



# Our hearings to date

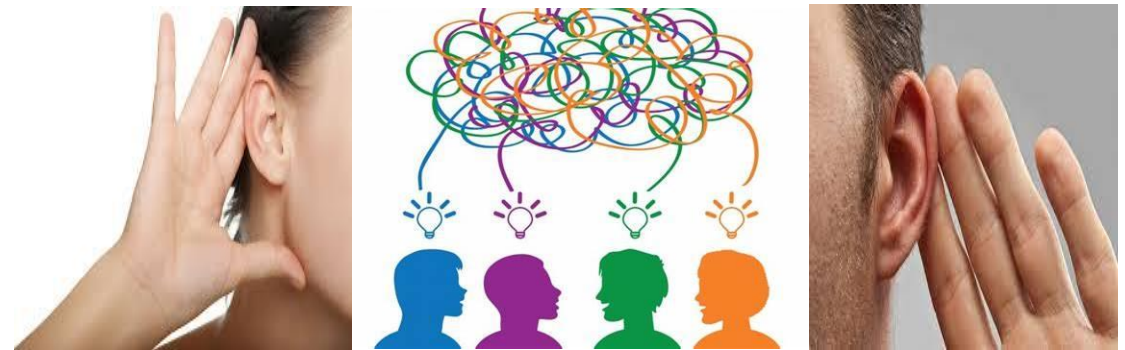
Interim report of the Diocesan Review  
Commission to Diocesan Synod

Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021

# Introduction

- Thank you to Bishop Burrows, Archdeacon Elmes, Archdeacon Gray and all the Diocesan Office team
- The Commission team: diverse and real people with love of our faith and Church
- Thank you to Dean Tom Gordon, who has just stepped down from the Commission, for his long and valuable service
- Our initial remit was to consult with all parochial groups/unions across the diocese. (This is still our primary focus)
- The reality of Covid 19 has meant that face-to-face parish visits, which are key, have had to be postponed
- Thanks to all for engaging with us, honest participation, not bridled, given space
- Our earnest wish is that each Synods person here today will bring back news to their parish of the Commission's ongoing work and will begin the process of preparation for our visits.

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- Our journey so far – here today to share our listening's
  - We deliberated on how to communicate our interim report
  - Difficult times bring opportunities for change
  - Who do our listening's belong to ?



**Hearings and thoughts for consideration operationally**

# Communication

The further development and growth of communication is a theme arising from all of our meetings

Communication is a vital lifeline

It's "essentialness" was highlighted more during Covid

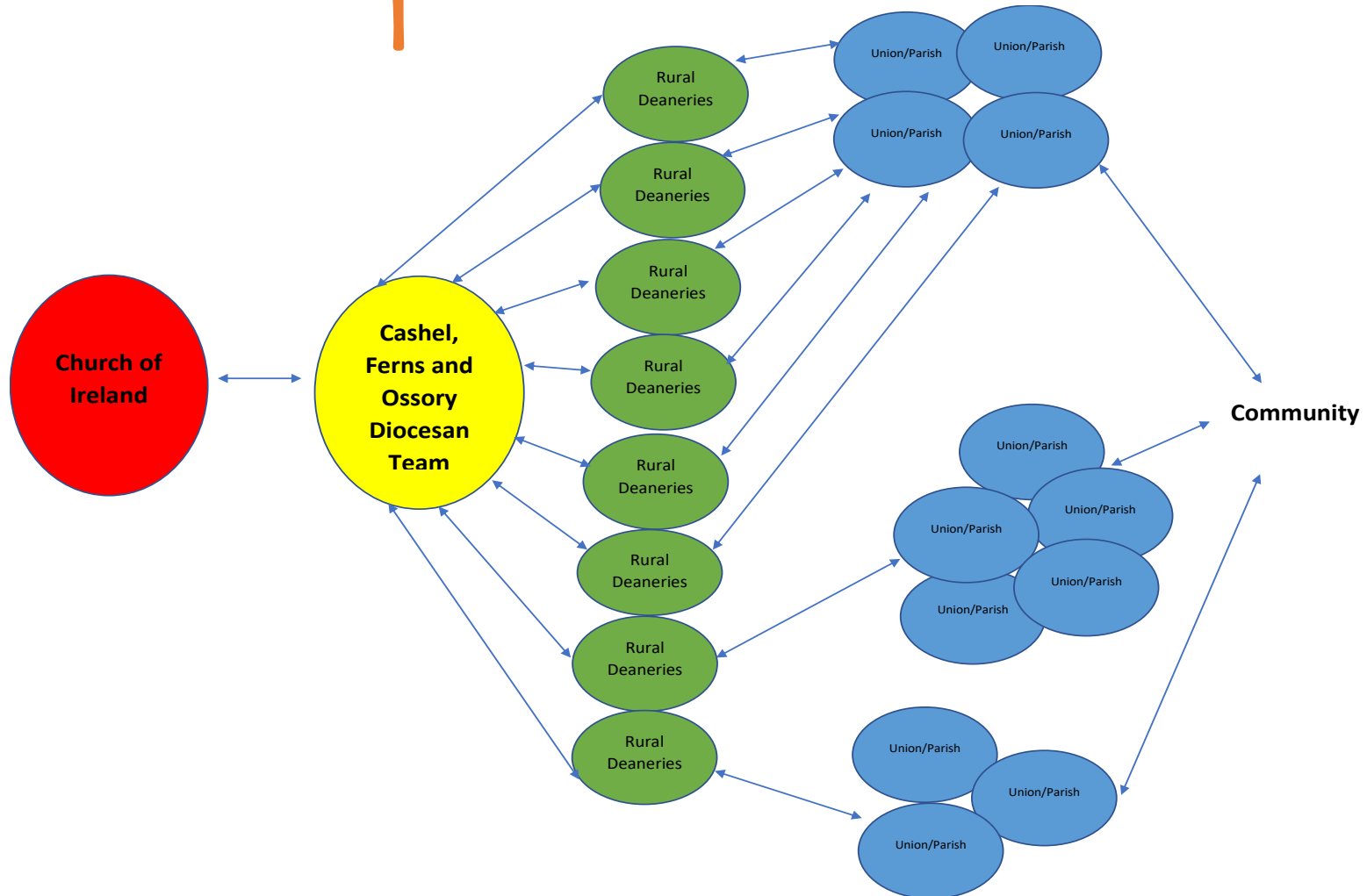
We need to strengthen understandings between the Diocese and Parish/Unions

Remember communication/understanding must flow both ways



# Diocese and Parish/Union thinking

WE NEED TO DISSOLVE THE **“THEM”** AND **“US”** THINKING



# Communication for a new age - some possibilities

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Margaret Hawkins – our invaluable asset in the field of communication

Cashel Ferns and Ossory Diocese could lead the way ...

Consider introducing a Diocesan COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

- Formalise a Diocesan communication team and structure;
- Team updating to Diocesan Council;
- Assign a budget;
- Look at new initiatives (e.g., intern to support the team)?

Introduce a communication policy?

The Communications team could look at structures to further strengthen communication





# An attractive shop-window

The Diocesan Magazine Committee – under the communication strategy could be developed and further resourced

Bursting with innovative ideas, changing the magazine from an ‘archive of parochial record’ to a publication that might be stocked by local news-stands.

Parishes, who do not already have, could consider having some, or all, of the following:

- a group-text for parishioners
- a weekly email to parishioners
- a Facebook page.

Diocesan office need to be kept up dated, essential for good two-way communication

Parishes ‘need to have an attractive shop-window’; to be a church of welcome; to have a good notice-board; perhaps a leaflet of the history of the church?





Communication is a **valuable pastoral tool** requiring a **team approach**





# Ordained Ministry

Clergy Questionnaire and Plans for Future Engagement



# Survey Responses

The first cohort reached out to by the Commission were the serving clergy (stipendiary and non-stipendiary) in October 2019.

Detailed questionnaires:

- areas covered included faith, ministry and vision
- seven questions divided into thirty-seven sub-questions

Thankful to those who took the time to complete and return the survey

32 questionnaires issued – 21 responded

Response rate worryingly low at 65% - shows a disconnect?

Some may have felt that the survey was too broad

This was only the first step of engagement. We look forward to engaging again with clergy (especially post-Covid).

A photograph of wooden letter blocks on a wooden surface. A row of blocks in the foreground spells out 'COMMUN' (the 'N' is partially cut off). Other blocks with letters like 'A', 'G', 'E', and 'H' are scattered around. The image is partially obscured by a white, torn-edge graphic that separates it from the text on the right.

# Emerging Themes

Most answers display conviction and depth of vocation

Worship and preaching/teaching are amongst the top aspects of ministry that bring joy

The traditional rhythms of liturgical and pastoral ministry are valued

Community building identified as a priority

There is a generally accepted need for change



HOWEVER,.....

Many report a lack of support from both parish/diocese

Support reported as coming mostly from family and friends, but also from the diocese and the Bishop (answers are not always black and white!)

Work/life balance generally regarded as poor; many clergy report feeling overworked

A well thought out vision is reported as being beyond the ability of many parishes, without help, given their demographics, church-attendance and interest

There are challenges experienced in pastoral leadership of laity

Administration workload is hugely significant and can take away from pastoral work and visits. There is a perceived need for greater support with this.





## Survey Retired Clergy Responses

The top priorities of ministry were worship, followed by pastoral visiting/visiting the sick

The areas which gave greatest joy were pastoral visiting/ministry, and involvement with children/young people

A significant majority reported a difficulty with work/life balance (a third mentioned having had to put parish ahead of family)

Admin was a problem. Sometimes there was a perceived lack of boundaries from parishioners.

Greatest challenges presented by conflicted parish relationships/difficult Select Vestry meetings



# Emerging Themes - Retired Clergy

- Looking to the future, more than half of respondents felt that more training was needed for clergy
- In considering alternatives to existing models of ministry, a third mentioned Ordained Local Ministry, almost a quarter mentioned Lay Ministry/greater use of gifts of all
- Many stressed the need for the Gospel to be seen in *action/practice* what we preach
- Two thirds experienced clergy peer meetings, contact and organized events within the diocese as 'somewhat positive'



## Further Engagement with incumbents

The data from the questionnaires was collected in late 2019

Covid will have influenced thinking

Further engagement with Clergy is thought desirable. Invitations will be sent to serving clergy to further engage with the Commission via group meetings.

The Commission's main remaining tasks are to travel to, and meet with, parishioners in all parochial unions and groups across the dioceses, and to engage with schools.



# Lay Ministry





# Diocesan Readers

There are 21 licenced Diocesan readers

Engagement of > 90%

It is a distinct calling and ministry

It is a hugely valuable resource, which supports the Clergy, Diocese and Parishioners, keeping the witness of the Gospel alive in our church for the future



# Hearings for Synod/ Diocesan Council

The Warden of Readers role could be developed

Alternatively, an additional role to support the team in the following areas could be looked at:

- ✓ deployment
- ✓ better mediums of communication
- ✓ practical informational pamphlet on parishes
- ✓ strengthening communication between the readers
- ✓ scheduling to incorporate time off to be part of the congregation
- ✓ more opportunities for fellowship among readers



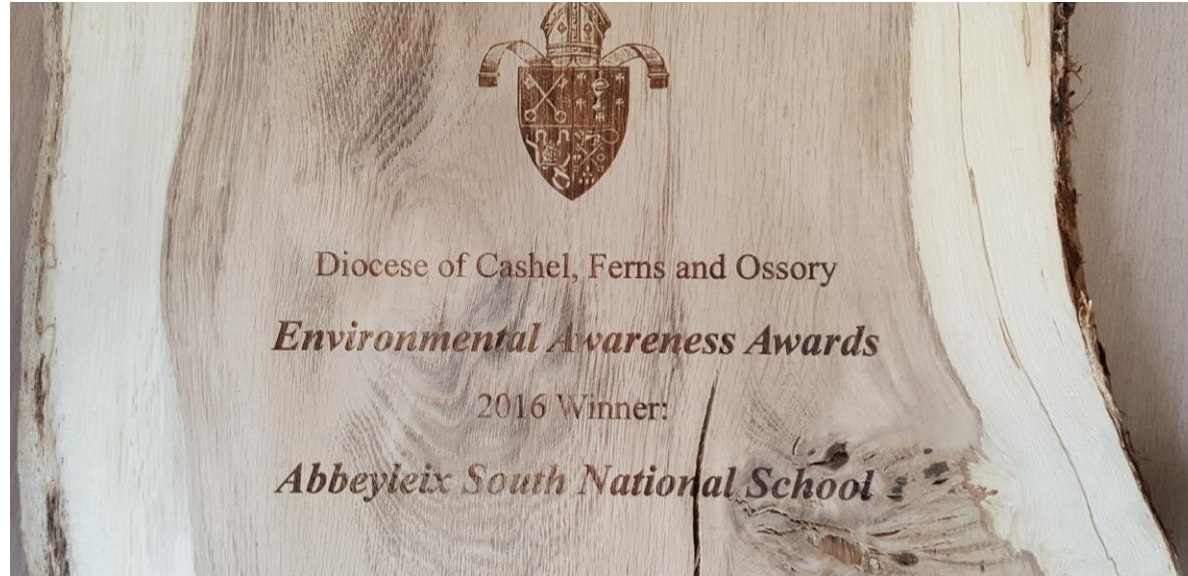
# Also, on the wish-list ...

The development of a central resource library – to help readers with sermon preparation etc.

Looking beyond diocesan boundaries to see how readers are compensated for costs incurred while carrying out their duties

The readers also expressed a desire for opportunities for fellowship





# Church of Ireland Schools within the life of the United Dioceses

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# Opening a Conversation

The Commission has identified the unique potential that lies within the Church's ministry to schools.

Whilst involvement in parish life is shrinking, many families continue to seek out an education for their children in Church of Ireland schools.

These school communities are deserving of all our attention and best efforts.

If, as church, we do not reach these families and young people through our schools, in many cases we may not be able to reach them at all.

The Commission wishes to open a conversation between our Diocese and our schools, as to what the Diocese sees as the purpose of its involvement in formal education, and how well is that purpose being fulfilled?





# Wearing two hats ...

In May 2021, the Commission met with Bishop Burrows in his capacity as:

- Bishop with oversight of Diocesan secondary and primary schools, and
- Patron of Diocesan primary schools

Areas discussed:

How is the ethos of the Church of Ireland school known and understood both within schools and across the dioceses?

In a time of decreasing Christian literacy, how well are our schools being supported in nurturing a basic knowledge of God, such as might ground Christian faith?

What practical supports exist for teachers in diocesan schools to help them in this task? Might these supports be improved? If so, how?

The Commission also set out to explore how closely linked are schools with parishes/the Diocese; might these links be strengthened?



# Pointers from the conversation

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Schools are not answerable to Diocesan Synod and operate under the remit of the Department of Education

There should be an authentic, close liaison between school and parish.

A school gathered for corporate worship readily exhibits a sense of growth from junior through to senior years

Meeting life partners through schools is not as important as it once was

Diocesan Boards of Education are concerned with buildings and furnishings more than with the RE curriculum

The central education budget of the Church of Ireland, such as would allow for in-service training for teachers/curriculum up-date, is seriously inadequate

The curriculum is crowded and there may be pressure to squeeze time available for Religious Education (RE)

The advent of a university in the South-East provides an opportunity for a joint bid for chaplaincy between the Catholic church and the Church of Ireland



# Where to from here?

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The Commission wishes to engage with our school communities, both at primary and secondary level, and invites suggestions as to how this might be best achieved.

For example:

- Is there support for a primary schools' representative group to look at areas for deepening engagement with the Church?
- Could there be similar engagement at secondary school level?

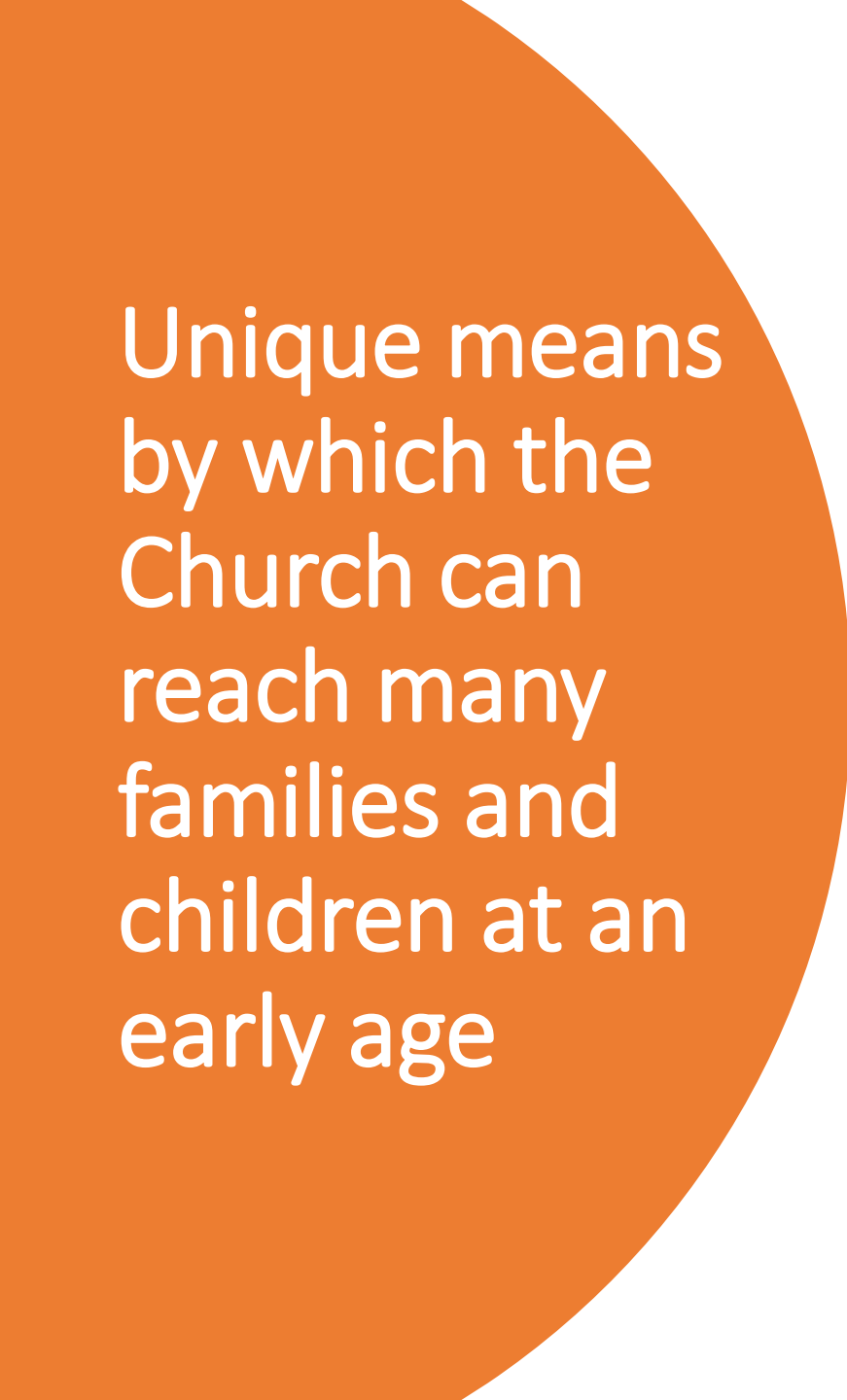


# Faith-based Youth Organisations, And Children's Minister (Primary school level)

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Unique means  
by which the  
Church can  
reach many  
families and  
children at an  
early age

- The Commission met with officers from the Girls Friendly Society, the Boys Brigade, and with the Children's Minister.
- The youth organisations decided on a representative sample to attend.
- Thanks to all who participated with us





# What did we discover?

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- A huge number of committed, enthusiastic and motivated volunteers
- Some of the groups cross over Parish/Union boundaries
- Some are growing in membership
- Huge numbers of children interact with these organisations (even through Covid)
- They are an under-used resource for the Diocese

# Youth Groups: What did we learn?

Leaders and volunteers felt a lack of acknowledgment and appreciation

Some very positive Clergy engagement, and some with less (a resource that can be taken for granted)

Volunteers love the work they do and value short visits from Clergy

Could be recognised in all associated Parish Cure profiles

Own governance, and a valuable resource to tap into





# Youth Groups: cont'd.

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- How can we best use the wonderful resource which are our youth organisations, to help bring children to an active faith?
- Youth Group leaders, bursting with ideas and would love to work with Clergy to have events in the church and bring in new ideas and thinking
- Could these organisations have input into the future decisions of the Diocese?



# What needs to be considered for Children's Ministry

- There is a vast number of resources available for Children's Ministry, (rarely looked for).
- At present the Diocesan Children's minister is also a part time stipendiary clergy man with responsibility for Safeguarding Trust.
- In many Diocese the Children's minister is a standalone, paid role with a clear job description and a set budget.
- This provides a hub to:
  - enable strategic planning for the Diocese,
  - coordinate information on activities in parishes,
  - liaise with and support volunteers already working with children, and
  - facilitate activities and training.
- Is the fact that one person is responsible for Children's Ministry and Safeguarding Trust not in some ways a conflict of interest? Should these roles be separated in order to avoid any issues which could arise?







Cashel Ferns and Ossory

Youth Advisory Group

(Secondary school and upwards)

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# What did we discover?

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## The Youth Advisory Group

- Enthusiastic motivated volunteer membership led competently by Rev. Nicola Halford (those on the advisory group are currently involved in youth work)
- Team works well together, especially with the existing diocesan youth events (Avoca weekend and confirmation trip)
- These main events give the youth an opportunity to mix and get to know a wider circle of like-minded friends giving an appreciation of where they belong
- Consensus that a review of the Diocese was needed, and timing was good



# What needs to be considered?

- Notable that youth work in Parishes/Unions not consistent (a lot in some, little in others).
- Lack of support and interest from parents with competing sporting activities.
- On a positive note, with the circumstances of Covid there was more of an interest and uptake with church activities, some parents reassessing what activities they do with their children and teens.
- Clergy support is welcomed for events; felt not recognized as a valuable way to get to know teenagers and families and to encourage participation at Parish/Church events.





# Also ...

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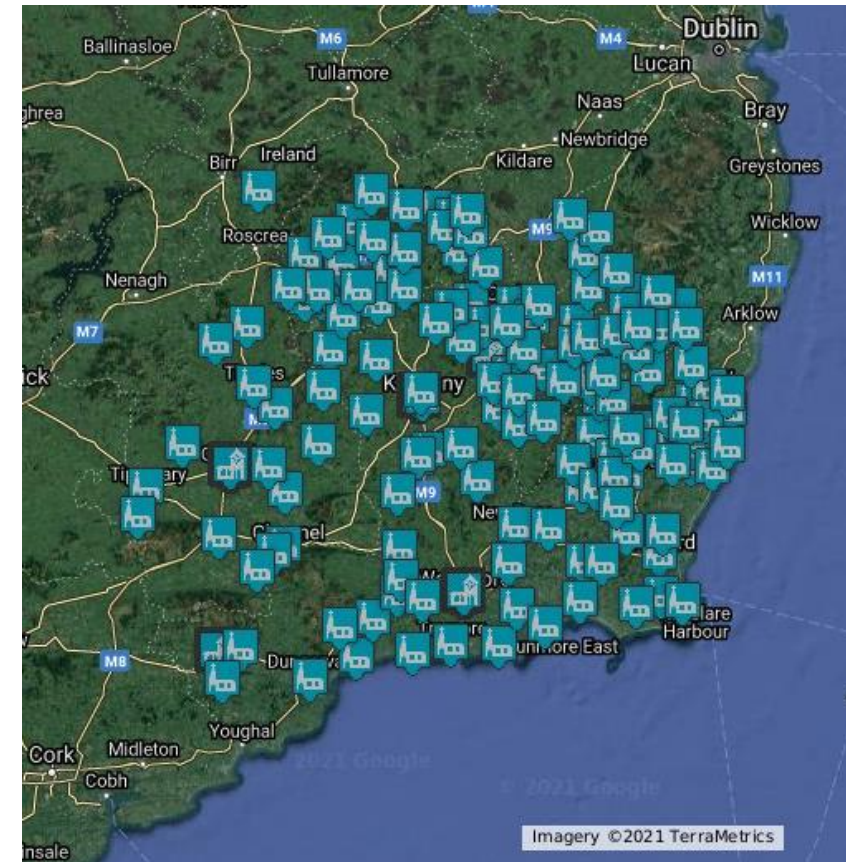
At times there seems to be more strategy in maintaining church buildings than in developing the churches future through involvement of the youth.

The geographical size of the diocese adds to the challenges of coming together, and transport is a challenge.

Having volunteers is difficult, perhaps a move of the Safeguarding Trust training to an on-line certificate could be advantageous. (Other models of this exist, e.g., HSE online “Children's First”)

There was unanimous support for the appointment of a Youth Officer, even part time, for assistance with strategy and planning

The Bishops Youth Advisory Group could be formalized with terms of reference and budget





# The Mothers' Union

## Purpose is to:

Encourage, Promote and  
Protect,  
Faith & Family in Parish,  
Diocese,  
Nationally, and  
Globally



# Another unique means by which the Church can reach many families

The Commission met with Diocesan representatives of the Mother's Union. Thank you to all who participated with us

## What we saw

- Supporting Women's Refuge,
- Facilitating Parish Events,
- Supporting Families,
- Active against Abuse,
- Prison Visits,
- Promote Overseas Literacy.
- Pre-term Hats, Trauma Teddys'
- +++ Pray in all things



# Pointers for consideration

Valuable resource for Clergy and Diocese to tap into

Crosses parish/union boundaries

Part of parish profile of cure

Some branches more active in some areas

Membership numbers reducing in some areas

A want and willingness: To continue to develop their work, with clerical help, to promote faith and develop relationship with God in families, especially with teens.

Some suggested ways to strengthen links between parishes and MU:

- Pray for MU during Sunday service prayers,
- Pray for causes sponsored by MU as notified to clergy,
- MU services could be held on Sundays, instead of mid-week, when full congregation there,
- Perhaps donate church-plate collection on Mothering Sunday to MU?
- "If you have a good Mothers' Union in a parish, you have a good parish."





# Board of Patronage (Parish and Diocesan Nominators)

The process of appointment of clergy is key to the life of faith in the diocese.

This has never been far from our thinking. Nominators were both the first and last groups with whom we met!

A huge debt of thanks is owed to all those who voluntarily serve in this role.

The Commission was keenly aware of the Constitutional requirements for the secrecy of the nomination process. Thus, meetings were prepared for with particular care, and in consultation with the Bishop







# Diocesan Nominators

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- Clerical and Lay members (some have served for many years)
- Have a unique view of the trajectory of appointments over a decade or two
- Concerns about the current model of appointments; outdated, non-transparent, too short (three-month period)?
- Work might usefully be done on devising a new 'profile of cure' template
- Change in clergy training has been followed by a rapid decline in vocations
- Small number of applicants for vacancies (sometimes there are none) is a critical challenge for the Diocese
- Any significant changes to the appointments process will necessitate a motion to General Synod.

A hand is shown writing in a notebook with a pen. In the background, there is a yellow cloth draped over something. The image is partially obscured by a white curved shape on the right side.

# Parochial Nominators

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- A 'strange process'
- Parochial nominators report not having much input into parish profile (schools not automatically included?)
- New nominators 'unlikely to speak up' – a document explaining the process would help
- Meetings with the candidates were a 'good experience'
- No 'pressure' during the process; meetings were expertly chaired
- There was 'trust and honesty'
- The 'elephant in the room' is that sometimes appointments don't work – like in any organisation; communication would help
- Parishes are not 'stress-tested' financially before a nomination process begins – this might help

# Finance committee

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**Purpose: The Diocesan Rules state:**

**“There shall be a finance committee to advise the Council on financial matters when so requested, and to recommend amendments to the diocesan financial scheme, and to perform such other duties as the Council may from time to time direct.”**





# Membership and Meetings

**Membership:** Six clerical, ten lay members; two Honorary Lay Treasurers; chaired by the Bishop

**Staff:** Diocesan Accountant, Diocesan Secretary, Assistant Diocesan Secretary

## **Meetings:**

Full Commission team met Finance Committee over two meetings with a huge engagement from enthusiastic, dedicated, fair and loyal volunteers

Members recognize the importance of ensuring experience and accounting knowledge among the membership of the Committee

Deals with the task of preparing the Budget, setting of Assessments and presentation to Diocesan Council with the support and input of the Diocesan Team

Responsible for ensuring that parishes are aware of the total cost of providing ministry



# Emerging Themes

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- Role is narrow and terms of reference are relatively weak for the responsibility delegated to the Committee by Diocesan Council
- Engagement between Diocese and parishes a matter of concern and a recognition of the need to support Parish Treasurers
- Not sure if Parishes/Unions really recognise or understand the financial position of the Diocese and the rationale and basis for some decisions
- A large, elected body, working well together, but concern expressed at agility, possibly because of its size, to respond promptly to challenges

For example:

- Immediate financial challenges facing the Diocese
- Response to COVID and its financial impact on Diocese and Parishes.
- Strategy and structure for supporting /dealing with parishes experiencing challenges with their assessments to prevent escalation of difficulties
- Concern at the financial position of Parishes and Unions coming out of COVID



# A trend of concern

A real trend of concern expressed by members of the Committee related to the age profile for financial giving, and future implications for the financial stability of the diocese and parishes.

The underlying information has been collated from two anonymous parish profiles, based on the age profile of those who are contributing financially.

- Parish 1: 67% over age of 60 years
- Parish 2: 45% over age of 60 years

WITHOUT A CHANGE IN TRAJECTORY A HUGE CHALLENGE TO MAINTAIN LET ALONE GROW

Age Profile	Over 80	70 - 80	60 - 70	50 - 60	Under 50
Scenario 1	27%	16%	24%	26%	7%
Scenario 2	15%	16%	14%	30%	25%



# The next steps

Our Parish visits

Develop brief pointers for Parishes to prepare

Schedule for parish visits – follow Rural Deanery areas

We are undertaking further training for our visits

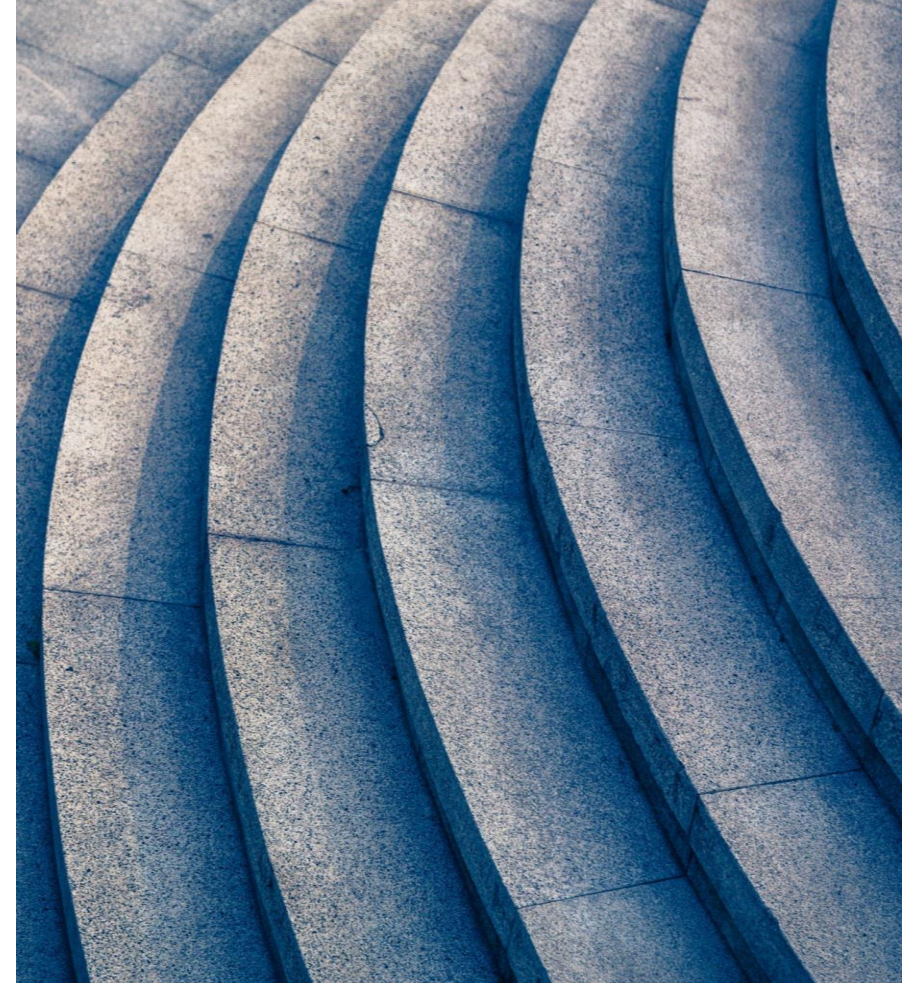
Further engagement with Clergy

Publication of Final Report and Recommendations

**Today we call on Synod to ask Diocesan Council to take our hearings into their working deliberations and considerations going forward**

Outline of mechanism for feedback from Synod

Our email address: [DiocesanReviewCommission@gmail.com](mailto:DiocesanReviewCommission@gmail.com)



Thank You

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