



diocese
of limerick
our catholic community

Moving Forward Together Pastoral Units and Team Ministry

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Leahy



What will the future of the Church be like? I can't answer that question in detail and yet, in the light of faith, I believe we can say two things: it'll be both the same as it is now and yet also different.

The same because Jesus promised he will never abandon the Church. The Word of God, the sacraments and the community life that he gave us, in the power of the Spirit, will always be essential pillars of the Church. Different because the Church is on a journey. Guided by the Holy Spirit, it is always developing and growing as it moves into new centuries, new cultures and new ways of doing things.

New Arrangements

In our Diocese the 2016 Synod offered us important signposts to guide us in the next steps we need to take at this stage of our journey. One of these steps is the development of "team ministry". In the past two years we have worked on this and are now at a point of arranging our Diocese into Pastoral Units with teams of clergy ministering in each unit. In other words, a number of parishes will be co-operating together as a pastoral unit with two or three priests ministering together as a team to the pastoral needs of these parishes. Each of the priests will be a "co-Parish Priest", that is, we will no longer have one single Parish Priest per parish but several priests working in all of the parishes that are linked together as a pastoral unit. In devising these pastoral units, I have travelled the Diocese and consulted with many groups of clergy and laity about this new arrangement.

How will it work?

Each pastoral unit will have its own character, but I can offer some pointers that will be common to all of them. In each pastoral unit priests will work much more as a team, meeting together regularly to plan and review their ministry in the Unit. At the weekend, instead of the same priest celebrating Mass in the local parish, the priests of the Unit will move around the parishes of the Unit to celebrate Mass in the different churches. It might also be that there will be one baptismal team for the whole Unit offering preparation for parents bringing their child for baptism with the baptisms then taking place in the local parish church.

There will be one Pastoral Council per Pastoral Unit made up of members of each of the parishes of the Unit. Each parish then will have its own smaller working group (some might call this a parish pastoral co-ordinating group or action group or animation group).



The main goal in establishing Pastoral Units and Team Ministry is greater co-operation between parishes. The hope is that there will be a greater critical mass of energy, competencies and lay volunteers at the service of a number of parishes. As the Irish saying puts it, *Ní neart go cur le chéile* (our strength lies in unity).

Each Pastoral Unit will need to work out the details of how their Pastoral Unit will work. But the hope is that there will be much more common action among the parishes, allowing for initiatives that might not be possible for a parish on its own.

Some Questions

In the course of the conversations I've been having about this new development, I've been asked a number of questions that are of interest.

Will it affect our parish identity? The new arrangement being introduced at this time means that parishes will still exist with their own structure and finances. Naturally, the hope is that there will be increasing co-operation between parishes with people getting to know each other across parish boundaries and sharing their resources of people and skills.

When will all of this start? The weekend of the First Sunday of Advent, December 1-2, 2018, is the official starting date. Of course, it will take time for this new arrangement to develop but hopefully with everyone's good will things will take shape smoothly and reasonably soon.

What are the next steps? Priests will now start meeting regularly to prepare, for instance, the Mass roster that will see each of them saying Mass in each of the churches in the Unit. The pastoral Council will have to be established in the coming months. Then the creativity and co-operation of priests and laity of the different parishes will come up with initiatives that respond to the pastoral and missionary needs of that Unit. It is hoped to provide training for priests and lay people in how this new arrangement works.

Will the new Pastoral Unit replace our parish pastoral council? In one sense, yes it will. There will be one Pastoral Council for the Pastoral Unit. The reality is that some parishes struggle to put together a Parish Council so linking with other parishes will help them. In some parishes the Pastoral Council is strong. In such parishes, the Council will continue more in the form of a working group or Pastoral Co-ordinating group.

Would it not be easier to bring priests in from abroad? At the Synod, we agreed that it would be good that a few priests might come from abroad to help out (perhaps priests here for studies or to learn English for a particular period of time). However, we also recognised that for many reasons it is not a real long-term solution to our problem. We have to learn new ways while, of course, praying for more vocations from our own Diocese to the priesthood and religious life.



Is all of this really necessary?

I don't think I need to repeat in detail what's obvious. There is a considerable decline in the number of priests, the age profile of priests is rising, there are increasing demands, bureaucratic and otherwise on priests today. It is clear that on a practical level, something needs to be done.

But our new arrangements are not just about responding to the decline in the number of priests. For the past fifty years, the Catholic Church throughout the world recognises we need to work more in a team spirit. It is something Pope Francis underlines when he speaks of "synodality". We journey to God *together*. We need to promote arrangements that encourage greater co-operation and exchange between parishes.

The steps we are taking together are in tune with the phenomenon the world over, that is, a realisation that there needs to be greater collaboration and togetherness than before, whether it be in dealing with the issue of global warming, peace-keeping or combatting social problems. The Spirit of God is prompting this new sense of inter-dependence.

At the deepest level, our new arrangements are in line with the rediscovery in recent years that the Church is the People of God joined together by the Holy Spirit. The model of our unity is nothing less than the community-life of God who is Three Persons in One: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Church is an icon, as it were, of the community-life of God. It is with a view to fostering the spirit of communion modelled on the life of the Trinity brought to earth by Jesus, that we are moving in a more team or community-centred focus, promoting co-operation between priests and lay people of different parishes and among parishes. And all of this is in view of strengthening the effectiveness of the Church's mission.

It is worthwhile hearing Pope Francis' words who urges us to take new steps for the sake of mission:

I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open...¹

The Need for Spirituality

We will be busy in setting up new arrangements but it has also been said to me that we have to make sure we don't lose sight of our need to nurture spirituality. I am indeed grateful for the many people who form the living heart-beat of the Diocese through their prayer, their works of charity and spiritual practices. They provide the "soul" for our structures.

I would like to propose to you for your meditation a lovely quote from Saint Pope John Paul. In the year 2001 he wrote a letter about the Church in the New Millennium. In that letter he said we needed to go beyond an individual I-God relationship and promote what he called a spirituality of communion. In other words, we need to adopt what might be called a "we-spirituality". Indeed, Saint John Paul said this should be a priority in all our new arrangements.

While we might want to rush into all the practical issues, we will always have to keep reminding ourselves of the spiritual roots of what we are about. Before making practical plans we need to make sure we are living a spirituality of communion, a "we-spirituality" as the foundation of the new arrangements.

In offering us a lovely description of such spirituality, Saint John Paul clarified that it is rooted in the "contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us", enabling us to see our sisters and brothers in the light of this calling to share, through God's gift, in God's own community-life. And so the Pope continues:

A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2)...²

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 27.

² Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, At the Beginning of the New Millennium, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 43.

A Lay Profile of the Church

In moving into the new arrangements, I believe God is at work. Change isn't easy but just as it is necessary in our own personal lives (for instance, a child changes to become an adolescent and then an adult with many changes through life), likewise in the Church we too constantly need to reform and renew our Church life.

Priests will always be necessary. But it is also true that today we are seeing a deep discovery that every baptised person has a vocation. Pope Francis writes that each baptised person "is" a mission. Lay people live out their baptismal vocation in different ways – in family life, in the workplace, in various social projects. But one way today of living out our baptismal vocation is to take a more direct role in the organisation and day-to-day life of the Church in our local area.

I believe that through all that is going on God is drawing out a new lay profile of the Church. We will see a more prominent role of lay people in the running of parishes in the future.

Recent Times

I want to acknowledge that recent months have not been easy for church goers. The revelations of scandal and cover-up have shocked many and disturbed our faith. The result of the 8th Amendment Referendum was a difficult moment for many who come regularly to Church. I thank you for your continued commitment to the faith and to the Church despite the often negative comments we hear about the Church. I thank you for your fidelity also in a time of change when we are having to let go of some of the ways of doing things we were used to.

At one of the conversations I had in recent weeks, one of the women present said simply from her heart: "Things are difficult but we can start again – and together".

It is this spirit of "together" that I would like to emphasise as we move into the new arrangements.

At times we can begin to worry about how things will be in twenty years' time. We might get despondent thinking of the difficulties facing the Church. But Pope Francis keeps repeating: "don't let yourselves be robbed of hope".

Let's take the steps we can take at this stage and then, in a great act of faith and trust in God, hand the future over to him. We can let him, in his loving providence, show us the way and provide for us in the future.

I am reminded of a conversation between Mother Teresa and a journalist. 'What can we do to improve the Church today?' 'It's simple! We just have to start! It's up to you and me.'



Conclusion

At the beginning of this letter, I said I don't know the detail of what the future of the Church will be like. But spiritually there are two aspects that will be constant. On the one hand, the mystery of Jesus' death on the Cross. The Church came to life through Jesus' passion and humiliation, abandonment and death. Every time we are faced with a negative aspect to do with the Church, let's unite our suffering with Jesus on the Cross.

The other constant element is the centre of the Church's proclamation, what is sometimes called the kerygma: Jesus is Risen! Jesus is Alive! We don't follow an inspiring leader who simply died two thousand years ago. We are not museum wardens. We believe Jesus is Risen.

He loves us; He gave his life to save us; and now He is living at our side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free us. With this conviction that Jesus is Risen and wants to be among us, so we can move forward confidently into our new parish arrangements.





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Diocese of Limerick Pastoral Units December 2018

<p>Pastoral Unit 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St John's • Monaleen • St Patrick's/St Brigid's • St Michael's • <i>OLHOC Milford (Salesians – associate parish)</i> 	<p>Pastoral Unit 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Joseph's • St Saviour's • Our Lady of Lourdes 	<p>Pastoral Unit 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donoughmore / Knockea / Roxboro • Our Lady Queen of Peace • Holy Family
<p>Pastoral Unit 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St Munchin's/St Lelia's • Corpus Christi <i>Sub-unit A</i> • Parteen/Meelick • St Mary's <i>Sub-unit B</i> • St Nicholas' <i>Sub-unit B</i> 	<p>Pastoral Unit 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ the King • Cratloe/Sixmilebridge • Our Lady of the Rosary 	<p>Pastoral Unit 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patrickswell/Ballybrown • Mungret/Raheen/Creora • St Paul's
<p>Pastoral Unit 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banogue • Croom <i>Sub-unit A</i> • Dromin/Athlaccá • Manister <i>Sub-unit B</i> • Fedamore <i>Sub-unit B</i> • Bruff/Meanus/Grange 	<p>Pastoral Unit 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rockhill / Bruree • Castletown / Ballyagran / Colmanswell 	<p>Pastoral Unit 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ardpatrick • Glenroe/Ballyorgan • Kilfinane • Bulgaden/Martinstown • Effin/Garrienderk • Kilmallock
<p>Pastoral Unit 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rathkeale • Ballingarry/Granagh • Knockaderry/Cloncagh 	<p>Pastoral Unit 11</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croagh/Kilfinny • Adare • Cappagh 	<p>Pastoral Unit 12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kildimo/Pallaskenry • Kilcornan • Askeaton/Ballysteen
<p>Pastoral Unit 13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shanagolden/Robertstown / Foynes • Loughill/Ballyahill • Glin • Coolcappa/Kilcolman 	<p>Pastoral Unit 14</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abbeyfeale • Athea • Templeglantine • Tournafulla/Mountcollins 	<p>Pastoral Unit 15</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newcastle West • Mahoonagh / Feohanagh / Castlemahon • Monagea • Ardagh/Carrickerry
<p>Pastoral Unit 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dromcollogher/Broadford • Killeedy/Ashford • Feenagh/Kilmeedy 		