



Living Church

DOWN & CONNOR 2013

Living Church Report  
Diocese of Down & Connor



## Foreword

### Bishop Noel Treanor

Dear Sisters and Brothers  
in Jesus Christ,

As we open this booklet, we take in our hands the fruit of hours of work and time spent for the good of the Catholic Christian community throughout this diocese of Down and Connor. These pages bear testimony to the courage of many who spoke at the Listening sessions in our parishes. The overview offered in each section of this Report is a tribute to the skills of the forty-seven facilitators and to the efforts of the Living Church Steering Committee to distil the core of what was said and to set out in a few pages a faithful record of the Listening Sessions, for our information, for further reflection and as a basis for future action. In short, this Report is testimony to a vibrant faith in our parishes and communities and a statement of hope for our diocese for the years ahead.

This report is the result of a long process, played out in our parishes, sometimes easily, sometimes with struggles and frustration, yet always in faith. These pages reverberate with hours of comment and lively exchange, guided by the facilitators, about the Christian life in our Church.



## Living Church

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They also bring together individual written submissions and contributions made on Facebook.

The pages you are about to read resound with the faith-inspired hope of all who have made the Listening Process come alive. Each one of us, child, teenager, young and old, lay, cleric, religious women and men, are called by our fellow Christians and Catholics, speaking through these pages, to share responsibility for keeping the message of Jesus Christ known, alive and active in our time.

Energy and verve for living one's life is derived from listening to, hearing and seeking to implement the word of God. As we listen to its call and promise, in reading the Bible, in celebrating Mass and the sacraments, or in other prayer settings, we discover the spiritual power of faith for life and living. When we gather for such moments of liturgical celebration and prayer, we "taste the beauty and the joy" of being and feeling part of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

"Living Church" is more than a logo; it is a mission statement. It is a call to play your part, at your particular stage in life, in the life of the people of God. It awakens us to a new and dynamic aspect of membership of the Church, namely that we never pray, or believe, or witness alone. As the People of God, as members of the Body of Christ, we are co-responsible with each other for our response to God's word which invites us to faith in Christ. Thus the model of "Living Church" invites us to do our personal bit, to make our particular contribution to the life of our parish and local Church community in tandem with others, including the clergy.

You will note that five key areas have emerged as arenas for further discussion and work.

Firstly, there is a clear desire for enhanced and increased participation on the part of parishioners. Co-responsibility on the part of laity and priests was clearly called for in all Listening sessions. This echoes Pope Benedict XVI's assertion that the laity "must no longer be viewed as "collaborators" of the clergy, but truly recognised as "co-responsible for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity" <sup>2</sup>.

Secondly, in the Listening sessions throughout our parishes, men and women spoke of the importance of

our parishes being experienced as Christian communities that are open and welcoming. We have heard a widespread call for transparency in the way we conduct our affairs in the parishes and in the diocese.

Thirdly, we must develop a culture of co-responsibility between laity and clergy in the life of our parishes and of the diocese.

Fourthly, participants in the Listening Process emphasised the link between faith and worship. Liturgy, edifying worship and prayer, nourishes and builds up faith. Parishioners underlined the importance of liturgies that are well prepared, enhanced appropriately by hymn singing and choir, where the word of God is expounded in the homily and where the celebration and the rite speak to us of the saving mysteries of salvation.

Fifthly, our responsibility for handing on the faith and for engaging our young people in the life of the Church was raised in all the Listening sessions. This is evidently a matter parish communities must work on, as the diocese now launches a new Youth Commission.

Our Catholic schools will continue to play a crucial role in supporting parents as they propose the Gospel message to a new generation. We have an invaluable companion for this project of educating children,





adolescents and adults in Share the Good News – National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (January 2011) .

These five themes will form the core themes of the Diocesan Congress that will take place at Pentecost 2013. The Congress will require significant preparation. For this reason we shall create a Living Church Office that will carry forward what has begun in the Listening Process. It will plan and prepare the Congress. It will offer support and training to advance the proposals listed in this Report.

This Report lays out a roadmap for our diocese for the decades ahead.

It directs our thoughts and prayers towards the Diocesan Congress 2013, a gathering which will launch us on a further diocesan process with a number of agreed targets.

All of the above and more will deserve our prayerful consideration in the years ahead and during the Diocesan Congress.

**Yours in Christ,**

**+ Noel Treanor**

Bishop of Down and Connor

3rd November 2011

Feast of St Malachy

# The Report on the Listening Process

During the early months of 2011 Listening Events took place across the diocese, mainly with parish groups, though people also gathered in other configurations and submitted reports and suggestions, both as groups and as individuals. The events, which were conducted by trained facilitators, opened with prayer and then posed two questions, one pointing towards our hopes for the future and the other calling for practical proposals for the way forward:

- \* What would our parishes and diocese look like if our Catholic faith was being fully lived?
- \* What needs to be done to make this a reality?

## THE RESPONSE

The group of 47 facilitators conducted events for well over 3,000 people. Those who attended came mainly from the 50+ age group. The response in every case was lively and engaged and those who came along were keen to participate. In some cases there was considerable tension and people expressed anger and confusion about the state of the Church and frustration about the process itself. There was some cynicism and a great fear that there will be no real change.

While some people expressed hopes for very radical change in the shape of the Church, others feared the loss of what is most precious in the tradition which means a great deal to them.

Very many participants expressed genuine gratitude for the process and the effort being made to listen to their opinions. The facilitators report that they witnessed the deep faith of the people and they found a great love for the Church everywhere they went, whether it was expressed in anger or with enthusiasm.


Throughout the diocese there are people who want to help and to play a part in the Church's renewal.

What follows is not an exhaustive account of everything that was said but an effort to highlight the principal themes which emerge most consistently in response to those questions under the following headings:

- \* Lay Participation
- \* Open, Welcoming, Community
- \* Clergy
- \* Faith and Worship
- \* Passing on the Faith

## LAY PARTICIPATION

More consistently than any other point, people stressed that lay people should, as of right, participate more fully in



the running of both their parishes and their diocese. Very often this was expressed as a call for the setting up of properly functioning Parish Pastoral Councils. It was highlighted that such councils would have to be open and accountable and to have a real and meaningful say in the life of the parish. Some people called for this to be an elected body.

It is felt that the talents and skills of many lay people, and especially of women, for ministry (other than ordained ministry), are left untapped. Reference was often made to the 'Priesthood of the Laity' and the Church as the 'People of God'. Many people want to serve the Church but feel that they have never been invited, or indeed feel discouraged as if surplus to requirements. This change in culture must be backed up by training in skills and leadership for priests and people.

A related theme, often expressed, was the conviction that priests should not continue to be burdened down by administration and care for temporal matters. Lay people should be much more involved in such things, in both voluntary and professional capacities.

In the future there will be a greater need to hire lay professionals in both administrative and ministerial roles. In this regard, the need for professionals to work in youth ministry was particularly highlighted. We could learn a lot from the experience of Protestant churches.

## OPEN, WELCOMING, COMMUNITY

### OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY

In almost every meeting people expressed appreciation of the Listening Process. They wanted to see more of it and expressed a desire for real and meaningful communication within parishes and within the diocese. This would require the setting up of ongoing structures in which the people would be consulted and kept informed. There was a clear call for much more openness and transparency in regard to decision-making on all matters including the question of finances. 'There needs to be an end to Us and Them' was a theme in quite a few parishes.

A significant number of people expressed feelings of anger and frustration that Church leaders at every level, including the Pope, have not been fully open with regard to the Child Sexual Abuse crisis. There is a sense that this issue is calling on the Church to reform a longstanding culture of secrecy and lack of accountability.

A good number of people in different areas expressed the concern that the Church has been seen to be even-handed in its dealing with all members. They said that there must be clarity and consistency about the application of the Church's law in marriage

tribunals and in other cases and that this needs to be seen to be the case.

## WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Catholics in many parishes long for communities that are more welcoming. There should be a new emphasis on the Ministry of Welcome in our parishes. This should express itself in social gatherings after liturgy and at other times. It is believed that many different groups of people

- older people - younger people -
- people with disabilities and others
- can often feel left out. It is the role of the Church community to gather people together.

In many places people expressed a concern that a welcome be extended to people who feel excluded: people in second relationships, gay people and people who have lapsed from the practice of the faith. There should be an openness, a welcome and a readiness to learn from people of other faiths.

## CLERGY

In many places people expressed great admiration and affection for their priests and a desire to support them in difficult times. The people greatly value the ministry of priests and their leadership in the things of the Spirit. For that reason they want to see priests having more time and space to


dedicate to their role as pastors and as men of prayer.

In some places people expressed a sense of distance between people and clergy, a communication gap that leaves them feeling that they have no idea what is happening, particularly at the level of the diocese and the bishop. They want to see structures whereby they can have more meaningful dialogue not only with their local priests but also with the bishops.

People feel that there are, and will be, new and greater challenges for priests in the future and it was often recommended that there should be ongoing training for priests in leadership, facilitation and communication skills. There should likewise be a continuous process of updating and renewal in preaching and the other essential functions of the priest. People who are used to systems of mentoring, support and review in their professional lives, and see their value, cannot understand the absence of similar support structures for priests.

In a certain number of places people said that incoming priests must respect the traditions of their new parish and not make changes without consulting the local people. The decrease in the number of clergy is a cause of concern and many people spoke of the need for the permanent diaconate with some suggesting that it should be open to women. Others would like to





see a review of the Church's rule on the celibacy of the clergy and some believe there should be no bar on the ordination of women. In the absence of a priest some people called for Eucharistic services conducted by a lay person.

### FAITH AND WORSHIP

In many parishes people spoke of a sense that we Catholics do not appreciate the richness of our faith, saying that there is a crying need for ongoing education in the faith for people of all ages, with a particular emphasis on scripture.

Some people expressed a hope for a return to a more traditional piety and a heightened sense of reverence for the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as well as a clear enunciation of the basic tenets of the faith. 'The children especially need to be taught about the centrality of the Mass' was a theme quite often repeated. A number of voices said that the Church seems out of touch with modern realities, particularly with regard to sexual morality.

Many people long for a more dynamic and renewed sense of the faith expressed in beautiful liturgy with good communal singing and participation of the people. Some people want more linguistic variety with a place for Irish and Latin in the liturgy.

There was a variety of opinions about the sacrament of confession and the need for it to be promoted more vigorously, while others wanted it replaced with General Absolution.

Some people want their parishes to encourage groups of prayer and meditation of various kinds.

### PASSING ON THE FAITH

There is a great desire to pass the faith on to the coming generations and a fear on the part of many that we are not doing enough in this regard. The parents of young families are a key factor in the passing on of the faith and many people want to see a concerted effort to help and support young parents in this role of introducing their children to the faith. It is vital, many say, that parents be encouraged to become involved in the preparation of Children's Liturgies. Indeed some people proposed that sacramental preparation would be better done between parish and home rather than at school.

Others emphasised the need for strengthening links between school and parish as part of an effort to defend and promote Catholic schools. There were also some calls for respect of parental choice regarding Integrated Education and faith support for children in non-Catholic schools.



All were concerned about teaching the faith to our children, while some people called for a revision of the current syllabi at both primary and secondary level.

'We need to listen to the youth' is a theme often expressed. The Church must put an emphasis on support structures and attractive activities for young people, faith-based and other. Many people said that there is much to be learned from Protestant churches about outreach programmes, often led by a paid lay Youth Minister. They felt that some of our parishes and regions ought to be learning from good practice in other places and adapting it to our own needs. If we want to help young people to become involved in worship there should be dynamic Youth Masses, organised by and for the young people themselves. Another voice emerged quite often: 'We need to pray for and encourage vocations among the young.'

This report was formally presented to Bishop Noel Treanor in July 2011 by the Living Church Steering Committee.

## THE WAY FORWARD

There is a great desire throughout the diocese for the process of renewal hinted at in the Listening Process to be given every encouragement and support. Many believe that lay people should be central to the

work of renewal and would like to see a Diocesan Council with lay membership tasked with driving the process forward.

The Living Church Steering Committee was initially comprised of members of the Council of Priests and subsequently expanded its membership to include both laity and religious.

Many said that we must not wait until 2013 but that proposals should be drawn up right away, priorities established and the work begun.

The Bishop will set up a Living Church Office whose first purpose will be to prepare for the Diocesan Congress. It is the Living Church Office which will be responsible for taking forward proposals in the following areas;

- \* Lay Participation
- \* Open, Welcoming, Community
- \* Clergy
- \* Faith and Worship
- \* Passing on the Faith



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There is a great need for a change in culture in the Church that encourages the service of the lay faithful

# Lay Participation

"Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes" <sup>3</sup>

## St Paulinus of Nola (354–431)

The Listening Process across the Diocese of Down and Connor was clear and resounding in its call that the lay faithful must be included in all aspects of church life here. Lay people have already contributed their skills and energy as facilitators and as members of committees looking at:

- \* The Life and Ministry of Priests
- \* The Clergy Appointment Process
- \* A new configuration of Pastoral Areas
- \* A vision of the Living Church.

Our work has just begun. Over two thousand years ago the people in Jerusalem met Peter and asked "What must we do?" (Acts 2:37). The same question confronts us today. We belong to parishes that are in great need of revitalisation. The answer to what we must do is found in Christ. However, it needs local people to translate that answer into pastoral initiatives that take effect in their own local communities.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that the Bishop should work towards the following actions:

- \* The calling of a Diocesan Congress "Living Church 2013".
- \* The establishing of a Diocesan Pastoral Council following the Congress to implement its recommendations.
- \* The creation of new opportunities for lay participation in the ministry of the Church.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that Parishes should work towards the following actions:

- \* Each Parish will establish a Pastoral Council.
- \* Pastoral Councils will seek to ensure that all the faithful can fulfil their baptismal promises by being co-responsible in the life and ministry of their Parish.

Living Church will provide support by:

- \* The organisation of a series of workshops on the role of Parish Pastoral Councils.
- \* Making available a support team to help establish Pastoral Councils and to support existing councils wishing to monitor their effectiveness.
- \* Providing training on the roles and responsibilities within a Pastoral.





There was a call for much more openness and transparency in regard to decision making on all matters.

# Open, Welcoming, Community

"One of the marvellous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility we can welcome many people." <sup>4</sup>

**Jean Vanier**

As Christians we are called to be an inclusive community of faith, hope and love: a truly Catholic community that welcomes all people. There is much work to be done in making our churches become places of welcome where all can find a sense of belonging, grow in their knowledge and love of God and support one another on the journey. Mary and Martha (Lk 10:37-42) are great examples for us. It was Martha, the one who worked quietly behind the scenes, who welcomed Jesus into her home. Our communities need the interplay of both Martha and Mary, being both focused on Christ and proactive in reaching out to others.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that the Bishop should work towards the following actions:

- \* Development of a communications strategy to foster openness, transparency and accountability.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that Parishes should work towards the following actions:

- \* Establishment of a Ministry of Welcome within Parishes.
- \* Ensuring, as far as possible, that parish liturgies and events are accessible to people with disabilities.
- \* Exploring ways to include people who are marginalised or disengaged from their Parish Community.
- \* Exploring ways to ensure that older people and people who are sick or housebound remain connected with the Parish Community.

Living Church will provide support by:

- \* Providing "Ministry of Welcome" training.
- \* Providing training for Parish teams on the role and skills involved in collaborative ministry.

The people greatly value  
the ministry of priests and  
their leadership in the  
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## Clergy

"Priests must always bear in mind that the ultimate fruitfulness of their ministry comes from Christ himself, encountered and listened to in prayer; proclaimed in preaching and lived witness; and known, loved and celebrated in the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation."<sup>5</sup>

### Pope Benedict XVI

Our Listening Events highlighted that morale amongst the priests of our Diocese is low. There are high demands placed on a decreasing number. To give priests the support they need, change is necessary. Many parishioners and priests will testify that it is also long over-due.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that the Bishop should work towards the following actions:

- \* Establishment of regular days of renewal for priests.
- \* Promotion of spiritual direction, ongoing formation, and pastoral supervision for priests.

- \* Review the process for clergy appointments.
- \* Consideration of the Diaconate within the Diocese.

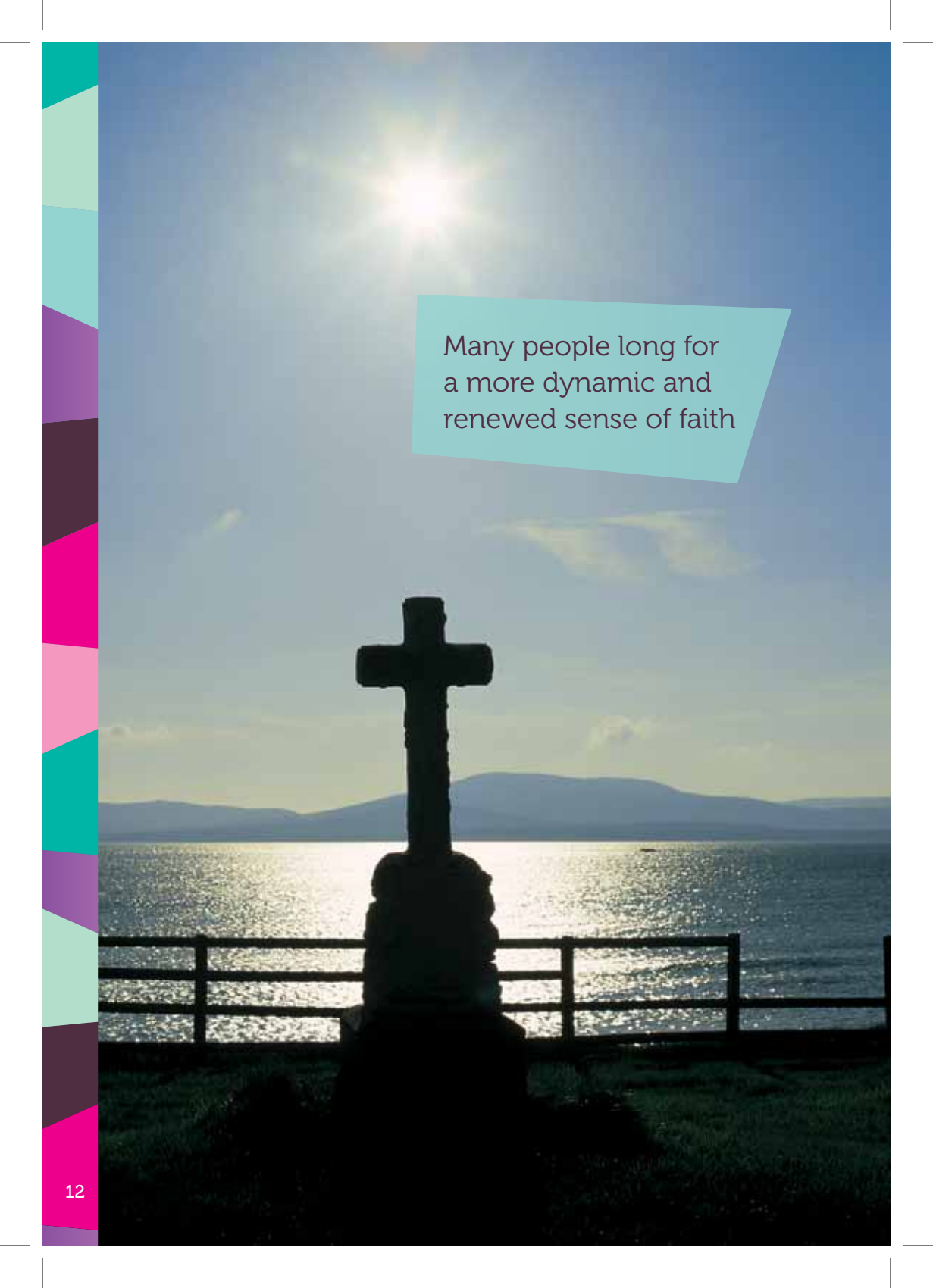
In response to the Report on the Listening Process priests and parishes should work towards the following actions:

- \* The establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils with a strong working relationship between the priest and the people.
- \* The development of collaborative ministry amongst priests within specific Pastoral Areas.
- \* The involvement of lay and religious in both administrative and pastoral work in the Pastoral Areas.

Living Church will provide support by:

- \* Promotion of appropriate skills-based training.



A large, dark silhouette of a cross stands on a grassy hill in the foreground. Behind the cross is a wooden fence. In the background, a calm body of water reflects the bright, low sun, which is positioned high in the sky, creating a lens flare effect. Distant mountains are visible on the horizon. The sky is a mix of blue and orange hues from the sunset. A teal-colored text box is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

Many people long for  
a more dynamic and  
renewed sense of faith

## Faith and Worship

"Faith that is lived from deep within amid a secularized world is the most powerful ecumenical force that brings us together, guiding us towards unity in the one Lord. And we pray to him, asking that we may learn to live the faith anew, and that in this way we may then become one." <sup>6</sup>

### Pope Benedict XVI

Our knowledge of God, the Church and its teachings must be shared and accessible to all. By devoting time to our relationship with Jesus we can grow in wisdom and know how best to discern the will of God for each of us. This will lead us into a greater sense of awe whereby we will seek to worship him.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that the Bishop should work towards the following actions:

- \* Encourage the need for ongoing formation in the proclamation of the Word and in music ministry.

- \* Promote Adult Faith Development across our Diocese.

- \* Draw on the expertise of Religious in the respect of faith development in our Diocese.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that Parishes should work towards the following actions:

- \* Review the quality of their liturgies and implement changes where necessary.
- \* Establish within Pastoral Areas regular, ongoing opportunities for Catechesis on the core Catholic beliefs.
- \* Provide opportunities for all to grow in prayer and to study the Bible.

Living Church will support by:

- \* Encouraging formation for those engaged adult faith development.



"We need to listen  
to the youth"

## Passing on the faith

"Friendship with Jesus will also lead you to bear witness to the faith wherever you are, even when it meets with rejection or indifference. We cannot encounter Christ and not want to make him known to others. So do not keep Christ to yourselves! Share with others the joy of your faith." <sup>7</sup>

### Pope Benedict XVI

The Listening Process identified the deep faith of our people. There is a widespread desire both to grow in the faith and to pass it on to future generations. We need to be open to the power of the Holy Spirit and become witnesses throughout our Diocese and beyond.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that the Bishop should work towards the following actions:

- \* Establishment of a Faith Development Plan.
- \* Promotion and development of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in the Diocese.

- \* Establishment of a new Diocesan Youth Commission.

In response to the Report on the Listening Process, it is proposed that Parishes should work towards the following actions:

- \* Setting up of groups to support parents in passing on the faith and ongoing reception of the sacraments.
- \* Provision of opportunities for young people to develop their relationship with God.
- \* Encourage young people to participate within their parish and put their faith into action.

Living Church will support by:

- \* Working in partnership with those involved in passing on the faith to prepare for the Diocesan Congress in 2013.



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'All of this, we recognise, depends on God's spirit and on Christ Jesus our Saviour, whom we seek to know, follow and serve with commitment, energy and imagination'.<sup>10</sup>

## **LIVING CHURCH STEERING COMMITTEE**

Fr. Seán Emerson (Chair), Sr. Anna Byrne, DC, Mr. Jim Deeds,  
Fr. JohnForsythe, Fr. Raymond McCullagh, Fr. Alan McGuckian, SJ, Mrs. Paula McKeown,  
Fr. Martin Magill, Fr. Declan Mulligan, Fr. Eugene O'Hagan,  
Ms. Josephine O'Neill, Fr. Joseph Rooney.



## ENDNOTES

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2. Ibid., par. 7.
3. "De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidem Spiritus Dei spirat": Epistula 23, 36 to Sulpicius Severus: CSEL 29, 193, St Paulinus of Nola, 354-431, cited in John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte ("At the Beginning of the New Millennium"), par. 45, January 6, 2001, retrieved 19 August 2011, [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html).
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