

Shaping the Future with Hope ***Pastoral Letter about our Diocesan Assembly***

9th & 10th MAY 2020

Two years ago I wrote a pastoral letter entitled "Sustaining our Faith Community in the Diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnois". It alerted people to the profound changes that are coming to our parishes and to the practice of faith.

In that letter I wrote "...consideration needs to be given to developing and enabling parish faith development and pastoral care to continue and to flourish with fewer priests and with greater involvement of parishioners". This is about reimagining how we worship and pass on our Christian faith. Part of that reimagining will take place in the preparation for and as a result of a Diocesan Assembly. It will be held on the 9th and 10th May 2020. Its theme is 'Shaping the future with hope'.

A DIOCESAN ASSEMBLY IS A YEARLONG PROCESS IN THREE STAGES:

Stage one is about listening. It involves the selection of delegates from each parish. The delegates will be identified this summer and will have three training sessions in advance of the Assembly to familiarise themselves with the process and the themes. They will help in the establishment of focus groups to listen to parishioners and other groups throughout the diocese. Each focus group will have a trained facilitator. I'm sure that people will have lots to say, what is said is important. From that experience of listening will emerge key themes.

Stage two is about discussing and prioritising. The themes emerging from the focus groups will be considered at a two day

Assembly on 9th and 10th May 2020. The delegates from each parish, clergy and religious will consider and shape priorities.

Stage three is about planning. A plan will be drawn up based on the findings of the Assembly – a plan for the future, a roadmap of what we should do to address current concerns and move forward. This will be practical and achievable and based on the key themes and priorities emerging from the process.

The preparations have already begun with the establishment of a Steering Committee and the engagement of a facilitator.

It is important that as many people as possible are engaged in the listening and planning opportunities that will emerge at local level in parishes. To that end please contact your Parish Pastoral Council or send your message to assembly@ardaghdiocese.org.

I think it is a vital development and a very exciting one. I ask people of all ages and of all experiences of faith, and there are many, to engage in this process and also I ask that you pray for this initiative. An Assembly Prayer has been composed asking the Holy Spirit to enthuse, energise, encourage and strengthen our hope as we make this journey together.

Over the next year we turn to our roots, to the people and the communities that have cherished and promoted the faith, that have challenged the faith, that have grown indifferent or disappointed and angry with the faith and the way it is promoted. We turn to listen, to learn and to 'shape the future with hope', to plan the way forward, a pilgrim way forward, a way that is laid out for us guided by the Holy Spirit.

FRANCIS DUFFY

Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois

Pentecost Sunday, 9th June 2019