

On Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th October I, along with other delegates from this parish, was among over 300 delegates, who attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kilmore Diocesan Assembly, in St Patrick's College, Cavan. Previous Diocesan Assemblies were held in 2000 and 2007. These were two days of intense listening and discussion in order to discern ways in which to meet the pastoral challenges that face every one of the 35 parishes in our diocese.

During the 18 months that preceded the Assembly, a listening survey was conducted throughout the diocese. This survey took on board the views and concerns of ordinary Catholics of different ages and backgrounds, as well as listening carefully to those who have grown distant from the Church, or who have given up on the practice of their faith.

At the Assembly we heard the results of this survey and it formed the basis for our discussion on three main topics:

1. Ministry to people on the margins of Church and society.
2. The practice of the sacraments in our parishes today.
3. Ministry to young people.

All of us who gathered in Cavan felt very strongly that there is a future for our Church, but we also recognised that we may all have to experience some change, if the Church is truly to live up to its mission of being a bearer of the Good News of Jesus Christ. There is a great desire for the Church to draw closer to the lives of the people and to show a greater

understanding of the many complex and difficult situations which individuals and families face, in the Ireland of today. Very many delegates highlighted concerns about the mental health of so many people in our communities, particularly the young. We felt the Church needs to be a place of safety and healing and asked that ways be found in order to let people experience this through our liturgies. In this regard, it was felt that a new role could be found for the sacrament of reconciliation.

We want our sacraments to be inclusive and welcoming, so that we can really share the Good News with all people. We want to engage with people where we find them, in the concrete realities of their own lives, yet, we do not wish to leave them there. We wish to invite them to join the faith community, so we can journey together. In this regard, the Church in Kilmore will need to offer focused, sacramentally based religious education, particularly to parents. This will require trained and committed lay people working in a co-responsible way with the clergy.

A call was made for fewer and better-prepared liturgies. Having many Masses on Sunday does not necessarily mean a faith filled and joyous celebration in each church. The diocese of Kilmore has 35 parishes with 95 churches. There are 76 diocesan priests, of those 60 are in active ministry, the rest are retired. The average age of priests in the diocese is 64. In 6 years' time that average will rise to 70 and at most, there will be 41 diocesan priests under the age of 75, which is the

normal retirement age. There has been one priest ordained in the diocese since 2010 and no further ordinations will take place for the remainder of this decade. On a more positive note, the first two Permanent Deacons were ordained for the diocese on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2014. These figures cannot be ignored and as a result, a review of the numbers of Masses as well as the use of Church buildings will have to take place. Obviously this will mean close consultation with parishes and communities throughout the diocese.

When the delegates came to discuss young people, there was a very strong feeling that action has to be taken in order to reach out to youth and involve them in every aspect of the Church's mission. Therefore, the delegates called for a major investment in youth ministry in the diocese, with a developed vision and policies. Such an investment would imply a full time youth ministry staff to carry forward the training of volunteers in parishes and a co-ordinated approach to youth ministry throughout the diocese.

At this time the Diocesan Pastoral Council is working on drawing up a Pastoral Plan for the diocese, for the next number of years. In sharing the story of the Assembly with you this weekend we want to get the message out that, yes the Church in Kilmore is alive! Do we face challenges? Yes, very steep ones. Can we overcome them? Without a doubt; but that can only be done by all of us working together.

In his message to the Assembly, Pope Francis prayed that we would illumine even the fringes of our world by the profession of our faith, which would in turn lead to fruitful evangelisation. Can we light up the fringes of this parish? Can we answer the call of the Pope and our own Assembly? Let us all try to answer that question with a clear and resounding YES.

For further information, please see the 'Summary Statement from Assembly' document, which is attached to this week's Parish Bulletin. You can also get a flavour of what happened at the Assembly by visiting the Kilmore Diocesan Website, where you will be able to watch videos of the main speakers.