CLONFERT, GALWAY, KILMACDUAGH AND KILFENORA

Le Chéile

2026

GATHERING FOR MEMBERS OF PARISH PASTORAL COUNCILS



Rise up with hope and proclaim the Gospel

Éirígí le dóchas agus fógraígí an Soiscéal

BISHOP MICHAEL'S WORDS OF WELCOME

There is a future for our parishes



Your willingness to serve as a member of your Parish Pastoral Council is deeply edifying. Tá bhur seirbhís agus bhur ndílseacht fíorluachmhar, your service and faithfulness are of immense value. Is obair chiúin í go minic, much of this work goes unseen, ach is obair ríthábhachtach í, yet it is vitally important work. I thank God for the continued commitment and ministry of our priests in challenging circumstances. I equally admire your generosity as parishioners and your willingness to serve, which at its heart is, like priesthood itself, a response to God's call. Tá sibh ag tabhairt sampla den dea-thoil agus den tseirbhís Chríostaí a theastaíonn inár saol inniu, you are giving an example of the goodwill and Christian service that our world needs today. I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire you in the task at hand. I pray that God will raise up new people to assist you and to carry on your work when your own term of service is complete.

I am absolutely convinced that the future vitality of a parish will depend largely on the faith, commitment, vision and effectiveness of its Parish Pastoral Council. Twenty years from now we may have fewer than ten local priests serving our sixty-four parishes. If our parishes are to remain centres of faith, local people of faith will need to stand with their parish. They will also need to cooperate ever more closely with neighbouring parishes within our faith communities. They will need to maintain our local faith communities, renew them and help them grow into something vibrant, welcoming and attractive to those who are searching for meaning, purpose and hope. This calls for a deliberate effort. Ní neart go cur le chéile, there is no strength without working together. Le chéile is fearr sinn, together we are stronger. It requires commitment. It requires sacrifice. It requires a generosity of spirit. Above all, it requires faith. Tá todhchaí lenár bparóistí, there is a future for our parishes. But that future will depend in no small measure on the people gathered in this room today.

Our gathering today is also a powerful expression of synodality at diocesan level. We gather as bishop, priests and people. Táimid le chéile mar aon phobal Dé, we are together as one people of God. Equal in baptism. Inspired by the Holy Spirit. Interested in and committed to our local faith communities. Different in our gifts, but united in our mission. Aontaithe sa chreideamh agus sa tseirbhís, united in faith and in service. My wish is that this gathering will strengthen our sense of diocesan community. I hope that as members of Parish Pastoral Councils you will know that others stand alongside you. Níl aon duine againn ag obair inár n-aonar, none of us is working alone. I hope that today will give us fresh ideas, renewed energy and practical encouragement. I hope that we will return to our parishes with a deeper sense of purpose and mission. Guím fuinneamh úr oraibh, I pray for new energy for you. Guím misneach oraibh, I pray for courage for you. Agus guím dóchas oraibh, and I pray for hope for you. Together, let us rise up with hope in our parishes, in our faith community areas and across our dioceses.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 How do we see our responsibility for the future of our parish?

02 What is our plan to get new people involved?

REFLECTIONS FROM THE GATHERING

Carried to Jesus

Paula reflected on the Gospel story of the paralysed man who, with the help of four people, was carried to meet Jesus (Mark 2:1-12). The crowd was so large that they were unable to get near, so they opened the roof above where Jesus was and lowered the sick man on his stretcher. Seeing their faith, Jesus reached out to the man. To the amazement of the crowd, he cured him of his illness. She compared our parishes, with their strengths and weaknesses, to the paralysed man. So many people desire direction, meaning and healing in life: the elderly, the young, families, and those who are sick or troubled by burdens. She asked: who is to bring them to Jesus? Which people of goodwill are carrying the people of the parish at this time? Paula was bold enough to suggest that it might indeed be the role of the Parish Pastoral Council to grab the ends of the stretcher. She suggested that the role of the Parish Pastoral Council is to find new ways, when old ways no longer work, to bring the people of the parish into that life-changing encounter with Jesus.



FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 How does our Parish Pastoral Council bring people to Jesus?

02 Are there things we have been doing that we need to stop doing?

03 What new ways might we try in this regard?

The vineyards of Bordeaux

Paula ended the day with a very personal reflection from a recent trip to Bordeaux during which she visited some of its famous vineyards. She was surprised to see among the manicured lines of vines purposely planted beds of roses. Investigating further, the guide explained how the roses were planted as a sort of early warning system for the health of the vines and the health of the vineyard. Paula drew a comparison. Perhaps the health of the Parish Pastoral Council is an indicator of the health of the parish. She ended on the hopeful thought that a committed, active Parish Pastoral Council that meets regularly bodes well for the life and future of the parish.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 How is our Parish Pastoral Council getting on?

02 Are we constituted properly, meeting regularly and achieving our aims?

03 Does our Parish Pastoral Council need a reboot?

PARISH EXPERIENCE

Listening before change



Parish representatives in discussion at Le Chéile.

A parish assembly

The joint Parish Pastoral Council of Ardrahan, Kilchreest and Peterswell gave a presentation on how they went about advertising and organising a gathering of the people of the parish to discuss what they, as parishes, might do to nourish the faith life of parishioners.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 As a Parish Pastoral Council, do we truly know the needs of parishioners?

02 Could we organise something similar?

Managing big changes

The East Galway City Faith Community of Parishes (Mervue, Ballybane, Renmore, Good Shepherd and Castlegar) gave a presentation on how, conscious of the burdens of ministry on the priests serving their grouping of parishes, they engaged in a process of consultation with parishioners and the Parish Pastoral Councils involved to significantly reduce weekend Masses from fifteen to eight.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 Have we reviewed our Mass schedule recently?

02 Would fewer Masses result in a better pooling of resources and a more meaningful celebration?

HANDING ON THE FAITH

School and parish





Music at the gathering and the presentation on Catholic school and parish links.

Faith formation in the parish

The Syro-Malankara community, a Catholic community from India, described how it provides faith formation and catechesis for its children and young people each Sunday before Mass. This offers an opportunity to get to know the young people of the parish, to teach them the faith and to accompany them and their parents on their faith journeys.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 How does our parish hand on the faith?

02 How does our parish prepare for the Sacraments of Baptism, First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation?

Building the link with local schools

Most parishes have at least one Catholic school. Against the backdrop of great change in this area, Ms Claire Hynes and Msgr Cathal Geraghty spoke about the opportunities in linking the local Catholic school more closely with the life of the parish and the life of the parish with the local Catholic school. They invited Parish Pastoral Councils to actively include this in their remit by appointing someone on each Parish Pastoral Council with the specific remit of liaising with the local Catholic schools and working to build relationships between school and parish.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 Do we know the names of the Catholic schools within the parish?

02 How might these schools become more part of the life of the parish and the parish become more part of school life?

03 Could we as a Parish Pastoral Council nominate someone as our Catholic Schools Liaison Person?

MINISTRY IN OUR PARISHES

Young people and lay ministry





Youth ministry participants and the presentation on opportunities for lay ministry.

Parish youth ministry

Recently, the Dioceses have embarked on a new initiative. Clonfert Galway Catholic Youth Chaplaincy Services aims to support and accompany young people throughout the Dioceses on their faith journeys. Father Declan Lohan, Chaplain to and Director of these services, explained his belief that, as a faith community, we have a responsibility to respond to the questions young people today have when it comes to life and faith, and to accompany them in their search for meaning and purpose in life. He outlined various initiatives that are currently in place in this area and others he hoped to progress. One such initiative was that each Parish Pastoral Council would appoint someone who would have responsibility for outreach to young people in the parish. This could be a young person, or someone with a heart for young people, willing to work with Father Declan as part of a Diocesan Youth Forum to progress this ministry. He also spoke of the importance of the ministry of altar servers in our vision for Parish Youth Ministry.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 How does our parish reach out to young people?

02 Does our parish have altar servers? If so, how can we strengthen this ministry? Where this ministry is absent, how can we begin it?

03 Could we as a Parish Pastoral Council nominate someone as our Youth Liaison Person?

New opportunities to serve

For the last few years, An Ghailíl, our Centre for Formation for Mission and Ministry, has been supporting initiatives aimed at equipping both laity and clergy for new forms of ministry. Father Gerard McCarthy presented on different possibilities for new lay ministries for women and men within parishes – Ministers of Communion, Ministers of the Word, Ministry to the Sick, Funeral and Bereavement Ministry, Youth Ministry, Outreach to the Poor, Prayer Groups, Leading Liturgy, Outreach to Schools, Catechetics and Faith Formation, etc. It is hoped that, in spring 2027, applications will be sought for a new two-year, part-time, accredited Diploma in Pastoral Ministry programme to train people to take up such positions in our parishes.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

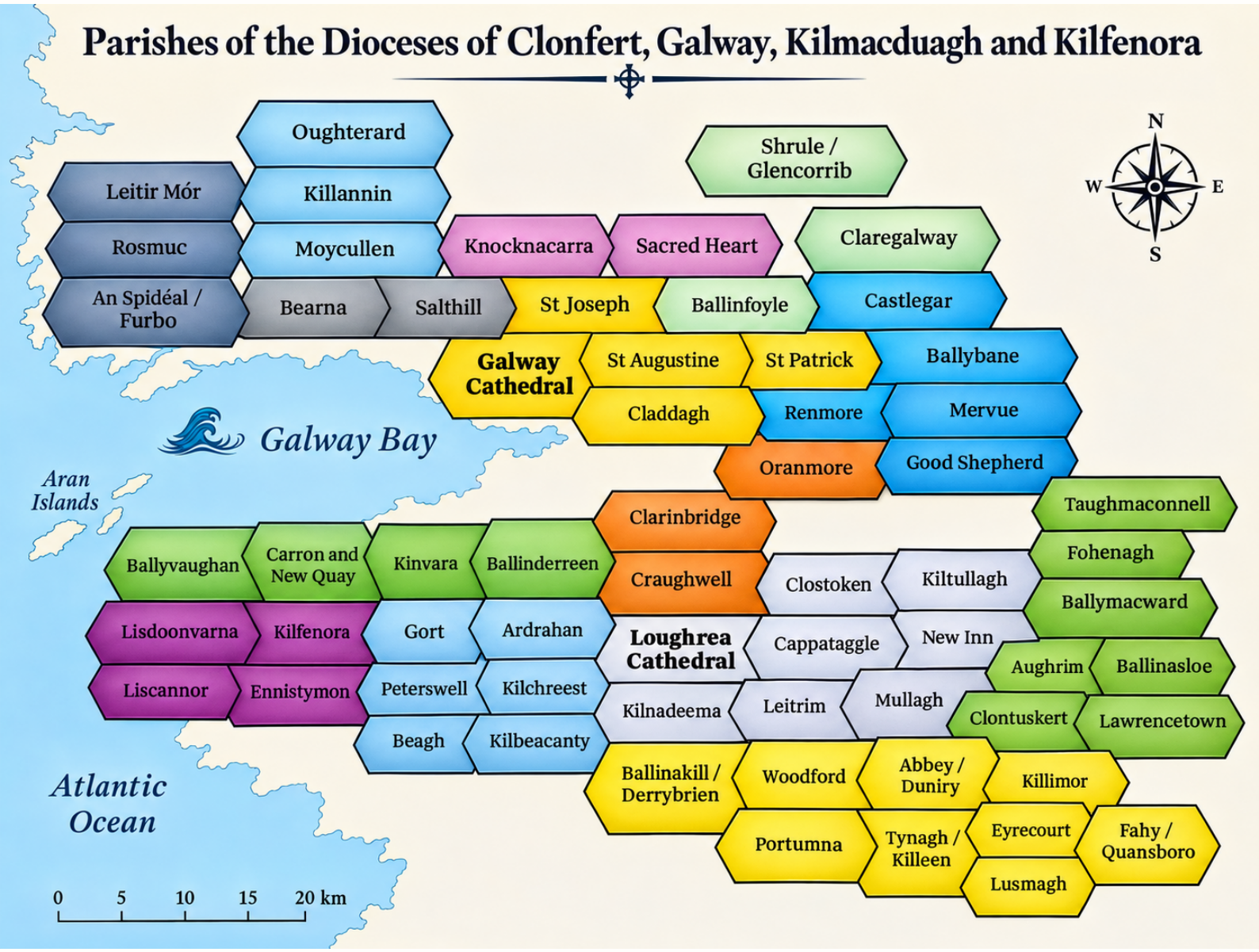
01 What new lay ministries could our parish benefit from?

02 How would we introduce them?

03 Could we put forward two willing people to undertake the two-year part-time training programme?

RESTRUCTURING AND RENEWAL

Proposed Faith Community Areas



Proposed parish groupings • A work in progress, subject to further discussion and revision.

The Diocesan Committee for Restructuring and Renewal has proposed possible new, self-sustaining Faith Community Areas of parishes. The future of many parishes will depend on their ability to work together. The proposal shown above is a work in progress and will require further thought and revision over time.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING

01 Do we see advantages in groups of parishes working together?

02 What initiatives could we undertake with the parishes in our proposed grouping?

03 What feedback would we like to send to Fr Gerard McCarthy at gmccathy@anghailil.ie?

PRAYER

Before a meeting of the Parish Pastoral Council

PREPARATION

Nominate someone to organise the prayer. Prepare a sacred space that everyone can see. This could include a Bible, symbolising the life-changing message of the Gospel; a candle, symbolising God's presence among us; and an image of Jesus, Mary or a saint associated with the parish. Three or four symbols are sufficient.

Leader — In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All — Amen.

Leader — Let us pause for a moment in silence
to become aware that God is here with us.

Pause for one or two minutes, during which one member lights the candle.

Another voice — Heavenly Father,
as we gather to discuss our local community of faith,
we ask that you send your Holy Spirit on each person present.

Give us the gifts of wisdom and insight, courage and imagination for our meeting. Help us to listen to your voice and to discern your will for us at this time.

We pray for the people of this parish, especially those who have died recently *(you may wish to name them)*.
May Jesus embrace them in eternity.

We pray for those among us who are sick or troubled *(you may wish to name them)*. May Jesus heal them and help them at this time.

We pray for our young people. May Jesus inspire them.

We pray for those seeking meaning and direction in life.
May Jesus guide them.

Father, give us the strength we need to carry out the decisions we take and the work we undertake in your name.

With Mother Mary by our side, we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

BLESSING

Priest — May almighty God bless us in our work,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All — Amen.

Priest — Let us bless the Lord.

All — Thanks be to God.