



Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin

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“Put out into the Deep Water” A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Denis Nulty

Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious and Lay Faithful,

The scripture verse “*put out into the deep water*”¹ comes from Luke’s gospel. It is the verse which has steered our Kildare & Leighlin conversation on the structures and supports we need to put in place as we plan for the future. These conversations have been further enriched by those who engaged and continue to engage with the Synodal Pathway. I thank the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Pastoral Council and all who have facilitated these conversations.

A few months ago, I announced that the seven former deaneries of the diocese were now reconstituted as seven Pastoral Areas. I heard many questions as I visited the seven Pastoral Areas reflecting on these structures and supports. Maybe the most critical question is how can we be Church with one another in 2022 and onwards thereafter? How can we develop new ways of evangelizing that speak to our people? How can we feel less afraid to work more closely together, while still honouring the autonomy and identity of the individual parish? What worked in the past doesn’t of necessity address the needs of the future. We must build a different type of Church, where all of us are in the boat together, not just the priest, the deacon and the small group around them, but all of us with our hands to the oar.

Maybe we are frightened of the deep water? With this Pastoral Letter I’m inviting you, the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful to come on the journey. Perhaps we’re unsure of where the journey might end? I remind you of the last words of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel: “*I am with you always till the end of time*”². Possibly we are tired and haven’t the energy for something new? With this Pastoral I’m reassuring you, you will not be on your own, there will be supports wrapped around you.

Working Together in our Pastoral Areas/Parish Clusters:

When Fr. Paddy Sweeney spoke at the Diocesan Clergy Gathering in Athlone in January 2020 he said “*this is a moment requiring a different way of thinking, a different way of talking and a different way of acting*”. I am now offering 19 more localized parish clusters, some of them crossing different Pastoral Areas. The 19 parish clusters are offered as an *ad experimentum* arrangement. These are the clusters that have emerged out of those initial Pastoral Area meetings.

It is important to give these clusters every support. I don’t see huge changes coming to the attached map; there may be slight tweaking, but this is the clustering within the wider Pastoral Area(s) that your parish will operate in from now on. I am asking that discussions be held at first at parish level with lay people, within the parish cluster and then in the

¹ Lk.5:4

² Mt.28:20

Pastoral Area to make sure that the clustered parishes are operable and correctly assigned. I am asking that responses come back to me regarding the parish clustering proposal by October 15th.

The Importance of the Sunday Eucharist:

We all accept that we celebrate too many Masses, and our priests are stretched to cover every scheduled celebration. Often it is difficult for a priest to get away from the parish for his day off, or indeed arrange some annual leave, because it is becoming more challenging to get cover. I am very conscious of the health and well-being of our priests, and I ask parishioners to be reasonable in the demands they make of them. If a priest gets sick or over-stretched, where does that leave us?

I have asked the Diocesan Commission for Liturgical Formation to organize training in the autumn of lay people to prepare and lead liturgy in parishes. I would envisage that the lay leader, as part of a local team, would stand in on the priest's day-off or during the weekdays of his holidays to lead the liturgy.

The proposed 19 parish clusters must reflect together on a sustainable local Mass schedule. In simple terms every parish, every religious house will be looking at their current celebration schedule and asking how they might have a richer celebration. Simple changes everywhere can allow for more time between Masses, improved celebrations, and better participation of all who gather. An agreed approach to what happens in a local church when a priest is unavailable for Sunday Mass will also need to be arrived at in time.

I know changing schedules disrupts routine and traditions, but I am appealing to all to look on this with an open mind and a generous heart. I realise that there will be a certain loss in these necessary changes, but also there is a gain of more enriching and lifegiving celebrations. This request was evident in our recent diocesan synodal submission. It is my intention that on the First Sunday of Advent, November 27th a sustainable local Mass schedule within each cluster will be agreed upon and announced and then become operable on the First Sunday of Lent, February 26th, 2023. These schedules may have to be amended by the parish cluster as time goes on, but we need the first of them agreed and announced without delay.

A Greater Sharing and Co-Responsibility:

But it's more than about Masses, much more. I am asking that deep reflection happens as to how these parish clusters or the wider Pastoral Area might share resources such as secretarial services or the employment of administrative support. Can we support one another in our chaplaincy outreach to schools (Primary and Secondary), hospitals, nursing homes, prisons? Our experience of the pandemic taught us the importance of the parish taking the lead in the programmes for sacramental preparation working alongside our schools and homes. Might we work towards a common approach within each cluster?

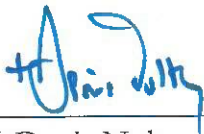
The Synodal discussions that are ongoing have been a great example of people journeying with one another – walking and talking. We continue on the synodal journey. The life of the parish clusters will be the breadth and strength of what is shared and how deep the engagement becomes.

Keeping the Momentum Going:

This is a wonderful opportunity for our diocese. I understand that having a definite timetable is very important. I want to remind you of what must be done locally, neighbourly and within the Pastoral Area in the coming weeks:

- Reflect on this Pastoral within your parish and in the parish cluster, leading to a meeting in each of the seven Pastoral Areas and a response to me by **October 15th**.
- Further reflect and explore practical ideas around a sustainable schedule of local Masses and greater sharing of services and resources within the agreed parish clusters, by **November 27th**.
- New schedule of Masses becomes operable throughout the diocese on **February 26th 2023**.
- There are other challenges that will be addressed at **September** meetings of the Council of Priests and the Diocesan Pastoral Council, particularly around how this process can be supported and sustained into the future.

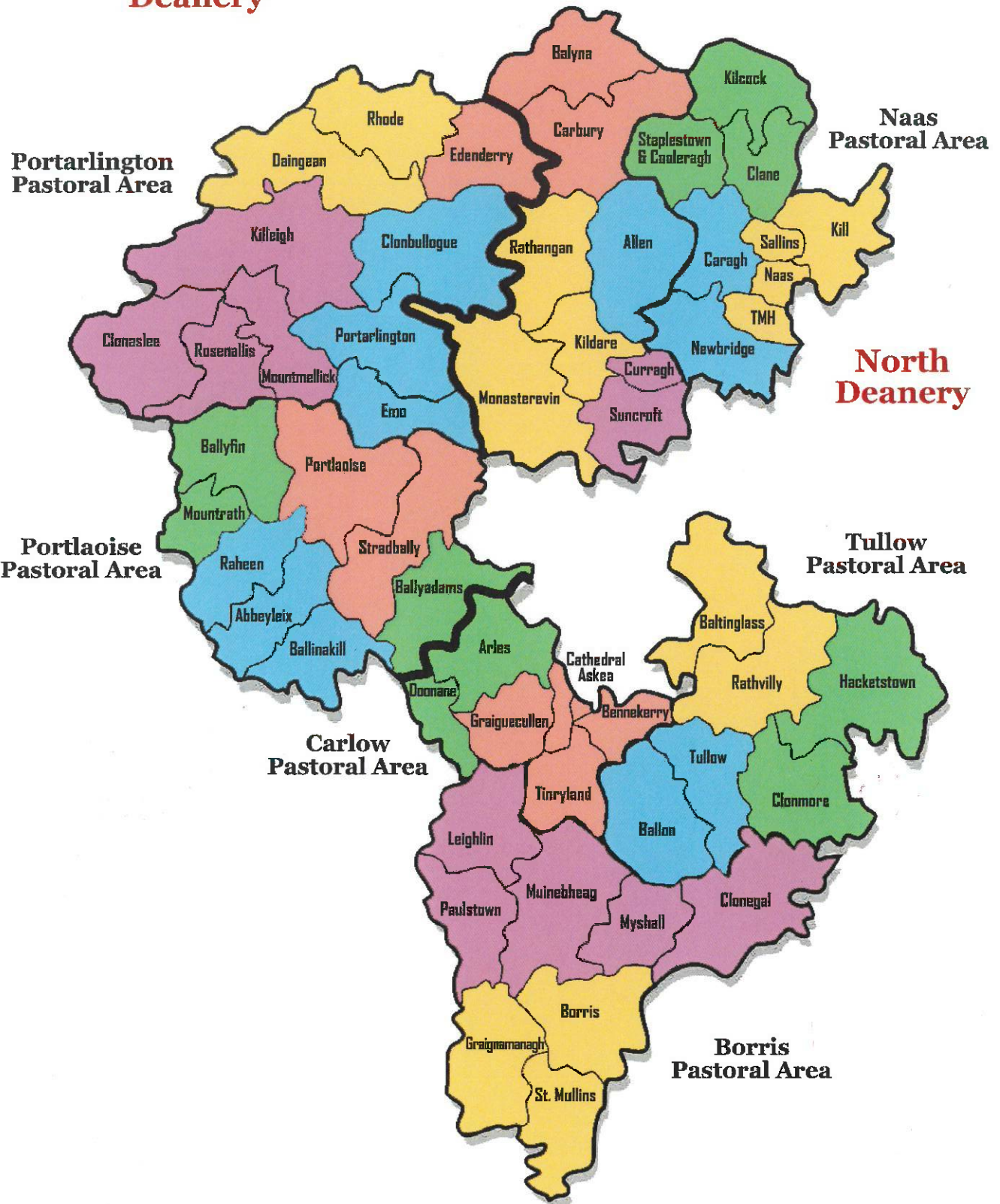
We are indeed in the boat together, we are launching into the deep. I pray that St. Brigid, St. Laserian and St. Conleth will guide our sails as we continue to journey together,



✠ Denis Nulty
Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin
5 September 2022

**West
Deanery**

**Kildare
Pastoral Area**



**North
Deanery**

**Tullow
Pastoral Area**

**Borris
Pastoral Area**

**South
Deanery**