



Living Church

DOWN & CONNOR 2013

Diocesan Pastoral Plan



Prompted by the Holy Spirit, we seek to witness to our faith in Jesus Christ as a community of disciples dedicated to service of God and one another.



Foreword

In this Year of Faith 2012-2013, launched by Pope Benedict XVI, I present this Pastoral Plan to each single member of the Diocese of Down and Connor confident that it will support us in building up the Body of Christ. Throughout salvation history, during the life and ministry of Jesus, from the early Christian church to today, God constantly calls humanity to salvation and forms a People.

We too are God's chosen people, glimpsing and knowing God in Jesus Christ. In Christ, in whom we are baptised, we are called to life with God and to the service of others. With this plan I invite you to join with and become involved in the opportunities it will create to enrich your relationship with Christ, to grow in holiness and to serve your neighbour both as believer and fellow-citizen.

I extend a further and more personal invitation to you: I invite you to take up the call of service set out in this plan. It points out numerous arenas in which we can support others on their journey to Christ, so that in

our parishes we may truly be a welcoming community of believers bearing witness to our faith in today's society. We must not leave it to others! Let's dare to live for each other and revitalise the culture of volunteer service in our Church.

Our pastoral plan has grown from the Listening Events which took place in 2011. In the Listening Events you had the opportunity to share your concerns and aspirations for the life of our Diocese. In these gatherings in our parishes it became clear that people desired to participate more fully in the life of the Church and to be co-responsible for the mission of the Church. These desires and words now need to be put into action by each one of us. We need to create ways to make this possible. This new era in the life of our Diocese offers many opportunities for you to put your talents and experience at the service of the common good in our Church and by extension in our society.

Co-responsibility has been a hallmark of our planning process. A group of women and men, clergy, and religious worked closely together, investing many hours to develop a pastoral plan

It is my wish that as a Diocese we continue our commitment to listening both to the Word of God and to the people of God...

for the life of the Church in our Diocese for the coming years. I am content that this plan is true to the Listening Events and faithfully distils their outcomes. The plan will provide direction for the pastoral activity of the Diocese for the years ahead. On your behalf, I thank all those who helped to develop this plan. I thank them for their commitment, enthusiasm and wisdom and, above all, for the generous gift of their time. I also extend my sincere gratitude to all those who held this planning process in prayer.

All down the years our Diocese has been blessed with individuals and numerous groups deeply committed to the spread of the gospel and the service of our neighbour. I salute all the generous and zealous work that goes on in our parishes and at diocesan level. I recognise that this plan simply seeks to build on the great mosaic of service that is already there. The dedication of our clergy, parish and diocesan staff and the generous spirit of our laity, evident in so many of the groups and activities that already enrich the life of our local Church, will be central to the successful implementation of our pastoral plan. There is something in it for each existing group and initiative and I invite you to use it as a springboard to refresh and re-energise your present commitments.

I have asked Fr Alan McCuckian SJ to take on the new role of Living Church Co-ordinator. His role will be to finalise an operational plan which will outline the achievable steps arising out of the strategic plan. He will work with diocesan staff and commissions to review and enhance our diocesan services, ensuring increased coordination and the successful implementation of the plan. Our planning will be on-going and developmental and it will require regular monitoring. I pray that the implementation will be led by the Holy Spirit and that it will 'enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.'¹

It is my wish that as a Diocese we continue our commitment to listening both to the Word of God and to the people of God so that we may respond pastorally to the needs that arise. In the spirit of this Year of Faith we must grow and develop our understanding of the gift of Christian faith, regaining a sense of its beauty and the dignity of Christian lifestyle. We are aware of the historical failures of Christians and of the Church in many arenas in the past. However, in the words of Pope Francis we also recognise that faith "brings grandeur and fulfilment to life"² and offers us a "new way of seeing things centred on Christ"³.

There are many difficult questions that lie ahead of us as a Diocese. As the number of clergy and religious rapidly declines we must have honest conversations about our future. We must ensure that everyone within the Diocese has support for their Christian journey and this will require an increase in collaboration among neighbouring parishes. We must pray and discern about our future, recognising that we are called together as parts of one body.⁴

From our diocesan past, lived within the great tradition of the universal Church, we draw on the "memory of a promise"⁵ which is ours to live and activate in the conditions of our time.

May each of us respond to this plan, giving thanks for our endeavours and successes to God the Father through Jesus Christ, humbly aware that "faith is truly a good for everyone; that it is a common good"⁶. As we address each new pastoral challenge together, let us pray for the spiritual strength to do so in a spirit of trust, unity and hope that will strengthen and renew our faith and the life of the Church.

Yours in Christ,

+ Noel Treanor
28th of September, 2013

¹ Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29, 6 January 2001.
² Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter, Lumen Fidei*, 5, 29 June 2013.
³ *Lumen Fidei*, 20

⁴ Colossians 3:15
⁵ *Lumen Fidei*, 9; also 19,25, 38
⁶ *Lumen Fidei*, 51



The Genesis of the Pastoral Plan

The Living Church process dates back to Bishop Treanor's arrival in the Diocese and his request to the Council of Priests to help him with pastoral planning. A small committee was established which soon set about a comprehensive programme of listening to the hopes and desires of priests, religious and lay faithful all across the Diocese. The Listening Events which touched every single parish came to a conclusion around Easter of 2011. Though more than 3,000 people took part and there was a great diversity of perspectives and aspirations nonetheless five very clear themes emerged as dominant and they were presented to the Diocese in the Living Church Report of November 2011.

They are: Lay Participation; Open, Welcoming Community; The Clergy; Faith and Worship; Passing on the Faith.

Bishop Treanor established the Living Church Office later that year with three purposes: to prepare for a Diocesan Congress in 2013, to oversee a Planning Process based on the five themes of the Living Church Report and to make a start on the work of facilitation and training necessary to enhance the experience of Lay Participation in our parishes and Diocese.

The Planning Process

Five working parties were established made up of clergy, religious and lay faithful whose background or expertise enabled them to contribute to the plan. All five working parties produced their reports with proposals for a way forward in their specific area by Christmas 2012. On February 12th, 2013 everyone involved in the process gathered together with the three bishops for a full day session in Drumalis Retreat Centre to review all the work done to date. At the end of that day it was recognised that all of the recommendations would have to be reviewed yet again with the goal of arriving at a coherent plan that would be, at the same time, both bold and realistic.

The Final Stage

During the Spring and early Summer of 2013 the Chairpersons of the five working parties and the three bishops met regularly and, having reviewed all the work done to date, came to agreement on the Strategic Plan presented here. The Plan has arisen directly from the concerns expressed all across the Diocese in the past three years. The Diocese adopts it in the firm conviction that over the course of the next three years it will make significant inroads into dealing with those concerns and, indeed, with the new concerns that will inevitably face us as we move forward.



Open, Welcoming Community

As a community of faith, hope and love we open wide the doors of our Church to all without exception.

To create a church where everybody feels welcome and supported and knows that their needs have been considered.

We will:

- provide the necessary formation and support to establish a Ministry of Welcome in every parish in the Diocese.
- support parishes in identifying and responding to the groups of people who experience obstacles to their full and active participation in the life of the church.
- reach out to those who feel alienated from the Church.
- support individuals making a safeguarding allegation/disclosure; facilitating their access to information and help, and representing their concerns during the inquiry process.
- support parishes in improving their hospitality and outreach to their local and migrant communities.
- review and develop the accessibility of buildings and activities in the Diocese.
- review and develop the participation of children and adults with special needs within the life of the Diocese.
- formalise and publish existing diocesan guidelines on sacramental preparation for people with special needs.
- review and develop the work of the Diocese in its social outreach with a concern for those in need.
- improve accessibility to Church life for all people regardless of race, culture, disability, language or personal circumstances.



Open, Welcoming Community

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To ensure that the highest standards of safeguarding of vulnerable adults and children continue to operate in our Diocese.

We will:

- establish a new Safeguarding Commission whose role and function will be to ensure governance arrangements are in place and to implement a 3 year strategic plan.
- contribute to the development of a 3 year strategic plan for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults within the Diocese, which will be compliant with the National Board for Safeguarding Children in the Catholic Church in Ireland (NBSCCCI) Safeguarding Standards and the standards set by the NI Health and Social Care Board.
- provide regular training, advice, guidance and support to the Bishops, clergy, religious, staff, volunteers, diocesan bodies and groups regarding safeguarding legislation, policy, procedures and practice.
- continue to work collaboratively and in partnership with the PSNI and Social services and other relevant statutory agencies.
- continue to manage all allegations, suspicions and concerns of abuse of children/ vulnerable adults that come to the attention of the Diocesan Safeguarding Office, in line with policy and legislative requirements and guidance.
- work in partnership with other Diocesan bodies, commissions and organisations in order to promote best practice and to ensure that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is central to all aspects of Church, diocesan and parish life.
- ensure that all clergy, staff and volunteers who undertake regulated activity in the Diocese of Down and Connor are appropriately vetted through the Northern Dioceses Vetting Office.

To maximise opportunities for interchurch and interfaith dialogue.

We will:

- support and enhance the broad range of work of those involved in ecumenical and interfaith activities.



Open, Welcoming Community

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To ensure that the Diocese has structures that foster open and transparent communication.

We will:

- facilitate regular communication between our clergy, staff and commissions to enable effective coordination of the activities of the Diocese.
- enable effective communication and the practice of on-going listening between those who work in the Diocese and the people they seek to serve.
- ensure the publication of an annual financial report highlighting how we fund the works of the Diocese.
- ensure the publication of an annual report highlighting the activities of the Diocese, the implementation of the pastoral plan and new planning initiatives.
- ensure the publication of the annual Safeguarding Office Report and the Diocesan Annual Audit for the NBSCCCI.

To ensure that the voice of the Church and of the Gospel is heard in the public square and that the Catholic response to all major issues is clearly presented.

We will:

- set up a commission to oversee the establishment and work of a Diocesan Communications Office.
- develop and implement a communications strategy.
- appoint and develop a team of spokespersons who will represent the Church in response to media requests and proactively seek to increase the Catholic presence in the media.





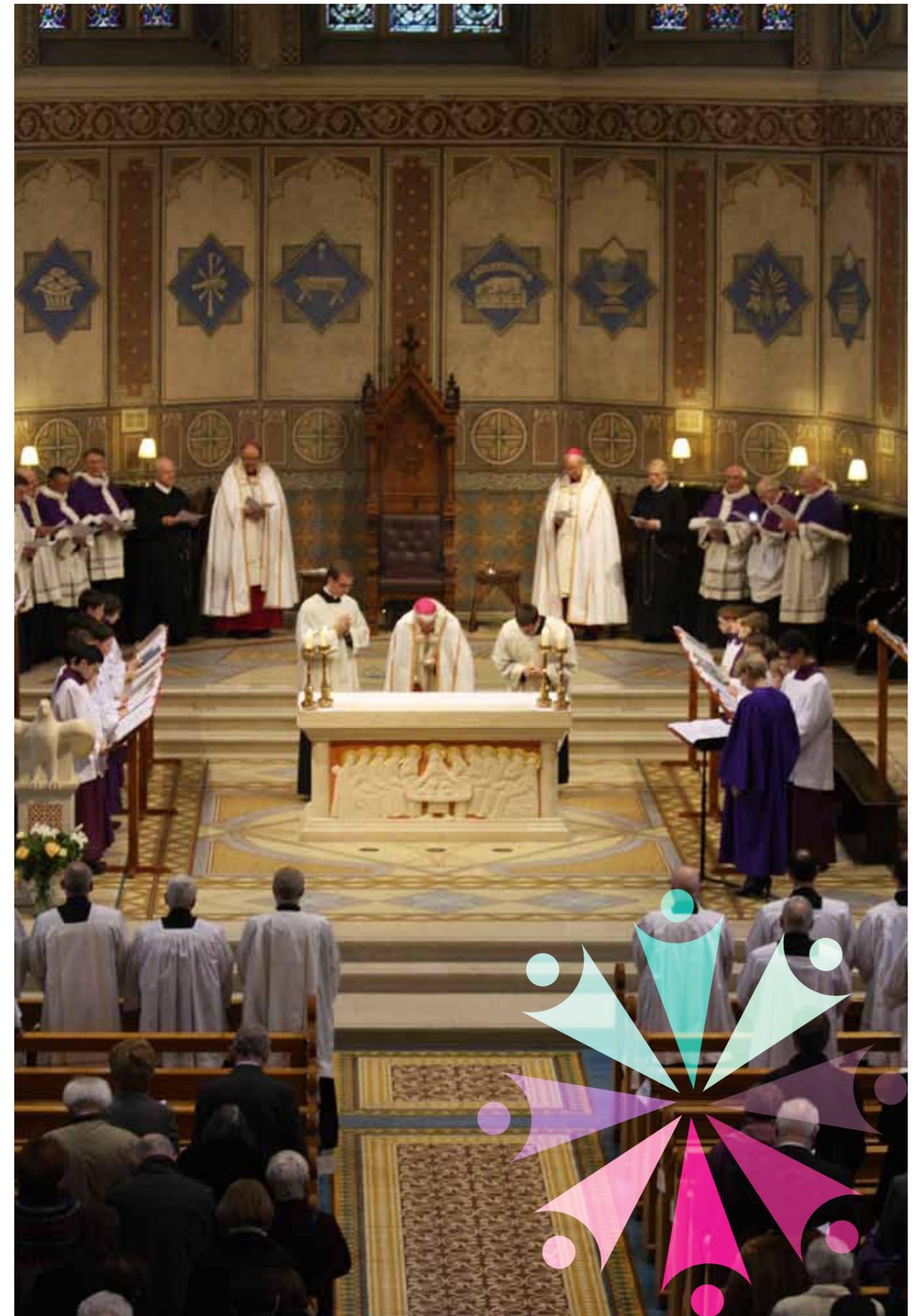
Open, Welcoming Community

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To contribute to the Church's engagement with legislators, politicians, and public bodies both statutory and voluntary sector.

We will:

- work closely with Northern Ireland Catholic Council on Social Affairs (NICCOSA) and play our part to ensure that information is made available to legislators, politicians and public bodies.
- work collaboratively under agreed protocols with the statutory agencies in respect of the work of safeguarding in the Diocese.
- develop relationships with political parties.
- arrange an annual Diocesan forum to support Catholics and others exploring current issues in the light of the Gospel.





Faith & Worship

We celebrate and participate in the saving work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are strengthened to proclaim and live the Gospel.

To place adult faith development at the centre of parish life, helping the community to grow in its on-going conversion to Jesus Christ.

We will:

- establish a Faith Development Services team to develop, promote and support a faith development strategy across all parishes based on 'Share the Good News', taking into account the formation programmes already running in the Diocese.
- provide training in the delivery of local programmes of teaching, helping people to understand, live and share our faith.

To promote the worthy celebration of the liturgy as an uplifting experience of communion with God and with one another and as an integral part of the community's growth in faith.

We will:

- provide training at a vicariate level for those involved in lay liturgical ministry such as Proclamation of the Word, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist and Children's Liturgy.
- support and develop a range of training in liturgical music.
- implement strategies to improve the understanding of the sacred nature of the liturgy.
- provide on-going formation for clergy in the preparation and presentation of homilies.
- prepare occasional liturgical resources for use within the parishes.



Faith & Worship

We celebrate and participate in the saving work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and are strengthened to proclaim and live the Gospel.

To provide opportunities for people across the Diocese to deepen their own prayer life and develop their relationship with God.

We will:

- implement strategies to support and encourage people in prayer.
- facilitate and co-ordinate access to opportunities available in the Diocese through the wide range of groups, both Religious and lay, who have charisms, skills and training in the areas of prayer and spirituality.

To ensure that families can grow in their prayer life.

We will:

- encourage and support families to develop and renew the life of prayer within the home.





Clergy & Religious

The priests, Religious and bishops are supported and nourished in their life and ministry in the service of the People of God.

To ensure that all priests are given the support they need for their life and ministry, taking into account the changing context within which our priests minister.

We will:

- support the Bishop, who has the primary responsibility for the care and support of our priests, through the appointment of an Episcopal Vicar for Clergy.
- identify a team of people, clergy and lay, who will work proactively with the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy to support the priests of our Diocese.
- co-ordinate and develop the existing support given to priests at all stages in their life and ministry.
- facilitate priests in accessing support in areas such as emotional well-being, conflict resolution and stress management.
- provide support to those clergy who have stepped aside from their ministry in compliance with the agreed standards of the National Office for Safeguarding Children.

To develop a structured programme of on-going formation to support and nourish the clergy in their personal and vocational lives in order to respond to the needs of the Diocese.

We will:

- deliver an on-going Priestly Formation Programme covering human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation.
- develop and implement a policy of sabbatical leave for priests.
- develop and implement the induction programme for newly ordained and newly appointed priests.



Clergy & Religious

The priests, Religious and bishops are supported and nourished in their life and ministry in the service of the People of God.

To facilitate fraternity and mutual support among the priests of the Diocese.

We will:

- encourage and support priests to get together in spiritual, study and social interest groups.

To encourage the work of the Religious and facilitate their involvement in the life of the Diocese.

We will:

- continue to support the Diocesan Commission for Religious.
- cherish and promote the charisms of the religious orders and movements within the Diocese.





Lay Participation

Our Diocese is marked by faith, worship and service where laity, priests, Religious and bishops embrace and live out the commitment of their Baptism working together to build the Kingdom of God on earth.

To promote a culture of co-responsibility among clergy, Religious and laity at every level of the life of the Diocese.

We will:

- set up a Diocesan Pastoral Council to work with the Bishops to identify the key pastoral issues facing the Diocese and to discern together the appropriate responses.
- provide the necessary formation and on-going support for existing and newly formed Pastoral Councils in every parish in the Diocese.
- seek to utilise the wide range of skills, gifts and talents that the faithful, lay and Religious, are willing to contribute to the life of the parishes and Diocese.
- continue to support the role of laity in Parish Safeguarding Committees and Vicariate Support Teams in their work to promote safe practice in parishes, highlighting the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults as everyone's responsibility.
- develop the capacity of the Parish Pastoral Councils to work effectively with staff, parents and Boards of Governors to support the Catholic ethos in our schools.
- cherish and promote the charisms of ecclesial movements and communities.

To promote the on-going formation and development of lay volunteers for service in parishes.

We will:

- work closely with Parish Pastoral Councils to identify the training needs for developing lay ministry within parishes.
- begin a discernment process for the role of lay people in leading liturgies and providing chaplaincy services in the absence of a priest.

To promote the on-going formation and development of lay volunteers for service in parishes.

We will:

- reinforce best practice in the areas of recruitment and retention within the Diocese.





Passing on the Faith

All members of our church are supported in their relationship with God throughout their lives as they grow in faith together.

To ensure that children, aged 0-11, belong to a parish community that provides a safe place for them to grow in their experience and knowledge of God's love, to hear God's plan for their lives and to develop their potential to make a difference in the parish and the wider world.

We will:

- ensure that Parish Pastoral Councils review current provision for the faith development of children and adopt a plan for future enhancement.
- identify and enhance the diocesan resources and services that exist to support parishes and schools in meeting the needs of children, their parents and schools.
- continue to promote best practice and raise awareness of what constitutes a 'safe place' and ensure that all diocesan personnel work to a clear Code of Conduct.

To ensure that young people, aged 11- 18, recognise their place within the parish community and grow in their own relationship with Christ and with peers who will share with them the mission to build the Kingdom of God.

We will:

- set up parish-based coordinating teams to ensure that our newly confirmed children, who are transferring from primary school, are supported in maintaining their links with the parish community and with the life of faith.
- provide resources and training to help parishioners and families accompany young people in the years following confirmation.
- ensure that Parish Pastoral Councils review their current provision for the faith development of young people and adopt a plan for future enhancement.
- increase the capacity of parishes to deliver youth ministry programmes through access to training and resources.
- enhance the range of opportunities for young people across the Diocese to grow in lives of prayer and service, acknowledging their work through the John Paul II Awards.
- work with parish-based youth centres; continuing best practice in safeguarding and seeking to build on their potential for faith development.
- identify and enhance the diocesan resources and services that exist to support parishes and schools in meeting the needs of young people, their parents and teachers.



Passing on the Faith

As a community of faith, hope and love we open wide the doors of our Church to all without exception.

To reach out to young adults and provide them with a peer community that supports them in entering fully into the life and mission of the Church.

We will:

- set up and support a young adult faith committee which will create bespoke opportunities for faith development, catechesis and vocational discernment.

To ensure that the Diocese has the capacity and resources to welcome and form new members of the Church and support renewal of adult faith.

We will:

- review current provision of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) and seek to enhance its delivery across the Diocese.
- encourage and support the work of parish and diocesan groups who provide adults with opportunities for faith encounter.



Acknowledgements

Open and Welcoming Community

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Very Rev Brendan Hickland,
Very Rev Martin Magill,
Ms Josephine O'Neill,
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