



Diocese of Limerick Our Catholic Community

Letter to be read out at Masses the weekend 13-14 June, 2026

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We have just listened to the Gospel account of the calling of the apostles, where Jesus turns to his disciples and says, “The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few; so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest.” These words echo across the centuries and reach us today. Every one of us, through our baptism, has been called into the life and mission of the Church. We are not passive observers but active participants in the Lord’s work. We are the labourers he sends into the harvest fields of our own time, our own communities, and our own parishes. The Gospel reminds us that the mission of the Church is not the task of a few but the shared responsibility of all the faithful.

For many months now, our Diocese has been engaged in parish consultations, a process rooted in listening, discernment, and shared responsibility. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all who took part, whether by attending gatherings, offering reflections, or helping to organise and facilitate the sessions. Your generosity of spirit and your willingness to speak honestly about your hopes and concerns have been a blessing. I have prepared a Report summarising the findings, and I encourage you to read it, reflect on it, and pray with it.

The publication of this Report marks a milestone on the road we have been travelling together, especially as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of our Limerick Diocesan Synod of 2016. The Holy Spirit continues to urge the Church to walk the path of consultation, listening, and shared planning. This is not a new direction for us but a reaffirmation of the path our Diocese has been committed to for many years. At times the journey may feel slow, yet we know the wisdom of the saying: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

There is much in the Report that gives us reason to give thanks. It is clear that faith remains a living source of hope, identity, and belonging for our people. At the same time, the consultations named challenges and highlighted priorities. The most urgent priority identified was the need to engage more deeply with young people and families. Again and again, parishioners spoke of the need for greater lay ministry, for formal recognition of the contribution of women, and for more training and formation. Many emphasised the importance of welcome, inclusion, and improved communication. Another strong theme was the need for clearer roles, better collaboration, and stronger communication within and between parishes. The quality of our liturgical celebrations, including music, was also highlighted. Practical concerns were raised too: the maintenance of buildings, energy efficiency, and financial transparency. Yet throughout the Report, alongside these concerns, there is a sense of hopefulness.

I have begun preparing short summaries of the consultation results for each parish, along with some comments. I hope to share these with you soon. In the meantime, I encourage you to reflect on the general findings and begin discerning what steps might be taken locally. Some actions can begin immediately. Others will require planning, cooperation, and patience. Still others will need collaboration across pastoral units.

At the diocesan level, and as an initial response to the consultations, I intend to establish five new resource centres at the Diocesan Centre to support pastoral units and parishes across the Diocese. The first is a Pastoral Unit/Parish Leadership Resource Centre which will promote and provide resources for participatory bodies such as Pastoral Unit Councils, Parish Mission teams, and Finance Councils. It will encourage lay ministries, including women's leadership. The second is a Pastoral Unit/Parish Training and Resource Centre, which will coordinate formation, training, and resources for parish pastoral ministries, liturgy, youth ministry, and family faith support. The third is a Digital Diocesan Resource Centre, strengthening the digital presence of parishes and supporting mission in the digital environment. The fourth is a Dignity and

Hope Resource Centre, fostering welcome, inclusion, and safety, and resourcing parishes in hospitality and outreach. The fifth will be a Stewardship and Governance Support Resource Centre will assist parishes in implementing their financial, stewardship and governance obligations. It will assist parishes in preparing an annual Parish Report Day on parish finances and mission.

I hope our Diocese can continue developing new ministries, including the ministry of catechist, the permanent diaconate, and roles such as coordinators of small communities and parish administrators. To that end, I invite expressions of interest in these ministries.

However, we must also be honest about the challenges ahead. Many of the proposals brought forward are excellent, but they come at a time when both clergy and parishioners are ageing, and when the pool of volunteers is smaller than before. We cannot keep asking the same faithful people to take on more; this was clear throughout the consultations. Unless more people are willing to become actively involved in the life of the parish, many of the aspirations and proposals that emerged from the parish consultations will be difficult to realise. The call for more lay involvement is not abstract; it is real and urgent.

We must also acknowledge the financial reality. Some parishes are in a precarious position. Running a parish and maintaining church buildings costs money. I know how deeply people cherish their parish church, and I share that love. I do not intend to close churches unless a parish reaches a point where it cannot, financially or in terms of safety, keep the building open. We are not at that point now, though one or two are close. But we must face the truth with courage and prepare for the next decade so that we do not leave an unnecessary burden for others.

The continuing mission and sustainability of a parish require more than keeping a church building open. I welcome the willingness of parishes to collaborate more within their Pastoral Unit, and some are even open to amalgamation. Parish identity does not disappear when communities pool resources or work more closely together; in fact, collaboration may be what allows it to endure. I cannot emphasise enough the urgent need for smaller parishes to deepen collaboration with their neighbours for a sustainable future.

The consultations show clearly that people want their parishes to thrive, not merely survive. They want faith passed on, liturgy renewed, young people welcomed, and communities strengthened. These desires are signs of the Holy Spirit. But they also call us to take new steps in changing times. At the same time, we also know that structures alone will not shape our future; only renewed faith, generosity, and the spirit of the Lord's command to "love one another as I have loved you" will do that.

Please read the Report in its entirety or at least its Executive Summary.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, accompany us as apostles sent by the Lord in our time into the harvest. Let's pray too for our Limerick Diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes that begins later this week.

With kind regards,



✠ Brendan Leahy,
Bishop of Limerick.