



DIOCESE OF LIMERICK MISSION REPORT 2024



Table of Contents

04	Introduction	31	Young People
06	At a glance - Statistics	35	Liturgy, Spirituality and Life
07	A Brief Review of 2024	39	Faith Formation and Education
18	Community and Sense of Belonging	46	New Models of Leadership
28	Pastoral Care of the Family		

Introduction



I am pleased to present to you a Report on Mission in the Diocese of Limerick in 2024. In November 2023, an “Overview” of the Diocese was distributed, providing various facts and figures. The 2024 Report is more an exercise in accountability, calling to mind the main elements of how we as a Diocese carried out our mission last year.

It is an exercise that was recommended in the *Final Document* of the Synodal Assembly that I attended in Rome last October.

As the *Final Document* itself clarifies, this is not meant to be a bureaucratic action for its own sake. We know that reporting about and accountability to the community for one’s ministry belongs to our oldest tradition of the Church. In the Gospels, we hear of the apostles reporting to Jesus how their mission had gone. And in the early Church, we find many examples of missionaries updating the community.

As well as an exercise in accountability by presenting key features of our Diocesan mission to the whole People of God present in Limerick, this Report is an opportunity to give “greater visibility to many valuable initiatives of the Church and its institutions, which too often remain hidden”, as the *Final Document* puts it. Indeed, Jesus himself has said to us that we are to let our “light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.” (cf. Mt 5:16).

The Report begins with a statistical overview followed by a brief overview of 2024. It then provides short summaries of missionary aspects from last year structured around the key themes of our 2016 Limerick Synod: Community and Sense of Belonging; Pastoral Care of the Family; Young People; Liturgy and Life; Faith Formation & Education; New Models of Leadership.

The Report aims to be informative. As we read of the many activities indicated in the various summaries, let's be grateful for them and for the contribution of so many involved in them. Of course, it is impossible to do justice to all that goes on in terms of mission in the Diocese – in families, in educational, healthcare and social settings, and in parishes, congregations and movements, prayer groups and organisations.

A reading of this Report indicates areas where we are stronger and some areas that require attention. For instance, while care of the family and liturgy are, in some ways, the daily bread of much ministry in parishes, nevertheless it's probably true to say that we could focus a little more on them in order to improve the quality of our missionary outreach in these areas.

What's not included in this Report is the administrative aspect of Diocesan life. With 92 churches, 436 properties held in trust and 101 primary schools under Catholic patronage, as well as the statutory requirements in relation to finance, properties, Data and safeguarding, a great deal of administrative duties arise both on parish and Diocesan levels. Much of that work remains hidden to most people in the Diocese. But it is real. In its own way, when done well and efficiently, this administrative work is also missionary as it is about the Church fulfilling its obligations in the spirit required by Jesus, namely, that we be good stewards, responsible with our talents and faithful in small things. My gratitude goes to all who work so carefully on all the background administrative tasks that accompany the Diocesan missionary outreach. Finance Reports are uploaded on the Diocesan website and parishes are encouraged to give an annual account of finances of the parish.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, my wish is that reading the Report will remind us that the Spirit is still at work, the Church is still continuing to communicate its message. We remember Pope Paul VI's words: "The Church exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection". Let us thank God the Holy Spirit that the mission, though in a time of transformation and challenge, is still alive in the Diocese of Limerick.

+ Brendan Leahy

✠ Brendan Leahy,
Bishop of Limerick.

At a Glance



**50 Active
Diocesan
Priests**



**36 Retired Priests
with 17 Assisting
Pastorally**



**13 Priests from
Abroad**



**60
Parishes**



**92
Churches**



**15
Pastoral
Units**



**36 Parishes
with Resident
Priests**



**24 Parishes
without
Resident
Priests**



**100
Sacristans**



**21 Lay
Ministers**



**2,547
Volunteers**



**70 Youth
Volunteers**



**69
Choirs**



**24 Religious
Congregations**



**190 Female
Religious**



**60 Male
Religious**



**1,441
Baptisms**



**1,289 First Holy
Communion**



**2,050
Confirmations**



**256
Marriages**



**1,238
Funerals**



**7.3K Facebook
Followers**



**1,370 Instagram
Followers**

A Brief Review of 2024

What follows is just some of the events that took place throughout the Diocese in 2024. So much happens not only in parishes but also in Catholic schools and colleges, in healthcare and social outreach settings, that is impossible to name it all. However, in later chapters of the Report, some further detail is provided. What follows is a presentation of events at both Diocesan and parish level, many of them linked to the Bishop's own diary.

The visitation of the sick is a significant feature of parish outreach. Social outreach takes many forms in each parish. Parishes offer various prayer possibilities – Rosary in common, Lectio Divina sessions, Eucharistic Adoration. Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter see a plethora of ceremonies and events – from Christmas Carol concerts and plays to Penitential services and festive liturgies.

Apart from the events listed here, the Bishop's diary also involves many meetings and events not listed here, not least in relation to his commitments in the Irish Bishops Conference (Council of Catechetics, Irish Inter-Church Meeting, Veritas), St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, and the Irish College, Rome, Mary Immaculate College, St. John's Hospital and regular parish visitations as well as visits to religious communities, movements and associations in the Diocese and private meetings with individuals and groups.

It is clear that most of the activities of busy Parish life are not included here – from the everyday liturgies and prayer ceremonies to the celebrations of baptisms, First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies, marriages and funerals. The "Do this in Memory programme" for families preparing for their child receiving First Holy Communion is popular in many parishes.

January

The year 2024 began on January 1st with the annual Mass for the World Day of Peace. Held in Raheen church with a large number in attendance, Bishop Leahy spoke on the theme of artificial intelligence and peace proposed by Pope Francis in his World Day Message for Peace. Masses were held throughout the Diocese on January 3rd to mark the Feast Day of St. Munchin, on January 15th, Feast Day of St. Ita, Patron of the Diocese, Bishop Leahy celebrated Mass in Killeedy, speaking on St. Ita in the context of the final document from the XVI Synodal Assembly in Rome held the previous October which he had attended on behalf of the Bishops Conference. He noted how the gathering had reflected on women in the life and mission of the Church.

January 8th saw the beginning of the three weeks of the Anois Leadership Programme, a residential student leadership programme offered to TY students by the Diocese of Limerick.

From 8-12 January, Fr. Éamonn Fitzgibbon delivered in Dublin a 'Training for Transformation' session for the Religious Formation for Ministry Programme for members of Consecrated Life (known colloquially as the Loreto House Programme).

On January 21st, parishes marked the Sunday of the Word of God.

Catholic Schools Week took place from January 22-29, with the theme "Walking Together in Faith and Love", taking up three features of synodality as helpful to exploring 'Walking Together in Faith & Love': Communion; Participation; Mission. A favourite moment during this Week is the Grandparents Day.

The Week of Prayer for Christian unity was marked at Masses throughout the Diocese from January 19-25. On Tuesday 23rd January, a Liturgy for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was held in St Nessian's Church Raheen.

On January 24th, the annual yellow ribbon Mass for the Limerick Rotary club in the Augustinian Church, O'Connell Street, and also the Rotary club held a blood pressure clinic at the back of the church.

January also saw the arrival of Frs. Peter Claver Emeka Eze and Andrew Chamberline Umeh, members of The Congregation of the Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy, Nigeria. This is a new male religious community in the Diocese. Both men took up their appointments here: Fr. Peter in Cathedral Pastoral Unit and Fr. Andrew in the St. Nessian Pastoral Unit. Sr. Mary Dolara arrived from the Alma Mercy Sisters, (Michigan) and she was joined in May by Sr. Seán Marie, thereby establishing a new womens religious community in the Diocese.

February

On February 1st, St. Brigid's Day, in the parish church of Athea, a short play on the life of St Brigid, involving mostly teenagers was performed.

The annual Day for Consecrated Life was marked in Limerick by a gathering in Casteltroy Park Hotel on February 3rd. The guest speaker at the conference was Fr. Hugh O'Donnell who guided the almost 100 participants in reflections on the theme of the care of creation

and the inspiring encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. At the Mass as well as a renewal of vows, the Jubiliarians (Platinum, Diamond, Golden) were honoured.

On February 6th an eight-week programme entitled "Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible" began at the Diocesan Centre animated by Pauline Maher, Mossy Hynan and Paudie Hurley.

From February 6th-10th, an international conference was held in Rome on the ongoing formation of priests entitled, "Fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess". Limerick Diocese was represented at the conference by Fr Tony Mullins V.G., Ms Catherine Kelly, Diocesan Secretary/General Manager of the Diocese of Limerick, and Fr Sean Harmon, Chaplain at UHL. The conference was attended by over 800 delegates.

On February 9th, Bishop Leahy began the season of Confirmation ceremonies by celebrating the sacrament in the parishes of Kilmallock, Martinstown/Bulgaden and Bruff. In the following months until June, Bishop Leahy administered the sacrament in approximately 80 celebrations. Also on February 9th, Bishop Leahy visited the Maria Goretti nursing home, Kilmallock.

From Feb 12th-17th, the Dominican Sisters of St Saviour's in Limerick offered Level I Catechesis Training sessions for Adult Formation for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd- a Montessori based method of catechesis for children 3-12 yrs old.

On February 14th, Ash Wednesday, Bishop Leahy issued a Lenten Pastoral Letter on the theme of almsgiving, recognising the many ways we can "give" not just financially.

On February 15th, John Lannon, CEO of Doras, addressed clergy on the topic of "Welcoming Refugees".

As part of a process of renewing the Diocesan Pastoral Council, on Saturday 17th February, a full day of reflection led by Dr Jessie Rogers, was organized in Patrickswell, Limerick to revisit the Terms of Reference, as well as the Vision, Mission, Objectives and role of the Council. It agreed to operate in a Synodal way and to use the "Conversations in the Spirit" methodology for its meetings and visits to pastoral units across the Diocese. Subsequently the Diocesan Pastoral Council met at regional level throughout the diocese with local Pastoral Unit Councils. The agenda was driven by the Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

HUGG, a national suicide bereavement charity helping people bereaved by suicide hosted an information event on February 17th, entitled: 'Finding Hope and Healing After Suicide', in the Absolute Hotel. Also on February 17th, a Desert Day in Lent entitled: "Come back to me with all your heart" was held at the Diocesan Centre.

On 18th, some people from Limerick attended the "Connect 4: what is the point of being Catholic" event at the Student Centre in University College Cork with Msgr James Shea a guest speaker.

On February 22nd, an "ecumenical breakfast" took place in St. Mary's Cathedral. It is an initiative of ministers of various churches coming together a few times a year for a time of sharing and updating.

Bishop Leahy took part in an ecumenical meeting of Bishops held in Augsburg, Germany, from February 27th to March 1st on the theme: "Dare to be One. A call from Jesus to live the future, now".

March

On March 5th a session of the "Theology on Tap" initiative aimed at helping young people reflect on the theme of vocation was held at Fennessy's Pub with Fr. Noel Kirwan sharing on his vocation.

On March 8th, The Ecumenical Project, Rathkeale Together hosted an International Women's Day festival.

On March 13th, Bishop Leahy visited the Caherass Nursing to celebrate Holy mass with the residents.

Two evenings of reflection "The Cross in the 21st Century" - dead metaphor, or a sign of hope?" guided by Mossy Hynan, in preparation for Holy Week, were held in the Diocesan Centre on Thursday 14th and 21st March.

On March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, Bishop Brendan Leahy celebrated Mass at Sarsfield Barracks, Limerick and spoke on the theme of emigration and immigration noting how Ireland cannot be allowed to become a place where "the warm fire of hospitality is being replaced by raging fires of division, distrust and disdain". He was joined in the liturgy by the Church of Ireland Dean, Niall Sloane.

On March 20th a Biodiversity Workshop for Parishes was held at the Diocesan Centre with Sinead McDonnell, Biodiversity Officer with Limerick City and County Council. Twelve parishes attended.

On March 22nd, Bishop Leahy visited the Abbot Close Care Centre in Askeaton.

A Desert Day in preparation for Holy Week entitled "Companions on the Journey" was held on March 23rd in the Diocesan Centre.

On March 27th, the annual Chrism Mass was celebrated in St. John's Cathedral. This wonderful Diocesan occasion is one the Bishop concelebrates with all the Priests in the Diocese in the presence of many lay people who come from various parishes, congregations and orders, associations, movements and groups in the diocese.

During the Chrism Mass the Bishop consecrates the sacred Chrism and blesses the other oils, that will then be used throughout the year in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick. During the Chrism Mass, the Priests renew their priestly promises. In his homily, Bishop Leahy invited those gathered for our Chrism Mass to reflect on three elements: renewing belief in the work of the Holy Spirit; focus on the way of Synodality, in particular, Conversations in the Spirit; the need to support one another.

March 28th- 30th. Easter Triduum ceremonies celebrated throughout the Diocese.

On March 28th, Bishop Leahy visited the Cuan Mhuire Addiction Centre in Bruree to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

An ecumenical Good Friday pilgrimage was held on March 29th moving from St. Mary's Cathedral to St. John's Cathedral. Both Bishop Brendan Leahy and the Church of Ireland Bishop, Michael Burrows were present, as was the St. Mary's Cathedral Dean, Niall Sloan and the St. John's Cathedral Administrator, Canon Gerard Garrett. The pilgrimage featured on the RTE news that evening.

On Easter Sunday morning, Bishop Leahy, having visited the prison some weeks previously, celebrated Easter morning mass in the Prison. At various parishes throughout the Diocese, Dawn Masses were celebrated.

April

On April 4th the GRACE report was published in Mary Immaculate College. Entitled, "The Identity and Ethos in Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Ireland: Exploring the Attitudes and Behaviours of Stakeholders", It involved an international research-based partnership between academics in universities and Catholic education bodies across three different continents, spearheaded by members of Mary Immaculate College.

Divine Mercy Sunday was celebrated on April 7th in Mt St. Alphonus Redemptorist Church.

On April 16th, Bishop Leahy visited the young people of the Home for the Harvest group.

Vocations Sunday (Good Shepherd Sunday) was celebrated on 21st April with parishes praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

A 5-week Bible Study on the Psalms began at St Saviour's Dominican Church on Wednesday April 24th. Also on April 24th, Bishop Leahy celebrated Mass at Mary Immaculate College at which Eucharistic Ministers (40 students and 6 staff) were commissioned.

During the month of April, the Limerick Diocesan Archives moved from the Henry Street Social Services Centre (where the Diocesan Office was previously located) to the new location of the Diocesan Centre at St. Munchin's Corbally.

Throughout April, First Communion ceremonies and Confirmation ceremonies took place in parishes across the Diocese.

May

One Wednesday May 1st, a 120th Anniversary Mass was celebrated by Bishop Brendan Leahy in St. Joseph's Church, O'Connell Avenue. A large number attended with a large number of priests concelebrating.

The national Pilgrimage for Life was held in Knock shrine on May 4th.

On May 6th the pastoral area of Ide Naofa (Abbeyfeale, Athea, Tournafolla, Mountcollins, Templeglantine) hosted an event to welcome new families and reflect on Pope Francis's pastoral letters regarding our responsibility towards caring for our common home. It involved an insightful talk on the local wildlife and how their habitats and populations have been impacted by climate change. Following the talk, participants were invited to join a nature walk along the Greenway. In Tullig wood a reflection was shared by Fr Micheal Long the inspiration behind the Thurles Wetlands, encouraging the many participants in attendance to consider the small yet meaningful actions each of them could take to protect the environment. All of this was followed by light refreshments in Templeglantine parish hall.

On May 7th 2024, a very successful and informative session was held in the Diocesan Centre for Parish Sacristans and Secretaries. Also on May 7th, a moving and beautiful celebration of the John Paul II Awards (faith achievement awards for young people between the age of 16 and 18) took place in St. Munchin's College Chapel.

On May 16th in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College, An Garda Síochána, Tusla and the H.S.E., the Diocese of Limerick organised the second Interagency Safeguarding Conference entitled: "Working Together to Protect Children and Adults who may be Vulnerable". Bishop Brendan Leahy addressed the conference recognising the extensive safeguarding protocols and procedures which are led by many committed people across the country, while also acknowledging the importance of keeping abreast with the very significant developments in the policies and practices of the statutory agencies.

On May 18th a Desert Day "Realising your gifts from the Spirit" to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost was held in the Diocesan Centre.

A Bereavement Support Information Talk took place in Milford Care Centre, Education Department on Tue 28th of May.

The Provincial Retreat of the Salesians was held on the last week of May followed by the Provincial Chapter which finished on the 8th of June.

First Communion ceremonies and Confirmation ceremonies took place in parishes across the Diocese.

June

June 1st. New Canons were appointed to the Diocesan Chapter.

The annual Diocesan retreat for Clergy took place from June 2nd -6th in the Mary Immaculate College, St. Patrick's Campus. The retreat was led by Fr Stuart Chalmers, Spiritual Director of the Scots College, Salamanca, Spain.

From June 5th-13th, the Annual St. Anthony Novena took place in St. John's Cathedral. Bishop Leahy attended the Dicastery for Clergy Plenary in Rome from June 5th-7th and then attended the Irish Bishops Conference Meeting from June 10th-13th.

On the 7th of June, coinciding with the Feast of the Sacred Heart, the renovation of former Jesuit Church on O'Connell Street in Limerick, led by the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priests, was celebrated at a ceremony presided over by Bishop Marco Agostini, Master of Ceremonies to His Holiness Pope Francis. The renovation involved four years of meticulous labour and dedication, drawing on the exceptional skill of the Hodkinson family associated with many restoration and painting of church buildings in Limerick.

On June 9th, Bishop Leahy ordained the Salesian Bro. Mulugeta Deacon in Our Lady Help of Christians Church, Millford.

On June 15th a meeting was held to bring together all four cohorts who have completed the Lay Pastoral Ministry Formation Programme across the Dioceses of Limerick, Killaloe, Cashel and Emly and Kerry. Over 80 people were in attendance and the day was facilitated by Martin Kennedy.

The Day for Life was celebrated on Sunday 16th June 2024 with its message: "The Lord is my Shepherd - Compassion and Hope at the End of Life".

The American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS), took place at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick on 17th-21th June, 2024.

On June 28th a Meeting of Lay Pastoral Ministry Formation Programme Course Co-Ordinators was held in the Springfort Hall Hotel, Mallow in which they discussed the three sections of the Report from 15th June.

The annual Lourdes Diocesan pilgrimage took place from the 20th-25th June. To the joy of all, 2024 saw the return of Assisted Pilgrims on the pilgrimage.

From 27th June to July 1st the 'Daring to Hope', social history project, sharing through a photographic exhibition, the work of Irish Religious Sisters in Ireland and overseas from 1923-2023, was on display in St. Augustine's church, on O'Connell Street.

July

On July 10th, a meeting was held with participants and co-ordinators of the Lay Pastoral Ministry Formation Programme to agree a report and steps to be taken to further improve the programme.

On July 13th, the Knock Diocesan pilgrimage took place with some 300 in attendance. The Oblate Family were also on pilgrimage that day. In his homily, Bishop Leahy spoke about three ways lay people can look to Mary in living out their vocation given to them in baptism.

Limerick hosted a National Day of Commemoration Ceremony on Sunday, 14th of July to honour all Irishmen and Irishwomen who died in past wars. Representatives of churches and religious communities were present. Bishop John Fleming represented the Catholic Church.

From July 13th to 27th, young adults took part in the Muintearas Íosa experience offered by the Diocese of Limerick in Brú Na Gráige house in West Kerry. It gave young people a chance to experience community, friendship, faith and fun as well as learning a bit more about themselves, their culture and heritage.

The World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly was celebrated on Sunday 28th of July.

On July 28th, people from Limerick joined the Reek Sunday national pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick while others joined the National Grandparents pilgrimage in Knock.

The Pioneer Pilgrimage to Knock took place on Sunday 21 July.

August

On August 16th, Bishop Leahy formally opened the Classics Association of Ireland Summer School held in Mary Immaculate College.

The annual national Syro-Malabar retreat took place from August 16th to 18th in the Patrickswell Racecourse. Over 2,000 people, including children, from various counties in

Ireland participated with the renowned retreat preacher from India, Rev. Fr. Binoy Karimaruthumkal PDM (Preachers of Divine Mercy). Bishop Leahy attended a morning session.

September

September 1st to October 4th marks the period when the season of creation is celebrated throughout the Diocese with events and liturgical celebrations highlighted the theme of care of the planet in the light of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

An Ecumenical Harvest Thanksgiving Service was held in the Augustinian Abbey Ruins in Rathkeale on Saturday 7th September with the participation of Bishops Brendan Leahy and Michael Burrows as well as Fr Derek Leonard, Rev Jackie McNair and George (McNeill). This was preceded by a Picnic Day for some 90 children and their families.

On September 8th, the 200th anniversary celebration of Dromcollogher Church was marked by a Mass concelebrated by Bishop Brendan Leahy and local priests, followed by refreshments in the local hall.

On September 9th, a new initiative began in St. John's Cathedral with a Mass for first years in Second-level schools. Many schools were represented.

On September 10th, 28 people from the Pastoral Unit of Rathkeale, Knockaderry/Cloncagh and Ballingarry/ Granagh set off to walk the Camino of St James for 5 days in Spain, covering over 110km.

September 11th and 12th saw some 10.000 people attend the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Childers Road for the visit of the relics of St. Bernadette.

On the lovely sunny day of September 15th, Tim Collins was ordained to the Diaconate by Bishop Brendan Leahy in St John the Baptist Church, Croagh, Co. Limerick.

On September 17th, Fr. Éamonn Fitzgibbon delivered a one-day workshop on Synodality with Seminary Students in St Patrick's College Maynooth with Julieann Moran, General Secretary of the Irish Synodal Pathway. Also on that day, Catechetical Talks for Adults and Youth by lay catechists of the Neo-Catechumenate began in the John Paul II Oratory in the Crescent Shopping Centre.

On September 21st, a Diocesan Assembly was held in the Castletroy Park Hotel. It was an opportunity to review activities and plan for the pastoral year ahead. Many significant and interesting experiences from parishes across the Diocese were shared.

The Annual Men's retreat hosted by the Order of the Knights of Saint Columbanus on the theme "Be still and Know I am God: Trying to take God seriously in our busy and complicated lives" and animated by Fr. Joe Hayes SJ, took place at the Diocesan Centre on September 28th.

The World Day of Migrants and Refugees was celebrated on Sunday, September 29, 2024.

October

On October 2nd, an in-service day was offered to teachers by the Diocesan advisors. Also on October 2nd, Athea parish began meeting on Wednesdays for Bible Study on the Upcoming Sunday Readings.

On 3rd October, the Northstar Family Support project held a special remembrance service in the Augustinian church.

The annual blessing of pets took place on Animal Day on October 4th at the allotments in Ballynanty.

On October 7th, Alpha course began in Foynes Centre.

A reflection on an initiative entitled "Reaching out to the 'Spiritual but not Religious'" took place in the Diocesan Centre on October 8th.

Representing the Irish Bishops Conference, Bishop Leahy participated in the second session of the XVI Synodal Assembly in Rome from October 2-27.

On October 13th, the Bishops of Ireland published a Pastoral Letter and a short video on welcoming migrants to Ireland. Also on that date, a bus of pilgrims left from St Saviour's Dominican Church on pilgrimage to Knock to mark the 800th Jubilee of the foundation of the Dominicans.

The Funeral of Bishop Donal Murray.

Principal celebrant at the Funeral Mass on 17th October was Bishop Brendan Leahy who returned from the Synod in Rome for the funeral liturgies. Concelebrants included Cardinal Sean Brady, Archbishops Dermot Farrell (Dublin), Kieran O'Reilly (Cashel & Emyl), Francis Duffy (Tuam), Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, Emeritus Archbishop of Dublin, Bishops William Crean (Cloyne), Fintan Gavin (Cork & Ross), Fintan Monaghan (Killaloe), Bishop Emeritus Willie Walsh (Killaloe) Alphonsus Cullinan (Waterford & Lismore), Paul Connell (Ardagh & Clonmacnois), Paul Dempsey (Auxiliary Bishop Dublin), Kevin Doran (Elphin), Lawrence Duffy (Clogher), Denis Nulty (Kildare & Leighlin), Monsignor Patrick Saw Zay Hay, (Charge d'Affairs Papal Nunciature).

Other concelebrants included the Vicars General of Limerick Diocese Canon Anthony Mullins and Fr Éamonn Fitzgibbon, Fr Paul Finnerty (Diocesan Secretary with Bishop Murray and now Rector of the Pontifical Irish College in Rome) and Canon Gerard Garrett, Administrator of St John's Cathedral. Master of Ceremonies was Fr Séamus Madigan.

An Anam Cara Bereavement Information Evening took place on the evening of 17th hosted by The Milford Care Centre.

Mission Sunday was celebrated throughout the Diocese on October 20th, remembering the many Irish missionaries still contributing so much in many parts of the world.

On October 24th, Donncha Mac Gabhann presented a "guided tour" of the Book of Kells in St. Mary's Church.

Some possible candidates for priesthood from Limerick attended an open-day "exploring Priesthood" in St. Flannan's College, Ennis.

The Care of the Earth group of Our Lady Help of Christians parish offered an Autumn Reflection on October 27th at the Infinite Woodland Pathway, Little Company of Mary.

November

Masses of remembrance were celebrated in parishes across the Diocese.

On November 2nd, the monthly Desert Day was held in the Diocesan Centre on the theme: "Remember your loved ones who are with God".

50 people attended the Monaleen Parish Retreat Day at Glenstal Abbey on Saturday 2nd November 2024. The theme was the Samaritan Woman at the Well.

On November 3rd a Mass was held in the Holy Rosary Church for parents and families who experienced the death of their baby or pregnancy loss at any stage.

The St. Martin Triduum was held at St. Saviour's Parish on 1-3 November with Join Fr. Philip Neri Reese, O.P as the preacher.

On November 10th a Scoil Pól Opening Ceremony and Celebratory Mass was celebrated in Kilfinane parish church.

On November 12-13, 2024, in his capacity as Co-Chair of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting, Bishop Leahy co-chaired the 34th plenary gathering of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting at the Dromantine Conference Centre in Newry. The theme, 'Finding the Face of God in One Another', focused on the various ways society in Ireland is fracturing today, with discussions centred on responding to the human dignity in every person.

On November 14th, Bishop Leahy, in his capacity as head of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences interreligious dialogue section co-chaired an on-line meeting Organized by Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue between Hindus and Christians in Europe in collaboration with the Hindu Forum of Europe.

On 15th November a Ukranian Benefit concert featuring Ukranian artists was held in the Augustinian Church, O'Connell Street.

From November 19-21, Bishop Leahy attended the Dicastery for Catholic Education and Culture Plenary meeting in Rome.

November 21, a workshop "Discover your natural breathing" was held in the Diocesan Centre.

As co-chair, representing the Dicastery for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Bishop Leahy attended the Catholic Church - Salvation Army Conversation in London from November 22-25.

From November 25-27 the Relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis were welcomed in Newcastle West church and by Bishop Leahy in St. John's Cathedral.

A 3-day in-service gathering of clergy of the Diocese took place in Knock from 27th to 29th November. It focused on the Facilitative Leadership programme organized by the Irish

Synodal Pathway and was delivered by Julieann Moran, Jim Deeds and Dr Michael Conway.

On November 30th a "Peace morning" was held at St. Augustine's, O'Connell Street, where members of the congregation gave out candles on the street and asked people to take them home and light them and pray for peace in Ukraine.

December

Various Advent and Christmas events took place throughout parishes in the Diocese.

Bishop Leahy issued an Advent Pastoral Letter and booklet entitled "Reflections on Giving".

On December 1st, in Rathkeale, approximately 40 children, together with their parents, took part in the blessing of the town crib.

On December 2nd the first of three sessions (also 9th and 16th) of an Advent *Lectio Divina* was facilitated by the Alma Mercy sisters.

On December 7th, the Children's Grief Centre celebrated its 15th anniversary. Founded in 2009 by Mercy Sister Helen Culhane, the Centre has supported children between the ages of 4 and 18 who have experienced loss due to death, separation, or divorce. Since September 2023 it has been in its new building at the John Henry Newman Campus at Mary Immaculate College.

From the 7th to the 12th of December Bishop Leahy undertook a Cathedral Unit Pastoral Visitation visiting the churches and schools of the parishes of St. John's, St. Patrick's/Brigid's, Monaleen and Our Lady Help of Christians.

December 12th, St. Munchin's parish hosted a Concert "An Irish Christmas" with guest Moya Brennan with special guest Emma Langford and Thomand Primary School Choir.

A Lessons and Carols service was held at St. Saviour's Dominican Church on Friday 13th December.

On December 18th and 19th, Bishop Leahy was on a pastoral visit to the parish of St Munchin's/St Lelia's.

On December 22nd, Bishop Leahy participated in the Civic Carol Service held in St. Mary's Church of Ireland Cathedral. Bishop Leahy was invited to proclaim the Gospel reading from St. John.

On December 24th, following a tragic traffic accident which claimed the life of a young local woman, Rathkeale Together organised a public vigil to pay tribute to the victim.

On December 25th, Having visited a few days previously, Bishop Leahy celebrated Mass in Limerick Prison. Bishop Leahy also visited staff and patients in St. John's Hospital.

Throughout December people of the Diocese responded generously to the Redemptorist Christmas Hamper Appeal, the Vincent de Paul collections and supported many other worthy causes.

COMMUNITY AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Community and Sense of Belonging was the most popular theme that emerged in the journey leading up to the 2016 Limerick Synod. Topics included in this theme are: the importance of building community, the need for parishes to be inclusive and inviting, the need for social gatherings, the importance of cultivating a caring ethos in the community as well as the need to encourage and develop volunteerism to sustain the community. Some of the Proposals that emerged were: engage with the marginalised; reach out to those hurt by the Church, use social media more, Compassionate Communities - Café Conversations, care for the environment, attentiveness to those with disabilities, inter-faith dialogue, establish a network of small Christian communities, lay parish visitation teams, establish a parish register, offer hospitality after Mass.



Welcoming Migrants

Pope Francis writes about “Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees”. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of people from other countries attending liturgies. However, the most significant place of welcome and integration has to be the network of Catholic and Catholic-linked schools, primary and secondary, that have done wonderful work in making migrants feel welcome and at home. Great credit goes to the staff and students. Some schools have particularly high numbers of migrants.

Lourdes Pilgrimage

After a few years of not being able to gather in Lourdes for a full Diocesan Pilgrimage, it was with a sense of anticipation and gratitude that we returned on June 20th, 2024. Particularly for the assisted pilgrims Thursday 20th June was a day they eagerly awaited. Returning to Lourdes with a full pilgrimage was a new experience for a few volunteers who were taking up key positions for the first time.

Bearing that in mind it was agreed to resume the pilgrimage with smaller numbers than we were familiar with in the past, 21 Assisted Pilgrims were afforded the opportunity to travel to Lourdes. Having Assisted Pilgrims as part of the Diocesan Pilgrimage is the catalyst for inviting volunteers to accompany them and so enable pilgrims who need assistance to experience the joy and blessings of visiting the Grotto at Lourdes.

To see pilgrims needing assistance gathering in Shannon as they waited to check-in was an inspiring image of the essence of what Lourdes is about. On that morning pilgrims needing assistance were accompanied by nurses, broncardier, handmaidens, doctors and young people ensuring that they were safe and comfortable.

Bishop Leahy as he greeted the assisted pilgrims offered them his welcome and support. It has been commented that the Limerick Diocesan Pilgrimage “is Limerick Diocese at its best”. The picture of the pilgrims that morning in Shannon emphasised the validity of that observation. The five days in Lourdes began with Bishop Leahy celebrating the opening Mass at the Grotto. In his homily he encouraged us by quoting Taylor Swift to “shake off” our worries and anxieties and entrust ourselves to the care and protection of Our Mother Mary.

As pilgrims participating in the various ceremonies associated with Lourdes, the Blessed Sacrament and Torchlight Processions, the International Mass in the underground Basilica really spoke to us of being part of a universal church. Our Diocesan celebrations of the Sacraments of Anointing and Reconciliation and partaking in the Water Gesture was humbling, emotional and uplifting for so many of the pilgrims.

Traditionally the Youth Pilgrimage Group organise and lead the celebration of the closing ceremony, which they did again this year.

It was a lovely and thought-provoking ceremony leaving those who were present with much to reflect on. The presence of Youth is integral to the success of the Diocesan Pilgrimage.

They bring to the Pilgrimage experience the joy, laughter, enthusiasm and vibrancy that is synonymous with young people.

A lovely feature of this years Pilgrimage was the opportunity to join with and share some resources with our neighbouring Diocese of Killaloe.

Limerick Social Service Council

Founded by the late Bishop Henry Murphy in 1966, the service continues to adapt to meet current and emerging needs throughout Limerick. A leading voluntary service, LSSC delivers its services at the LSSC Centre in Henry Street, the Child and Family Centre in the Southside Education Campus on Galvone Road Galvone Road and at different locations throughout Limerick City and County. The five elements of service in 2024 were: Child and Family Service, Early Years Services (Crèche and Pre-school), Counselling and Psychotherapy Service, Traveller Health Programme and Services for Older People. Rooms and facilities at the LSSC Centre in Henry Street were offered to other agencies and organisations to enable them to serve clients within the community. Also during 2024, extensive consultation took place with internal and external stakeholders as part of the development of the Organisations strategic plan for the period 2025–2029. Alongside this, a very useful community needs assessment was conducted to gain a nuanced understanding of the LSSC target areas in terms of demographics and socio-economic factors. It also identified needs through data collection in order to pinpoint specific needs and concerns within the LSSC target areas to determine gaps and barriers meeting those needs. This material will not only serve the LSSC community, but indeed the Diocesan and other communities in the coming years.

Limerick Youth Service

Founded in 1973 and under the patronage of the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland Bishops of Limerick, the Organisation engaged with over 4,500 young people (10–25 years) in 2024. Programmes and initiatives included the provision and facilitation of a diverse range of youth work, education, vocational training, employability skills development and volunteering opportunities including a number of International Youth Exchange programmes. In keeping with the increasing numbers of migrants, Asylum seekers and international cultures in Limerick, dedicated Youth work and ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), gave young people a safe and welcome space to engage with peers and share their experiences of living in Ireland as they learn about our cultures, language and so much more.

Doras

An independent, not-for profit human rights organisation working to promote and protect the rights of refugees and migrants, Doras was founded in 2000 with the help of of the Mercy Congregation and Diocesan priests and operates out of a small space in O'Connell Street in Limerick City. The CEO John Lannon, together with a team of staff and volunteers, advocate for and offer support, training and education to migrants, international applicants and local

communities. In 2024 John Lannon spoke to clergy of Limerick Diocese on issues relating to migration. He proposed the Community Sponsorship programme as suitable for parishes. The programme aims to support a family to move to a home, access language and other education programmes, register their children in local schools, source appropriate training/work themselves and integrate in their new community.

St Vincent de Paul

The 2024 highlight was moving towards completion of the refurbishment of new adjacent premises at the former Mechanics Institute to house the Drop-in Centre, currently operating in overcrowded space. A core element of the Limerick Service is The Drop-In Centre comprising a café-style service that supports people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and/or food poverty. It opens Monday to Friday from 10am-12.30 pm and 1.00 pm-4pm Saturday opening is from 11am-1pm A Foodbank operates on Wednesdays from 9:30am-12 noon.

Diocesan Nurse

The Diocese of Limerick has been blessed in having a Diocesan Nurse working with priests since 2009. The role is to get to know each of the priests of the Diocese and offer support in their healthcare. The Diocese has an agreement with Carebright that they employ and supervise the Nurse and the Diocese funds the post. Over the years, priests have benefitted from this confidential and supportive service that has helped many in a range of practical ways.

Consecrated life

There are 24 congregations in the diocese of Limerick, 15 female and 9 male.

The religious men and women contribute in a very real way to the life and mission of the diocese. Their lives of prayer and community are the bedrock of their lives and is the greatest witness of who they are.

They continue to serve in various capacities throughout the diocese, such as parish ministry, ongoing faith formation, chaplaincy in schools and colleges, promoting care of the earth, supporting prisoners and their families, supporting bereaved children and families, supporting people in addiction, teaching English to immigrants, diocesan advisors in primary and secondary schools, offering retreat opportunities and spiritual guidance. Some also serve on boards of management in schools, colleges, social services and medical facilities, thus aiming to uphold Catholic values. Many also, through living in local communities provide significant support to vulnerable families throughout the diocese. Two congregations are administrators of parishes. Two other congregations have churches where they offer Eucharist and opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation.

Two new congregations have been welcomed into the diocese over the last eighteen months, two Sisters of Mercy from Alma, Michigan and two priests from Nigeria, Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy. The priests from Nigeria serve in two parishes. One of the Alma Sisters works in addiction services and the other is the Diocesan Advisor for Secondary schools.

The MidWest Interfaith Network

The MidWest Interfaith Network consists of a community of volunteers from diverse faith traditions (Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh) who come together to work for solidarity and mutual understanding among members of our great faith traditions. They collaborate on diverse projects that focus on building compassionate, welcoming, inclusive communities. They engage in respectful dialogue around faith and life and we place an emphasis on listening to each other, learning from each other and witnessing to our faiths through collaborative action. They have a history of offering inter-religious dialogue cafés for students and teachers in primary and post-primary schools in the Limerick Diocese. On 24 September 2024 some of their members (Bahá'í, Catholic, Muslim), jointly presented their work on inter-religious dialogue at a National Conference on Inter-religious dialogue at the Mansion House, Dublin. On December 13th 2024 they hosted a one-day seminar on inter-religious dialogue and the European InterMu-Se Project. The seminar presenter was Adrian Cristea of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum.

Redemptorist Christmas Hamper Appeal and the Perpetual Help Fund

As in other years, so also in 2024 a key action on the part of the Redemptorists was their outreach to the needy of the city and beyond through the Redemptorist Christmas Hamper Appeal and the Perpetual Help Fund, which supports individuals and groups in need of financial assistance. The generosity of so many people and organisations continued to amaze us. More than €300,000 was donated towards the Hamper Appeal alone, while our Christmas Crib Appeal raised more than €15,000 for the Lourdes Irish Pilgrimage Trust.

Rathkeale Together – An Ecumenical Initiative

The Group is a joint venture between the Methodist, Church of Ireland, and the Roman Catholic Churches ('the Churches'), West Limerick Resources, and the Rathkeale community. The aims and objectives of the Group are to help to facilitate reconciliation and justice - through the organisation and provision of events, programmes, and other initiatives and activities - within and between the Traveller and Settled Communities of Rathkeale. During 2024, Rathkeale Together continued to operate from rented facilities in the Catholic Parish Hall. The Hall proved very popular as a place where locals could 'drop in' for coffee and a chat. An encouraging feature of the Rathkeale Together activity in 2024 was the continuing involvement of local individuals in organising and leading the activities of the various groups in which they are involved. This is particularly true of the Women's Group, the Bereavement Support Group and the Men's Group. The Women's and Men's Groups engaged in a number of joint activities during the year, including visits to the Dáil and the National Gallery, Foynes Flying Boat Museum, Bunratty Castle, Killarney, and the local museum at Glin.

The Group held its 2nd annual seminar on 15 October 2024 following its very successful inaugural seminar in 2023. The event was attended by approximately 120 people (including the recently elected Mayor of Limerick), representing a wide range of interests, including national and local government, the churches, local schools, the Rathkeale community, and the various agencies with whom the Group has worked in the recent past.

Travellers

In 2024, Fr. John Walsh continued his ministry to members of the Travelling Community through his Masses with emphasis on Padre Pio and Divine Mercy. Many attend. The visitation of the various sites by Fr. Pat Hogan continued especially in times of sickness. Mr. Martin Casey, from Toppins Field Roxboro, won the Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2024 Volunteers in Sports awards, for his impact as a leader in Community engagement through sport.

Communications

2024 was a positive and affirming year on our external communications front as we continued our traditional proactive media approach but also tried and succeeded with a number of new initiatives that enhanced our engagement, specifically across social media.

We continued, as always, to capture the key moments in the liturgical calendar – St Patrick’s Day, Lent, Easter, Advent – and secured strong media coverage from these.

We were proactive also in relation to Lay Leadership, securing significant coverage on this key matter, a narrative well received in media and a topic we will continue to engage on this coming year.

We also stepped into social and civic conversations, with proactive press releases on major events, such as the Mayoral Election, The Great Limerick Run.

We communicated around the Synod in Rome, Bishop Leahy’s attendance at it and on the presentation of the relics of St. Bernadette and Blessed Carlo Acutis, who will be canonised a saint this year – the ‘patron saint of the internet’.

Following Blessed Carlos’ inspiration, we dipped our toe during 2024 a little bit more in the ‘digital world’ as we dialled up our social media presence with more content than heretofore. This returned some very positive signals as engagement around specific videos we created with Bishop Leahy to celebrate Lent and Christmas generated views on Facebook of 110,000 between them.

While social media most definitely carries significant societal challenge, particularly to younger demographics, our experience with these videos last year shows that the flip side of social media is that it offers enormous potential to carry our ‘good news’. These videos both had higher production values and related costs, but the investment in them most definitely

bore fruit and illustrates the potential from leaning more into video to communicate our message around key moments and initiatives across social media. Better again, as happened in 2024, when local media also carried these videos on their websites and social media accounts. We also used video to welcome in the New Year and this great Jubilee Year of Hope.

On a sadder note, 2024 was also a year when our communications team was called into action to respond to the passing of much-loved diocesan figures, such as Fr Frank O'Connor and, of course, Bishop Donal Murray. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anam dílis. As we turned the year, however, we are encouraged about the openness of media, particularly local media, to receiving our story, their willingness to carry it to their readers and, indeed, the potential of social media as a medium for us to communicate across. 2025 will, no doubt, be another year of opportunity and challenge, both of which we can meet with the help of creative and engaging communications.

Limerick Prison Chaplaincy

Two lay chaplains currently work in Limerick prison. They are a crucial supporting role in prison life. Considered an essential service as they work as part of the multidisciplinary team in a prison, addressing the physical, social and spiritual needs of all prisoners and staff in a holistic way. As chaplains they act as advocates. They walk with and assist prisoners, spiritually, emotionally with the daily life within prison walls.

Offering a comforting and supportive presence to staff, prisoners and their family members when they face many personal challenges and also at particular times of crisis such as illness and bereavements. The Chaplaincy are a listening ear, and a presence when things are tough, or if one feels lonely, they can offer a comforting word, or a prayer.

"Our Ministry is a privilege, working with those who feel cut off in so many ways. We encourage and promote a positive mentality by way of reassuring and appraising, by empowering and being visible. It is this visibility on the landings that is a key element of our duties".

Every Sunday prisoners can attend Mass celebrated by various priests from the Diocese of Limerick and they take an active role by helping with the readings, prayers and music.

"We distribute rosary beads, religious bracelets, medals, prayer books to those who wish to avail of them. We provide an outreach to other faiths and those of no faith, offering support and on occasion facilitating other external religious of all faiths, who request to visit the prison".

When Pope Francis opened the Holy Door for the Jubilee of Hope in an Italian prison, he suggested that the prisoners think of hope as an anchor that is fixed on the ground and that they try to hold tight to the rope that is attached to it, even if it sometimes hurts their hands. "Hold onto the rope, hold onto the anchor," Pope Francis said. "Never let go".

"As chaplains, we support prisoners in trying to hold on to the rope and in offering them hope, that they may see a new way ahead".

Army Chaplaincy

The chaplain in the Sarsfield Barracks in Limerick is Fr. Piotr Delimat CF. His ministry often involves overseas mission though not in 2024. In his ministry, he endeavours to link with all ranks within the army and liaise with all soldiers to build bridges and encourage cohesion. During 2024 he focused on supporting the recruits during their time in Sarsfield Barracks as they are new to the environment and are undergoing intense training, sometimes far from home.

As well as offering Sunday Mass Fr. Piotr offers opportunities for meditation, meetings in groups and one-to-one session. Among the sacramental highlights of the year is the celebration of faith and culture on St Patrick's Day when the Bishop celebrates mass with many civic dignitaries and representatives of various spheres of Limerick society in attendance. Other regular celebrations of sacraments are part of the chaplain's ministry. Month's Mind Masses are often offered for soldiers and their relatives allowing personnel to gather in prayer and solidarity. Outreach at times of funerals and bereavements is also important.

The No Interest Loan Scheme

The No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) was launched in Limerick by the Good Shepherd Sisters in 2018. Since then, loans of up to 1,000 euros have been provided to hundreds of individuals and families in Limerick, Cork and Dublin, who have no access to other safe or affordable credit.

Loans are provided for essential goods or services including white goods, course fees, car repairs or in some circumstances rent arrears. The impacts of the programme have been far reaching preventing people from entering homelessness to assisting them to access education and training and find secure employment

Pastoral Care Department of University Hospital Limerick

The Pastoral Care Department of University Hospital Limerick provide 24hr spiritual support to patients, and their families and staff. The Chaplains provides spiritual support to the sick, to those who are at the end of life, while also providing support to their families and to the staff caring for them. At the core of the service is the chaplains daily visitation to the wards, and the provision of the sacrament of the sick, confession and the distribution of Holy Communion to those who would like to receive. The provision of pastoral care, in terms of sitting and providing a listening ear, is also at the core of the service. To be available to those who need us. As the hospital continues to expand and grow it highlights the importance of chaplains being visible throughout the hospital, visiting the wards, and joining the staff in the hospital canteen and keeping in touch.

Initiatives taken during 2024

- Daily Adoration in the hospital Chapel. Monday to Friday 12pm to 1pm. Overseen by staff members Sonia and Alice.
- Short Novena prayers to St Anthony every Tuesday -Novena prayers to the Sacred Heart on Fridays. Novena prayers to St Francis Xavier (March 4th to 12th)
- The Thought for the Day displayed in the hospital Chapel .Comprising of scripture -prayers and Irish proverbs.(Supported by staff members Marion, Ann and Mary)

- The Rosary been recited before mass during the month of October.
- The Giving Tree in December 2024. In conjunction with Bernardo’s children’s charity .Over 140 presents were received. (Supported by staff members Marion, Cyrene and their colleague Nicole.
- The prayer intention box at the back of the church for those who want to leave intentions to be remembered at mass.
- The blessing of hands of newly graduated nurses during a Badge presentation ceremony in the Hospital.
- The presence of music /singing at mass from time to time ,during the weekdays and also on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
- We in the Pastoral Care Department acknowledge the tremendous support we receive from the staff in the hospital and also the tremendous work by the Chaplains before us, who are often fondly remembered and spoken of by the staff in the hospital.

Belonging Together on Camino!

In order to foster a greater bonding between the three parishes of the Pastoral Unit Rathkeale, Knockaderry/Cloncagh and Ballingarry/ Granagh, 28 people from those parishes walked the Camino of St James for 5 days together in Spain, covering over 110km. Over the year, in preparation for the Camino, the Pilgrim group met for preparation meetings and prayer. As a way of including more people from our Unit, the pilgrims brought petitions from each parish which people took it in turn to carry along the Camino. They celebrated mass and prayers together each day including a Mass at the tomb of St James in Santiago de Compostela.

Connecting in Christ – Ecumenical Breakfasts

Alongside the various formal and public engagements during the year when they meet, Ministers of various churches in the city have begun meeting four times a year for breakfast so as to grow together in a more informal fellowship of faith and friendship. Entitled “Connecting in Christ”, the morning gatherings were hosted during 2024 in St. Mary’s Cathedral, the Central Building, O’Connell Street, The Abundant Life, Centre, Henry Street, and Quaker House, Ballinacurra.

Safeguarding

Vetting

The total number of completed Vetting Applications for 2024:	1228
The number of Completed Vetting Applications for Schools:	814
The number of Completed Vetting Applications for Parishes:	414
School Chairpersons, Clergy, Youth Ministry, Lourdes, Affiliate Religious Organisations:	

Since the introduction of Foreign Police Clearance in June 2024 clearance has been requested in respect of 6 vetting applications (All Affiliate Organisations)

Clergy Re-Vetting was completed in 2024 and is valid for a period of 3 years.

Safeguarding Training

Safeguarding training was delivered in 2024 as follows:

One Day Safeguarding Session	42
Refresher Session	66
Training for Young Leaders	24
Adult Safeguarding Session	108
Adult Safeguarding Lourdes Pilgrimage	60
Safeguarding Information Session Sacristans	80

Three new trainers attended the National Board Train the Trainer and this brings the total number of trainers to six.

Interagency Safeguarding Conference

In May 2024 the Diocesan Safeguarding Service in collaboration with Mary Immaculate College, An Garda Síochána, Tusla and the H.S.E. organised the second Interagency Safeguarding Conference entitled "Working Together to Protect Children and Adults who may be Vulnerable". Sixty attendees from relevant agencies, members of religious communities and lay people attended.

Safeguarding Database

An integrated vetting and training database has been developed

Limerick Diocesan Archives

Ongoing Work Diocesan Archive continues to facilitate the work of researchers and genealogical requests where possible, while supporting the work of the Offices and Committees of Limerick Diocese including, Administration/Curia, Property and Safeguarding.

Relocation to Limerick Diocesan Centre, St Muchin's, Corbally - 2024 marked a new beginning for Limerick Diocesan Archives following the relocation of collections to the Diocesan Centre in April. The former Priests' Refectory, St Munchin's College - renovated to archival standard - was repurposed to house the records, allowing for the co-location of the archives with other diocesan services. As the storage area has been insulated almost to passive house standard - which obviates the need for constant electric climate control - significant savings of between €11-12,000 per annum have resulted.

Records Management - Sr Seán Marie Striby RSM has been engaged in the archives part time since June 2024, reorganising archival collections and updating 'box lists' following the relocation to St Munchin's. Sr Seán Marie is assisting with management of records deposited with LDA following the transfer of a Catholic Primary School to another patron body.

Archival volunteers - Archival volunteers are working on aspects of the collection of Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer (1842-1917). Sr Imelda Ryan is working on the papers of Dean John S. Flanagan, Adare, Monsignor Michael O'Riordan, Irish College Rome and others, while Winnie Davern is completing an introduction to the Anne O'Dwyer correspondence for publication, with accompanying catalogue.

PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

Family was the single highest ranking individual topic in the listening and discernment process during the 2016 Limerick Synodal process. Topics identified under this theme include: the role of parents and guardians in passing on the faith; caring for children; caring for the elderly or the sick; family relationships, issues around alienation from the church, the need to provide help and support of children of separated and divorced families and equality for gay people. Some of the proposals that emerged were: establish a parent support network, support those living with disability, volunteer led community bereavement support, develop a support programme for parents to provide family catechesis, foster the family Mass, provide support to the Children's Grief Project.



Schools helping families in educating children

Catholic schools welcome children from families of all backgrounds and religious beliefs. In fostering a sense of community and providing faith formation for students, Catholic schools help children grow in the values of respect, generosity, hard work, compassion, honesty, love of God and neighbour. They are places of formation that assist families in their mission. It is clear that the preparation for the celebration of Holy Communion for the first time and for Confirmation become privileged occasions for the family to grow together in a sense of identity and belonging, forged by the great heritage of Catholic faith that has been handed down over generations.

Accord Limerick and Accord Limerick West

Accord Limerick and Accord Limerick West aim to provide people with access to information and support if they are: Looking for help with marriage and relationship difficulties; Preparing for marriage; Seeking to enhance their relationship; Learning more about marriage and family issues. Accord provides a range of support services. Counselling Appointments are arranged for daytime or evening to suit client needs. Accord also offers a range of Relationship and Sexuality Education Programmes to a variety of schools. The Accord Limerick is based in the Limerick Social Services Centre in Henry Street. Tel: 061 343000 and e-mail: limerick@accord. The Accord Limerick West is based in the Parish Centre, Newcastle West. Tel: 069 61000. Email: accordnewcastlewest@eircom.net.

Children's Grief Centre

Children's Grief is a centre that caters for children (4-18 years) and young people affected by loss through bereavement, separation or divorce. Following the opening of a wonderful new child-friendly Centre in Autumn 2023, Sr Helen Culhane, the founding CEO moved to pastures new. The new CEO Mairead O'Keeffe joined the Centre in 2024. Many children availed of the Centre's work where they safely express their feelings with people they trust and like.

LGBTQI+

Following our own Diocesan Synod (2016) and the Universal Synod, a key theme that emerged has been that of Inclusion/Exclusion. In particular LGBTQI+ people were mentioned as those with whom we needed to engage in a more deliberate and meaningful level. A small working group was established by the Diocese of Limerick and this group created links with the diocese of Killaloe. Seven meetings were organised to which LGBTQI+ people were invited, along with family members and allies. We invited Jessie Rogers to speak on what Sacred scripture might have to say on this issue; we worked through James Martin's text 'Building a Bridge' over a number of meetings; we invited a psychotherapist who works in this area to identify some of the issues he encounters and we are now planning a liturgical event.

Mission in Peru and Family

The Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle is a group of Diocesan Priests serving in Latin America. Fr. David Costello is a Limerick Diocesan Priest who has been with them nearly twenty years and is currently the President of the Missionary Society. Currently, there are 10 priests serving in 4 different dioceses in Peru. Each of the parishes they serve in are located in urban shanty towns (Lima) and in the case of one of them, a rural village. In each of our parishes they are involved in the important work of Evangelisation and Social Outreach.

The Society of St. James can be credited with introducing 'Catequesis Familiar' to Peru, a family-based catechetical programme aimed at evangelising the whole family, and not just the children preparing for the Sacraments.

Fr. David began a new mission site back in 2006. He became the founding Pastor of the Parish of 'El Resucitado', in the Diocese of Chosica, in 2007 (Bishop Murray was present for the Inauguration Mass). It was a new area and the priests started there with zero...nowhere to live, nowhere to celebrate Mass and the Sacraments. Today there are 15 communities with Mass and the Sacraments being celebrated each week. On average there are 450 young people enrolled in the Catequesis Programme each year. Fr. David also began a feeding programme for school going children back in 2007, thanks to the help of so many different people who generously helped secure funds for this project.

YOUNG PEOPLE

The engagement and empowerment of young people was of concern across all groups in the listening process leading up to the 2016 Limerick Synodal process. The following topics were identified under the theme of young people: Young people's search for God but disenfranchisement in the church, the use of accessible language for young people, young people's competing interests, the need to develop youth ministry, the need for youth clubs, the need for youth friendly Masses. Many proposals emerged such as: to use music as a means of engaging young people, to develop a programme of pilgrimages, local, national and international, to set up a Youth Café, to provide more retreat possibilities, to introduce the John Paul II Awards, raise awareness of mental health issues, provide a programme of on-going faith formation for altar servers, establish a Youth Forum, expand on existing Diocesan Youth Ministry events and activities, to introduce Pastoral Area Youth Ministry Workers to each Pastoral Area, to develop a youth ministry training programme, child safeguarding, to more fully embrace the world of media and technology.



Catholic Education

Catholic schools and those linked to the Catholic Church are key to the accompaniment and formation of young people in important ways in their intellectual, physical, emotional and social development as well as attending to their spiritual needs and moral formation. They provide an education of heart and mind and soul, linking faith and life. They deepen the child/student's deeper relationship with Jesus as their friend who is always with them and who helps them throughout their life. As well as regular religious education, schools provide moments of prayer and rituals, singing and retreats, visits to churches and shrines, social outreach projects and attention to social friendship and care of the planet.

Youth Ministry

Limerick Diocesan Youth Ministry had a very vibrant and active 2024, adhering to the ethos of Muintearas Íosa and operating under the flames of Fáilte, Foghlaim agus Guí (Welcome, Learning and Prayer) the various programmes continued to build a sense of community, friendship, personal growth and faith among the young people of the Diocese.

Anois Leadership Programme

The Anois Leadership Programme is a residential student leadership programme offered to Transition Year students. It is based on the Training for Transformation Programme which revolves around experiential learning (learning by doing) and participants learn the importance of Listening, Planning, Acting, and Reflecting. Anois utilises a holistic approach to education and strives to nourish the student not just mentally, but emotionally, spiritually, and physically as well. In 2024, 102 students attended the programme, which was facilitated by 40 third level student leaders.

Brú Na Gráige

The Diocese of Limerick has a long association with the Brú Na Gráige house. For the last 40 years we have been taking young people to stay there in the heart of the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht on the Dingle Peninsula.

The whole purpose of the Brú is to offer young people a chance to experience community, friendship, faith and fun as well as learning a bit more about themselves, their culture and heritage and maybe even a cúpla focal! 130 young people availed of this experience in 2024.

Lourdes Youth Pilgrimage

72 young people travelled to Lourdes with Bishop Brendan and the Diocesan Pilgrimage. The pilgrimage focused on creating a safe and welcoming environment for young people to experience what it is like to be on pilgrimage. It provided young people an opportunity to form their own community and friends and in doing so build relationships that will last for years to come.

First Year Mass

Over 500 first year students attended a special mass in St Johns Cathedral, with Bishop Brendan to celebrate their next step in their educational and faith journey. It is envisaged that this will continue over the coming years.

Celebrations

Programmes were held at Easter, Christmas and Halloween for young people to come together and recognise and celebrate the occasions, these were fun events that included an opportunity for young people to spend some time in prayer.

Notable events

Two events of 2024 stand out, specifically the visits of the Relics of St Bernadette and of Carlo Acutis. It was encouraging to see the amount of young people in attendance at both events.

Retreats

Retreats are popular among students at primary and second level schools. A number of retreat initiatives are available in the Diocese. For instance, in 2024 Salesian students in training facilitated four retreats for primary schools in preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. These one-day retreats were held at the Don Bosco Centre. The Crescent College held retreat days for transition and 5th years in January and November at the Don Bosco Centre. Other retreats are held in the Diocesan Centre. The Home for the Harvest youth group also facilitated retreats in 2024.

John Paul II Awards

The Pope John Paul II Award is a faith achievement award for young people between the age of 16 and 18. It was established in the Diocese as a result of the 2016 Limerick Diocesan Synod.

The Award enables participants to take an active part in the life of their Church – in the life of their community and society. It enables young people become more aware of the teaching and role of the Catholic Church in the world and to engage at a deep level with Christ. On May 7th, a moving and beautiful celebration of the John Paul II awards took place in St. Munchin's College Chapel with some 50 young people being awarded.

Youth Outreach by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal

The Community of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal have been in the Diocese of Limerick for 18 years now. We have always resided in Moyross. We live a life of communal prayer, brotherhood and service.

The work of the friars here in the Diocese has been diverse and creative. The biggest area of our focus has been working with the youth, both in Moyross and from other areas of the city.

We are working with a new lay initiative called Home for the Harvest. They volunteer with us as well as the Dominican sisters and the diocese of Limerick. They are young men and women who are giving up a year of their lives to do service and ministry. They have been an incredible blessing, there is nothing like youth evangelising youth. On Tuesday afternoons the friars run a youth club for primary school children. Every other Tuesday there is a youth club for secondary school students, in the evening. On Thursday evenings we run a youth club for secondary age students. These are all very well attended, (in fact, we are running out of room) and are greatly appreciated by the youth. These consist of some time of fellowship and football and a time of prayer and teachings. There have been some real breakthroughs and blessings in the young people's lives, quite a few have gone on

to be missionaries in different places.

Trips and camps are a big part of the ministry as well. The friars run a summer camp every year for the primary school children and take them on numerous day trips throughout the year. The friars take the secondary school students on day and weekend trips and retreats throughout the year, including such things as Camp Veritas and Youth 2000. We have events and trips for those from the youth program who have turned 18.

We have worked quite a bit with Corpus Christi school and church on many different things as well as with people from the neighborhood.

We have co-hosted the Project Believe Christmas Spectacular which thousands attended. We have worked with them to visit and provide assistance to the homebound and those in need, providing food and emergency accommodations, We purchased laptops for the school so that the youth could learn the typing skills necessary for secondary school, as well as Easter eggs and Christmas gifts for the youth. It has been a blessed collaboration.

On Monday evenings the friars have a men's group, many of whom have been incarcerated or are in addiction recovery. We have seen much healing and growth there. The friars run another men's group once a month as well. The friars celebrate two Masses once a month in Limerick prison and a weekly Mass at TUS, as well as helping cover Mass at different parishes when asked. The friars are very busy doing spiritual direction and counseling and hearing confessions. We run several priest retreats every year, as well as doing many other retreats, talks, parish missions and processions. It has been a great blessing living and serving in the diocese and we are looking forward to many more years of it.

Youth 2000

Youth 2000 is a network of young people's prayer group. One group met weekly at Our Lady Help of Christians and the Don Bosco centre during the Academic Year. It was noticed how in 2024 numbers grew. Fr. John Campion is the Spiritual Director of the group.

Vocations

The work on promoting vocations to the priesthood and religious continued right throughout 2024 with Sr. Mara Rose as Vocations Director and then, following her recall by her Congregation to the United States, with Sr. Mary Sheila. A monthly meeting entitled "Theology on Tap" was hosted for young adults with guest speakers invited to share their experience of vocation. The Vocations team also presented the theme of Vocations to various prayer and school groups -- Youth 2000, NET Ministries at Steadfast, university chaplains, secondary schools, secondary students at Anois. The Limerick Diocesan Vocations Officer also collaborated with Vocations Ireland and attended national meetings of vocation directors, including a meeting with Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for Clergy, who had come to Ireland to meet and discuss the theme of vocations. Other work in this area included: promoting vocations on social media ; coordinating Eucharistic Adoration for Vocations; meeting 1:1 to accompany those discerning. Most recently a monthly discernment group for diocesan priesthood has begun and there a women's discernment retreat is also being organised.

LITURGY, SPIRITUALITY AND LIFE

The need for meaningful, joyful liturgy was of concern across all groups in the listening process leading up to the 2016 Limerick Diocesan Synod. Topics identified included: the need for joyful and life-giving liturgies, the importance of music in giving life to liturgies, the need for child-friendly liturgies, the need for creativity in planning liturgies, the need to support people in breaking open the Word in a meaningful way for their lives, the importance of good homilies that help people link their faith in their everyday lives, the importance of rituals to mark and celebrate key moments in people's lives. Some of the proposals that emerged were: have liturgies outside the church building, reintroduce the practice of blessing into people's lives, develop and support Congregational singing, provide reflection times during Mass, keep an emphasis on preparation for Baptism, create a welcoming space in Church environments, use modern technology in church and for church, attend to the formation for clergy and laity who lead liturgy, lay led liturgy templates, assist in improving the standard of and quality of delivering homilies, develop liturgical music and resources.



Liturgy, Sacraments and Encounter

Mass is the greatest prayer. Over 1000 people attend the daily Eucharistic liturgy in the Diocese. Between 15,000–20,000 attend Sunday Mass every week and others attend occasionally. Funeral liturgies are well attended. Liturgies are moments of important spiritual and social gatherings for local communities. As well as the public worship of God, the source of all life, liturgical celebrations (as well as weekly Masses, other liturgies such as the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Penance and Reconciliation and Marriage), become moments when people bond together, encourage one another and pray on behalf of the community. The liturgies create a community spirit at which Catholics are encouraged to go out and build up their local communities in faith, hope and love.

Schools and Colleges

Catholic schools and those linked to the Catholic Church introduce young people to an understanding of liturgy, ritual and community celebration. In creative ways, young people learn they are people made for ritual, and they recognise how to inhabit the liturgical assembly. At school, in and through Gospel reflections, prayers, songs and activities, children explore their faith as a faith to be celebrated in public and private prayer and worship.

Desert Days

Desert Days have been taking place in the Diocese since 2015. They are offered five times each year in the context of the liturgical year, ie. November, Advent, Lent and Pentecost. The venue is St. Munchin's diocesan centre.

The days consist of input and time for personal reflection and prayer. Silence is a core component of the days, ensuring a prayerful and peaceful atmosphere. An opportunity for the sacrament of reconciliation is offered and the retreats conclude with the Eucharist. An average of 20 attend each retreat day.

Novena

Mount Saint Alphonsus's biggest apostolic activity in 2024 was the annual solemn novena in honour of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, which took place in June. In the years before the Covid 19 pandemic, ten sessions of the novena were held during each of the nine days. Post Covid, we reduced the number of sessions to six per day. This reflected both the declining number of Redemptorists available to assist in running the novena, and also the slow but steady decline in the number of those attending the novena. The six sessions were very well attended last year, with an estimated 7000 people taking part daily. Many also tuned in online from every corner of the world. The numerous heartfelt prayers of petition and thanksgiving placed at Our Lady's shrine offer solid testimony to the faith of so many people as well as to their continued devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The theme of the 2024 novena was 'He had compassion on them.' During the nine days, preachers reflected on ways in which we can create a culture of care in our community today.

Knock Pilgrimage

Early in the year 2023, Bishop Leahy expressed the wish that we should organise an official Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock Shrine for that summer. The last Saturday of July was the chosen date and it was decided that we would try to arrange coaches for the trip on a Pastoral Unit basis.

We were conscious that a number of parish groups have gone annually to Knock for many years but we were happy to end up with five coaches for our Diocesan trip. We repeated the operation in July 2024 and we had a slight increase in numbers. Some pilgrims travelled by car and joined us in Knock for the ceremonies.

Door to Door Evangelisation – The Legion of Mary

The Legion of Mary is currently composed of 4 groups in the Diocese of Limerick, with approximately 34 active members (and many more praying members). Typical weekly works consist of visits to the homes of the sick and elderly, as well as to the residents of nursing homes, door-to-door visitations, and simple street contact. Notable events of the Legion in Limerick during 2024 included: organising traditional Irish music nights in pubs, with musicians enriching the line-up with some songs of faith; arranging well-attended talks by speakers such as Fr Brendan Kilcoyne; and participating in major door-to-door evangelising efforts in Raheen, Mungret, Crecora, and Askeaton, with thousands of people being reached – those who drifted away from the Church for whatever reason were gently invited back to the Sacraments and to others, who were interested, information was provided about the Catholic Church.

Divine Mercy Devotions

Divine Mercy Devotions originated from the revelations of Jesus to a Polish Nun, Sr. Faustina. These revelations took place in the early decades of the last century. The core teaching of Divine Mercy is the Divine Love of God for all humanity through the Sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. It is an invitation to all of us to tam to the Merciful Love of Jesus with total confidence.

The image of Divine Mercy which shows Jesus, his left hand on his heart with rays of blood and water coming from his heart. The pale ray represents the water washing away our sins and the red rays represent the Blood of Christ which strengthens us. The image with the words "Jesus I Trust in You" is inviting us to trust completely in Jesus merciful love for us and for the wholeworld. The Chaplet of Divine Mercy, a prayer Jesus taught St. Faustina is a prayer of great confidence, filled with graces.

The Devotion to Divine Mercy has been a very popular Devotion across the Diocese for many years. Since Pope St. John Paul II canonised St. Faustina in the year 2000 and instituted the Feast of Divine Mercy on the first Sunday after Easter Sundayin the same year, the devotion has been organized across the diocesewith the imagebeing displayed in many of our churches and the chaplet prayed daily.

Weekly devotions to the Divine Mercy take place in Our Queen of Peace Church, Roxboro Road each Tuesday from 7.30-9.30 pm including chaplet, veneration of 1st Class Relic of St. Faustina and Holy Mass.

Every Easter week a novena in preparation for Divine Mercy Sunday takes place publicly in Our Lady Queen of Peace church and Divine Mercy Sunday devotions are celebrated in many of our churches across the diocese and in particular 100's of people gather at Mt. St. Alphonsus Redemptorist church to celebrate this devotion as a Divine Mercy community . All are welcome to our weekly devotions

Monthly Prayers on Facebook

At 9.30pm on the first and third Wednesday of every month a time of live prayer is offered on the Kilmallock Parish Facebook site. A variety of prayer is presented, focusing on different themes, seasons and feasts. During the course of the year people were exposed to the following ways of praying: meditation, prayer around scripture, the rosary and Taize chants.

Those who pray with us have become a community of prayer who offer prayerful support, love and encouragement to each other and respond to the prayer requests of those who join us. The number of people who join us 'live' online varies from month to month. On average we have about 140 people praying each night and then the video recordings go on to be viewed an average of 2,500 times.

Chrism Mass

The annual Chrism Mass is celebrated in St. John's Cathedral on the Wednesday of Holy Week. This wonderful Diocesan occasion is one the Bishop concelebrates with all the Priests in the Diocese in the presence of many lay people who come from various parishes, congregations and orders, associations, movements and groups in the diocese.

During the Mass the Bishop consecrates the sacred Chrism and blesses the other oils, that will then be used throughout the year in the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick. During the Chrism Mass, the Priests renew their priestly promises. In his homily, Bishop Leahy invited those gathered for our Chrism Mass reflect on three elements: renewing belief in the work of the Holy Spirit; focus on the way of Synodality, in particular, Conversations in the Spirit; the need to support one another

Relics of St. Bernadette

In September 2024 Our Lady of Lourdes Parish completed a year of celebration having reached 60 years as a parish by welcoming the Relics of St. Bernadette to our church on the 11th. and 12th. The parish community in union with the Limerick Diocesan Lourdes Committee hosted the Relics of St. Bernadette to our Diocese. On the first afternoon led by Bishop Brendan Leahy we welcomed St. Bernadette to our church. Over the course of the next 24 hours, people from across the diocese came in their thousands to venerate her Relics.

The occasion was filled with activity with people queuing in good spirits for long periods for confessions and anointing of the sick with Bishop Brendan and priests, waiting long into the evening to facilitate the numbers who wished to avail of the opportunity for the sacraments.

There were many highlights over the period of the visit including the two Holy Masses offered and a torchlight procession which was an emotional experience for all who participated.

The involvement of the school children praying petitions through sign language, through drama and the huge number of school children who came to venerate the relics with enthusiasm and respect was an extraordinary witness and a sign of real hope for the future of the faith in our diocese. While Lourdes is renowned for its miracles, the visitation had its share of Blessings and Miracles especially with the continuous flow of Holy Water and the endless amount of Rosary Beads gifted to the 1000's who came to venerate was remarkable.

From those who were involved in organising the events they experienced peace, joy and hope.

FAITH FORMATION AND EDUCATION

This topic was considered important by many in the process leading up to the 2016 Limerick Diocesan Synod. Topics identified were: adult faith formation, Scripture/Bible study opportunities across the Diocese, reconciling Church teaching and lived reality, strengthening home, school and parish links, facilitating sacramental preparation in the home and parish to complement preparation carried out in schools, religious education in schools. Some of the proposals included: roll out a “Review of Life” programme for faith formation across the Diocese, develop an adult faith formation programme, establish Scripture and Bible Study groups, be creative in new outreach to people who no longer go to church, respond to *Laudato Si’*, support the links between home, school and parish, support Religious Education and characteristic spirit of Catholic Primary Schools; design a formation programme for Second level teachers, promote lay catechists, offer a training programme for Evangelisation.



The Role of Schools and Colleges

Catholic schools and colleges and those linked to the Catholic Church play an important role in the faith formation and education of young people up to the age of 18. Through programmes approved by the Bishops Conference, they help young people understand the Catholic faith, fostering a spiritual and moral development.

The life and teachings of Jesus as well as the tenets of the Catholic faith are taught, such as: the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Two Great Commandments taught by Jesus, the Parables, the Beatitudes, the Paschal Mystery, the moral teachings and the social teaching of the Church. Students are helped in their preparation of the celebration of the reception of Holy Communion for the first time and Confirmation. Children/students are encouraged to learn from Jesus and apply his teachings in their daily lives. Children/students are guided to deepen their commitment to social friendship and care of the planet.

Following an integrated programme, in primary schools formation is viewed as a pervasive element throughout the school day, and is not limited to religious education alone. As part of their education in a Catholic church, children/students attend Mass and other religious celebrations, study sacred texts and participate in faith-based activities and discussions.

Mary Immaculate College

Mary Immaculate College was established in 1898 by Bishop of Limerick, Edward O'Dwyer and the Mercy sisters. Bishop Brendan Leahy is the current Chair of the Trustees and Chair of the Governing Authority. Having been chaplain of the College for many years, Fr. Michael Wall retired from that position in November 2024. The academic year runs from September to May. Each year an open academic year Mass is celebrated in October, invoking God's blessing on individuals and on the college for the forthcoming year. On the last Thursday in November a Remembrance Mass takes place, praying for the repose and souls for the relatives, staff and students who would have passed away in the previous 12 months.

The annual Christmas Carol Service takes place in St Joseph's Church, prepared and conducted by Dr Paul Collins with choir consisting of students and Mary Immaculate College community choir. A blessing of throats is offered on February 3rd, Feast of St Blaise. On April 24th, Bishop Leahy celebrated Mass at which Eucharistic Ministers (40 students and 6 staff) were commissioned. In 2024 were commissioned. In May a Staff Continuous Profession Development/retreat day was held in Adare, consisting inter alia in a visit to the Holy Trinity Abbey Church in Adare focusing on its history with lecture by Dr Helene Bradley followed by Mass.

St Munchin's College

The College is the Diocesan Voluntary Catholic Secondary boys school under the Patronage of the Bishop. With an enrolment of 680 pupils, there are 54 teachers, 3 SNA's and 1 Chaplain in addition to the Principal and Deputy Principal. Many diocesan priests are proud past pupils and/or former staff members.

In 2024, Bishop Leahy conducted a student assembly prayer moment and celebrated the Graduation mass. Some students participate in the Transition year Anois programme in Castletown Co Laois and in May some attended the annual Donal Walsh Life day in Knock. There was also a St Bridget's cross-making workshop in the neighbouring Diocesan Centre.

Diocesan Advisory Service

Post-Primary

Inservice for the chaplains and religious education teachers of Limerick's 25 Post-Primary Schools took place on October 2nd. There were two presentations by Limerick Youth Services regarding mental health in youth and the programmes they offer for schools. There was also time for the teachers and chaplains to speak together and share what they have been doing in their respective schools, as well as to share resources. An Advent meeting also took place with a reflection on the virtue of Hope for the season of Advent and in preparation for the Jubilee Year of Hope in 2025.

Primary

The Limerick Diocesan Advisory Service works in collaboration with teachers, school management, parish clergy, parents and guardians to support and resource religious education in primary schools across the Diocese of Limerick.

- 99 schools visited (all classes)
- 17000 children approx. (3000 approx. other faiths)
- 650 classes approx.

How do we accomplish the above:

Visit all Catholic Primary Schools to encourage fidelity to Catholic ethos and the Grow in Love Program, and support principals and teachers through communication and resources throughout the year:

- Creidimid Newsletter (Termly)
- Sacramental Preparation support and resources
- Beginning of the year in-services on Catholic Ethos/Sacramental Guidelines/Recommendations from the Bishop, etc.

Recommendations moving forward:

- Engage and support Staff - all schools given the option to invite the DA's to a staff meeting or Croke Park hour on Catholic Ethos
- List of prayers to be taught to be sent to all schools
- 5 songs from the programme be taught in each class
- RE to be included in the Cúntas Míósúil

- Each school to have religion policy by 2026
- Engage teachers e.g pilgrimage for educators to Rome for the Jubilee Year of Hope
- Continue to strengthen role of RE Liaison Teacher
- Create and send out family leaflets on preparing for and celebrating the Sacraments of Confession, Holy Communion, and Confirmation.

Religious Education and Faith Development REFD

This scheme was established by the Diocese of Limerick a number of years ago. Its purpose is to offer sacramental preparation to children attending non-Catholic schools and whose parents (and they themselves) wish to receive First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. There are weekly classes (a mix of online and in-person) running from October to May. Groups work in junior and senior streams, each running over two years. Part of the preparation for the sacraments includes church visits where the children meet the chaplain, become familiar with the church setting and learn how things will work on the occasion of the relevant sacrament. Coordinated by a Steering group and the Diocesan advisors, classes are run by Primary School teachers. In-person classes take place in Mary Immaculate College and students come from a range of schools in Limerick.

Laudato Si'/Care of the Earth Diocesan Group 2024

The Limerick Diocesan Group met on several occasions during the year and also maintained Inter Diocesan connections, through zoom with the Killaloe, Kerry, Cashel and Emily.

Our main focus this year centered on efforts to engage parishes with the call to return 30% of Parish Grounds to nature by 2030. To this end commencing on 20th March 2024 we hosted a workshop for parishes in the Diocesan Centre. This workshop, facilitated by Sinead McDonnell, Biodiversity Officer with Limerick Co. Council and Sean Hartigan, Green Councillor, explored how parishes can improve their environment and improve biodiversity. Thirteen parishes were represented and expressed an interest in progressing efforts in their areas. Contact was maintained with these groups, and with all parishes, as preparations were made for the "Seeds of Hope" Conference to be held in Springfort Hall, Mallow on 25th January 2025. Thirteen parishes are participating in this event.

Events: Local events took place throughout the diocese at various times during the year. Here is but a flavor of some of them. The Naomh Íde Unit organised a Nature Walk with an attendance of over 70 people.

- The Westbury meditation group spent a Morning's Reflection immersed in the beauty of nature in the surrounds of a family home in Crecora.

A "Connection to Nature and Wellbeing" event took place in the Woodlands Infinity Pathway, Milford, as part of Heritage Week. Over 90 people attended. Hospitality was provided by the Salesian Community, Milford and the parish Care of the Earth group.

- During the Season of Creation St. Mary's/St Nicholas parish celebrated Harvest Services. Food was contributed and delivered to Homeless Street Services in the city.
- Many parishes created beautiful sacred spaces in their churches and organised inspiring liturgies to celebrate the Season of Creation.
- The Feast of St. Francis of Assisi was celebrated with the blessing of animals and hospitality in Ballynanty Community Garden Allotment, Limerick City.
- An Autumn/Winter Reflection Reflective Walk took place in the Woodlands Infinity Pathway, Milford organised by the local Care of the Earth group.
- A group of twenty two people took part in two sessions facilitated by Diarmuid O'Murchú on his most recent book entitled "Ecological Spirituality"organised by the Salesian Sisters Cosmology Group in Barak Obama Plaza, Moneygall, Co. Tipperary.
- Farming for Nature Project, Athea
- At various times of the year resources were distributed to all parishes.
- The Diocesan facebook was used regularly to advertise and record events.

Hopefully becoming aware of simple and achievable projects and events organized in different place will be an encouragement to others.

UL Chaplaincy

Fr. John Campion and Sr. Sarah O'Rourke are the chaplains at UL. In 2024 Fr. John Campion presided at Mass for the Ashbourne Cup Final Competition at the NUIG Aer Dome in Began Co. Mayo. The tradition of celebrating mass on the day of the final for the team, squad and management has been passed on by former players. The response has been very positive and an opportunity to engage with the young people. The Annual Memorial service for students and staff takes place at the Contemplative Centre in UL and with support from the Irish World Academy. Ash Wednesday the evening mass is well attended by students and a collection is held for the Salesian Missions. Services and distribution of Ashes are held on Ash Wednesday at the Contemplative centre and Teach Fáilte. Chaplaincy has been closely working with University of Sanctuary Committee supporting students from direct provision, helping them secure academic supports, accommodation, maintenance and part-time work. Members of the Youth 2000 group help with projects for the Dominican sisters and the Friars at Moyross.

Alpha Days

During each quarter of the year we held a mini Alpha retreat in the Diocesan Centre. These days were well attended and have become a fixture in the diary whereby people know that four times a year there will be a space and an opportunity to reflect on and nourish our faith in the company of other people of faith.

Neocatechumenal Way

The Neocatechumenal Way has been present in the Diocese of Limerick since 2014, the first years with two groups (meeting in St. Paul – Dooradoyle and St. John – Cathedral) and in recent years a third group meeting in the Oratory in the Crescent Shopping Centre.

The main group, a local christian community lead by a priest (fr. Nikola) and six missionary families – parents with children – with two lay sisters in mission, is formally erected as a missionary Christian community or *Missio ad Gentes*.

The main purpose of such a Christian community is to reach those who drifted away from the Church or those who perceive the need of a deepening in faith: in the common environment of their life (school, work, sport) people are usually led by attraction to know more about Christianity lived in such a way.

The goal of the community is then to live (and so to make visible) the signs of mutual Love and Unity (Jh 13, 34–35) in Christian families and in the Christian community as an evidence of the free gift of a new life in Christ offered to every believer, so that, by these signs “people may believe”.

The 3 neocatechumenal communities also live themselves, and offer to those interested, a way of Christian Initiation to faith, with the purpose to gradually strengthen the roots of their Baptism. This “way” is articulated in the celebrations of the Word of God, the Holy Eucharist, and the mutual relation in the Christian community. The venue of meetings and Liturgies is St. John Paul II Oratory in the Crescent Shopping Centre.

Other activities of apostolate taken in 2024 by the local Neocatechumenal Communities are:

- 2 series of 14 catechetical talks (advertised in the Newsletter and at the Masses of the close by Parishes) taking place two evening a week.
- At the end of each series of talks a weekend retreat was offered with some sessions of preaching about the Holy Eucharist.
- In Easter time, throughout three Sundays, a Public Mission with prayers, songs and sharing of personal experiences took place in different locations of the Limerick City Centre.
- Twice a month the members of the *Missio ad Gentes* have been doing a door to door visitation of the houses, to share their life and faith experiences.
- Every Friday evening, a Post-Confirmation Course took place for the youth of teen age with a final Summer Camp organised together with other Post-Confirmation groups held around Ireland.
- A monthly *Scrutatio* (personal deepening of the Holy Scripture) followed by a sharing and *Lectio Divina* was held either in the Oratory or in the Limerick Diocesan Centre.
- Two retreat-pilgrimages have been organised for the youth (mainly for those already taking part to the celebrations the Neocatechumenal Communities): one in Pettigo and one in Glencomeragh (Waterford) where a street evangelisation in some towns of Waterford and Tipperary took place.
- On the four Sundays of Advent, in collaboration with the Youth Ministry of the Limerick Diocese, a team of young catechists held different meeting focused on the announcement of the Good News of Christianity.

Syro-Malabar Community

The Syro Malabar community in Limerick comprises over 350 families from Ennis, Nenagh, Newcastle West, and Limerick. They gather for Mass every Sunday at 2:30 p.m. in St. Paul's Parish Church in Dooradoyle. Additionally, they offer catechism classes for children aged 5 to 18 on every second and fourth Sunday. They celebrate most of the Catholic feasts and the parish feast on the first Sunday after Easter. Every year, they organise an annual retreat in August at the Racecourse in Patrickswell for three days. Over 2,000 people, including children, from various counties in Ireland participated in the retreat last year. In 2024 they had a renowned retreat preacher from India, Rev. Fr. Binoy Karimaruthumkal PDM (Preachers of Divine Mercy).

Posadas

During Advent, the parishes of the Pastoral Unit of Rathkeale, Knockaderry/Cloncagh and Ballingarry/ Granagh organised "Posadas", an initiative whereby a statue of Mary and Joseph is passed from house to house each day, imitating the Holy Family's search for room at the inn. Each family was provided with a prayer pack for family prayers when they received the statues.

Pilgrimages organised in 2024 by the Dominican Sisters

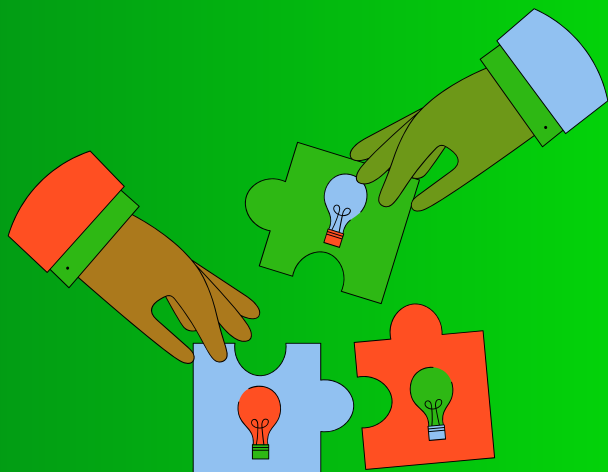
- Annual Dominican Pilgrimage to Knock
- Young Adult Day pilgrimages or hikes- Holy Island, Kilcommon Pilgrim Loop etc in collaboration with Youth 2000, NET, Home for the Harvest, Dominican Friars
- Annual 'Upward Call' Dominican Pilgrimage for Young Adults to Italy

Faith Formation at St. Saviour's

- Children's Catechesis (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program), age 3-12. Two sessions per week
- Confirmation Club (11-12yrs)- Twice per month
- Frassati Youth Club (13-18yrs)- Twice per month
- Young Adult Theology (18-30yrs)- Twice per month
- Parents Piece- Twice per month
- Adult Bible Study- Weekly
- Women's Endow Study Group- Twice per month
- Dominican Laity (Third Order)- Once per month
- Host Thomistic Institute Reading Group and monthly speakers

NEW MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

The need for new, skilled leadership models was particularly evident across parishes and among third level students. During the 2016 Limerick Synod Consultation topics included under this theme were: the role of laity in leadership, the role of women in leadership, the role of clergy in leadership, the need for spiritual leadership as well as administrative leadership, the shortage of clergy and lack of vocations, the need for effective governance models, the need for accountability and transparent finance, the importance of clear communication. Some of the proposals that emerged were: establishment of a Team Ministry Structure in each Pastoral Area, develop a diocesan strategy for enabling communities to become vibrant parishes, review of funding models, employ lay people to fulfil both liturgical and administrative roles in parishes/pastoral units, bring in priests from abroad, explore the introduction of the permanent diaconate, promote vocations to the priesthood, establish a diocesan strategic leadership group/Diocesan Council, organise an annual conference for Parish Pastoral Councils, strengthen volunteerism in the Diocese, discern the gifts of lay people, develop a handbook for Pastoral Leadership in the Diocese, explore how women play a leadership role in the governance of the Church at Diocesan and local level.



Pastoral Unit Councils

Following on from the Diocesan Synod in April 2016, the 60 parishes in the diocese were divided into 15 pastoral units. The pastoral units involve a number of parishes operating together, with two or three priests ministering together as a team. Each of the priests in the unit is a "Co-Parish Priest". The bishop has appointed one of the Co-Parish Priests as Moderator. The Moderators role is to co-ordinate the team ministry in the pastoral unit and to convene the Pastoral Unit Council. This is a new model of leadership in parishes.

The main goal in establishing pastoral unit teams and pastoral unit councils is to establish greater co-operation between parishes. The hope is that there will be a greater sharing of resources at the service of a number of parishes.

Since 2016 work in establishing this new model of leadership throughout the diocese has been ongoing. The Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2022), had a significant impact on this work and has slowed down the work of establishing pastoral unit councils. All 15 pastoral units are at a different stage of development.

A number of pastoral units have established good working pastoral unit councils. Some pastoral unit councils have looked at the number of Masses celebrated in the pastoral unit and drawn up a new Mass schedule for the churches in their units.

Four pastoral units have trained lay people to be part of a Pastoral Unit Funeral Team. Three units have established Pre-Baptism Preparation Teams. These teams help prepare parents for the celebration of their children's baptisms. This preparation is done at pastoral unit level.

One Pastoral Unit has organised a Pilgrim walk to an old monastic site in the unit and developed liturgies for these gatherings. Another pastoral unit organised a guided walk along the Limerick Greenway reflecting on the gift of creation and care for the environment.

One unit has established a central administrative office, where all the administration of the 4 parishes in the pastoral unit are administered from.

Another unit has begun to look at sharing resources in the whole area of social media and the establishment of what Pope Francis calls a 'Digital Missionary' group. A pastoral unit in Limerick City organised Confessions for Christmas in one of the city shopping centres. The same unit organised one Easter Vigil ceremony in their pastoral unit, encouraging parishioners from all the parishes in the unit to attend. Priests in some pastoral units have established a rota for the celebration of Sunday Masses and move between the churches in their units.

Our hope is that by the summer of 2025 there will be a Pastoral Unit Council in each of the 15 pastoral units. Greater collaboration is essential as we move forward together.

At the launch of this new model of leadership project in 2018, Bishop Leahy said: *"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, likewise in the Church we too constantly need to reform and renew our Church life"*

Fan into flame the gift of God that you possess

International conference on the ongoing formation of priests

An international conference on the ongoing formation of priests was held in Rome in February 2024. The diocese of Limerick was represented at the conference by Fr Tony Mullins V.G., Ms Catherine Kelly, Secretary Manger of the Diocese of Limerick, and Fr Sean Harmon, Chaplain at UHL. The conference was attended by over 800 delegates.

The conference was addressed by a number of bishops and lay people from around the world. The theme for the conference was taken from the second letter of St Paul to Timothy.

"Fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess"(2 Tim 1:6)

The conference speakers addressed such issues as the new pastoral challenges facing priests in a time of change from a global perspective.

The addressed important issues such as the identity and ministry of priests in a synodal and missionary church.

The conference also looked at Pathways and means for pastoral accompaniment of priests. Examples of 'best practices' from around the world of the pastoral care of priests were shared. Pope Francis addressed the delegates at a special audience. Pope Francis spoke words of appreciation to the delegates for their service and offered these words of challenge and encouragement.

"Service is the identity card of Christ's ministers. The Master showed this by his entire life, and particularly at the Last Supper, when he washed the feet of the disciples. Seen in this light, service is not simply the transmission of a body of teachings, but also the art of concentrating on others, bringing out all their beauty and all the good that they carry within, shedding light on their gifts but also on their shadows, their wounds and their desires"

Pope Francis said the priest is the apostle of hope. He concluded with these words. "

"I would like to return and add to something I said earlier, please do not get tired of being merciful. Always forgive. When people come to confession, they come to ask for forgiveness and not to hear a lecture on theology. Please be merciful. Always forgive, because forgiveness has this grace of embracing, of welcoming. I urge you: always forgive" The Priest is the apostle of hope.

Athea Parish

Athea is one of 24 parishes in the Diocese that has no priest resident in the parish. Fr Brendan Duggan retired on Easter Sunday 2022 and the pastoral care and administration of the parish became the responsibility of the priests of the pastoral unit. By the time Fr Duggan retired he had established a strong lay leadership group in the parish. These included a Pastoral Council, a Finance Committee, a Baptism Preparation Team and a Funeral Ministry Group.

These groups working with the Co-Parish Priests of the Pastoral Unit extended the involvement of parishioners including members of the local Tidy Towns Committee and other local organisations. Together they have organised outdoor Stations of the Cross on Good Friday, revived the traditional Corpus Christi Procession which was followed by a gathering of the community in the local community hall. During Advent they erected a large outdoor Advent wreath lighting a candle on the wreath at a special prayer service on each of the four Sundays of Advent. This prayer service took place in the church grounds followed by hospitality for those who attended.

The parish also established a Pre-Confirmation programme for the children who had requested the Sacrament of Confirmation. This involved three meetings of parents and children.

These preparation meetings were held on Zoom and facilitated by a lay parishioner who had completed the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry in conjunction with Mary Immaculate College. These meetings began with an opening prayer, followed by an introduction to the theme for the meeting, followed by a short video presentation and time for discussion on the questions asked. There was almost 100% attendance at the meetings and children and parents were happy with the experience. These meetings were linked with the celebration of Mass in the local Church the following weekend. Children and parents were encouraged to attend the Mass which included themes from the preparation meeting which they attended on Zoom during the week.

During Lent, the parish organised a scripture study group and invited parishioners from all of the four parishes in the pastoral unit. It was well supported and those who attended asked that the study group continue during the Easter Season. These meetings were organised and facilitated by the parishioners who had completed the Certificate in Pastoral Ministry.

In May of last year, the lay leadership group from the parish engaged with the pastoral unit council in organising a nature walk along the Limerick Greenway reflecting on the gift of creation and care for the environment. This was followed by light refreshments in Templeglantine community centre.

The funeral ministry group assist with funeral services at the funeral homes, the church and in the cemetery.

On St Brigid's day the leadership groups worked together to stage a short play on the life of St Brigid. This mostly involved teenagers who gave of their time generously.

The parish has an adult choir who sing at the weekend celebration of Mass. For special occasions a youth choir will gather to sing at Mass.

The involvement of the leadership groups are greatly appreciated by the parishioners and have help keep the community vibrant and positive about their church and the celebration of their faith.

Council of Priests 2024

The Council of Priests met five times during the course of the year. It discussed issues that were relevant or pressing for the diocese, it drew up guidelines where necessary, implemented changes, formed committees and engaged with the feedback received from the clergy area meetings. The following items were discussed during the course of the year:

The challenge of parishes without a resident priest and the appointment of lay leaders and lay administrators; The Jubilee Year, the formation of a Preparatory Committee, the theme of hope and Jubilee pilgrimages.; *Laudato Si* - many churches have given a percentage of their grounds to nature and wild flowers; Education - the importance of school visitation. Appointing a parish/school liaison person and the Divestment of Schools and the value of Catholic Patronage; Altar Servers.

The importance of Altar servers was discussed and the decline in the number of altar servers since covid has been drastic; Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* - On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings - The council discussed this document and the pastoral need that it responds to; Diocesan Medal - The Council discussed the possibility of instituting a Diocesan Medal to honour the dedicated service of parishioners; Priests coming from Abroad - The pastoral needs of priests coming from abroad were discussed and how the diocese can respond; Possible future greater co-operation between/amalgamation of parishes; The Celebration of Wedding and Funeral Liturgies - The Council discussed the challenges and the disillusionment that some liturgies cause priests. Suggestions were made about how to encourage people to be more respectful of the occasion, especially the reception of Holy Communion.

Mass Stipends - A discussion around Mass stipends highlighted the various misunderstandings clergy have around best practice; Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults - A discussion was had about the importance of a diocesan response to meet the need of adults seeking Christian Initiation; Asking and tackling the hard questions - The Bishop led a conversation around the hard questions that parishes should reflect on and engage with.

A number of updates were given to the Council during the course of the Year. Sr Mara Rose spoke about vocations. Fr Éamonn Fitzgibbon updated members on the Synod and the Lay Pastoral Ministry Course and its graduates. Mr. James Connery gave a presentation on Youth Ministry.

Fr Tony Mullins on the International Conference for the Permanent Formation of Priests.

Moderators

Each of the pastoral units in the diocese has a Moderator. The Moderator is a Co-Parish Priest and his role is to co-ordinate the team ministry in the pastoral unit and to convene the Pastoral Unit Council. As well as meeting with his Co-Parish Priests, the moderators meet as a group with the bishop on a number of occasions throughout the year. They reflect together on their experiences in each of the pastoral units. It's an opportunity to share 'good news' about what is working well in the pastoral units and also to experience support from one another in dealing with the challenges as they emerge. There is a supportive spirit about these gatherings which helps to build up wisdom and fraternity in the group.

The ongoing formation of priests Conference

From February 6-10, an international conference was held in Rome on the ongoing formation of priests entitled, "The Priest is the Apostle of Hope". Limerick diocese was represented at the conference by Fr Tony Mullins V.G., Ms Catherine Kelly, Diocesan Secretary/General Manger of the Diocese of Limerick, and Fr Sean Harmon, Chaplain at UHL. The conference was attended by over 800 delegates.

Diocesan Synodal Team

The Diocesan Synodal Team is made up of the following members Padraig Hurley, Richard Keane , Phyllis Moynihan, Bríd Murphy, Con Buckley, Nessa Breen, Rose O'Connor, Éamonn Fitzgibbon, Bishop Brendan Leahy. The group met on a number of occasions. In the Spring, at the Regional Meetings we were asked to conduct a consultation on the basis of this question: *How can we imagine the life of the Church in Ireland where people are co-responsible for the Church's mission in different ways?* Then we were to write up a 4 page response to this question and a 2 page summary of best practice. Limerick Diocese organised a number of Focus Groups as a means of deepening our reflection on this moment in the Synodal journey. We prayed with a selection of New Testament Readings to assist us in this (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; 1 Peter 4; Eph 4) and we use the Conversation on the Spirit method to address the guiding question. The Focus Groups comprised members of Religious Communities, members of Parish and Pastoral Unit Councils, Young People, Lay Ministers - this selection was based on the belief that this this question requires some familiarity within the sample of 'co-responsibility'. The Limerick Synthesis was submitted to the National Synodal Group on 25th March 2024.

The Limerick representation was one of the largest diocesan groups. A follow-up meeting was convened a follow-up meeting on Wednesday 2nd October at 7.30p.m. in the Diocesan Centre. At this meeting we looked at the next steps on the Synodal Pathway and also how best to use the skills learned at the Training. We also covered a brief recap and further training on the Conversations in the Spirit Methodology. These facilitators are now available to assist with facilitating diocesan gatherings to progress the Diocesan Overview.

The Facilitative Leadership Training Programme is a pilot programme that has been funded from the Porticus grant given to the Irish Synodal Pathway. This Programme was offered in six training opportunities on different dates and at a number of locations (Mallow, Co. Cork; Knock, Co. Mayo; Drumalis, Co. Antrim; Carlow, Lough Derg, Co. Donegal). The Limerick people that have taken the training are: Con Buckley; Patrick Higgins; Seán Ó Mocháin; Bernadette O Connell; Anne Mulcahy; Tim Collins; Sr Mary Dolora (Deirdre) Keating, RSM; Fr Peter Claver Eze; Fr Andrew Chamberline Umeh; Fr Tim Wrenn; Sr Betty Baker; Maurice Hynan; Mary O'Reilly Glynn; David Walsh; Michael Burke.

Meeting of Sacristans and Parish Secretaries

On May 7th 2024, a very successful and informative session was held in the Diocesan Centre for Parish Sacristans and Secretaries. This bi-annual event. It had a number of purposes - networking and acknowledgement of the important roles both secretaries and

sacristans make in each parish. Practical issues included Safeguarding, Data Protection procedures, Financial procedures to name but a few. Almost 100 people attended from across the diocese. All welcomed the invitation and fully engaged in the day.

Lay Pastoral Ministers

There are 21 Lay Pastoral Ministers in the Diocese who have completed the Certificate in Lay Pastoral Ministry and Diocesan formation programme. They meet regularly to share experiences, challenges, and what is working well or not working well for them in their respective parishes and/or pastoral units. We held regular meetings throughout 2024 to hear the various roles that the Ministers are undertaking and see how they can be best supported. We invited Hugh Lagan to meet with the group on 9th March and he explored Integrity in Ministry. We also held a moment of Prayer and Reflection for Advent. Those who have completed the course have taken up voluntary roles across parishes and communities. These include leading public prayer, assisting with funeral liturgies, engaging in ecological concerns, music ministry, praying with the Bible and reaching out to those who may be distanced from the faith.

Diocesan Pastoral Council

After Covid, it was felt necessary to review the workings of the Diocesan Pastoral Council. On Saturday 17th February, a full day of reflection led by Dr Jessie Rogers, was organized in Patrickswell, Limerick to revisit the Terms of Reference, Vision, Mission, Objectives and role of the Council. It agreed to operate in a Synodal way and to use the "Conversations in the Spirit" methodology for its meetings and visits to pastoral units across the Diocese. Subsequently the Diocesan Pastoral Council has met at regional level throughout the diocese with local Pastoral Unit Councils. The agenda was driven by the Diocesan pastoral Plan that emerged from the Limerick Diocesan 2016 Synod.

Croí Clann Naofa Pastoral Unit

Croí Clann Naofa Pastoral Unit consists of three parishes St. Joseph's, St. Saviour's, Our Lady of Lourdes.

Faith Formation in Pastoral Unit

Sacramental preparation (First Holy Communion) at Scoil Mháthair Dé and Our Lady of Lourdes Schools

Retreats for Sacramental classes

Combined Initiatives in the Pastoral Unit

Rotation of Priests at Churches for Sacraments

Bi-annual Unit Reconciliation Service- Advent and Lent

Annual Christmas Carol Singing and Reconciliation at the Crescent Shopping Centre and Oratory

Pilgrimages

Annual Dominican Pilgrimage to Knock

Young Adult day pilgrimages or hikes- Holy Island, Kilcommon Pilgrim Loop etc in collaboration with Youth 2000, NET, Home for the Harvest, Dominican Friars

Annual 'Upward Call' Dominican Pilgrimage for Young Adults to Italy

World Youth Day Pilgrimage

St. Saviour's Parish Groups and Sacramental Ministries

The ministries at St. Saviour's Dominican Church are coordinated and led by the Dominican Sisters, in collaboration with a lay pastoral coordinator, Home for the Harvest mission team, lay catechists, parish volunteers, and university students.

- Baptism Ministry
- Funeral Ministry
- Pre-Marriage Preparation
- RCIA Programme
- Eucharistic Adoration
- Choir
- Altar Servers Club
- St Anne's Society Cleaning Group
- Parish Visitation
- Pastoral and Finance Councils
- Ten external groups also use the parish spaces on a regular basis for religious services, prayer and faith formation, or community support.

St Nessian's Pastoral Unit

St Nessian's Pastoral Unit consists of five parishes Patrickswell/Ballybrown, Mungret/Crecora/Raheen, St. Paul's, Kildimo/Pallaskenry and Kilcornan. The unit meets bimonthly with each parish represented. The coming together in itself creates bonding. The priests aim to meet every 4 weeks also to discuss possible rota for upcoming weekends. The rota exchange is the best visual sign to people of priests being in a family of parishes. Both people and priests seem to find the exchange refreshing. Of note is that 20 years ago there were 9 Limerick Diocesan priests in what is now St. Nessian's unit whereas now there are 2 Limerick Diocesan priests in our unit.

At the weekends when the "Do this in Memory" is celebrated, priests remain in parishes in which they are resident. Recently the priests have a short lectio divina on Gospel of the following Sunday just to share any personal insights. There have been some issues with buildings in St Paul's and Kilcornan.

Fr. Michael Wall has been very helpful in resolving them. Some steps in preparing for the future include lay people sharing funeral prayers and a funeral support team, lay people accompanying the priest when meeting family about funeral, lay people sharing prayers at the graveside. Each home is a little church and that is where the real pastoral care begins.

It is important not to confine the image of pastoral activity to what goes on around the church building. Jesus' promise two or more gathered in his name with him among them is more important than ever in context of pastoral units.

A good experience in the Pastoral Unit has been the support provided when a parish needs additional support such as the illness recently of one of the priests in one of the parishes. Another positive feature of the Unit has been the strength of the combined knowledge and reflection within the group. A proposal was put forward that the Pastoral Unit might use a consultancy company to future proof the resources of the Pastoral Unit to meet the needs of the area.

The Pastoral Unit members met with the consultant on 2 occasions, scrutinised the proposal and against further engaging with the consultants. The consideration within the group of the work was informed and from diverse viewpoints and experience. Another positive feature is the ability to be critical of decisions. It has come up on a couple of occasions at the Pastoral Unit meetings during the year that the Diocesan policy to not support the distribution of the eucharist at lay led liturgies is not the right decision. The experience in our Pastoral Unit, due to our proximity to the city is that people leave the church when they realise that it will be a lay led liturgy and go to another church. People are not afraid to voice their disagreement. Critical opinion that is reflecting on how things are done is healthy and worth listening to.

Thomond Pastoral Unit

The Thomond Pastoral Unit consists of five parishes.

St Munchin's/St Lelias, St Marys, St Nicholas, Parteen/Meelick & Corpus Christi/Moyross.

The formation of the Unit consists of the Co Parish Priest of each parish & two parish representatives. We have a very active, enthusiastic & energetic & supportive Unit.

We meet every other month, for instance, on the lead up to Advent/Christmas, Lent & Easter and for any other liturgical occasions or activities. Yes, it's a work in progress, albeit slowly & to date, we have introduced pre baptismal preparation for parents, also, where some have & other parishes are working on the introduction of funeral liturgy teams.

Eucharistic Services are in operation when it's not possible to have Mass.

Pre First Communion & Confirmation liturgies & talks are also in operation.

Recently, the internationally renowned singer Moya Brennan of Clannad performed in a Celtic Christmas Concert in St Munchin's Church with the proceeds in aid of the restoration of the Church & it was incredibly successful.

Of the five parishes in the Unit, one priest is in his mid eighties another in his mid seventies, two over seventy & one under sixty which is an incredible statistic. Five years from now, it will be dramatically different.

Ballyhoura Pastoral Unit

The Ballyhoura Pastoral Unit encompasses six parishes. Ardpatrik, Bulgaden/Martinstown, Effin/Garrienderk, Glenroe/Ballyorgan, Kilfinane and Kilmallock working together to serve their communities of ten churches in synodal process. We have two active priests and four retired priests ministering in our area. During 2024 we welcomed Bishop Fleming to our area during the year.

Our "Mission" involves the pastoral activities, community engagement, and spiritual services provided by the parishes to ensure that the Good News of Jesus is lived and effectively to address the needs of the faithful. Generally focus on Synodal Mission.

Pastoral Activities:

- Since 2023 after dialogue with meetings we have now four Saturday evening Masses and Four Sunday morning Masses, two churches have the Eucharist each day (Kilmallock and Kilfinane) and other churches have Mass once during the week. Garrienderk church has Sunday Eucharist on Friday evening.

- Established in 2024 Funeral Liturgy Teams for the area and are shadowing the priests at the moment, as there are a lot of funerals.
- Schools: Involved on Board of Management, visitations of Schools and preparing for Sacraments.
- Visitations of the Sick and Elderly continue in hospitals, nursing homes and peoples homes. Community Engagement: Gathering of people in Kilmallock parish 2024 looking at needs and trying to create initiatives aimed at involving parishioners in community life.
- Finance Resource Allocation: (a) We have established one account for Priests Dues. (b) repaired, maintained and restored churches in our area. More to be done in Kilmallock church.
- Future Planning: Developing strategies to address emerging challenges and opportunities within the pastoral area. Lots done and more to do. The Mission Review of the Ballyhoura Pastoral Area in Synodal way, we have the pastoral office and this year a new official website with social media pages, where announcements and reports are typically shared for the area.

Biography of Bishop Donal Murray 1940-2024

Bishop Murray died on the 13th October 2024 at the age of 84. He was Bishop of Limerick from 1996 to 2009. The following is a biography read at his funeral.

Born in Dublin in 1940 and educated at St Thérèse National School, Mount Merrion, Blackrock College and UCD, Donal Murray studied for the priesthood at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and was ordained in 1966. Following completion of a Doctorate in Theology at the University of St Thomas, Rome, he lectured in the Mater Dei Institute of Education, becoming Professor of Moral Theology at Clonliffe College in 1970. He also lectured in catechetics and medical ethics in UCD until 1982 when he was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Dublin at the age of forty-one. He was then the youngest member of the Irish hierarchy. Installed as Bishop of Limerick on 24 March 1996, he was the first priest from outside the diocese to assume the role in two hundred years.

Endowed with a brilliant intellect, Bishop Murray published fine works in the areas of theology, ethics and social issues. In Limerick, he is remembered for many aspects of his ministry. We cannot but think, for instance, of the renovation he undertook of the beautiful St. John's Cathedral. We are grateful for his tireless ministry in establishing a listening process in the Diocese, setting up a diocesan council and promoting various lay ministries, not least in the area of youth ministry. We recall his enthusiastic church preparations prior to the Millennium. Bishop Donal also co-founded the St. Senan's Education Office located in the Limerick Diocesan Centre and a Federation for Second level schools. His years as Bishop of Limerick also saw him busy as Chair of Mary Immaculate College and St. John's Hospital. Bishop Donal invited into the Diocese the Franciscan Friars of Renewal who quickly became known as the Moyross Monks. And we cannot forget to mention his great ability as a composer of lyrics - whether it be sacred Marian hymns or simple entertaining songs creatively composed for the sing-song concert during the Lourdes pilgrimage.

Bishop Donal Murray engaged in social outreach and advocacy, for instance, in speaking up for the tourism and business of the region in the face of a decision to abandon the Shannon-Heathrow link as well as his support for and contribution to initiatives such as that of the LEDP, that celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2024 and his involvement with the Limerick Social Services. Other works too come to mind, such as his courageous supportive visit with Trócaire to Rwanda at a very dangerous time.

Bishop Donal was very mindful of the rapid changes in culture, society and Church and the need to rebuild the community of faith for new times. He addressed these questions in two significant pastorals, *We are God's Temple* and *How can we Know the Way?* Striving as always to keep hope alive, he wrote, 'none of the previous generations of Christians in Limerick would ever have looked on the challenge of passing on the message of Jesus as a lost cause; none of them saw their many difficulties as signs of inevitable decline. They saw their moment in history, and we should see ours, as ' "time to build up" (Eccles 3:3)'. Through the listening process he launched, as well as his pastoral councils and pastoral visits, Bishop Donal desired that lay people would appreciate the full the dignity and the vocation that is theirs as lay people. In this he was an ardent promoter of the vision provided by the Second Vatican Council.

Bishop Donal's building up of the Church was not just limited to the Diocese of Limerick or the Archdiocese of Dublin. He was appointed by Saint Pope John Paul II a member of the Vatican's Council for Culture and his contribution was greatly appreciated, particularly his analysis of contemporary cultural trends and the growing secularisation in Europe. As Archbishop Eamon Martin, President of the Irish Bishops Conference has noted, Bishop Murray was fascinated in reflecting on the interface and overlap between faith and culture; between the sacred and the secular. Speaking to the Céifin Conference in 2007, Bishop Donal remarked: "The secular is the world in which faith is lived. If believers do not reflect and pray and understand what the Gospel has to say to all the complex dimensions of that world, and act on that reflection, they cooperate in confining God and silencing the big questions."

As a member of the Irish Bishops Conference Bishop Murray contributed more than we will probably ever fully realise to the Church in Ireland through his thoughtful insights, writing of documents and clear-headed analysis. His advice and opinion were highly valued. He served as advisor to the Irish representatives at the World Synod of Bishops 1977. He attended the European Synod of Bishops in Rome in Autumn 1999 on behalf of the Irish hierarchy. He was a member for many years of the Irish Bishops Standing Committee, as well as being a member of four episcopal commissions of the Irish Bishops Conference. He was Chair of the Bishops' Department of Catholic Education and Formation. He was a significant presence in the joint Commission for Bio-Ethical Issues for the Bishops' Conferences of Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland. His commitment to ecumenism can be seen not only in warm ecumenical relationships here in Limerick and throughout Ireland, but also in his membership of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

Of course, Bishop Donal also knew how to relax. He valued friendship, had a good sense of humour and enjoyed sport. We think of his close Dublin Archdiocesan friends Frs. Teddy Downes, Cormac McIlraith, Paddy Littleton and Bill Fortune with whom he holidayed or played golf and other priests from the Dublin Archdiocese whom he esteemed. Of course, he greatly esteemed his colleagues from student days in Maynooth and elsewhere. He taught many lay and religious order students and he enjoyed meeting them over the years on various occasions. The Limerick Diocesan Staff always found in Bishop Donal a gracious and inspiring presence. There are many priests who were ordained by him who recall his personal warmth, encouragement and wise words. He treasured the supportive friendship he experienced with members of religious orders and congregations as well as associations and movements. He enjoyed, in particular, the company of his Bishop colleagues of the Episcopal Conference and priests of the Diocese of Limerick who welcomed him warmly among them. In retirement he enjoyed a weekly game of cards with priests of the Diocese.

Bishop Donal's last book bore the title *What are we waiting for?* On the one hand, these were words through which he wanted to appeal to the Irish of today, in imitation of the missionaries of the past, to take up the calling to become missionary disciples, not wilting in passive paralysis, waiting for some external permission to take initiative, but rather following the push of the Holy Spirit to go forth in mission in one's family life, in education, in social justice, in politics, in media, in the world of the arts and culture...

But the words "What are we waiting for?" were also a clue to what Bishop Donal was concentrating his mind on especially in his final years - the journey to the next life.

Ar dheis Dè go raibh a a-nam a nAnamacha Uaisle



**Fr Joe Kennedy who
died on 10th April 2024**



**Fr Willie Walsh who
died on 28th April 2024**



**Fr Frank O'Connor who
died on 1st August 2024**



**Bishop Emeritus Donal
Murray died on 13th
October 2024**



**Fr Thomas (Tom) Hurley
died on 20th November
2024**



**Canon Patrick (Paddy)
Kelly died on 8th
December 2024**

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