Parish and diocesan resources

On this Vocations Sunday I encourage you to join your fellow parishioners to participate in these upcoming meetings, to offer your opinion and to make a contribution in shaping our parish and diocesan Church for the future. As we face these changes and challenges I thank you for what you have already achieved and pray for the courage of the Holy Spirit to guide all of us as we embark on this journey together.

Blessings and good wishes,



✠ Denis Nulty

Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin

07 May 2017