

To Serve in New Ways

Bishop Larry Duffy of Clogher looks forward to new challenges of ministry in his diocese.

In his letter, 'Our Baptism Calls Us to Serve in New Ways', Bishop Duffy sets out the background to the current situation and the outcomes of a recent review day held in June, which highlighted the urgent need to look at a whole new model for mission and ministry into the future. The facts, he states, are that if the diocese continues as it is, in less than twenty years time there will be less than ten priests to cover the eighty-five churches from Bundoran on the Atlantic to Inniskeen and Killanny on the Louth-Monaghan border. He points out that there is too much dependency on priests and on sacramental provision, rather than 'one that is broader in terms of recognising, utilising and

The facts, he states, are that if the diocese continues as it is, in less than twenty years time there will be less than ten priests to cover the eighty-five churches from Bundoran on the Atlantic to Inniskeen and Killanny on the Louth-Monaghan border.

honouring the vocation and varied gifts of all the baptised and which will, over time, allow for really effective and meaningful co-responsibility in the Church's mission'.

The pastoral letter also sets the local reality into the wider context of what is happening within the Church at national and international level, particularly the emphasis on a synodal Church that listens and walks with people in the various situations and how these processes can help 'enable us to imagine and realise new possibilities for the future of the faith here as well as journeying with those people who carry wounds which were inflicted on them by Church representatives in the past'. He also cites the Year of Vocations currently underway and its emphasis on diocesan priesthood. In addition, Bishop Duffy highlights new life-long ministries that Pope Francis has opened up to all lay women and men as well as the ordained ministry of permanent deacons, as examples of new ways of being Church now and into the future.

To move matters forward locally, and bearing in mind a series of consultations that were held early in 2020, Bishop Duffy is establishing a diocesan group to lead and guide



Bishop Duffy anoints the new altar in St Mary's Church, Castleblayney in 2019

a planning process. This group will be made up mostly of lay men and women, and their role will be to listen to people locally in a structured way and to draw up a vision and a plan for the future outworking of pastoral ministry across parishes. Noting that the configuration of parish groupings may have to be reviewed in order to take account of the capacity for pastoral outreach, new forms of ministry, the wellbeing of priests and local circumstances, Bishop Duffy adds, 'These challenges will involve letting go of some things that are familiar to us. We will be challenged to develop new ways of learning and celebrating our faith; new ways of gathering in our parishes for prayer in the absence of a priest, new ways of preparing for and celebrating funerals, new ways of assisting in parish

administration and so on.' He points out that some parishes are already doing some of this and notes that some have asked lay people to go forward for training and formation to lead some aspects of funeral liturgies locally.

Bishop Duffy concludes his letter by calling on people to take up this invitation to participate in the life and mission of the Church with hope, adding that God is always with his Church, despite the noises and ideologies that try to drown out the message of faith today. 'Let us discern, therefore, on how best we can all promote a different way of doing things; how we can better appreciate and value the specific gifts of all the baptised and the ordained within the one People of God – the Pobal Dé. We cannot afford to wait any longer!'