

Future Church

As part of our series on the Church in the years to come, Anne Marie Lee looks ahead at how in her view the Church in Ireland may appear in the future.



For the Catholic Church to be relevant in Ireland it must be a Church of the people. The normal lives of the people, as lived in modern society, must be reflected in the Church of today. We need theologians and philosophers who will study and bring the message of Jesus down through the centuries to us, the people.

It will be a welcoming not a judgemental Church, since God is our ultimate judge and all humans have

their flaws. All people are equal in the eyes of God, the same must apply in the Church. All adults must be free to serve in all aspects of Church life from pope down. The institutional Church must be pared back to a much simpler form consisting of servants of the Word.

Confession will be less practised; we will forgive each other for transgressions as only God is the ultimate judge. We will be free to participate in

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Church life as we see fit, there will be no more obligations to attend, to fast, to confess.

We will have an inclusive liturgy. The latest official text of the Mass was released in 2008 and it remained, to the disappointment of many, a language mostly exclusive of women. Introducing children to their First Holy Communion will be the responsibility of the family and carried out when the child is of an age to understand. The Sacrament of Confirmation might be received from mid-to-late-teens, when the young person is more competent to make such a commitment.

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Informal religious education should be available in every parish or between two or three parishes. This can be in the form of discussion groups,

lectures on spiritual or historical religious subjects, reading groups, etc. Presently religious education for adults seems in many places to be non-existent or to be limited to academic courses providing accredited certificates based on exam results.

There is a need for various types of gatherings from parish visitation groups to ensure the sick, the elderly and the lonely are not neglected; groups to organise scouts, guides, youth clubs and sales of work, choirs, a drama group to produce a play each year or every two years and a children's nativity play.

I have been invited on a number of occasions to give the homily at Mass. I knew most of the people in the church, their circumstances and their family make-up. I spoke to them of the families of Abraham, Sara and Hagar with their children Ishmael and Isaac (Gen 16); Jacob and his wives Leah and Rachel (Gen 29:15–30) and his concubines Bilhah and Zilpha. Then there was Mary and Joseph, who was not the father of Jesus their son (Mt 1:18–24). Here were different make-ups of family, all loved by God regardless of circumstances.

The Church of the future will belong to the people, be facilitated by the people with the leadership/guidance of the ordained priest or parish administrator, male or female. Canon law will reflect that change. The parish will be the parish of the people, not only of the priest but involving the priest and deacons as appropriate. The priest may be married and have a family. The parish council, facilitated by its elected chair, will make decisions concerning the running of the parish, democratically, by a vote.