

The courage to face up to today's reality in Dublin Diocese



Fr Gareth Byrne

At Pentecost, Archbishop Dermot Farrell published a striking Pastoral Letter to all the people and priests of the Archdiocese of Dublin: 'Come, Holy Spirit, Fill Our Hearts with the Fire of Your Love'.

Archbishop Farrell asks that, like Mary and the Apostles "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1), we allow ourselves to be encouraged by the same Spirit and recognise the same mission entrusted to us. In challenging times, we too are called to share the good news of what God has done, and is continuing to do for us, in Jesus.

Crisis

Speaking after Easter in Knock during the Dublin Diocesan Pilgrimage, Archbishop Dermot acknowledged the crisis in the Church in Ireland and throughout Europe, but offered hope: "Our Church

is alive! We are in crisis, but we are alive!"

In response to that crisis, the archbishop at Pentecost contends, we need to be a "living Church", close to the Lord, listening to the Holy Spirit at work among us, "going into new places", alive to the challenge: "If we have the courage to face up to the reality of our local Church today, we will clearly see that we need to travel lighter, and that already we need to let go of many things which we considered essential, but which now – truth be told – overburden us."

“His Building Hope pastoral planning initiative has opened up a journey of renewal across the archdiocese”

Visiting Rome in the week between Ascension and Pentecost, Archbishop Farrell met Pope Leo XIV and assured him of the prayers of the people of the Archdiocese of Dublin. At Pentecost, he quotes the Pope's prophetic words in

Angola last month: "Today we need to look to the future with hope and build the hope of the future."

In fact, Archbishop Dermot has always had the future of the archdiocese at the forefront of his mind. His Building Hope pastoral planning initiative has opened up a journey of renewal across the archdiocese, encouraging parishes to work together in partnership.

Reflection

Emerging from this context of continuing prayer, listening, discernment and decision-making, this Pastoral Letter introduces a canonical and synodal process for reflection in parishes on the way forward, appreciating new pastoral possibilities: a Process for the Modification of Parishes for Mission.

Central to any such process, the archbishop confirms, must be the pastoral care and good of Christ's faithful.

All Parish Pastoral Councils and Partnership Pastoral Councils are asked to engage in initial reflection. Where there is a need, "when new parish structures and relationships are being considered", the process sets out the formal steps to be taken, together with the archbishop.

This material has been



Archbishop Dermot Farrell greeting pilgrims in Knock last month. Photo: John McElroy.

“Let us show ourselves faithful and creative, hope-filled and resilient, synodal and pro-active. Using all our charisms, gifts and ministries, the Spirit of Truth and Love will help us find new ways to express, generously, what the Church can be for all the world to see and hear”

developed through a consultative process. The diocesan Council of Priests recommended to the archbishop that he move forward with the process. Conversation has also taken place at the Dublin Diocesan Pastoral Council, and in Deaneries which comprise lay representatives and clergy from each parish.

“Now is the time, in prayer and reflection, to deepen the renewal which has been long under way”

Many have noted the emphasis on unity of purpose: "we must find new ways of binding ourselves together as disciples of Christ, sharing our efforts, establishing flexibility, renewing our energy."

The focus is on strengthening our faith communities into the future. If mergers and amalgamations of parishes are to take place, it will be the result of courage, creativity and proactive leadership. It will be because we are alive! "Now is the time, in prayer and reflection, to deepen the renewal which has been long under way among us."

Archbishop

In the Archdiocese of Dublin, there is a deep-felt confidence in Archbishop Dermot: a strong appreciation for his leadership; for his presence to the clergy; for his enthusiastic support for co-responsibility among all members of the Church; and great gratitude for his willingness to look to the future with hope, all of us together, with Jesus in our midst.

The desire of this archbishop is that all of us who have been 'baptised and sent' would embrace our mission in the 'living Church' and find new

ways to be of service to the Lord. He put it this way in Knock: "Every single person is a vital part of the Body of Christ. Every one of us has something to give, something that only we can give."

Welcoming Pope Leo's first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, Archbishop Dermot emphasises here too that "the call is for each to contribute according to his or her expertise, capacity, influence and wisdom".

In his words at Pentecost: "Let us show ourselves faithful and creative, hope-filled and resilient, synodal and pro-active. Using all our charisms, gifts and ministries, the Spirit of Truth and Love will help us find new ways to express, generously, what the Church can be for all the world to see and hear."

i Very Rev. Gareth Byrne is a Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Dublin and Moderator of the Diocesan Curia.

i Archbishop Farrell's Pentecost Pastoral Letter can be read at www.dublindiocese.ie

How Modification of Parishes works

The process for the Modification of Parishes, when the need arises, is set out below. It is guided by the Instructions of the Dicastery for the Clergy.

The process takes place within the context of the partnership of parishes established by Archbishop Farrell (December 2022) across the Archdiocese through the Building Hope pastoral renewal initiative.

Overview

Following local conversations, a desire may be expressed to the Archbishop, or he may request, that the possibility of parish modification be explored. The Archbishop will write to initiate formally the Process of Modification appointing two or three people to oversee and guide the process. A period of up to a year may be required for the whole process – but this will depend on local needs and specific circumstances.

Factual statement

A Factual Statement is drafted with the assistance of the Diocesan Communications Office, highlighting the pastoral realities and drawing on liturgical, statistical and financial information. The type of parish modification which may be suitable (usually 1 or 2 below):

1. Merger: where two or more former parishes unite to become a single new parish; all previous parishes become extinct – A and B unite to form C, only C remains (Canon 121)

2. Amalgamation: A is subsumed into B, only B remains (by analogy to Canon 121)

Early communications

The importance of early, clear and respectful communications (conversations) is a key element in the process.

9 steps to be taken in the formal process of modification

1. The Parish Pastoral Council of each parish meets to pray and reflect on the matter.
2. The PPCs of the parishes that are considering modification come together.
3. Open Parish Conversations held in the individual parishes.
4. Open gathering of all of the joint parishes concerned.
5. Meeting with the Archbishop to inform him of the outcome of the process.
6. Meeting of the Council of Priests.
7. The Archbishop will give consideration to the Report and the determination of the Council of Priests and, having judged there to be just cause, will issue a Decree of Modification of the Parishes.

i This is an edited summary of the document on the Dublin diocesan website by The Irish Catholic.