

Much work has been done since then to prepare for the future. In particular, the Diocesan Assembly was a grace filled event which brought together representatives from all over the diocese. It identified three main priorities for the future – Family ministry, Formation of the laity and ministry to young people. And despite the interruption of the Covid pandemic, a start has been made in all these areas, particularly in the area of family ministry. Many parishes across the diocese now have a dedicated family Mass on Sundays. In addition, our parish councils have been involved in the synodal reflection begun by Pope Francis. One of its key themes is co-responsibility where by working together, everyone in the church has a role in its future.

In tandem with all these activities, Bishop Francis consulted widely regarding nine pastoral areas, essentially groups of parishes co-operating together regarding the formation, promotion and practice of the faith along with maintaining the physical structure in these parishes. The nine pastoral areas are clearly outlined on the map of the diocese on the back page of this pastoral letter. As Bishop Francis emphasised, this is not about closing churches or parishes but rather about reimagining how we worship and pass on our Christian faith to a new generation of believers. This process of grouping parishes has already begun. **Carrick-on-Shannon** has been grouped with **Annaduff** and **Kiltubrid**, and **Lanesborough** with **Killashee** and **Newtowncashel**. And the reality is that in the very near future your parish may not have a resident priest, or if you have, then your priest may be called upon to provide pastoral care in a neighbouring parish that does not have one.

Shortly after my arrival in the diocese a new Diocesan Pastoral Committee was established with the objective of mapping out our future with the theme of 'Travelling Together'. Its work has been closely aligned with the Synodal process. In May of this year, it met with representatives from every parish in the diocese. From those meetings has emerged the need going forward to provide training and support for parish pastoral councils. And in the medium to long term, to establish a network of parish secretaries, catechists and pastoral workers who will work with our clergy to ensure the future of worship and faith formation.