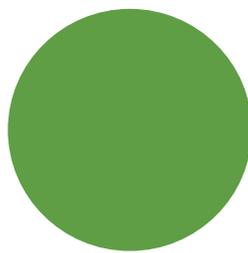
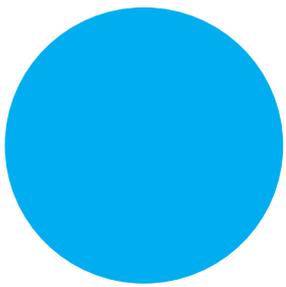




# Creating Pastoral Communities

**Diocese of Down and Connor**  
**Creating Pastoral Communities**  
*Consultation Response Spring 2015*





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## Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Since the inception of the Living Church project in 2011 we have witnessed on many occasions the great dynamism that comes when we gather together as a Christian community and listen to the Word of God and one another. Our diocesan review last Spring initiated much debate, prayer, and soul searching that led us to our consultation process on Creating Pastoral Communities. The consultation has been insightful, highlighting both our apprehensions and our willingness to support one another on our Christian journey.

In this Easter Season, as we set out on the next phase of our journey as a diocese, may the words of Jesus from the end of Matthew's Gospel resonate within us: 'And, know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.' These words are both our consolation and our challenge. Let us reflect on the elements of his final instruction to us:

'Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.'

There are four distinct actions in Jesus' farewell address: Go! Make disciples! Baptise them! Teach them to observe all the commands! It would be good for us to examine our consciences as a Church and as a diocese on all four of these.

## Go

There is a powerful missionary imperative in that single word: Go. In the past the Irish church sent thousands of men and women all across the world as missionaries for Christ. This year we celebrate one of the most illustrious, Columbanus, who set off from Bangor in our own diocese and helped to change the face of Christianity across Europe. Today we have a mission to those on the margins, or as Pope Francis says, 'the existential peripheries'. They are to be found right here among us and around us. We have a big challenge to be a truly missionary church.

## Make Disciples.

It is important for us to recognise that the first job of the missionary is to 'make disciples' rather than to baptise. For reasons that are obvious, our practice since Ireland ceased being missionary territory over a thousand years ago, has been to baptise first and rely on the strength of the faith in family and society to form disciples. It is now becoming obvious that we must listen with new openness to the call of Jesus. He wants all of us to be disciples. He calls us to be followers who have made a clear choice to trust God and to be his presence in the world today. Many people in our diocese have clearly made that choice. It is now our call to support and encourage one another to deepen that experience and to become ever more free to express and share the joy that we have been given.

## Baptise them.

We discovered in the recent Diocesan Review<sup>1</sup> (Spring 2013) that while our regular Sunday Mass attendance is now at around 20% the numbers who are being brought for Baptism are as high as ever. This gives a new perspective on the dimensions of our mission. It is obvious that parents and grandparents desire new life in baptism for their children. We all must realise that Baptism is nothing other than the start of a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a call to active, lifelong engagement in the life of the Church. In our secularised society, in which many people experience a serious crisis of faith, this foundational relationship with Christ and his Church is undermined. Parents and grandparents today need our ongoing support and challenge to live up to the promises they undertake on behalf of their children.

<sup>1</sup> Diocesan Pastoral Plan, 2013

## Teach them to observe all the commands I gave you

So many of us, in family, school and parish groups, strive to pass on the faith to the next generation and encourage our young people to grow in their experience and knowledge of God's love. In our Listening Events some years ago many people acknowledged that they do not have a coherent and adult grasp of the scriptures or of the Church's teaching. It is only when we Catholics, young and old, come to appreciate the compelling beauty and attractiveness of faith in Christ that we will effectively pass it on to others. Our faith is much more than simple attendance at Mass on Sundays. Being witnesses to Christ means bringing our faith into everything we do. When we do this the world becomes full of carers, farmers, civil servants, citizens of every kind who bring Christ's light into the market place and the public sphere. It is the vocation of every one of us to be artisans of a new humanity and to build up a civilisation of love.

This is the journey that we have committed ourselves to in the Living Church project. It is primarily a missionary journey but it also requires of us to take stock of how our diocese is organised.

## Pilot Pastoral Areas

Three years ago I asked two groups of parishes to pilot 'Pastoral Areas' on behalf of the diocese. They were five parishes in North Belfast and six parishes in North Connor. Subsequently the parishes of the Ards Peninsula came together to form a third Pilot.

At one meeting a member of the North Belfast Pastoral Area Team said that when they began they had a great number of fears and through the experience of working together they found their fears were allayed. The work was slow and communication between parishes not always easy, but as trust grew, they found that they had a new energy and commitment for their shared mission.

A report from the North Connor experience said that they found that the mission began to emerge very clearly when they took time to share experiences and listen to each other in an inter-parish setting. New initiatives like a Family Fun Day or Ministry of Welcome Training or Quick Journey through the Bible offered across the area have been some of the first fruits.

We can indeed do much more when working together than apart. I am confident that we will seize the opportunity to be bold and creative and experience new synergies and possibilities for mission in our new Pastoral Communities.

## Consultation Process on Pastoral Community Boundaries

We had four Regional Meetings in Ballymena, Downpatrick, Dunmurry and Belfast. Through them I came to see that the proposal for the new boundaries met with considerable acceptance and a willingness to give it a try. We listened to Hopes and Fears expressed with great honesty and respect by both clergy and laity.

## Hopes

There was a real hope that this could be a moment to challenge existing ways of thinking and to begin to do things in new ways. That involved a call for us to be proactive in bringing about the rejuvenation of our church. It was acknowledged that the experience of 'chaos' can be a good thing; it can be the catalyst that brings change and growth. As people of faith we are called to see this moment of decline: in mass attendance, in priestly and religious vocations and in other ways, as a moment of grace and a call from God to see the world with fresh eyes.

This will be a challenge to us to build teamwork both among the clergy and between clergy and laity. The pooling of resources will bring us new energy and open up new possibilities.

## Fears

People spoke honestly about our process, some with the often expressed caution that 'we've heard it all before' and the fear that it might just be 'too little too late'. There was the added worry that there was too much concern with 'maintenance' and not enough vision. There was also the recognition that we must allow the new reality to grow incrementally and that it must be supported from the centre.

There was a concern that the rural Pastoral Communities cover too wide an area. Parishes feel they have nothing in common with other parishes many miles away. We have had the benefit of the experience of other dioceses which have begun a process of clustering groups of two or three neighbouring parishes, only to find a few years later that they needed the energy and resources of a larger group.

There was a strong recognition that relationships are central to all these realities. This surfaced a very real fear, on the part of both priests and people, that if the priest

loses meaningful contact with one parish and is asked to serve across a number of parishes he could be reduced to being simply a 'sacramental functionary'. On the one hand this would lead to a loss of continuity of care and, on the other, we could end up encouraging workaholicism among our priests.

Some people expressed the concern that, apart from the most committed, it is still difficult to get lay people to volunteer and get involved.

A very frequent fear was of a loss of identity and the sense of belonging that is central to Christian community. In this regard smaller parishes and the bigger parishes with several local church communities fear that they will lose out, particularly if churches and facilities are to be closed in the future.

People spoke of the uncertainty about how Pastoral Communities would operate both financially and in Canon Law. Very practically, if people regularly worship outside of their home parish on a Sunday how do they contribute to their own parish's finances?

It was acknowledged that much of our ministry takes place outside of parishes: in our hospitals, universities and prisons. The diocese needs to reflect on how these important ministries are sustained into the future.

## Local Perspectives

I also had the opportunity to hear some local perspectives that have encouraged me to make a few modifications to the original proposal.

There was a lack of enthusiasm for the establishment of a new Belfast City Centre Pastoral Community. City centre parishes tend to be closely associated with their neighbours to the north, south and west respectively. It remains true that the centre of Belfast is the locus of very specific needs and opportunities for evangelisation which we shall need to address in new and creative ways.

In addition there were a number of specific cases where we came to recognise that certain parishes would fit more naturally in a Pastoral Community other than the one proposed.

I present our 13 new Pastoral Communities to you. While these boundaries are not written in stone at this stage, I do hope that the priests and people within them will work hard together in the coming years to create new centres of evangelisation.

In the first year formation will be the key focus of each Pastoral Community's work. A Pastoral Community Council will have to be formed and this will require work and commitment on the part of priests and representatives from the constituent parishes. Building relationships and establishing new ways of doing things takes time but will repay the effort involved.

Pastoral Community Councils will develop a shared appreciation of what already happens in each of our parishes.

There are so many great initiatives in our parishes; let us be generous and share them with each other.

We are at the beginning of a work that will last for many years and this must be rooted in the will of God. For that reason prayer and discernment will be at the heart of each Pastoral Community and this will lead us to respond energetically to God's call. Developing a culture of prayer and discernment within any group takes time. We need to be patient with ourselves.

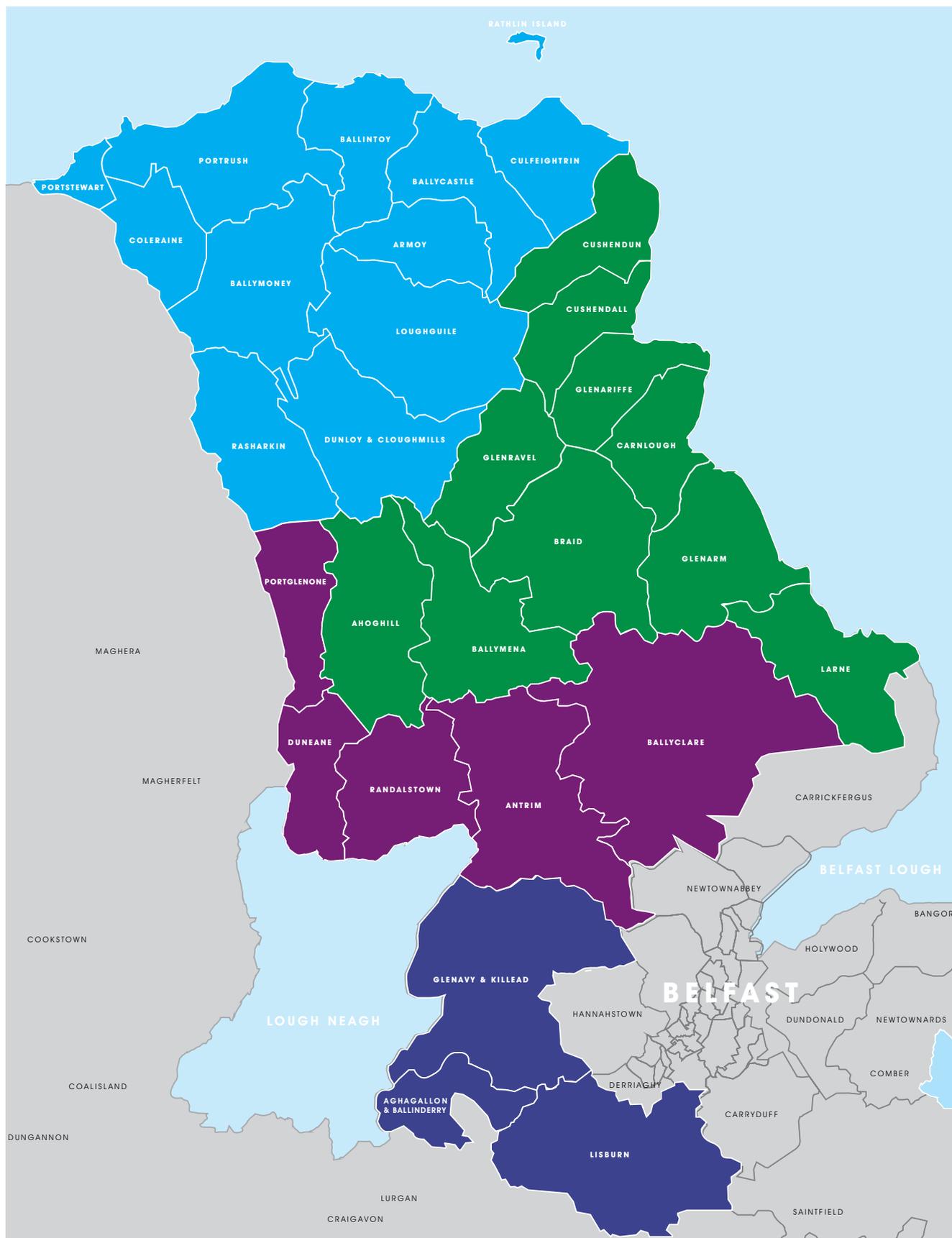
The rush to action can impede or subvert the establishment of new relationships. However, I would like each Pastoral Community to be open to one challenge in the first year:

In this coming Year of Mercy, beginning on the 8th of December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we are called along with the Universal Church to reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Pope Francis says; "It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty."<sup>2</sup>

I want each Pastoral Community to find an appropriate way to mark this special year. I am convinced that if, during this year, we reflect seriously in our Pastoral Communities on the call of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy we will begin to see our way ahead.

<sup>2</sup> Misericordiae Vultus, 15

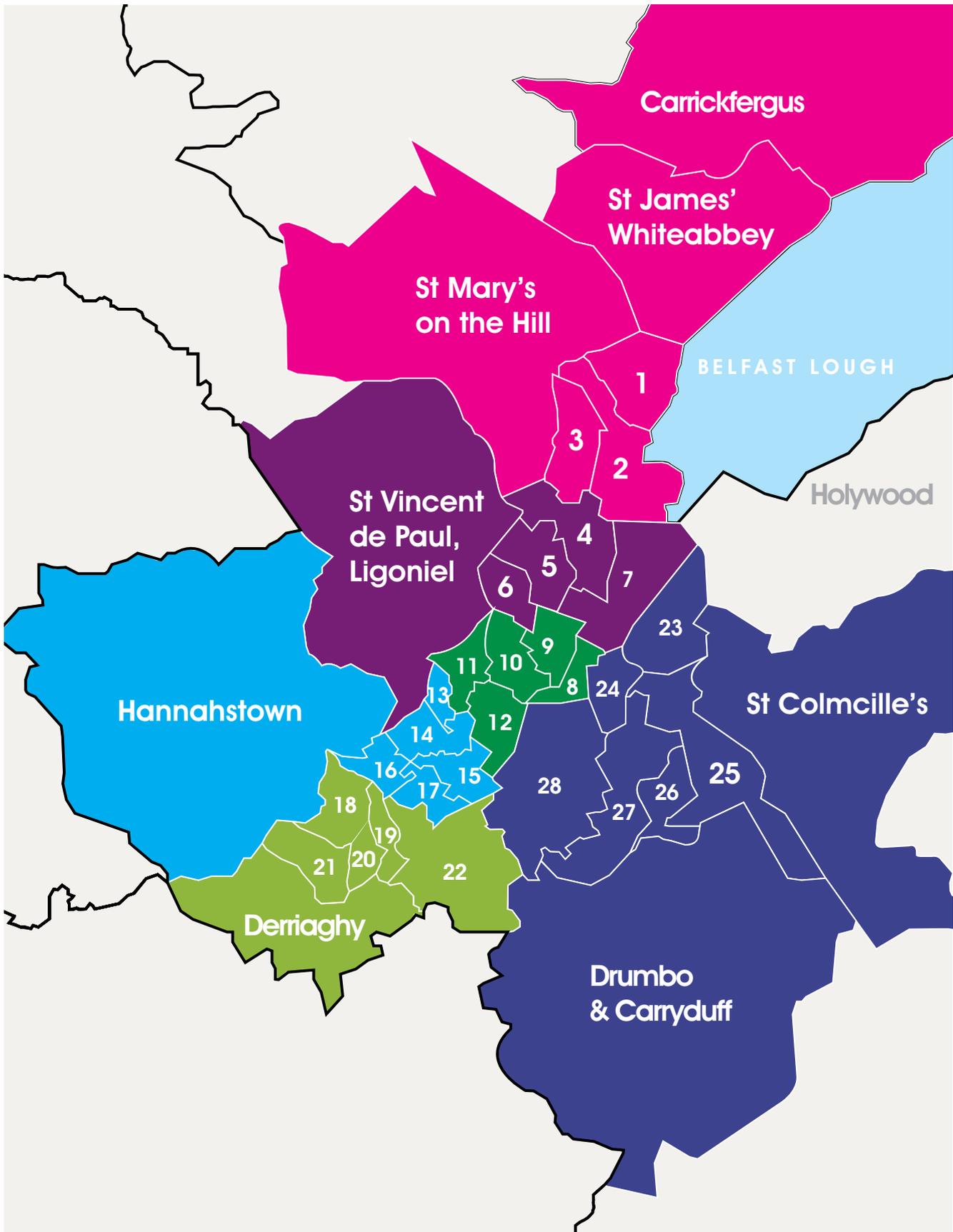
# Pastoral Communities in Connor



## Proposed Pastoral Communities in Connor

Area	Constituent Parishes
North Connor	Armoy Ballintoy Ballycastle Ballymoney Coleraine Culfeightrin Dunloy & Cloughmills Loughguile Portrush Portstewart Rasharkin
Ballymena	Ahoghill Ballymena Braid Carnlough Cushendall Cushendun Glenariffe Glenarm Glenravel Larne
Antrim	Antrim Ballyclare Duneane Portglenone Randalstown
Lisburn	Aghagallon & Ballinderry Glenavy & Killead Lisburn

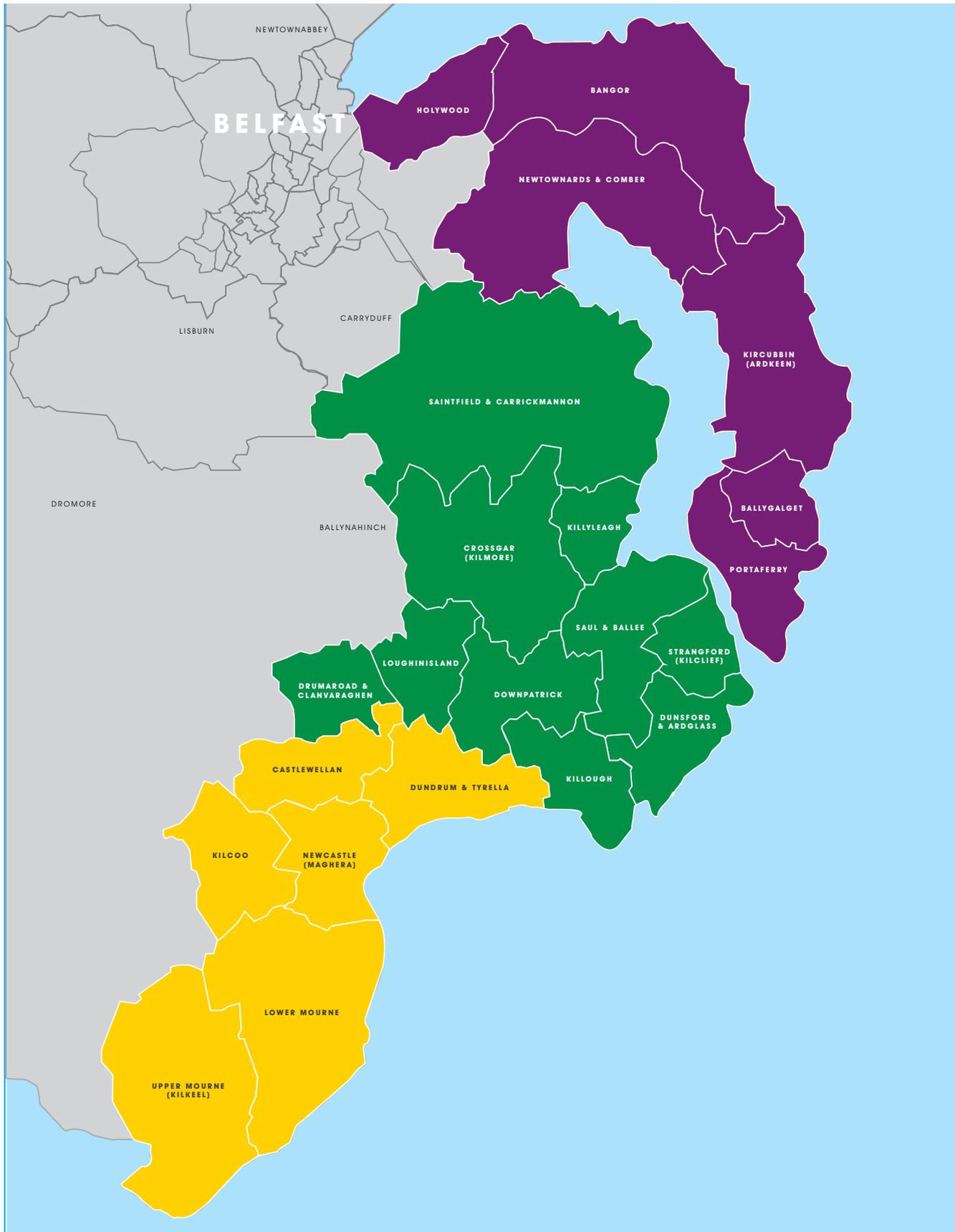
## Pastoral Communities in Belfast



## Pastoral Communities in Belfast

Area	Constituent Parishes
Loughshore Region	Carrickfergus Greencastle (2) St James' Whiteabbey St Gerard's (3) St Mary's on the Hill Whitehouse (1)
North Belfast	Holy Cross (6) Holy Family (4) Sacred Heart (5) St Patrick's (7) St Vincent de Paul, Ligoniel
Falls Road	Corpus Christi (11) St John's (12) St Mary's (8) St Paul's (10) St Peter's Cathedral (9)
West Belfast	Hannahstown Holy Trinity (13) St Agnes' (15) St Michael the Archangel (17) St Oliver Plunkett (16) St Teresa's (14)
Outer West Belfast	Christ the Redeemer (21) Derraghly Nativity (18) Our Lady Queen of Peace (19) St Anne's (22) St Luke's (20)
South & East Belfast	Drumbo & Carryduff Holy Rosary (27) St Anthony's (25) St Bernadette's (26) St Brigid's (28) St Colmcille's St Malachy's (24) St Matthew's (23)

## Pastoral Communities in Down



## Pastoral Communities in Down

Area	Constituent Parishes
North Down & Ards	Ballygalget Bangor Hollywood Kircubbin (Ardkeen) Newtownards & Comber Portaferry (Ballyphilip)
Downpatrick	Crossgar (Kilmore) Downpatrick Drumaroad & Clanvaraghen Dunsford & Ardglass Killough Killyleagh Loughinisland Saintfield & Carrickmannon Saul & Ballee Strangford (Kilclef)
Mourne	Castlewellan Dundrum & Tyrella Kilcoo Lower Mourne Newcastle (Maghera) Upper Mourne (Kilkeel)

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## Training and formation

Central to the development of our Pastoral Communities will be the formation and training of Pastoral Community Councils made up of local clergy and parishioners who will prayerfully discern the needs of the community. This will be a phased process beginning after the summer 2015. Obviously it is the beginning of a new project that will develop slowly over time. Over the last few years much work has been completed across the diocese in the establishment of Parish Pastoral Councils and I have asked that the Living Church office will provide support in the co-ordination and delivery of training for our new Pastoral Communities. The training required will vary from one area to another based on their previous experience though it will initially focus on areas of leadership, team building, and discerning our own gifts and charisms for service.

## And now to work together

As I present these proposals, I am aware that they are the outcome of a long process in which many have been involved. It was most encouraging, indeed energising, to meet with, talk to and hear the views of so many parishioners over recent months. This continued the work launched by the group of 47 Listeners who volunteered to set us on our way as a diocese some four years ago.

I thank all who gave of their time and creative energies to engage in prayer, discussion and debate. I also acknowledge the great work of the pilot projects which have generated the home-grown base for these proposals.

I now wish to make a request to all parishioners, priests and religious in the parishes of our diocese: for the pastoral good of all, in the service of the Risen Lord, let us put our shoulders to making a living and lively success of these Pastoral Communities for the glory of God, for the sanctification of our parish communities and for the religious well-being of society.

Yours in Christ,

**+ Bishop Noel Treanor**

17th May 2015

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God our Father,  
your Son Jesus has given  
his Church the mission to  
proclaim the Gospel to all  
the nations. May our efforts  
to fulfil this mission be guided  
by the Holy Spirit so that we  
might be a leaven of new life,  
salt for the earth and a light  
for the world. Help us to be  
worthy missionaries and  
faithful to you.

St Malachy, Pray for us.  
St MacNissi, Pray for us  
St Columbanus, Pray for us.

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Creating Pastoral  
Communities

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