

# PARISHES ALIVE - MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE!

21ST JUNE 2025



On Saturday, 21st June 2025, Bishop Denis Nulty along with the Diocesan Pastoral Council hosted a conference attended by over 100 parishioners and clergy from around the diocese. The event took place in Carlow College, St. Patrick's, and marked the second annual Parishes Alive day in the diocese.



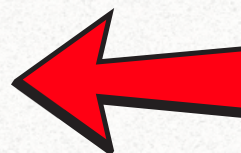
After some time for prayer, Bishop Denis welcomed people and described for them the challenges, hopes and opportunities currently facing the diocese. Noting the durability and adaptability of parishes, he encouraged us all to walk together into the future with hope.



Professor Michael Conway led two inputs in the morning, leading people through where we have come from to a changing understanding of what it means to be a Christian living out our faith as a member of the Church today.



In the afternoon people had the opportunity to engage with what had been said, using the synodal method of conversations in the spirit, and discerning together where the Spirit is leading us in all that was shared.



## The path of the day





## What did Professor Conway talk about?

- He explored our image of Church up to Vatican II and how this has influenced our understanding and way of being Church in terms of practice, structure, leadership, and governance.
- In the second half of his talk he invited us to receive again the vision of Church expressed at Vatican II, a vision founded in Christ and our life with Christ through baptism. Each of us, lay person or cleric, is a Christian living out our faith. That calls us to imagine parish life differently - one in which each member is called and gifted, one which underscores the importance of a shared Community, Assembly and Mission, one in which we walk together with Christ.





# Conversation in the Spirit



## A Way of Reflecting Together

Believing that the Spirit of God is in our midst  
working through and in each us



## The Question

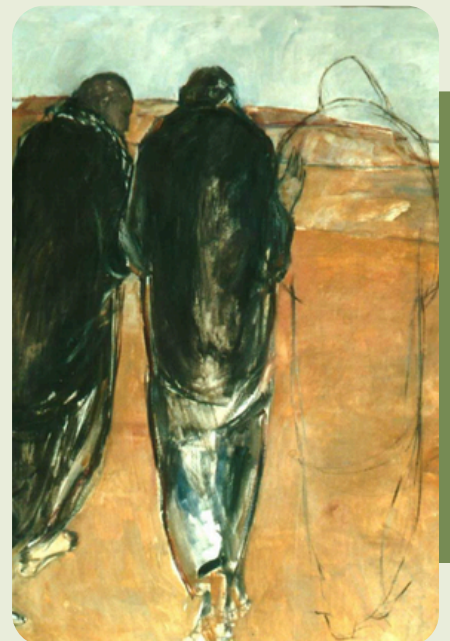
In what you have heard today what do you sense the Holy Spirit is saying to us and how are we being called to respond, individually and collectively?

## The way

Attendees gathered in small groups around 15 tables, with a facilitator. They followed the synodal method of Conversations in the Spirit that brings people through an experience of deep listening and sharing. The listening was preceded by the prayerful reading of the Emmaus story where Jesus walked with the disciples and brought them to a deep encounter with him.

## Three rounds

In Round One every person is given an opportunity to speak without interruption, followed by a moment of silence before the next person speaks. Round Two follows a similar pattern with each person sharing what emerged within them as they listened to others and in the silence. Round Three is a freer dialogue where the group seeks to name what the Spirit is saying to them through what has been shared.





# WHAT EMERGED

## What did people notice

Many common strands became evident. There was a feeling of positivity that was identified as the work of the Spirit. People could recognise an extraordinary amount of goodwill and a commitment to the future of the Church. Even though the size and structure of parishes in attendance differed, everyone was able to relate similar concerns.

While it is evident that change is happening, it must continue and must be monitored and guided. A call to openness and to be open minded was strongly felt, inviting us to a change for the better.

Underlying all of this is the importance of our relationship with God and the desire to live in a community of faith. There is gratitude for our faith and for all that God gives us.



## We are called by our Baptism

Many felt that new insights emerged from the morning's presentations – namely, the importance of Baptism. A need was felt to realize the importance of the reality that “I am baptized” not that “I was baptized” and the mission which that calls us to. We are called to serve others and to encourage others. We are all called through Baptism; Baptism is the foundation of our mission in the Church, not Ordination.

Collaboration is vital - we are obliged to support parish pastoral councils. Baptism confers responsibilities on us, responsibility for all aspects of Church life.



## What is the current situation?

We need to move forward. The Church of the past (pre-Vatican II) fed the needs of the people of that time. Culture has changed; people need to adapt their understanding of parish/Church so that the Church can fulfil its mission in today's culture and context.

There is a sense that the parish community has broken down. Many in our communities feel isolated (this is social as well as religious).

There is a need to welcome back those who have left/lapsed. Children, young families need support. The Body of the Church, the baptised, are called to help and support each other.

## Guidance From God

The importance of prayer and personal example for the younger generation was mentioned. We must be people of prayer and be trusting. Prayer is a dialogue with God, a conversation. We must trust in the Spirit.

Overall, we should not worry, the Holy Spirit will guide us. The Church has survived huge challenges in the past. To be ever hopeful is a common theme - it is God's Church and not ours. We have the hope of God moving forward who promised to be with us always until end of time. We must trust the Lord.





## Necessary Dispositions

We must be prepared to try new initiatives in the spirit of synodality. We should not be afraid of new directions or of failure. Change can be difficult, but we move forward with faith, hope, love. That there is a willingness to change is evident and welcomed. We need to take responsibility for our own faith, and we cannot be passive about it. There was a call to be less judgmental and more accepting of people practicing their faith in different ways. We need to be understanding. Education and information are important. We need to ensure that people in our parishes understand where we are going and what the changes involve so that there is buy-in from the majority for the necessary changes to be realized.



There is a deep concern for those not practicing and how best to support them.

The challenge is to be Christ-like in all our endeavours. Christ is love, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, welcoming of strangers. Responsibility must be given to the laity, retaining power which is vested solely in clergy leads to failure. If we trust in the Holy Spirit our gifts will emerge. We must let go of old models of church – strip back, simplify and get back to the Gospels.

Pastoral care and the importance of looking after youth was a common theme. The youth are the future of our church, and we need to find ways to nurture and involve them in parish activities. We must nurture the family among the community. It is critical that we, as people of God, 'enhance' faith to help parents, children etc find the niches they are in.

## Challenges

Church experiences can be good and bad. There is acceptance of the current situation of people not going to Mass – the challenge is how to involve them and bring them back. Shared experiences help.

Other challenges: - Stepping up amid fear of backlash or rejection. Where do youth fit in? How do we reach those mentioned above? There is a hunger for faith. How do we respond? How to show the church as moving and a hopeful and place for all.

The legacy of the wrongdoing to show community /society that the Church is a good/safe Church for everyone.



## Charisms

I am baptized, gifted by God. Everyone has something to contribute to the life of the church: we all have charisms. We bring our own charisms, gifts.

Co-responsibility means lay people having a role - this gives a sense of ownership and provides a support for the priest. We all have gifts and must have the courage to use them.

Good leadership is necessary for the changes to take place because there will be resistance. We must not lose sight of the bigger picture which is the Kingdom of God.

## Convergence and divergence

We are all called to mission by our Baptism.

There is a sense of disappointment/ disenchantment with the current situation regarding practice and involvement of people in the Church and how we respond. We need to move away from using the 'Mass' as an indicator of the Church's health. Linking into the call from the Synod to "enlarge the space of your tent" ( cf Isaiah 54:2), we need to expand the tent and sometimes move the tent. This will create a wider space for all the community.

We must ask ourselves "Do we keep things going for the sake of the way things are done or do we do things out of a sense of being called to mission?"

There was broad acknowledgment that respectful change is necessary. While we may be fearful, we are also hopeful that this can happen, with God's help.

