



# Ferns Diocesan Pastoral Council

**Our First Year as a Diocesan Pastoral Council**

**November 2014**

## Commissioned by Bishop Brennan



### How would your parish benefit from a Pastoral Council?

*"It is almost twenty five years since the Irish Bishops first called for the development of parish pastoral councils .... this call has been repeated many times and at various levels within the Catholic Church in Ireland. In parish communities throughout the country, the life of faith, liturgy and service is being enriched through the work of the parish pastoral council."*

From "Parish Pastoral Councils: A Framework...", 2007

*"The spread of bible study groups, of ecclesial basic communities and of pastoral councils is helping to overcome clericalism and to increase lay responsibility."*

(Pope Francis to the Episcopal council of CELAM in South America, July 28, 2013).

**See details of parish councils and resources on Page 4.**

On Sunday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013 at 12.30 Mass in St Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy, Bishop Denis Brennan commissioned the very first Diocesan Pastoral Council for the Diocese of Ferns. This was a proud moment in the history of the Diocese. The Diocesan Pastoral Council is made up of priests, religious and laity with each of the four Deaneries of the Diocese represented.

Bishop Denis Brennan along with the Priests of St. Aidan's Cathedral, Fr. Richard Lawless and Fr. Billy Swan welcomed everybody to Mass on this momentous day. Members of the newly formed Diocesan Pastoral Council played an active part in the Mass through readings and prayers of the faithful, carrying the Processional Cross, the Book of the Gospels and a lighted candle, and the offertory gifts of Bread and Wine to the Altar. After the Gospel, the Bishop told the congregation what was about to take place for the first time in the Diocese of Ferns and that the purpose of this Diocesan Pastoral Council was to advise him, as Bishop, of the pastoral needs of the Diocesan community. He then invited those who had been called to this service to come forward. The members of this newly formed Diocesan Pastoral Council stepped forward together onto the steps of the Altar, the Bishop then invited them to kneel, he commissioned them, blessed them and welcomed them to this new ministry. Bishop Denis Brennan presented each of the members with a stone from Carrigbyrne Mass Rock. This was offered as a symbol of association with the long history in their diocese of keeping the faith and at times with great cost, and of the new



Diocesan Pastoral Council's commitment to preserving it for future generations.

After the Mass the members of this new and exciting Diocesan Pastoral Council posed for photos and were congratulated by their families and friends and members of their Parish and the parishioners of St Aidan's Cathedral. It was a great privilege for all the members to be part of this group and they accepted this task humbly but with pride.

This ceremony was well received by the congregation at Mass that Sunday with many people travelling from other Parishes in the Diocese to witness this historic event. St. Aidan's Cathedral was full to capacity and the priests of the Parish and the Bishop spoke with many of the parishioners after the Mass. There was a positive feedback from the Parishioners and many were pleased to have been present at this commissioning. It was a positive step forward, one that I personally feel will be a great asset to both the Bishop, the Diocese and to all the Parishes

therein.

We pray to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit to bless these members of our first Diocesan Pastoral Council. May God the Father deepen their faith. May God the Son entuse them with hope. May God the Holy Spirit fill their hearts with love wisdom and inspiration. (Prepared by Joan Mitchell (Enniscorthy Deanery Representative).

### Photos

**1.** Caroline O' Connor, Michael Foley (chairman), Maria Colfer (co-ordinator), Nan Furlong, and Joan Mitchell at a diocesan pastoral council meeting.

**2.** Diocesan Pastoral council members Gerry Maguire (Ballycullanne), Sr. Grace Redmond (Presentation, Wexford) and Audrey Doran, (Gorey) chat on the fringes of a diocesan pastoral council meeting. (P.2)

**3.** Council members Aidan Ryan (Enniscorthy) and Laura Connick (Wexford). (P.3)

**4.** Maria Colfer - Pastoral Co-ordinator for the diocese of Ferns. (P.4).

## What is the Diocesan Pastoral Council?



The Ferns Diocesan Pastoral Council was established in October 2013 and it meets approximately 10 times a year.

It is a representative body of the faithful which works in close partnership with the bishop to further the mission of the church in the diocese of Ferns.

It is concerned primarily with people and with building up the faith, hope and love that cements them into a real, living and caring Christian community.

The role of the diocesan pastoral council is consultative and advisory in nature.

The diocesan pastoral council will work in partnership with other existing structures in the diocese including the college of consultants, the council of priests, the diocesan focus group, other diocesan committees and groupings.

### Aims

The purpose of the Diocesan Pastoral Council is described in Canon Law as follows:

'Its function, under the authority of

the Bishop, is to study and weigh those matters which concern the pastoral works in the diocese and to propose practical conclusions concerning them'. [Can. 511].

### Reflection

There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but in everybody it is the same God who is at work in them all. The particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the general good. (1 Cor 12:4-7)

### Prayer.

**Lord, as disciples, help us to live like Jesus with you, with each other and with all of creation. Keep us alert in faith to the signs of our times and eager to accept the challenge of your Gospel. Heal us with your love, nourish us with your Word, and feed us at your table. Open our eyes to appreciate and use the gifts of all, signs of your Spirit among us. May we be living witnesses to truth and freedom, to justice and peace, in our homes, in our workplaces and in our communities. Amen**

2.



## Key tasks are emerging... members are working...

The meetings we have held as a Council and in consultation with other groups within the diocese have helped us to discern what are our key goals:

1. The preparation for and celebration of the sacrament of baptism
2. Support and pastoral care of marriage and the family;
3. **To support and promote parish pastoral councils.**

To that end, we have divided ourselves into working parties and set ourselves the goals of coming back to the Council

with concrete proposals for recommendation to the people, religious and priests of the diocese.

### Membership of the Diocesan Pastoral Council

The members of the Council are:

Bishop Denis Brennan, Sister Grace Redmond, Audrey Doran and Caroline O'Connor (Gorey Deanery); Joan Mitchell and Aidan Ryan (Enniscorthy Deanery); Nan Furlong and Gerry Maguire (New Ross deanery); Laura Connick and chairman Michael Foley (Wexford Dean-

ery), Father John Carroll, Father Billy Swan.



## A Trip to Dublin - The Family in the 21st Century



**"THE FAMILY IS THE NATURAL AND FUNDAMENTAL GROUP UNIT OF SOCIETY, AND IS ENTITLED TO PROTECTION BY SOCIETY AND THE STATE" -Article 16 (3) of the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.**

Thus Archbishop Diarmuid Martin opened his contribution, making the keynote address at a recent conference entitled "Marriage and Family at the Heart of the Parish" in Clonliffe College, which I attended as a member of the Ferns Diocesan Pastoral Council. In exploring the challenges to the modern Christian family, he took as his starting point the above affirmation, written in 1948 shortly after the end of a terrible war which saw individual rights trampled on by totalitarian states, when the family remained a pillar in the defence of the most fundamental rights and values, and confirmed its role as a bridge between the individual and society.

He believed it would not be possible to write such a statement today, given the growth in the rights of the individual, and also the distinct change in family size and composition, instability of family structure, and in the way families are formed. He stopped short of idealising traditional family structures, which were often characterised by an unhealthy male dominance, the rights of women and children being secondary. But then a secular belief arose that saw the family as being oppressive, suppressing individual rights. Thus the Vatican was categorised by the more liberal states of the E.U. as being fundamentalist, defending an untenable, backward looking position,.

These same ideological debates continue around the world, including Ireland, and he believed the Church cannot stand aside and accept this diminution of the family as an institution. One way of dealing with this challenge is to focus on how we build strong families. We need to help the next generation to understand how a stable and loving family is a primary focus for their happiness and fulfilment. In Ireland the family is challenged as elsewhere, but is healthier than in many other countries. The human is not meant to function in isolation merely as a self-serving individual. Our humanity finds realisation and fulfilment in relationships based on respect, caring and sharing.

He referred to the few words which Pope Francis believes are the basis of human courtesy and at the heart of any real family relationship - " PLEASE, THANKS and I'M SORRY" He suggests repeating them three times daily, - before or after meals!

We need to restore confidence in the family. Every new marriage is a desire for happiness and fulfilment. As a Church, we need to build up a culture in which that love can flourish in the context of a lifelong commitment, strengthened by rediscovering the simplicity of family prayer. He asks us to swim against the tide of popular culture that sees everything as temporary, and above all- " Have the courage to be happy"

Dr Tony Fahey, Professor of Social Policy at U.C.D. spoke of the changes to the composition of the Irish family in the past half century, when aspects of Catholic teaching are now largely ignored, particularly with regard to co-habitation before or instead of marriage.

Family sizes have reduced drastically. In 1966, more than half all housing estate families had 7 or more children. Now the family of choice is 2 children, and the single parent is accepted socially.

In 1960, 5% of children were born outside marriage, by 2000 it had risen to 30%, but not necessarily to single parents. It became increasingly common to make a decision to rear a family in an unmarried relationship. The religious aspect of foregoing a sacrament wasn't relevant. Abortion rates rose and the number of single parent births fell as a result. There was also a deliberate tendency with some females to form single parent families.

In 1982, with the ending of what was then termed illegitimacy, children of all and no relationships were treated equally, but unmarried fathers didn't receive full rights. It was deemed more important to respect the rights of individual children than the

institution of marriage.

Divorce rates rose steadily until 2007, but are now quite low. It appears that the division of property is a deterrent, coupled with the reluctance of Irish people to enter into formal second unions.

Co-habitation before marriage is now widely accepted.

The proportion of young women either married or in relationships is the lowest in Europe.

The final speaker, Collette Furlong, previously a third level lecturer, is Catechist to the Sligo Parishes Cluster. This group, spread over a number of parishes in Sligo, aims to create an independent group or cluster of families, based on the premise that each parish is a community of families. Their belief is that families must be active missionaries offering mutual support, through enhancing the status of the Sacraments, and the promotion of Family Masses and Family Prayer.

It bears directly on what the Diocesan Pastoral Council hopes to achieve in Ferns Diocese.

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