

PASTORAL LETTER FOR PENTECOST 2020
FROM BISHOP LARRY DUFFY, BISHOP OF CLOGHER

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Peace be with you! (John 20:19)

Those words of Jesus have a special meaning for us today as we mark the end of the Season of Easter and also the moment when the Holy Spirit descended on the Church, bestowing on it a mission and the power to forgive sins; to preach the love and mercy of Christ to the ends of the earth. To carry out that mission we constantly need the help of the Holy Spirit through prayer and dialogue.

The Clogher Diocese in Dialogue process began in late 2019 when fourteen people (laity and clergy) answered my call to come together to lead a series of meetings about the future of the Church here in our Diocese of Clogher. With the help of the facilitation skills of Jim Deeds, Belfast, the group engaged in a series of workshops to establish the key topics and the approach to be adopted. Finally, we all decided on the topic of our ‘living parishes’ and what that should look like in the future. During the first two weeks of March, over 800 people from across every parish in the diocese gathered at different venues to reflect on the positive things that are happening in our living parishes, as well as the challenges that lie before us.

Each meeting had a life and style of its own but, generally, the same message came through. People love their church, their parish and they wish to make a contribution to its life by celebrating and handing on the faith. Some parish teams were so keen to continue the work that they invited the facilitators to come to their parish for further meetings. Prayerfully and purposefully, we all considered the present and the future. Having been briefed on the current shortage of clergy, we considered how things could be done differently in the times ahead through renewed ministry. Many ideas were shared, many cases put forward and these deserve to be considered further in the next phase of our dialogue process.

The current restrictions imposed on us by the Covid-19 pandemic will undoubtedly slow down the process a little for now, but I want to assure you that the group is continuing to work on the findings and to prepare for the next phase. In particular, the themes that have emerged include the formation and training of lay people to take up roles in the parish that until now have been undertaken by priests. There are many people who have such great talents to contribute to the life of our parishes in a meaningful way. As today’s Second Reading puts it: ‘there is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them’ (I Cor. 12: 4-6).

Another question that is urgent too is how to reach out to those who have lapsed; how can we show them that the church welcomes all of God’s children; how it is a place of light and how its message is central to their daily lives? How to connect and communicate? These questions are just some of the areas that the next phase will deal with.

But that is not all. Our experiences as a Church and wider community over the past few weeks have left us with questions that will require attention. Many have experienced great loss and pain and many people are struggling to cope and even to hope. And yet, through it all we have seen heroic witness to Gospel values of love and mercy by people and whole communities. Throughout

this period, parishioners and priests have continued to celebrate Eucharist in such different ways, especially through spiritual communion and online means. How is the strangeness and bleakness of these days; how is our becoming a 'Digital Parish' challenging us and engaging us to be people and places alive with the presence of Jesus Christ now and into the future? How will we accompany the many people who seek God in the uncertainty of everyday life.

The next phase of Clogher Diocese in Dialogue will consider in more detail many of the views expressed in Phase 1 together with what we are continuing to learn during this time of Covid-19. These will be looked at in terms of practical proposals that will help us continue to be living parishes that do some things differently. While it will possibly take a little longer than we had planned, our conversations will inform our decision-making when the time is right. In some respects, and in some places, that time may be sooner than in others, but we place our trust in God.

I want to thank all those who took the time and effort to attend and contribute so far. I look forward to your continued involvement. I also thank the team of facilitators who generously gave of themselves to enable this to take place and these same people are committed to seeing this process through. I am very grateful to you all.

In the meantime, I ask you to pray for the success of our discernment; that we may continue to be guided by the Holy Spirit as we walk together on the way towards Christ, on new pathways. Please pray for all our parishes, for our priests and deacon, for me as your bishop and for all those helping us with this process; that all of us throughout the Diocese of Clogher may be renewed and strengthened for the days ahead.

May Mary, Mother of the Church, and St Macartan intercede for us.

“Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth (Ps. 104)

Yours in Christ,

+Larry Duffy
Bishop of Clogher

Feast of Pentecost,
Sunday, 31 May 2020