



'Put out into the Deep'

An update
St. Brigid's Day 2024



A PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP DENIS NULTY
TO PARISHIONERS, RELIGIOUS AND CLERGY
ACROSS THE DIOCESE OF KILDARE AND LEIGHLIN

Greetings and blessings as we celebrate the feast of our patron saint, St Brigid, and mark the 1500th anniversary of her death. St Brigid's Day traditionally announces the first day of spring, a time filled with the promise and signs of new beginnings and growth. I pray that each of you will feel the refreshment of the promise that these spring days bring.

I write to keep you updated on the diocesan process, 'Put out into the Deep'. Thank you to all who have engaged in conversations locally in parishes and in the emerging parish clusters since the beginning of this process. It is important that we keep listening to one another. Together, we want to build for the future of our diocese so that our parish communities continue to be vibrant places of faith, prayer, and care where the mission of Christ continues for the good of all people. There are many, strands to this work that may seem disparate but which, in fact, are all working to the common purpose of supporting parishes now to build for the future. I want to keep you informed here regarding some of those strands.

DIOCESAN PASTORAL PLAN

The need for an articulated diocesan plan was something voiced at a number of clergy, parish, and parish cluster meetings. The Diocesan Pastoral Council has already done much of the work towards such a plan and this work has very much informed the process of 'Put Out into the Deep' to date. However, a Diocesan Pastoral Plan needs to be brought to a final form that can be printed and shared. To this end, Jim Deeds will facilitate a day-long meeting of the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and Faith Development Services on 23 March 2024 in Carlow College, St Patrick's. I ask your prayers for this key piece of work.

APPOINTMENT OF A DIRECTOR OF PARISH DEVELOPMENT

The importance of having someone with skills to facilitate and drive this entire process is something that was mentioned in many meetings in recent months. I am very happy to let you know that the diocese has begun the recruitment process for the employment of a fulltime Director of Parish Development (DPD). The person appointed to this role will direct and support pastoral development in parishes across the diocese, facilitating clergy and parishioners to engage in new ways and structures of working together and building the capacity of parishes to meet the ongoing pastoral needs of people. Included in this work will be identifying and managing the delivery of appropriate training and formation across the diocese. The Diocesan Pastoral Plan will help inform their work. This

appointment will be a very significant help in advancing the work that has already been taking place in parishes and at parish cluster level.

I want to thank Jim Deeds and Julie Kavanagh for their work so far in this process, as well as members of the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Faith Development Services and all who help to accompany this process. They will be essential partners with whoever is appointed in the role of DPD.

FORMAL FORMATION AND TRAINING FOR LAY PARISH MINISTERS

While we await the appointment of the DPD, practical work is progressing. A subgroup of the Diocesan Pastoral Council met with Dr Jessie Rogers from the School of Mission and Ministry, Maynooth, to explore the delivery of training and formation for lay parish ministers. They also met with representatives of other dioceses who are beginning similar training. This group will continue to liaise with Maynooth and do the necessary groundwork ahead of the commencement of training. They will work with the DPD, when appointed, to ensure that the training provided for the diocese will be appropriate to the needs of parishes and that those trained will be supported to offer their ministry in parishes.

CARE OF OUR PRIESTS

Care of our priests is essential. At a clergy gathering last October, I announced that I would be meeting with all priests individually. Those meetings have started and are going very well. There is absolutely no agenda in them except to check in with how men are doing and what supports they would welcome. As parish confirmations take place across the diocese, I will be using those occasions as an opportunity to meet priests in the parishes where I celebrate Confirmation. Thank you for the welcome opportunities these meetings offer. An additional and very practical support for priests and Parish Finance Committees is the establishment of the Diocesan Property Commission. The office roles in Bishop's House have been reorganised to facilitate the specific support around property matters, which can be contentious and challenging for many.

PARISH MASS AUDITS, MASS SCHEDULES, AND RETURNS

On two Sundays before Christmas, parishes undertook an audit of Mass attendance. I remind parishes to return the audits to Bishop's House so that they can help inform wider discussion. If they have not already done so, I invite parish clusters to meet and in light of these figures to agree a Mass schedule that is manageable and achievable. Support in relation to facilitating these meetings can be provided from the Diocese upon request. Revised schedules should be returned to Bishop's House for website updating. An agreed schedule is to be implemented across the diocese on 5 May 2024.

SUNDAY CELEBRATIONS IN THE UNEXPECTED ABSENCE OF A PRIEST

Emerging from local conversations was the request for a resource for use in parishes in the unexpected absence of a priest to celebrate Sunday Mass. The Diocesan Commission for Liturgical Formation has produced a resource and will introduce it to clergy, sacristans, and parish representatives in three deanery evening workshops in March.

CONTINUING ON THE SYNODAL PATHWAY

The Synodal Pathway is continuing in Ireland and across the world. Journeying together and listening to one another and the Holy Spirit, while developing more collaborative structures for sharing responsibility for parish life is clearly not a separate task to our 'Put out into the deep' process. The call to synodality is at the very heart of the direction we are moving in as a diocese. The Synod Diocesan team is working in conjunction with the national synod process for the next phase of the synodal journey. Part of this work will be to identify a number of people from the diocese who will undertake national training on synodal leadership and facilitation in April and who will then join the Synod diocesan team.

CONFERENCE TO LEARN FROM EXISTING PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS

The ways of synodality can greatly inform how a Parish Pastoral Council and other bodies within the diocese work together. On 8 June 2024 the Diocesan Pastoral Council will host a one day conference to learn from existing councils and other such groups, to hear of their experiences on the ground, to hear their training needs and to explore together how synodality can be embedded even more into the ways of being a Parish Pastoral Council. This will give the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the newly appointed DPD invaluable information for the delivery of training in the Autumn for new and existing councils. All parishes must have a Parish Pastoral Council, or equivalent, in place by 31 December 2024.

WE EACH HAVE A PART TO PLAY

We are entering the next phase of our diocesan process – a process that some parishioners might not even know is happening! It is hoped that this letter will help people appreciate the proactive work that is being done by many people in parishes across the diocese. Each of us have a part to play. Your part may be by responding to a newsletter invitation to come to a meeting or to take part in a parish ministry, or it may be simply to pray for the parish and for our diocese. Together, we need to ensure that our parishes continue to be places where people can experience the presence of Christ in their lives, as we pray together, and as we care for one another and all those who need help in our midst and beyond.

A PRAYER FOR OUR DIOCESE

As we celebrate the 1500th Anniversary of the death of St. Brigid, we look forward to the many events over the coming days, weeks and months that will honour this anniversary. As Patron of our diocese, we invoke her protection and guidance for the journey ahead. I invite all of you to commit yourself to pray this prayer with me over the coming year.

Every blessing at this momentous time for our diocese,



✠ Denis Nulty
Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin

A Prayer for our Diocese



Gracious God,
we ask that you send your Spirit
upon the people of Kildare & Leighlin.

Help us to be
as charitable as St. Brigid,
as prophetic as St. Conleth,
and as prayerful as St. Laserian.
May we respond to the call of our baptism,
to use our gifts in service of each other.

May each of us be a living witness
to a kingdom of justice and peace.

Grant us the courage
to follow where you are leading
and with your grace
to journey together
in faith, hope and love.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen