

As a result of these meetings the Diocesan Pastoral Committee has established, as a first priority, that there will be a restructured pastoral council in every parish in the diocese by the middle of 2025. A new template for parish pastoral councils is being prepared and will be ready by the autumn of this year. A network of trainers and a programme of training will also be made available to assist parishes to roll out the new model from the end of this year into 2025. We will also have a commissioning ceremony for all our new parish pastoral councils in the Cathedral.

It is very important that everyone in our diocese knows and understands what is happening, as inevitable changes occur. That is why I am writing this pastoral letter to you now. As we travel this journey together, please pray for the continuing help and guidance of the Lord as we strive to do His will. It is of course vital that we also continue to pray for and promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life. That men and women, young and older will answer the call to serve the people of God. This year for the first time in a number of years we hope to have two seminarians beginning the journey to priesthood. Please pray for them in particular.

For many centuries now, the Church has celebrated a special Jubilee Year every twenty five years. Next year we will be celebrating a Jubilee year to which Pope Francis has given the motto – *Pilgrims of Hope*. In the heart of each one of us is a desire and expectation that good things will come our way, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. For all of us in our diocese, may the Jubilee be an opportunity to be renewed in hope. That hope which as Christians encourages and sustains us as we journey through life towards the goal of unity with the Lord Jesus. St. Mel and St. Ciaran pray for us.

Not only that; let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope,

And a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (Romans 5: 3-5).

+ Paul Connell,
Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois