Good evening everybody. I'm just going to start by telling you all a little about myself. My name is Ursula Hayden and I live in Graiguecullen. I have three children and myself and my husband own a pub in Graiguecullen.

I have always lived in Graigue and consider myself extremely lucky to be part of a great parish. Community and parish life has always played a huge role in my life growing up, as my parents played an instrumental role in all the community workings of Graiguecullen and Killeshin and most particularly in the Church.

I tell you all this 'cause I want you to realise where I'm coming from with my own ideas. I myself have always had a very positive experience with the Church and I completely understand that this is not the same for everyone. I can only hope that I have and will pass, even a little of this, to my own children.

I'm not going to be unrealistic about what I hope will be the future of the church and try to stick with things that I really think are achievable for the next few years. ( so no talk of ye getting married or women deacons which would be an obvious solution and is certainly a suggestion that the Church will have to make a stand on in the future).

Following the recent appointments of the priests, I think that is a good place to start. It's 12 years ago now since I personally wrote to Bishop Moriarty at the time, to express my worries about the level of vocations and suggested that some inroads be made to encourage foreign priests to come help us with the pastoral work in our Diocese. It has taken 12 years for this to come to fruition and honestly, I don't think that the twinning with Romania will be enough. For our parish, we have a parish population of 6,374. Now we just have Fr. Dunphy. For luck, he is still relatively young and hopefully still enthusiastic about the immense work that is involved in parish life. Plus, we as a parish already have a good liturgy group in place. We have a sacramental co-ordinator, welcome group, a youth minister, a great finance committee, baptismal ministers and a total of 20 ministry groups. Now the work that has gone in to the formation of all these facilities has been huge. It has taken years of commitment on the part of our parish priest and many parishioners. And no offence Father, but one man cannot do the work of many.

We have two primary schools, one secondary school, two churches, christenings and weddings every week, invalids, a home for the elderly, a food kitchen, funerals and mass every day. Now, seriously can this level of work be expected to be done by one priest? And this doesn't just apply to our parish. This situation is repeated throughout the Diocese.

I seriously believe that we do need a priest in our parish and other parishes need the involvement of the laity in the more administrative roles within the Church to leave the priests to complete the pastoral work, where their true vocations lie.

We the people still do need the input of the priests in our lives and I certainly hold in high regard, the value of the pastoral work which is carried out.

This problem of vocations can only now be addressed by bringing in priests from different countries. We spent many decades sending Irish priests on the missions and now it is our turn to ask for help. There are many countries where the priests would love to improve their English and learn about the running of Irish parishes. I appreciate that the Diocese is just starting but I feel we need to see this up and running as soon as possible and for it not just to stop once a few priests have come from Romania. Perhaps we should be the Diocese to show the way to others in taking a positive step in the recruitment of priests. The more senior priests need a chance to retire and immediate steps must be taken.

In our parish, we have a strong and active Finance Committee made up independent parishioners who have the full support of the parish and they voluntarily, work on the finances of the parish. They are responsible for the decisions about the allocation of parish funds to various projects. It is important to remember that now in Graiguecullen/Killeshin we have one priest but over 6,000 parishioners and parishioners must be involved in the running of every parish.

It is vitally important that all parishes are seen to be open and inclusive of any help that is offered. I appreciate that in most cases you have to campaign for assistance but this will have to be done.

One of the biggest problems that I feel the Church faces is the negative publicity which is like a constant battle for those of us who feel very strongly about our faith and the Church.

Would it be a good idea to appoint someone who would be a strong spokesperson for the Church? It is tough to always defend the Church when the media so constantly reminds us of previous scandals and continues to portray the Church in a negative way. I think we are all agreed that we must move forward and build on the teachings of Jesus.

78% of the Irish population are registered on the last census as Catholic. We should be building on that. I completely understand that many parents get babies christened into the Catholic faith just because it is tradition, but, I still feel that it means something to them and I don't feel that it is wrong to build the Church on tradition. This is where a stronger approach is needed in the portrayal of the strength of our faith. We have to remind all parishioners that being Catholic means something to us. We don't need hangers on. We want everyone to enjoy the blessings that the Lord has to offer and we work better as a group. But we have to be strong. Our parents and ancestors fought hard in this Country so we have the privilege today of being able to practice Catholicism, so that Catholics could be educated and Catholicism and Christianity is a good thing. What we are offering is the teachings of Jesus. 'Love God and Love your neighbour as yourself'.

Fr Dunphy often talks about going back to basics, following the teachings of Jesus and the apostles and one of Jesus main teachings was to help those less fortunate. In our parish, we are already up and running with St. Clare's Hospitality and we certainly hope to continue with this most important work over the next number of years.

This is not about individual parishes, this is about the Church as a whole. We are not to apologise for what we believe in, don't forget - 78% of Ireland are Catholic and many only appreciate what they have if they think someone is going to take it away from them.

This often applies to the Sacraments. I personally firmly believe that we should keep the preparation of the Sacraments within the schools. I don't believe that many parishes would be ready to prepare children for Communion and Confirmation outside of school hours. Perhaps this is something that will happen in the future but I don't think we are there yet.

I do think that the Preparation programmes for First Holy Communion can be successful and found it to work extremely well when my own children were in primary school. I also found that when it came to making Confirmation, the children who had experienced a Communion Preparation Programme, were more at ease in taking part in the preparation for Confirmation. However, this must include the help of the parents. This is the key to the success of any sacramental preparation, this insistence of the parents' help with their own child's faith development. Of course, you're not going to get everyone on board but with this we have to try. It is sole destroying to put huge effort into the sacraments for them to be ridiculed by those who, in general, don't even go to mass. But, if the parents have to be involved in sacramental preparation, they will appreciate far more what we are trying to pass on to future generations. Don't forget, our faith is not just for us. I feel it is our duty to pass it on as our parents have passed the faith to us.

So is this a radical reappraisal of what a parish community should be, of course not. We all know what a parish should be but it's to put that into practice that is the issue. I'm not going to lie, I feel that in Graiguecullen/Killeshin, we do have a very good formula for the co-ordination, funding, management and ministering of a parish but it takes an awful lot of work and all of this would not have come about without the persistence of our own parish priest and our many ministry groups over the past 12 years. The success of any parish cannot be down to just one person. Our parish couldn't possibly manage without the continued support of 20 different ministry groups with over 300 people and over 130 young people in ministry.

So what do I personally want or not want?

Our parish needs a priest and will continue to do so and I think that the appointment of another priest or deacon to Graiguecullen/Killeshin would be immensely helpful as we continue to work on maintaining a strong parish unit.

I do not want to an amalgamation with another parish, because I strongly feel that each parish needs its own shepherd.

I would like to see much more involvement of the laity in the running of other parishes throughout the Diocese.

I would seriously like women to be considered for the Permanent Diaconate because I feel that this is a completely unused resource which would be available to the Church.

To solve nearly all of the above, I would like to see immediate commitment to the sourcing of other priests from foreign countries and let Kildare & Leighlin's recruitment programme be the standard that all other Dioceses could follow. We have a fabulous resource in St. Patrick's College in Carlow where courses for priests from outside Ireland can be organised to help with the integration into Irish society, with the teaching of English and hopefully the creation of a full recruitment programme for Foreign Priests.

This is not impossible.

Thank You